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Evangelization of the Poor on the Eve of the Third Millennium

QUESTIONS

The broad theme of the Chapter seeks to underline the momentous experience of being on the threshold of the third millennium. It is intended to fix our gaze on and direct our energies towards the new challenges that emerge on the horizon, and to read the signs of the coming times. The following questionnaire aims at ensuring that all the members of the Congregation participate in the preparation of the Chapter. Your answers will assist in locating the deliberations firmly within the missionary thrust of the Oblates.

“As Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, we strive always to be attentive to the voice of Christ who calls us through people’s need for salvation – especially through that of the poor. In our world in radical transition, this cry is painfully urgent. What response are we to give under the Spirit’s guidance? [...] Christ is being born anew in a flawed world. Are we capable of serving this promise?” (Witnessing As Apostolic Community 1 and 5).

Question One: *“We are a missionary Congregation. Our principal service in the Church is to proclaim Christ and His Kingdom to the most abandoned”* (C 5)

In your area, who are the poor with their many faces to whom the Oblates should give preference?

Question Two: *“We will spare no effort to awaken or to reawaken the faith page in the people to whom we are sent and we will help them to discover ‘who 7 Christ is”* (C 7).

In your context, what are the ways through which the Oblates make Christ known? What more should be done in this regard? What should be done in different ways?

Question Three: *“In a secularized and at times secularist world one no longer speaks of God. Traditional values are greatly weakened... While some adapt well to such a situation... others are seized by fear and anxiety”*

(Missionaries in Today’s World 35).

In your area, how do Oblates enable the people they serve to be free, to discern and to retain their own cultural values in the face of the influences of the ‘new culture’ created by secularism and by modern communications?

Question Four: *“We will let our lives be enriched by the poor and the marginalized as we work with them, for they can make us hear in new ways the gospel we proclaim”* (R 8).

In your area, in what ways do the Oblates allow themselves to be evangelized by drawing on the cultural values and religious traditions of the people they serve?

Question Five: *“... It is not enough to use the media simply to spread the Christian message and the Church’s authentic teaching. It is also necessary to integrate that message into the ‘new culture’ created by modern communications”* (Redemptoris Missio 37c).

In your area, how do the Oblates make the gospel message to reach out and to challenge the ‘new culture’ created by modern communications?

Question Six: *“The rapid and profound transformations which characterize today’s world... are having a powerful effect on the overall missionary picture... One thinks, for example, of urbanization... The young, who in many countries comprise more than half the population... Migrants... Refugees... There are many other forms of the ‘Areopagus’ in the modern world towards which the Church’s missionary activity ought to be directed; for example, commitment to*

peace, development, and the liberation of peoples; the rights of individual and peoples, especially those of minorities; the advancement of women and children; safeguarding the created world”

(RM 37b,c).

“... The spiritual dimension of life is being sought after as an antidote to dehumanization...”
(RM 38).

In your area, how sensitive and committed are the Oblates in directing their missionary activity towards the above-mentioned milieus or issues?

Question Seven: *“The Churches in traditionally Christian countries... are coming to understand more clearly that they cannot be missionaries to non-Christians in other countries... unless they are seriously concerned about non-Christians at home”* (RM 34).

In your area, how do the Oblates respond to the challenge of teaching who Christ is to post-Christian as well as to pre-Christian people or groups?

Question Eight: *“We must also mention the immense ‘Areopagus’ of culture, scientific research, and international relations which promote dialogue and open up new possibilities. We would do well to be attentive to these modern areas of activity and to be involved in them”* (RM 37c).

“Some Oblates... are present where decisions affecting the future of the poor are being made” (R 9).

In your area, how and to what extent are the Oblates committed to reaching out and to evangelizing the world of culture, scientific research, as well as the institutions of international relations?

Question Nine: *“We shall support the participation of the laity in those organizations which are actively engaged in the transformation of society. Many of these, such as community and civic organizations, professional associations, popular movements, labour unions and political parties, are vehicles for authentic Gospel values. [...] We shall... motivate and even prod the laity to take their rightful place in the decision-making within the Church”* (MTW 81 and 78).

In what ways do Oblates in your area assist lay people to be effective in the above-listed areas?

Question Ten: *“That we foster and develop the various forms of association [with the laity] that already exist and that we encourage new forms which are adapted to different local settings, always safeguarding the essential elements of the Oblate charism and respecting the specific vocation of the laity”* (WAC 44, 4).

In your area, how and to what extent have the Oblates been promoting forms of association with the laity?

I THE POOR WITH THEIR MANY FACES

The poverty of Oblates

1. The rapid and at times radical changes that take place in the environment in which Oblates work, have underlined the new and urgent needs of the people around them. This development has produced a sharp awareness of the poverty of the Oblates themselves. Their numbers are declining and consequently they are unable to respond adequately to the increasing needs of the poor.

2. The social, material and spiritual needs of the poor in contemporary society, are at times so overwhelming that some Oblates find themselves totally immersed in the day-to-day needs of the people they serve. This situation, inevitably brings about the impoverishment of the spiritual dimension of Oblate life. Oblates themselves observe that their social and pastoral

involvement (justice and peace issues, environmental concerns, development projects, counseling, etc.) ought to be balanced by a deepening sense of spirituality. There is a strong feeling among some Oblates that secularization has played havoc on the spiritual lives of the Oblates themselves. The long-standing tradition of dedicating time to silent prayer and to the Office in community, in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, has by and large been discarded. There is therefore an appeal that the Chapter should urge the Oblates to return to the traditional Oblate way of giving witness by reviving Oblate prayer life.

3. Furthermore, there is also an awareness that Oblates do not always have the wherewithal to confront the needs of the poor, and to answer to questions that are raised by the radical transformation of society. Besides, along with the problems caused by the reduction of personnel, the inadequacy of expertise and the loosening of the spiritual grip, Oblates are aware that the Church no longer exercises the same influence as in the past. The power of its formerly formidable institutions has been greatly curtailed. The Oblates can no longer comfortably depend on that one time pervasive influence of the Church. This has therefore rendered them vulnerable messengers of the Gospel. In some instances, Oblates experience the tension between making a 'preferential option for the poor' and exercising a ministry in a traditional parish setting. Gone are the days when Oblates used to be specialists in difficult missions. This situation breathes uneasiness, undermines confidence, and generates a sense of guilt.

4. There is a feeling of inadequacy among senior Oblates, who realize that youths constitute the majority of the people in need of spiritual formation. They recognize the challenge, but feel helpless before it. So immersed they are in the day-to-day activities of the parish that they are equally neither ready nor free to respond to the new emerging needs of the poor around them.

5. There is a strong prophetic voice among the Oblates that cautions against the financially powerful Oblates and about the comforts of life that have crept into the life-styles of some of them. We are painfully reminded of what the Founder referred to as *la paresse, la nonchalance, la corruption des prêtres*. Some provinces are said to have become 'large corporations with financial holdings that bring in huge dividends', and that money is eventually used to gratify 'all our whims and fancies'. This attachment to material well-being by some Oblates is said to explain in part why some young men are not attracted to the Oblates. Oblate commitment is no longer seen as a challenge. The Oblates are seen to be just like any other middleclass grouping. The Rule book exhorts the Oblates 'to contest the excesses of power and wealth and to proclaim the coming of a new world freed from selfishness and opened to sharing' (C 20).

6. Strong, but one-sided remarks, have been made about the spirit of poverty among some African Oblates. Instead of being at the service of the Oblate community and its mission, they are at the service of their families and clans. They deprive the community of its resources in order to satisfy members of their own families. They have one foot in the Oblate community and the other in their family. They extend hospitality to their family members to an unreasonable degree. This disrupts and divides the Oblate community and encroaches on the time for study, prayer, and apostolic work. There are also incessant requests to go on further studies. Some have no desire to dirty their hands in domestic chores for the benefit of the community. They would rather play the role of the chief. Clearly, what is missing is a solid formation. For mission to succeed in Africa, personal conversion is still absolutely necessary. Inculturation must begin with oneself before it embraces the community. Individual Oblates are challenged to become personal in their thinking and in making options. The tribal outlook must be discarded in order to embrace a new vision of God, of human kind, of society, and of power relations. At community level, there ought to be an attempt at evangelizing each other, and severing old loyalties in favour of the new.

7. In the face of the radical transformations taking place in society and the irrepressible needs of the poor, some contend that the tendency is to look for new strategies to communicate the Gospel message. Little or no attention is being paid to the fact that the Oblates themselves might be a stumbling block to the Gospel message. Such spiritual impoverishment on the part of the Oblates calls for a deep spiritual cleansing and an opening-up to the Spirit of renewal who

alone can enable us to hear the new voices of our times. There is a need to develop a fresh missionary approach. There is also a need to discern what we need to change in ourselves in order to respond more effectively to the demands of the Gospel, to the crying needs of the poor, and to remain faithful to the spirit of the Oblate Congregation.

Poverty and its many faces

8. The rapid and profound changes in to-day's world have brought the Oblates face to face with new forms of poverty. This is different from the times of the Founder, when he encouraged his followers 'to limit the scope of their zeal... to the poor of our countryside and others...'. Traditionally, the Oblates have preached the Gospel to the most abandoned, to those who have not yet received the Gospel, or to those who once had the faith but now consider it of less importance in their lives (see C 5).

9. From the responses given by the Oblates, there is a remarkable common thread notwithstanding the uniqueness of the different situations. Poverty is not restricted to particular races or ethnic groups. It is not exclusively described or defined in terms of material needs. Poverty also refers to the absence of a spiritual well-being. There is a consensus throughout the Oblate world that the ugly face of poverty is not only reflected on the materially needy, but also on a variety of people who have fallen prey to the different forms of poverty. The following categories have been mentioned:

youth – advancement of women – material poverty – minority groups, refugees, legal and illegal migrants, and others.

Youth

10. From the United States to Latin America, from Canada to Europe, from Asia to Africa, Oblates see young people as falling within the category of the most abandoned and therefore deserving of their attention. More than 50% of the population in many countries is made up of young people. Young people are described as living in a world of insecurity. Many of them drop out of school at an early age. They then become marginalized by society. They are unemployable because they do not have skills. Those with

education struggle to get employment because they do not have any experience of work. Some are frustrated because they have no purpose in life. They have no dreams. Life has no meaning for them. They resort to drugs, gangsterism and petty crime. Some are sexually abused, and in some instances high-school girls have become prostitutes. Street children have become a worrying phenomenon in some countries. Young people bear the burdens of life at a very tender age: in some areas some children have to start working (polishing shoes, selling food) at the age of 5.

11. In the Provinces in Africa and in some countries of Asia and Latin America, large numbers of young people will grow up without having had a chance to acquire education and training. While such a gloomy picture emerges about the youth who are on the margins of society, those in secondary and tertiary institutions are not immune from the hassles of life. Many students are isolated, lonely, and lack a sense of identity. The competitive nature of education and financial pressures, weigh heavily on them. It is not unusual for students to contemplate suicide. The youth seem to bear the sufferings of Christ in their fragile bodies and souls at an early age. If the future is to be redeemed, attention will have to be given to the youth and to their aspirations.

12. While the young have been cited as a specific area that demands attention, very little has been said about how the Oblates address this growing challenge, except for youth retreats and campus ministries.

Advancement of women

13. Modern society prides itself on the collapse of social hierarchies. Public discourse

gives the impression that we all subscribe to the inherent dignity of human beings. This is simply not true as is evident in the case of women. A lot of damage has been inflicted on women by simply denying them due recognition. Women experience violence in their homes. They are subject to cultural restrictions in public and to discrimination regarding employment opportunities. If they are allowed to work, they are given exhausting men's work like the *palliris* of Bolivia, sorting and crushing stones from which they extract tin, for which they don't even get half its value. Women are employed as housekeepers, cooks and baby-sitters of rich families and only earn board and room. Oblates are invited to take a prophetic stance against the oppression of women, especially because the Virgin Mary is a source of their inspiration. Women could be encouraged to do theology courses rather than cooking courses. There is a feeling among some members that the Oblates are barely aware of the revolution that is taking place within women's movements. Their association with the Virgin Mary ought to encourage their promotion of the cause of women, otherwise history is likely to judge them harshly.

Material poverty

14. Traditionally, the poor are described as those who lack material goods. In some instances the harshness of poverty has left its victims spiritually broken. In other instances, the poor, though deprived of material goods, remain rich as human beings. Oblates in the mission territories have principally been involved with the materially poor, the most abandoned members of society. This equally applies to the poor who inhabit the periphery of the large cities in the Northern hemisphere. Oblates have responded to these communities by being present in their midst, by offering spiritual support and material relief where possible, by offering God's word as a constant source of solace. There is a growing awareness in some countries of involving people in self-help projects and in anti-poverty campaigns. Some Oblates maintain that the best form of helping would be by getting lay people involved in leadership roles in an attempt to alleviate material poverty. The question remains: to what extent should the Oblates be involved in directly combating the causes of poverty?

Minority groups, refugees, legal and illegal migrants

15. Situations differ radically from one area to another. Apart from these categories, there are countries where a human rights culture is virtually nonexistent, where exploitation continues unabated. Minority groups, migrants and refugees are poor in so far as they are made to feel unwelcome by their host countries. In some cases, their labour is exploited, because the justice system of the country does not offer them protection, even though their rights may be enshrined in the Constitution of the land. They are compelled to embrace a self-demeaning image of themselves. Obstacles are placed before them so as to deny them possibilities of advancement. Some multicultural societies deny some groups their basic human dignity and equality. It is this denial of recognition, the refusal to recognize others as reflecting the same image of God, that has spurred some Oblates to become involved in Justice and Peace programmes. These programmes are aimed at promoting a culture of human rights. They also seek to promote the belief that all human beings are equally worthy of respect. They assist in regularizing the status of migrants and refugees in order to make them feel at home in a foreign land. They support educational programmes aimed at challenging the rise of xenophobia in some countries. The social teachings of the Church, in some cases, have become the primary tool in promoting awareness about the simple demands of justice based on the Gospel.

Other faces of the poor

16. The poor are also the millions of *unemployed*, whose families break up because they are unable to support them, who become *homeless* because they cannot afford a home. They are poor because they cannot be absorbed by the labour-market.

17. *Illiteracy* in the modern world has almost become a curse. Illiterate people are invariably destined for a life of poverty, either through exploitation or by being made redundant by the demands of the modern industrial sector. Unemployment, homelessness, illiteracy, and a host of other causes of poverty, conspire together to destroy the self-esteem of the victims. The

Oblates find that the world in which they work is not always fair and accommodating. People are not always judged on the basis of their human potential. Potential does not necessarily guarantee all people equal respect. It does not open doors. It does not create opportunities. The challenge is to engage the political and economic leaders who, more often than not, hold the fate of the people in their hands. The leaders are to be held accountable for the promises they make.

18. The burden of poverty is also seen on the faces of the *sick*, and the *elderly*, *divorcees*, *prisoners*, *drug-addicts*, *victims of sexual abuse*, and *HIV/AIDS victims*. This category includes Oblates who have been jailed or involved in sexual abuse cases. Pastoral care by way of counseling, visits, moral support, catechesis, formation of conscience, etc., continue to be high on the list of services provided by the Oblates. It is also, precisely in this area of welfare, that the Oblates feel increasingly that lay people should be invited to render their invaluable services by being encouraged to play a leading role.

19. Other faces of the poor mentioned: land-less peasants that migrate to the slums (*favelas*) of big cities and live in precarious improvised dwellings, or are hired by rich landlords who exploit them; miners who lose their job because of the privatization of the national mining corporation (*relocalizados*); families that come to the *comedores populares* (popular kitchens) run by the Oblates or by other Church organizations to get one decent meal a day; prisoners waiting up to 5 or 6 years for their trial, or condemned to years of jail because they had been constrained to work in the cocaine elaboration process in order to feed their families, while the rich drug-traffickers

remain free; minority ethnic groups (Indians or Afro-Americans) excluded from work because of racial prejudice; countryside families that abandon their home and land to escape from violent areas (*guerrilla*) to save their lives; under-age soldiers ill-treated by their officers; great numbers of retired workers with a miserable pension or none at all; odd-job workers with no legal contract and no social benefits or protection; etc. Many Oblates feel these and many more are the victims of the neo-liberal model of economy which excludes them socially and economically: they are used whenever they are needed, but they can be disposed of at will.

20. The poor also continue to be those who *have not yet heard* the good news of the Gospel. In mission territories they are many. It has been pointed out that, in some regions, the preaching of the Gospel is in competition with either the resilience of the indigenous religions, or the advance of Islam. How to preach the Gospel in such contexts without proselytizing remains a serious challenge for the Oblates.

21. The poor are also *those who have abandoned* their faith, who stay away from Church, who no longer find solace in the Church. For these people, faith in God has ceased to be a source of meaning. In the Northern hemisphere, there is a distinct concern for young people, who no longer seem to have any relationship with the Church. Nominal Catholics are increasing in numbers. What has gone wrong? Where have the Oblates, as part of the pastors of the Church, have gone wrong? Some argue that the Oblates simply do not have the answers to the questions raised in the changing society of to-day. Many leave the Church and find themselves without anchor or meaning in life. If these questions and challenges are not taken up, the Oblates will increasingly find themselves preaching to empty pews.

22. On the basis of the responses given, there seems to be a consensus among the Oblates as to who the poor are with their many faces. The rapid and profound changes in society have caused some serious social dislocations that have contributed to the variety of painful situations in which the poor find themselves. The faces of the poor have been merely enumerated and, at times, described. On the whole, except in some specific cases, there is no evidence that the Oblates have necessarily developed consistent pastoral, educational, or programmed activities to respond to these new social and pastoral developments. The description of the many faces of the poor is essentially an appeal from the Oblates to the Oblates to rise to the occasion, and to respond to the new needs. As observed by some Oblates, it is difficult in to-day's world, for a religious community, to remain fixed on a certain

type of ministry, without continuously raising new questions; hence the need for flexibility,

mobility, and adjustment.

23. Some think that these new pastoral needs require new specialized ministries. Given the limited numbers and the age of personnel, the new challenges appear to some to be a bit far-fetched, if not irrelevant and misleading. The question remains: why mention these many faces of the poor, and yet be unwilling to do something about it? It is in itself a challenge to redefine the most abandoned, to decide how their pain is to be alleviated, and how the Gospel is to be preached to them.

24. There is a response, on the other hand, given by some other Oblates who neither see the necessity of categorizing the poor in their many faces, nor the need to be specialists. Oblates are supposed to be sharp-shooters all over the missionary terrain. First and foremost, the poverty Oblates encounter is the poverty of human relationships gone bad for a variety of reasons. The absence of sound human relationships impoverishes most. It will therefore be the quality and the capacity to sustain good human relationships in Oblate communities that will be an effective way of witnessing to the world.

II OBLATES AND THEIR APOSTOLIC WORK

I – Witness

1. As they look upon the vast mission before them, Oblates today, ever faithful to the ideas strongly expressed by Eugene de Mazenod, are convinced that the witness of their life, both personal and communitarian, is of the utmost importance. The Oblate charism is above all realized in them and among them. This is a unanimous conviction. Impassioned of Christ, trying to be like an icon of him, they know that Christ gives himself to the poor by a way of living rather than by pretty words. Their ideal is to give witness of the love that moves them. Oblates also see themselves as the first ones who must receive the Gospel. The success of mission depends on the authenticity of their own relation to God, of the coherence between the word spoken or heard and the word that is lived. It seems then basic that we no longer dissociate religious life and mission. Mission can only be realized through the witness of consecrated life. People are looking for witnesses and models ('role models').

2. The message of *Witnessing in Apostolic Community* was received, meditated upon and understood in many places. The ideal community – more or less successful – tries to be joyful, open, welcoming, prayerful, and radiant rather than proselytizing. Prayer (meditation, oraison, lectio divina...) is an essential apostolate, available to all, even the eldest. It is felt that sharing lived in community, the missionary zeal of persons and more so of oblate teams, can be contagious. Likewise many communities try to keep or rediscover a simple lifestyle; it is vital that it not place us above the people. Some communities are not close enough to ordinary neighbourhoods; some are well inserted into meaningful poor areas, while others hope to do so. Otherwise, how can one announce the gospel beatitude of poverty.

3. Some Oblates, because of the obedience received, live and work mostly in our houses. Many answers speak of the indirect ministry of those that provide *the services* that are indispensable for the apostolate of many others. The warm hospitality of these houses that are more centred on administration, the witness given to the salaried employees or volunteers they rub elbows with daily, seem like just so many important elements of mission.

II – Fields of Mission

A – Oblates and ordinary pastoral work

4. Statistically there is no doubt that the majority of Oblates carry out their missionary activity in the setting of what is called 'ordinary' church ministry. On all the continents they are therefore in charge of *parishes* – often parishes in working class areas. They give much time and energy to sow the Word and serve the people of God. Preaching, catechesis of children as well

as young people and adults, preparation and celebration of sacraments are all part of their daily bread.

5. How do Oblates live this extensive involvement in a type of ministry that could well absorb them into the diocesan clergy? That is the topic of an already old debate. Even though there is no *one* oblate way of being pastor, it is certain that Oblates try hard to give a special touch to this work, a touch which they care about and for which they are generally given credit. We will come back later to the *ways of being Oblates in ministry*. It is good to note at this point some priorities that were mentioned: visits to families, to the sick, to the aged or persons in difficulty. There is also an effort made to let the laity express themselves in the liturgy, so that the sharing of the Gospel can enlighten the life of the faithful. More typical of Africa, but also true

elsewhere, is the effort to heed the call of those who are furthest away: Oblates go out to visit isolated posts ('the villages', 'the out-stations', the mountains, 'the interior', 'the barrios'...). "The lost coin must be sought out in every corner."

6. In what is called ordinary pastoral ministry there is one reality in particular that is affirming itself more and more: those small teams for Christian life and action that Latin America has baptized *basic ecclesial communities*. These communities are seen as a priority, as a key to the apostolate; this principle was pointed out almost everywhere in Africa, as well as in other regions. We might consider the village, neighbourhood or street teams where faith, prayer and Christian action is shared as an analogous reality. They all demand a distinct type of involvement by the Oblates. Wherever fundamentalism is a threat to the Christians, it is even more urgent that such methods be used for mutual support.

B – Specific pastoral ministries

7. Preaching, a traditional Oblate ministry, is not limited to the parish setting. It takes place especially in the setting of the *parish mission*. Under adapted forms (including parish retreats and novenas...) it is very much alive in many countries of the northern hemisphere. It has been launched with success in some new Christian territories, especially in Africa where there is a strong demand to develop it, and for the Oblates to get seriously involved in it.

8. Another type of preaching is *retreat* ministry, under its various forms: days of Christian renewal, spiritual exercises given to different groups. In many countries this takes the form of important spiritual centres which are managed and animated by Oblates.

9. As always Oblates are likewise involved in the ministry of *pilgrimages*. This is true especially of the older Christian countries (including Sri Lanka). This ministry includes accompanying groups of pilgrims to famous shrines, receiving them and other visitors in places confided to the Congregation, and promoting devotion to Mary. In the same line we can mention the ministry of *confessions* and *spiritual direction*, which are in some cases completed by services of listening and aid.

10. Oblates everywhere are involved in the pastoral care of those particularly fragile categories of society, and generally speaking of those in difficulty. In first place there are the *sick* and the *dying*, either through hospital chaplaincies or associated settings. Not only the AIDS epidemic and drug addiction, but also alcoholism and gambling, are new and sometimes dramatic calls for involvement. This kind of missionary presence traditionally includes the institutional care of *prisoners* and young delinquents, as well as orphans. Today we must add destitute street children. Oblates are also present in *social and health care* for the needy, either in Church works or non-confessional programs, or sometimes by means of a daily fraternal care, even opening our own houses to them.

Some Oblates specialize in *counseling* for the handicapped, and also in *healing* ministry. One community (Canada) defines itself as 'a community of hope', proposing 'interior liberation through the mercy of the Heart of Jesus'. Another community offers a two minute that changes every day. For those wounded by life there is an Oblate 'Christian coffee shop' in the gay district in Montreal, and the 'Fallen from Heaven' bar in Lyons. "We must be ready to drastically change our programmes, and listen to peoples' real needs, which are mostly the need for healing." "Christ

continue to makes himself present to the hearts thirsting for justice, peace and dignity by means of these new initiatives.”

11. Oblates almost everywhere are involved in the *pastoral care of ecclesial movements*. They assure the chaplaincy or direction of many groups, from Catholic Action to the Legion of Mary, including the professional pastoral care of more recent spiritual movements (*cursillos*, marriage encounter, *focolari*, renewal in the Spirit...). It is not rare to find them personally involved in the dynamic of these movements. There are also other more informal forms of involvement: accompanying specific married couples and parents; reflection and prayer groups, and the like. Finally, for many Oblates, the *Pontifical Missionary Works* offers an occasion to serve foreign missions and to cultivate a missionary spirit in the older Christian countries, by being witnesses of the inseparable link between the mission ‘elsewhere’ and the mission ‘at home’.

12. The specific pastoral care related to *marriage and the family* is among the priorities in many places, especially in the more developed countries where the social institution of marriage is in crisis. Among the many forms this apostolate can take there is also the service rendered by many Oblates in diocesan tribunals. It is important to help persons who seek recourse at the tribunals to understand the causes of failure.

C – Oblates and youth

13. From kindergartens in Japan on through classes for shepherds in Lesotho and onto junior colleges and professional schools all the way up to universities, Oblates are or at least try to be present in *the world of teaching and schools*, wherever this is possible. These institutions are often the fruit of their own missionary initiative. They are involved either as teachers or chaplains, or sometimes on just an occasional basis. They are in contact with students, administrators and professors, both Christian and non-Christian. They sow the word of the Gospel; they help disenfranchised youth to rise to a higher level, and they are concerned about providing the younger generation with a moral basis and the values of the Kingdom. They are concerned about warding off suicidal tendencies (Australia).

Some of these initiatives are in favour of young people and children who are particularly in need. By providing academic training the Oblates help them rise to a recognized level. “Do everything to give them hope by means of a fraternity and a solidarity that goes beyond tribalism and differences” (Africa). “Personal attention to each of these young people is the foundation for the service by which we seek to help form their minds, their hearts and their feelings” (Maggon, Sri Lanka). This is followed up by contacts with the parents, who are themselves often victims of cultural changes that they do not understand. Organized contact and links with past students is also important.

14. There are also other means of giving priority to the young. There is a concern for them in those places where the parish or school structure is inadequate: the underprivileged children and youth of poorer areas, young people who have trouble in society or with their faith. We provide them with libraries, places to meet (‘the youngsters’ quadrangle’ Maroua, Cameroon); we try to create activities with them, like a music group (Nigeria). All of this to give them some points of reference in our ‘modern capitalist and secularized society’; to make them instruments of evangelization; to call forth and form leaders.

15. For this Oblates provoke new initiatives (camps, live-ins...), care for *groups*, and are in charge of *movements* of young people and children. These movements are sometimes open to youth of other confessions. One answer mentions a group of young volunteers for work abroad. They are provided with preparation and follow-up of the experience. As regards the most *marginalized* some Oblates seek them out in the night world. Others welcome them into the community and offer them a place to live, to be healed and to grow. We cannot forget the *promotion of priestly, religious and oblate vocations*, which is not necessarily distinct from the above initiatives. One answer says that lead groups of young Christians to identify themselves partially with the Oblates. Many invite them to become evangelizers. In some areas (Jaffna, Sri Lanka), the direction of seminaries for future priests remains an Oblate apostolate.

D – Formation of the laity

16. The formation of lay adults is a vast and multifaceted field. In all the Regions, Oblates offer courses and conferences, workshops and seminars. "The formation of lay volunteers (for catechesis) is a work the Oblates have pursued for 50 years" (Haiti). As regards content, biblical formation has the first place. Mostly the aim is faith formation, initiation to theology or to social questions.

17. The adult catechumenate is important in many places, be it in the context of 'mission countries' or in the more developed societies. In the Anglo-Saxon countries, the 'RCIA' programme (rite of Christian initiation of adults) is well under way and many Oblates are animating and promoting it. In Africa, wherever it is possible, the missionaries take the initiative to go to those peoples who have not yet been evangelized to bring them a direct proclamation of the Christian message.

18. In the Christian communities especially in Africa and Latin America formation of the laity is given high priority. It seeks first of all to support the neophytes in their life of faith and commitment, and then to form and support catechists and people who can care for the communities. It aims also to make them men and women who are able to be part of society, and take part fully in decision making. Biblical and socio-political formation as well as formation for evangelization are mentioned. There is no fear of investing in this financially.

E – Oblates and the new cross-roads ('areopagus') of mission:

19. The *mass media* and communication are two major challenges of modern times. Oblates have long been involved in the *press*: various missionary and pastoral magazines and publications have a long tradition in the older Christian countries and are being stressed in newer ones. All Regions have a *radio* apostolate which is sometimes rounded off by the diffusion of cassettes. Recently one Oblate has become involved at 'Radio Veritas Asia' which provides a way of evangelizing the Hmong mountain peoples of China and other countries closed to traditional means of evangelization. On a rare occasion we have access to the cinema and *television* programs. Some speak more modestly of mini-media: personalized correspondence, catechesis through images, theatrical presentations of the Passion, and even a ministry of 'Christian clowns'. There is no ignoring a partnership with the laity when it comes to the domain of the media.

20. Some new and original, even daring ministries are cropping all over the Congregation. We give here a few of those noted in the answers.

In situations of underdevelopment, in Africa for example, Oblates give time for actual *development work and education in view of development*. In societies marked by institutional injustices, they are working in solidarity against injustice, violence (city violence, gangsterism...), defending the rights of the oppressed. They are with land-less farmers and other conscientization or action groups. They help to organize 'small coop enterprises' (Uruguay). Elsewhere, they sometimes discuss with the ruling class.

Situations of grave crisis or war brings Oblates to take courageous initiatives, to be present among both the military and the civil population (e.g. in Sri Lanka). Their presence, which is often one of being a refugee among the refugees, is very encouraging for the people. In these situations, displaced persons are definitely a new call. In a disaster one must start with the most urgent needs: finding food and shelter.... But on a deeper level, in the face of racial hatred, we must defend ourselves from the evil effects of hate and war that change our scale of values as well as our style of life. We must affirm the religious and cultural values that we believe in. Some Oblates have done this at the cost of their life, and have become examples for Christians and non-Christians alike (e.g. Michael Rodrigo, Sri Lanka).

21. In the more developed countries this same kind of preoccupation leads to commitments adapted to the situation. Everywhere we find Oblates side by side with workers, the unemployed, immigrants, refugees, the youth and even in the political world. They are promoters of *social justice, peace, human dignity, the rights of women and children*, advocates of the struggle against hatred, racism, tribalism... They maintain a presence in the most troubled and

violent neighbourhoods of the cities. Some feel called to a more active solidarity with women ('like Jesus'), even to calling the Church to open a real dialogue with them. All these commitments are forms of evangelization: "We must contextualize Christ". There are even those communities that provide the more marginalized a place to live and to re-enter society.

Justice and peace are particularly in the forefront of Oblate thinking. "No evangelization without Justice and Peace," answered one respondent. The Oblate North-South Dialogue meeting (Mexico, September 1997) puts it this way: "The themes of justice, peace and the integrity of creation (should be) an integral part of our ongoing formation, our community life and our mission."

III – The Modes of Mission

A – The Oblates and their partners

22. The Oblates do not see themselves as lone riders in the apostolate and the mission. In some cases they find it difficult to work together among themselves, but in concrete, they live in partnership with others. Among others other men and women religious, deacons and neighbouring parishes are mentioned. Above all they believe in acting as Church, in communion *with the laity*, and without clericalism. In some places 'persons above suspicion' are sought. They are given a formation and support. They are invited to give witness of their faith and their prayer. They are permitted to speak, even in the liturgy (preparation and sometimes even giving the homily). They are helped to commitment themselves more and more, both within the community and within society, as the first evangelizers. Lay ministries are confided to them; the charge of small communities far from the centre is thus placed in the hands of persons or groups ('sodalities').

23. When the Oblates speak of working with the laity, they do not mean only committed Christians. In the social realm this partnership can be lived with *all men of goodwill*. Many initiatives are from the start *non-confessional* or *inter-confessional*, or sometimes included other local agents. In areas with a strong presence of migrants, there is an effort to build bridges between the cultures. Likewise in the pastoral realm there is an effort to have open communities. There is no hesitation to even involve non-practicing Christians. Ecumenical spirit is cultivated. The answers from several regions speak of programmes of evangelization together with other Christians.

B – A typical way of being Oblate?

24. It would be vain to search for a *method* of apostolate proper to the Oblates, but we do find in many of the answers certain *tones* and things that Oblates insist on no matter what their field of action or type of ministry is. "We try to do as Christ did: we begin with the essential."

25. Above all Oblates want to be *close to the people*, to their real needs, their difficulties and their joys. Men among men, they are at meeting point between society and the word that liberates. This means going out to people (visits...), receiving them ('in the name of Christ'), listening to them:

Oblates try to create places for sharing, for listening. They are loved by the people... We believe in the irreplaceable value of presence, of fraternal contact, of friendship, of personal dialogue. We take time for people, to meet also them outside of the pastoral or professional setting strictly speaking, in their own daily setting, in their families. We are available to all who call upon us without distinction of confession. In difficult personal situations understanding and compassion are first and foremost for the Oblate. Presence and authentic closeness speak to people; they ask us who we are, about our way of life (celibacy lived in community).

26. Oblates seek to live their commitments in the Church, *in Christian community*. The Christians in their charge are called to be living faith communities ('that are worth joining'); communities that are very much a part of the local milieu; communities where the pastors are united in life and in action with the people. These communities are open to participation by all, and they have a clear missionary dimension ('outreach'). Oblates seek to be faithful to the

pastoral policy of the local Church (synods...) or the Region (e.g. Latin America). They also feel obliged to make known to the Church that sends them the situations in which they live, and the 'unexpected ways of the Good News'. This is not always easy. When this is difficult, or even impossible, the Oblate missionary feels hurt, and asks himself if the infidelity is his fault or the fault of an ecclesial institution that refuses change.

27. Oblates especially want to give *priority to the poor*, to the poor layers of society: "We cannot separate evangelization and the poor". They want a Church that can identify with peoples crucial problems, one that values their real-life experience while still preserving its own teaching role. They seek to establish themselves close ('*inserción*') to the poor, the marginalized, or at least feel bad if they cannot. This includes 'finding Christ in organized struggle', nor does it exclude a concern for the beauty of the environment.

28. When Oblates speak, 'preaching Christ in season and out of season', they try to do so with the *language of experience*, and not that of pure reason. Their theology is 'more inductive than deductive'. The encounter with God of which they give witness is rooted in daily life. They present Christ with a human face. In keeping with this line we can see a constant care for the *inculturation* of the Gospel.

The first and indispensable step is learning the language of the ethnic groups with which we are involved. When these languages are too numerous (e.g. in Chad), we rely on lay catechists, so that the Gospel may be heard by all in their own language. In several places (e.g. Africa and Canada), Oblates are active in translating the Word of God into the local languages.

29. In the past Oblates were called specialists of difficult missions. They want to keep at all costs a truly missionary spirituality. They volunteer for *urgent* and dangerous ministries for which other evangelical workers cannot be found. They do so with real *modesty*, well aware that they cannot do everything, and that it is always necessary to go deeper. What is important is to do well what they are called to do, as is the Oblate way, knowing how to delegate to others, notable to the laity. Without a doubt their *Marian outlook* helps them in this.

C – Some deficiencies and issues of concern

30. The deficiencies pointed out in the answers are about a deeper reflection of the priorities and emphases mentioned above. The Oblate communities expressed at the same time both their real missionary activity and the ideal that they see more or less clearly before them. They described their pride in being missionaries and their regret of not being yet missionary enough. Some answers speak of real tensions which harm the missionary's identity. This is expressed in different ways. First of all, each man must walk his own path to healing, face his own personal problems, own his origin and history, live his sorrows, his anger, and meet Christ in the awareness of his own poverty and wounds. According to other responses, it is more urgent to set the new priorities needed to face the new needs of salvation of the poor. This must be planned. Spreading oneself too thin ('patchwork activity'), or pushing oneself beyond the limit of one's strength ('workaholism') is not fruitful. "Many Oblates have too many irons in the fire, and the mission suffers from it." Finally, others insist on the need to promote an Oblate spirituality: we must believe more in the meaning of what we are doing.

31. The vast majority of Oblates in ordinary pastoral care do not have any complexes. But many do express some reservations: ordinary pastoral care absorbs too much one's missionary energy; there is no more room to be creative, to go out to the real poor. Oblates want to be able to move about in order to keep a real missionary openness. The lack of priests, which is often serious and even agonizing, should not stop us in this effort. Mobility, however, does not mean dispersion: like St. Paul, Oblates see themselves going from one community to another making links. Moreover, they must learn more how to delegate many tasks to the laity, so that they can free themselves for the mission.

32. Most, however, express the needs in terms of 'more' and 'better', both as regards their being as well as their doing. They want to be *more* close to people, *more* attentive to the poor, to the workers, *more* available, *more* creative. They want a style of life that is *more* radically simple, a *more* real '*inserción*'. They propose to be *more* resolutely committed to human pro-

motion and development in schools and in training young people. They feel the need to *better* learn the language of the people, to be *more* faithful to their cultural realities, to give homilies that are *more* concrete. They want *better* organised parishes, method of catechesis and liturgies that are *better* adapted, sacraments that are *better* prepared. Many wish for a *stronger* presence in the media, or better use thereof. Some ask to be able to spend more time building living communities *rather than* to the construction of buildings. They wish to spend more time and energy on the catechumenate with particular attention to each person. They intend to require *greater* commitment and responsibility of the Christians, a *more* real sense of community, a *greater* missionary openness. They dream of offering the laity a *more* adequate and *more* specialised human and Christian formation that will lead them to a real Christian conscience...

33. Many also wish for *innovations in the methods* of apostolate. Thus many in Africa and elsewhere look forward to the setting up of teams for preaching missions. Others speak of well-organised programmes to *form lay community animators*: to motivate them, to guarantee them a complete formation, to develop a lay spirituality together with them, to give them responsibility, to make them self-sufficient, to create specialists for catechesis, retreats, social involvement, and also vocations of formators to whom they can pass on the torch.... Furthermore, it is often necessary to redefine and redistribute the tasks between the priest, the members of the parish council, between Oblates and associates...

34. Some of the wishes expressed concern the *formation* of Oblates themselves, especially *ongoing formation*: a good initiation to the media and to computers, so as to incorporate these new cultural realities into our missionary being; a mastering of the tools of sociology and social analysis and a deep reflection on modernity and its consequences, so that we can better read the signs of the times; a new approach to Christian doctrine in order to be able to propose it to the up and coming generation, including the theology of marriage and the family. But one community asks if all this knowledge and these experiences will suffice to confront today's real challenges? Will they really benefit the poor?

Some answers point to the formation of a new type of missionary, one who does not wait to be served (Africa), who accepts to be placed in daily situations of real poverty.... Elsewhere, it is asked that formators help the young Oblates to make the link between the knowledge of Christ and the new faces of suffering, to open themselves to the realities of the mission today. For this they feel it is essential to have enough well prepared formators, men of faith and prayer who can provide the accompaniment that is needed. It is likewise necessary that formation objectives and methods be unanimously accepted.

35. By contrast some speak of a *reorientation to the essential*: "If we were accused of being Christians, would the judge have enough evidence to condemn us?" (Canada). "Do we live in such a way as to be perceived as men of hope?" (France) "Are we signs of Christ's presence?" Our main work is to announce Christ in words and actions, to make him known as best we can, even in ordinary conversation. This should be done more through the language of the heart than by that of the intellect. We must read, re-read and study the Scriptures, with the attitude of one praying, but who still accepts to be enriched by exegesis.

There are divergent opinions as to what this reorientation or conversion to the Gospel means. Some Oblates deplore the fact that we waste precious energy criticizing the Church, thus giving a counter-witness: what's left of authority? they ask. As they see it, we should first of all stress our own sanctification, our relation with God, and a new bonding with Christ and the Church by means of our vows as religious. These Oblates feel threatened by an all pervading 'consumerism, hedonism and individualistic relativism'. "Let God make us more efficient instruments of evangelization." We should study Church documents on the consecrated life, and get back to our own Oblate spiritual texts. This will make it possible to be more evangelical and kerygmatic in our preaching, instead of getting bogged down in the social; the accent will be put on the knowledge of Jesus rather than on the preservation of cultures.

Others ask a more fundamental question: "*Who is the Christ we proclaim?*" Is not our

image of him only partial and unilateral? Do we let him challenge us, or are we content with just a sentimental relationship with him? If non-believers tend to reduce Christ to his human dimension, we must also beware of believers who would reduce him to his divinity, thus making him a personal comforter for the hereafter. To these latter, we should present especially his human face and his social message, which has meaning for this life.

36. The *Oblate community* (local, provincial...) is questioned on many levels, especially in the Northern regions. First of all its interior dimension: let it begin by evangelizing itself in order to be evangelizing; let it be the word of God so as to be heard; let it use the too neglected spiritual means (oraison, fraternal correction, examination of conscience, confession... in conformity with C.33), and let it open its doors for prayer. Moreover, the environment of the house itself must bear witness (atmosphere of order, quiet, study and prayer), and should not be confused for some kind of middle-class house.

However, the Oblate community does not exist of itself: it is a place of meeting and regular sharing by men totally dedicated to the 'reception and proclamation of the Gospel'. Within this community, communion always remains an ideal to be attained, the sense of belonging and interdependence has always to be strengthened. The members of the community must know how to affirm, encourage and help each other, how to share each others' joys, expectations, frustrations and hopes. Fellow members who are involved in today's new ways of apostolic activity have a particular need for moral and spiritual support. The community must also know how to share financial power, not to favour personal independence, but, on the contrary, in order to permit the financing of new community projects. The use we make of our real estate holdings, which are sometimes quite extensive, should be examined.

One response (USA) raises the question of community members who are a problem because of their inability or refusal to contribute positively to our common life and mission. Should there not be tools of evaluation that make it possible to foresee probable failures, such as are used in the preparation for marriage? Consequently, we could accept (or impose) non-communitarian or semi-communitarian situations.

37. Other requests concern the community in its outward thrust: that it may know how to *work in teams*, and adopt a common pastoral policy. May it dare to speak strongly, for example on the questions of immigrants and refugees. May it overcome its bureaucracy ('red tape'). May it take a prophetic attitude, know how to honestly acknowledge the faults of its members (including matters of sexual abuse), to rid itself of systems of oppression inherited from the past, ask pardon of persons it has offended, and so doing restore its true charismatic dimension.

One respondent raises an even more radical question: why so much effort to recruit vocations that resemble us? The classical forms of religious life have seen their day, 'at least in western Europe.' The Oblates would do better to open themselves to new forms of evangelical life and commitment: very different forms, that respond to the present state of post-modern civilization. The Oblates should be more involved in helping them come forth.

IV – A Few Challenges

A – The distant ones

38. All Oblates who are involved in what is known as pastoral work face this challenge: the number of baptized Christians does not correspond to those who show up at Sunday celebrations. The difference varies according to regions and countries, but those who stay away are sometimes an overwhelming majority. Some of the answers point to possible causes: negligence, geographically distant, being away from their place of origin, studies abroad (e.g. Africa), difficult marriage situations, social marginalization.... We sometimes find among them people who have rejected the Church but remain deeply attached to Christ, 'angry Christians' whose motives and anticlericalism we must try to understand. Their rejection of absolutist language should be met with an effort to present another image of the Church, that of Church as communion. In some developed areas we also find Christians who are 'in good health, fat and rich, and not very vulnerable to preaching', or those 'who would go out of their way' to avoid contact. In

dechristianized regions (France), the administration of the sacraments does not necessarily correspond to an act of faith. This belittles the Good News of Jesus Christ; Oblates try to be a critical voice in such a context.

39. As regards these 'distant Christians' the Oblates' attitude is in keeping with their spirit. The answers speak of the desire to make contact to enter into dialogue with these people. Before preaching, we take care to listen to them, to enter into their concrete concerns as they search for meaning (linked often to family life). We try to be close to them in their places of leisure or affairs (pubs and clubs)... We welcome them and visit them, especially during parish missions, and try to enter into their lives and daily struggles. In order to do this it is sometimes necessary to ward off the practicing Christians who form like a human shield to stop the priest from going out to these people. "St. Eugene and St. Paul would blame our reticence to go out to those who are the furthest away." An Italian respondent quoted Blessed Luigi Orione: "Lord, deliver me from the diabolical temptation and the harmful illusion of being content with the pious souls who frequent the church."

40. Dialogue depends on the religious elements, 'those seeds of life and gospel value' that remain present in these distant Christians. In Latin America, Oblates pay a lot of attention to popular religion, of which some elements could be integrated or at least provoke thought. In other countries, care is given to the numerous 'distant ones' who come to shrines and places and pilgrimage. In the underprivileged neighbourhoods of Naples, they try a meditation with the rosary in the streets which abound with many ancient religious images. Everywhere their requests for the sacraments are taken seriously and are an occasion to make a little progress: baptism of the children, a marriage, and especially funerals. Oblates put a lot into the preparation and celebration of these key moments. More generally, suffering and death offer chances to meet. In all these cases, lay groups, be they confessional or not, are very valuable: welcoming groups, 'outreach groups', non-confessional groups for mourning....

41. Sometimes these efforts open up a new phase of Christian living. Requests for the sacraments can lead them to accept a catechumenate programme, sometimes small liturgical celebrations at home. On the other hand visits lead to reconciliation and reintegration ('coming home programmes', 'groups for starting again'). In Africa as well as in many northern countries, a whole cycle of re-evangelization is set in motion with the purpose of remaking the whole Christian fabric, but this 'new evangelization' is much harder to accomplish than the first one. Together with the local Churches some Oblates have launched specific programmes in preparation for the Jubilee Year 2000, ad hoc renewal programmes ('Tent meeting', etc.: USA).

B – The crises and challenges of the world and the Church

42. Among the questions that are difficult to resolve and the challenges that emerged from the answers, some have to do with *the status of religious or priest*, and his way of acting. The old models of priest are sometimes a persistent obstacle, and without wanting to we find ourselves submerged by activities that are not among our missionary priorities. The Oblate-lay relationship seen from the perspective of Church as community is not always easy to establish. The link between evangelization and the ministry for justice, or action in the social realm, is sometimes not well perceived. On this score one Latin American answer spoke of the danger of 'romanization'. One or the other answer mentions the right of specialists in theology to freely seek the truth by resisting if need be a reactionary dogmatism.

43. In many older Christian countries there is a tendency to refer more to a *crisis of Christianity* or of *the Catholic Church*: "Who wants to join a society that is going bankrupt?" (Canada). The loss of riches, prestige, credibility, and even honour, as well as intra-ecclesial fighting, empties the auditoriums and leads to a big instability. The analyses and proposed remedies are far from being unanimous among the Oblates concerned, but all are aware that we are facing a profound purification, including one of 'Christian culture', which must be purified of that which is far from the spirit of Jesus. The Church, and the Oblates with it, are invited to understand that they are not confronted with, or outside of, nor are they in the midst of the world's realities, but rather that they are one component of those realities. We Oblates, ourselves, must become

aware of our poverty and open ourselves to the Spirit of renewal, who will lead us where He wills. It will probably take new generations of Oblates to effect the needed mutations.

44. Other questions have to do with what is seen as a *crisis of Christian communities*. In many places, faced with a great religious ignorance of the majority, there is worry about how to teach who Christ is, to make him present in the post-modern society. In Latin America they mention entire peoples who are 'ill-evangelized'. In a recently evangelized country in Africa, some Oblates are asking how to root the Gospel in people's hearts, because the religion that was implanted sometimes seems purely sociological: the neophytes received instruction, but in fact they did not personally encounter Christ. Elsewhere, it is asked why Christians are turning to Islam. Almost everywhere the blossoming of new marginal and sectarian religious movements seems to be a new challenge.

45. In general, *modernity* seems to be an obstacle, like a wall that blocks our action. As regards people who do not express their religious needs, we ask ourselves what their real needs are. The culture of pleasure seems to have put the youth and even children beyond our reach, so much so that a regular catechesis becomes almost impossible. The moving population, uprooting, or at times extreme social situations lead us to discover many who are excluded from evangelization, and who we do not know how to reach.

46. More serious, possibly, is the *crisis of values*: 'loss of traditional values', 'crisis of morality'. Modernity, secularism engender, especially in the excluded, disillusion and a feeling of emptiness. We are hard put to know what to teach them to give them hope again, so that they may regain an optimistic view of themselves, of life and of the world.... Yet, secularization is not the absence of God, but indeed another path of revelation: the face of God that we thought we knew is gone, but he is present in another way, and of that we are witnesses. To do this, the first attitude is one of kenosis: the missionary feels deeply that he must enter a phase of emptying himself, of aphasia, before the Gospel can once again be spoken as Good News to the man of today, in words that he can understand.

C – Notes on 'non-Christians', 'post-Christians', 'pre-Christians'

47. The questionnaire had a quotation on non-Christians from *Redemptoris Missio* followed by a question (N° 7) referring to 'post-Christians' and 'pre-Christians'. This question was not too well understood or accepted, but it did provoke some interesting reactions. Without a doubt there are many things in common between the 80% inhabitants of Zwickau (in former East Germany) and the 94% of students in Oblate schools in Hong Kong who have no Christian reference whatsoever, even though the former have a Christian ancestry while the latter do not. In both cases the Oblates don't give up. A fundamental reflection on these questions has been undertaken by, among others, The Institute of Mission Sciences at our own Oblate University of St. Paul in Ottawa.

48. The notion of 'pre-Christians' indicates on our part a *project of Christianization*. If this notion has meaning, it is first of all in Africa. In many countries of the black continent, Oblates give priority to the peoples and areas that have never heard the Gospel. They do so with some hope and some success. Catechumens are numerous and require an intensive work of evangelization. This is direct proclamation of the Christian faith. One answer even speaks of the same for Muslims. On the other southern continents, they speak of pre-evangelization: removing prejudices and presenting Christian teaching discretely without proselytizing. One example would be the Hmong language programme of Radio Veritas Asia. "People thirst more and more for Christ" (Sri Lanka).

49. In all regions it is rather *inter-religious dialogue* that seems to be the order of the day. Oblates meet with believers of other religions: Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, other traditional religions. Presence among these believers must be sometimes discreet and anonymous (e.g. among the Muslims in Belgium). They give importance to friendship, daily human contacts (e.g. by giving free language lessons, or digging a well...), by promoting common human values. This is done where this is possible, and even where there are tensions (Sri Lanka). We seek that part of the truth which they have, keeping well in mind our own faith. Dialogue is an absolute priority

wherever Christians are a very small minority: "A constituent element of the Oblate mission in Africa" (Senegal). Some do not even hesitate to call for dialogue with non-Christian and non-Catholic theologians, exegetes, thinkers and poets, and eventually even including dialogue with sects and traditional religions. Sickness, suffering and death, as well as festivities, are chances to organize ecumenical or inter-religious celebrations. They are occasions to announce a good news.

Oblates are also involved in *non-denominational* groups (Rotary...), common social projects *with non-believers* ('including communists'). They even open their projects to these people: Christ will pass through our involvement with the poor, witness prepares the word. According to circumstances, they know how to present the Gospel as a counter-culture.

50. In the developed and older Christian countries, the questions presents itself in another way, and the term '*post-Christian*' is not altogether inappropriate. Here are mentioned 'baptized pagans, Christian or agnostic Christians'. More generally, a big challenge is to meet modern man, so marked by technology, the media, secularism and consumerism (the 'terror of consumerism'). In the southern continents, the scepticism and indifference of intellectuals and universities is pointed out. We are convinced that modern man has needs of salvation, even though they are not expressed. How to be missionaries in his universe? Yet we know that God acts within every man, and that there are lay values about which we ourselves must reflect.

51. The first attitude proposed is one of active patience: an attitude that implies respect, confidence and friendship. The method is one of openness and attention to peoples' real needs with reference to their affiliation. The dialogue can begin on common concerns related to life, to morality and sometimes faith. This will mean setting aside false images of Christ. When we get to the point of presenting the faith, we should present it as an initiation, in a language that speaks to people where they are at. This often requires that we distance ourselves from a 'Christian' language that our contemporaries cannot even pronounce. It is also necessary to see that the catechumens, as well as the Christians, are first of all men and women who are responsible for themselves, their actions and their commitments. In the very poor contexts, this presupposes a human formation (reading, writing, arithmetic; hygiene and health; respect for creation, a sense for others, and for the common good, life in society, rights and duties of a citizen...).

52. Finally Oblates expect to reach the non-Christians born of this modernity through the lay Christians they form, through specialized groups (charismatic groups, Legion of Mary), through small communities (basic Christian communities...), and other such groups they animate. Much pain is taken to communicate to these lay people our deep sense and concern for mission, and the love we feel for all those who live in the ignorance of the Gospel.

III CULTURE AND CULTURES

1. The New Culture Promoted by the Media and Traditional Values

Under this heading the Oblates offer a wide spectrum of opinion, from those who judge very positively the contribution of the *New Culture*, emanating most all from the mass media, all the way to those who opt to seek refuge almost exclusively in the traditional. The majority of the Oblates, however, can be found some place in the middle. By making use of indigenous and folk cultures, they accept new values, while still resisting certain modern and post-modern anti-values.

** Support for the New Culture Being Promoted by the Media*

For some, the *New Culture* promoted by the media, as regards the religious, expresses a search for God with a critical sense. This culture opens one to transcendence and to faith. It promotes values like liberty, dignity, equality in diversity (women, without distinction, are absolutely equal). It is a bearer of life, of a gospel sense and openness. According to them, the non-evidence of God in society is not atheism. Secularization is a unique chance because it permits responsibility and authenticity (not following like sheep). In the traditional cultures, there were many prohibitions that did not permit an authentic freedom.

Moreover, with the present technological progress, this new culture permits access to or

the possibility of being active members of an infinite number of new milieus, and to accomplish our work with greater efficiency. For this it is necessary to be peace-makers and to promote the knowledge and use of what is new (mass media, computers, Internet, etc.). A different attitude would be the equivalent of 'flight from the world' that would make it impossible for us to be 'leaven in the mass'. We should not 'demonize' culture, but on the contrary we should offset the negative which is found in all cultures by living totally immersed in the midst of the people of today. If we want to evangelize culture, we must know it and accept it, and not trim the demands of the Gospel to our own limitations. Presenting ourselves as referees or guides of this new culture is the same as assuming a paternalistic attitude at a time when our world (our society) is in its social 'adolescence', or in a stage of emancipation moving toward maturity. We can have influence only when the people ask our advice or require our intervention.

Entering into communion with this new culture we can give new hope to those many who are disillusioned with the institutional Church or with a 'social' Catholicism. Finally, whether we like it or not, this new culture is furtively penetrating the cities and especially the world of the youth. So it is useless to oppose ourselves to it. Moreover, there is need of a 'renewed' spirituality that is open to the society in which we find ourselves immersed. In order to live immersed in the real world, it is necessary to accept this new culture and to promote exchanges on secular values that are authentic. We have to change language so as to be understood by today's world and not present ourselves as being from another world (extra-terrestrials).

Some Oblates observe with sorrow and bewilderment that certain brother Oblates accept this new culture up to the point of promoting very liberal attitudes, contrary to the official teaching of the Church, for example in the areas of conjugal morality or the non-ordination of women. Of course these Oblates tend to reject this new culture as a whole. On the other hand, some Oblates, reacting to such an attitude, warn against 'restoration' tendencies which should be resisted.

** Rejection of the New Culture promoted by the media*

For some, the *New Culture* cannot be accepted because it is the bearer of secularism, materialism, individualism, consumerism, licentiousness and hedonism, immediate and superficial satisfaction, economic globalization and exclusion of the poor and the unproductive, rupture of the family and its values, privatization of faith and religion which present themselves as simple articles of consumption, etc. Church and faith realities are seen as marginal and behind the times, so much so that the Christians are ashamed to be seen practicing their religion, and hide it.

On the other hand, other Oblates do not reject this new culture outright: they say that it does not affect them, because the people with whom they live are immersed in extreme poverty, or caught in a civil war, and have all they can do to fight for survival. In this context, the Oblates say their role is to deal with the effects of these conflicts: to preserve intact their scale of values and their style of Oblate life (community, culture and traditions); to be faithful witnesses of the Gospel; to help the suffering; to respect human dignity, to preach justice and peace, to strengthen the bonds of community with each other and with the Congregation.

** Selective acceptance of the new culture*

a) The contribution of other cultures

None the less the greater majority of Oblates try to nuance their judgment of the new culture. In this sense they accept the authentic values in it, and they try to offset its anti-values with alternative elements taken from traditional culture, folk cultures and indigenous cultures. And above all they insist on the need for their own formation, and for the formation of the people they serve so that both can judge the new culture correctly and without prejudice.

i) Indigenous and ancestral cultures

It is truly admirable how Oblates have had recourse to indigenous cultures in recent years, especially in the Regions of the southern hemisphere and among the Amerindians in the north. So doing they have made enormous steps towards inculturation. They have introduced into their celebrations indigenous singing, instruments, dances, sound ancestral traditions (harvest

festival), symbols, gestures and rites. They have rediscovered the richness of 'local' cultural values and ways of doing that enrich Christianity (oral transmission in catechesis). They have made use of some myths, modifying them in the light of the Gospel. An especially enriching aspect of indigenous cultures is the respect for creation, which opens us up to a renewed awareness of the ecology. Indigenous cultures promote goodness, a respect for life, sharing with the most needy, and a simple lifestyle that can serve as a break against consumerism.

There are also those who say: "Making a defense of the signs of God's presence in ancient rites is not the same as proclaiming the Good News, and at times can even lead to apostasy." In this same line some Oblates observe that the members of these groups have sometimes reacted strongly to the acceptance, promotion or giving free way to the integration of indigenous cultural elements. They totally rejected Christianity that had first evangelized them, and openly returned to their ancestral religion and spirituality on the pretext that Christianity had nothing valid to give them. Might this be a momentary reaction that would correct itself with time? Might it not be necessary to find a way to better orientate with more discernment this effort at inculturation? Furthermore, it is said that this urge to recover indigenous values leads some Oblates to relativize their own faith and dampens their missionary zeal. If that is the case, does this not point to an inadequate understanding of what authentic inculturation is? It is pointed out that to work successfully among indigenous peoples or other minorities, one must be first of all a balanced person, not inclined to conflict, and open to cultural diversity.

ii) Folk and ethnic cultures

Besides the valuable contribution of indigenous cultures, in various places good use has been made of the contributions of folk religiosity and ethnic cultures, especially among the Hispanics and Afro-Americans in the USA. Some Oblates note that this is very delicate, since one must give a better formation to people in order to free them from their inadequate beliefs and their superstitions. At least this popular religiosity (Hispanic and Afro-American) can create some space that is different from or an alternative to the new culture propounded by the media. This spirituality and religiosity are well adapted to maintain and strengthen family values and social commitment in the face of injustices, while the new culture privatizes faith and destroys the family fabric.

iii) Traditional Christian culture

The majority of Oblates working in traditional Christian settings in Europe and North America recognise the need for a serious renewal. The new culture spreads rapidly in the world of the youth, and our half-empty churches serve only for the spiritual care of the majority who knew other times. In this situation Oblates believe there is need for a double attitude. The first is to continue animating these Christians of days clearly gone by. This includes encouraging them to assume new commitments and apostolic responsibilities, above all the service of those who are suffering the most, and to renew themselves to the best of their ability. The second attitude is to seek new methods, new interests that can attract the youth, giving them direction in their sometimes indiscriminate acceptance of the new and pseudo-values of the new culture. In any case we must take our people where they are at and accompany them on their path of growth.

b) A critical spirit and discernment as regards the new culture promoted by the media

The greater majority of Oblates, who by their selective acceptance of the new culture promoted by the media and their search for alternative contributions from other cultures (indigenous, ethnic, folk or traditional), make many suggestions that deserve our attention. These suggestions are at times wishes that they themselves want to realize, but most of the time they reflect actual practice. Suffice it to list here the most central from a very long list.

Above all Oblates underline the importance of the witness of their lives. We cannot correctly guide others if we ourselves are blind. We want to update our faith and our spirituality for today's world, but this will not be achieved by turning away from or hiding authentic Gospel values. It is in this sense that they insist on the following aspects of our life and our work:

* We must continue presenting the truth, making it real for today, since truth frees: “To bring up to date the doctrinal content of faith, especially as related to the family and the economy”.

* Be present in this new world with the attitude of a companion, of support, of acceptance and witness, all the while training people in collective responsibility, and assuring personal and spiritual care for those wounded by this world.

* Adapt our preaching using the means of social communication as well as imagery (the new culture is a culture of the image, no longer an oral or written culture). This does not mean conveying our old messages with new techniques. It means learning a new language, so as to be understood by the new culture, and so that our message make sense.

* Give more emphasis to witness rather than argumentation so as not to fall into spiritualism: “To touch their hearts rather than teach them bookish theories”.

* Make gestures of solidarity with the poor and the disenfranchized: “Support those forces that seek to change the structures that exclude”. Help people to get organized, and ourselves to be present in their organizations, and in their basic communities.

* Educate people to be free in the face of consumerist publicity.

* Be men of the Church without ambiguity in language and behaviour. To share our faith, and to stress being and becoming rather than having and appearances.

* Reaffirm our own scale of values so as not to be ‘secularized’: “The New Evangelization is also for us”.

* Be careful of our Christian example, and of justice towards our own employees and collaborators.

* Have a simple, detached and gospel lifestyle. “The poor question our style of life, and our rich attitudes.”

* Pay attention to persons rather than works and regulations.

* Enter into the midst of our people so that they can upset and convert us. Share with them.

* Get rid of our masculine fears and complexes (macho) so that women can humanize and evangelize us. Help people to overcome their fears.

* Have confidence and give responsibility. Give rise to authentic personal encounters that ‘always leave their mark’.

* Teach how to discern what humanizes from what dehumanizes.

* Look at the world through the eyes of the poor. Judge all new policy from the perspective of the poor: does it favour them or hurt them?

This list of ways of giving more authentic witness could go on and on. But let us go on to look at some concrete attitudes suggested to help our people confront the new culture promoted by the media.

Above all we must help them, especially the youth, to acquire a critical sense in the face of this bombardment of this new culture by the mass media of which they are the object. With a more careful formation they will be able to discern better and not be victims of all the pseudo-values and anti-values aimed at them.

In particular it is suggested (without any order of priority):

* In the face of individualism, educate them to a sense of community, encourage sharing and gestures of solidarity and participation in civic organizations; put them ‘in relation’, help

people to unite and organize to defend themselves from injustice.

* In the face of consumerism help them to become free and responsible; awaken and develop an ecological conscience and solidarity with future generations in order to counteract the destruction and contamination of the environment by the unbridled production of consumer goods that are sometimes superfluous.

* To counter materialism give an example of simplicity and detachment, personal liberty and poverty; recall to value of hospitality and the respect for life; make our doctrinal presentation 'speak' to the men, women and youth of today.

* In the face of hedonism and licentiousness, and immediate and superficial satisfaction, inculcate values of authentic freedom, of responsibility, of service and gratuitous giving.

* In the face of the exclusion provoked by economic globalization, form them to solidarity, open the minds and hearts so that they may broaden their

horizons beyond their own frontiers and seek out alternatives for co-existence and social justice on our 'global village', with the conviction that working for justice is an integral part of evangelization.

* In the face of secularization, the privatization of faith and the break-down of the family and its values, study in depth together with our people the social (and family) implications of the Gospel, and encourage them to receive the sacrament of Confirmation.

The Oblates also emphasize many other forms of confrontation with the new culture promoted by the media, describing how they have been enriched, and at times evangelized, by the poor and by other cultures and religious traditions. This is the subject of the next section.

2. The Contribution of Other Cultural Values and Other Religious Traditions

It would be vain to pretend to make a complete list of the enrichment that Oblates have received in their work with the poor of other cultures and religious traditions. Without giving up our own mission of announcing the gospel, which by vocation is directed to the poor, there are those who suggest that our '*missio ad gentes*' should be called '*receptio apud populum*', since who knows that what we receive from them is maybe more than we give them. Another Oblate emphasizes that they give flesh to our intellectual bones by making us have a new reading of the Gospel, uniting faith and life.

By way of example we present some of the Oblates speaking themselves on this point:

"It is important for us to learn (from the native peoples). We are impressed by their family values and their love and appreciation of the beauty of nature. For them God is the God of creation.... They have a deep religious sense, a great capacity to forgive, great strength in time of trial, respect for their elders and their wisdom, unconditional hospitality, love of Mary and Christ crucified, patience in educating their children, and they value the example the elders must give.... Their ability to interiorize is openness to the Word of God..."

"We identify with what is positive in the culture (Hispanic) and we celebrate it. We must listen to them and watch them to learn... to learn their language, the openness with which they express their faith, their generosity, their sincerity, their joy, their resignation.... To do this we must learn to appreciate their typical food, their folklore, their traditions, listen to their stories, take part in their reunions, recognize the importance of the role of the mothers and grandparents... have confidence in them and give them responsibilities..."

"We must open ourselves to the immigrants who teach us.... Learn to use the law for the service of people.... They challenge us to be more authentic, to let go of our security in order to be credible.... Their hospitality, their openness, their human warmth, their ecumenism, their spirit of work, their toughness, their patience, their courage, their hope in the midst of problems inspires us.... We struggle with their problems and grow in compassion.... Their solidarity among themselves challenges us. Are we united?.... By revealing the poverty of our speech and our lack of authenticity, the poor invite us to convert ourselves to the truth of our vocation...."

“We feel with them in their suffering (Africa)... We admire their patience, their mutual solidarity, their sharing and their strength in suffering.... Their heroic life in the midst of enormous problems edifies us.... Their living faith and the depth of their convictions impress us, as do likewise, the importance they give to persons over things... their hospitality, their sense of community and their resignation in the face of difficulties and death.... We learn to have confidence in them and to back their initiatives....”

“In their joyful and mutual support (in Latin America), they make us discover the social sense of the Gospel.... Their sense of humour in the face of adversity, their faith and confidence in the love and mercy of God, their tenderness, all this impresses us....”

“Despite the difference in faith (in Asia) we learn local manners by osmosis as it were.... We appreciate their art, their dance and music, their literature.... We recognize their deep human values and admire their simplicity, humility and patience, their sense of hospitality, their love of nature, their confidence in God and their sense of divine providence ('slow but not sure'), their joviality, their courage, their spirit of work, their respect for priests and religious, their hospitality and sincere friendship....”

The seriousness with which the Muslims live their faith encourages us to do the same. The Buddhists uphold their cultural values better than the Christians, who are too westernized (Sri Lanka).

The situation of our older Oblate brothers who face today's world is particularly 'poor'; yet they evangelize us by helping us to relativize many aspects of the new culture, and to avoid activism and superficiality.

By this more real contact with those who are different, the Oblates have learned a lot from them: their openness and humility; their perseverance and resistance in poverty; their solidarity in times of distress; their joy despite material deprivation; their authentic belief in the Word of God; their love for the Church and their responsible involvement in its life; the patience they have for arriving at a consensus; their capacity to find time for interpersonal relations; their courage and efforts in the struggle for a decent life; their patience and hope in a better future; their constancy in precarious and destitute situations; their confidence in Divine Providence, etc.

In short, the Oblates have learned to recognize the cultural and religious 'difference' or 'otherness', and this difference has enriched them. To do this they have had to open themselves more, to learn and appreciate languages and local manners, and to share more with their people, to be associated with them, to visit their homes, to listen to them and their problems, to dress, eat and work like they do. Then they went on to correct many previous prejudices that they considered 'incorrect', or 'diabolical', or 'pagan', many foreign cultural elements. They fostered the integration of local culture into the liturgy, into catechesis, and into Christian tradition: songs, dances, music and instruments, funeral vigils (Africa), 'circles for healing and sweat tents' (Amerindians of North America), processions, rites of passage, New Year and 'pongol' celebrations (Sri Lanka), a Christian adaptation of yoga and the concept of the 'ashram' (Sri Lanka), other adaptations of liturgies and myths ('the peace tree' in Cameroon), fiestas and festivals proper to each place.

But it is not enough to integrate local cultural symbols into Christian life, there must also be a deep penetration of the Gospel into these cultures. In this some Oblates say we have failed: “Secularization advances and we do nothing; we let ourselves be secularized.” – “All this disorients and bewilders the people.” – “The people lost their former cultural values and assumed a secularized culture.” – “Our Oblate communities are divided over our attitude towards Amerindian spirituality.” – “We do not get involved in other cultures and we continue living according to our own foreign culture.”

– “We preach our own culture.” – “Some do not start from the religious traditions of the people.” – “The pursuit of earthly goods as the sole source of happiness.” – “Fear of losing one's culture, one's identity, and confusion of the Gospel with western colonialism.” – “The rush for power provokes tribal and ethnic conflicts.” – “Tribal and regional feeling, as well as the spread of sects and national or regional churches, reject the 'mission' as an obstacle to the indigenous.” –

“A Church that has its head in the West is seen as a menace to autonomy.” – “The Bible is interpreted according to the charism of the leader... and for his profit.”

However, several concrete challenges to community life are pointed out in this effort at inculturation:

1. The community is in solidarity with the families of Oblates, but this solidarity can put in jeopardy the bare minimum autonomy necessary for the mission;

2. Welcoming the families of Oblates can impede concentration and serious work (constant coming and going, endless conversations and music...); the result: work is improvised, superficial, lacking in soundness, and there is hardly time for prayer and study;

3. Study is valued as formal intellectual preparation, but the manual work necessary for the good running of the community is looked down upon.

The following is suggested by means of countering these excesses:

1. On the personal level:

One must evangelize oneself, in order to become authentic and personal as regards one's thinking, options, decisions and actions; this implies freeing oneself from an enslaving ancestral vision of things (belief in sorcery, in expiatory victims, in the clan secret, in the despotic authority of 'elders'), and that one acquire a new gospel vision of God, the world, of man, society, power, and created things. In order to do this, it is necessary:

to radically commit oneself to Christ without mistrust;

dare to distance oneself from one's own family, without fearing threats or what will be said;

to do domestic chores humbly, as a service to the community.

2. On the community level:

It is necessary to help and evangelize each other, and not to view the other as an intruder or a threat;

to open oneself to the community as to a new family, and to strengthen the bonds between the members;

value service above power.

On the other hand the greater majority of Oblates affirm that they have not renounced their mission of evangelizing cultures and religious traditions. They confirmed the good and positive of cultures, deepening this with the gospel message adapted to today's world. They have detected forces contrary to traditional values (New Age, fundamentalism, feminism/anti-feminism, consumerism, materialism, individualism, etc.), and they have helped the people to confront them. They have entered in depth into indigenous and youth spirituality, and at the same time the natives and youth have assumed the Gospel in greater depth. They have helped the people to make an evangelical discernment of neo-liberalism and its consequences, by promoting the 'globalization of social justice'. They have pointed out the modern pseudo-values and traditional cultures that block the Gospel and education (witchcraft), by deepening and adapting traditional values and instilling that which is lacking to swim against the current, or to be prophetic or counter-cultural, by encouraging viable alternatives. They have been determined to train their people in the Sacred Scriptures, in theology and spirituality, so that they can better assume their apostolic responsibility in any period and support community projects in favour of the disenfranchised. They have tried to discern the riches and the limits of cultures in order to relativize them and to form consciences. They have helped people to have a critical conscience as regards the means of social communication. They have encouraged praiseworthy customs and purified anti-evangelical ones. They worked at knowing and using better the culture of the image, in view of getting their message through.... And they have been close to their people and journeyed with them in their growth.

3. Using the Means of Social Communication for the Oblate Mission and Questioning the New Culture

The presence of Oblates in the field of social communications varies from Region to Region and place to place. Many observe that this requires special abilities and a formation which they don't have. They note that it requires much money, and that it is necessary to give priority to witness and to the use of more modest visual media. The simplicity of our lifestyle is a powerful means to resist consumerism. Our commitment to the people and our religious life are a help against the absence of God advocated by the new culture.

As regards the ability and special preparation, there seems to be a consensus that those in formation should be initiated into this field, and that it is they who will be able to use them better. They can be used to 'give a voice to those who have no voice'. Where there are no young Oblates, we must make use of the young lay people who work with us.

As regards cost, it is suggested that to get our message across when preaching, we make use of that which does not depend on sophisticated and costly means, but of a witness that is supported by economical visual means. It is also mentioned that real communication is only achieved through personal encounter and dialogue, and that we should not let go by any occasions that come our way. The depth of our relations with people is an antidote for the superficiality of the media. Our liturgies, our lifestyle, and the firmness of our convictions are also means of social communication. Our participation in workshops, our support of campaigns (e.g. against abortion, alcoholism, etc.) cost nothing and are good means of communication. Likewise our parochial bulletins, the contribution of theatric, music or dance groups, our good use of the sacramentals (very visual), our availability to accept invitations to take part in public panel discussions or conferences, etc., these are all means very accessible to everybody. And finally, there are more economical means of media that we can use for catechesis and teaching groups, parish or neighbourhood communities (the CEBs, 'Asipa', 'Pududuwa': Sri Lanka).

In various places, the Oblates are present and influence the means of social communication. For example in Canada: *Novalis*, *Radio Maria*, *Radio Galilee*, regional community TV channels (cable with 35,000 homes subscribed), *Cap-Jeunesse* (for young people); family magazines (St. Mary's Province); a regular newspaper column by an Oblate; in the USA: programs on *Nuestra Familia*, *Spanish Television Network*, the weekly *Our Sunday Visitor*, the productions of the *Oblate Media Center*, newsletters like *Scope* and *Vision*, festivals of Christian art; in Europe: *CREC-AVEX*, theatric, choral and musical groups, kiosks in expositions, transmission of Feast day Masses, articles for the press, cassettes of the Gospels in local languages, the promotion of films, magazines and newsletters, the creation of posters; in Africa: formation workshops, articles for the press, TV appearances, the promotion of periodicals and reviews; in Latin America: *Radio Pius XII*, *Radio Pa'i Pukú*, drama groups, alternative popular TV, popular radio programmes, books (G. Iriarte, D. Gagnon); in Asia: inter-religious dialogue, *Centre for Society and Religion* which publishes *Social Justice* and *Sadarnaya* (Sri Lanka: Frs. Oswald Firth and Tissa Balasuriya), the review *Bakhti Probodanaya* which exists for one hundred years.

Wherever possible, Oblates are present in the big national or private media agencies, putting their know-how to use. Others make use of alternate types of media (smaller local, regional or neighbourhood) as a space where the voiceless can be heard and mentalities formed. They are especially concerned about forming responsible lay Christians who are involved in the media world. This is particularly true where the media refuse a religious presence, either because they are controlled by the State or are in private hands. All esteem the use of the computer very highly for its efficiency, e.g. in parish administration. Many are hooked up to the Internet and take part in forums, some even have their own web page. They see this as a way of reaching the youth and to dialogue with the future generation.... In all of this, the Oblates don't want to be mere spectators or users. They want to teach people to be critical, to question the '*New Culture*' (e.g. the way it has made violence and sex every day facts of life, etc.), and to question traditional culture (anti-feminist). In this it is necessary to be prophetic, to know how to counter the dominant culture.

Many Oblates are getting onto Internet and already have their own page. They consider this a good way to reach the youth and future generations.... They do not want to be mere spectators or consumers, but rather prophetic and counter-cultural, teaching others to be critical of and to question the new culture (trivialization of violence, sex, etc.), and also to question traditional culture (anti-feminist). Several consider alternative means of social communication (small, local or regional, community) as a space where they can give a voice to those who have no voice, and form people. All judge the use of computers as an invaluable instrument for greater efficiency in parish administration. Where possible Oblates collaborate by their presence and expertise in the major state or private means of social communication. And above all the Oblates consider it most important to prepare and give Christian responsibility to lay people who are in this field.

In spite of all that was mentioned, several Oblates feel that we are only at the beginning and that we need to go much further, stressing that *media* are only *means* and that what is important is the goal, which can only be reached by the action of God, our own authenticity being the most important means.

4. Influence of Oblates in the world of science, international relations and the decisions that affect the world of the poor

The Oblates in general, except for a few personal commitments, recognise that they are not involved much in those international forums that influence the fate of the poor. Almost all mention the presence and interest in Oblate *Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation* commissions. Some appreciate the *OBCOM* network. In the Americas the *North-South Dialogue* is appreciated, and in Europe and Africa the Oblate presence in the European network for promoting justice in Africa.

Various Oblates are working in universities or colleges where they have influence in administrative posts, or as teachers or chaplains (St. Paul's University, Newman College, National University of Lesotho, UNAM-Namibia, Collège de Jonquière, Vista Hermosa College, Catholic English College, etc.). They have the *Baobab* and *Luzingu ya mpa* publications in the Congo. Wherever they are, Oblates publish or take part in the publication of various scientific reviews. The Izcán Catholic Office for the Rights of Man (OCADHI) was started by the Oblates of Guatemala, who also collaborate with Minugua (United Nations Mission for Guatemala). The Centre St-Pierre-Apôtre in Montreal has its own audio-visual service which produces and distributes various products in this field.

On a more personal level, there is an Oblate presence in various organisations like the *Catholic Physicians' Guild*, *Urban Core Association*, *NET*, *Yukon Water Board*, *International Association of Prison Chaplains* (Bernard Pinet), *ACAT* (Asociación Cristiana para la Abolición de la Tortura – Christian Association for the Abolition of Torture), *Missio* (Germany – Lucien Schmitt and Heinz Steegman), *Catholic Forum* (Namibia – H.-Theo Stens). They also take part in many international, regional or national organisms like *Amnesty International*, *American Watch*, *Centre for Society and Religion* (Sri Lanka), *UNICEF*, as well as Conferences of Religious and various NGOs. One Oblate (Gregorio Iriarte) took part in the Latin American Parliament in order to study with other experts the problem of the external debt of the countries of the continent in view of the third millennium jubilee. Another (George McLean, Eastern US) has been doing research on culture and values for many years now. St-Joseph Province in Canada has one Oblate who is chaplain to the *World Union of Women's Organisations*; another who is an adviser to the federal and provincial governments on immigration policy, as well as being director of the Centre for Latin America. Through their scientific work, the Oblates of Sri Lanka are engaged in the struggle for land distribution to the poor, and in general against the causes of poverty. They actively take part in international networks for human rights that try to modify national educational policies. The Canadian Oblate Justice and Peace Commission questions multinationals, and fights against the MAI (Multilateral Agreement on Investment). In Poland the Oblates let one of their houses serve as an African Centre; they open their doors to meetings of journalists, for religious concerts, and for meetings of the Catholic Intellectuals Club. In France, the Peace Chalet is open to persons

involved with these high authorities. St-Pierre-Apôtre church in Montreal is open to television for the direct transmission of certain important events. In Belgium North, one Oblate house and some parishes have become meeting places for believers and non-believers, young and old. Some Oblates live together in communities with persons of other cultures and religions, thus fighting against xenophobia. Oblates are members of the *Chad Union of Christian Leaders*. The Guatemala Delegation has organized an international meeting of indigenous peoples. There are Oblates known internationally for their theological research, for their study of Justice and peace questions, and for inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue.

Some Oblates decry the fact that since our scholastics study in non-oblate institutions, we are left with fewer specialists and consequently less influence.

Nevertheless being involved directly in work at the grass roots level and in the middle of the poor, Oblates do not fail to exert influence in the local and regional level. They conscientize their people through various groups; they form lay people to commit themselves in this field; they train people for responsible participation in elections; they give financial support to various specialized organizations; they publish articles and books with the results of their studies on culture and international topics; they work in the defense of the ancestral rights of the First Nations and their cultures; they take part in the international defense of women's rights; they fight for the rights of the unborn; they sound the alert against corporations that exploit the Third World; they defend the rights of refugees, immigrants and prisoners; they promote appreciation for the different rites in the Church; they support ecumenism and take part in ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue; they revive the historical memory of peoples; they intervene in matters of concern by letters or setting up meetings with ministers or other government persons; they urge prepared persons to take up public charges; they invite specialists and intellectuals for conferences, sessions, courses or encounters; they give retreats for students and professors, etc.

IV OBLATES AND THE LAITY

1. Oblate support for lay participation in civic / community organisations engaged in the transformation of society

On the whole, the question whether the Oblates support the participation of the laity in community and civic organizations which are engaged in the transformation of society has not been enthusiastically answered. Some responses indicate that some Oblates are not in any way directly involved with civic organizations. The majority of the responses show that the Oblates are overwhelmingly involved with apostolic movements or Church based groups. A logical question that arises from the lack of direct support given to civic organizations is whether these organizations are at all seen as vehicles for authentic Gospel values.

While the Oblates do not give direct support to civic organizations, most of them appear to encourage the laity to participate in organizations which are actively engaged in the transformation of society. The Oblates encourage lay people to take their civic duties and responsibilities seriously. Catholics are encouraged to participate, for example, in general elections and in local government. They are encouraged to run for office. It is strongly believed that the laity with their Christian values will be in a position to influence the ethos of the public service. Some Oblates state that their commitment to economic justice is normally expressed through their involvement in the social justice ministry. They work closely with the Justice and Peace groups. This involvement is seen as an expression of Oblate charism, of not only evangelizing the poor and the marginalized, but also of seeking ways and means of changing the status quo in order to free the poor.

Work with Community Organisations

Oblates in different parts of the Oblate world, express their charism of solidarity with the poor by collaborating with lay people in movements such as 'La Poudrière' in Belgium, Credit Unions, Co-operatives, Red Cross, Feminist movements etc. In many places Oblates work with farmers, fishers, trade unions and professional associations. The involvement of Oblates in these

movements is intended to promote the culture of human rights. It is an expression of solidarity with people who constantly face the odds in society. Above all, some Oblates see their involvement with lay organizations as a way of encouraging them to form networks that will make their voice heard in the corridors of power. They are also convinced that one of the best ways of helping the poor is by encouraging them to be responsible for their own destiny, to take their rightful place within society and in the Church.

Lay people already play leading roles in society. There is no reason why their contribution should be less felt in the Church. Oblate involvement with lay organizations should lay more emphasis on Christian formation and the strengthening of the leadership of these movements. Some Oblates specifically offer leadership training programmes. In the Philippines, for example, Oblates work with Muslims, not only to promote interfaith relationships, but also to jointly tackle societal problems. There is a conviction among those Oblates who work with the poor that collaboration with people has the effect of changing people's attitudes, of inspiring hope and of strengthening community ties.

In some developing countries, especially in the recent past, the Oblates were involved in educating people about the different parties and what they stood for. They taught people about their civic duties and rights. This was and continues to be a necessary function in view of the fact that in some countries a democratic system of government is still very much a fragile institution. In many countries, the Oblates have built schools and have also trained lay people to take over the management of those schools. Some Oblates now look forward to lay people to defend the Church's right to run its own private schools in cases where the government plans to take over Church schools. There are other instances too where the Oblates established institutions and subsequently handed them over to lay people. In Lesotho for example, the Oblates started a Radio station. Today the radio station has become a national radio station. The same can be said about the university which was originally built by the Oblates, but later on handed over to the state.

Again in some developing countries, the Oblates continue to run adult literacy programmes in order to empower local people, to prepare them to enter the labour market with confidence and simply to enhance their dignity as persons. The Oblates believe that the social teachings of the church are a powerful tool in the hands of lay people. Lay people who receive and embrace such teachings from the Oblates are seen as a leaven in society. Through them, Christian values are spread and the presence of Christ announced.

In some developing countries, Oblates admit that collaboration with the laity is still at an infancy stage. Oblates are rather involved in literacy education and in biblical formation programmes. The Christian communities are still young. Oblates see catechists as their co-workers. Some missions are still by and large inaccessible. This reduces opportunities of collaboration. Lack of personnel is also cited as a stumbling block to building meaningful working partnerships.

Apostolic Movements

Most of the Oblates have cited apostolic movements or church based groups as examples of groups with which they collaborate. The following examples have been given: 'L'Action Catholique' in France, St. Vincent de Paul, Charismatic groups, Marriage Preparation groups, 'Foyer Marial', Scouts, 'Focolari', Young Christian Movements, Young Christian Workers, Knights of Da Gama and Knights of Columbus, Rosary groups, Cursillo movement, St. Augustine Society, Pioneers, Daughters of Isabella, Promise Keepers etc. Oblates also state that they are involved in preaching and conducting conferences for lay people. Involvement with these groups is rather inward looking. These lay movements are inward looking in so far as they have no working relationship with civic organizations, whose expressed aims and objectives are to transform society. Lay movements in the Church aim at raising the awareness of their members and engendering a sense of commitment. In this way, the members are prepared to play a more meaningful role in society, upholding and promoting values consistent with their own Christian teaching.

Oblates serve as chaplains in these movements. They are also directly supportive of the lay leaders of these movements. In fact, some maintain that this is the proper way of promoting lay leadership and that, hopefully, the skills of these lay leaders can be extended to other areas of Church life, namely: ministerial, catechetical, liturgical, pastoral, administrative, etc. The best examples of partnerships so far are parish councils and catechists. In some few instances the Oblates have appointed lay people to serve on some boards in some Oblate provinces.

The major challenge is to encourage and support lay people involved in community and civic organizations. These organizations are directly involved in the transformation of society. The apostolic movements on the other hand tend to have church people as their target group. Oblates who work with higher educational institutions see themselves as directly contributing towards the development of a future leadership. Oblates encourage lay people to take their rightful place in the world of work. Lay people are expected to permeate their home and work environment with Christian values. They are expected to promote values of accountability and transparency. They are encouraged to become involved in the decision making processes. Some Oblates warn that upon 'passing the torch', Oblates should not wash their hands of the responsibilities they have asked others to undertake. They also suggest that lay people as partners should not only be given Oblate work to do but should also be invited to Oblate community life and prayer.

One of the key challenges of the mission of the Church today (and by implication, that of the Oblates) is to openly invite lay people to be full partners in the work of evangelization. In order for lay people to do so in a meaningful manner, they need to share power and authority. This is the challenge most Oblates are reluctant to face up to. On the other hand, partnership presupposes that lay people would have been given a solid formation in theology and in pastoral ministry. It also presupposes a leadership which, in some cases, would have been refined in the professional environment of the lay people themselves. Genuine partnership invites the Oblates to let go off some of the roles they have traditionally come to hold onto, believing that these roles are part and parcel of the priestly function. It is recommended that the Oblates should let go off 'the oppressive hierarchical system and clericalism'. There is, for example, a call that lay people in parishes ought to be requested to participate in the evaluation of their pastors' performance. This would require the authorities and the priests to take the laity into their confidence, and jointly develop evaluation mechanisms.

From the above input it is clear that, generally speaking, there is no particular plan or a strong motivation to support the laity in their participation in civic or community organizations. This appears to depend entirely on the interest of individual Oblates. Lay people continue to be seen as object of evangelization rather than partners in evangelization.

2. The promotion of different forms of association with laity

Oblates associate with lay people in a variety of forms but mainly as spiritual directors or chaplains. They are also involved with lay people in a number of ways as outlined above. One of the main associations of Oblates with lay people is through the Missionary Associates of Mary Immaculate. This group of people is expected to participate in the lifestyle (*l'agir et l'être*) of the Oblates. They are to share with the Oblates their spirituality and heritage. These groups are to be associated with the Oblate communities. Some Oblates observed that where there is no Oblate community life, it is difficult for the laity to see an association with the Oblates. Isolated Oblates are not always in a position to discover the proper charism of the founder. Some have a difficulty of knowing how exactly lay people should be involved in Oblate ministry. Many encourage lay people to assume different ministries in the church and to become partners in the work of evangelization.

The promotion of different forms of association with the laity is at times hampered by the following:

- There is a lack of conviction among some Oblates about their own value and charism. It is argued by some that the canonization of Eugene de

Mazenod has helped the Oblates to appreciate their own heritage. This has also had an impact on their self perception.

- Some Oblates fail to see that partnership with lay people is truly a sign of the times. Some prefer traditional forms of ministry where the role of the priest is clearly defined vis a vis lay people.

- Some feel uneasy because it is not clear what the Oblates wish to achieve in their association with lay people, and also how to go about animating lay people to become associates.

- There is also a hesitation to show lay people that they are a source of inspiration to the Oblates.

- In some countries in Africa, Oblates do not promote their association with the laity because they claim that their first responsibility is to bring people to the church and that the Christian communities are far too fragile to be considered partners in the work of evangelization.

In some cases, Oblates have developed sterling working relationships with lay people. There are groups that are considered as 'friends of the mission', 'benefactors' and 'friends of the Oblate family'. In some cases there are lay missionaries such as those from Texas who work in Zambia. The experience of the conference at Aix in 1996 encouraged many Oblates who are now responsible for the promotion of MAMI.

It is clear that there is a need to define more clearly the relationship between the Oblates and their lay associates. Some Oblates still need to be convinced about the value of having lay people as co-evangelizers and as sharing partners in the charism of the founder. The 'traditional model' of the Church is also an obstacle that needs to be overcome. In a world where the numbers of the Oblates are dwindling it is imperative that the role of lay associates be clearly articulated so that new partnerships may emerge. Lay people represent an enormous potential for the Church and for the Oblates. The Oblates are urged to read the signs of the time, to take the bull by the horns, to open the doors for lay people, or alternatively, to leave it to others to trail the blaze.

Synthesis of Answers of the Questionnaire Addressed to Young Oblates

I YOUNG OBLATES IN THE FIRST FIVE YEARS OF MINISTRY

1. From the experience you have acquired after you have completed your initial formation, could you spell out the main missionary challenges you have come across?

2. Have your first years of insertion into the ministry helped you realize your ideal of being involved in the evangelization of today's world? What specific difficulties have you experienced in this regard?

3. In the light of the above, what would you like to suggest to the 1998 Chapter with regard to formation and vocations, and concerning the support which young Oblates should receive in order to promote a smooth transition from the first formation to the next phase of Oblate mission?

1. The questionnaire addressed to the Oblates in the first five years after first formation is a novelty. It is because of the 1992 General Chapter's wish that special attention be paid to this group that the Pre-capitular Commission wanted to give them a chance to express themselves. Answers were received from all the Oblate Regions except Latin America. They are the expression of young men who have taken seriously the call of Christ, people's needs for salvation that express it, and the Oblate family's own answer. Here and there we hear an echo of some difficulties and sufferings, and also some calls addressed to the Congregation.

The Challenges

Challenges concerning the person of the Oblate

2. Upon leaving the well structured formation environment and having to face the demands of the mission, the young Oblates find themselves challenged to really be the apostolic men that they had proposed to be. This is all the more true in several regions where the status and prestige of the priest and religious is being strongly questioned. Without a true witness, the word of 'the man of God' is of no interest anymore.

3. The first need mentioned concerns the spiritual life: for an effective ministry the young Oblates want to take time for personal renewal, and not let themselves be dominated by 'doing' to the detriment of 'being'. This renewal includes study, reflection, and discernment, but especially prayer, without which witness is empty. The balance and symbiosis of prayer and mission is yet to be found. From Africa to the United States the prayer life of the young Oblate is also challenged by the traditional forms of prayer dear to the people of God that he does not feel he has the right to scorn or neglect.

4. A second need concerns closeness to the poor. The young Oblates sometimes have the impression that they must get rid of an hierarchical mentality that dominated their formation. It means choosing a simple life by resisting the traps of consumerism, to have confidence in God by resisting an illusory security that comes from having things. And notably in extremely difficult situations (ex-Zaire), the young Oblates see the need to become men of sacrifice, defenders of the poor, artisans of peace in a world of violence and injustice: "That, one does not improvise."

5. In other contexts, the challenge is to maintain the missionary zeal and enthusiasm of one's early stages. Faced with the indifference of the youth and the apathy of the greater majority, when pastoral work is not very fulfilling and one feels like an automatic distributor of sacraments ('sacramental conveyor-belt'), some feel themselves becoming cynical, unable to face new challenges. In the face of the vocation crisis, departure of confreres, the scarcity of Oblates of their age, the drop in religious practice, some are tempted to despair of the future. The soundness of their vocation undergoes a tough testing.

Challenges concerning Oblate community

6. There is one conviction common to all the answers: community is essential to the mission, and it is itself mission. Evangelization today requires that we share in community, that we create a common understanding, even if the daily tasks are different. Those to whom we address ourselves should see that we act as an apostolic body and not as individuals ('that we are all pulling the same rope'). One difficulty is felt everywhere: the style of community experienced in the years of formation cannot be found anymore after. Young Oblates try to believe in community anyway, even if the appearances are just the opposite and adaptation is difficult. Within the community, each one needs to be recognized for what he is: the young Oblates know that they are part of a generation where each one wants to prove he is unique. The challenge for the community is above all to exist through sharing and prayer, and then to give each the support necessary for his own struggles and needs.

7. In a world torn by tribalism and ethnic egoism, one witness in particular that we can give is that of an international community. This challenge is felt even more when the economic potential of each is different from that of the other.

The challenges of the world of the poor today

8. Among the challenges of today's world to evangelical workers, modernity as such is hardly mentioned by the young Oblates. They seem much more attentive to the big crises of present society, where 'money, power and sex' dominate. The situation varies from country to country: dire material poverty with its obsessive search for physical survival (ex-Zaire); crying inequalities linked to the landlord (latifundia) and caste systems (India), or to the population displacements (e.g. immigration in Europe); ethnic clashes; all the forms of corruption and parasitism; the squalid ugliness of the poverty in the metropolises; alcoholism and other drug abuses; the extreme fragility of marriage and the family. Thus, in certain countries (e.g. Africa) the single-parent family and new forms of polygamy are major social problems.

9. In the midst of these ills, the poor and marginalized can have some gospel needs, that become Good News for ourselves. Most often today's poor, the subjects of our mission, are those with wounded lives who need to discover by means of authentic love their dignity and the meaning of their lives. The great majority of young people have doubts about the future. The social forms of poverty are accompanied by a serious spiritual poverty: tossed about between the sects and illusions of happiness, people no longer know in what direction to go to find something deep and consistent. But even if in some places people seem avid to deepen the Christian faith (youth in Senegal), the general situation is very different. Even in a Christian context, the masses are alienated from the Church and seem inaccessible, the youth are apathetic ('boredom'), faith is without impact on life ('irrelevant'). In the developed Western world, social and religious individualism and the ephemeral are the order of the day: in this kind of context it is very hard to establish true relations.

10. In all areas, it is urgent to have the culture or cultures present in society meet the faith culture where Christian values dwell. From India to France, and South Africa to the United States, situations of cultural pluralism are numerous. They question the Church. The young Oblates know that they must adapt themselves to cultural worlds that are not those of their childhood nor of their formation. Concretely it means, first of all learning a people's language, knowing their customs and traditions, and also to change mentalities, including that of the believers. Then it is absolutely necessary to grasp and deal with the contradictions between social traditions and Christian values, and to counter to opposing tendencies in order to build a society and a Church of fraternity and complementarity. The universality of the Church should always transcend ethnic distinctions.

11. In the developed countries the young Oblates feel particularly called to make the link between the emerging contemporary culture, which is already part of themselves, and the Christian culture into which they were immersed during their oblate formation. Using the language of today's youth, the young Oblates want to say the right word, and a word that has meaning. Pastoral care aims at re-translating for the people of today the primordial importance of the Christian event; of communicating to others the enthusiasm of faith; of giving back to the world a taste for interior peace and the joy of being loved by God.

Challenges concerning the apostolic works entrusted to the Oblates

12. Before the concrete pastoral situations and tasks they take up, the young Oblates stress missionary openness and innovation, and also the option for the poor and the most distant. They want to be faithful to the spiritual heritage and traditional commitments (e.g. schools) of the Oblate family, but at the same time, given the vastness of the mission field and the small number

of available workers, they ask that choices be made that correspond to the reality of people today. Neither the pastor nor the flock have the right to fall back upon comfortable positions. Inter-religious dialogue and social justice are two major preoccupations that Christian spirituality and life do not have the right to ignore.

13. The role of the laity in the mission of the Church is self-evident for the young Oblates. They are sometimes deceived by the passivity of ordinary Christians, too dependent on the priest, and more so by the little availability of the better ones to get involved. They feel called to share their own spiritual and intellectual resources with them, and to develop co-responsibility especially so that the link between faith and social life can be made better. They are also concerned about the unity that there must be between pastoral agents and the mass of the faithful. In those places where the laity have in fact taken up responsibilities, they feel the need to redefine what is specific to the religious and to the priest.

Moving from first formation to the next step in Oblate life

Necessary transition and hardship

14. There was one specific question about the transition from the years of first formation to the five years after. The answers underline unanimously the difficulty of the passage, the need to prepare for it in first formation programmes, and a specific follow-up. Most of the young Oblates feel they have succeeded in making the passage, yet a few answers point to some remaining suffering.

15. There is first of all the joy of finding oneself in the front line among the poor and the abandoned and their needs for salvation, which is the vocation proper to the Oblate. It is the occasion to become more useful and creative in evangelization, to love more concretely the people met and welcomed. There is also the confrontation of generous ideals with the reality of the world and of persons. The clarity and coherence of ideals is tested, sometimes severely. Difficulties are often more numerous than foreseen, in the apostolate as well as within the Oblate family. The young Oblates, 'useless servants', need to learn humility, perseverance in work and in prayer, surrender to God. They also need to be welcomed, supported and encouraged in order to continue hoping and believing in evangelization.

16. The answers as a whole ask that the passage and confrontation might be gradual. The young Oblates need some years of apprenticeship. They are happy to get into what is already going on rather than finding themselves in a new foundation without experience and something to fall back upon. On the other hand, they want to be able to negotiate the freedom of the missionary as regards some given situations and unwarranted demands of local Churches.

From the formation community to the apostolic community

17. First formation takes place in a particular communitarian context: a team of formators in charge, numerous exercises.... The insertion into the apostolate necessarily implies a different framework, however the young Oblates need to find a real community, one where there is sharing about apostolic experiences, where people sit down to evaluate, where they work together, where there is fraternal correction, and where there is mutual support in prayer. This is an essential factor in their growth as Oblates and apostolic workers. In many cases this expectation ended in frustration.

18. The older Oblates with whom the young ones are called to live are seen as elders on whose experience and help they can depend, and whose serenity attracts and gives support. The local superior has an important role to play, and the young Oblates expect a lot of him: he must know how to listen with sympathy, show that he is understanding and worthy of confidence,

capable of supervising, intervening and at times of questioning. There should be neither untimely interference, nor *laissez-faire*. Finally, it is important that the young Oblates can get together with Oblates of the same generation, who are facing the same situations, even if this means crossing provincial or national frontiers.

Particular difficulties

19. The list of difficulties the young Oblates have during their first five years is long.

Some difficulties are linked to the place itself and to the way of carrying out the mission. Sometimes the young Oblates find a harsh world, where violence and injustice reign, or faithful who are little receptive, who do not respond to the best of apostolic proposals. Sometimes they have to take over difficult situations. They discover that they have ideals that are too high and unrealistic, that they are not well prepared for the missionary reality, and they soon exhaust themselves in apparently useless efforts.

Some missionary teams to which young Oblates are assigned work without a plan, with no team spirit. Other times they find themselves buried in pretty documents, 'new methods' that remain on paper. They find that no one has confidence in them: they are not given any responsibility, or they are left with no freedom to fulfill their ideal. On the contrary some others are over-burdened with work and pile up duties with the risk of burning themselves out. Left to themselves, without direction and encouragement, they become exhausted, and sometimes paralyzed by distress.

Financial autonomy can be a source of difficulty in some cases: the separation of competency in this matter between the Congregation and the bishop is not clear, and the young Oblate does not know to whom to turn; or sometimes some Oblates are able to make gifts or use them, and boast about their apostolic success to the detriment of their poorer confreres.

20. Difficulties with the Oblate community are mentioned the most, and these are the most painful.

On the provincial level, the ageing and lack of available personnel have a harmful effect. Sometimes the young Oblates suffer from immobility, from structures that are too heavy and which are more a handicap than they are a help. They have the impression of being stand-ins who are used 'to keep the shop running'. When they want to face new missionary challenges, they feel that others don't share their aspirations; they are sent from the Superior to the Provincial and from the Provincial back to the Superior, without really being heard.

On the local level, they do not always feel as welcome as they would like. Some communities are not very open as regards 'accountability'. Some older members seem little interested in meetings and common prayer, and are not open to faith sharing or exchanges about apostolic activity. They sometimes feel threatened by the arrival of a young Oblate and react aggressively. Some Superiors are haughty autocrats, and the young Oblate feels himself the object of suspicious surveillance. Other Superiors are unable to take decisions. In tense situations there is no dialogue among confreres, and this has its effect on the ministry. Lacking points of reference after years of formation that might have been too structured, and suffering from loneliness in the community, the young Oblate becomes disillusioned.

21. Well aware that they can be very demanding of others, the young Oblates know how to look at themselves with a critical eye. "Sometimes we young Oblates ourselves are not serious about life" (Africa). "We are critical and yet caring about our confreres and their work, as well as our own" (United States). "Difficulties are a good thing. We have to learn by ourselves and not always wait to be taken by the hand" (Europe).

Suggestions for Oblate Formation

Concerning first formation

22. It is important that formation houses have a sufficient number of qualified formators. The answers draw this ideal portrait of a formator: he is a man with an open mind, always available, who has had a special formation and has acquired personal experience of community life and the mission. He must 'first of all be human, then a saint, and not the other way around'. He should not be just a teacher, but an educator, and still more he should be a witness. Formators should be encouraged to follow a programme of personal renewal. They should be able to learn from listening to the members in formation and from those young Oblates who have finished first formation. There should be transparency and truth, openness and mutual confidence between formators and the members in formation. Both must be faithful to their religious life.

23. Concerning first formation itself the young Oblates insist above all on human and spiritual formation seen as an integrated whole ('holistic approach'). The spirituality they learnt is often judged to be too theoretical and removed from real needs. At all stages the young men are in need of a personalized guidance that permits growth. In a context of interdependence in community, the member in formation with his talents, needs and weaknesses is at the centre. He must become a man of interiority and prayer, who counts above all on Christ to be a good missionary. He tests the effectiveness of Christian values by first living them himself. He must learn to learn by himself, even as regards prayer. He must learn to be a man of sacrifice who can face a world of violence, injustice and religious indifference. He must be placed before responsibilities and encouraged to take them. He has to learn patience, to accept tension and resistance from others ('training in opposition handling'). He has to learn to be a community man, part of a community where people know how to question each other and support each other. These principles apply equally to Oblate Brothers, for whom a professional formation is not sufficient.

24. The second dominant concern of the young Oblates is the need for a missionary dimension for the whole of oblate formation. There is much insistence on the realism of this formation. The members in formation must become aware of the realities of the oblate missionary vocation in a concrete country, and culture, with its joys and demands, its rights and duties. They must be prepared to face the challenges these present. But this must be done without prejudice to an openness to the needs of the world and the universal Church. All pastoral formation must be completely a part of the pastoral project of the Province, with its diverse types of service, but it must also take into account the reality of a changing world, new challenges that arise, and teach how to read the signs of the times, and what flexibility and creativeness mean.

25. Missionary formation must integrate a theoretical approach with concrete experience, and itself must be the object of follow-up and evaluation. It is essential that there be an encounter with the harshness of life and the daily reality of the mission. Exposure, in meaningful places, especially of poverty, is essential. This should take place in long training periods (according to some 2 or 3 years), in pastoral situations either at home or abroad. More generally, formation institutions must be open to the outside world, to collaboration with the laity, to dialogue with other cultures and religions. Apprenticeship in the community dimension of Oblate apostolate also begins in this period. Given the difficulties mentioned above, the young Oblates ask that nothing be hidden from the members in formation concerning the lived reality within the Congregation, with its strong points and its weakness, and especially that which regards community. This is so that they 'can grow in love of the Congregation and its members' (Asia).

26. Various proposals were made concerning the content of formation. In general, it was felt that the gap between intellectual formation (theological or spiritual) and pastoral formation must be breached. First formation should provide a solid doctrinal formation in view of an in-depth evangelization, especially in the areas of marriage, family life and anthropology. It should also set down solid roots in the theological and liturgical tradition of the Church, so as to prepare the candidates to be able to face change. The members in formation should be prepared to do theological reflection on their own, so that they can adapt to the concrete demands of the mission without being neither rigid nor lax. Particular attention should be given to the specific mission of the religious and the priest in a Church where the laity are gradually taking their proper place.

27. More particularly they ask for a serious initiation into present trends of pastoral

theology and missiology, with special concern given to inculturation, because of the confusion in this area (Asia). They also ask to be introduced to methods of social analysis applied to the religious life and ministry; to be made sensitive to questions of justice, peace and law; initiation to special ministries, including rural ministry (Africa); a specific preparation for those who are to be sent abroad; training in foreign languages.

Concern for vocation ministry

28. As regards promoting Oblate vocations, the young Oblates are aware that all are responsible. There is a need to invent new ways to be present to youth. Communities are invited to be more open (visits, meals...), but most of all the communities must live in a way that inspires young people. Where they exist, Oblate schools have a potential that should be developed. However, personal contacts are often the most effective way to young people's hearts. Besides the contacts in ordinary ministry, there is need to create networks that have a typical Oblate tone. There must be a serious discernment in the choice of candidates (Africa). We must not accept too readily spontaneous requests that may be made by 'strange or naive' persons (Europe). We should be able to offer young people an idea of the oblate mission that is not limited to routine ministries (USA). The image of the Oblate Brother's vocation needs to be appreciated.

Concerning the ongoing formation of young Oblates in their first years of ministry

29. The first concern that is found in the answers is to succeed in this first entry into ministry. This cannot be presumed. Those who give the first assignment should take care to choose well the communities and the Oblates who are able to receive the young Oblate and give him direction and help him grow. This implies evaluation and supervision of the communities from this perspective, and eventually a programme of initiation with a helper.

30. The young Oblates need to find a home, understanding and support from those in authority and from their confreres, as well as the possibility of dialogue and a sharing of life. They want to be able to choose a mission meaningful today, but are likewise aware that the Provinces have commitments to honour, and that certain tasks that one would not want a priori are also part of an authentic missionary call. There is need to find a balance between being closed up in the 'big houses' and innovation at all costs (Europe). Care must be taken not to overburden them with work and not to assign them responsibility too quickly. They must have the time to absorb the shock of the passage and to learn in a new way what it means to live and work in community. Finally the length of the first period of insertion into the ministry must be just right: long enough for the young Oblate to have time to accomplish something, and to do something new, yet short enough that he does not get into a rut, or feel indispensable. There is much divergence as to the length: 'not more than three years' and 'at least five years'.

31. On the whole the answers asked for a specific programme of ongoing formation and guidance during this period of their life. The young Oblates need to be accompanied personally, as they were during first formation, by older and experienced Oblates: a spiritual accompaniment aimed at practice ('God lives in me, God manifests himself through me'), and pastoral guidance. The aim is first of all to learn to live the Constitutions and Rules in a radical way by becoming men of the Gospel; then to acquire self-confidence by learning to deal with one's own weaknesses and those of others, as well as difficulties and failures in the ministry; finally, to round out their formation in its more important areas, or at least in some specialized areas (e.g. justice and peace, linguistics, popular missions, cultural matters of the people to be evangelized...). As to the means to do this, the answers point essentially to regular and obligatory sessions, for example two weeks each year for five years. One group proposes a longer session after three or five years, with the purpose of strengthening the Oblate identity. The theme could be the Oblate charism and missionary experience. The session could include some input, personal study, a moment for spiritual renewal. It could ideally be organized on either the international or regional level.

32. Most of the answers also want to favour the interpersonal dynamic – the fraternity and solidarity among young Oblates in the same situation. They need to share among themselves their hopes, their dreams, their fears, their faith, as much if not more than well organized programmes. Some find themselves isolated in Provinces where the average age is high, and they dream of an annual retreat or holidays with other young Oblates. All wish to establish bonds, give birth to and nurture a feeling of belonging, think and pray, share experiences, imagine together the Oblate mission as it could be in today's world. Such bonds could extend beyond province and national boundaries, or even could be established with the generation in first formation.

33. Finally, one group wants to receive directives and guidelines from the General Chapter, and to be heard.

II The Young Oblates in First Formation

1. In your experience, especially in the world of young people, what are the main challenges facing the Oblates in order to respond to the demands of mission in the coming years?

2. What kind of formation (personal, intellectual, spiritual, professional...) do the Oblates need today in order to evangelize the modern world (refer to: new culture, secularisation, global economy, youth...) and affirm the authentic values of the people they serve?

3. In the light of the above, which aspects would you like the 1998 Chapter to pay special attention to? Would you have any suggestion specifically with regard to formation and vocation?

1. Challenges

The Oblates in first formation formulated various challenges for the General Chapter, many of them having to do with the world of youth.

A – As regards *our relations with the youth*, they ask for relations that are sincere and transparent, 'one on one' personal relations. They ask for understanding and closeness, someone to accompany them. They ask that we open our houses to them, that we have confidence in them and give them some responsibility in youth ministry. They want help to deepen their Christian life, to pass from hope in technology and the modern world to Christian hope.

B – As for *our knowledge of the world of youth*, they ask that we know them well, that we know their affective immaturity, their family problems, their lack of direction, and sometimes their religious indifference, their crises, their frustrations and worries, their propensity to consumerism, their work problems, their poverty, their lack of motivation, and their heterogeneity.

C – The youth ask for greater dynamism in *our work* with them. They want us to share our mission with them (to let them work with us), to find leaders among them, to listen to them so as to know their uneasiness in announcing the Good News. They want personnel prepared to reach out to those furthest away, by seeking out new means to do this (retreats and missions for young people); that we help to create jobs for youth disillusioned with life, so that

they may rediscover a meaning to existence and hope; that we be missionaries in the midst of religious diversity and plurality, who can speak to a secularized world and who know about the mechanisms of oppression in society; that we establish rehabilitation centres for young people. They want us to be competent in the means of social communication. They want to be formed not only with a general education, but also with a specifically moral education. They seek not just a general pastoral care of vocations, but more particularly help to prepare for a successful Christian marriage, and help in making the passage from youth to adulthood. They want new models of being Church that attract youth: "It is necessary that the Church become sympathetic to the world of youth".

D – As regards *our Oblate witness*, they ask that we be sources of hope and authentic in living our Oblate life; that we inspire faith by our life of prayer, our holiness and direct involvement in proclaiming who Christ is. They look for the witness of our Oblate life: of our fraternal charity, of our chastity, of our resemblance to Christ and of our renunciation of everything in favour of the Kingdom (This is the only way to encourage vocations.). They ask that we try to be more united among ourselves stressing human relations, and that we adopt a new style of life that has meaning today. They warn us against a form of secularism that has infiltrated even our religious life, and that impedes us being authentic witnesses of what we preach. Likewise, they point out that our presence among them must be marked by the fact that we are religious, so that it challenges them (just ‘any kind’ of presence is useless).

Other challenges that they mention concerning the future of the mission are the incompetence, lack of adaptation to culture and customs of the region and the country; the scandal of certain conduct; the blockade produced by traditional culture and western civilization; the proliferation of sects and the attraction of other denominations; the trivialization of sex, secularization and laicization, the penetration of the secular values of material goods, immorality and lack of authentic faith; drug addiction, political influence, fundamental Islamism, ignorance (superstition); the inability of the laity to accept mistakes on the part of priests and religious, and the fact that people depend on the Oblates economically and do not learn to contribute according to their ability. In those places where the youth are caught up in civil war or violence, they feel very challenged by the message of love and reconciliation that we bring. In other places, they regret that the Church appears as an institution characterized by strict rules that have no meaning or relevance: we must make the faith more attractive to them.

2. Type and style of formation

To explain what kind of formation our young Oblates need in order to evangelize today’s world, they affirmed on the one hand the need for solid theology and spirituality so that they do not become victims of passing and trendy fads. On the other hand they mention a more diversified, personal formation adapted to them and to the world that they are called to serve.

Solidity and quality of basic formation

They clearly express the desire for a basic general formation that is solid and of quality. They say that spiritual formation should lead them to acquire the personal conviction to be ‘men of God’ and ‘men of communion’, one that complements the human maturity and formation which is its base. It means, therefore, giving more importance to human maturity than to intellectual formation, seeking an integration of *being* (being an Oblate) and *doing* (doing Oblate works), of giving priority to the psychic and spiritual aspects of the candidates. It also means helping them to interiorize and make their own their biblical and theological knowledge, so that they can live it; helping them to take responsibility for their vocation and their action among the people (so that they are not ‘eternal children’); helping them to learn to appreciate spiritual direction both receiving it as well as giving it. In a word, they say that human and spiritual formation should lead them to an authentic conversion and self-evangelization, so that later they can lead people to their own conversion and evangelization, and not be protagonists of a mere social activism.

Referring elsewhere to their fundamental academic preparation some suggest it is necessary to overcome categories like ‘conservative’ and ‘progressive’, which do not correspond to present day society’s search for sense (both in the sense of ‘meaning’ and ‘direction’). What is needed is adherence with audacity and tenacity to Christ and to a Church ‘that has authority’ (both of which are the same ‘today, yesterday and forever’), to present the ‘whole’ Gospel and assume a radical fidelity as Oblates who have ‘vision’ and ‘zeal’, like the Founder demands in the Preface of the CCRR. For this they propose the following:

Give solid theological and biblical teaching, which is both healthy and serious, and rooted in the teaching of the Church today; do not permit the scholastics to study in institutes that transmit ‘theologies of dissent’.

In the formation given in Oblate houses, don’t bring in nor let it be contaminated by ‘current fads’ that are suspect; don’t use spiritual and psychological ‘techniques’ and ‘methods’

that are biased or reproachable, under the pretext of being 'modern' (or just use them with discretion and correcting them).

Recognize the experience and preparation of the candidates who are mature adults.

A formation that is diversified, personalized and adapted

Besides the normal materials of philosophy and theology, the young Oblates suggest a multitude of other knowledge necessary to be an Oblate today. The following are some examples:

knowing and using the means of social communication to be able to create and make alternative proposals;

formation in art, culture, politics, ecology, social questions and the promotion of justice and peace;

encouraging post-graduate and specialized studies;

the flexibility needed for a contextualized formation;

initiation into the cultures of places where Oblates work (inculturation) and dialogue in a pluralist society.

the integration of local spirituality in formation (e.g. African), respecting the cultural roots of those in formation, and thus preparing them to serve their own people better, i.e. inculturation of the process of formation itself.

to keep good relations with the families of those in formation;

training to confront liberalism, amorality, dechristianization and secularization.

a preparation for the world of today (post-modern, sects, ecumenism); a formation that begins with an immersion in the world and its problems, avoiding a context that is unreal, artificial and sentimental: in fact, a formation that is cut off from culture and a real environment might help avoid mistakes during the time of formation, but these will come back later. It is better that they occur earlier.

an authentic accompaniment by the formators, who should not be mere spectators, nor just inspectors who demand respect for external structures;

specialization in anthropology, psychology, missiology, economics, computers, pedagogy (in order to teach in schools and colleges), law (to defend the lands of tribal groups), inter-religious dialogue, sociology, homiletics.

They also suggest initiation into other skills like animation techniques, knowledge of human values, discernment between the technology that promotes life and that which promotes death, geographical, cultural and psychological adaptation of the missionary, preparation for leadership, self-discipline, etc.

Of course everybody does not have to study everything. We should rather be attentive to the personal interests of each one and the needs of the mission. As much as possible we should seek the self-fulfillment of the one being formed. Some ask that they be permitted an extended pastoral experience during the course of their formation (two or three years interruption of their studies). In the same line others mention the concern to have the formation house in poor districts because this helps in the personal and spiritual formation by giving the candidates an 'incarnated spirituality' 'with real people'. Others recommend that oblate work not be limited to parochial ministry, and that they be prepared to serve the 'poor with their many faces'. Others ask that they may know beforehand the area where they will be placed so that in choosing a theme for their licentiate thesis, they can study something that will be immediately and directly of use. Finally they point out that formation should be gradual and progressive, adapted to each step (pre-noviciate, noviciate, post-noviciate, pastoral experience), without however any break between the steps, and that it respect the rhythm of each young candidate.

3. Other points and suggestions for the General Chapter

The young Oblates in formation have also a variety of other suggestions and things they want to bring to the attention of the General Chapter, some of them general, others with specific reference to vocation ministry and formation.

In General:

- give importance to cultures, customs and local languages;
- that an Oblate in first formation from each Region be a member of the General Chapter;
- that the General Councillor for a Region visit his Region enough to detect the problems; that older Oblates renew and update themselves: 'recyclage';
- launch 'popular missions' and 'evangelization campaigns';
- that Oblates return to the authenticity of their vocation in order to give the only witness that attracts and challenges young people;
- that the Chapter reaffirm the preferential option for the poor and for youth;
- that the Oblates open their houses and communities to the youth;
- that all Oblates commit themselves to vocation ministry;
- that there be Oblate psychiatrists or at least psychologists who dedicate themselves especially to the problem of sexual identity among the Oblates themselves and help to overcome problems and eliminate a great cause of scandal.

Regarding vocation ministry:

- that each Province have one or more Oblates for involved full-time in vocation ministry who organize and implement specific activities in this field;
- that we do not hide the radicalism of our vocation from the youth who come to us, so that they will not have false ideas or insufficient motivation; that the person in charge of admissions know how to critically discern authentic vocations from false ones; that we be vigilant in accepting vocations from irregular or broken homes, so as to avoid hidden motives, or personal projects that are foreign to the Oblate vocation;
- that there be an ongoing accompaniment of the young man before pre-noviciate; it should start right in the family of the future candidate; and the demands of our mission should be made known to him from day one;
- involve youth in popular and youth missions, share with them and open our houses and communities to them;
- be alert to possible oblate vocations in sacramental ministry in parishes and when animating youth groups;
- organize, direct, accompany and evaluate experiences of young 'volunteers' in other countries, that might be sources of vocations;
- instead of looking for vocations in diocesan seminaries (where there are other ways of being missionary, for example '*Fidei Donum*'), that we present our own specific one: mission in apostolic community and the international character of the Congregation;
- in a youth movement or centre that is Oblate, even though Oblate values are imparted, do not separate the young person from his own milieu or parish, because that is where he must live his vocation;
- seek quality before quantity.

As regards formation work as such:

that a specific formation programme for brothers be developed so that they do not feel marginalized or useless in the community or Province;

- that there be mutual confidence and true friendship between formators and candidates;

- instead of *stressing structures*, train candidates to be *free and responsible (self-formation)* in such a way that they can act out of conscience and conviction;

- train the young Oblate to be critical and to recognize the signs of the times, the signs of life and the signs of death;

- that formators not improvise, but be prepared to dialogue with the youth and to detect their aspirations;

- that there be more native formators;

- that formators not be chosen with only their academic qualification as the criterion;

- that the formators have a united view of what formation is, of its programs and the method to be followed;

- that formators be aware that all questioning by the members in formation is not always authentic or convincing; let them help the young men overcome all that is not authentic, but accept willingly any authentic questioning;

- that they do not hinder authentic *missionary* vocations; rather during formation they should give priority to *missionary formation*;

- that there be more apostolic experience during the noviciate;

- that during formation there be opportunities for pastoral experiences with other church groups (non- oblate);

- that a specific formation for youth ministry be given during the scholasticate;

- while assuring a common and general introduction and initiation for all, that nevertheless formation be directed to some specific apostolate for each Oblate;

- that there be the possibility for exchanges of scholastics and formators from one country to another; also missionary experiences or 'stages' in other countries;

- that regional and sub-regional meetings of scholastics be organized;

- that a kind of *second noviciate* programme before perpetual oblation be organized.

Evangelizing a Secularized World A View from Europe

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Introduction

Reading a synthesis of answers to the questionnaire concerning the next Chapter's theme, "*Evangelizing the poor at the dawn of the third millennium*", one soon gets the impression that the Oblates are vitally involved in the dynamics of current history and in modern culture – thus urging local Christian communities to re-examine their identity and mission. The faces of the poor, the traditional faces and the new faces, lay bare our own poverty and invite us take another look at our own lives and missionary endeavors. (Part I) The very breadth of ministries entrusted to us leaves our preparation, the authenticity of our witness and the efficacy of our apostolate open to discussion. (Part II) Furthermore, we are becoming more and more aware that we operate in and with the Church, through a life-style characterized by a spirit of community based on simplicity, hospitality, dialogue, and companionship. (Part III) The testimony and experience of young Oblates urge the entire Congregation to follow these ways. (Part IV) The riches and the ambiguities, the hopes and fears, the opportunities and the temptations of the end of the millennium require of us a total oblation "to discern the will of God, what is good, perfect, and acceptable to Him" (Rom 12:2), in obedience to the Spirit who precedes us to and accompanies us in our mission.

1. Europeans in the Post-modern Age

Current interpretations of the cultural situation in Europe today speak of bewilderment, complexity, and disenchantment¹. We live in an age of rapid and profound changes, whose direction and import are hard to discern, as they involve the totality of individual and social existence². No facet of human experience can escape these transformations which concern economics and politics, communication and culture, ethics and religion.

For twenty years now post-modernity has been discussed as a reaction against modernity³. We have abandoned blind faith in reason which, through scientific discoveries and more sophisticated technologies, should have insured unlimited progress: certainty has been replaced by individual conviction, the search for truth by assertions of opinion, the great narratives of ideology and religion by small personal stories. Institutional references to the family, the school, the state, the churches have fallen into disuse, and our reference point has become a pure subjectivism, often leading to narcissism or nihilism. The process of globalization, especially in the spheres of economics and communication, tends to impose a shapeless super-culture, which perverts or absorbs traditional cultures – a new form of colonialism. The experience of the moment takes precedence over the definite task, emotion over reason, the particular over the totality, possession and consumerism over the profoundness of being and contemplation.

Attention to these cultural phenomena, which seem to preclude any acceptance of the gospel message, should not prevent us from discerning the opportunities which open up for a renewed evangelization. Our age is more sensitive to democratic values and tolerance in pluralistic societies. The relationship between the sexes are being redefined, recognition paid to equal dignity, the value of the differences, reciprocity. The development of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue has opened paths to reconciliation and the humanization of culture and of cultures. One notices a new openness to the sacred and the religious, and the need to return to ethical stances, even if at times this movement has shown a sectarian or fundamentalist character. Despite evident contradictions, new ways have been forged in favor of the dignity of

the person, the primacy of conscious, the value of freedom⁴.

What attitude should we take in regard to a secularized culture? In fact, one can distinguish three ways of responding⁵. The most apparent is the tendency to insist on the irreconcilability of Christianity and contemporary culture. The Christian identity is defended in decisive tones, condemning irremediably the antagonistic culture of secularism. Even if this does signal authentic obstacles to evangelization, this attitude leads to fanaticism, in its flight from the task of dialogue, in its fear of novelty, its preference to condemn rather than to interpret. The opposite attitude would uncritically accept whatever the culture proposes. This would force us to submit to the dominant fashion, abandoning ourselves to the current of popular opinion and prevalent life-styles, avoiding every confrontation with evangelical values and the “folly” of the cross.

Above and beyond these two, rather adolescent, reactions, there is a third attitude: evangelical discernment. To discern means to examine, ask the right questions, to research, evaluate, verify, to judge every reality in the light of the Word. The art and virtue of discernment trains us to measure the value of human words with the yardstick of the Word of God. Only with this perspective is it possible to discover the “seeds of the Word” in our historical moment and culture. Only in this way are we capable of recognizing the dross of sin and to intuit the action of the Spirit which guides the steps of the missionary.

2. A Church in a State of Mission

One conviction which guides renewal in the Christian communities of Europe is that the age of “Christianity” has faded into the sunset and that any nostalgia for the past would be illusory and sterile. This leads to a missionary evangelization which would have every community in a state of mission. To speak of “a state of mission” means to recognize that pastoral activity must change its mentality, its methods and objectives, given that it no longer serves a believing community, but must reach out to vast areas of disbelief and indifference. What’s more, even for the believers and practicing Christians a pastoral theology of conserving what exists is not enough; their faith and their membership in the Christian community calls for refounding, to be justified and confirmed in its new historico-cultural setting. To be a Christian, in fact, is no longer a given, the product of spontaneous religious socialization within the family or in the Church. It is a choice to be made in a personal and knowledgeable manner.

The term “evangelization” well expresses what is felt to be missing in many Christian communities: an effective proclamation of the Gospel, promoting a convinced adhesion to the faith, an incisive catechesis accompanying the itinerary of an authentic initiation to Christian life, an active involvement in the life of the Church which produces active members of society. “Evangelization” reminds us of the missionary dimension of the Church, a dimension which should be present in every expression of its life, but in fact has been eclipsed in many churches well-founded in history. An urgency to go back to the original proclamation, the *kerygma*, which inspired conversion and faith, is by now a priority of every Christian community. Religious instruction, catechesis or preaching, must be considered inadequate if it blithely presupposes the faith.

In the new European context, signaled by the fall of the wall between east and west, the Church is called upon to redefine its mission whenever she articulates her position. Some future requirements, which cannot be avoided, can be outlined according to some general perspectives.

Europe’s Christian roots

The Christian heritage of the European countries is evident, to the point that it is difficult to separate Europe’s culture and history from that of Christianity itself. Her thought, her institutions, her art in all its expressions are incomprehensible if not seen as rooted in the Christian tradition. On the other hand, the process of secularization has dug deep trenches between the world of the Church and the world of politics and culture, bringing the Christian community to the point of isolating itself in defense of the truth, against anti-Christian ideologies. Only with the Council did the churches begin to change their pastoral attitude: from confrontation

to dialogue – proposed in a programmatic form by Paul VI's *Ecclesiam Suam*. It is not without difficulty that the churches are adopting this attitude, in order to set up a new evangelization in a credible way⁶. Any attempt to return to past methods seems doomed to fail, but it is also illusory to develop methods of evangelizing with no reference to Christian roots and the patrimony which has molded European civilization and been its chief protagonist. It was along these lines that Cardinal Martini addressed a symposium of the European Parliament in Strasbourg, September 7, 1997: "What we are being asked to construct is a Europe of the spirit, recovering for today the values which have molded it throughout its history: the dignity of the human person, the sacred character of life, the central role of the family, the importance of education, and the freedom of thought, of speech, and of the free expression of one's convictions and one's religion..."⁷.

A new missionary praxis

In a decisive way, Vatican II encouraged renewed theological reflection on "mission", reorienting missionary praxis. From this emerged a new missionary consciousness, evident when we reread *Ad Gentes* in the context of all the conciliar documents: the primacy of the Word of God (*Dei Verbum*), the opening up of the Church to the world (*Gaudium et Spes*), ecumenical movements (*Unitatis Redintegratio*), dialogue with non-Christians (*Nostra Aetate*), the affirmation of religious liberty (*Dignitatis Humanae*), even the redefining of the church itself as people of God, sacrament of salvation, mystery of communion (*Lumen Gentium*). All this has fostered a conscientizing of the church as missionary by its very nature. The Council forced a movement away from the static idea of a 'euro-centric' Church to a dynamic vision of a world Church, capable of expressing an authentic missionary catholicity, yet proper to every local church. This perspective has led us to define mission not in strictly geographical terms but according to social, cultural and theological criteria. A missionary way of thinking should dominate all aspects of the life and praxis of Christian communities. This would favor a movement from the pastoral theology of spontaneous Christian socialization to one of personal and conscious initiation; a praxis of welcoming only those already in the Church to one of outreach to those who don't know Christianity or even refute it or are indifferent, from a theology which would conserve the faith and sacramental practices to one which is courageously missionary in its evangelization. An authentic missionary pastoral theology requires the community to know how to interpret the signs of the times, singling out places, groups, and socio-cultural situations which await faith's proposal to be gathered in the name of Christ and nurture the seeds of the Kingdom planted in them by the Spirit.

The need for inculturation

Christianity cannot be reduced to an intimist or individualistic religion and remain loyal to its foundation in the incarnation and in its very sacramentality. Awareness of this fact was made evident in the 1991 Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Europe, when for the first time representatives from east, west, and central Europe gathered for the first time. At the end of the gathering, dedicated to ecumenism and evangelization, the bishops' common Declaration stressed the need for a "encounter between the Word of life and the cultures of Europe. Evangelization not only reaches out to individuals, but also to cultures. And evangelization of culture means the inculturation of the Gospel. In the new cultural situation of Europe, characterized not only by modernity but also post-modernity, this task implies a challenge we must answer in the best possible manner."⁸

The local church's need for discernment

One of the fruits of a conciliar ecclesiology has been the rediscovery of the local church, whose face is recognized only in the light of its history and its particular traditions. From this comes a recognition of every community's responsibility, not to be relegated to others, of a mission *ad gentes* and a new evangelization. The churches of Europe have clearly embarked on a road to spiritual and pastoral discernment, involving all components of the Christian community, conscious of the effective subjectiveness of the entire people of God. Many are the questions that touch every community and demand an attentive community discernment: how to reach the adults who, even though 'initiated', have lost all vital contact with the Church and with Christ?

How to reach the growing number of groups made up of non-believers or the indifferent? How to approach members of other faiths? How to educate the young people who abandon the Church after confirmation, thus interrupting their faith development and maturity? How to accompany those young people initiated in the faith but without any faith support from their family or peers? How to develop a missionary spirit within the community and in the individual? How to respond to the anxieties of the poor, the poor with their new faces and their new voices? There are no prefabricated answers or valid recipes to fit every situation. The way can only be forged with patient constancy through the pastoral creativity of each church, attentive to the voice of the Spirit⁹.

3. The Mission of the Oblates

The *Preface* to our Constitutions, despite its somewhat archaic style, still constitutes the fundamental inspiration for all Oblate ministries: the evangelization of the poor is the mission which the Oblates are called to carry out in every generation, with renewed and creative fidelity. The approach of the Great Jubilee of 2000 recalls the main characteristics of Jesus' mission: "The Spirit of the Lord is over me, for this he has anointed me and has sent me to announce good news to the poor, sight to the blind; to free prisoners, and to preach a year of grace from the Lord" (cf. Luke 4:18f). The mission of the Oblates in a particular way finds itself in this current of preaching and liberation.

One cannot speak of Jesus and his gospel without speaking of the poor; one cannot speak of the Oblate charism without hearing the voice of those most abandoned. This dedication to the poor, this sharing of their anxieties and hopes, is only realized and nourished by the recognition of our own poverty: the lack of personnel in face of growing needs of our missions, awareness of our own inadequacies, spiritual and pastoral, as we face evangelical and ecclesial demands, the temptation to let ourselves become discouraged as we face the needs of this new generation.

It is the very awareness of his poverty, however, that convinces the Oblate of his power, which is nourished by faith in the salvific action of God. Paul reminds us (I Cor 13: 1-3) the dedication, even the most radical, is useless, if one does not love with the heart of God. Oblates meet in the world all the faces of poverty and are called to also discover the hidden faces, so as to offer to all God's own compassionate face. The multiplicity of fields of Oblate endeavor should not be a reason for dispersion, if we remember that we are sent "*to evangelize the poor*". Thus we are reminded that we are ministers at the frontier, and this should orient every Oblate ministry.

The complementarity and reciprocity of our ministries is nourishment for that communion which unites the Oblates in one spirit and one apostolic body. A communion which puts them in solidarity with all humanity with its variety of peoples and cultures. A communion which also unites all the members of the Oblate family, promoting and recognizing each charism and each ministry in the Christian communities into which they have been inserted. It is there that the Oblates are called to offer, with humility and competence, their contribution towards the development of an authentic missionary praxis, attentive to the demands of inculturation and in an attitude of continuous evangelical discernment.

Synthesis

In the precarious cultural context of post-modernity, the Oblates are called to discern the obstacles and the opportunities which today present themselves for effective evangelization. In the process of the renewal of a missionary awareness on the part of the European churches, Oblates animate their Christian communities to a rediscovery of the Christian roots of Europe, and promote the development of a new missionary sensitivity, supporting a dynamic process of inculturation of the faith and an enabling of discernment. The specific contribution of Oblate communities lies in their ability to co-involve all who approach, from and within all social-cultural contexts, in the evangelization of the poor.

For reflection and dialogue:

What feeling, what awareness, what values guide us as we confront today's culture?

What are the most notable characteristics of the Christian communities in which we minister?

Among Oblates engaged in diverse ministries and social contexts, what exchanges can enrich our missionary praxis?

What contribution can we make to an authentic inculturation of the faith in the cultural context in which we work?

What attitudes and what concrete choices can we make to remain faithful to our charism and our mission to evangelize the poor?

Notes:

¹ See M. Gauchet, *Le désenchantement du monde. Une histoire politique de la religion*, Paris: Gallimard, 1985.

² See A. Alessi, ed, *La cultura europea tra crisi e speranza*, Roma: LAS, 1985. Includes an ample international bibliography.

³ See AA.VV, *La vita consacrata nella postmodernità*, Roma: Rogate, 1994.
A. Touraine, *Critique de la modernité*, Paris: Fayard, 1992.

⁴ See S. Fausti, *Elogio del nostro tempo*, Casale M. (Alessandria, Italy): Piemme, 1997.

⁵ See M.P. Gallagher, "Il discernimento nell'ambito della cultura", *La Civiltà Cattolica*: 3530, 1997/III, 119-129. *Idem*, "Nuevos horizontes ante el desafío de la increencia", *Razón y Fe*: 232, 1996, 279-293.

⁶ See *La nuova evangelizzazione dell'Europa nel magistero di Giovanni Paolo II. Antologia di documenti*, ed. by Benedetto Testa, Bologna: Studio Domenicano, 1991.

⁷ C.M. Martini, "Sant'Ambrogio e rinnovamento dell'Europa", *Il Regno/Documenti* 17, 1997, p. 546.

⁸ Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Europe, *Dichiarazione* II.3, in *Il Regno*, 1992, p. 20.

⁹ See, for example, J. Rigal, *Le courage de la mission*, Paris: Cerf, 1985. Italian version, 1988. And his *Préparer l'avenir de l'Église*, Paris: Cerf, 1990.

Analysis of the Synthesis Report from a North American point of view

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I. Vulnerability acknowledged

From a North American perspective, the most salient feature to emerge in the *Synthesis Report of Answers to the Questionnaire* can perhaps best be summarized in one word: a sense of *vulnerability*. This can be seen in many of the responses. I give just a few indicators from the Report to illustrate my point:

The rapid and at times radical changes that take place in the environment where the Oblates work...(have) produced a sharp awareness of the poverty of the Oblates themselves. (p. 8)

The Oblates can no longer comfortably depend on that once pervasive influence of the Church. This has therefore rendered them vulnerable messengers of the Gospel. (p. 8)

The faces of the poor have been merely enumerated and, at times, described. But on the whole... there is no evidence that the Oblates have necessarily developed consistent pastoral, educational, or programmed activities to respond to these new social and pastoral developments.(p. 12)

The Oblate community (local, provincial...) is questioned on many levels, especially in the Northern regions... (in both) its interior dimension and in its outward thrust (p. 22,7)

There is a tendency to refer more to a 'crisis of Christianity' or of the 'Catholic Church'... The loss of riches, prestige, credibility, and even honor, as well as intra-ecclesial fighting, empties the auditoriums and leads to big instability. (p. 22,9)

RICHARD G. COTE

This acknowledged vulnerability is something relatively new for us Oblates in North America. Let me explain:

In the past and throughout our history on this continent, the American and Canadian cultures have generally fostered in us a sense of self-confidence, a natural optimism, a feeling that with our abundant God-given resources and practical ingenuity, we could face the future and overcome most difficulties that confronted us in our missionary endeavors. We generally carried out our mission in North America with considerable self-reliance, bold initiatives, and stouthearted assurance. On the whole, our collective Oblate outlook was up-beat and our mission undertaken from a position of real (or imagined) strength. We possessed an uncommon *optimistic spirit of enterprise, initiative, and creativity*. To varying degrees, this spirit still informs much of our thinking and the way we seek to implement our established regional priorities and mission objectives. What is new, however, is that for the first time in our history we have come to experience and acknowledge a collective sense of *vulnerability*, a sense that perhaps we cannot

achieve our objectives and goals as readily or as resolutely as we had hitherto imagined... a sense that perhaps our past is brighter than our future.

As we approach the millennium, the big challenge facing us might well be whether or not we can give ourselves a new missionary outlook (and spirituality) in which our sense of vulnerability is conjoined and integrated in our traditional spirit of optimistic enterprise. At first sight, vulnerability and optimism may well appear as conflicting – if not irreconcilable – states of mind. Hence the presence of so much soul-searching, questioning, and collective uncertainty about the future among the North American Oblate rank and file. With an aging personnel, a paucity of vocations, and a lingering overload of so many disparate ministerial commitments, the question may well be asked: *How can we embrace our new vulnerability in a positive way without losing that spirit of daring optimism which has characterized our mission in North America thus far? In other words, How can we give ourselves a new local mission spirituality that integrates both our strength and our vulnerability?*

Some would argue that as we move into the next century we must give ourselves a truly *localized* North American Oblate spirituality. For many years now, we have had well-defined and clearly established *priorities* in both the United States and Canada. What is more doubtful is whether we have created and given ourselves a commensurate *regional spirituality* that would underpin, infuse, and support our Oblate priorities? Thus the question may be asked: *Is there a perceived need in North America to foster a regional Oblate spirituality whose profile and inner 'way of life' correlates with our set priorities and gives them more credibility?*

II. Vulnerability contextualized

If we *contextualize* our Oblate sense of vulnerability, we immediately recognize that it also exists in the very fabric of our North American society and hence forms part of the cultural landscape in which we live and work. We are not alone in our growing awareness and sense of vulnerability. It exists in virtually every important sphere or sector of our cultural setting (the religious, political, economic, social, and familial). Hence the importance of *Part Three* in the Synthesis Report, entitled *Culture and Cultures*. It is here, especially, that we find evidence of considerable discrepancies, mixed-feelings, and a wide spectrum of opinions on the part of the Oblates concerning our *post-modern* (or so-called New) culture.

What is conspicuously lacking in this section is evidence of any serious indication that the Oblates have an enlightened *historical* sense or understanding of our post-modern times: Where do we come from?... How did we get here?... Historically, where are we now? This can be seen, for example, in the way the terms modern and post-modern are used interchangeably, as though these two terms were synonymous and speak to the same historical reality. Nor does the term New Culture sufficiently take into account the *transitional* or *axial* nature of the historical paradigm shift we are presently experiencing.

The profound social transformations that are now taking place in North America are such that neither the Oblates nor the Church can halt, reverse or otherwise substantially alter the direction or pace of these changes – certainly not as we perhaps once thought we could in another era. Put only slightly differently, these transformations have to be seen for what they really are: they are not merely superficial trends or temporary drifts in society that could be stayed or put right with *greater* missionary zeal, *better* missionary strategies, or *more* good will on the part of the Oblates. On the contrary, we are witnessing a profound historical ground swell over which we have very little real control – hence our sense of vulnerability. Indeed, these social transformations reflect an “axial” paradigm change from modernity to what is being called “post-modernity” – a change that is leaving very little untouched, unquestioned or securely anchored, either in the Church or in society at large.

Evangelization of the Poor and Interculturation / Interculturalité

Denis DANCAUSE, O.M.I

1. Among the emerging challenges concerning the Evangelization of the poor at the Eve of the third millennium, interculturation / interculturalité is seen as part of the Oblate awareness: many of us are living in context of cultural conflicts that has to be turned into a fruitful dialogue context. The Oblates express the need for a deeper reflection on the issue and its impact on the communication of the Gospel.

2. We are aware that what is at stake here is not only dialogue between cultures but the communication of the Gospel within and beyond any cultural life context. Not only this is perceived by the Oblates as a challenge but as a privileged way of their missionary call to promote a deeper dialogue between different cultures, and by doing so promoting at the same time a deeper dialogue between Gospel and cultures. It implies the reciprocity of offering and receiving the Gospel beyond the limits of our own cultural setup and boundaries.

3. In all those, there is a more explicit discovery of the presence of the Spirit: the richness and the differences of cultures being assumed in the celebration of the Mystery of Christ and its fullness. This conscious dialogue takes time and it implies mutual respect and trust. It is a long process where the immediate results are not always at hand and where the power play can always mar the whole process of communication of the Gospel between cultures.

4. Nevertheless, we are committed to persevere in that often difficult task, empowered by the Spirit opening the Word of God for us, building up communities both communicating and receiving the Gospel between cultures, going beyond their own limits and opening them both to the fullness of God's revelation.

5. The challenge is not a new one, but the conditions and the context are new indeed. Just mentioning few aspects, rapidity in communication, contacts and conflicts between cultures on account of unprepared context. Besides those, the complexity of communication has reached a new degree of awareness: not only one is speaking and one is listening but from both cultural contexts people are speaking and listening to one another, or better say, people have to learn to speak and to listen to one another.

6. We know that the depth opening of the Good News can only be achieved in and through the Spirit. And so it is with the cultures where the Spirit is at work and his action has to be discerned. If so, then the communication of the Gospel beyond the limits of cultural boundaries appears not only as a challenge but as a new opportunity for Evangelization.

7. For us Oblates, sent in a special way to evangelize the poor, interculturation / interculturalité has a new dimension. It implies the awareness of power influence, of power play linked with the interculturation process of the proclamation of the Gospel in the past, in the present so as to impeach it in the future. It implies the need for a new and clearer awareness of the issues involved, the need for more reflection on our part as an international evangelizing body, unfolding the richness of our missionary experience.

8. Identity and openness in dialogue while sharing the richness of the Good News in different parts of the world are for the Oblates a daily experience of interculturation, assuming the diversity as complementarity, as new possibilities for celebrating the Mystery of Christ, the Saviour. Inserted in different cultural contexts, we are challenged and challenging one another as far as the authenticity in living and transmitting the Good News is concerned.

9. The Oblates have often expressed awe and admiration for the new ways of manifesting in life and in specific celebration the same Mystery in its fullness, aware that this mystery goes beyond all the limits of cultural expressions. We are also aware of the so called "new culture", influenced by mass media, characterized by rapidity, information, marketing mentality, having deep impact especially on the youth. In such a context, the Oblates at large are

reminding the depth of traditional cultural values, the importance of the time factor for maturation, the need to go beyond mere information level.

10. We assume traditional cultures with a critical eye but with a sense of their abilities for expressing the meaning of life in reference to cosmos, community and the Presence, the value of their rich symbols, the only language able to go beyond the language of technology and science expressing measurement but with the inability to unveil what is beyond measurement. Oblates, with a special concern for the youth rooted in their own cultural context, at the same time exposed to the full blast of global-media pressure, feel the urgent need for them of an open dialogue with other cultures.

11. While acknowledging that the actualization and the inculturation of the Good News are necessary dimensions of evangelization, since the Good News is addressed by us to people with a history, an ancestral memory, a culture of their own, all those have to be assumed to express in a new way their experience of the Presence in and through the newness of the Passover Mystery in Christ Jesus.

12. The Oblates are joining their efforts for further reflections on this regard within the larger ecclesial context, having in mind in a special way the inspiration from Vatican II and the recent synodal orientations in reference to Europe, Africa, America and Asia, signs that a long on-going search of speaking and listening has still to be experienced.

13. The Oblate missionary way situates itself at the grass root level, as we live close to people, rich in human and religious experiences of their own, pertaining to their cultural context and their religious traditions. We have been enriched by them to an unexpected degree, bringing new vitality in our understanding of the Gospel. At the same time, we are aware of the importance of proclaiming in an authentic way the supreme fullness of the mystery of Christ, the newness and the uniqueness of that gift from the Father, a gift filled with the Spirit and that can be known only in and through the same Spirit.

14. A healthy tension has to be assumed between the universality of the message of evangelization and the contextualization. It is here that inculturation and interculturalization of the Gospel have to be achieved with patience and mutual trust. It implies an on-going awareness of the importance of dialogue in communicating the richness of the Gospel in its fullness, aware that the truth is always beyond what we can grasp and what we can express within the limits of human languages and cultures, the Reality being always richer and deeper than our understanding.

15. To sum up, at the eve of the third millennium, among the emerging challenges of the evangelization of the poor, contacts and dialogue between cultures have a prominent place. The acceleration of these contacts implies unexpected difficulties linked with unprepared context because the identity of people is under threat while power play is at work.

16. The phenomenon is not new but the awareness of its complexity is new. If accepted not only as a challenge but as a special invitation of the Spirit for a new way of communicating the riches of the Gospel, then our effort implies ways and means of promoting the communication of the Good News within and beyond cultural boundaries.

17. The Oblates, as a whole, while acknowledging their own poverty, are at the same time experiencing the renewing power of the Spirit who alone can open in depth the life giving power of the Gospel. The same Spirit is also acknowledged as present in different cultures with their wealth, to be discovered as new ways for celebrating and expressing the fullness of Christ mystery within and beyond cultural boundaries, through an on-going dialogue rooted in mutual trust and respect.

Question 1. The encounter of the Gospel and cultures: Present practices and scopes for the future – Agents of cultural changes – New ways of Speaking and Listening.

Question 2. How to promote means for sharing our community experience concerning the

communication of the Gospel beyond the limits of cultural boundaries?

Question 3. How to promote means for sharing the new and various ways of expressing the richness of the Gospel discovered through our on-going dialogue with cultures?

Evangelizing the Poor at the Dawn of the Third Millennium An African Point of View

Godé IWELE, O.M.I.

Introduction

How is it possible to live and evangelize the world of the poor even though history proves to us more each day that, like people who are out of the picture, the poor are always wrong? What specific challenges are to be met in risking a liberating and humanizing work which is indicative of the fundamental issues of the contemporary search for meaning? How, at the dawn of a new millennium, can we define ourselves as a missionary religious family, facing an ideal way of life which we believe noble but that the age in that we are called to live persists obstinately in considering irrelevant?

To adequately name the poor and identify their many faces today, it is important to examine carefully the global context in which our evangelizing action takes place. The intention of these pages is rather limited. We shall attempt here an African reading of the major points of the 1998 General Chapter's theme from the synthesis of replies forwarded by the entire Congregation to the Pre-Capitular Commission. This personal rereading will be partially inspired by pastoral directives of the African Synod of 1994, such as found in the final message of the Synod and more particularly in the apostolic exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*. Our reflections will unfold in four stages. In the beginning we shall try to analyze the new context of the mission in Africa on the eve of the 21st century. Firstly we shall dwell on the social context. We shall next analyze the religious, and then the political context of evangelization in Africa. There will follow next an examination of the cultural context. Here we shall pay particular attention to the new emerging cultures. Once these diverse contexts are described, we shall ask ourselves in turn what type of apostolic action to recommend in order to better face up to the challenges thus identified, and what are the effects on Oblate formation in general and on that of African Oblates in particular. All will be followed by pertinent questions for the benefit of the capitulars.

I – The New Mission Context in Africa. The social context: The faces of poverty in Africa.

At the time of the Congress of African and European Theologians in Yaoundé (Cameroon), an African Jesuit surprised his audience by his somewhat strange word of welcome: "*Welcome to Africa, the birthplace of the poor, the feeble, and the oppressed*". Some years later in 1981, this same Jesuit, Engelbert Mveng, invented the concept of '*anthropological poverty*' to describe the existential condition of Africa of that time. The concept designates a state of poverty that is deeper and still more deplorable than simple material poverty. This is something at the level of being, because in Africa, it is the very being of the Black Man as such which has been denied, scorned, and tarnished. The slave trade, colonization and *apartheid*, as well as neo-colonialism, have impoverished the African in his very being. For there is no greater poverty than the very denial of one's being. This anthropological annihilation is so serious an ontological state that it could not in any case be compared to the fact of simply lacking in this or that. Africa is not, perhaps, the only continent to have suffered from it. It is always a question of a more subtle, more dehumanizing form of poverty which is part and parcel of the present African condition.

Moreover, in Africa as elsewhere in the Third World generally, a characteristic feature of our period is that we watch, powerlessly, the *sophistication of poverty*. It is a sophisticated misery, so to speak. Indeed, the most painstaking, complex, and uncontrollable mechanisms produce poor and marginalized in great numbers. On the one hand, countries are only developed by under-developing others; on the other hand, it has become almost impossible for a poor country to extricate itself from the infernal cycle of poverty. The rich always become richer and the poor

poorer. Between the two groups the distance widens as Pope Paul VI already remarked in his Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*¹.

Dependence is another name for poverty in today's world. Entire nations are crushed by the burden of an immeasurable debt which, in other respects, is known to have only profited some leaders in power. Thus entire generations are condemned to pay back huge debts which only profited some individuals, or which have been used to buy arms at the suggestion of creditors themselves. To be poor today is to know oneself also as an insolvent debtor. Is it necessary to make clear that material or financial dependence often brings about intellectual or ideological dependence? The poor states however are not the only ones suffering from this; churches likewise are no exception. Charitable work, though necessary, is not capable however of breaking the cycle of dependence. As the South-African novelist

J.M. Coetze, remarked: "*It is just as hard to receive as to give. It requires the same effort*"².

But poverty and misery often summon *violence* with which they have formed a link. That results, on the social plane, in a persistent and multisector crisis which is at full swing, delivering entire populations to a massive inhuman death. Nowadays, in many sub-Saharan African countries, people are born and die pointlessly, so to speak. *New forms of poverty* are born. Multinationals and the nameless middle class, created by the neo-liberalist market, hold the strings of the social fabric, and parsimoniously administer happiness. There results from this the systematic *marginalization* of the African continent. Since the end of the cold war and the hegemonic rivalries between East and West, black Africa seems to have lost its significance in the geopolitical world. It would therefore be more exact to speak in the case of Africa, not simply in terms of poverty, but of absence: the absence of an entire continent in the great debates and places of decisions which affect the future of humanity. The significant issue is that they are absent at these moments. To live on the fringes of society is to be felt as an absent presence. It is to feel worthless. The plans of structural adjustment initiated by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund only add to the sore burden of the people with already weakened economies, who seek gropingly the way of social reconstruction. This policy of austerity no doubt spawns the phenomenon of the '*economic refugees*', that is more widespread nowadays. Rejected by the countries where they seek refuge, and not recognized by the United Nations, they constitute nevertheless embarrassing witnesses for the conscience of the affluent countries, of this section of the human family which demands its right to eat, a right guaranteed by the 1948 Charter of the United Nations of the Rights of Man³. This explains in part why many African men and women, even among the better educated, advance hopelessly in a sort of roaming statelessness. They feel foreign everywhere, even at home. In the West, where they go and try their luck, many of them are condemned to be satisfied with degrading moonlighting. The African situation is particularly worrying because "*the African continent, as the Fathers of the African Synod recognized, is put to fire and sword in many places*"⁴. Consequently, following the example of the African Synod which wanted to be a Synod of revival and hope for Africa⁵, the bishops of Africa and the neighbouring islands invite a new missionary thrust which announces Christian hope.

The religious context: An agonized quest for meaning

But there is also in a special way spiritual poverty. It is real and equally formidable. Paradoxically, this spiritual poverty unfolds in the context of a great spiritual thirst⁶. It is rooted in the agonized, indeed desperate *quest for the meaning of life*. And since in their structural rigidity, the traditional historic churches do not know what to do with these impatient existential quests, some try their luck on the side of the secular if not atheistic humanism, others are firmly thrown as pasture to religious sects, to fundamentalists and to illusion mongers. The *proliferation of religious sects* in Africa (7,000 in the South-African Republic, 4,000 in Ghana), and of messianism of all kinds, manifest also this sharp thirst for the spiritual and the need of a true ministry. The fundamentalist sects recruit not only among the illiterate masses but also among the intellectual

elite itself. Those that the sects corrupt are often heard to accuse the Catholic Church of having "hidden the truth" from them, or of being at the service of a foreign alienating ideology. But it seems that one must rather seek the profound causes of this spiritual poverty both in the rapid changes of our period as well as in the *collapse of traditional values* under the shock of the pseudo values sold by the industrial and hedonist society, and greatly reinforced by the media. Whatever the case, this reveals a real need of an adult faith, solidly rooted in the experience of life. An in-depth evangelization is therefore necessary. Moreover, the agents of evangelization themselves must firstly regain their spiritual health before going to preach to others. The traditional religions, still very present particularly in Western Africa where they still claim 70% of the national population, and the expansion of an often aggressive and intolerant Islamic extremism, constitute real challenges for traditional Christianity, calling it to redefine its fundamental objective and methods. The Catholics, who are 95 million in Africa, represent however only 14% of the total population of the continent.

The political context: Democratic offer and demand

With the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of communism, world geopolitics has been re-designed. In Africa, the repercussions of these reforms were subject to a catalytic change by the strong *democratic demand* of the peoples who took by storm the streets of African capitals from the beginning of the 1990s. The African peoples demanded democracy, a state of law and the end of dictatorship, of arbitrariness, of corruption and of State terrorism. But what these new states offered has not matched the scale of this strong democratic demand. National conferences held in several African countries, as peaceful ways towards democratization, have ended up with rather lukewarm results. Legislative and presidential elections were held in several countries. 1997 alone saw the holding of elections in some fifteen African sub-Sahara countries, but these elections have not always enjoyed transparency.

It can nevertheless be asserted that in this political overbid, the catalyst of civil energies and the hope of the African people was, in a special way, the liberation of Nelson Mandela and the subsequent end of the *apartheid* regime in South Africa. In spite of the recurrent troubles in the Great Lakes region of Central Africa and elsewhere in Africa, the African people today are resolutely and obstinately engaged on the road of national and democratic reconstruction. Problems of all kinds persist however. The mission will consist also in accompanying this general quest of the African people towards a State of democratic law.

The cultural context: Cultural pluralism and neo-cultures

One of the most outstanding cultural facts at the end of the twentieth century is no doubt *globalization* due to the modern means of social communication and laws of market economy. More than ever we feel truly belonging to a planetary village. Information circulates at the speed of light; the problems of some people easily become the problems of others. Distances in both space and time dwindle. But, paradoxically, humanity also makes the dramatic experience of *estrangement*, of *isolation* and of a lack of deep communion between peoples, in spite of appearances. One of the greatest dangers of this process of internationalization or globalization is that of imposing and universalizing a particular model, thus canceling otherness, differences, and pluralism. The challenge then consists in *re-establishing unity in diversity*, communion in respect of otherness. For missionary action *inculturation* represents a sure way for the promotion of such an ideal. Evangelization, which, in the words of John-Paul II in his speech of March 9, 1983 at the ninth General Assembly of the Latin-American episcopacy at Port-au-Prince must be, "*new in its ardour, new in its method, new in its expression*". It must consist in a new type of rapport and relation to the culture of the people, in short, quite a new kind of life.

Regarding the evangelization of Africa at the dawn of the third millennium, the Fathers of the African Synod rightly remarked that it will necessarily have to assume and transcend the present *crisis of the African identity* with a view to the creation of a new identity, because the former African identity "*is like crushed grain in the vice of an implacable history*". According to the Fathers of the African Synod, "*the culture which gave its identity to our people is in a state of*

profound crisis"⁷. That means that we can no longer speak of the African culture as we did in the past, or up in the air, or in a romantic fashion. A cultural substratum certainly survives, but something has also changed fundamentally in the manner of being African. But more profoundly, we must strive for "*the creation of a new African identity*", recommend the Fathers of the African Synod.

In a context where around 60% of the total population of the continent is less than twenty years of age, the Church is called resolutely to learn the languages of the *new African culture* emerging in post-colonial Africa. It is within this new culture that we must announce the Gospel and make inculturation work. The missionary and pastoral agent must learn to know and understand the mechanisms of the production and diffusion of this new culture.

If it were necessary for me to open trails, I would willingly suggest some places where I see this new African culture in progress. *The street* is one of these places. In Africa, the street is the place par excellence for unfolding the condition of the common people, their hopes, their anguish, and their frustrations. But the African street also displays the inventiveness and resourcefulness of the people, and their sometimes heroic and superhuman efforts to survive. The soul of the people lives in the street. The African street is the gauge of the state of the soul of the people of the slums and shanty towns, as well as the expression of the frustrated dreams of the country masses who come and fail in town. *Music* and *art* (spontaneously simple, not that of the learned societies) constitute another place for learning the post-colonial African culture. The stars of the '*Lingala Music*' which rages throughout black Africa, are perhaps as important today as the pundits of the universities. One must learn to listen to them. Their language and their ideas hit home among the young, and the young, we said, represent around two thirds of the African population. We have seen them descend to the streets in order to call for liberation or to acclaim pseudo-liberators. Unfortunately, neither our studies nor our catechisms prepare us to listen to this artistic universe, sometimes so critical of religious orthodoxies and political surroundings. *African literature* also represents a place of high conceptualization of the human condition of the African social drama, and a language of an entire world vision. The novels of Wole Soyinka, Ngugiwa Thiong'o or Sony Labou Tansi speak a language and describe a world that the missionary must henceforth live in if he does not wish to preach into thin air. Let us finally mention in conclusion a non exhaustive list, the politicians and *politics*. They also count among the creators of the post-colonial African culture. If we continue to be unconcerned with politics, politics will continue however to be concerned with us, to our cost. It is therefore a question of learning the new culture, but of course also approaching it with a critical spirit. It is also a question of revaluing what is regarded as the most noble in the old culture. It is a question especially of allowing the Gospel of Jesus Christ to challenge, to enrich and transform the African cultural world, to make it a welcome place for the seed of the Divine Word.

My short personal analysis of these places of finding the new African identity leads me to believe that we witness today, everywhere in Africa the emergence of a real *culture of poverty and pluralism*. The African who is the object of our evangelizing action in this dawn of the 21st century is essentially those people who travel on foot along the asphalt roads, who eat once per day, who pray a lot, often in a state of disorder, who dance and drink 'to forget'. It will be enriching to learn how the new interpreters and creators of post-colonial Africa express themselves, how they act and react, as well as relearn the mechanics of the never-ending traditional discussions. An initiation to the traditional cultures is important and necessary; the African culture, however, does not pass away with the death of the last ancestor of the clan. *Both forms of culture* need be held together. The African culture, both traditional and modern, is a pluralistic reality. Civilization is recognised, said Paul VI on May 14, 1969, by the capacity of the human being to accept and respect pluralism, therefore, otherness. Africa is one, but pluralistic. To take the full measure of the issues that present day Africa represents for evangelization, the post-colonial and the post-modern condition need to be combined.

Such appears to me to be the global physiognomy of Africa which is getting ready to leave the 20th century. These faces of African poverty portray the new context of the mission in black Africa. It is therefore to that Africa that we must announce and proclaim the Good News of

integral salvation in Jesus Christ. The African Synod has called it an evangelization in depth, which will attach great importance to the following issues: Announcing the Gospel, inculturation, inter-religious dialogue, questions on justice and peace, as well as the modern means of social communication.

II – Challenge to Apostolic Oblate Action

In the light of the general context described above, what would be the specific challenges that apostolic Oblate action must face to evangelize in depth the African land and the poor with their many faces at the dawn of the third millennium?

The second part of the synthesis of the replies seems to me representative enough of the principal issues and challenges of apostolic Oblate action. Generally all the replies indicate that it is principally a question of a *challenge of holiness*. We need to come up with a kind of an evangelizing presence in the world, so that our life as persons and as communities bear witness and present a real challenge. It is henceforth accepted that there is an *Oblate spirit*, a manner specifically Oblate of being religious and missionary. This spirit seems characterized by a simple fraternal, jovial and convivial lifestyle, in short, a family spirit (C.39), proximity with people placed under our pastoral care (C.8), an audacious zeal which does not wish to be content with mediocrity or comfort where the lot of the poor is at stake, a recognized sense of belonging to the Congregation and to its work, which urges us to prefer and renew the choice of a community life and the choice of priority for the most abandoned (R.2).

The parish remains the traditional and ordinary place of apostolic Oblate action, but everywhere also we endeavour to imbue it with this (missionary) oblate spirit. It has seemed to me also that there is a real effort of reinterpretation and *re-appropriation of the charism of the Founder*. The Oblates wish to make this charism relevant to today's world, and wish to share it, in various degrees, with others, notably their lay associates. A new awareness is clearly becoming manifest (helped also by the canonization of the Founder) that the charism of Eugene de Mazenod is a God-given gift to the Church in its entirety and not the private property of the Oblates. But this charism is called to update itself ceaselessly according to the challenges of the time. In concrete terms it is meant to be lived through new forms of a sometimes non-conventional apostolic presence. *"No ministry is strange to us, provided we never lose from view the principal end of the Congregation: to evangelize the most abandoned"*, recalls Rule 2. In this sense, the distinction between ordinary, extraordinary, or special pastoral work becomes somewhat outmoded in so far as we endeavour to do it in every ministry, to live it and exercise it in conformity with this oblate spirit. The recent *Dictionnaire des Valeurs oblates* (Dictionary of Oblate Values) can, we hope, highlight the essential features of this oblate spirit.

Therefore, whether it be a question of 'ordinary' parochial ministry, of preaching of popular missions, of the means of social communication, of commitment for the promotion of justice, of peace and the safeguard of the environment, or be it the apostolate with legal and illegal immigrants, of refugees, of victims of the pandemic disease of AIDS, of prison chaplaincy or teaching ministry, or with the young, what seems to matter from now on is a kind of *specific oblate presence* in the midst of ministries that are not always specifically oblate. That seems to be an important acquisition, indeed a (r)evolution. It is in this sense that I understand insistence on the search for, not so much a strictly oblate apostolic method, but a spirit or oblate emphasis, characterized by the effort of a more or less direct insertion into the apostolic field, while speaking the language of experience and living the culture and condition of the people. But in order not to become an impoverishing structure in the usual practices, insertion must maintain a deep and prophetic character, indeed a certain radicalism.

In Africa, need is felt for a radical *inculturation*. Inculturation is revealed thus as a way of authenticity, a challenge for holiness, a need for total restructuring and a refusal of the status quo and the beaten tracks. In the global context described above, to evangelize then becomes a way to offer the people of God, in the name of Jesus Christ, new reasons for living and dying. Prompted by the success of sects and other religions, we feel the need of aiming at deep, serious, and lasting evangelization, without triumphalism. To curb the surge of expansionism, we

need good quality both in the evangelizers and those who are evangelized. After the tragedy of the Rwanda genocide, the Churches of Africa feel the need for deeply questioning and examining their conscience without leniency. Here, we perhaps feel more than elsewhere in the world the need to '*dare in world-wide proportions*' and to exit from traditional ways. Too rigid Ecclesial structures could inhibit creative initiative. Africa would continue to be the '*success story*' of Christianity, but it would only be a tree which hides the forest. A responsible freedom is necessary in order not to turn the effort of inculturation into an adventurous and amateur charlatanism. As the South-African missiologist David Bosch noted, today's mission is alternately an effort for inculturation, liberation and an effort for contextualization. If it is less than that, evangelization will remain a 'superficial gloss' according to the word of Paul VI, and would not join the people there where they stand in real life.

Today, a fundamental attitude seems required of the missionary and of any pastoral agent, especially on African territory: *listening* and the aptitude to receive, that is, the firm will of letting oneself be evangelized by those whom one is charged to evangelize. One must learn to listen to what the Spirit says to the Churches. Indeed, the Holy Spirit has preceded the missionary on the mission field. The missionary can only evangelize in as much as he accepts also to let himself be evangelized.

III – Oblate Formation

The need for a systematic '*vocations*' apostolate is a necessity today felt and shared by the entire Congregation. How could it be otherwise, in view of the ageing personnel and the more numerous, more urgent, and more complex calls of mission? The young also remind us – and this is no less important – that we have not come to the wrong place, and that they still find the charism of Eugene de Mazenod appealing and pertinent. The young are also the sign that we can die in peace and that the mission of the Congregation will continue. The problem, however, is situated rather on the side of the *quality of people* who join our ranks and of those charged with their formation, as well as the type of formation that is given.

Generally, oblate vocations are becoming rarer in the Northern Hemisphere countries. In the Southern Hemisphere on the other hand, they proliferate at times, thank God. In the Northern Hemisphere, family break-up and traditional family values, added to the over enhanced value of money, of power and sex, results in many young people not finding in religious life the ideal of life that the society in which they live speaks highly of. In the South, many seem rather provoked by the challenges of the injustice and misery of the people of God around them. In the North as in the South, true vocations exist. There also exist false ones. It would therefore be naïve to believe that everybody is equally well-intentioned. But it would be simply very wrong to believe that none of them has a vocation. The laborious work of *discernment* and *accompaniment* is therefore an inevitable must. But what the young ask above all is that we have confidence in them.

It would not therefore be wise that the shortage of vocations make us *lower the requirements* or desperately accept any kind of dubious candidate. In this sense the age of the candidates who aspire to the Oblate religious life seems to me to constitute an important criterion. "One does not change at a certain age" a confrère used to say jokingly. Unfortunately it is true. It is somewhat frustrating to have to deal with candidates who already know everything about life, who know exactly what they want and what they do not want, and who consequently are not receptive, and lay down for their formators a programme of formation preconceived by them. That often places the formator in an uncomfortable position. Please forgive me for stating that I have met, especially in the countries of the North, quite a lot of candidates or 'young' Oblates who are at least as 'catholic' as the Pope himself, if not more so. This group is not in the slightest interested in intellectual formation, theology, or philosophy, that are necessary for the deepening of Christian doctrine. All they seem to be worried about is orthodoxy, attachment to the person of Christ and the Church: both judged "the same today, yesterday, and always". Such candidates demand "that it not be permitted to scholastics to study in institutes which transmit a theology of dissent". For them, the categories of 'conservatives' and 'progressives' are only library categories. We should not, they recommend, "contaminate oblate houses of formation with suspect 'current

mania”, nor “use biased spiritual, technical, psychological, or reproachable methods under the delusive pretext that they are ‘modern’, or only use them with discretion, after amendment”⁹. For them (Oblate) formation should “accord more importance to human maturity than to intellectual formation”. Similarly, “there are some who ask to be permitted to lengthen their pastoral experience during the course of their formation (two or three years’ interruption of their studies)”. And yet, there are some who enter religion with a religious background hardly any richer than that learned from the catechism!

Much could be said on the subject of these requests and remarks. They testify indisputably to an authentic aspiration to a deep communion with Christ, of belonging to the Church through the oblate missionary ideal. However, they bear a smattering of *anti-intellectualism* that is surely a dangerous and regrettable thing in a more complex and demanding world. But they are perhaps only the reflection of this same atmosphere of anti-intellectualism prevalent in the Congregation as a whole, which would tend to subscribe to a certain French dictionary which defines ‘Oblate’ as ‘a kind of country Jesuit’ (*une espèce de Jésuite des campagnes*). For many, that amounts to saying that “studies are not our vocation, let us leave that to the Jesuits”.

On the other hand, I have often met in the countries of the South, another class of candidate pathologically addicted to the *myth of diplomas*. Those often show themselves more concerned with ‘studies’ rather than (personal) study, of bookish learning rather than personal experience, of the search for knowledge than wisdom and holiness of life. If they are not ‘sent for studies’ (preferably abroad), they become insufferable in community, and are capable of the most despicable lack of discipline. It is to be wondered if their treasure is not indeed where their heart and their most secret dreams are. I have also met some who have almost wanted to have themselves crowned ‘king’ on their return from ‘studies’ with grand ‘diplomas’... At any rate, a *balance needs to be restored* in our oblate formation between oblate or religious values and the requirements of a presbyteral and religious ministry which has become complex and demanding.

As for *formators*, their selection must be more demanding because the young let us know it. They want formators who are brothers, dedicated accompanying adults, men of the Church, gifted with a solid spiritual personality, of moral integrity and good human maturity. The young who join our ranks are not fooled, they are mature, they know what they want and they are capable of questioning us, indeed of challenging us. Consequently, we should perhaps try to make a clearer distinction between teacher and formator; both skills should be developed, even if it be in the same person. Semi-scholars as well as demi-saints are dangerous. Constitution 8 reminds us pertinently that the Oblates must not fear, for “*To seek out new ways for*

the Word of God to reach their hearts often calls for daring; to present Gospel demands in all clarity should never intimidate us”. Faced with career ambitions we shall recall, in season and out of season, that whatever be our ministry, we must not forget that we are ‘workers of the Gospel’ (C. 6), that “*it is for God that we work and that the glory of his Holy Name is committed to it*”.

IV – Final Considerations: The Missionary, a Profession to Be Reinvented

It is in a complex world, complicated and demanding, that we are called to evangelize at the dawn of the third millennium. We must therefore prepare ourselves for it while avoiding shortcuts, comfort, and mediocrity. If, “*wherever we work, our mission is especially to those people whose condition cries out for salvation and for the hope which only Jesus Christ can fully bring*” (C.5), lo and behold, to be a missionary has become in our day an extremely demanding and complex profession, precisely on a scale with the complexity and requirements of the world to be evangelized at the dawn of the 21st century. To be a missionary and an Oblate will have to become clearly a choice and an ***option for excellence***, a choice for Christ in the Church. The multiple faces of a more and more sophisticated misery obliges us to dare a new and profound evangelization through a spirit of radical inculturation, understood as liberating, contextual, and holistic. The lifestyle of the Oblates and the type of formation that they dispense will serve as a

test to this effect. Africa which leaves the 20th century has a great need that we announce to it "the liberating presence of Jesus Christ and the new world born in his resurrection" (C.9). But from now on the announcement will have to be accompanied by listening where the missionary will let himself also be evangelized in his turn (R.8). A theology and a spirituality of listening must be invented, but the profession of the missionary himself must also be reinvented.

Some practical suggestions:

Global context of the Mission:

1) It would be good that the General Chapter study meticulously and in depth the global context of the post-modern and post-colonial world: this alone can permit us to adequately recognize the poor, to identify and recognize their multiple faces.

Apostolic Action:

2) We should seek to combine these two elements: an effort of missionary expansion involving opening new missions; and the need of an active presence and quality in the milieu where we are already established, and whose culture seems to escape us more and more.

3) Shouldn't the Congregation officially join the present campaign to nullify the debt of the poor countries on the occasion of Jubilee 2000?

Questions regarding Formation:

4) What formation for what type of Oblate? Has the Congregation a coherent policy regarding the intellectual formation of our candidates? 5) Should a congregation of this calibre not need to have at its service at least one high level university? There our missionary activity could be thought and re-articulated, our best candidates formed; and through it the Congregation could contribute to the development of the missiological thought of the Church.

6) Is it not desirable to be present to students, especially in secondary education, for encouraging young vocations?

Washington, DC, December 8, 1997,
The Feast of the Immaculate Conception

Notes:

1 No. 29.

2 J.M. Coetze, *Age of Iron*, New York: Penguin Books, 1990, p. 20

3 Art. 25.

4 Final message of the Synod, No. 37.

5 *Ibid.*, No. 2.

6 John-Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, No. 47.

7 Final message, No. 15.

8 D. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, Maryknoll, NY:

1991.

9 Cf. Synthesis of replies, parts 4 and 5.

“Synthesis” of the Questionnaire of 1997: a Latin American Reaction

Guilherme REINHART, O.M.I.

Part 1: The poor with their Many Faces

The first part of the document prepared by the Pre-capitular Commission poses two fundamental questions: 1) Who are we? and 2) Who are the poor in our globalized, post-modern world?

Before attempting to respond to these questions, we Oblates working in Latin America are forced to recognize our personal and communitarian limitations. We are few in number (427 Oblates in the Region, according to the last official report: Feb. 1997) and, despite the increase in vocations in recent years, our average age is rising (roughly 55 to 60 years, with the possible exceptions of Haiti and Mexico). We are made up of small groups (18 Delegations or Vice-Provinces) and located in 15 different countries (4 groups are in Brazil). These groups are scattered over an immense Continent thus making personal contacts between groups rather difficult and rare. Most of our countries now enjoy the benefits of formal democracy (freedom of the press, free elections ...) but the majority of our citizens have yet to win their economic and social rights. We are increasingly aware of our limited response capabilities and often feel a deep sense of frustration in not being able to bring about real change or to diminish the suffering of our people.

The second question – who are the poor today? – is more difficult to answer. We know that since the fall of the Berlin Wall the indices of absolute poverty have increased significantly and entirely new categories of the miserable have been created. This did not happen by chance, nor is it “the will of God”! Those who were oppressed with meager salaries, are now either excluded from the table or simply eliminated. We are convinced that extreme poverty, social apartheid, violence, migrations, hunger, homelessness, the dismantling of the family, disillusionment and despair are not signs of an archaic civilization but the perverse side of the one global “civilization” which is capable of putting men on the moon, creating instant planetary communication and satisfying the desires of consumers at the ends of the earth, but is incapable of supplying the fundamental needs of people. The neo-liberal form of world capitalism continues to put profits over persons and thus reeds death and destruction for our ecosystems and our populations. The reason is simple: with advanced technology modern companies no longer need thousands of unskilled workers, but only a few well trained and competent technicians. In Latin America, as in other Regions, we have millions of unskilled workers and more and more computers, robots and other hi-tech machines displacing people. The obvious results are structural unemployment, homelessness, violence and a long list of woes. Worse still, a climate of fatalism is rapidly growing: what can be done to stem the tide? There seem to be few, if any, real alternatives. Within this context the challenge for us remains: how can we struggle to transform the structures of society without distancing ourselves from the victims of the system? Is it possible to remain close to the poor as living signs of solace and hope, using modest low-cost instruments of evangelization, and still have an impact on society as a whole?

Part II: Our Apostolic Works

Apparently one of the few “unanimous convictions” that Oblates around the world have is that the witness of our lives is fundamental to the effectiveness of our mission. Put in another way, we cannot expect our pastoral efforts to be fruitful if our day to day living is not consistent with our discourse. In Latin America this is translated: moving ahead in our efforts to live simply; insertion in poor periphery or inner city neighborhoods; sharing what we are and have with the people among whom we live; celebrating the “eighth sacrament” of hospitality not only with fellow Oblates but also with pastoral agents and those excluded from the table of life; presence and

solidarity with those who struggle for human rights and dignity, jobs, decent housing, schools, day care centers; and above all being prayerful persons, placing our trust in the Risen Lord at all times.

In Latin America, as in the Congregation as a whole, we are constantly rediscovering the power of witness in mission. It is the most concrete manner of fulfilling the Founder's final request: "Charity, charity, charity ..."

Most of us, however, still live in the context of urban or rural parishes, and it is exactly here that we will have to concentrate our reflection. Much energy has been spent in trying to make our parishes genuinely "missionary". We have created "go-structures" to replace more traditional "come structures", and we are often criticized by the faithful for never being in church. We are encouraged by the example of Jesus who left the ninety-nine to search out the lost and dispersed, those who never come to our well prepared liturgical celebrations. It is important to note that in the process it is often we ourselves who are evangelized. It is clear to most of us that we have to be free enough from parish (and other) structures that we can touch, and be touched, by the poorest of the poor. It is essential that we be willing to give up, renounce or delegate certain activities, functions and paper work that normally consume so much of our time and energy, that we are impeded from getting close to those who need us most, and who by definition never come to church!

One of the key issues in this new approach to evangelization is the delicate question of power sharing. It presupposes a well formed, mature lay leadership on the one hand, as well as generous, open and humble Oblates on the other, since an authentic self-emptying ("kenose") is implied. Over the centuries priests and religious have concentrated sacred power in their hands, while the laity has been relegated to faithful functionaries of the clergy. This is also one of the most sensitive issues related to women in the Latin American Church (much more sensitive, for example, than the ordination of women).

Parishes were never meant to evangelize! They arose in the context of Christendom and were intended to facilitate the distribution of the sacraments, especially Baptism and the Eucharist. It is too much to expect that this type of ecclesial structure can respond adequately to the needs of postmodern Christians. "Missionary" parishes are conceived more along the lines of a "community of communities" where autonomy, diversification and interdependence are promoted by a mobile missionary team, normally composed of priests, religious women, seminarians and lay pastoral agents. Experiences in this direction have proved to be fruitful in responding to the felt needs of the faithful in not a few Latin American dioceses. At the same time specific pastoral ministries have been organized to meet very concrete social problems. In Brazil and other Latin American countries Oblates have become involved and several are responsible for the coordination of diocesan or national programs. They become gradually more involved in "secular" rather than ecclesial structures, participating on committees, teams or councils together with other professionals in an organized effort to resolve crucial social problems (reform of the prison system, create programs for low-cost housing, confront the issue of abandoned children, etc.).

In conclusion, we perceive three basic scenarios of pastoral activity in Latin America today:

- 1) Continuity: focusing attention on traditional pastoral commitments (parishes; schools; chaplaincies);
- 2) Modernization: making small adaptations but using the same basic models, for example, using new technology in our parishes, schools, etc.;
- 3) Transformation: creating new models to respond to contemporary situations, such as: social exclusion, massification, global migrations, etc. Obviously it is in this third category that we find the greatest concentration of fragmented human and social groups, the crushed, the excluded, the eliminated. They are served neither by government nor ecclesiastical institutions, since they offer no hope of financial return. It is precisely here, however, that the genuinely NEW

is being born, and it is here that entirely new forms of evangelization will have to be developed in the next century. Are we not being challenged as Oblates, even with our limitations, to be present to these suffering people? And are we not challenged to go much further than simply “evangelizing the poor”? Discerning collectively the signs of the times, the Chapter must call Oblates to make every effort to reach these millions of the new poor, “leaving nothing untried” so that they themselves become evangelizers and protagonists of their own human, social, political and spiritual growth, responsible with us for the future direction of the Church and society.

Part III: Culture and Cultures

Another fundamental question the Chapter must face is the relationship between the Church, and the Congregation within it, and the multiple cultures or cultural manifestations which exist in the world today. It would seem that without a detailed analysis of the relationship between the so-called New Culture (presumably the dominant world culture disseminated by the mass media) and specific cultures of historical social groups, the topic cannot be adequately treated.

According to Karl Rahner, SJ, Vatican II was the last Council of the Eurocentric Church and the first Council of an emerging world Church. What was perceived as missionary zeal in previous centuries is now seen as a temptation to impose, perhaps unconsciously, a colonialist agenda, as many well known examples from mission history illustrate. The Chapter might well ask itself if some of the Church’s present attitudes and comportment are not a subtle effort to hold on to European structures and norms, and also to a unilateral vision of what its identity should be in the next millennium. Even John Paul II has called attention to the importance of the Gospel being rooted in culture as well as the vital role of inculturation in the process of evangelization.

This openness to a multi-cultural approach is also fundamental if we are to understand and penetrate the culture of youth. The Church’s limited success in reaching youth in our times is undeniable. In fact the Church often comes across as a stodgy enforcer of a dying culture.

Once again the cultural issue cuts across the entire field of education: catechesis, religious education, social doctrine, adult education, the relation of faith to science and technology, etc. What do we as Oblates and “members of the prophetic Church” (C9) have to contribute in this regard and more precisely, by means of the present Chapter? As missionaries incarnated in many different cultures around the world, are we sensitive to this issue, and are we preparing ourselves to confront it, especially within the perspective of the defense of human life and culture wherever they are being threatened? What does the Church (and the Congregation) have to learn about its own identity in open dialogue with the Gospel? To what extent does there still exist the idea of a unique “Christian culture” above all others, and into which all cultures need to be invited with their values, gifts and seeds of the Gospel? Within this discussion the pluralistic paradigm is better suited as an instrument to analyze and comprehend the many cultural challenges of today. The Church can only thrive where culture – and cultures – thrive!

Parts IV & V: Young Oblates in Ministry and First Formation

Our young Oblates are conscious of the difficult challenges they face as they leave the false security of the seminary and plunge into the modern world. They deeply question the type and quality of the formation they have received. They ask themselves (and us) if they are credible witnesses of the Good News of Jesus; if they are inner-directed men, sufficiently motivated to follow Him in a radical way, often swimming against the stream. They sometimes doubt if they have the spiritual stamina to avoid the traps of the consumer society, of slipping too easily into a comfortable lifestyle, forgetting the enthusiasm that was once theirs. They wonder if they have the energy and drive that will be necessary if they are to insert themselves in the world of the poor and abandoned. They seem uncertain as to how they will react if assigned to a community that has resigned itself to a routine of TV, meals and perhaps the distribution of the sacraments. They want to be given responsibility and to participate in a missionary team that really functions. They feel the need for more competence in handling conflicts, no doubt because they have already suffered through more than one. Fundamentally they are searching for a healthy balance between an openness to world mission and the need to be deeply inserted in a particular

historical culture. All of these attitudes and questions put our traditional approach to formation, as well as our actual formation programs, on the firing line. No doubt the Spirit is speaking to us through these sincere young men. Will they be taken seriously by the Chapter of 1998?

Those young Oblates still in first formation also have some important questions for the Chapter. After recognizing their own personal, family and cultural limitations, they express the need for a more personalized style of formation, reacting to a certain massification which is an integral part of the post-modern world culture. They are aware of the necessity to be intellectually prepared, but nevertheless give priority to human and affective maturity within a more holistic view of formation. They also ask the Chapter to give special attention to our Oblate Brothers (R3), with formation programs tailored to their specific needs. Will the Chapter be capable of getting to these questions? Will it be willing to give them the time and importance they deserve?

Summary

Starting from the "Synthesis" we have tried to point out, from a Latin American perspective, several points which will demand special attention at the Chapter of 1998. At this historic moment, the turn of the millennium, we Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate are certainly being called to be: sign, symbol, parable and prophesy of God's Kingdom. To help us understand this mission we offer four reference points:

Oblate religious life must be based on the experience of God. If this is missing, all our missionary commitments and activities lose their power and their meaning;

Rebuild apostolic community. Rediscover the secret of community in profoundly human inter-personal relationships, in sincere friendship capable of healing wounds and reinvigorating tired fellow Oblates;

Return to evangelical poverty. In recent years the new-liberal mentality has infiltrated our communities. The lack of an evangelical flavor of a simple lifestyle is the root of many other evils. This ground can be regained, especially by insertion and closeness to the poor, the excluded from the banquet of life; and solidarity with those who struggle for human dignity. This leads us to the final point:

Transform periphery into center. Periphery understood not in the geographical sense but as the symbolic place of encounter with the poor. Our task is to make it the center, the place where we make our pastoral decisions, in partnership with the poor, and where those decisions are later evaluated with them. In doing so we may well discover the contemplative dimensions of inculturation and the secret of discovering hope in the midst of apparent despair. Wherever we are or whatever we do, our mission as Oblates at the birth of the new millennium is basically the same: defend life wherever it is threatened; give meaning and hope to our fellow human beings, especially the poor, the crushed, the fragmented, the excluded.

Evangelization of the Poor on the Eve of the Third Millennium: An Asian Point of View

Clement WAIDYASEKARA, O.M.I. (Pakistan)

Introduction

In the next General Chapter in 1998, in Rome, the entire Congregation will reflect on the theme *Evangelization of the Poor on the Eve of the Third Millennium*. This theme was chosen for the study and reflection by the Congregation, in my estimation, realizing the fact that the Congregation is well aware of a growing consciousness within the Church as well as within the Congregation itself that we cannot walk blindly into the 21st Century. In other words we need to *journey together towards the Third Millennium* in our missionary endeavours as Oblates. In view of this the Pre-Capitular Commission through a *Questionnaire* has sought to understand and appreciate the critical importance of the present time and hear what God is calling us to do as we complete the last few years of the second millennium and come to the threshold of the third, remembering that all times are embraced in the hour of Jesus. And also in 1998 we are to have an Asian Synod – in Rome. It seems that the 21st century belongs to Asia. For the Asian Church this is something significant, it needs our attention, it needs our support. What will the Oblates contribute?

Pope John Paul II has declared 2000 AD as Jubilee Year. Biblically it is intimately associated with the Israelites' experience of liberation in the Exodus event. But does this indicate, in any way to the local Churches, that "all roads lead to Rome"? Or is it a reminder of our being pilgrims, and also meant to be for the whole Church an experience of crossing boundaries, boundaries that minimize her credibility as the sacrament of the Risen Lord?

Outcome of the Synthesis

The *synthesis* which the commission has prepared is the signs of the times for the future of the Congregation. Signs of the times also mean an invitation and a response through change, renewal, transformation and transcendence.

Many issues have been highlighted in the synthesis namely, social (poverty, justice, youth, women, children, minorities), cultural (indigenous, inculturation, modernization), religious and their structures (witness, spirituality, dialogue, formation) and so on. But all these issues could be put under the common title, i.e. *the poor in their many faces*. Parallel to these issues run other challenges, such as: a growing uncertainty and "fear" among the Oblates that Oblate commitment is no longer a challenge; there are deficiencies regarding our priorities and emphasis as a missionary Congregation, poverty and a feeling of inadequacy of spiritual well-being; Oblates are aware that the Church no longer exercises the same triumphalistic influence as in the past. This has therefore rendered them vulnerable messengers of the gospel and on top of that there is the crucial danger of "romanization" of the catholic world. We can, therefore, speak of a time of "concern" in the Congregation, a moment of history opening out to both danger and opportunity. Yet all this ferment is the stirring of the creative Spirit, a Spirit sometimes disturbing but ever surprising, challenging and hope giving.

There is a call for deeper spiritual cleansing, and an opening up to the Spirit of renewal, who can enable us to hear the *new voice of our times*. There is a need to develop fresh missionary approach. There is also a need to discern what we need to change in ourselves in order to respond more effectively to the demands of the gospel, to the crying needs of the poor, and remain faithful to the spirit of the Congregation. We ourselves must become aware of our

poverty in many faces and open ourselves to the Spirit of renewal, who will lead us where He wills. In the past Oblates were called *specialists in difficult missions*. The Oblates' current cry is that they want to keep, at all cost, a truly missionary spirituality.

It is quite obvious that Oblates can respond to the gospel demands, can remain faithful to the charism of the Congregation and the renewal of spiritual life. These happen only in historically conditioned situations and realities. In this sense the issues that have been stated in the synthesis need to be seen in our own particular perspective – the Asian reality – if we are to have a meaningful dialogue with oneself, with the people, with the Church and with the Congregation. The issues mentioned in the synthesis are the outcome of particular situations where Oblates live and have their being. While an overview of the world's situation needs our attention, our concern, here, will be centered on Asia.

The Asian Reality

The recent past has been a time of extraordinary change and desire for change. The face of Eastern Europe appears transformed. There is a new hope for a just society in South Africa. In Asia popular movements for participation in society are emerging. We are conscious that the Asian reality is increasingly part of the global reality. Our world is becoming progressively interdependent, with mutual interests and concerns. This situation holds out great opportunities. Older power blocks have broken down. A new order is emerging, in which even the smallest nation can play its role. Asian countries are influencing, as well as being influenced by the rest of the world. Speaking in the same vein, we hear it said frequently these days, that the world has become a "global village". This affirmation is made primarily from the view point of communications because the media communication has brought people and places closer to each other. Such possibility and ease of communication on a global scale favours also globalisation of economic and political relations and structure, culture, and even religions. Thus we hear about a new world order. The question then becomes: whose order is it and who is imposing it on the world? This situation affects the Asian Church as well as the Congregation in this Region. We need to ask the vital questions that will enable us to move ahead as a Congregation. We have to know what is the difference between "Communion and Solidarity" that we are attempting to understand and articulate, and the process of "Globalization" that is so pervasive today. As expressed in the synthesis, the Oblates do not have always the wherewithal to confront the needs of the poor, and to answer to questions that are posed by the radical transformation of the society. Thus we need to try to see the new way of being and becoming a Congregation in Asia and also the spirituality which must inform it.

Missionary mandate.

Our major concern as Oblates needs to be, first of all, to realize what it means to be the Church of Jesus Christ in Asia, a continent that is witnessing the birth of new societies in the post colonial era. What distinguishes the Asian Churches' mission is their dialogue with Asia's realities such as its history, cultures, religions and its peoples, especially the poor and their liberation and development. The language of the Asian Churches is of relatedness, service, dialogue and harmony. The Church sees itself as servant of the Kingdom, and the historico-cultural context, in which a Church is situated, is part of the divine plan.

The local Churches of Asia are in communion with other local Churches with whom they share the one faith, one Spirit and one sacramental life, as well as communion with the See of Peter that presides over the universal Church. It is a *participatory* communion in which all share in the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Oblates do not see the local Churches of Asia as mere extension or administrative units of a universal Church but as the incarnation of the Mystery of Jesus Christ in Asia. It enjoys equality with the rest of the local Churches who are responsible for the mission of witnessing Jesus Christ in the context of Asia.

We can discern many signs of hope. There is a new consciousness of solidarity, a desire of community which seeks to cross boundaries – ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue. By doing this we run counter to all forms of fundamentalism. Proclamation through dialogue and

deeds – this is the first call to the Oblates in Asia. Daring, openness must characterize us in Asia.

The thrust of the Oblates is to become serious searchers of the divine human, respecting personal freedom including their own, and valuing pluralism as richness. When community is not people-centred but becomes institutionalized in some way and related to political and other institutions, then it seems to lose the prophetic intensity and earnestness of the Good News.

What distinguishes the Asian Church is the manner of executing this Mission. Asia affirms that the basic mode of Mission in Asia must be dialogue. It is a missionary dialogue in the sense that it is a search to find the meeting point of the Gospel values with Asian realities and the people of Asia, with their histories, cultures (i.e. inculturation) and their religions (inter-religious dialogue) and the poor masses (development / liberation) of Asia. This has been the thematic background of both the pastoral and missionary activity of the local Churches of Asia. In turn, it should create a genuine commitment to bring about social Justice in Asian societies. “Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel... for we believe that this, in our times, is part and parcel of preaching the Good News to the poor (Mt 11:5; Lk 4:18)”. Further, Evangelization and the promotion of true human development and liberation, make up today the integral preaching of the gospel, especially in Asia (*Evangelii Nunciandi*, Nos. 17, 129).

The essential spirituality of the local Church in Asia requires solidarity and compassion with the poor and struggles for the removal of divisions among its people. Its prayer binds the Asian Church to solidarity with the poor and powerless, the marginalized and the oppressed in Asia. It moulds the Asian Church to Christ-like sensitivity to the cries and sufferings of the poor, in order to respond generously and courageously to the needs of the poor and to join them in their struggles for a fuller life. “Were you there when they crucified my Lord”: the song is worth many a page of ecclesiology.

In our efforts of the renewal of the Asian society the lay faithful need to take upon themselves their specific responsibility according to the values of the Gospels. They are the primary evangelizers of culture and of cultures, and of the whole fabric of life in society. This calls us to be active in the formation of the lay people. Dialogue between religious traditions, the ideological movement, and aspect of the women’s movement also offer hope for a more holistic spirituality.

Renewal of missionary spirituality

There is an urgency in the Oblates for renewal of their sense of mission. This will also require a renewal of our motivations for mission. We evangelize, first of all, from a deep sense of *gratitude to God*, the Father “who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing” (Eph 1:3). That is why it is so important for us to have a deep faith-experience of the love of God in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:39), that love has been poured forth in our hearts by the holy Spirit who has been given to us (Rom 5:5). Without a personal experience of this love received as a gift and mercy, no sense of mission can flourish.

God speaks to us from the travails and the progress of our countries, and bids us from the contemporary challenges of our world to renew our sense of mission. A renewal of our sense of mission means, first of all, renewal of our faith that God so loved the world that he sent his Son the Saviour of all. He has imprinted traces of his revelation in the world which exists in him (Col. 1:16), and in the “seeds of the Word” found in cultures and in other religious traditions. The spirit of the mission of Christ involves a being with the people, as Jesus was: – The Word became flesh and dwelt among us (Jn 1:14). “To proclaim Christ” means above all to live like him, in the midst of our neighbours of other faiths, to accompany people to experience helplessness and powerlessness and to avoid as temptation all efforts for power and recognition.

Local Church is not just a community of faith, sacraments and hierarchy, as it normally understood, nor even a community that has adapted itself to the local customs to a great extent. More so it is a community that is truly a transforming agent in the local context, and bringing new life which the people can experience as responding to their problems and aspirations.

The success of mission depends on the authenticity of the missionary's own relation to God, of the coherence between the word spoken or heard and the word that is lived. Any vision of mission in today's world must arise from the point of view of its victim – the poor, the marginalized and the oppressed. They are the mediators of the challenging demands of the good news. Our Mission today should be to offer an alternative way of living in the world.

As observed by some, it is difficult in to-day's world, for a religious community, to remain fixed on a certain type of ministry, without continuously raising new questions. Hence the need for flexibility, mobility, and adjustment. Flexibility, at times, could mean withdrawal when confronted by powerful structures whether the world or the Church.

Religious formation

In this missionary vision religious formation needs to be geared for the service to the poor. We earnestly need to search for a type of formation more suited to the times and the people of Asia. Its apostolic character is determined by the social reality of the particular country. The theological understanding of religious life, which is conditioned by the ecclesiology of the time, influences the formation policies and strategies.

The purpose of religious life is to be at the service of the people. Religious life is for the growth of humanity. The set-up of a religious community, the pattern of prayer, the terms of reference for the choice of apostolic priorities, follow one or the other of the models of the Church.

The goal of evangelization is not merely the transformation of individual lives but also the collective transformation of society. Evangelization of culture would mean the evangelization of relations, as these are mediated through the socio-economic and political realities. This would require reinterpreting of the original charism, the understanding and articulation of which was conditioned by the culture of the past. My experience tells me that religious congregations struggle to bring about changes in the apostolic orientations and formation pattern, without adequate supportive changes in their theological perspective. Those who are in formation, coming into contact with people in their living conditions, will give rise to new models of formation programmes and mechanisms. There is an urgency to train our candidates to be contemplative in action.

Concluding reflections

The renewal of our sense of mission will mean that the acting subject of mission is the local Church living and acting in communion with the universal Church. It is the local Churches and communities which can discern and work out the way the gospel is best proclaimed, the Church set up, the values of God's Kingdom realized in their own place and time.

Oblates can be enriched, and at times evangelized, by the poor and by other cultures and religious traditions. This is the way we find meaning and fulfillment in our Mission and life. The poor make us have a new reading of the gospel, uniting faith and life.

The Second Vatican Council emphasizes the role of the lay people and local Churches in the work of evangelization (*Ad Gentes* n.2). It proclaimed the restoration of unity among all Christians as one of its principal concerns (*Unitatis Redintegratio* No. 1), declared its recognition of other religions and encouraged dialogue and collaboration with the people of other faiths (*Nostra Aetate* No. 2). Currently, it is a "concern" for the people of Asia and for the Oblates whether the official Church has any reverence and appreciation for the wholeness of another's religious experiences. For example the published remarks by the Pope about Buddhism being "atheistic", and Cardinal Ratzinger in an interview describing Buddhism as "autoerotic".

Similarly, the International Theological commission, an advisory body to the Vatican, whose president is Cardinal Ratzinger, published last January a document on "Christianity and the World Religions". In that it is stated that there can be no roads leading to God that do not converge in the only road which is Christ. This is a more complex way of saying there is only one salvation and that is Jesus. How does one square this with the "Christian minority – plurality of religions" Asian experience? Such an absolutizing attitude, opting for certainty over mystery, is

utterly disruptive of dialogue with other religions.

The major service that the Oblates could render is to prepare Asia for the in-breaking of the divine reign. Hence we are challenged to be creative and responsive to the local situation and evolve a missiology that is relevant to the Asian context. Asia needs an ecclesiology more concerned with community than structures of power, even "sacred power".

Asians are not talking about "another Church, but another way of Being Church" with the good will of being the Church of Jesus Christ without pride or belittling of others. This was the very reason that sparked our Founder – *St. Eugene de Mazenod* – to establish the Congregation of Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate (cf. *Preface*). We need to consider a system of establishing relationship not based on "centralization" but on "collegiality", and ask for more recognition given to the rightful autonomy of the local Churches. Where are we in offering the Church at large a special way of being Oblates, and of being Church? How can our experience of pluralism enrich the entire Church?

Finally, Oblates must be among the prophetic rather than that legitimizing element in the Church. The most pressing signs of the times for the Oblates is to take the "crucified people – the poor in their many faces – down from the cross". Will the Oblates take this challenge and allow themselves to be leaven in the masses, remain true to its missionary spirituality

– specialists in difficult missions?

Oblate Vocations, A Call for New Strategies

Experiences of Vocation Ministry, Mainly from the Region of Europe

Jean-Pierre CALOZ, o.m.i.

I. Context

Religious vocations are very distant from the prevailing culture, marked as it is by secularism, spontaneism, hedonism, the need for change, the difficulty of a life commitment. This is true everywhere, but particularly in Western Europe.

As a result, very few young people will of themselves take the first steps toward an Oblate vocation. Fortunately, there are exceptions: youth from very Christian families wherein the subject of vocation is considered and encouraged, but such cases are rare.

So it is necessary to spell out an approach to youth by means of a progressive nurturing.

II. Normal Stages of Commitment

1. First contacts

Since young people no longer come to us, we must go to them. This is done by organizing encounters, retreats, hikes, pilgrimages, camps, etc., conducive to bringing together youth who are close to Oblates as well as tending invitations to much larger milieus.

We can take note of some of these initiatives, such as “Trips Unlike Others”, to Cameroon and Thailand. They were launched in the city press; they presupposed a selection of candidates, began with a time of preparation on the country to be visited and were followed by meetings, once the trip ended.

Other experiences – various summer activities: community experiences in the mountains, pilgrimages, hikes, time spent together around a work site

– repairing a chapel, for instance; animation at a shrine such as Lourdes, hikes in the footsteps of the Founder, trips to Rome. These experiences are occasions for becoming acquainted, living in community, speaking of the Oblates, visiting a few of our communities, and above all for discovering “interesting” youth.

2. Accompaniment

This is the most important time. The first contacts are very often well done, but what is lacking is the long work of accompaniment.

Accompaniment presupposes a personal relationship between an Oblate and a young person or several of them. There has to be a relation of confidence on the part of the youth, they must feel understood and accepted. Accompaniment, close to “spiritual direction”, is a time of discernment on what the Lord expects of this or that youngster. It aims at deepening of Christian life to produce love for God, a taste for prayer, the will to make a disciple of oneself. This is the undertaking during which one or the other will ask himself the question of religious life.

Accompaniment is done personally; it must also be done in a youth community during weekends, summer camps, organized retreats for youths in search of answers.

3. Choosing

After some time spent in accompaniment and journeying together, there comes the time of choosing. The one who accompanies should sense when the opportune moment has arrived. It should not be too soon, when the youth is still too much of a stranger to Christian experience, and

it should not be delayed, otherwise the youngster gets accustomed to living with his hesitations. The choice that bears on entering the noviciate is normally made in the course of a retreat of discernment.

III. Various Places Where Stages of Accompaniment Are Experienced

1. Youth movements

The journey just described is experienced naturally enough in organised movements of "Oblate youth" such as the *Movimento Giovanile Costruire* in Italy, or the *Grupos de Vida* in Spain. One finds there the various stages described above, integrated in the pedagogy of the movement. The "choosing" stage is offered to the youth who want it, at the most appropriate time.

2. Oblate Centres for Vocation Ministry

The same journey can be largely facilitated by Oblate centres specially set up for this purpose. In such a house the Oblate community is free to develop all the activities that it considers can lead to the aim for which the centre was constituted. The Province to which this house belongs thus has at hand a place of reference where those who are interested in Oblate life can address themselves. They can find there an environment of life and an accompaniment with a view to discernment.

3. Accompaniment of Acolytes ("Altar boys")

There are Provinces – I'm thinking of Poland in particular – that do a great job of animating altar boys. It is a ready-made setting to solidify the "first contacts" already mentioned. The next thing is to get organised for the accompaniment and discernment stages toward making a choice. This will not necessarily apply to all the group.

4. Make the most of Oblate celebrations to sensitize the youth

This means taking advantage in particular of first vows, perpetual vows and ordinations – all very favourable occasions in themselves. The youth should be prepared by moments of retreat, of meeting with those committing themselves, of witnessing – followed by a time of evaluation and sharing of what has been experienced. From these events can come the beginnings of an accompaniment...

5. A "juniorate outside the walls"

Aware of the vocation problem, some provincials have thought that a vocational process had to be started with youngsters no more than 13 to 14 years of age. On this score they were raising once again the question of juniorates. It is probably not opportune in Europe to renew the experience of the classical juniorate, if it is at all possible to gather its fruits otherwise. Hence, the idea of a "Juniorate outside the walls" brought about in the following way:

Create a network made up of youth.

Offer them a "rule of life": it would include times of prayer and a way of living inspired by the Gospel. The candidate is free to engage himself

formally in writing or not. Youth often like to have specific proposals made to them and find it profitable to become part of a group.

Plan regular meetings for a "revision of life" starting from the "rule of life" and deepen the Christian experience.

Make sure that each youth has personal accompaniment.

Organise the undertaking in such a way that it allows a vocational discernment and presents the question of religious life.

One could even imagine producing a brief bulletin to link the youth, give news, publish texts of the Founder...

Rome, 17 May 1997

Oblate Districts

Thomas M. Cassidy, o.m.i.

Local communities are the basic living units recognized by the Constitutions and Rules; they are of two types: houses and districts. At the time of the 1992 General Chapter 25% of the Congregation lived in local communities which were districts. At present, in Canada and the United States, not counting those who are in retirement or formation communities, well over half of the Oblates live in local communities which are districts.

Nevertheless, in a 1994 survey taken in preparation for my doctoral thesis in Canon Law, 19.05% of North American Provincials having district local communities, expressed the opinion that Superiors of these communities were an unnecessary level of authority between the Provincial and the members. Also, 30% of the same Provincials did not feel that if all members dealt directly with the Provincial on all Oblate matters, that this would centralize too much power and ignore subsidiarity. Regarding preparation for their office, 47% of Superiors of district local communities said they never had any, and 66% of those who had, said it was inadequate. Although 57% of Provincials said they provided some preparation, 80% said it was inadequate. One Provincial noted that "if a man is a good, empathetic, gregarious Oblate, no course is needed; if he is not, no course of preparation could help."

Historically, districts, as units of local Oblate government, were founded in the missions of Ceylon by Bishop Étienne Séméria and approved by Joseph Fabre, Superior General, and his council, on December 1, 1865, within a few years of the death of the Founder. These districts were much more than governmental units. They were functioning community structures, characteristic of their day, and the direct forebears of the post-Vatican II apostolic communities.

A current opinion has it that district local communities, as they are found in the 1990's, are the result of post-Vatican II apostolic community religious theology. According to this view, this new theology renewed Oblate religious community life by remaking an outdated, sterile, governmental concept (districts), left-over from early missionary attempts to keep control of, and contact with, the missionaries in non-Christian areas. This position is condescending and not borne out by the facts.

Granted, districts were not in existence in the time of St. Eugene de Mazenod. However, given his family background, his stubborn insistence on a vibrant community life in his institute, and his dismissive attitude toward anything which hindered community life, it is not surprising that an innovative solution to the major missionary problem of the impossibility of establishing canonical houses in mission territories, was found within four years of his death, before the problem could become a hindrance to the growing Oblate apostolate.

With all forms of religious life, continued updating of structures and renewal is necessary, lest the life simply become a shell covering a sham. District local communities, in this, are no different than any other. Following the admonition of the Council Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, a complete study and renewal of districts as apostolic communities cannot be successfully undertaken without knowing the intentions, ideas and implementation of the 'founders'. In this instance, district local communities, there were three founders:

– De Mazenod, the charismatic Oblate Founder, who taught the primacy of community, to the extent that if community life did not come before even the ministry, the Congregation, as he intended it, would die.

– Séméria, the missionary Bishop, formed by the Founder, who took an existing structure (diocesan rural districts with their vicars forane), and adapted it with the help of his missionaries to fit the needs of the Oblate missionary religious lifestyle, so that de Mazenod's intention could continue to be fulfilled in a new milieu.

– Fabre, the Superior General, immediate successor to the Founder and consummate

administrator, who saw in that missionary structure, a means of preserving de Mazenod's founding concept of the primacy of community. This was a structure, he foresaw, which could well be of use elsewhere in this rapidly expanding Congregation.

District local communities, as an active and alternate form of apostolic community, have been renewed, reborn, and restructured in the light of the

Second Vatican Council, the revised Code of Canon Law, and the updated Constitutions and Rules of the Oblate Congregation. However, they are no more an invention of contemporary Oblate life than is the very notion of Oblate apostolic community. Both are creatures of the mind, spirit, life, and writings of de Mazenod as they have evolved and are found in the present day life of his institute and will continue so into the future.

The Code of Canon Law and the proposed Constitutions and Rules of the Oblates already give to the Superior of district local communities adequate authority to fulfill his task according to the law; no additional authority is needed. What he does not have, the survey shows in too many instances, is sufficient power to carry out that mandate.

In the meaning of the previous paragraph, 'authority' to govern (the formal cause), is given from above, by the law and the appointment to the ecclesiastical office, independent of the individuals concerned. 'Power' (the instrumental cause of governance), is the means to use that authority, comes from below. Power is earned, *supra legem*, by the Superior of the district, bestowed by his brothers, the membership, supported by his peers, and aided by the positive actions of his Provincial. Without that type of power, the office is nominal and sterile.

Without a Superior with such power, the district, as a local community will atrophy. If this happens too often, the province, in its turn, will die, and so on to the region, and even the Congregation.

This General Chapter must implement concrete measures to reinforce their vision of the community system as it is communicated between the general and the provincial levels. The 'word' is not getting down; too much is filtered out. General Councillors must come and talk to the members of district communities, and not be hesitant to take the Provincial to task if there are shortcomings. The Congregation dare not simply presume that a renewed community life, at times involving fundamental changes in lifestyle, will come about through osmosis.

Provincials may sometimes have to be reminded that a Superior of a district local community holds an ecclesiastical office with ordinary and proper power, as does a Superior of a house local community. They are neither the delegates of the Provincial nor the first among equals within the membership.

Apart from the proposed definition of a district local community itself, three items should become either part of, or strengthened in, the Constitutions. The necessity of particular provincial statutes for district local communities, preparation of Local Superiors, and the holding of district community meetings.

Without particular statutes/norms (present Rule 86), a general one for all district local communities in the province and specific ones for those that need them, district local communities are like rudderless ships destined to flounder into the night and come to a disastrous end. Through these statutes, inspired by guidelines from the general administration, implemented by the Provincial in council, and based on the experience of the individual district local communities, a balance will be achieved between over-centralisation and unwarranted independence. Such guidelines themselves would be found in the general administrative directory, and based directly on the definition of a district local community.

One crucial need, that has already been widely recognized, is the adequate preparation of Local Superiors. Implementation has always been the problem. This can best be done on the regional level. Such a need calls for the creation at the regional, or inter-regional, level of the post of 'local superior formator' as part of the ongoing formation dossier of the region. He would have the responsibility of setting up and running such language based courses on a regular basis. This would be a part-time position, well suited to a former Provincial with a good grasp of the needs of

Local Superiors, an excellent administrative background, teaching abilities, and a good working relationship with the general administration. If not considered to be a position, which needs to be in the Rules, it ought to be in the General Administrative Directory, and not simply left to the good will and memory of overworked Provincials. De Mazenod would demand no less.

District local communities themselves, and their Superiors, must see that the success of their existence as apostolic communities will come only through internal sharing. The sequence is simple: no sharing, no community meetings, no district local community. The initial sharing is on the level of basic human communication: the sharing of stories, both personal and ministerial/apostolic. In the beginning, this calls for a minimum of trust, and as that trust grows so does the basis for a living community. Afterwards, the sharing will expand covering life aspects: areas of physical and spiritual life and health. Sharing will naturally expand to cover problem areas, in the community and in the apostolate. Financial and other resources will first be shared within the local community, then with the province. Finally, all of this is held together by the Oblate life which grows within the members through their sharing in prayer, especially the Eucharist, recreation, and in the brotherhood which is the result of eating a common meal together. This sharing has been the basis of religious life since the time of Benedict; it is the essence of de Mazenod's thinking, and it is the point, on which districts will live or die. It is called the *vita fraterna*.

Law, by itself, is sterile unless the Oblate Congregation, in its General Chapter, Superior General, General Council, Provincials, Local Superiors, and members, have the vision and the values necessary to make districts important and workable, that is, living and vibrant.

The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate were the first to formally establish districts as units of local community and government, and to receive the approval of the Holy See for them, making districts part of our proper law. The Society of the Divine Word has done likewise, and in more detail. In preparing for the upcoming changes in the Constitutions and Rules regarding districts, we Oblates ought to read and benefit from the experience of the Society of the Divine Word. Not to do so would mean a great loss to our institute.

The definition, proposed in my thesis, includes elements of Canon Law and is according to the norms of the Oblate Constitutions and Rules (1982/ 87), and some of the elements of the proposals for the 1998 General Chapter. It is recommended that elements of this pivotal definition be included in the body of the Oblate Constitutions and Rules as a constitution, as follows:

A district is a local apostolic community, lawfully constituted as a unit of local government with particular norms. It is distinct from an established or 'canonical' house, in that it is an apostolic community of the common life, wherein members live either together, in various separate small residential units, or individually, all within a specified geographic area. It is under the authority of its own local superior, designated according to the norms of law. Each district is to be of a size and membership so that ordinary communication and interpersonal relationships are possible and fostered, the *vita fraterna* is capable of growth and encouraged, specifically through community meetings, and where there is at least an oratory, in which the Eucharist is celebrated and reserved.

This definition, as it stands, may appear, to an Oblate, as containing several self-evident statements. However, as it is formulated in my thesis to be of use to all communities, even to ones that have no such community tradition in their institute, it was felt best not to be too Oblate-specific in the definition. The intention is to have a definition in the constitutions, which would remain, unchanged, even if a future general chapter made some changes in the applicable rules or regulations. What are intended to be easily

adjustable are the guidelines for implementation, as found in the general administrative directory or equivalent.

The definition's core, or skeleton, is the statement:

'A district is a local apostolic community of the common life, wherein members live either together in various separate small residential units, or individually, all within a specified

geographic area, under the authority of its own superior.'

However, a skeleton without any flesh is quite dead. The definition without its integral components is also quite dead. The additional elements in the first, more complete, definition are not accidental, in the Aristotelian sense, but are substantial. From an Oblate viewpoint, and taking into consideration present traditions, one could consider omitting from the definition, elements such as „a district is a local apostolic community,“ not simply because Oblates know that all local communities are apostolic, but specifically because this has been said previously, elsewhere in the constitutions. What ought to be remembered is that each of the above elements is essential and must be either explicitly in the definition, or implicitly in the definition because it is already explicitly elsewhere in the constitutions.

What is new, is that, within this definition, the elements of: particular norms (the statutes of the current R. 86), restrictive size, and membership, and most especially the necessity of community meetings, are all now constitutive elements (constitutions), rather than useful adjuncts (rules). The minimum number of members in a district would be accidental (a rule).

Let us consider 'community meetings' as an essential element of the definition. On the one hand, community meetings are very useful for the governing of a house, and perhaps even essential for the healthy growth of the community life of the apostolic community in that house. On the other hand, community meetings, in a district apostolic community, are essential to the very existence of that community, let alone the health of the *vita fraterna*. Again: no sharing, no community meetings, no district local community.

A major item flowing from the 1994 survey of North American Oblate district communities which calls for further study and research, is one which is beyond my training. In studying the 173 pages of the 79 replies to the questionnaire on districts, which formed the basis for Chapter 5 of my doctoral thesis on Oblate districts, it became obvious that there is a wealth of further information contained there. This deserves a thorough scientific

analysis by an Oblate researcher who can apply to them the tools of the sociology of religious community life. Such a study must be done fairly quickly, before the information contained becomes merely an historical footnote. To such a person, the collected research material could be made available.

Even if everything enacted by this General Chapter is accomplished on a structural level, there is no guarantee, nor should there be, that a renewed district community structure will produce as good, or better, a local apostolic community than did the old-fashioned institutional-style house in its day. Such a success, today as always, depends on how much work and prayer the Superior of the district local community, his council and the members are willing to put into the exercise, on their level, and the same for the two senior levels of government on theirs. Structures may help, structures may change, but only individuals can build community. So it has been in the past and so it will be in the future.

You have not only a glorious history to remember and to recount, but also a great history to be accomplished! Look to the future, where the Spirit is sending you in order to do even greater things [John Paul II, "Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation: *Vita Consecrata*", March 25, 1996, No. 110, in AAS, 88 (1996), p. 484].

Ottawa, July 15, 1997

Reflections on Oblate district communities and mission

Martin WOLF, O.M.I.

1. Points of view concerning district communities - The local community, a necessary condition of Oblate life

According to Canon Law (canon 608), “a religious community is to live in a lawfully constituted house, under the authority of a Superior designated according to the norms of law”. In the Code, there are three exceptions to the obligation of common life: “for reasons of health, studies or an apostolate to be exercised in the name of the institute” (canon 665, §1). Therefore, religious who live alone because of their apostolate are exempt from the obligation of common life. The Instruction *Congregavit nos in unum Christi amor* underlines the necessity of a common life which is realised in living in the same house, participating in common exercises and collaborating in a common service. The Instruction, however, also considers the possibility of living outside the common residence (CN, No. 3).

The Constitutions and Rules attempt to harmonise the two aspects: on the one hand, the obligation of common life and, on the other hand, the legitimate possibility of a life outside the common residence in view of the apostolate. They prescribe that every Oblate should live in an apostolic community (CC 1, 37). Thus, local communities are the necessary condition for Oblate life. Even when Oblates must live alone because of the apostolic activity which they exercise through a mandate from the community, they are assigned to a house or a residence or gathered together in districts (C 77). These units which the Constitutions call “living cells” are parts constituting the whole of the Congregation. The Congregation finds its consistence and its reality in each and every one of these local communities. The house and district communities have the same purpose: to promote community life through relationships and reciprocal help and to authentically realize the mission in a variety of geographic, cultural and ecclesial contexts.

The principle of equivalence among the different forms of community

Constitution 88 clearly states that the local community may take the form of a house, a residence or a district. Hence we may conclude that the diverse forms of community are juridically equivalent, even if some particular statutes or specific norms apply exclusively to the house community. In other words, the community where Oblates live under the same roof is given the same rank as the district, in which community life is realized in physically distant places. There also is a quasi-equivalence with the canonically erected religious house regarding erection, suppression or change of apostolic goals or superiors. Constitution 77 explicitly places district and house superiors on an equal footing.

Having established this fundamental juridical equivalence, we must not forget however, that there is an intrinsic hierarchy of the different forms of community. In his report on the state of the Congregation at the Chapter of 1992, Father Zago indicates indirectly the priority of the house community over the district community. He shares with the members of the Chapter the following wish: “It should be possible and normal for young people and those who so desire to live in *residential communities*. Both individuals and the mission would benefit thereby” (No. 32, d). However, the two last Chapters have expressly underlined the principle of equivalence. The Provincials are asked to “support district communities as real Oblate communities having a special purpose” (MTW, 131). It was also reaffirmed “that *district community* is an authentic and important expression of local community” (WAC, No. 23, 5).

The district superior

The district community is directed by a district superior appointed by the Provincial in Council for a definite term (C 90, R 92). In the Constitutions, the same title of “superior” is given to the person in charge of a house or a district, whereas the person in charge of a residence is

designated as a “director”. Whatever is stated about superiors in the Constitutions and Rules applies fully to district superiors, “saving exceptions foreseen by the Church’s common law or by the particular statutes of the district” (C 77). The canonical conditions to be a superior and the qualities required by the Constitutions and Rules are the same for district and for house superiors. Both have the same obligation to take part in meetings for their own formation and renewal (R 78). In many cases, the district superior is always a member of the Provincial Council in order to facilitate the link between his confrères and the Provincial authorities. But the opposite situation also exists: the district superior is asked not to be a Provincial consultor in order to avoid the plurality of offices (cf. *OMI Documentation* No. 168, p. 5).

Oblate communion and common mission

If apostolic community is an essential condition of Oblate life, it is also necessary for the district community. The question remains as to the way in which it is realised. The two constitutive elements of apostolic community are, on the one hand, the unity among Oblates and, on the other hand, the common mission. Constitution 3 expresses it in the following way: “The community of the Apostles with Jesus is a model of our life. Our Lord gathered the Twelve around him to be his companions and to be sent out as his messengers” (cf. Mk 3:14). To be “companions” and “to be sent out” are the two key concepts of Oblate life. Oblates are called upon to realise unity among themselves and then to be sent for a common mission (cf. Districts as Expression of Apostolic Community, in *Vie Oblate Life*, Vol. 53, No. 2,

p. 111). In this respect “Jesus and the Apostles” must be their model.

The unity of Oblates and their common mission are an integral part of the legacy handed down to the Oblates by the Founder, as we see in Constitution 37: “The Founder left us a legacy: “Among yourselves practice charity, charity, charity, – and outside, zeal for the salvation of souls. In fidelity to that testament, each member’s zeal is sustained by bonds of fraternal charity.” Fraternal charity and missionary zeal presuppose and support one another. This legacy must also bear fruit in district communities since they are called upon to be communities by virtue of the law itself. Fraternal life in community is an expression of this unity which is realized by the love of God and must bear an essential witness to the service of evangelization and apostolic activity (*OMI Documentation* No. 197, p. 5).

Interdependence of life and mission

Constitution 37 explicitly affirms that Oblates fulfill their mission in and through the community to which they belong. Their community life must witness to Christ whom they proclaim. This communal witness can only be realized in the framework of apostolic communities. In their life and missionary work, Oblates are inter-related even when they must be dispersed for the sake of the Gospel. What is said here of life in community holds true for every Oblate even if he does not live in a community. In this sense, every Oblate, no matter where he is, remains a member of the community. “Obedience and charity bind us together, priests and Brothers, keeping us interdependent in our lives and missionary activity, even when, dispersed for the sake of the Gospel, we can benefit only occasionally from life in common” (C 38). This is a new perspective. What is affirmed here is that community does not mean exclusively common life under the same roof, but can also be a life lived in reciprocal interdependence. Community life is no longer defined as the fact of living together in a house community but as a network of relationships among members. This broader notion of apostolic community can also be applied to the Province. The relationship and the interdependence within the communities is expressed in the mutual responsibility and the reciprocal emulation.

These reciprocal relationships must be made concrete and become structured in order to produce a lived reality. The daily practice of community requires a regular rhythm of meetings, spiritual retreats, celebration, verification of activities and personal renewal, in order that the members may experience interdependence in a concrete way and that the community may grow in unity. For an active missionary group living in a district, this presupposes a common effort at planning.

Financial sharing has a central meaning: it is an important dimension of interdependence. The members of a district must be ready to account for their use of money and material goods, in order to grow together in freedom and detachment.

Communion and dependence become a lived experience when the community becomes aware of its role in healing and reconciliation. There are also other occasions for that, such as celebrating feast days and anniversaries of the members of the district. This expresses the will to share joys and sorrows with one another. The interdependence of the members is expressed even more vividly when the missionary district community takes on a common missionary project.

The need for a common life program in the district community

Constitution 38 states that “each community, whether a house or a district, will adopt a program of life and prayer best suited to its purpose and apostolate”. Therefore, the district must have its interior program entrusted to the vigilance of the superior. The program must include regular meetings during which the members take time to celebrate the Lord and evaluate apostolic activities. The purpose of the meetings is renewal, reinforcement of unity and interior growth of the district community (C 38). These meetings are the most important manifestations of the district.

The themes to be brought up at these meetings focus on three main issues: prayer, study and sharing of life experiences. The Constitutions and Rules give priority to time spent praying together which is considered to be the summit of community life and the demands of the ministry must not impede this privileged time (C 40). Normally the Eucharist must be at the centre of the meeting. In several districts, the monthly retreat alternates with a day of sharing of pastoral experiences. Elsewhere, these two aspects are linked together: the day of recollection consists of prayer, reflection and sharing of pastoral and missionary concerns. As regards common study, there exist many approaches to the choice of themes. Sometimes the meetings will deal with the themes proposed by the general government, at other times social or religious questions or matters proper to the Oblates will be brought up. Meetings will also be used to prepare Province meetings, to reflect on lifestyles, to evaluate the apostolic activity or the internal life of the district. In some instances, the meetings take place weekly, in other situations, they are held five or six times per year. Often Oblate feasts, birthdays and anniversaries will be the motive for coming together.

The district community as adaptation to the missionary outlook

The district community is a reality arising from experience. It appeared in response to a need to adapt structures in such a way as to realize concretely the finality and the objectives of the Congregation. The question arises: is the district community able to reconcile the demands of the apostolate and of religious life, which are often experienced as a permanent tension? And how can this be achieved? The main purpose of the Congregation is to preach the Gospel, especially to the poor (CC 1,2, 5). The structures of the Congregation do not have their finality in themselves. They must always be at the service of the main purpose. Rule 23 clearly expresses this: “Apostolic works and the demands of authentic religious life will be the determining factors in the design and furnishing of our houses, as well as in the community’s lifestyle and means of support.”

In 1989, exactly 24.1% of Oblates were living alone in their mission or their residence and in the ten years that have gone by since then, the tendency has grown. In reflecting on this fact, the importance of having district communities that function well becomes evident. Many Oblates have no other way of taking part in a community life. The district community allows

Oblates to undertake missionary tasks that deprive them of the possibility of life in a community. The Rule requires that “any new forms of community living developed in response to special missionary needs, will begin in dialogue and will be periodically reviewed at the local and provincial levels” (R 24). In order to remain faithful to its mission, a missionary Congregation must be flexible in its structures and in its forms of apostolate. The district community is without doubt a way of maintaining this flexibility without sacrificing the essential conditions of the consecrated

life.

2. Two conceptions of the district community

Within the framework of adaptation of the forms of community to the apostolic mission of Oblates, we find district communities in two distinct contexts.

When there is a tendency toward decline in our numbers, district communities are often established in order to maintain the status quo as long as possible in the apostolic and missionary activities of the Province. Changes occur especially when members die or become unable to remain active because of their age. In these regions, the district community appears as a last resort solution to gather together in ‘community’ those Oblates who are isolated or scattered. When this model of community becomes the rule, there is a danger for the Provinces concerned to see a strong tendency toward the disappearance of all community life.

In regions where the tendency is towards a growth of personnel, districts have a different function. They are seen more like an adaptation to the growing needs of apostolic activity. Their purpose is to provide a structure for community life, so that members may face their missionary commitment collectively. In this case, the orientation of the district is much more clearly a missionary one. In my opinion, this missionary orientation is what distinguishes these districts from the districts of regions which are in regression.

3. A few questions in conclusion

The last two General Chapters have asked that district communities be recognized as authentic communities. However, for many reasons, certain districts cannot be considered as communities in the full meaning of the term. Many of them do not live up to the demands of apostolic community life. A district community can be considered as an authentic community only if it possesses the constituting elements of community life, even if in a modified form.

The following questions are intended to promote an authentic debate on this question.

– Is it possible to follow the last Chapters and the General Administration in recognizing the full equivalence of the forms of community, when an intrinsic hierarchy subsists between them? There is no doubt that in many situations, a district that works well can attain a better quality of community life than a house community where common life is not up to par. But is it possible for a district community to attain the same quality as a community living under the same roof?

– It is necessary to establish strong bonds among Oblates who, because of their apostolate, live apart from one another, in order to strengthen the esprit de corps and the awareness of sharing the same ideal and to keep alive the Oblate identity of each member of the community. Mutual support, sharing and interdependence are the necessary conditions of community life in a district. We must therefore raise the question of the role of the district community superior, of the required formation, without losing sight of the fact that his mandate also concerns co-ordination of the missionary activity.

– For all districts, sharing through regular meetings is of paramount importance. These meetings are often the only possibility of sharing, reflecting, planning together and praying in an Oblate community. If the sharing among members is lacking or is insufficient, the fraternity usually will become weaker. Meetings reinforce the community and the fraternal bonds in the district. Are these factors taken into account when time comes to establish a district and to proceed to nominations? Are there any criteria that could help Provincials who must make decisions in this area? Beyond territorial criteria, should not the Provincial government take into account other criteria concerning the content when it has decisions to make concerning the establishment of districts? Would it be possible to establish districts grouping Oblates who wish to work together in the same missionary project, for instance in the area of youth and vocation work or popular missions?

– In an effort to unify terminology, is not the concept of “district community” difficult to

work with because often it does not correspond to reality? This concept may awaken expectations concerning community life that certain districts are unable to achieve. Should we not restrict the expression to situations in which it truly corresponds to a lived reality, that is, to use it only if the essential elements of community life are present?

– The importance given to district communities is basically a good thing because it gives legitimacy to the situation of Oblates living alone. Also, districts may be an effective response to the demands of the mission in certain Oblate Provinces. But can we ignore the fact that the present increase of isolated posts presents a great risk, even if they are grouped in districts? Does not a Province where house communities have become the exception lose an important dimension of the Oblate charism? Should we not consider district communities as a particular, but necessary and legitimate form of the community as such?

P.S. The present text is an abridged version. The complete text is available in *Vie Oblate Life*, August 1998, 275-287

Christian Communities in a Post-Christian Era

New Evangelizers Demanded

Claude CHAMPAGNE, o.m.i. Saint-Joseph Province, Montreal

A) A Post-Christian World Where God Seems to Be the Great Absent One

When we mention the reality of the post-Christian world, we speak of a society where the Christian faith and the Church that bears it were until recently the dominant elements of life together: we spoke then of Christian countries, of Christianity. All these facets of life in society were under Church control. To be a full member of society, one had to be a member also of the ecclesial community. This tells us that the oldest people of the community, those who had reached adulthood at the time of Vatican II, have known this situation; they were also exposed in a systematic way to the teaching of catechism and to catechesis. They have some knowledge of the Church's message.

But society has undergone profound transformations leading to a radical configuration different from that of the past. Christian faith, ecclesial life have been marginalized, privatized. The different elements of life in society

– politics, economy, cultural and social life – expand in an autonomous way, independently of the religious aspect. God is no longer necessary in life in society: there is no longer need for a God stand-in, available to explain everything that escapes us. It is no longer necessary to be a practicing person, nor even a believer, to be a full member of life in the community. God can appear as the great absent one. He is no longer needed for human life to have sense. Post-Christian culture already offers a meaning to human life.

The older members of society have already heard of the Gospel, of faith and catechism. They often retain of them their abstract, notional character, which they reject. Several have distanced themselves from this reality which does not seem to them particularly "good news". They retain particularly the teaching of the Church on sexual reality that is perceived as morally repressive. The Church, omnipresent, omnipotent in the past, is subject to the criticism of its institutions; it is accused of abuse of all kinds, physical, psychological, sexual and cultural. There is a phenomenon of rejection of the ecclesial institution and of this Gospel without rapport with the life of today. If the impact of faith and Church in the past within this society is recognized, it is only as a reality now worthy of museums.

This post-Christian world is paradoxical: on one hand, religious indifference, but on the other, we notice a return to the sacred. It is one of the surprises of the present world – this renewed interest in all that touches spirituality. The last decades of material abundance allowed the experiencing of this world of consumerism. Once the experience made, one has to submit to the evidence; the abundance of goods is incapable of filling the human heart in its search for meaning. The world needs a surplus of meaning. All the more so because in a world of deep economic restructuration, the abundance known in the recent past will become the privilege of a small minority of wealthy people; the phenomenon of growing impoverishment will invite the population as a whole to learn to live from other values than those of the economic reality.

B) A World Still Inhabited by God

In recent decades the Church deepened the facets of the Good News it had received and seeks to live – the Good News of the Kingdom of God proclaimed and inaugurated by Jesus. The use of new theological methods more inductive than deductive has permitted the putting into relief the elements of our faith, little developed until then. It is not a question of a new Gospel, but of the Gospel proclaimed by Jesus and by the first Christians. We are more conscious, however, that this coming of God cannot be limited to the ecclesial community. God made himself present and

active to this world he madly loves: each human being is preceded by God's love and his destiny is a return to God. The disciples of Jesus who we must believe enough in the Good News of God's coming to be disposed to discover, recognize and valorize this presence and this action of God beyond the Christian community, in history and society, in religious traditions as in cultures.

We must know how to recognize the good and beautiful features of the post-Christian or post-modern culture. The presence and action of God manifest themselves in the values of God's Kingdom present in this new world; a new sense of the dignity of the human person, of his freedom, his search of spirituality and his rediscovery of moral values; new type of socialization that has broadened the network of human relations, multicultural milieus, valorization of individual freedom and recognition of diversity in tolerance, increased sense of interdependence between persons, etc. The post-Christian society, democratic, conceals therefore authentic values. Some of these values are of Christian origin while others were fashioned outside the Church.

When persons have grasped that giving one's life for the happiness of others is the true meaning of a life authentically human, we have to recognize the presence and action of God. When persons are driven by the quest for truth, for peace, for justice, for communion with the ultimate reality, we have to accept that the Spirit of the Resurrected is at work in the heart of our brothers and sisters.

C) A Church, Symbol and Artisan of this Presence/Action of God

We cannot live the Good News proclaimed by Jesus without forming community around him. We cannot live the Gospel alone. Society in general no longer sustains with its esteem Christian life, considered as a private reality. The importance of ecclesial, communitarian support appears still more clearly than in the past. The faith of the disciples must be nourished within a community where together we welcome and celebrate the Good News, where we learn to discern the presence and action of God.

It is not enough to know and understand the content of faith – one must above all experience it, really meet the living God, the God of the Alliance who offers himself, gives himself gratuitously, respectful of the freedom and autonomy of persons. This God of gratuity can only astound and surprise. The Church has to live the Beatitudes in a convincing, attractive manner.

The Church is already evangelizing, bearer of the Good News by the new type of interpersonal relations lived within her. Following Jesus, the disciples are invited to reject the temptation to dominate others, to compete with them. The life together of disciples cannot be built on questions of prestige or conquest of power. On the contrary, relationships must be founded on Gospel realities like mercy, gratuity, concern for the growth of the other and equality between all members, everyone participating in the same dignity of God's children.

It is equally important for the disciples of Jesus, faced with the reality of religious and cultural pluralism, to be conscious of the wealth of God's specific gift in Jesus Christ: the Gospel (this Word of God who is the person of Jesus Christ), ecclesial reality (the community of those who welcome the Gospel) and sacramental reality (these effective signs of the presence of Christ in the community). Christians should increasingly know the basic content of the Christian faith, beyond present theological discussions and opinions.

D) Evangelizers Required

For this "new evangelization" there is need for men and women evangelizers who have truly received the Good News in their own lives. They make the daily experience of it. Their confidence in Jesus Christ has been renewed. They give evidence of a new ardour, a new hunger to transmit the joy springing from the Good News received and lived. What is really important is their personal witness that is lived in an ecclesial community. They do not present themselves so much as teachers but as witnesses, persons touched and transformed by the coming of God's Kingdom.

These evangelizers do not entertain a nostalgia for the past, for the world of Christianity

that once was ours. They have enough faith to discover, recognize and valorize the actual presence and the present action of God beyond the Christian community. They know that God acts in history, in societies, cultures and religious traditions. To grasp him well, evangelizers of the post-Christian world must become contemplatives. Conscious that this world is inhabited by God, they approach it with love, sympathy and openness. They seek to know better, through precise technical information, this world to which they have been sent, this world they are invited to love.

It is essential to know how to recognize all the positive elements of post-Christian culture: the values of justice, of goodness and mercy. We cannot share the Good News with today's people by denigrating the present world or by systematically imputing guilt in one's speech. There are authentic values in the present society, in the other religious traditions just as there are in different philosophical currents, values of God's Kingdom. While recognizing the richness of God's gift in Jesus Christ, the evangelizer is ready to recognize the action of God in the other person; he is even ready to learn from the other. It is not a matter of diminishing culture to become an instrument for proclaiming the Good News. We must respect its value in itself.

Today's evangelizer has to be aware of all the developments in theological and ecclesial reflection on the mission: the integral notion of evangelization and the major directions taken by the Church's missionary activity. Whether we speak of dialogue, liberation, proclamation or even inculturation, it is a question of valid ways of proclaiming the Good News in the post-Christian world. No activity has exclusiveness or a monopoly in what is evangelization.

In the post-Christian world, evangelization cannot be reduced to an explicit announcement, since people are resistant to a message they believe to have heard and which they perceive in a negative way. The evangelizer must therefore make himself present to his brothers and sisters in humanity, he has to go out to them, to reach out particularly to the forgotten, the marginalized and the estranged. He enters into dialogue on their turf with respect and love.

Mission then is understood as a mystery of "visitation". The evangelizer, the missionary leaves his milieu ever so familiar to him to cross frontiers, sociological and psychological distances of a social, economic, racial, sexual or religious order. In this world where is born the sub-culture of youth, to go to the young generations is also the crossing of a frontier. This comes down to saying that the evangelizer is always a guest received by the other, a more vulnerable host, which leads the evangelizer to be present, to listen in another way.

Whether members of other religious communities, old or new, of people holding to different philosophies or still non-believers, the evangelizer commits himself in the service of others to contribute to responding to the different needs of salvation, of liberation.

Becoming conscious of alienating structures which fashion our societies and that are factors of impoverishment, of injustice, the evangelizer proclaims the Good News by committing himself to justice, making the option for the impoverished. He is called to express his concrete solidarity with those who take the defense of people and work for the promotion of justice by setting up projects of development and support.

Linked with this commitment to justice, the evangelizer is asked to give the witness of a simple and frugal life, contesting the practical materialism which extols the vision of happiness found in the possession, the accumulation of goods. The life of the one who believes in the Good News is there to say no to the quest for power and security at all costs. It must affirm the importance of the values of an interiorized life.

In the world of the anonymous, the creation of communities of belonging in human dimension is another way of proclaiming the Good News and of evangelizing – whether communities of life, reflection groups, prayer groups, associations or groups of commitment. It is important to be able to present living communities where one can truly feel a sense of belonging.

When hearts are once again open to hearing the announcement of the Gospel, this proclamation should aim toward affirming the meaning of personal existence and history: the

ability to decipher the mysterious presence of God. We have to take into account the post-Christian culture which already offers a sense to human life but not necessarily an ultimate sense. It will then be possible for us to show that Christian faith brings a surplus of sense. It is necessary to present the Gospel as a response to the search for liberation, gratuity, humanization of the human person. Hence, the announcing of the God of Jesus Christ, this God of the Alliance who gives himself gratuitously, in the respect of our freedom and of our autonomy. Christian faith wants to be a response to the initiative of God who exceeds our needs and expectations. The life of the evangelizer must be inviting, an awakening of the desire for this God who astounds, disconcerts and surprises.

Reflection Science – Culture

François DUPONT, omi

*Orientation notes elaborated within the framework of the Technical Commission
of the Mission Province of Belgium South – May 1, 1997*

Two observations

1. Today a dynamic of internationalization is invading us in an inescapable way in all sectors. We must be conscious that it constitutes a process undergoing constant change.

The economy becomes the exclusive criterion for decision, but the orchestra conductor is finance. The motor of this dynamic is the “techno-scientific” thrust, itself in the hold of the economic-finance game.

2. Thus, a cyberworld is organized which becomes dominant culture without roots, predator of times and places, of the cultural and of our creative diversity¹.

The challenge to be met at the dawn of the new millennium will be to give the lie to the predictions of contemporary experts for whom only 500 million of the eight billion human beings will be able to benefit nearly alone of the scientific and technological thrusts concentrated essentially in the “triad” of North America – Western Europe – Japan + the “dragons”; it’s intolerable.

Urgency to act

Consequences already exist that cannot but get worse. National governments become the vassals of international networks of business firms. We note:

-the exclusions, relocations as so many processes which unbridled, short-term competition can only accentuate;

– the marginalization of continents as well as of regions or areas of agglomeration;

– the significant concentration of generic scientific sectors (artificial intelligence, biotechnology, aerospace groups) into some kind of archipelago, as for example, “the blue banana” made up of ten small urban islands where are working in networks a majority of laboratories and concerns in Europe: London, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Paris, the Ruhr, Stuttgart, Frankfurt on the Main, Lyons, Grenoble, Milan, Torino, or in the USA with the well-known image of “Silicon Valley”.

– the disappearance for young generations of local and traditional know’s, know-how’s, and transmitters of how-to’s;

– the reduction of cultural diversity and plural belongings to a common denominator: a culture of ventures coupled with a scientific and technical culture reserved to the super-qualified who become experts in a society that finds its legitimation and brushes aside from it the citizen, even the city representatives.

The refusal of fatality

There is no such thing as a fatality that is economic, financial, techno-scientific, historico-cultural, or social – especially for Christians and in particular for Oblates who have chosen to be where the lot of the poor is played out.

Even if the history of evangelization, that of mission, were lived more in terms of implantation or restoration of the Church – the Missionaries of Provence are an example – it still

remains paradoxically true that the witness of the Good News was lived as a listening, a recognition of values (the Provençal tongue), the capacity to boost a development, to stimulate the responsibility of the poor in taking their human dignity upon themselves and to conduct their future in a veritable dialogue of openness, sharing and solidarity. This in fact was already applying the present spirit of UNESCO.

Culture “makes of us specifically human beings, rational, critical and ethically committed. Through culture we discern values and make choices. By culture man expresses himself, becomes conscious of his self, recognizes himself as an unfinished project, questions anew his own achievements, searches untiringly for new significations and creates works which transcend him”².

For a sustainable development

A sustainable development implies articulation between culture and development. Javier del Cuéllar, president of the United Nations “Culture and Development”, makes clear that today sustainable development supposes not only mastery of equipment, capital, technology or expertise, but demands also a mastery of masteries. Happiness “key in hand” has failed³.

It implies the pursuit of three objectives:

- promoting new models of development combined with new cultural policies,
- promoting cultural diversity,
- promoting a new cultural dynamic of social change.

Culture thus becomes “the star that guides development”. So it is essential to valorise all wealth, all human and social experience, to promote the alliance of man and nature instead of domination and possession.

For a viable human development

An answer to realise, conceive and get going a human viable development, equitable, durable, liveable for everyone.

It is urgent that there be set up human, associative networks where there can be a meeting of searchers, users, the various powers concerned, “live forces” to define, in deliberation and negotiation, the choices and orientations of development.

Thus are found together:

- doctors, healers, patients, users,
- farmers, agronomists, doers of biological culture, users,
- planners, directors of housing, neighbourhood committees...

In the European example, the social is all too often confiscated by the classic partners – employers and labour unions. To be accepted as well are the associations of outcasts, homeless, without social security, etc. The social should integrate the cultural dimension and the styles of life.

All these strategies are based on a salutary requirement: at all levels, from the local to the regional and to the global, it’s a matter of favouring all decompartmentalization between technical and social, between scientific and cultural, between North and South, between clerics and laymen, between neighbours and strangers, between endogenous and exogenous.

To satisfy these needs in their diversities, the next thing is to guarantee a social and cultural cohesion that implies interface interactions at all levels. For example, at the world summit “Environment and Development” at Rio, the presence of Non-Governmental Organizations obliged politicians to take another look. Tomorrow at Amsterdam, the “marchers of the social” will bowl over the European decision makers.

Scientific and technological innovation

Let us emphasize the primacy of the actors' games as regards scientific and technological innovations and of their networks.

The example of the Tissot watches, in Switzerland, is revealing as far as this experience shows the value of evolutions at the professional level to produce useful mutants, very concretely, in passing from watch producers to producers of cardiac stimulators, thanks to know-how on the waterproofness of watches equally applicable to the production of cardiac stimulators. This was the source of a new development on the spot.

In a similar way, the meeting of healers who know the value of medicinal plants permitted the creation of new medications more adapted to the human organism and allowing greater independence in countries of the South. This, however, brings up the whole question of the rights to intellectual property – a major question in the science-culture debate.

The Oblates' place

We are all concerned, starting with the places where we function. Few Oblates, admittedly, participate directly and are present in these diverse, significant and decisive places, at these national or international meetings where "the lot of the poor is cast".

Here in Belgium South, it's the case of Georges Thill, but in our daily work there are occasions every day to be in places or with multiple groups where civil society wants to have its say in the global development of its region, to struggle against all the consequences of the internationalization of the economy, the relocations and exclusions that result, for access to culture, to defend it or integrate in the economic and social spheres. These are places where, by an active presence, evangelization should take root for the announcement of the One who is the source of life.

Let us underline, lastly, the importance of having, in the Province, a "place" where these questions are analyzed, debated, in order to allow us to have, with more discernment and daring, a leadership role. This is the meaning of the Technical Commission of Mission in Oblate French-speaking Belgium.

Notes:

¹ Report of the World Commission Culture and Development, Ed. Unesco, Paris, 1996.

² Conference in Mexico, Unesco, 1982.

³ "Culture, key to the 21st century", *Le Monde*, 02.25.91. Every user is a producer, every producer is a user: a new citizenship to grasp.

Young Oblates in the First Five Years of Ministry: Identifying the Challenges of Mission

Andrias FERNANDO o.m.i. (Sri Lanka)

Introduction

The call of Jesus Christ to take part in His mission ever resounds in the hearts of the Oblates. As in the past, this call comes to us today through people's need for salvation (MTW). The field that lies before us today is very vast. The time has come for us to interpret the Mazenodian Charism. Our Founder's ardent and audacious zeal for the discipleship of Jesus, salvation of souls, radical poverty, option for the poor and self-sacrifice for the mission are still relevant. This Charism of the Founder can inspire us in rethinking our Spirituality of Christian life and mission in the context of our dialogic approach of other faiths. We have however to think of our mission in Sri Lanka today according to the best contemporary Christian insights and the situation of our people and country now at the turn of the 20th century.

Present Ministries

Today young Oblates are serving in many ministries, such as formation, preaching, parish, hospital chaplaincy and in many other special ministries.

Challenges of Mission

Oblate community is an essential dimension of our vocation. Community life itself is mission. Today community life has become a problem. Everyone wants to prove their uniqueness; hence we have lost the sense of community. It is therefore vital to consider community in relation to Oblate mission and values. Those who live together but engaged in different ministries should dialogue among themselves. This dialogue will enable them to arrive at a consensus and thus understand what community means to them in their particular situation or mission.

For authentic community living, all Oblates must be trained in "Opposition Handling".

There is a need to rediscover the importance of prayer life in view of personal and community renewal. Still we find too much of separation between prayer and ministry. For some, ministry alone is enough. Hence the ministry is not nourished by prayer, thus making our apostolate mere social work. We need to strike the balance.

A praying community should address the realities of life in solidarity with the struggles and need of each member and of those whom he serves.

The need of Social Analysis in Christian Formation in Religious life and ministries is a must.

Through our vow of Poverty we are called to live a simple life. Even we are caught up in consumerism. We do not have to look for an illusory security in the possession of material things. We must have a firm belief in divine providence.

The poor and marginalized can manifest some of the urgent and radical demands of the gospel. We can be evangelized by the poor.

Christians can have a major influence on building the Sri Lankan nation since we are from different ethnic groups and are present in all areas of the country. We have to counteract the build-up of antagonistic mindsets and feelings among the ethnic groups, sometimes supported by political groups and the mass media that cause communal disharmony.

Formation is a priority if we are to exist as a Congregation. We are in need of more qualitative men in this field today. Formators should commit themselves to this task fully without

engaging in other ministries.

The special apostolates that we are engaged in need to be constantly rethought and designed according to the signs of the times. This demands more openness to the world outside and working with other Religious and laity.

There is a greater need for integration in the process of formation between mission and formation programmes.

The elements of the more important formation programmes can be continued throughout the formation process at every level of formation.

It is essential that formators accompany the candidates in every moment of their lives.

We need sufficient training in order to handle our apostolates efficiently and effectively.

Announcing the Good News in the Information Society

Alfred A. HUBENIG, o.m.i.

In 1816 Eugene de Mazenod looked about his native Provence and saw a situation that called for “apostolic men deeply conscious of the need to reform themselves, men who would labour with all the resources at their command to convert others.” And he observed, “How vast the field that lies before them! How worthy and holy the undertaking!”¹

Today, the successors of those first few apostolic men find themselves in fields even more vast and daunting, and in an undertaking no less worthy and holy than in 1816. The 1986 general chapter of the Congregation observed:

We are engaged in our mission at a specific moment of time, a moment characterized by special needs that challenge our work of evangelization... We live in a world that is secularized or quickly becoming so... (Technology) touches every aspect of life and shapes a new person... It is useless to complain about the world or to seek to flee from it. For us, Oblates, cooperators with Christ in the work of salvation (CC 1 & 2) this world cannot be alien territory. We are part of it and we are constantly influenced by it, for better or worse².

When announcing the Good News in today’s secularized world, one of the major challenges the missionary Oblate faces is the information and communication explosion. Never before in the history of humankind have such vast amounts of information intruded upon our lives so pervasively and with such instantaneousness. Indeed, the phenomenon goes far beyond merely transmitting information. The computer is creating a new communication culture, a technological and cultural revolution far surpassing anything the industrial revolution of the 19th century brought about. The European Ecumenical Commission for Church and Society stated in a 1996 report:

Today, computer technology touches every area of our lives and is in the process of changing the way we work, do business, make money, manage, think and communicate. No one knows where it is taking us, but it has set us on our way! Politicians tell us that we must not miss the boat and lose power to those who will dominate through their command of these technologies³.

Before such an onslaught we frequently feel helpless, overwhelmed and inadequate to the task. And yet our charism and our calling as apostolic men sends us out to preach the Good News to the poor and the abandoned in this daunting new world.

A Universal Phenomenon

This new information revolution is not just reserved to the United States, Japan and Canada, where information technology was first promoted and areas of applications first opened. Western Europe, too, is preparing and creating cyber-markets of the future, while in the former Eastern Bloc they are frantically catching up, after years of pervasive censorship⁴. All over the industrial world the digitalized language of ones and zeros that make up computer data is cross-pollinating the communication media and changing the way households function. Television by the year 2000 will integrate the telephone, a personal computer with World Wide Web access, interactive programming, and even a video game system. Prototypes for much of this technology are already in place. 2.2 million tiny mirrors, for example, are already on a postage-stamp-sized chip, moving in unison to produce stunning TV images, and hologram transmission into homes is on the planning boards. The set-top box, long in use throughout much of western Europe to connect consumers to services such as pay-for view television, on-line shopping, ticket purchases and banking, is now preparing to launch into computer-generated ITV (interactive television) with video-on-demand, the World Wide Web and the fabled ‘500 channels’. At the

same time, many life-skills are already being learned through virtual reality.

But a radically changing world is not reserved to the industrial nations. In the Third World, there is not a jungle or an outback, not a desert or a mountaintop, not an isolated cabin in the bush or a steamy favela in a megalopolis that does not at least have its transistor radios; and even now, a growing crop of television antennae is sprouting in many of these places, pulling in the signals of metropolitan or small rural transmitters. Not only is this new revolution bringing the global village ever closer to reality, it is making the global university both an increasing possibility and a double-edged sword that could make the gap between the well- and poorly-educated even greater. Federico Mayor, Director General of UNESCO, commented:

New information and communication technologies, especially the Internet, are offering researchers, educators, artists and administrators all over the world an opportunity to form the most cultivated, specialized, versatile and active intellectual community the world has ever known⁵.

The Information Revolution Impacts on the Good News

Almost imperceptibly, this new information revolution is quickly changing the patterns and style of our life. It is a force with tremendous potential for good, yet often the deep changes it brings about are negative and materialistic. Indeed, in less than a generation the influence of orchestrated icons and manipulatively hyped mega-products has all but supplanted the wisdom and experience of family elders. Even in remote regions consumerism supplants traditional values. In his Instruction, *At the Dawn of a New Era (Ætatis Novæ)*, Pope John Paul II observes:

Today's revolution in social communications involves a fundamental reshaping of the elements by which people comprehend the world about them, and verify and express what they comprehend. The constant availability of images and ideas, and their rapid transmission even from continent to continent, have profound consequences, both positive and negative, for the psychological, moral and social development of persons, the structures and functioning of societies, intercultural communications, and the perception and transmission of values, world views, ideologies and religious beliefs. The communication revolution even affects perceptions of the Church, and has a significant impact on the Church's own structures and mode of functioning. All this has striking pastoral implications... As media become ever more intertwined with people's daily lives, they influence how people understand the meaning of life itself. Indeed, the power of the media extends to defining not only what people will think, but even what they will think about. Reality, for many, is what the media recognize as real. What media do not acknowledge seems of little importance .

The Oblate Charism within the Informational Revolution

So what does all this mean to the Oblate missionary today? To seek an answer to that, I believe we must again go back to our Founder and his founding charism. What did Eugene de Mazenod do when faced with the situation of southern France in 1816? He gathered a group of apostolic men (priests in that case) and together, they went throughout Provence tirelessly announcing the Good News to the most abandoned. Their message was highly visual and dramatic, and it really was good news, far different from the bad news of the Jansenists. Moreover de Mazenod insisted vigorously that his missionaries proclaim that Good News in Provençal, the language of the poor and the unattended. Later, when the Oblates went into overseas missions, he insisted just as vigorously that they learn and work in the language of the people they were sent to evangelize. Some of those early missionary Oblates became linguistic experts and even wrote grammars and dictionaries, but all the missionaries spoke the local language and idiom. It was part of the Oblate charism of being close to the poor. Perhaps this should tell us something in our present situation about the way we are to proclaim the Good News in our world. Today we are priests, brothers and lay associates all sharing the charism of Saint Eugene de Mazenod. We are missionaries to a new world wherein we remain inspired by

the same “call of Jesus Christ, heard within the Church through the people’s need for salvation.” And just as in the Founder’s day, our mission continues to place us with, “those people whose condition cries out for salvation and for the hope which only Jesus Christ can fully bring (the poor with their many faces).” The charism is the same; the call is the same. But the situation has changed. The poor have many more faces. And today’s poor frequently speak a new language.

Living in a largely nihilist and secularist world that often sees no God, no past and no future, a rootless and depressed generation – Generation X – is frequently unclear in its direction. It is a generation with ten times the suicide rate of previous generations; a generation that wants to belong to something, yet feels abandoned; a generation that hungers for the transcendental, yet shows little loyalty to church institution and often considers church pronouncements as inconsequential. To fill the emptiness of not belonging, this generation frequently resorts to gangs, drugs and superficial sex. To explore the transcendental it reads *The Celestine Prophecy* rather than John of the Cross and listens to the lyrics of hard rock rather than the psalms. Thich Nhat Hanh, the Vietnamese Buddhist monk best known for his work in the peace movement, insists that the greatest problem in our world is the large number of younger people roaming the earth without any family, either biological or spiritual. They hunger for family, for their history, for their lineage, and see themselves as an abandoned generation⁷. Our charism calls us to the most abandoned.

Communicating the Good News in a New Language

The need for the written word remains, and Oblates have a history of communicating the Good News effectively through magazines, newspapers and books. But new avenues to communicate in the language of the cyberworld peopled by Generation X must also be explored. Oblate Father Pierre Babin states,

Gutenberg’s genius was to teach and explain... Now, the media, with their enormous power to influence the masses, are gradually imposing another language... They speak in images and stories; they replace co-ordinating conjunctions with gesticulations and oral sounds, dramatizing everything. In a word, we are falling into a language of modulation wherein vibrating together is more important than thinking rationally...

Being a schoolman, I have long thought the message was conveyed by words, words all the more valid because they are written. Now the light and sound vibrations of technical instruments are shaking up the importance given to the abstract concepts and signs that are words. Henceforth, what comes first in the message is vibration, or, in technical jargon, ‘modulation’.

The message, consequently, is not contained in the ideas transmitted but in the effects they produce. An example: Pope John Paul II is said to be ‘mediatic’ or media-minded. It is not his encyclicals or the intellectual content of his speeches that evangelize, but his travels and gestures. In Thailand I heard that a number of people were converted to Christianity during the pope’s visit to their country. “For this man to do everything that he succeeds in doing”, they said, “God must be with him.” Kissing a child afflicted with AIDS, dialoguing with his would-be assassin, this evangelizes! Not that his encyclicals and speeches – generally read – are unimportant and unnecessary: the Church could hardly do without the discipline (at times authoritarian) of words, nor without the intellectualism (occasionally ideological) of its teachings. The primary language of evangelizing is similar to that of the media. It is the warmth of gestures, body language, interior convictions – in summary, the language of the heart’s vibrations. This experience relates to both the individual and social or communitarian body⁸.

Are we familiarizing ourselves with this new sensate and intuitive language of the media culture to effectively “bear witness to God’s holiness and justice, announcing the liberating presence of Jesus Christ in a new world born in his resurrection?” Are we equipped to incarnate that same Jesus Christ into the image-retaining consciousness of today’s most abandoned so that the agora of mass media becomes the areopagus of the Good News of the Unknown God?

Initial Formation

A question must be asked: is our initial formation gearing to the new media culture?

In 1992 the Oblate General Chapter observed that the media have a determining influence on the contemporary person and are increasingly, therefore, an integral part of evangelization. Accordingly, in their closing statement the chapter members incorporated the following:

The 1992 General Chapter requests that initial formation include an adequate preparation in Media, not only as a technology, but also as a culture⁹.

Has anything concrete been undertaken in this regard?

Pope John Paul II has also made an urgent appeal:

Education and training in communications should be an integral part of the formation of pastoral workers and priests. There are several distinct elements and aspects to the education and training that are required. For example, in today's world, so strongly influenced by the media, Church personnel require at least a grasp of the impact that new information technologies and mass media are having upon individuals and society. They must likewise be prepared to minister both to the 'information-rich' and the 'information-poor'. They need to know how to invite others into dialogue, avoiding a style of communicating that suggests domination, manipulation, or personal gain. As for those who will be actively engaged in media work for the Church, they need to acquire professional skills in media along with doctrinal and spiritual formation¹⁰.

The Pope wants it.

The Congregation needs it.

We have the expertise¹¹.

Do we have the will to do it?

At this point overworked Oblate formators and harried scholastics are probably thinking, "Oh no, not more courses!" But the times do indeed call for communication to enter into Oblate formation, not as a mere appendix, but as an intrinsic part of the curriculum. The same could also be said in regard to ongoing formation. Yet, this is not so much a call to add still more media courses or technical workshops to an already heaped plate of formation studies, as it is an appeal to formators, first and foremost. If they are going to teach young Oblates to announce the Good News in the new millennium, they will have to familiarize themselves with the new non-linear language of the media culture (to 'vibrate with its modulations') so that they can take its terms and manner of expression into the aula and the classroom. Moreover, we desperately need a theology of communication that sees the implications for ecclesiology in the new revolution and examines the anthropological, sociological, philosophical and ethical realities of life in the cyberworld. Cardinal Etchegaray, the former archbishop of Marseilles, urged, "We must go beyond the ethics of communication to a communication of ethics. This means we must be bearers of values so that men and women can discover a glimmer of God."¹²

In their thirty-fourth General Congregation, held in 1995, the Jesuits stressed the importance of justice in communication and the communication of ethics.

Communication is a powerful tool that must be used in the promotion of justice in the world. But we must also look at the authoritarian methods and unjust structures of communication and information organisations themselves.

The promotion of justice within communication calls for the co-ordinated action of Christians and other people of goodwill in several areas. Freedom of the press and information must be promoted in countries where they are non-existent or threatened by state control or ideological manipulation. An equitable flow of communication between industrialized and developing countries needs to be established. At present, the rich countries dominate the world with information, films and television programs. The voices and images of less powerful nations and cultures are largely absent from the global village. All Jesuits, especially philosophers, theologians, social scientists, those directly involved in the promotion of justice, as well as those involved in the production of creative works, should be conversant with communication ethics¹³.

The document says 'all Jesuits', but we could just as well substitute 'all Oblates'. Our Constitutions and Rules remind us that as Oblates "We are members of the prophetic Church... We announce the liberating presence of Jesus Christ and the new world born in his resurrection. We will hear and make heard the clamour of the voiceless."¹⁴ In the present context, this would certainly seem to imply a renewed approach in the struggle for justice and at least a grounding in communication ethics.

Communication – not just for Experts

It is too easy to say that formation in media culture is for the experts: let those so inclined pursue the proper studies at a post-graduate level. Indeed, some Oblates will be directly engaged in media and will require specialized training, but learning the language of the new media culture is not a field reserved to experts. It is a necessity for every person who would effectively share his or her faith in the new Information Society. Of course, just as in our early Oblate history we had men talented in linguistics who expertly wrote grammars and dictionaries, so today we have Oblates and Oblate associates who are experts in media. But the question goes beyond experts – all Oblates must learn to cope with the new language of media culture, just as missionaries in the past – and today – have had to learn the language of the people they were sent to serve. We do so to better communicate the Good News – to evangelize – and also to help people discern the messages that bombard them daily. Communication must not be seen simply as a specialized apostolate; rather, we must come to realize that it is a *dimension* that increasingly covers every aspect of all our apostolic efforts.

Learning a new language is not easy. Any missionary who has had to do so has felt the initial frustration of listening to the ease with which children express themselves while we try breaking through the barriers of alien thought patterns and twisting our protesting tongues around unaccustomed sounds. But once we were able to communicate in the language of the people, what a difference it made to our credibility and to the credibility of our message! It is no different in today's computerized cyberworld. We stumble and stammer into a world where even children play with ease. It can be uncomfortable; it can be frustrating – even embarrassing at times. The alternative is to remain snugly on the outside, doing what we have always done in the same way we have always done it – and dooming ourselves to technological illiteracy wherein we announce a message of Good News that will go largely unheard. But such an alternative is not of our Oblate charism. Saint Eugene continues to call Oblates today to be "apostolic men deeply conscious of the need to reform themselves, men who would labour with all the resources at their command to convert others."¹⁵

And Still Another Factor in the Equation – the Internet

We cannot speak of evangelizing in the cyberworld or of the new information revolution without including its most recent and perhaps most impacting phenomenon, the globalized system of computerized connections called the Internet. In 1961 a journalist with *The New Yorker* wrote, "Freedom of the press belongs to the man who owns one." Today, because of the Internet, it might be more accurate to say that freedom of the press belongs to anyone who can type into a computer. We may view the Internet with trepidation or enthusiasm, but we cannot deny that it is one of the most revolutionary and vast sources of instant information and interpersonal communication in our world today. Nor can we deny that although its impact may still be minimal in some parts of the Third World, it is changing patterns and life-styles all around us. In two recent surveys taken six months apart in the United States and Canada, use of the Internet was seen to have jumped fifty per cent among those sixteen years and older in the sampling¹⁶ !

It is estimated that at least fifty million people are already surfing the Internet, and the number is increasing geometrically. By the year 2000 an incredible 1,500,000,000 persons will be on the Internet!

While the United States, Japan and Canada remain in the forefront, the number of connections to the Internet in other countries is far from insignificant. In France, Germany and Britain, the Internet has now surpassed connections to other new media (notably cable and satellite connections)¹⁷ . Throughout Asia, moreover, it is proliferating at astounding speed, and one of Mainland China's preoccupation in the take-over of Hong Kong on July 1, 1997, is precisely the Territory's widespread use of the Net¹⁸ . To the south, because a news agency published an item about Bolivian miners on the Internet, Oblates in Bolivia received Spanish e-mail via the Internet from all over the world. We are dealing with a world-wide phenomenon that can only grow.

The Internet's great drawing card is its interactivity (being able to communicate on a computer monitor with people around the world). Through it, much of today's interpersonal communication and lively discussion are taking place. An incredible number of open forums and 'chat rooms' provide an opportunity for users to join in debates and garner information of all kinds. That is what could make it a privileged areopagus on which to announce the Good News. St Eugene admonished us wherever new needs arise, new means should be found. There is a new need in evangelization, and the Internet appears to be a new means to carry it out.

What Can We Do Specifically?

It is fine to talk in theoretical terms about announcing the Good News in an Information Society, but specifically, what are some practical aspects the Congregation can address between now and the Jubilee Year 2000, at the level of the general administration, regions, provinces, communities and individual Oblates and associates? I see five of them:

1.A Theology of Communications

Just as the Congregation has brought experts together to produce such worthwhile works as an Oblate encyclopedia, we must bring together our best theologians and media persons (Oblates and associates) on a more daring project: to reflect on and lay the groundwork for a sound theological approach to the realities of life and their ecclesiological implications in the cyberworld.

2.A Pastoral Communications Plan and OBCOM

Pope John Paul II has stated under the heading, 'Urgency of a Pastoral Plan for Social Communications':

We strongly recommend that dioceses and episcopal conferences or assemblies include a communications component in every pastoral plan. We further recommend they develop

specific pastoral plans for social communications itself... In doing so, bishops should seek the collaboration of professionals in secular media and of the Church's own media-related organizations¹⁹.

Should Oblates not be doing the same thing at the general, regional and provincial levels of the Congregation? A plan for social communications in a region or in a province would go a long way to dispel feelings of helplessness and inadequacy experienced by so many communities and individual Oblates facing the problems of evangelizing in today's Information Society. An appendix to *Ætatis Novæ* spells out some of the elements that such a plan should include: 1) A statement of vision that addresses contemporary issues and conditions, and identifies strategies for all ministries. 2) An inventory describing the media environment of the region, including audiences, public and commercial media producers, resources, delivery systems, etc. 3) A proposed structure for Church-related communications in support of evangelization. 4) Media education with special emphasis on the relationship of media and values. 5) Pastoral outreach to and dialogue with media professionals. 6) A financial plan to make this ministry viable²⁰.

OBCOM – the Congregation's media network – could become the force to tie all this together, forging connections and providing vitality and information at all levels. OBCOM was set up to connect, catalyze and enable initiatives between Oblate communicators and their co-workers around the world. Perhaps now is the time for it to take on a wider role by promoting and facilitating an in-depth and competent analysis of the Congregation's overall global communication capacities. Such a study would have to take into account not only the possibilities that technology presents but also the multitude of cultural realities with which the Congregation deals. Done comprehensively, it could go far toward creating effective connections to more fully realize the Oblate charism in the new millennium.

3. Make Friends in the Media

Are there negative forces at work in the communications media? Unfortunately, yes. So many that we often feel helpless before the constant attacks on Judeo-Christian values. So many that the Pope has sounded an alarm on several occasions:

In some parts of the world voices are being raised against what is seen as domination of the media by so-called Western culture. Media products are seen as in some way representing values that the West holds dear and, by implication, they supposedly present Christian values. The truth of the matter may well be that the foremost value they genuinely represent is commercial profit...

There is an ever-growing choice of sources in the media. The greater the choice, the harder it may be to choose responsibly. It is increasingly difficult to protect one's eyes and ears from images and sounds which arrive through the media unexpectedly and uninvited... and public opinion has been shocked at how easily the advanced communication technologies can be exploited by those whose intentions are evil. At the same time, can we not observe a relative slowness on the part of those who wish to do good to use the same opportunities²¹?

The Holy Father throws us a challenge in that last sentence. It does little good to complain of bias in reporting and programming if we are not prepared to do something about it. Of their nature, media people are not necessarily hostile to the Church or to the Good News. Frequently they look for sensation and operate more out of preconceived notions of the faith and out of ignorance than out of malice. That makes it important for us, as a first step, to have friends among them, to be, in a sense, chaplains of the Media, persons whom they trust to be straightforward, persons upon whom they can call when questions arise. In some ways maintaining friends in the Media can be a strong complement to religious radio and television which by and large reach out mostly to the converted and elderly²². Ideally, we would do well to have contacts in all three arms of the Media: press, radio and television. The concept of such a chaplaincy has far-reaching merits.

4. Become Active on the Internet

Too often we still view the computer as a glorified typewriter. The World Wide Web of the Internet, with its myriad Web sites, quickly shows us it is far more. There, the computer becomes a new means of relating to others and a Web site (or Web page) on the Internet can be the electronic areopagus where we proclaim the Good News of the risen Lord to an entire segment of the population which hardly knows him. Every province can benefit from a Web site, an attractive and appealing electronic home page that takes interactivity to its maximum with a whole gamut of informational choices. Almost anyone can put a Web page together, but to do it well, it may be necessary initially to hire a professional. Once set up, however, anyone can operate it and frequently keep updating and amplifying the information it provides. Besides telling surfers who the Oblates are and what we do, a province's Web site can be a privileged forum for seeking out vocations. Religious vocations are out there, we must invite them to 'come and see'.

But the great attraction of a well-put-together Web page will be the interactivity of its 'chat room' where interested or curious searchers can engage with Oblates in computerized discussions, electronically dialoguing and asking questions on any matters they chose. And the beauty of such discussions is that from the computer in his office or rectory an Oblate, anywhere in the province (or anywhere in the world, for that matter) can at any time 'enter' and join in the dialogue. This takes dialogue to another level, dialogue with mostly younger people all over the world, many of whom seldom if ever enter a church or take part in traditional religious practices. In such chat rooms we have the opportunity to truly introduce people who are among the most abandoned in today's world to the Unknown God, people who are rarely if ever touched by the Church. One of St. Eugene's prime concerns as a young priest was the unattended youth of Aix. I believe he would have loved the Internet because today it can put us in touch with abandoned and alienated young people in the entire world.

The Oblate General Administration is to be congratulated on opening its very attractive Web-site on the Internet²³. Hopefully this will be kept updated and even expanded with chat room interactivity. It would also be a masterful site for the Information Service to provide the Congregation, and especially the various Oblate magazines and reviews, with instantaneous news as it happens: the bulletins are informative, but by the time they reach a magazine editor's desk they are history rather than news. The Internet could change all this.

5. In the Third World, More Radio

Radio is a powerful force in the Third World and Oblates are among its involved leaders. In the Congregation we have at least two approaches to radio ministry, very different from one another, yet both are highly effective in their particular spheres. One model is in the southern Philippines, the other in the tin-mining Andean mountain region of Bolivia; both involve Oblates working in the local language with competent and dedicated young lay persons native to the region. It is urgent that this way of reaching the poor and most abandoned be ably expanded into other regions, notably Africa and the former Soviet Union. In doing so, both of these models should be studied to see which might best apply in a particular area with its own particular conditions. This, again, is where OBCOM can be of assistance.

In addition, the Oblates working with First Nations people in the isolated northern interior of British Columbia, Canada, are launching into rural television with a small station and transmitter. This will be an interesting and important pilot endeavour to follow.

2000 — a Year of Jubilee

We are preparing for the Year 2000, the Year of Jubilee, a time "to bring the good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners..." In 1816, after the French Revolution, Eugene de Mazenod, in a way, refounded the proclamation of the Good News to the most abandoned in his world, and by doing so broke their chains. Today, in the spirit and charisma of St. Eugene, we are called upon to bring the Good News to the oppressed in our Information Society, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty. It is not only part of our apostolic Oblate charisma, it is also the wish of the Holy Father for the Jubilee Year:

Perhaps one of the finest gifts which we could offer to Jesus Christ on the two thousandth anniversary of his birth would be that the Good News will at last be made known to every person in the world – first of all through the living witness of Christian example, but also through the media: “Communicating Jesus Christ: the Way, the Truth and the Life.” May this be the aim and commitment of all who profess the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, the source of life and truth (Jn 5:26; 10:10, 28)²⁴ .

May this also be our aim. A new moment of grace is at hand. Let us embrace it with a hunger.

A.A.H., Edmonton, AB, Canada

Notes:

¹ Preface to the Oblate Constitutions and Rules.

² *Missionaries in Today's World*, 1986 General Chapter document, Nos. 3, 31, 37.

³ European Ecumenical Commission for Church and Society document, January 9, 1997.

⁴ *UNDA News*, No. 4-5, 1996. Andrzej Koprowski of Polish Television reported that while much of the privatized media in Poland have been cornered by of the old guard *nomenklatura*, some outlets have gone to opposition groups. Moreover Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia and Croatia now have satellite direct-to-home services available.

⁵ Federico Mayor, in *The UNESCO Courier*, December 1996, p. 38-39.

⁶ Pope John Paul II: *Ætatis Novæ*, I, No. 4.

⁷ William J. Bausch: *The Parish of the Next Millennium*, Twenty-Third Publications, Mystic, CT, USA, p. 234.

⁸ Pierre Babin, OMI: *Evangelization and Media*, p.8, 4-5; *OMI Documentation*, Rome, No. 181, May 1991.

⁹ *Witnessing as Apostolic Community*, the Acts of the 32nd Oblate General Chapter, Rome, 1992, III, No. 3, p. 44-45.

¹⁰ Pope John Paul II: *Ætatis Novæ*, No. 21.

¹¹ CREC/AVEX in Écully (Lyon) and Local AVEX in various regions; the Communications Institute at St. Paul University in Ottawa, the Centre St-Pierre Apôtre and SAVO in Montreal.

¹² Cardinal Etchegaray's message to journalists during the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, March 4-8, 1996.

¹³ *Documents of the Thirty-Fourth Congregation of the Society of Jesus*; Decree Fifteen, No. 389, Curia of the Superior General, Rome, 1995.

¹⁴ *Oblate Constitutions and Rules*, Part One, Chapter one: 'Mission', Constitution 9, Rome, 1982.

¹⁵ Preface to the Oblate Constitutions and Rules.

¹⁶ Nielsen Demographics Recontact Study, p. 4. Internet address: <http://www.commerce.net/nielsen/exec.html>.

¹⁷ UNESCO, October 1996.

¹⁸ *Tripod*, No. 94, July-August, 1996, p.51-52, Hong Kong. On June 21, 1996, a year before the take-over, Cardinal John Baptist Wu Chen-chung hosted a private dinner in Hong Kong. Invited were the head of Mainland China's Religious Affairs Bureau, Ye Xiaowen, and some sixty leaders of the Territory's six main religious bodies: Buddhists, Catholics, Confucianists, Muslims, Protestants and Taoists. Ye Xiaowen asked only two questions of the Catholic representatives: 1) Where does the Church get financing for its seminaries and schools?

2) Are church bodies in Hong Kong linked with the Vatican through the Internet?

¹⁹ Pope John Paul II: *Ætatis Novæ*, No. 21.

²⁰ Pope John Paul II: *Ætatis Novæ*, No. 24.

²¹ Pope John Paul II: *Communicating Jesus: the Way, the Truth and the Life*; Message for the

31st World Communications Day, January 24, 1997.

²² George Gallup, Jr., and Jim Castelli: *The American Catholic People: Their Beliefs, Practices and Values*, Doubleday & Co., Inc., New York, 1987.

²³ The Internet address is: <http://www.oblates.com/>

²⁴ Pope John Paul II: *Communicating Jesus: the Way, the Truth and the Life*; message for the 31st World Communications Day, January 24, 1997.

New Culture and Formation of Young Oblates

Gregorio IRIARTE, o.m.i.

I. A New Era

Everyone agrees that we are at the dawn of a 'new era'. The most dynamic sector of world society is in the process of living a new model of organizing cultural parameters and the scale of values that are linked to it.

Some prefer to define this great planetary mutation that we are already living as a *crisis of modernity* rather than to classify it as a *new era*, a *postmodern* or *post-industrial society*... In other words, it is not clear that the *new times* we are living are the fruit of a crack in the organization model of modernity, or contrariwise, the sign that new ways of thinking and existing are being born, or still the two things at the same time.

What is certain is that while completing this second millennium, we are living a *situation of profound change*. These great mutations can be observed in all spheres of this *planetary civilization*.

In the sphere of economy: globalization of models; the market as a unique factor of regulation; concentration of revenues in the hands of a few persons; increase of poverty; joblessness...

In the social sphere: fragmentation and weakening of popular organizations: growth bringing about dehumanization; migrations; growth of aggressiveness and violence; marginalization and exclusion of big sectors of the population...

In the sphere of culture: enormous power of social communications media; computerization, race to consumerism, individualism, hedonism, pluralism, an always growing permissiveness...

In the ethical sphere: a crisis of public morality; generalized corruption; ethical relativism and subjectivism; autonomy of the economy facing ethics, genetic manipulation...

In the religious sphere: return to the sacred; religious *intimism* and individualism; various sectarianisms: flight/escape into the religious; fundamentalisms...

We find ourselves faced with a *process of internationalization* conveyed by neoliberalism, politics, military strategy, technology, computer science, genetic engineering, communications, religiosity, etc.

The new world scene has the following characteristics:

The fall of socialism, decline of the left, implantation of the neo-liberal model, internationalization of the economy.

The crisis of modernity, advent of post-modern thought and ideology...

Unlimited progress and development are a myth...

Passage from ethics to aesthetics: enjoy life, hedonism, live for the present moment. Down with Prometheus! Up with Dionysos!

Twilight of reason, reflection, analysis. Explosion of sentiment, of the emotional, the spectacle lived 'live'. Crisis of big reportages, fragmented world, weakness of thought, lax consensus...

Return to the religious, search for the mysterious and the miraculous, sects, 'electronic churches', esotericism, religiosity without ethical dimensions, 'New Age'.

Mass media communication as the new power, culture of the image, impact of television, deterioration of the environment (multigraphed document of Victor Codina, SJ).

To us, are all these signals simple signs of death, or are they signs of the times which should be submitted to analysis, discernment, critical questioning, and especially so during the stage of formation?...

II. Civilization of the Image

Technological thrusts and the internationalization of the economy are related to a profound change of mentality in new generations. The language of the image is what predominates, that of the lived, the emotional, what is 'live' on TV. The great utopias are no longer ferments of mobilization or conscientization. We live henceforth in the immediate and the individual, and for what is gratifying. We have the impression that the great ideals have been reduced to petty, selfish interests. We live in a time of weak compromises, governed by relativism and a moral of situation. The fire of enthusiasm that marked youth is weakening and dying out under the effect of disenchantment. Our society, and still more our youth, has lost all confidence, not only in enlightened reason but as well in the philosophy of progress and even in the possibility of creating a society more just and more human.

Reality is the image; the spectacle is more important than the work; appearances are worth more than reality; *having* counts more than *being*: what doesn't benefit from publicity promotion won't sell, what isn't seen on television doesn't exist...

In fact, television is already no longer a *means* but the *medium* of all cultural expression. We live in a world totally dependent on the culture of the image. We find ourselves totally immersed in the *civilization of the image*, in the *iconosphere*, in the era of *symbols* and of *visual codes*. Our existence is being submitted to the bombardment of the visual in cinema, advertising, televised serials, magazines, reportages, documentaries...

The image is the bearer of a few characteristic traits of modern mentality:

It is evident that audio-visual language with the primordial culture it conveys, that of the imagination, of curiosity, the senses and sensuality, weakens and supplants the much more reflexive and serene language of analytic reason.

Starting from the fact that television language affects the very depths of our society, and therefore the whole process of education, it is indispensable to perfect a method founded on integration rather than exclusiveness. It's a matter of arriving at a synthesis, since the effectiveness of media television is not the same as that of the oral or the written. Hasn't the time come to engage in a methodological dialogue between the culture of the image and the whole system of education and formation which remains so based on imposition, memorization and speech?

III. Effects of Language of the Image

The language of the image helps acquire ideas and knowledge; but it does so rather by a psychological and subjective reaction than by the intermediary of reasoning. Advertising experts, for their part, when they use images to 'sell' a product or an ideology, manipulate surreptitiously the springs/forces of the subconscious. The danger of falling into an amorphous and depersonalizing mass culture is only too real.

The language of the image also has effects that can be considered positive on the mentality of TV viewers, especially the young or adolescents.

Thus, the TV viewer:

benefits from a greater development of emotionalism and affectivity;

perceives reality in a way that is more synthetic, richer, more complete and more global;

develops his œsthetic sense, particularly visual and auditory;

sees his intelligence develop through inductive methodology and become more open, more inclusive, but at the detriment of its capacity of deductive analysis and its capacity of reflection.

Direct human experience has always been the principal way of developing knowledge and affectivity. The communications media have appropriated this experience; recovering it is urgent. To that end, it is necessary to establish a critical and active distancing versus television, an attitude very distant from all passive or simply receptive attitude. We have to convert the television set into an instrument of our liberation.

IV. Active Central Role of Television

The television set has become an element that plays the active principal role within the context of family and community – a guest who has installed himself in the house's place of honour.

Thanks to the simultaneousness of image and sound – features of its messages – television has raised itself to the rank of *queen of the social communications media*. The active central role it plays in our societies is impressive, as much for what concerns its audience as for its influence on ways of thinking and acting.

It needed only fifty years to invade in a sly manner millions of homes in the whole world.

Indeed, television is influenced by the morals and cultural characteristics of each country and each of its viewers; but progressively television now conditions the conduct of individuals and social customs.

One of the strongest and most constant reproaches made to television is that, far from *uniting the family*, it subjects it instead to the constraint of situations foreign to the specific interests of the home.

The small screen has served only to strip us of our own lived experiences. Television has introduced into family homes as well as in religious communities: violence, exploitation of man by man, sex, the trivializing of problems and most fundamental truths of life... It has contributed to estranging spouses from one another and parents from their children. It has had for effect to rupture communication between friends and between members of the same community.

Television is absorbed essentially within the framework of the family home. So it is of capital importance that families and other kinds of community give themselves norms on the subject, under penalty of seeing the TV set become a domestic tyrant and permanent intruder.

It is necessary to arrive at some *basic agreements*, strongly founded on *human and educational* types of criteria and on an *attitude of dialogue*, in such a way as to make of television a means at the service of unity and solidarity.

To do so, we must first of all *avoid two extreme positions*:

excessively rigid and authoritarian attitudes which, in practice, make the use of the set nearly inaccessible; and

excessively permissible attitudes whereby the use of the set is left to the taste and arbitrariness of each individual.

Many analysts agree that the most negative effect of television is that it *favours estrangement between persons*; true above all within a family and within a community. It always contributes to an isolated perception, in a ritual of pure passivity and in a silence quasi sacred. To rupture this silence becomes a kind of challenge!

V. Toward an Active and Positive Reception of Televised Messages

Surveys on the impact of television concentrate often on its negative effects. Valerio Fuenzalida, a Chilean analyst, on his own has created the concept of *active reception* of televised

messages.

Education to television is not the only factor leading to a socially positive use. The audio-visual image has in itself a great potential to develop imagination in us, an aesthetic sense auditory as well as visual, while it makes us jump the barriers of provincialism and opens us to a much more universal vision.

The most recent surveys show that the time passed before the screen is not as *passive* as was thought. In reality, we are not affected by the TV messages in an *unidirectional* way. Independently of age, sex and cultural level, every TV spectator enters into an interactive relationship with the program: he chooses the contents and looks for meanings in it that agree with his own point of view; and also, very often, he moves ahead to find the solution to the conflicts being shown.

As for television's effects, we should see that its positive or negative influence is highly variable, according to the *mental health* of the viewer, whether child or adult.

The concept of *health or mental state* includes not only the *cognitive* aspects, or those linked to the age and *experience* of the viewer, but also to the *regard he has for himself, the basic structure of his personality, his scale of values, his beliefs, affectivity, sense of security and tenderness experienced in the family, his experience of fraternal life in the community...*

For lack of apprenticeship needed to handle and dominate the modern means of communication, they could become the worst enemies of our young Oblates.

The majority of formators cling doggedly to avoiding the question of a formation 'starting from the media' and 'to the media'. That could possibly be the reason why we see around us a generation that confuses the superficial with the essential, the ephemeral with the transcendent, imagination with reality, and mediocrity with excellence.

When faced with the great socio-cultural and technological changes being produced in so accelerated a way in the society in which we live, and that have such deep repercussions in the Church, the solution is not to take refuge in the past, with the illusion of thus preserving one's own identity. We must remain open to newness in a constant effort of discernment. With the help of social sciences, this discernment becomes clear and concrete in a *discernment of faith*.

The signs of the times warn us that we must valorize personal freedom, earthly realities, the human body, the autonomy of sciences, pluralism...

That we must accept having more as an indispensable condition for being more. That science, progress and development imply great conquests... But we shouldn't entertain illusions; in them, the *institutional sin* is, as well, inscribed and somewhat 'crystallized'.

We have to be at the same time in the world and bordering it; but that does not mean that we must identify ourselves with it. The interests of the system are not our interests. The model of the consumer society is not our model of society.

VI. On the Pedagogical Level, What Has to Be Done?

Here are a few very schematic directives for actions to take when faced with the *challenges of post-modernity*.

Pass from a macro-strategy to a micro-strategy, from the mass to the individual person, from abstract to concrete, from reason to experience...

Reconcile oneself with the body but without, for all of that, losing the spirit.

While teaching thought, at the same time educate in sensitive perception.

Give value to efficiency without losing gratuity.

Promote dialogue while respecting personal options.

Encourage personal autonomy without falling into individualism.

Be tolerant in moral matters without falling into relativism.

Live the present moment without losing sight of the future. Re-value religious experience without letting yourself be entrapped by anti-intellectualisms, sectarianisms and fundamentalisms.

Esteem at their just value the emotional and affective, without depreciating the analytical and the rational.

Open oneself to comprehension and to dialogue with all, without giving up the option for justice and for the poor. (J. González Carvajal, in *Selecciones de Teología*, #126, Barcelona, 1993).

VII. Three basic Attitudes towards Television

1) Be active and not passive

One must react against passive and resigned attitudes as concerns the TV set. The negative effects of television increase in direct proportion to the passivity of the spectator. The complacent resignation of the *pure televiewer* to everything that he is presented transforms him into a *television addict*. As in the case of drugs, minds totally lacking in will power are easy preys to addiction and dependence.

Let us banish, therefore, indolent and purely receptive attitudes when viewing TV. Being active there means always keeping to mind a basic principle: *Television is made for me, and not me for television*. I am the one who manipulates it and directs it and not the reverse. TV is my servant and I am its master.

2) Be critical and not naive

To be critical is to know how to decode the messages presented to us by television, which are not always truthful or honest. It means to show discernment on the contents and even on the very language of the programs. It means to develop in ourselves the mental capacity needed to discern the values and the counter-values in each situation and in each program, and to use them to enlighten and direct our behaviour.

But all that does not come spontaneously. It is the result of working on oneself, an effort at self-formation.

No one is condemned by destiny to submit to the manipulation of mass diffused media. Each person has his critical potential hidden in the deepest recesses of his being. One of the very important tasks of the formator consists in *awakening this critical aptitude* that exists as a germ in the mind of the person in formation.

3. Be creators and not repeaters or copiers

The *mass media*, means of communication 'with the masses', produce a *mass-culture* and a *man-of-the-mass*. Facing this-man-of-the-mass is the man-creator.

Bibliographical References

The subject at hand being the development of a critical mind in our members being formed, we can find appreciable help in the most important

documents published in recent years by the Church on mass media: *Inter Mirifica, Communio et Progressio, Ætatis Novæ*, in the contributions of Latin-American assemblies at Puebla and Santo Domingo, also in pontifical messages on the occasion of the World Day of Social Communications.

We must equally recommend the works of Father Pierre Babin, OMI, which have already become classics at world level. As regards formation in relation to new culture, here are a few ideas extracted from his works:

“Of course we will not oppose the language of doctrine and teaching to that of the heart and feelings, but there must be a change of accent in the manner we teach. In these electronic times, it is more important that we communicate what we are rather than what we say.”

“Christianity relied on the written word and books for its development in the world; thus faith was strongly linked to reading and catechism. Who would dare question the great success of this union between faith and books...? But the mistake would be to remain there and miss the train of history that is passing at this moment... In an era in which the environment and the dominant ‘medium’ are in a process of changing, it is of vital importance that the Church and its ways of communication also change in terms of language, style, and pedagogy... that we do today with audiovisuals and electronics what the Church did with print. It is not only a question of using new means, but rather forms of evangelization and formation that correspond with the demands of a new culture.”

“In a dialectic of evangelization, the first and foremost apprenticeship should be to form oneself in this active line, with a deep spiritual outlook. It is easier to limit oneself to learning dogmas or moral with the traditional repetitive methods, but we run the risk of becoming unbearable to the new generation.”

(Pierre Babin, OMI, *La evangelización en la era de los medios de comunicación*, stencil copy. Cepromi, Cochabamba, 1997)

– Our own book could also serve as reference: *La formación religiosa frente a la crisis de la modernidad*, edited in December 1996 by Cepromi, Casilla 804, Cochabamba, Bolivia.

Eugene de Mazenod and The Poor: the perennial question

Ronald LAFRAMBOISE

“Evangelizare pauperibus misit me ... pauperes evangelizantur” (“He has sent me to evangelize the poor”). This quotation from Luke 4:18 which is the motto of the Oblates, sums up the motive that led Eugene de Mazenod to the priesthood, and to found a society of missionaries in Provence in 1816. It is the one expression that best describes the specific character of the Oblate: missionary of the poor. The poor are the preferred objects of the Oblate’s missionary and pastoral activity. Evangelization of the poor is their distinguishing and specific character, not specifically because they are poor, but because they are abandoned. Such was the conviction of St. Eugene. Such has been the conviction of Oblates down through the years.

The Founder’s Conviction.

The very root of his priestly vocation is his conviction that he is sent to the poor. When he writes to his mother in 1808 to tell her of his decision to enter the seminary he says: “I call on the Lord as my witness. What he wants of me ... is that I devote myself, in a special way, to his service to try and kindle the faith that is dying out among the poor¹ ...”

As a seminarian at St. Sulpice he is given charge of catechism instruction for some of the poorest children in the parish, a task that he found completely to his liking. We find his thoughts on the experience in another letter to his mother. “These are the poorest in the parish ... but I am not concerned with that, and I am very happy to find myself in the middle of these poor verminous lads, whom I shall try to win over to ourselves² .”

Who are the Poor for de Mazenod?

In this last quotation from the letter to his mother in 1810 we see joined together the expressions ‘poor peoples’ and ‘abandoned’. These two expressions ‘the poor’ and the ‘abandoned’ come back repeatedly in his writings, ‘the abandoned’ more than ‘the poor’. They are sometimes used almost interchangeably, though the latter is broader in perspective than the former. The fundamental idea underlying all these statements seems to be the abandoned state of the Church especially as it is manifest in certain categories of Christians, namely poor people⁴ .

Returning to Aix as a newly ordained priest in 1812 this deplorable situation is uppermost in his mind. He asks his bishop not to be assigned to a parish, but to be left free “to serve the poor and the children⁵”. He begins his priestly ministry by visits to the prison, the sick, and ministry among the youth of Aix.

Lent of 1813 finds him preaching a Lenten series early in the morning at the church of the ‘Madeleine’, for the servants and domestic help. His choice of audience is noteworthy, and his notes for the occasion provide a list of these poor. “During this holy season, numerous instructions will be given to the rich and the educated. Will there be none for the poor and the unlearned?” [...] “The poor, that precious portion of the Christian family, cannot be left in their ignorance⁶ .”

The text of this Lenten instruction, which is one of the earliest written texts we have of his preaching, appeals to the ‘artisans’, ‘domestics’, ‘farmers’, ‘peasants’, ‘indigents obliged to beg for their subsistence’.

At the climax of the passage his sonorous voice certainly echoed through the vault of the Madeleine and stirred the hearts of his listeners. “You, the poor of Jesus Christ, the afflicted and wretched, the sick and suffering and covered with sores, etc., whom misery overwhelms, my

brethren, my dear brethren, my dear respectable brethren, listen to me. You are the children of God, the brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, the co-heirs of his eternal Kingdom [...]⁷.”

Today we would say that he chose by preference the marginalized, those in society which the established Church touched least – literally the abandoned. He chose them as the object of his ministry not because of some humanistic motive nor primarily because they were materially poor, but especially because they were abandoned. Following the example and in the spirit of Jesus Christ the poor and the abandoned have a right to hear the Gospel of salvation. The young preacher of the Madeleine makes this clear in the introduction to his Instruction. “The poor, that precious portion of the Christian family, cannot be left in their ignorance. So important did our divine Savior consider them that he took it upon himself to instruct them; and he gave as proof that his mission was divine, the fact that the poor were being instructed: *Pauperes evangelizantur*.”⁸

Such was his personal choice at the outset of his ministry, and such was the purpose he had for the society of missionaries he founded, as we can see from his retreat notes of 1831. “Will we ever have an adequate understanding of this sublime vocation! For that one would have to understand the excellence of our Institute’s end, beyond argument the most perfect one could propose to oneself in this world, since the end of our Institute is the self-same end that the Son of God had in mind when he came down on earth. The glory of his heavenly Father and the salvation of souls... He has been especially sent to evangelize the poor: *Evangelizare pauperibus misit me*, and we have been founded precisely to work for the conversion of souls, and especially to evangelize the poor.”⁹

The evangelization of the poor and abandoned will be the driving force that will carry Eugene de Mazenod and his band of preachers to the poorer rural villages of Provence and finally to the farthest corners of the globe. In his writings we find a variety of expressions to describe the preferred objects of his ministry: ‘the poor’, ‘the little people’, ‘the uneducated’, ‘the rural folks’, ‘those in the towns who languish in spiritual distress’, in the foreign missions they are referred to as the ‘infidels’, the ‘heretics’, the ‘prisoners’, the ‘dying’, or in other words the ‘most abandoned souls’. Abandoned refers especially to their spiritual distress. However a spiritual poverty which is nevertheless incarnated in a poverty of the natural order¹⁰. In the Founder’s time the most spiritually abandoned were in fact materially in bad straits. The two words are readily used interchangeably under his pen. However, as Emilien Lamirande points out, the underlying idea seems to be the notion of abandonment. “To return to the point under discussion, it seems to us that the concept of being abandoned is the more basic one. The Founder was deeply moved by the sight of the Church and souls in distress. The people who are most deprived of spiritual assistance are the poor, the humble folk; hence these were to be the Congregation’s first care. Before all else, the Congregation will be concerned for their spiritual distress, but it will always remember that the underprivileged of every sort have a preferential claim on her care.”¹¹

This initial inspiration of the Founder became codified in the first two articles of the Constitutions and Rules in 1818: “They devote themselves principally to the preaching of the Gospel to the poor.” Article 2 of the 1818 text describes the subjects of this preaching: “Hence the members of this Congregation will make every effort to provide spiritual aid especially for the poorer classes of the rural districts, and also for the inhabitants of towns and villages who have the greatest need of this spiritual food.”

1998 OMI General Chapter: Evangelizing the Poor...

If in the course of our history there were times when ‘poor’ was taken in a very broad sense to include anyone in spiritual need, the past 30 years or so reveal a new awareness of the fact that the most spiritually abandoned today are often in fact poor. This awareness was certainly nurtured by the great concern in the Church itself towards the growing phenomenon of world poverty and social injustice. Church documents without being exclusive of other categories of people speak more and more about the need to give a preference to the poor in its evangelizing activity. Our own 1966 Constitutions (15a) specifically mention the illiterate, alcoholics, drug

addicts, minority groups, immigrants... as preferred subjects of our evangelizing activity. The General Chapter of 1972 referring to that article describes such categories of people as *the abandoned poor with their many faces*. Subsequent General Chapters come back to this perception and use a variety of terms to describe the poor of today. The General Chapter of 1980 incorporates the expression in C5 and gives similar examples of the most abandoned to whom Oblates are called to give a preference in choosing ministries. The subsequent Chapters of 1986 and 1992 keep the same focus. We seem to have overcome the debate of spiritual poor-material poor.

As the 1998 Chapter begins its work under the theme '*Evangelization of the Poor on the Eve of the Third Millennium*' we can be thankful that the semantic question of the poor is basically a mute issue at the present time. Accepting a given that those most deprived of spiritual care today are still *the abandoned poor with their many faces*, just as they were in the time of De Mazenod, the Chapter should be able to focus more on how we meet the challenge of evangelization today and how we might do so even better tomorrow. At this juncture in our journey, it would also seem important to look at the link between evangelization and the ministry for justice (R 9). How and to what extent have we incorporated action for justice into our overall mission of evangelization of the abandoned poor of today?

Notes:

¹ Letter to his mother, June 29, 1808 (*Selected Texts*, 36).

² Letter to his mother, February 4 1809. Cf. Collection *Écrits Spirituels* I, 14, p. 111. In the summer of 1810 having been impeded from returning to Provence for the summer holidays he regrets missing the opportunity to give instruction to the poor of St. Julien where his grandmother lived. "I had intended to go and see grandmother in St. Julien, and I was thinking of giving a little instruction to these poor people who are so abandoned. I was already quite enjoying the idea of the fruit these instructions might produce. Poor Christians without the least idea of the dignity that is theirs, for want of meeting someone to break the bread of the word³."

³ Letter to his mother, July 3, 1810, Cf. Collection *Écrits Spirituels* I, 14, p. 191.

⁴ Émilien Lamirande, 'Les Pauvres et les âmes les plus abandonnées d'après Mgr de Mazenod', *Études Oblates*, Vol. 20 (1961) pp. 4-5.

⁵ Journal, March 31, 1839, quoted in Leflon (English) I, p. 403.

⁶ Notes for Lenten Instructions, *Selected Texts*, 37.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Collection *Écrits Oblats* I, Vol. 15, p. 217.

¹⁰ Marcel BÉLANGER, 'Vocation Oblate', *Études Oblates*, Vol. 3 (1944) p. 91.

¹¹ Lamirande, *op. cit.*, p. 19. remains the most authoritative and complete treatment of the topic to date.

Minorities in Modern Societies: Challenges to the O.M.I.

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Reality

Study on minority groups is of international significance. There is scarcely a society in the world today that does not have one or more minority groups within its borders. The minority groups are, often, distinguished by their language, religion, race and culture. The emergence of minority groups within one's border is brought about by the collapse of borders and frontiers as globalization continues to impact modern societies everywhere.

The myth that globalization shall, in time, eradicate cultural differences towards a more homogeneous culture does not work. In fact, the emergence of minority consciousness is becoming more widespread despite globalization. In a way, this fact tells us that ethnicity and religion shall continue to be with us, perhaps even until the end of time.

The sooner we realize that the world is composed of plural societies, the better we can come into terms with the good as well as bad effects of globalization. People shall continue to hold on to their own religion, culture, language and ways. Understanding plural societies inevitably leads to the realization that minority groups are also plural.

Common Elements Among Minority Groups

Given the pluralism among minority groups in societies, there are, however, common elements that they all share wherever they are. Some common elements are identified for our consideration.

First, the minority groups feel, in large measure, to be '*disprivileged*'. Modern societies claim that legislation has, more or less, removed discriminations against minorities. However, attitudes and habits of discriminations are still realities minority groups still confront in their daily lives both in work places and in their communities as well. This is exacerbated by problem of language, education, religion and employment opportunities for the minorities.

Second, the minority groups feel *dominated and oppressed* by the majority population. Most often, the minority groups, because of their distinct race, language, religion and family ways, are treated as 'aliens' at best and 'weirdo' at worst, regardless of years of stay in the host countries.

Third, the minority groups feel *the pressure to change their ways* to be accepted. Their 'refusal' to be assimilated into the dominant majority culture is one of the reasons for their remaining 'foreigners'. The other reason is the inability of the majority culture to recognize and respect differences in communities. There is an unspoken rule in social behavior that requires the minorities to conform to be accepted. Yet, those who conform still confront the reality of being treated as second class citizens. There seems to be very little room to recognize diversities, especially when these differences do come from Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Fourth, groups that do not fit into the national self-image are seen as *a source of trouble or insecurity*. These groups can be deported anytime by the state's power of expulsion. There is the accepted praxis that minority groups are 'tolerated' or are only there on 'sufferance' of the majority. This springs from the argument that territory is the homeland of the nationality. The link between territory and nationality is further strengthened by the use of word implying a parental relationship: 'Fatherland', 'Mother' Country. The funny thing is the fact that in the Americas, the indigenous peoples are considered even below the level of other minority groups, yet historically they were there first!

Possibilities

Theoretically, a policy of integration of the minorities into the dominant culture is possible. Ethnicity, for all its centrality to the minorities' sense of themselves, is not a constant. It is negotiable and it is quite possible for the minorities to maintain their ethnic identities and be active partners in nation building. In the United States, the Irish and the Italians, to name a few, are able not only to maintain their distinct cultures but also to contribute their 'uniqueness' in the actual shaping of the American culture. This is a concrete case where the dominant culture (the white Anglo-Saxon and Protestant) has allowed other national cultures (Italian/Irish and Catholic) share fully in its privileges. Whether this type of integration is possible for non white and non Christian remains to be seen.

On the whole, globalization, including the all embracing education and the rapid advances in information technology, shall impact the new shape of power, economic and social relationships in societies. As societies and communities and institutions become more knowledge based, ethnicity and its eventual integration will become less problematic. For one thing, national culture and nation state will completely be undermined as borders and frontiers collapse and as people, trade and information move more freely and quickly.

The other possibility is to recognize the fact that minority identity continues to persist on practical consideration. In a highly urbanized setting, minority identity is linked to network and customs which are important for survival in hostile surroundings. Moreover, minority identity provides network of relationships and a source of protection which individual finds difficult to give up without exposing them to great risks.

Challenges to the O.M.I.

In many places of the world the minority groups are considered the new poor. They feel the pressures of the majority group to conform yet they continue to be treated as aliens or second class citizens. The minority groups are further exacerbated by the phenomenon of migrations (legal and illegal). The movement of peoples across borders and frontiers has resulted to new minority groups in the once upon a time colonial 'mother' countries. These new minorities are disprivileged in our modern societies. Often they do not enjoy the protection of the law and are easy prey to abuse and discrimination.

The new wave of anti immigrant sentiments, especially those coming from former colonies, presents a new threat to social integration that respects diversities. The feeling that the immigrants whether legal or illegal steal job and opportunities from the 'citizens' is simply not true. They simply become ready escape goats for the failures of societies to respond to the needs of citizens.

In fact, the contribution of migrants to the increasing wealth of the host countries cannot be underestimated. The menial jobs as well as the domestic chores that the new migrants assume free a big segment of modern societies, especially women, for more enterprising and productive activities. A national strike of these workers would wreck havoc in the normalcy of many work places in our modern societies. Yet, their contribution to the national wealth and growth is never factored in.

They are unappreciated and are often threatened by violence, abuse and at times deportation. In the real sense, they are the new poor and are included in the Oblate Charism to preach the Good News to the poor. They invite us to be present among them in their uncertainties, fears and 'homelessness' as 'undesirable' aliens.

As an international missionary congregation with members coming from all parts of the world, we are privileged to experience diversities of cultures, races and languages. Our diversities, that is, coming from many nations, has truly enriched the congregation. These diversities with a common purpose actually shape our congregational identity as international missionary society. This very experience strategically places us wherever we are to effect changes in the appreciation of cultural diversities that constitute the minorities within our still remaining national borders. Advocacy for minority rights is found at the very heart of our Catholicity and international identity as well. Our call to become Oblates of Mary Immaculate

includes among others the acceptance of pluralism yet forming one body and a common mission.

In many parts of the world, our missionaries begin to venture in ministry to the minorities amid misunderstanding and risk. In the American provinces, our confreres have, for years, ventured into apostolate among the Latinos, Afro-Americans, and the First Nations who are now cultural minorities in the land that was historically theirs. In Europe, our confreres begin to see the need to minister to the millions of minorities who continue to come from former colonies. Our 'welcome' houses have become veritable shelters to the homeless and strangers. In both Japan and Hong Kong, OMI missionaries have ministered to the domestic helpers and spouses. In the Philippines, there is a growing involvement among the Indigenous Peoples and the Moros who have been 'minoritized' due to the unabated migration of Christian Filipinos to Mindanao. This is further exacerbated by the development thrusts that make Mindanao the new focus of intense developments upon the establishment of a new East Asian Growth Center involving Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia and Mindanao.

There is also the desire to do more, that is, to go beyond our usual 'welcome' houses and unsystematic or uneventful contacts with the new poor. There is the hope to enter into inter-religious dialogues and intercultural exchanges. No doubt, our ministry to the new minorities will open new possibilities of sharing not only our resources but also our values and character as International Missionary Society dedicated to the evangelization of the poor and the most abandoned.

In most cases, we will be challenged to exercise our prophetic role to act and speak for and behalf of minority rights, especially when these are ignored and wantonly violated or abused. Our growing and deeper involvement with minorities who are the new poor in modern societies is at the heart of our discernment processes in retrieving and regenerating our Charism as we prepare ourselves to face the challenges of the next millennium. This ministry enhances our identity as missionary to the poor and become witnesses to the Catholic and international character of the congregation. In a very special way, our presence and work among the minorities is a sign of the eschatological times when what truly matters is not whether we are Jews or Gentiles, circumcised or uncircumcised, but we are God's sons and daughters in the name of the Risen Lord Jesus Christ.

Muslim and Christian Collaboration on the Eve of a New Millennium

by Eliseo R. MERCADO, Jr., o.m.i. President, Notre Dame University

Muslim and Christian collaboration is a major issue and concern as we prepare ourselves for the next millennium. This has been made more complex by the rise of a new wave of fundamentalism both in Islam and Christianity in our contemporary times. Coupled by historical relations that are, more often, marked by rivalry and conflict, Muslim and Christian collaboration has become a more problematic task in our age. Biases and prejudices are as strong as ever if not stronger. Often our perception of each other is shaped more by historical memory and the mass media than actual knowledge and experience.

The Rise of Islamic Fundamentalism.

Today, the rise of Islamic fundamentalism is a single factor that seems to block Muslim and Christian collaboration. Yet, the new wave of religious fundamentalism is not a monopoly of Islam. Our secular humankind understands this new religious awakening in a very narrow sense. Various religious revivalist movements in Islam as well as in Christianity or in other religious traditions are, often, lumped together under a generic label of religious fundamentalism. This is interpreted as a reaction to the present secular realities.

In Islam, religious revivalist movement is much wider and broader. Muslims themselves like their Christian counterparts do not accept the label fundamentalism to describe the present religious re-awakening. For one thing, religious re-awakening differs from country to country. In fact, it is as complex as the very relations between Muslims and Christians.

As in Christian re-awakening movement, the Islamic one is a desire and the determination to a 'return' to the perceived basics of the religious tradition. There are those who are inspired by the ancient religious grandeur and want to replicate in our present time the institution and praxis of the so-called 'golden era'. On the other hand, there are those who attempt to recapture the dynamism of religion and reconcile it with the exigencies of a modern and technological era and the condition of globalization in which old rules cannot possibly remain unaltered. Then there are those who embrace the new wave religious re-awakening to oppose the increasing secularizing trends of the contemporary society.

Common Characteristics of Religious Revivalism.

There are four basic common characteristics of the current religious revivalism. *First*, there is the accepted blueprint of societal as well as individual life. This blueprint is given by God in the revelation. The blueprint is completed and/or nearing completion. The members of the movement are called upon to either re-produce or hasten the realization of the said blueprint in our times.

Second is the fact that religious revivalism is a reaction to the contemporary secularizing trends that are perceived as menace to the faith of the individuals and the community. The adherents of this movement believe that this new 'Modernism' and the perceived moral and social 'corruption' threaten to destroy the very fiber of the traditional mooring of the individuals and societies. Revivalism, in this sense, is a strong reaction to the present social and moral order that is perceived as a new 'Paganism'.

Third, religious revivalism gives answer to individual's needs for healing and identity. No doubt, the woundedness and injustice, particularly the structural violence that reduces the greater number of people to poverty, seeks healing and redress. The religious re-awakening movements focus on this individual and communal 'brokenness' and the necessity of healing by way of strict adherence to the imperatives of faith as given in '*illo tempore*'. In the same vein, the growing

alienation of people in our contemporary world surfaces the need for identity and belonging where lines and parameters are clearly defined and delineated. Often, these parameters are also God-given thus cannot be changed or modified at all times. The religious revival movements give 'security' and identity as well as belonging to individuals and groups who are considered 'saved' or 'redeemed' constituting the new 'Holy Nation'.

Fourth, the new revivalism is seen as an alternative vis-a-vis the growing arrogance of the state to think and decide for all. The imposition of a uniform economic and social order in this era of globalization threatens to destroy the specific character of peoples, nation and individuals. The new revivalist movements take this power from the state and business and restore it to God.

There is, today, a strong belief that the new surge of religious revivalism in the world is the single factor that erodes the inter-religious dialogue and collaboration that have gained currency in the post Vatican II era. Religious re-awakening both in Islam and Christianity as in other religions has taken an 'exclusivist' form that views all others as 'foreign' bodies and source of contamination and defilement.

Legacies and Hopes of Muslim-Christian Collaboration.

The new religious revivalism has brought to the fore the lingering resentment and injustices of our past relationships. They are deeply rooted in the psyche of Muslim-Christian encounters. With few exceptions, there was really no mutual openness between Muslims and Christians but a steady accumulation of biases and prejudices. These developed a sort of exclusivism of culture and identity drawing all things into a calculated 'otherness' and reciprocity.

The legacies of the past are still alive. They remind the living of the bitter encounters between Christians and Muslims. In some instances, these legacies are enshrined in the living traditions, though mostly ceremonials and rituals, they continue to enslave the present day consciousness that prevents Muslims and Christians to venture into a new relationships of trust and brotherhood.

The historical territorial contests between 'Islamic' and 'Christian' powers from the seventh centuries (in the Middle East, North Africa, Europe and Asia) to the present (in the Persian Gulf and again in Asia, Middle East and Africa) continue to live on. In similar vein, the perceived 'Christian' or Western dominance in the globalizing trends of new world social and economic order is seen as another form of territorial contests that undermine the true course of Islamic history.

All these legacies are familiar enough and part of our present problem. Often, they exercise tyranny over our spirits. They have produced a culture and a habit of suspicion and confrontation that make inter-religious collaboration and dialogue, truly, a very difficult task. It requires a commitment and determination to steadily school ourselves to resist and reject our habit of preferring suspicion to trust; our instinct to prefer the familiar confrontation to a new relationship of partnership in the world that is in difficult transition.

In the past as well as today, there is an ever growing awareness of common territory and affinity between Islam and Christianity. The Qur'an in chapter 5 verse 82 unequivocally encourages Muslims to cooperate with Christians. "Thou wilt surely find the nearest of them in love to the believers are the ones who say, 'We are Christians'; that because some of them are priests and monks, and they wax not proud" (S.5:82).

The Second Vatican Council document, *Nostra Aetate*, clearly articulates the common territory and affinity between Christianity and Islam. "The Church has also a high regard for the Muslims. They worship God, who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the creator of heaven and earth, who has also spoken to men. They strive to submit themselves without reserve to the hidden decrees of God, just as Abraham submitted himself to God's plan, to whose faith Muslims eagerly link their own. Although not acknowledging him as God, they venerate Jesus as a prophet, his Virgin Mother they also honor, and even times devoutly invoke. Further, they await the day of judgment and the reward of God following the resurrection of the dead. For this reason they highly esteem an upright life and worship God, especially by way of prayer alms-

deeds and fasting.”

“Over the centuries many quarrels and dissension have arisen between Christians and Muslims. The Sacred Council now pleads with all to forget the past, and urges that a sincere effort be made to achieve mutual understanding; for the benefit of all men, let them together preserve and promote peace, liberty, social justice and moral values.” (NA3).

OMI Witness to Muslim-Christian Collaboration.

Long before the historic document, *Nostra Aetate*, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate in Sulu and Cotabato Provinces (Philippines) have always understood the importance of Muslim and Christian collaboration in the carrying out of our Mission. There were difficulties, frustrations and pains, yet, they were transcended as they continued to learn how to live as neighbors. With few exceptions, the Oblates have established a friendly and warm relation with their Muslim neighbors.

In the Philippines, we have two traditions of Muslim-Christian collaboration personified by two Oblate bishops who met their tragic deaths in February 1997.

The first is the tradition of Bishop Antonino Nepomuceno, omi, or Bishop Tony as he was popularly known. In the early 70's, when the Moro rebellion was at its heights, Muslim individuals and communities were constantly harassed and repressed. The military wantonly violated their rights. Arbitrary arrests, searches and military operations both in urban areas as well as in the remote areas further fueled the animosities between the Moro people and the Philippine government during the period of Martial rule. It was during this crisis, that Bishop Tony stood as a living witness to what the Sacred Council beautifully articulated in words which speak of concern and sincere effort to achieve understanding between Muslims and Christians and to work together preserve and promote peace, liberty, social justice and moral values.

To accomplish this Muslim-Christian collaboration, he initiated the first Catholic, Protestant and Muslim Leaders Association. The association was there to protect civilians' civil rights against the constant assaults of the fascist army of Mr. Marcos. In times of calamities, Bishop Tony with his Muslim and Protestant friends were in the forefront to give relief, assistance and moral support as well. He was a man who in these times of war was able to forge Muslim-Christian solidarity that witnessed to the common tradition of trust, friendship and hospitality amid the legacies of suspicion, anger and hatred. The Social Action Center that he headed in all those years became the powerful symbol of Muslim and Christian solidarity for justice, freedom and brotherhood. He was, indeed, a pioneer in a prophetic ministry always in solidarity with Muslims and other Christian churches as well. He lived to the full his Episcopal motto: 'To serve and not to be served'.

The second tradition is that of Bishop Benjamin de Jesus, omi. Bishop Ben was a gentle, yet a very jovial person. As priest and later as Bishop, he was a friend to all, but most especially to the poor and the vulnerable sectors of Philippine society. His passionate commitment to the poor urged him to venture in a humble and non-threatening friendship with the Muslims in the Vicariate of Sulu. He wanted to be the humble and compassionate servant of the peoples of Sulu. It was his contagious and compassionate smile, his willingness to walk the extra mile and his gentle and humble presence that endeared him most to the Muslims.

He was, indeed, a gentle friend to all... yet he was shot by an assassin's bullets in front of Jolo Cathedral. A violent end for a man of God. His Episcopal motto: 'To Love is to Serve' beautifully described the life and the ministry of the man.

These two traditions in Muslim-Christian collaboration point to the heart of our dialogue with Muslims. They are rooted in 'being' with the people, especially the poor and the vulnerable sectors of society. It is a 'rootedness' that shaped and fashioned by a shared living, sympathy and solidarity. This becomes the well spring of our active participation in all human endeavors, economic, political and cultural, always in favor of the poor, the oppressed and the marginalized. Oftentimes, this kind of witnessing is clearer and more eloquent than any oral proclamation of the Good News.

In both cases (Bishop Tony and Bishop Ben), there is that desire to carry out the joyful and humble work of proclaiming God's unconditional love and his inclusive kingdom which recognizes and respects the dignity and spiritual treasures of our Muslim neighbors.

Moreover, the passionate commitment of these two confreres of ours to the promotion of peace, justice and human rights is a powerful sign of concern for persons and is directed towards integral human development (*Populorum Progressio* 21, 42). Again in John Paul II's Mission Encyclical, this theme is given focus and emphasis when Christians are called to bear witness to Christ by taking courageous and prophetic stands in the face of corruption in the political and economic order. The prophetic stand allows us to make personal and communal examination of conscience in order to correct in our behavior whatever is contrary to the Gospel and disfigures the face of Christ (*Redemptoris Missio* 43).

Conclusion.

Muslim-Christian collaboration is not something abstract. It is a human activity which involves our total life experience. It takes place in our individual as well as communal lives as we live out our faith and conviction according to our living traditions. No doubt, our partnership and collaboration depend upon mutual trust and understanding. It demands respect for the identity as well as the integrity of the other. It rests on the conviction that God who is all merciful and compassionate desires to draw all peoples and the whole creation into a relationship of love and peace.

Our partnership should enhance a new culture that enables and empowers us to draw from each other's traditions and common resources to help face today's threats to global survival and work together toward peace with justice and the integrity of creation. We must spare no effort to live and work together towards reconciling conflicts, eradicating bigotry and prejudices, and empowering grassroots level communities to act upon their own choices in self-development towards a more just and participatory society.

There are no simple formula to our enhancing collaboration and partnership. Every situation demands a serious study and reflection of the many and varied factors at play. Some of these are historical, social or doctrinal. But whatever the factors and their magnitude, it is our duty to see a better community where peoples of differing faiths and traditions live in love, justice and peace. We have the obligation to emphasize that which unites us and make a determined effort to set aside that which would divide us. We can only do this if we have full understanding of what the other believes, and are committed to the principle of respect and recognition of the beliefs and feelings of every community and person.

In this long and difficult journey of Muslim and Christian collaboration, the Spirit is with us. This same Spirit who was at work in the Incarnation, Life and Resurrection of Christ is NOW at work in our endeavors to breakdown the barriers which create division and conflict so that we can see in the other the neighbor whom we are called to love and to serve.

In concrete terms, there is the urgent need to steadily school ourselves to prefer trust to suspicion; prefer friendship to familiar confrontation; and above all, prefer love and service to the usual hatred and bigotry. This demands a shedding off the old as well as dying But is this not the meaning of the saying: "The old gives way to the new and death leads to life?"

Evangelization of the New Culture

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Introduction

There is nothing more difficult to analyze than the 'new culture', especially at the philosophical or anthropological level! Are we dealing with 'subjective' reality that in some way would be the result of human subjects' dynamism, of their options, projections and selections always in motion? On the contrary, could it be something more 'objective' or *objectivable*: the institutions surrounding life, the behaviour and values of a human group, the works marking an epoch? A realistic look at the contemporary situation shows that it is increasingly difficult to define culture as a 'coherent system' which determines all aspects of our lives. We live in a fragmented universe where the vast majority of human groups and peoples are exposed to a veritable multiplicity of cultural influences. That is why the 'new culture' does not present itself as a system or objective framework. It is instead more of a space of multiple passages whose frontiers are far from being clearly defined. In this brief study we shall adopt a *descriptive* approach of this phenomenon by concentrating on two questions: (1) What is the reality evoked by the term 'new culture'? (2) What are the major stakes of this reality for the mission of the Church?

I. Complex Reality of the 'New Culture'

1. Planetary globalisation and multiculturalism

Since Vatican II, the world has undergone enormous and, at times, unsuspected cultural mutations. It is certain that Christianity finds itself today in a situation it never knew until now. The traditional rapport between faith and culture is deeply disrupted. This novel situation is characterized by two major forces. On the one hand, we note how *Euro-American technological culture*, with its economic and media components, is gradually imposing itself everywhere in the world as a new totalitarian colonial power. The 'global village' of Marshall McLuhan has become a reality. On the other hand, we notice that we continue to evolve in *a world that is increasingly multicultural and multireligious*. Culture has become a truly multiform phenomenon. This is the end of our 'splendid isolation'. We are in the process of becoming cultural nomads. We feel ourselves torn between fidelity to our 'cultural heritage' and our commitment toward a 'new world to build' whose co-ordinates escape us. Thus, the enormous impact of technology, world economy and secularization raises basic questions concerning the 'human' future of humanity – not only in more 'traditional' cultures that are directly threatened by this evolution, but as well in the more developed societies that feel themselves crushed by the weight of their own bureaucratic system. The very notion of 'new culture' calls to mind the image of a 'spiritual crisis' of world dimension.

2. Radical modernity and post-modern societies

The confrontation between the two phenomena we have just mentioned intensifies the debate taking place for a few decades around 'modernity', the dominant culture of western society which, during the second half of the 20th century, massively imposed itself upon our whole planet. If we take into account the fact that this 'modernity' is the result of a series of consecutive revolutions (scientific, philosophic, industrial and technological) which – since the 17th century – have transformed irreversibly all aspects of our life under the common denominator of 'rationality', it is difficult to accept that humanity would be in the process of 'exiting' from this global culture. Are we not assisting today at a kind of uncontrolled radicalization of major traits of this culture,

particularly of technology and of secularization? Yet, it is around this concept of 'post-modernity' that are rallying the believers in the emergence of a new culture! It matters to note here immediately that this rather ambiguous concept does not comprise a judgment of global value on modernity. 'Post-modern' does not mean 'anti-modern'! We should nevertheless recognize that the rapid spread of this term during recent years in the realm of social or human sciences witnesses to a certain malaise as regards the great cultural period we call modernity. What seems more and more contested is the normative character granted to modernity in the philosophical, political, economic and social realms. It is as if humanity had no future away or beyond the enormous cultural heritage that modernity represents. But modernity increasingly appears as cultural environment which, in its strongest aspects, has equally become very vulnerable. We can no longer celebrate the values and rights of the individual without becoming conscious of the deep tears in our communitarian tissues. We can no longer sing of the unlimited progress of science without thinking of the sub-human conditions in which live the majority of our contemporaries. We can no longer receive technology, materialism and liberalism without denouncing the profound dichotomies they continue to cause: the separation of soul and body, the systematic exclusion of women in the patriarchal world, the stifling of youth in a world rapidly ageing, the growing opposition between the rich and the poor, a futuristic mentality which no longer knows how to integrate the experiences of the past, and the 'à la carte' religions which only reflect our disenchantment and spiritual poverty. Post-modern thinkers are rallying around a common and urgent task, that of reconstructing a world torn apart. They are doing so by appealing to a new cultural 'paradigm', a new way of looking at things. It rests on the totally ancient idea that the human being is basically a relational being, but also around the contemporaneous realization that modernity has – in a large measure – objectivized and exteriorized these relations. Everything has become objectivable and calculable. Postmodern thinkers propose the opposite road of interiorization and integration...

II. Cultural Mission of the Church

Missiologists like David J. Bosch and Aylward Shorter have quickly seen that this 'post-modern' paradigm allows us to interpret in a new way the cultural mission of the Church. On the one hand, this term allows us to look more critically on the type of humanity resulting from modernity and on the participation of Christianity in the development of this culture. On the other hand, the post-modern paradigm asks us equally to look to the future and see in what way the Church can still contribute to the creation of a cultural environment favouring the integral development of the human person. The new culture now emerging in post-modern society suggests three great axes with a view to reflecting on the cultural mission of the Church at the dawn of the third millennium: spirituality, community and dialogue.

Mission and spirituality

The first challenge of the missionary Church as regards the new culture is the spiritual accompaniment of those who are seeking a meaning to personal and collective life. On the morrow of Vatican II, Karl Rahner had already noted: *Tomorrow's Christian will be a 'mystic', that is to say, someone who has experienced something, or he will no longer be!* Despite the rationalism of modernity we notice today a real thirst for transcendence and a sensitiveness for mystery, the hidden bottom of things. The new culture lets itself be understood as an undertaking of integration and research for integrity. What place does Christ hold within such a cultural environment? How can we valorise in it the dynamism of his Gospel?

Mission and community

The second challenge of the missionary Church as regards the new culture is situated in line with its collaboration to the reconstruction of truly human relations within our fragmented societies. The Church can valorize here its millenary experience as *koinonia* (communion) and *diakonia* (service) through the prophetic dynamism of its base communities. These communities are not only real hearths of Gospel inculturation in a particular milieu. Very often, they are also called to become 'contra-cultural' cells in their struggle against the nefarious aspects of modernity

and in their real solidarity with the multiple victims of modernity.

Mission and dialogue

The third challenge of the missionary Church as regards the new culture concerns the inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue in its broadest meaning possible. We live in a universe of constantly growing relations. Thus the awareness that 'everything is linked to everything' is one of the most constructive aspects of spirituality or post-modern culture.

Could we not see in this an indispensable 'pre-comprehension' to valorize better the universality of Christ and of his Gospel?

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The Role of Lay People in the Work of Evangelization

Rolando POLZELLI

The Context in which We Are Living

2000 years after the coming of Christ we find ourselves in a situation in which many nations are still awaiting the message of salvation and others have abandoned or refused the faith. These are our closest brothers, those whom we choose before all others.

Four fifths of humanity are still living in conditions that are unworthy of human nature and of the gifts given by God to man.

Today Western civilization is decadent, completely disorientated and affected by egoism, hedonism, disobedience, consumerism and slavery to money.

The ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor within every single country and between the North and the South of the world leads us to be more aware of the manipulation of the destiny of peoples by those who detain power.

The economy stands at the centre of the universe. It is as a god which tends to substitute itself to all values and is the main cause of illusion for modern man.

In this situation, the Church appears as a sign of hope for humankind, especially since she has discovered that she is the People of God. Lay people, in the unending struggle against that which disfigures man, share in Christ's and the Church's general project of salvation. They commit themselves through their life-witness to rebuild relationships among men in order to renew the social and ecclesial fabric of dialogue of contemporary society.

Religious and lay people, being aware of their sharing in the one mission of Christ, discover that they are challenged by the same charisms, in a harmony of love, each in his or her own life situation. And so, being stimulated to build in communion, with a greater richness and more open horizons, they accept one another, not with a desire to take advantage of one another, but as they really are, in the diversity of their conditions of life (their ways, times, opportunities ...). They are truly aware that "the Church has not been truly established, it is not yet fully alive, nor is it a perfect sign of Christ among men, unless there exists a laity worthy of the name working along with the hierarchy" (*Ad Gentes*, 21).

The Urgent Needs that Challenge Us

To draw the attention of Western countries to the real needs of the human person.

To place ourselves at the service of peoples of the Third World in order to help them achieve their self-determination on the basis of their own cultural values.

To enter into more partnerships with all men of good will on the basis of individual human values, in order to set up social, economic and political projects that will oppose sinful structures presently operating at the national, international and world level.

To build and form missionary communities that will show the true face of the Church.

To heal families in order to lay the foundations of a new humanity.

To promote the processes of globalization and culture exchanges.

Sharing in the Mission

1 – A mission in a world which is largely secularized (MTW, 5).

The decline of Christian values is becoming greater, especially in the Western world. The search for a new consensus concerning these values must pass through the aspects that are

accepted at a simply human level and are therefore capable of being understood by all.

Here is an experience. The setting is a small town, 25 kilometres from the city, a dormitory town lacking in social services. People from outside the community come to live here only for short periods of time. There are two parishes with a Church attendance rate of 10% of the population. What should be done? It was decided to appeal first of all to the needs of individuals, and then to move on to the level of the community in order to promote the sense of solidarity that opens the way to interest in others and then to charity. Lay persons in the parish created the "Caritas centre for listening". The point of reference for the poor of the area was shifted from the parish to the Centre for listening. The people became involved in pooling their means of helping. Among the poor people who attended the Centre there were also drug addicts: drugs were widely spread in the area. A support group was founded in conjunction with a therapeutic community. People from the town were invited to serve as volunteers in this group. Simultaneously new initiatives emerged with the scope of helping the sick. Blood donations were encouraged and periodic blood collections were organized. Campaigns were sponsored to encourage organ donations. More and more persons got involved in one of these initiatives. Because hospitals were far away, another initiative was suggested: to set up an association that would provide an ambulance service for the population during holidays and half-holidays, at times when public transportation services were less available. Volunteers were recruited and were given formation as drivers, orderlies and telephone operators. The number of volunteers grew more and more and the formation program began to include more aspects and values. It is possible to continue to build on this fabric of a regenerated humanity so that reasonable persons may become first of all Christians and then saints.

A volunteer program, whatever it may be, is undoubtedly the best set of values capable of calling forth persons from their indifference, their lack of interest, their closure upon the private dimension and lead them to a community dimension. The reason for this is that a volunteer program is rooted in gratuitousness which is the basic value of creation, of incarnation and of salvation.

In this experience, the lay persons involved discovered that they were able to exercise new and important roles. One of these roles was the mediation between public and private structures in order to bring about collaborative efforts that took into account and responded to the needs of the poor. Often it is preferable not to work in private structures, but to share and be active in representative organisms where pressure can be exercised to make the structures of the state operate well and legitimately. Lay people in this situation acquire a new role of justice inasmuch as, by being present in these structures, they act as mediators between the state and the poor and help the latter to affirm their own rights.

This raises some questions. Does the Christian community have the tools to confront and the instances of decision-making that allow the study of a long-term strategy for human promotion? The identification of problems and the search for solutions is often discredited by a lack of faith, by individualistic endeavours, by a lack of conviction of being called to intervene. We are speaking here of long-term projects that present the greatest difficulty in integrating the spiritual dimension into the renewed human substrate. To what point are we convinced and committed to the service of man? Or do we prefer to hand all this over to the state and limit ourselves to almsgiving? Or do the extended periods of time required to achieve human promotion make us run the risk of never reaching the moment of direct proclamation?

In this context of secularization, the problem of human work arises. What are the prospects of evangelizing the world of labour?

The experiences that we hear about in this area are practically only simple witnesses in the relationships between colleagues or in gestures of solidarity. It is difficult to find aspects of structural and intrinsic relevance regarding the organization of labour. Too often, in the witnesses we hear, we feel a sense of powerlessness. We can ask ourselves if, in the formation of Christians, the necessary attention is given to grasping the philosophy that underlies the organization of labour in our society. We can also ask ourselves if we are able to give an answer and make proposals that would reject the philosophies that produce a mentality of exploitation

and denigration of the human person stemming from violent wicked conceptions (such as slavery) or from softer conceptions (such as the management of human resources). Is it not necessary then, in order to re-evangelize the world of labour, to give a just priority to the specific commitment of restoring the true meaning of work along with the personal witnessing of Gospel values? "We are working to achieve the good of humanity, we share in a building-up that is at the same time temporal and spiritual", even if this implies effort and even, at times, suffering.

How can we help the Christian laity recover a sense of sharing in the action of the Church, in its general role of discernment and ethical considerations, of a cultural elaboration leading to a plan inspired by values, and of a concrete service to those who are in need? All this in order to see to it that every person be able to find work and to be a good worker.

2 – "A mission to the poor, one in which ministry on behalf of justice is an integral part" (MTW, 5).

Our present experience with poverty, particularly in the Third World, is one of making known and sharing in the solution of very small problems which, however may be a matter of life or death for some brothers. At other times, the requests that come to us in the West do not inspire confidence, either because of their lack of real effectiveness or because of the lack of precision of the projects. And this creates alienation, estrangement, mistrust and a lack of involvement. Beyond all this, the question remains as to whether our efforts are sufficient because the general situation of poverty does not seem to be altered in spite of everyone's efforts.

A question arises. In the situations "wherever the poor try to take control of their future" (MTW, 19), perhaps the isolated initiatives of the missionary are no longer sufficient even if this form of charity responding to particular needs must continue to give concrete and immediate responses. Human promotion needs to be supported by an analysis of the structural causes of problems, by plans to change situations, by guidelines that produce concrete and lasting results. Perhaps there is a need for plans of intervention at the level of regions or of individual countries that take into account more general plans that should be elaborated by men of culture who would be willing to put into play their ideas and their various professional resources in favour of mankind. Is such an investment attainable by choosing and bringing together men who could create strategies capable of obtaining results that would not only nourish the hope of the poor but would also make more concrete the commitment and the sacrifices of all (missionaries, volunteers, benefactors, ...). "We strongly urge Oblates to study, with the poor themselves as well as with other involved Christians structural and other causes of poverty ... (MTW 28)

"In the face of this reality the poor do not remain passive but they are organising so as to take hold of their lives. They are supported by a variety of organizations and by Christian Churches which view the promotion of justice as an authentic living out of their faith in Christ" (MTW 12).

A further question that arises is: how can we find a way of creating partnerships among men of good will and structures set up by them to live in solidarity with the poor in a concrete way and to give power to their voice.

Volunteer service at the international level and the other forms of cooperation are concrete modalities that are available for lay persons to work for justice and to collaborate with those who intend to take their destiny into their own hands. But their voice is weak and stifled and their accomplishments are too often conditioned. What new frontiers of collaboration among lay persons of diverse countries can be opened thanks to the facilities of communication?

3 – Building and setting up missionary communities

Lay persons belong to the people, the village or the place where the missionary goes. They are immediately able to inform the missionary about all the cultural aspects of this place. In doing so, they accomplish a work of mediation that favours and accelerates the process of inculturation and makes them the first mediators of the missionary work. Their work can be understood in a more general and more valuable way that can be carried out in all the phases of

missionary work.

“Inculturation is not only a way of acting, it is also a way of being. It implies a spirituality which affects our entire being as well as our missionary outlook. We allow ourselves to be challenged by others and at the same time we have the courage to share with them our own convictions and our values ...” (MTW 57) This behavioural pattern, carried out first of all by lay persons who collaborate more closely, can open up new frontiers in the building up of the reality of the Church.

In this respect, a first reflection spontaneously arises. In the foundation of a new church or community that normally arises through the work of a missionary, is there not perhaps a very specific role of the laity that is lacking? Until that church or community has seen its first Christian lay persons become adult and mature enough to work in their own society, who will proclaim Christ on the streets of that city? Christian families could very well play a very specific role. By their very presence they are an immediate and visible witness to many sacramental graces and an example and mediation of the Gospel proclamation. I believe that the “*implantatio ecclesiae*” and the new evangelization challenge lay people directly to form an evangelizing community together with the missionaries, both being faithful to their own specific mandate. This is what seems to be present in the two localities in Albania which Italian Oblate missionaries and lay people visit periodically. This hope is strengthened by a recent request of the General Administration to consult the laity about the decision to begin this mission. Similar experiences help the maturing of communities of lay associates who collaborate with the Oblates in the ministry of popular missions. The preparation and the carrying out of this special proclamation, the direct witnessing of the lay persons and their commitment to the animation of small sharing groups bring about an action of evangelization of the Spirit mediated by a Church community made up of the Oblate community and the lay community.

“The entire Church is missionary” (EN, 59). In itself, the specific mandate received by lay persons implies a great responsibility: to continue the

work of creation, ordering all things to God and, at the same time, working concretely “so that the world may come to believe”.

4 – The formation of families, a specific field of intervention.

The first need of all people is “to know who Jesus Christ is.” (MTW 2) Concretely we often see that this affirmation, instead of being considered as an objective to be kept present as the goal of our actions, becomes an unproductive working method. In order to avoid this, we have learned from the Gospel and from experience, that our attention must be totally centered on the person we meet in ordinary or extraordinary situations. And at the same time our attention must be focused on identifying the right method and the right moment for approaching the person. This will allow us to enter into this person’s world, into his or her family, to be able to listen, to love, to encourage and show the mercy of the Father, and then to develop a friendly relationship that will allow us to talk about the small and great problems of life.

In small groups, the sharing of experiences and problems has provided us with a vital and common meeting-point. Through listening to and addressing problems, it is possible for lay persons to lead their brothers in rediscovering the spiritual dimension of life and the concrete ways of incarnating their faith. To be able to meet without the preoccupation of having to teach Christian doctrine makes it easier to find the way to lead men to reasonable behaviour, to a coherent life and finally to faith. Often it is a matter of confronting, of accepting, of supporting in difficult moments of life, of discovering the ways of incarnating the love of God in daily life. The work that can be accomplished in this field is very great because graces can easily be multiplied because of the affective dimension of family relationships.

Women have a special role to play. In many cultures they constitute the axis that holds the social fabric together. They play a determining role, not only as mothers and wives but as down-to-earth guides who recall the fundamental values of life.

It is evident that by restoring the faith of a married couple one brings back hope not only

in themselves, but also in those that they contact and especially in their children and their family. Can we heal society by healing families? Would it not be opportune to have this as one of our priorities?

Formation

Helping one another to become saints.

"The laity, however, are given this special vocation: to make the Church present and fruitful in those places and circumstances where it is only through them that she can become the salt of the earth." (Lumen Gentium 33b) Surely we all journey along the paths of the world (family, work, social, cultural and ecclesial environments), carrying with us our own contribution of hope. But holiness of life is required so that our contribution may shine forth and be effective.

Saint Eugene always underlined the fact that only He who has saved mankind and those who live in communion with him as his instruments can give true responses to the problems of man. It does not matter what their vocation is, as long as they as they acknowledge their responsibility and try to live out their call in the reality of daily life. What is really important is the quality of the witness they have to offer, that is: incarnation.

The proclamation given through the witness of every person's life plays a vital role, even more so in today's secularized world. This is especially true for the ordinary person, layman or laywoman, committed lovingly to live every moment of his daily life in his family and his society. "The witness of a Christian life is the first and irreplaceable form of mission" (Redemptoris Missio 42).

Therefore the first goal remains communion with God and with men, a life centered on the Gospel and capable of making radical choices, according to the modalities that a layman's life allows. In particular, vocations of adult lay persons are able to mature through the mystery of the Cross and the understanding of the Good Friday message. This vocation opens up the path that leads to a gift of self for the mission that is a deep understanding of our own being, of our existence on this earth and of our daily participation in creation.

Our experience so far, in its diverse forms, has led us to rediscover how the general call to holiness involves lay persons and religious in a unique adventure in which they can support and enrich each other in a reciprocity of witnessing. The need for an ongoing formation of the lay associates has had as its scope the formation of an authentic laity. Not a laity dependent on the clergy or "clericalized", but a laity that is faithful to the Gospel and to the choice in favour of the poor, that has an awareness of the whole planet, a capacity for dialogue and for a critical quest of the positive values of contemporary society, a laity that is available to persons and a witness of love and solidarity to make the "unknown God" (Acts 13,23) understandable. Surely there are difficulties in the carrying out of this way because it is possible to fall into several errors such as directive behaviour on the part of Oblates and expectations of directions on the part of lay persons, emulation of the religious life rather than a lay translation of the Oblate spirituality, excessive stress on the link between religious and laity to the detriment of the life and identity of the religious community and of the family, and so forth. All these possible deviations underline even more how much this experience is delicate and requires maturity in behaviour, care, humility ... There is a need, in short, to become "men living in God's presence, united with Him in prayer, in communion with all their brothers in the love that comes from God" (WAC 17).

Associates: a Growing Awareness

The long experience of collaboration between lay persons and the Oblates has brought forth a greater sharing of the charism and the mission. So much so that some lay persons feel called to enter into a partnership with the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate for the evangelization of the poor.

Here are a few of the aspects that emerge from being *associated* with Christ the Saviour with the Oblates of Mary to evangelize the poor.

What "associates" us, beyond our baptism, is the charism of Saint Eugene, or the same

passion for a humanity in which Christ reigns in the hearts and where all are in communion among themselves in God. To be associated is not a juridical fact but a unity of desire that all the world be saved, a willingness to work in harmony, animated by the same charism, so that all this may come to be.

A communion and a reciprocal interest in our life and our worlds are the manifestation of this link. This communion is nourished by the modalities that each person can express in his particular condition of life and it commits us to a ongoing conversion that reconstructs the fabric of family and society.

Our life-style seeks to be that of all Oblates. "In imitation of the Twelve and St. Paul, we bear in ourselves the characteristics of the apostolic man: openness to the signs of the times, availability, closeness to people, love of the universal Church and fraternal spirit" (MTW 118). "Oblate formation

takes place in the context of an apostolic community. We are all involved in a process of mutual evangelization" (Constitution 48).

For us lay persons, this experience, which can already be realised in the family, finds its concrete expression in lay communities (Base Ecclesial Communities, life communities in diverse forms and in various continents) which are led by an Oblate and become a living Church and a presence of Christ. Periodic meetings between the lay community and the religious community help the reciprocal growth.

Our life is open to the needs of all peoples. We are united in charity, in mutual respect, in listening and in dialogue, taking care of one another in reciprocal dependence. We are at the service of the poor: of isolated persons, families and populations which are victims of social and economical changes, the many poor of the Third World and those belonging to the Fourth World who do not know God. We are ready to share our goods and to use them for the needs of the Oblate family and the poor. In a spirit of reciprocal communion, we desire a growing opening up of Oblate houses, especially for the needs of formation.

Concrete Objectives

1. To foster missionary collaboration in all forms and to support the peoples of the Third World by developing the Missionary Association of Mary Immaculate in all provinces and by joining together the various Associations in view of common projects.

2. To promote participation of the laity in the charism, by making known Saint Eugene and the Oblate charism, by encouraging various experiences and developing the experience of lay associates.

3. To make known the experiences of Church-communities that evangelize, at home and abroad in the missions, through the direct involvement of lay associates and with the contribution and support of the Missionary Association of Mary Immaculate.

New Foundations of Missionary Oblates

Established Since the General Chapter of 1986

Ryszard SZMYDKI

Appeals from bishops sent to the Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate during the past decade to establish a mission in their dioceses, have been very numerous. Since the General Chapter of 1986 missions have been founded in thirteen new countries. This fact is of importance especially if one considers that the Congregation continues to diminish world-wide, and that some Oblate units experience difficulty in maintaining their present commitments owing to a lack of personnel. Before introducing new foundations, it would be well to recall the stages and criteria which are used in the discernment of the acceptance of a new mission.

A. The process of discernment of a foundation in a new country

Generally the initiative for the foundation comes from the diocesan bishops who apply directly to the General Administration. Indeed it returns to the Superior General in Council to accept the new foundations. The request is at first examined by the Mission Committee, one of the internal committees of the General Council, who presents its recommendations to the General Council. If their first impression is favourable, the major superiors of the Oblate Region from where the request comes are consulted. If they are in favour, an Oblate unit is sought which could take the responsibility of this new foundation. After an on the spot visit, and after fixing the details of the foundation, the Superior General in Council officially accepts the new mission at the request of the Oblate unit which takes the responsibility of it.

The initiative to found a mission can also come either from an Oblate province or from the Superior General and his Council. In any case, the process of discernment is customarily done at three levels: The General Council, the Oblate Region, and the Province concerned.

B. Criteria of discernment

Faithfulness to our missionary charism is the principal reason which brings about accepting new Missions. In the choice of new foundations one resorts to several measures. Most often one responds to the urgent needs of the Church: the existence of groups that the Church hardly reaches, lack of pastors, the call to first evangelization. We assure ourselves at the same time that the mission be carried out in and by the apostolic community and that its goal be really evangelization of the poor with many faces. We are also sensitive to the works and places which have a particular strategic value for the Church of our time and for the Congregation.

C. The thirteen new Missions

1. Guatemala – 1988

While wishing to found a mission in Central America, the Mexican Province was ready in 1988 to open a mission in Honduras. At the last moment, the episcopal conference of that country reconsidered its invitation and the Provincial Administration turned towards Guatemala. The bishop of the diocese of El Quiché entrusted four parishes to the Oblates in a vast area of the country, with some 70 villages. The population of the area, 90% indigenous, was very afflicted at the time of the military regime. The General Council accepted this mission in June 1988.

2. South Korea – 1989

The initiative was taken here by the Superior General and the question of a foundation in Korea was discussed several times during the Plenary Sessions of the General Council. The reasons put forward in favour of a foundation were: the strategic position of South Korea for mission work in Asia, the possibilities of evangelising the poor, the sharing of our charism with the local Church, the promotion of missionary vocations in Korea then the taking part in dialogue with

the prevailing and other Asiatic cultures.

Following contacts with several South Korean bishops, the diocese of Suwon agreed to welcome an Oblate community. The decision for an Oblate foundation in South Korea was passed in General Council in June 1989. The Mission was joined to the Province of Japan and entrusted to the Italian Oblates who arrived in May 1990. The Mission has subsequently been reinforced by the Oblates of Sri Lanka.

3. Nigeria – 1989

The first Nigerians began knocking at the door of the Oblates at Cameroon at the very beginning of the 1980's. After the 1986 Chapter the idea of opening a mission in Nigeria arose. The aim of this would be a missionary activity in the line of the Oblate charism and the reception of local vocations. This plan was studied several times by the General Council and by the Provincial Administration of Cameroon-Chad. After contacts with five dioceses and an on the spot visit, the diocese of Orlu was accepted for the first establishment. The new Mission was accepted in February 1989 and entrusted to the Province of Cameroon-Chad.

The international foundation team of five Oblates arrived in Nigeria at the beginning of 1990. Some months later, because of difficulties relative to staying visas, the non-Nigerian Oblates had to leave the country. The team was restructured two years later, to be divided into two communities, one in the diocese of Orlu and the other in the diocese of Jos.

4. Venezuela – 1990

At the time of the Provincial Congress in 1987, the Province of Spain expressed the desire to found a mission abroad. It then made clear its preferences: a poor mission in Latin-America among the indigenous people, and in a country where there were not yet any Oblates. The General Administration presented the requests of the bishops to the Province: those of Barrancabermeja in Colombia, and Machiques in Venezuela. After a consultation of the Latin-American Region and a visit to two bishops, the Apostolic Vicariate of Machiques in Venezuela was chosen for the new foundation. It is a vast region where some indigenous tribes live and numerous Colombian immigrants who were suggested to the Oblates. The mission was accepted by the General Council in September 1990. In December of the same year the three Spanish missionaries arrived in Venezuela and they undertook the work of the new evangelization.

5. Botswana – 1991

The Oblates began their apostolic work in Botswana in 1928 as the first permanent missionaries in this country. In 1952 they were replaced by the Irish Passionist Fathers. In 1989 the Bishop of Gaborone asked the Oblates to come to the aid of "their child", – his young diocese spread out where there was still a vast territory for first evangelization. The Superior General in Council, having studied the request during two Plenary Sessions, invited the Province of Lesotho to take charge of this new foundation in Botswana. The principal argument put forward was to give a more missionary dimension to the Province, rich in numerous vocations, and follow the missionary work begun by the Oblates in Botswana. The mission was approved in March 1991. A team of five Oblates were established in January 1992.

6. Czech Republic – 1991

Following the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the Oblates of Austria dreamt of a return to Czechoslovakia where the origins of their Province were situated. Fr. Cizkovsky, a Czech Oblate, who entered the Congregation in South Africa gave his agreement to return to their native country becoming the "pillar" of the plan. In 1990-1991 contacts were made with the dioceses of Budejovice and Olomouc. The offer of the Archbishop of Olomouc to take charge of a parish at Kromeriz in Moravia was welcomed by the Austrian Province as a place for the new foundation. The Mission was officially accepted in March 1991. It began by an international community: an Austrian scholastic and a young Polish priest joined Fr. Cizkovsky in Kromeriz.

7. Angola – 1992

While civil war was taking place in Angola, the population of the border region with

Namibia underwent severe hardships. The Christian communities were victims of breaking up and were deprived of pastors. With the improvement of the political situation in the country, the Bishop of the diocese of Ondjiva who had contacts with the Missionary Oblates in Namibia, requested from the Congregation in 1990 the missionary personnel for his local Church where there were only three priests for 180 000 Catholics. In January 1992, after consultation with the Major Superiors of the English speaking Sub-Region of Africa, the Superior General accepted the new foundation. It was entrusted to the responsibility of the Province of Namibia with the personnel coming from the Province of Zaire.

The beginning of the Mission underwent some difficulties and consequently another solution was sought. In October 1996, the Superior General in Council decided in conjunction with the Province of Namibia, to entrust the Mission in Angola to the Province of Zaire. Owing to problems with visas and entrances to Angola, besides our commitment in the diocese of Ondjiva, the Oblates accepted to take charge of a parish in Luanda, the capital. The idea was to have a pied-à-terre there and to facilitate contacts with the missionaries in the South of the country. The first team of Zairian Oblates arrived at Luanda in February 1997.

8. Ukraine – 1992

From 1989, first two and later three Polish Oblates helped the local clergy in Central Ukraine in the pastoral work with Latin Rite Catholic communities. The catholic dioceses in the Ukraine were established in 1991. In the diocese of Kameneć Podolski the Missionary Oblates were asked to take charge of the parish community at Gniewan, in the diocese of Zytomir a parish at Kiev and one at Chernihov. The objective of an Oblate presence was defined thus: the sacramental pastoral, evangelization under the form of basic catechetics, preaching, the pastoral for vocations, the reconstruction of places of worship and the organization of medical aid.

In May 1992, the Superior General in Council officially established the new Mission in the Ukraine under the responsibility of the Polish Province. The development of this Mission and the good number of local vocations enabled it to establish on September 14, 1997 the Delegation of the Ukraine, subject to the Province of Poland.

9. Colombia – 1993

The initiative was taken by the provincial Administration of Haiti. On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of its foundation, the Province wished to set a missionary gesture: the foundation of a mission ad extra. The responsibility for an outside mission would give a new missionary spirit to that Province owing to a good number of vocations. Encouragement also came from the Oblate Latin-American Region.

Contacts of the Provincial of Haiti with the Apostolic Nuncio in Colombia and his visits to the Archdiocese of Cartagena in 1992 clarified the foundation plan of a Mission in the territory of the Archdiocese, peopled with Blacks and half-castes most of whom are very spiritually abandoned. The purposes of this was to have an apostolate which corresponds to the indications of the Synod of Santo Domingo as well as to the Oblate charism. In June 1993, the Superior General in Council accepted the new Mission of the Province of Haiti in Colombia. On January 25, 1994 this Mission was inaugurated at Malagana.

10. Kenya – 1995

The Bishop of Meru has several times expressed his desire to have an Oblate community in his diocese to establish the charism of our saintly Founder there. The prospect of a missionary foundation in Kenya, the English speaking hub in East Africa, and the welcome of local vocations pleaded in favour of accepting the Mission. The missionary urgencies touched on the first evangelization, the strengthening of Christian communities, the formation of the laity and the foundation of new parishes.

The Oblate units of the African region who were consulted on the plan were not in a position to reply positively to the invitation. In May 1994, the General Council therefore sent the request to the Oblate Conference of Canada. After a time of discernment and consultation, the Canadian Provincials decided to take charge of this new foundation. The Superior General in

Council accepted the Mission in Kenya in May 1995, under the responsibility of the Region of Canada. In the plan of the foundation, the participation in personnel by the African-Madagascar Region was foreseen. The obtaining of African Oblates being difficult for the foundation team, the Mission began by the missionaries of the Canadian Region. The first ones arrived in Kenya in April 1997.

11. Cuba – 1997

Over the past few years at least four Cuban Bishops applied to the General Administration seeking help in personnel. The consultation of the Latin-American provincials in 1995 concluded that they were favourable to an Oblate foundation on the Island. After a visit of the Provincial of Haiti and the General Counselor for Latin-America to Cuba, the responsibility of the Mission was proposed to the Province of Mexico.

In January 1997, the Superior General in Council accepted the foundation of a new Mission in Cuba in three border dioceses: Cienfuegos, Matanzas and Santa Clara. The Oblates were asked to undertake pastoral work in the rural regions there and also to develop later on the diocesan centres of formation of the laity. The direct responsibility of the Mission was entrusted to Mexico in partnership with Haiti and with the collaboration of the Latin-American Oblates units. The first missionary team arrived in Cuba in December 1997.

12. Turkmenistan – 1997

Turkmenistan, one of the Asian Republics of the USSR since 1924, declared its independence in 1991. The initiative of an Oblate foundation in Turkmenistan came from the Pontifical representative of Kazakhstan, Bishop Mariano Oles. The official request for sending a group of our missionaries to Turkmenistan was sent to the Superior General in April 1996 by Cardinal Tomko, Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. The principal reason was that in this mainly Muslim country are some dispersed Catholics without Catholic pastors or place of worship, nor organised community. The General Council perceived in this request a true apostolic challenge for the Congregation, that of establishing a Catholic Church in Turkmenistan and evangelization in Central Asia.

In January 1997, two Oblates visited the country. In May 1997, the Superior General in Council accepted the new Mission in Turkmenistan which was entrusted to the Polish Province in partnership with the United States' Region. In September 1997, John-Paul II established the Mission *sui juris* in Turkmenistan which was up to that time under the jurisdiction of the Apostolic Administrator for Kazakhstan. Fr. Andrzej Madej omi was named "ecclesiastical Superior" of this Mission. Two Polish Oblates are present at Ashgabat, the capital, since October 1997. Their real challenge is to open new missionary routes.

13. Bielorussia

From 1992, the Polish Oblates, one at first, and later a second, works in a permanent manner in the diocese of Grodno in Bielorussia. They serve two rural parishes and moreover one of them is teaching in the major diocesan seminary while being also director of the diocesan catechetics department. Other Polish priests and scholastics come there occasionally to help in the pastoral work and the preaching of popular missions. Up to the present the Mission has not been officially established.

On Poverty in Africa: Oblates' Response

G. M. TLABA, o.m.i.

The 1994 Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Africa has been described by both Pope John Paul II and some bishops as "An event of hope". The facts show that there is little hope for Africa. Africa has historical legacy of unequal integration into the world economy. Now it is rapidly becoming the forgotten continent, an embarrassment to the rich nations of the North.

Africa, perhaps more than any other region of the world, has suffered heavily from this rather unequal integration into the world economy which has left a permanent, unwholesome and inhibiting effect on the continent's development process. Indeed, Africa's relationship with the world economy over the past five centuries has been based on dispossession and dependence. The first two centuries of this relationship were dominated by human plunder and slave trade. This was followed by the 19th century scramble for Africa for commercial and political exploitation. Its production for the international market, when the slave trade was abolished, was limited to primary commodities and even trade in these, both domestically and internationally, was often controlled by foreign enterprises.

Africa's weakness is its failure to diversify its economy. Its primary and grave problem is that of excessive dependence on few commodities for export – commodities for which there is little domestic demand – while at the same time being overly dependent on import of basic manufactures and food for survival. Dependent and dispossessed, Africa has been marginalized for centuries. Whereas three and half decades ago, Africa accounted for about 2.0% of global GNP, today it accounts for only 1.0%. Africa's share of world trade has fallen from 3.8% in 1970 to 1.0% in the 1990s. Thus Africa's marginalization has not only persisted but has also worsened.

Given the rapidity of technological development in the North and the new paradigm of marketization and globalization, "the latest wave of dispossession is threatening to lock Africa into the concentric circle farthest from the centre of global power – the periphery of the periphery"¹. Thus, in spite of its excessive dependence on foreign trade, Africa has been de facto delinked from the global economy.

The worsening situation of Africa is no doubt the cumulative result of the long years of persistent crisis triggered off by drought and desertification, a depressed international commodity market, excruciating external debt, which has led to reverse flows of resources from Africa and wrong economic policies.

The thorny issue of "dependency" further aggravated by chronic shortage of resources and series of environmental obstacles inevitably favour the outbreak of contagious and preventable diseases from which Africa still suffers. More than ever victims of poverty, many people can no longer provide certain basic needs for, particularly health expenses, for themselves and their families. High infant mortality, very low life expectancy, malnutrition, outbreak of malaria and infectious diseases, AIDS epidemic and Ebola are results of poverty. Undernourishment and malnutrition are at the origin of all the deficiencies engendering "hunger related diseases" peculiar to Africa and the so-called less developed countries.

The declining educational standards and delivery of social services are another indicator of growing poverty. An increasing number of kids are entering the education system each year aggravating the strain on educational resources in terms of classrooms, teachers, etc.. On the other hand an increasing number of young people are left out of the educational system either because their parents cannot afford the increasing cost of education or because the stretched facilities cannot accommodate them.

Many pupils are therefore dropping out of school and taking to the streets to fend for themselves and their immediate families. Unemployment is another way poverty rears its ugly

head. Insecurity and exploitation of the weak (poor) by the strong (rich) are the order of the day. Bribery and nepotism reduces the quality of manpower, and with it the means to tackle the problem of poverty.

Most unfortunately, Africa is a continent which is at war against itself. Wars, conflicts and massive civil disorders, punctuated by crime and violence, abound. All these are economically debilitating. Economics do not operate well, if at all, without law and order or without adequately financed public services and infrastructure. In many African countries, emergency survival programmes have become the principal concern of public policy and the growing subsectors in net foreign transfer. Unfortunately, this has led to the neglect of development as survival programmes are hardly, if ever linked to recovery of output, rehabilitation of livelihoods and transition to renewed development.

Africa is becoming poorer because of lack of good governance. The basic requirements of good governance are accountability, law and order, and capacity. Accountability must include workable mechanisms for selecting or deselecting political office holders and penalizing or removing non or malfunctioning officials. Capacity is ability to strategize, prioritize and carry out state functions. As Reginald Green most aptly put it, "an accountable state delivering law and order plus freedom to criticize but demonstrably incompetent on strategic policy and unable to deliver on programmes is not providing good governance nor will its citizens perceive it to be ... The most universal criticism of African governance is that on non-delivery. Even when accountability is seen as passable, corruption as bothersome rather than appalling and oppression as limited and unusual, capacity is, with few exceptions, criticized"².

The biggest problem of Africa is the lack of total political commitment to socio-economic development by its leadership. This is very surprising when one looks at the number of seminal strategic development blueprints this continent has since 1980. But the reality is that the governments fail to turn these regional seminal documents into operational, implementable policy frameworks annual budgets. This failure is symptomatic of the governments' lack of commitment. African governments have the unfortunate uniqueness of drawing up development programmes and annual budgets whose financing is expected to come largely from donors. In such circumstances, it is always easy to derail the home-made development paradigms and substitute therefore the externally oriented ones, thus exacerbating their

external dependence and making it relatively easy to manipulate our leaders. Because of this high dependence on external funding and because of the severity and protracted nature of Africa's economic crisis, the continent has become extremely vulnerable to externally imposed policy leverage.

At the root of Africa's poverty are colonial psychological legacies of lack of self-confidence and self-esteem and obsessive mental dependence. What else can you expect from a people that are preoccupied with imitative modernism while neglecting the possibilities of harnessing the positive aspects of their own traditional values, cultures, institutions and modes of socio-economic organizations? These are the very people we are called to share our lives with.

Our Commitment:

As Oblates of Mary Immaculate we are called to work among and with these people that are oppressed by system – political, social, economic, and cultural – and thus are robbed of their dignity as human persons. We don't have a choice like other people, even the so-called "committed Christians", who can choose to shut their ears and refuse to hear, who can close their eyes and refuse to see the misery and suffering of the poor. Our vow of Poverty binds us to express our commitment to the poor. Since this vow obliges us to espouse the values of Christ's Kingdom, we must espouse brotherhood, freedom, justice, love and sharing. Like Christ, we too must draw near to the poor, the weak, the oppressed.

It is important for us to reflect on why we commit ourselves to the poor. There are many possible reasons: ideological, political, socio-economical, reasons arising from sadness because of the sufferings of the poor or from guilt because of the injustice they suffer. For whatever reason

we commit ourselves to the poor, we must have our priorities straight. We must value morality, integrity, conscience, faithfulness to God, and sensitivity to our brothers more than material comforts, the false respectability which comes with conformism, and the insensitivity to suffering.

Our commitment to the poor and the oppressed involves a genuine experience and understanding of poverty, deprivation and oppression. Much harm has been done by people with good intentions who rush in to solve a problem that they haven't even begun to understand. We can only be fully committed to the poor when we know their real needs and aspirations as they identify and articulate them. It is only then that we can strive for their fulfilment, by transforming those structures and situations which keep them in that deprivation and powerlessness. This is what we are called to do and we can do it.

True commitment to the poor demands working, not for them merely (in a paternalistic sense), but with them, helping them to help themselves. This commitment, as Australian bishops put it, "involves a willingness to stand side by side with those in poverty and other victims of injustice, to see the world through their eyes, to be willing to learn from them, and to treat them as equals and not as objects of one's charity or pity. It includes a willingness and readiness on the part of the better off to share their wealth and their power. It includes a humble acceptance on the part of those who are not poor that the principal role in the struggle against poverty will be played by the poor people themselves"³. We must never forget that the poor lead to the alleviation of their poverty and its consequent miseries, not to mere identification with them in their poverty.

Indeed, our rules and constitutions keep on reminding us that we are incarnate people; hence our physical presence has significance. The poor suffer from a lack of dignity. When we work and live with the poor, they can regain their dignity and new respect for themselves. This personal contact should not exclude some material contact and sharing in the lives of the poor if we are really to enter into their world and commit ourselves to them and to their struggles. The material assistance given to the poor should endeavour to help them get out of that situation, rather than to simply provide temporary relief. Even where immediate relief is called for and given, beneficiaries should be encouraged to believe that they are actually helping the process of getting them away from the ravages of poverty.

Job creating programmes to help the poor find jobs in their communities, legal assistance for the poor who are being deprived by the rich and corrupt, skills training workshops and similar programmes should be considered. The Oblates should mobilize their resources within their lay community to plan, co-ordinate and manage these programmes on a volunteer basis. A meaningful effort at tackling poverty problems requires a clear definition of objectives and how they are to be met (policy) as well as to coordinate such an effort with what others are doing – including government, and other non-governmental organizations.

Commitment demands Conversion

This is easier said than done. Some of us are too attached to the comfortable lifestyle in which we live, and we are not yet ready to give it up for the sake of the poor or to share it with them. We are afraid to abandon the security that our present situation provides us. Then we console ourselves with the thought that commitment to the poor depends on a personal call and on the different psychological drives of each person. For others this call challenges their present involvements and priorities. Many are using their talents in important work, and they are so overwhelmed and overworked that they find little time to reflect on or to act on a commitment to the poor. There are also some who do see the need for commitment to the poor, but they are confused as to how they might respond.

These resistances provide very fruitful material for one's conversation with the Lord. How one handles one's resistances and ambiguity determines the depth and quality of one's response to the call of Christ. For all of us conversion is necessary – a conversion which depends on the Lord's grace. Conversion involves on-going personal change and social transformation. Basically, conversion is a change of heart and attitudes – it is taking on the mind and heart of Jesus Christ. Jesus committed himself to the poor, the marginal and the oppressed.

Our commitment should aim at changing our hearts and attitudes and those of the oppressed and the oppressors. While attacking political and economic systems and the rich who have profited from them has much validity, the attack should be made in such a way that the “oppressor” is respected, in the hope that he too may see the light and be converted. The rich need to be evangelized in the same way that we need to be evangelized. They too need to be shown the values and struggles of the poor. It is important that they realize that the sufferings of the poor are not the fault of the poor but the result of an oppressive political, social and economic system. Most rich people do not see the system as unjust. It is hard for them to see that their success is in a way connected with the exploitation of the poor. They should not be traumatized with guilt, rather they should be encouraged to create a just social order. This means that they should be treated with respect, hoping that they too can see the light.

Actively sharing in the Struggles of the Poor.

There are many ways in which we can get involved in responding to the needs of the poor. But the educational model seems to be the most effective.

It strives to accompany the poor in their struggle to better their situation, in their struggle to find their own dignity. In this model one does not give but one shares. In sharing, a person can give as much as he wants because the one sharing is also receiving.

Because the political and economic systems of the world do not favour the poor, a genuine sharing in the poor person’s struggle for justice necessarily is going to call for political action. Our commitment to the poor is necessarily going to imply some attack on the social, economic, and political structure of those in power. Our attitude should always be influenced by our contemplation of the lives of the poor and the evils of social injustice and not by the desire to protect a particular political social, or economic system. We have to attack for evangelical reasons and not for ideological ones.

Therefore, we should actively encourage the governments to pass laws defining the parameters for dealing with poverty. In 1964, The United States of America promulgated the Economic Opportunities Act which created the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) to administer a programme to fight poverty. We are not as endowed with resources as America is, but we have a number of people with skills that can be applied productively to combat poverty.

Our property should at all times be maintained in a manner that clearly suggests that we do not consider poverty to be a virtue. Buildings, gardens, fields and other pieces of property should be kept productive, clean and in a general good state. We should understand that we are personally responsible for the security and proper maintenance of our property. In the case of parish priests, such a degree would help them lead by example and show people in their parishes that it is through work that poverty will be eradicated in our world.

Listening to the poor and learning from them is all important. We must hear the national and international cries of the poor and oppressed. We need to understand the frustration of the poor which at times give rise to acts of violence. We are not called to condone violence, but we are called to understand its causes. We have a responsibility to help the rich and powerful to hear the cries of the poor which lie beneath the acts of violence.

There are many possible ways in which we can express our commitment to the poor. Fundamentally, we are called to share the lives of the poor in any fashion that we can and to commit ourselves to struggle with them for the cause of social justice. Wherever we work, our goal is that the poor person can be more fully a person, that he can have a sense of his own dignity in the eyes of God, in the eyes of his fellow-men and in the eyes of himself.

Notes:

¹ Adebayo ADEDEJI (ed.), *Africa Within the World: Beyond Dispossession and Dependence* (Zed Books, London & ACDESS, Ijebu Ode, 1993), p.1.

² Reginald HERBOLD Green, "Not Farewell but Fare Forward Voyagers: Africa's Challenges in the 21st Century" in Bade Onimode & Richard Synge (eds.), *Issues in Development: Essays in honour of Adebayo Adedeji at 65* (Heinemann, Ibadan, & ACDESS, Ijebu Ode, 1995), p. 212.

³ "A new Beginning: Eradicating Poverty in Our World", Pastoral Letter by the Australian Catholic Bishops' conference, in *Catholic International* , vol. 6, No. 7, February 1997, p.70.

Sharing of Experiences on New Ways of Mission Today

Evangelizing Today

(Cameroun, Canada, United States, England, Kenya)

New Foundatons

(Columbia, Korea, Ukraine, Angola)

Mission Through Mass-Media

(Bolivia, Canada)

Mission and Interreligious Dialogue

(India: O.M.I. Ashram: Philippines)

Precapitular Commission OMI C.P. 9061, I-00100 Roma Aurelio, Italy December 1997

Evangelizing Today - (Cameroon, Canada, U.S.A. Kenya, England)

In preparation for the 1998 General Chapter, the Precapitular Commission has requested from various corners of the Oblate world a series of background papers which will be sent to all the members of the Chapter. *OMI Documentation* will present some of them during the coming year. Our first selection from the series "New Ways of Oblate Mission: Sharing of Experiences" presents three papers on new efforts to *relaunch the ministry of parish missions* in Africa (Cameroon), the U.S.A. (Central) and Canada (Grandin); a paper on *a mission of presence* in the suburbs of London, England (Anglo-Irish), and the reflections of our confreres as they begin the *new mission* in Kenya.

Parish missions in North Cameroon and Chad The CO.MI.PAR. (Community of Parish Missions)

Origin – Evolution

Less than twenty years after its foundation in 1946, the Cameroon/Chad Mission was already thinking of a traditional Oblate ministry – the preaching of parish missions. Indeed, as early as 1963, a small team of Oblates came to Yaounde for that very purpose. The bishop entrusted a parish to their care in order to *acquaint them with the milieu*, but the initial project fell through.

In May 1980, the Province Report stated, "We missionaries must work to make ourselves redundant, not to resign but *to situate ourselves in a different way within the local Church by defining new priorities*". This was taken up at the Provincial Assembly in 1982, at which Fr. Jetté told us: "The Church of North Cameroon and Chad is more than the Oblates. As it grows, it is normal that it become more aware of this and that it express its identity even more clearly. *On the other hand, the Oblates have their own traits and values. It is well that they become more aware of them, and that they affirm them more and more, while putting them at the service of the local Church.*

The third Provincial Assembly was held in January 1985. A new way to be present in the local Church was sought. The Assembly opted for the foundation of an itinerant mission team. In 1988 the Community of Parish Missions (COMIPAR) became a reality.

It can be said that the development of the Mission is at the origin of COMIPAR. The arrival of missionaries other than Oblates, the existence of well-formed Christian communities, the birth of a native diocesan clergy – all were contributing factors which led us to redefine the meaning of the OMI presence. "*Mission accomplished, we leave?*" Not quite.

What about the young Oblates coming up? Young Africans from Nigeria, Cameroon and Chad were knocking on our doors to become Oblates (a small but sizable number are now in formation). The foundation era being over, what ministry could these men look forward to in years to come?

We looked to our Oblate roots for answers. The Founder's creation of *parish renewal missions* showed the way. We saw real needs still remaining to be fulfilled. A reawakening of the faith, of the Christian life of the baptized, to arouse Christian communities that were slumbering or paralyzed by misunderstandings. After a while, they lose their impetus and need special attention to survive. The pastors, who are often too busy with parish affairs, do not have time to be concerned. What's the answer? There is no forgetting that our Founder saw parish missions as the major means of a "new evangelization". Thus did the Holy Spirit, by means of developing events and the memory of our origins, lead us to our COMIPAR decision.

Purpose of COMIPAR – means used

The purpose of COMIPAR is to provide parishes forwith a time for awakening the Christians, for strengthening their resources so that they can make a deeper commitment. These are not meant to be retreats, and we don't seek to teach new things. But we do invite the people to stop and take time. It's a call to look at their experience, to reflect on the interplay between faith and life, between life and faith. Our task is to ask the right questions that will enable people to express themselves in small groups on important points of Christian faith and life. We listen to them: after proclaiming the Word it's important to see how it was received. We learn a lot! We then build on what was said..., we develop it and complete it, referring them to the Gospel. Lastly, we pray with them. Such is the pedagogy we follow.

Normal course of events

The COMIPAR is available to the parishes during the dry season, about seven and a half months of the year. From October 1989 to February 1997, we gave 27 missions in five dioceses (Garoua, Ngaoundere, Maroua and Yagoua, in Cameroon, and Pala in Chad). Each mission lasts a month, three missionaries take part and divide up the villages among themselves.

People's reactions

People say they have again become aware of the value of faith, as a source of joy, and of the value of a Christian orientation in life. They are able to speak among themselves of serious things that they had never talked about before, and they are able to listen to the their brothers' sharing. They recognize their weaknesses without our having to point them out. The desire for meetings to discuss among themselves is reawakened. And they said there is a great need for this kind of intervention which inspires them to go on.

Leaders' reactions

As for the leaders who often find it hard to “bear” with their group, they recover the joy of seeing the reawakening in faith of their brothers and sisters, and also the return to the community of some who had left or were very irregular. They appreciate the animation, the pedagogical method, and claim that they have gained new insights. They are once again strengthened in their commitment.

Parish apostolic teams

During this month, we live in real companionship with the priests. To tell the truth, the priest often finds himself alone with his pastoral problems. Then, suddenly, three companions arrive and he has someone with whom to discuss. There are similar fraternal exchanges with the Sisters.

Our own reactions to this experience

It's evident to all that these missions answer a real and important need of the local Church, a need well known to the bishops. The animation of Christian communities is a vast undertaking, complementary of the parishes' activity. We are not the first to have perceived this: we are entering a great Oblate movement which dates back to the Founder's time.

The people trust us. We learn much about their concrete life and the way they feel. We are often touched by the witness of their faith. – We feel increasingly how much the people in charge are in need of formation as animators and teachers. – This work establishes fraternal bonds between us and the priests in parishes. – Lastly, the fact that our team lives together and works together, makes it easier for us to live as an Oblate Apostolic Community.

Frame of mind demanded in this ministry

It calls for Oblates who are able to work together and with others. It calls for Oblates who already have experience in parochial work, though this doesn't exclude the presence of a younger man who could benefit from the experience of the elders on the team. What also matters is to consider oneself first of all an animator, a specialist in the faith, and not primarily a preacher or teacher, even if the Word of God does hold an important place in these missions.

February 20, 1997 Luc ATHIMON

U.S.A. Experience of Oblate Renewals (Missions) as Compiled by the Members of the Central Province Oblate Preaching Team

Our experience of the renewal weeks, since we began this ministry in 1993, has been very positive. We began this work again because we believed that there was a deep spiritual poverty present in this country that needed to be addressed. What better way to address it as Oblates, we thought, than to do the original work of the Congregation, to preach parish renewals (missions). Four years later, we find that our original suppositions were true and that people across the country have been deeply appreciative of our efforts.

Here are just a few of many written comments:

“This was a high point for our parish this year. You have made a lasting impression on us, with positive results.”

Krista Bendinelli/Hercules, California

"The Holy Spirit has reached through you to touch my heart."

Joanie Clemons/Farmington, Missouri

"You planted many new seeds of faith in my life and provided new growth for those already deeply rooted." - Ernest Befort/Topeka, Kansas

"It was great to hear from a Catholic Priest a discussion of outreach and renewal that was hitting the mark of today's challenges and pressures." - Gabriel Faimon/Auburn, Kansas

"You helped to refashion the Dream of my Heart, and made me turn eagerly to it." - Carisa Rhodes/Philpot, Kentucky

At the last renewal a young couple in their early twenties came to us to say that because of the renewal experience she was converting to Catholicism. One man recently said that after coming to the first session on Sunday evening he decided to use vacation days at work to make the rest of the renewal week and was very glad he did.

Since 1993 we have conducted over 175 parish renewals in 20 different states and 33 different dioceses. Everywhere parishioners have indicated that they have deeply appreciated and profited from their experience, that they would love to have us return to lead another renewal week, and that they wished the week could last longer. Pastors have been very hospitable, parish staffs have been very cooperative in the planning and preparation, and now largely through word-of-mouth we have received numerous invitations to conduct renewals at other parishes.

As one member of the Preaching Team stated, "There is a deep longing for value, purpose, and meaning that somehow has been obscured in the last couple of generations in this country. We seek to help people get in touch with their aspirations and hopes." In the words of our mission statement, we seek to "preach the Good News to people, to energize their faith in a way that internalizes the mystery of the Lord's active presence in their lives."

As Oblates we prefer the witness value of a team approach in giving the renewal weeks. Therefore, there are usually two missionaries present at each renewal, sharing the duties of preaching, presiding at Eucharist, leading evening rituals, hearing confessions, visiting schools, etc.

We currently offer three different renewal experiences, each five days in length, beginning Sunday evening and running through Thursday evening. The renewal has some activity for each day part, morning/after-noon/evening.

Morning is Eucharist and a special talk following, and the afternoon has a Holy Hour of prayer with reflection.

The Evening session is the main time and usually lasts about an hour and a half. It consists of listening to the Word of God, a major address by the missionary on the theme of the evening, and a creative ritual designed to let those words sink to a deeper level of one's being. After each evening experience there is also some social time.

We've received many suggestions as to faith topics that people would like to have addressed. We have taken these into consideration in preparing subsequent renewals. As a result, the people comment that the talks are helpful and meaningful. Many express gratitude for both the content and format of the presentations.

On average each of the main evening sessions have between 150-250 people, although several renewals have had audiences ranging from 350-600. Generally, the audience builds during the week as people begin to share with others their experience of the renewal.

Another positive sign is that we have been invited back to many parishes. Out of 48 parish renewals this year, 10 of them were parishes where we had already done a renewal.

The time is ripe in this country to address a deepening spiritual poverty. This ministry has traditionally been the Oblate Way to do so; and, from all indications, it is making a difference for Christ in people's lives!

Grandin Province: Parish Missions

In the past few months something new has appeared on the horizon of Oblate ministry in Grandin Province: parish missions which have taken place in Alberta, Saskatchewan and the Northwest Territories. While they are still few in number, they have great potential as they were very well received by the people. Dozens of requests are awaiting the two active teams presently in the field: the harvest is plentiful.

Doing parish missions means that we are going back to our roots as Oblates. The ministry most favored by the Founder was the re-evangelization of the villages of Provence. The Church had suffered greatly from persecution by both the French Revolution and by Napoleon's regime. This new evangelization took the form of parish missions where a group of a half dozen Oblates would go to these villages spending several weeks teaching catechism, preaching to the community, celebrating the Sacraments, especially Reconciliation and the Eucharist. The Mission crosses of these early days still stand in these villages of Provence as eloquent witnesses to the powerful work of re-evangelization done by the early Oblate missionaries.

A fresh beginning of this ministry in our Province was made possible by the support of our Oblate confreres in Italy. Three of our men have experienced the powerful evangelizing event that Parish Missions have become in Italy. These missions are prepared, in most cases, over a period of six months by an Oblate team working closely with a local missionary team made up of several committees of lay people. The team gives various tasks and tries to nurture in them a spirit of service and missionary zeal. For instance, the Home Visitation Committee will divide the parish into various zones and will gather the people in different homes and public places so that the missionaries can animate these district groups by sharing the Word of God with them and reflecting on its application to their everyday life. These groups are expected to continue to meet and reflect on God's Word long after the missionaries have left. We hope that they will become the seeds of "Christian Base Communities".

There are also committees concerned with youth ministry and liturgy. These committees are concrete ways by which the Oblates are able to involve lay people in the ministry and to share various responsibilities with them. All told, these people are becoming the base of a renewed Church through a process of an on-going commitment. To support them the Oblates commit themselves to re-visit these communities over a three year period.

The highlights of the Mission are:

1. The Home Visitation which is one of the very first activities of the Mission. The missionaries will visit as many homes as possible. People who have fallen away from the Church have an opportunity to address their situation and perhaps experience new growth in their faith, get clarity about personal problems and relationships, receive blessings and healing of past hurts. The love of a caring God is being expressed through these visits.

2. The Bible Study evenings of the first week attempt to gather people around God's Holy Word and build a more solid Christian community by encountering Christ in his Word. The joy and happiness of people at the end of a good Bible sharing echo the words of the disciples of Emmaus after the Resurrection: "Were not our hearts burning within us as He explained the Scriptures to us?" Luke 24, 32. Jesus, the One sent by the Father brings good news to his people.

3. In the Evening Assemblies of the second week the great themes of our faith are presented through catechesis and are celebrated with songs, witnessing and rituals. These are

celebrative gatherings for the whole parish family with young and old partaking in great liturgies which include the Friday Way of the Cross which processes through the streets of the village. Through these Assemblies the warmth and power of the Holy Spirit are experienced.

4. The celebration of the Sacraments: daily Eucharist each morning; Reconciliation during the second week; Matrimony during a Eucharistic celebration at which all couples celebrating a noteworthy anniversary that year publicly renew their vows; the Anointing of the sick during a morning mass, followed by the visitation of the sick with the Sacrament for those unable to attend the church service.

5. Youth Ministry is an important feature of the Mission especially during the evenings of the first week. Wherever possible visits by a youth team is done in the school. Our team visited a public school with a minority of Catholic students. Initially the school authorities would allow very few contacts except at the lunch break. That half hour was so successfully used by the team that the student population pressured the staff to have the team come to their classroom. In the space of a week all the classes (grade 1-12) were touched by that excellent ministry.

In Canada we have had to adapt the Italian model to our particular situation. For instance, we are not blessed with many priests and nuns, so our team may comprise three Oblates and the rest would be lay people. In reality we are finding very competent and dedicated baptized people to minister alongside us. They visit people and bless homes; they provide ministry to children and to youth; they lead the singing in the liturgies and assemblies; they provide moving testimonies and they challenge all with powerful exhortations; they lead Bible study groups and model for local people to do likewise.

So far these Parish Missions appear to be a most promising ministry, providing much needed renewal to parishes as well as to Oblate communities. They open the door to lay people to share our ministry thus enriching us and our people with their many gifts. Perhaps a stronger Church is developing through our returning to the early ministry of Eugene and his early companions.

Jacques JOHNSON

England Broadwater Farm: Oblate MISSION

The Oblates came to Broadwater Farm in September 1989 after a process of discernment within the Province initiated by the Provincial Congress of 1989. The first Oblate to minister here was Fr. Patrick Towe. Patrick was replaced in 1996 by Fr. Oliver Barry.

Broadwater Farm is a local authority housing estate in the Tottenham area of the London Borough of Haringey. The housing is mostly flats of which there are over one thousand units. The population is ethnically diverse and subject to periodic change. Presently the largest group within the population are of West African origin, coming mostly from Nigeria and Ghana. There is also a large number of Kurdish and Turkish people. The older resident groups are of Caribbean, Irish and British backgrounds. A recent survey indicated that the first language of more than 60% of the population is other than English. The same survey pointed to an unemployment rate in excess of 50%.

The Oblate residence is a one bed-room flat within the estate. It was allocated by the Local authority with the support of the local residents association. The ministry was established at the request of the local church following the breakdown of community relations due to riots and other traumatic events during the mid-1980's. Initially the focus of the ministry was on community development. Much valuable work was done including the foundation work for a new Community Health Centre. However community politics have reduced the possibilities for service at this level within the community.

The Oblate Ministry is undertaken within an ecumenical context. The ministers of most of

the local church communities who have an interest in the estate meet regularly to share their reflections, to support one another and to organise for a positive Christian presence on the estate. Those who live on the estate, which includes an Anglican married couple, a Catholic sister and a number of Pentecostal Pastors, work in close association with one another on a day to day basis. Part of the ministry is to work through the inevitable tensions which can arise in this context.

Two Catholic parishes share responsibility for the estate. A close relationship has been developed with these parishes. There is a sharing in the task of the development of the local faith community through the ministry of adult education and spiritual development. This service is provided from a base of insertion within the local community and is hopefully sensitive to the realities of the lives which people live.

A significant part of the ministry on Broadwater Farm is the ministry of presence. This is fulfilled basically by living and working in the context of the estate and valuing as ministry those contacts which occur on a day to day basis with neighbours. This sort of presence can form a basis on which people can build a relationship with church or community or to rebuild that relationship if it has been broken. This type of presence helps to develop an awareness of what is happening at a basic level within the community and to facilitate the local church to sustain its sensitivity to the life of the local community. It was the absence of this awareness which made the church so much a subject for criticism when community difficulties arose in the past.

As well as being a community of diverse races, cultures and languages, it is also diverse in regards to religion. Although the overall culture is secular the majority of people retain some form of religious identity. The challenge is to develop a positive awareness of one another and to allow what we share to be a binding force within the community. As a Catholic community we have a given relationship with other Christians and many other faith communities. This relationship has not always been positive. The work of reconciliation needs to happen within the context of communities like Broadwater Farm. Part of the Oblate ministry is to engage with others at this basic level and to encourage others in doing the same.

The ministry on Broadwater Farm involves the establishment of a Religious Missionary presence. The aim is to be a resource within the parish and locality for the building of Christian community. The Christian Community itself is the principle agent of evangelization. By sustaining the Oblate presence on Broadwater Farm it is hoped to facilitate the community in its development and to be a positive presence as it deals with such issues as community development, community relations and whatever the future might have in store.

Oliver BARRY

Kenya Mission in the Diocese of Meru - (November 6th 1997)

We are presently meeting as a district community for the second time since the four of us have arrived. I have decided to share with you some of what one of our members wrote to lead us in a prayerful reflection as we began our day of sharing and support. These are reflections of Joe Singarajah OMI which reflect well where we are at presently.

In Roman Mythology, Janus was the god of gates and doors. He was also the god of beginnings and endings. This strange deity had two faces; one looking back and one looking forward. For obvious reasons, our month of January is named after him. It is time to look back and reflect on our past ministry in Canada. It is also a time to look forward and anticipate our future ministry in this part of Africa. Our Scripture reading for today is taken from the first letter of St. Paul to Timothy. It was a time when he reflected on the beginning of his own ministry, and I am sure, he would not mind if we borrowed his thoughts to reflect on our future ministry in Kenya.

We will also borrow the two faces of Janus. First, the backward face. What did Paul see behind him? Anyone who looks back across the years of his ministry is going to see a few things

to regret. Paul was no exception. Every backward glance confronted him with the painful memory of his life, as a persecutor of the Church. He never did deny it and never could forget it. Regret was not his primary feeling. The more dominant thought in his mind was gratitude. He said, "I am grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord that he considered me trustworthy in appointing me to this ministry."

That sentence is a perfect fit, for the purpose of our meeting today. All we need to do is change it to be the first person plural. We are grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord, for He considered all of us, Harold, Ken, Bill and Joe, trustworthy in sending us here to do His work. So many years ago, God looked down on Saskatchewan, British Columbia, Jaffna and said, "There is a man I can count on. I will appoint him to the ministry." That was a good choice the passing of years has proven to some extent. Many hurts have been healed and many lives have been touched and enriched because God placed us in this ministry. Looking back across the years, our feelings can be summarized in one sentence. Thank you Lord, for your trust in all of us.

Now, I ask you to put on your forward face and take a brief look with me at the future. What is out there? In specific terms nobody knows, but in broad terms, we have a fairly good idea what the future holds: political instability, authoritarian church, visa, language, inculturation, and so on. In general, trouble is there.

The patriarch Job said, man, born of woman is short lived and full of trouble. In other words, life is brief at best. And most of it is fraught with hardship and heartache. If that sounds overly pessimistic, remember who said it; a man whose troubles were legendary. He lost his health, his fortune, his children and his wife. All in a very short time span. Most of us will not have to endure that kind of grief. But we will have trouble and those of us who are wise expect it and prepare for it.

On the more positive side, opportunity is out there spiritually. As the poet said, "The best is yet to be." The best book has not been written. The best song has not been sung. The best sermon in Kimeru has not yet been preached. The best spiritual discovery for the African soil has not yet been made and these possibilities are out there, waiting for someone to turn them into realities. This is a great time to be here in Africa. None of us can even imagine what the next few years will bring forth.

The most exciting thing about the future, however, is not "what" but "who". God is out there, regardless of how long we live or where we go. He will be there. The Psalmist said in Ps 139, "If I go up to the heavens, You are there. If I take the wings of the dawn, if I settle in the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, and your right hand hold me fast." The most important thing about the past is that God was there. The most important thing about the future is, that God will always be there.

Let us close our brief meditation, in the same way that Paul closed his: "To the king of ages, incorruptible, invisible, the only God, honour and glory forever and ever. Amen."

New foundations

The Oblate Mission in Colombia Starting Point and Options

by Pierre-Antoine PAULO, O. M. I.

The Oblate Mission of Colombia began officially on January 25, 1994, with four Oblates, two of whom returned to their country (Haiti) and two remained. They are now five members: three priests and two scholastics.

From the beginning this mission wanted to give itself a very clear orientation. Even before

going to Colombia and getting to work, they had met for three months in Haiti to consider the missionary work they were preparing to undertake. This option could be expressed in four main challenges, always current. They orient our options and direct our ministry.

1. Apostolic Community

The Archbishop of Cartagena put two parishes in our care. So from the start it was possible to divide the group in two; thus each parish would have had two missionaries. This however is something we did not want. We decided to remain together, to form a single team and a single community, and to serve the two parishes in common.

Community level

Each week we have a community meeting during which we make an evaluation of our community life, from fraternal correction to the use of money.

When we are all in the same place, we have Lauds, Vespers and the evening silent meditation in common. We keep the last Thursday of the month for a retreat in common with a more extensive evaluation of our community life.

Apostolic level

We have a weekly planning session of our apostolic work. Each of us has a specific task (for example, catechesis, youth ministry, prayer groups, parish councils) in the two parishes. No one has a particular geographic sector all his own. We rotate duties everywhere (at the centre and in the villages) by doing a specific and identical work at each place.

During the monthly retreat, we evaluate our apostolic commitments.

2. Simple Life Style

The budget for our ordinary expenses (current maintenance of the house and persons) is adjusted to local resources and remuneration for our services.

A large part of domestic tasks (clearing, laundry, cooking) are at our own costs. To reach our destinations, besides a bicycle and a motorbike, we use public transports. The furniture is simple. The house is open to the neighbours, especially the youth.

3. The Most Abandoned

We have started the first community in the village of Malagana because it was the most abandoned village from a pastoral point of view. On our arrival, there was no catechist in the whole parish. The parishioners were disorganised, without identity, without commitments. The villages were not the object of any planned pastoral attention. We refused several of the archbishop's proposals to give our preference to Malagana.

In the archdiocese we have given priority to Afrocolombian ministry (the country has about seven million blacks, 20% of the population). Persons and Afro communities are the ones receiving the least attention from social and political viewpoints. They are victims of prejudice and discrimination.

Our presence at Cartagena now (at El Poz6n) was decided after three years of life in common at Malagana. We have opted for this very abandoned sector with a strong concentration of displaced persons due to violence with all the social and religious problems they entail.

4. Inculturation

We are making the experience of acculturation which is at the same time a deprivation and an enrichment. We are becoming aware that the missionary is not an actor but more of a promoter of inculturation. The actor is the evangelized native. For this reason we work to form local pastoral agents; they are the real actors of inculturation. With them we are trying different

things in liturgy and youth groups. Multinationality favours acculturation. Under this aspect, our community appears fragile.

5. Perspectives

Ministry in teams that work together seems positive. It fosters community life. There is more concern for the other: planning with him, thinking of him, taking into account his preferences, abilities and his limits. There is no private turf: the field belongs to all. Team ministry lets the people we serve benefit from a broad variety of guides, witnesses and models. Even if some day we have to increase our residences (if our personnel increases), it will be necessary to find a way to maintain and promote this experience of ministry in well-knit teams, where missionaries who work in the same geographical area are united as brothers.

The situation of violence present in the country today has negative effects on our ministry. The pastoral agents, especially in the villages, are afraid to come together to meet. We must find another way to meet with them.

The witness of a simple life is well seen by the people. It stimulates their co-operation. It must be insisted on even more.

The Oblates in Korea

A Presence of Communion with the Local Reality and of Evangelization of the Poor

The Oblates arrived in Korea in 1990. Their mission there did not begin under the best of circumstances. During a visit to the auxiliary bishop of Seoul at the time, they were told that there was no need in Korea for priests from other countries. The Church of Korea, which had begun 200 years ago, was now well established (with 1500 priests, 1600 seminarians, 6 Major Seminaries, 5800 religious sisters) and could count on the help of an active and committed laity! It was suggested that perhaps it would be better to return to Italy where there surely was a greater need for young priests. (At that time there were over 50,000 priests in Italy exercising their ministry in a Church with an experience of over one thousand years!)

In a conversation with the Superior of the Maryknollers, an Institute that had been present in Korea for over 65 years, it became clear that there was no room in the Korean Church for priests from foreign countries because of a growing national pride and a steady growth in local vocations. The Maryknoll Superior affirmed, in concluding, that the mission in Korea was nearing its end and that there was an ongoing debate in their Congregation about whether they should remain in Korea or look for other places to exercise their apostolate. One thing was sure: their General Administration had stopped sending young missionaries a long time ago and the older missionaries were gradually returning to the United States.

The Columbans also expressed doubts concerning the missionary future of Korea. "The Church of Korea has less and less need for parish priests. We ourselves are gradually leaving all our parishes in the hands of local priests and there is less need for material help. The per capita income is over 6000 American dollars per year and the national rate of growth is 10% annually. There is no future for the 'mission' in Korea.

We felt dismayed and lost and were facing a great impasse. We had been sent to found a mission in Korea, but the fact of the matter was that we were being "refused" by the local Church because our presence was not necessary and by the civil society because it no longer needed the economic help of a foreign country. We deeply felt that Korea had no need for us. We realised that the classical vision of mission as "*implantatio Ecclesiae*" and as "aid for development" was no longer adequate to understand the reality in which we found ourselves.

And so we began a series of meetings, studies, debates, reflections... and prayers in order to understand from the inside our own situation in that particular ecclesial and cultural

context. We became more convinced that the Church is more than a hierarchical and sacramental structure. It is above all, in the very words of Vatican II: "evangelisation and communion of charisms". We also gained a much deeper understanding of Saint Paul's theology when he affirms that the Church is founded on at least 5 charisms: "apostles, pastors, teachers, evangelists, prophets" (Ephesians 4, 11; Romans 12,4-11; 1 Corinthians 12, 4-11 and 28).

The apostles, we felt, were the Bishops, the pastors, the local clergy, and the teachers, the professors at the catholic universities. We realised that while the first three charisms were well represented in Korea, the other two, that is the evangelists and the prophets (= the religious), were practically missing. (There were slightly over one hundred men religious, including priests and brothers.) And so, in an ongoing dialogue with the local Church and by being attentive to the people and the local culture, we tried to identify the meaning of our presence and of our role in Korea as missionaries (= evangelists) and religious (= prophets).

In the light of our charism, we privileged four working hypotheses: commitment to the poor, vocation ministry, partnership with the local Church, and spiritual animation of the laity. And thus we began engaging in pastoral activities with workers from foreign countries and with the sick in a large hospital in the city; we also set up a food-kitchen for the poor and committed ourselves to the ministry of vocations and of youth work.

The pastoral method we adopted in our activities has its own originality: we want to *help the local Church and the structures of society to become more aware of the new needs* that are slowly emerging in their midst. (The pastoral activity in favour of workers from foreign countries, which an Oblate launched, did not exist in the diocese of Suwon; the soup kitchen in Song Nam, also initiated by an Oblate, was the first of its kind in the city). We also sought to *involve local people in these projects*. (The Office for foreign workers has become part of the ordinary pastoral activities of the diocese and is sponsored by the diocese itself. The soup kitchen is housed by the City and also financed by City funds at the rate of 90%.) We are also trying to *sensitise people to the needs of the weaker and poorer layers of the population* by animating lay people and involving them in these projects.

Beginning with the vision of a Church as a "communion of charisms and evangelisation" and with the light flowing from our charism of evangelising the poor, we found ourselves facing immense fields of evangelisation and not having enough personnel to respond to all the requests that were made. Clearly, our journey has not been exempt from mistakes, frustrations, mistaken evaluations, lack of understanding, opposition, and we have received very little encouragement... but there have been a few meaningful moments of joy.

If we continue to actualise this theological and missionary vision of the Church we may conclude that in Korea there is a great future for the mission as we have come to understand it.

MISSION IN UKRAINE

A Word About the Mission In Ukraine - Andrzej MADEJ, OMI

A short time ago the Church in Ukraine was a wounded Church; today her mission is that of the Good Samaritan towards the Ukrainian people.

The wounds of the ex-Soviet peoples are, in fact, deep, much deeper than we thought at the beginning. They have been freed from totalitarianism, but nevertheless they are not free people. They have been destroyed morally and spiritually; even the family itself has been destroyed. They need to find a meaning for life and to find a place in a world with human values. In the hearts of

the people, fear still has the upper hand. They are frightened; our problem is how to awaken their trust again.

The situation of the Church in the new States which have arisen on the ruins of the Soviet empire may be described most eloquently by means of two texts.

1. The text in the Gospel in which Christ describes the Good Samaritan. Is not the wounded man on the roadside the Church of Christ? Today, however, the Church which has returned here is rather in the role of the Good Samaritan in the presence of societies, of nations which have been deeply wounded.

2. The text in the Preface of the Oblate Constitutions, written by St. Eugene de Mazenod himself. The nations have completely forgotten God, or at least they have banished him beyond their frontiers. In that way the battle against God has been transformed into a battle against mankind. Dechristianisation is also dehumanisation. Men and women who are deprived of the Gospel have been deprived of what they need most to preserve their dignity.

We see, then, nations who have been deprived of their liberty by communism for decades and who today are rejoicing in their freedom. This is a paradox in history! But what do we see now? Incredibly there is a nostalgia for communism. The Biblical paradigm of the Hebrew people longing for the flesh-pots of Egypt has not lost one iota in today's situation.

The real drama is this: the people no longer have any idea of the meaning of responsibility or of risk. They have learned all too well how to be slaves. Martin Buber gives an accurate description when he writes: the slavery of the Hebrews was not really in the fact that they were forced to serve as slaves, but in that they had lost all recollection of what it meant to be free people. They had *learned* to live in slavery, they had become *accustomed* to it. They had lost the ability to imagine what it was to live as *free* people.

In the same way, then, the communist regime killed liberty; it ruined the human dignity of these people. The people entrusted to us have no idea how to behave, how to live their freedom!

For us, proclaiming the Good News means healing the inner wounds of people. The Christ whom the Oblates proclaim in Kiev is Christ the doctor: he who heals and teaches us true freedom.

Going Down to Luanda, Angola

A little contemplation of a Missionary Oblate

It is four days today since my arrival in the land of which I dreamt so much.
I feel that I arrived in front of an open tabernacle, full of wounds and pain.
A lot of people. Poor and suffering.
I see the mothers with their children on their backs...
I see children walking in the streets, without clothes, without hope...
I see men without hope...
I see old people with so much suffering...
I see houses and faces covered with thick dust...
I see rubbish everywhere - every street has its mound...
The people have a different smell - a special perfume
I believe it is the perfume that will bring me to heaven.
I see a people that despairs from the pain that has afflicted the country for so long... I see a lot, many things, a lot of pain, a lot of love! In these first four days of close contact I see a happy people, a people that loves the missionary A people that knows how to celebrate - the feast of the poor! A people that communicates, that dances, praises, prays - and prays a lot! The masses at 6.30 in the morning have a large attendance. The music of the people delights me! Beautiful! Very contemplative! It touches the depths of the soul! It is born of a poor and suffering heart.

As a missionary community we try to be hospitable,
Warm and respectful. We try to live in the "African Spirit".
With the war, everything was destroyed in the country.
We live in two huts.
Our showers are "with a bucket", and dirty water -
With earth, water blessed by the "African God" so that we are
Washed, "baptized" in the culture of this people so dear to God!
The heat is extreme - I feel that we deserve so much heat,
because the people suffers so much - so much more than us!
Every day there are big shoot-outs nearby.
UNITA is organizing its forces. A country rich in diamonds and petrol
reduced to such misery!!!
Here the people are very good! A welcoming people! An affectionate people! I feel challenged,
happy, and in the process of an "African incarnation". Thanks for your prayers. We remain always
united in contemplation and in the prayer of the people that is writing its history from the starting
point of the poor! Fondest regards.

*Wilmar Varjão Gama, OMI cio Dom Damiao Franidin CEAST,
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Mission through Mass-Media - Formation in Mass-media In Schools and Colleges: Bolivia

Gregorio IRIARTE, o.m.i.

Point of reference

The mass-media, and especially television, have replaced school and church in their function of education and formation. Television is having an ever more preoccupying influence on children and youth, not only in terms of acquiring knowledge, but principally in the area of behaviour.

The school system must face this important challenge. At the present time it is impossible to carry on education while ignoring television.

It is absolutely essential to develop in the pupils a capacity for critical and creative reflection on the impact of television language; this vital education process must not be done in a slapdash manner.

Objectives of the project

Our Pilot-Project "*education and means of communication*" strives to form the critical consciousness of the pupils, both in the cognitive domain and especially in the emotional-affective area and that of behaviour. The aim is that the children and adolescents pass from being *passive receptors* who are a-critical, to being *perceptors with a capacity of discernment*.

We believe that the Means of Communication, especially TV, can become an excellent auxiliary of education and formation, as long as the children and young people are formed for an *active, critical, and creative* reception of its messages.

Methods

To arrive at a critical and creative use of the means of communication in the classroom, we propose:

Give value to the means of communication as a very important source of knowledge and information for the pupils.

Use methods and analysis techniques.

Make the class into a real workshop, drawing on their own experiences.

Use of periodicals in the class.

Direct use of video in the class to analyse information programs, cartoons, comic strips, soap operas, commercials...

Develop wall magazines, bulletins, radio programs, social drama, commercial spots, interviews...

Organise forum-debates, competitions, expositions...

Preparation of teachers

The experience of this project is going on both in public colleges and in private schools and colleges. The experience is open to any education establishment, with the only condition that the Director or Directress accept it.

One or more teachers must attend the preparation workshops. These courses generally last three full days. There is a lot of enthusiasm and positive response on the part of the teachers. All consider this preparation urgent and necessary.

In various schools and colleges this material, which we call "*Formation of critical consciousness towards the media*", is integrated into the curriculum, with its own fixed hours. In the majority of education establishments it is included as an *interdisciplinary and progressive subject*. That is more in accordance with our proposal.

Textbooks and other aids

To help the teachers face this new challenge, we have prepared three basic publications:

The book *Conciencia crítica y medios de comunicación* (Critical consciousness and means of communication). This book serves as a reference manual, providing many practical exercises.

Four pamphlets for the four years of secondary school. These pamphlets serve as the "pupil's book".

A booklet entitled *Educación y medios de comunicación* (Education and the Media) for primary schools, i.e. for pupils from 7 to 14 years of age.

Once a month there is an open meeting with all the teachers of this course in order to deepen their knowledge, show new techniques, share experiences, and evaluate results.

Evaluation

The Pilot-Project began to function in the year 1995 in 14 education centres, with 74 courses and 3.800 pupils. It was the first experience. At the end of that year we had an evaluation with pupils, teachers, directors and parents. The feedback was very positive. In the 1996 course the experience was further broadened, and at the time of writing (first week of February 1997), we are leading various workshops for principals who wish to take part in the Project. While at the beginning, the initiative was limited to the town of Cochabamba, it is now being extended to various colleges and schools of La Paz, Potosí, Santa Cruz, Oruro, and Sucre.

The Project has been accepted by the Ministry of Education of Bolivia as a "Pilot experience", and has been partially financed by the Italian Bishops Conference.

February 1997

Novalis – Ottawa – Canada

Gilles COMEAU, o.m.i.

How, in the context of the new ways of evangelization, are we to present a work which has celebrated its sixtieth year of existence? The work in question is Novalis, a publisher attached to the University of Saint-Paul in Ottawa. The style it has adopted is to renew the presentation of the Gospel message, not only year by year but month by month.

We shall deal here especially with the little Missal which is published weekly (Sunday Mass) and monthly (daily Mass). This little Missal is called *Prions en Église* in French and the English equivalent is called *Living With Christ*. Recently a Spanish edition is being published with the title *En el Nombre del Padre*. Hundreds of thousands of copies of this little prayer book are printed each month.

The little booklet contains not only liturgical texts: it also provides a presentation of the bible message in the Sunday Mass, introductions to the readings and suggestions for the penitential rite and the Prayers of the Faithful. The texts are prepared by a team whose members have a variety of qualifications: the editors represent the pastoral field, catechetics, social workers, theology, family apostolate, etc. They work as a team and they try to provide a link between the prayer of the Church and contemporary events or current trends. The editors also prepare for each Sunday an outline homily which is in keeping with the contents of the Missal. These are published in a bi-monthly booklet: *Rassembleur* in French and *Homiletic Service* in English.

The little booklet is small enough to fit in a pocket or handbag and is used by a considerable number of priests, both men and women religious and lay people as their Bible reading for the day, a source of meditation. It can be read in the bus or the subway. A section of the booklet is devoted to the listing or presentation of documents which comment on present day conditions or which are of Christian interest: social teaching of the Bishops, world day for Young People, etc.

Although the publication of the little Missal is the principal work of Novalis it is not the only one. Since its beginning, the publishing house has been actively involved in marriage preparation; sixty years ago it published its first "*Projet Mariage*" (Planning to get married) which became very popular. This course has been revised periodically and published under other titles.

It would take up too much space to list all the publications that have been done by Novalis. It will be enough to state that the editors are open to all the questions on which the Christian would wish to be enlightened: ecology, social justice, sexuality, economy, etc.

In all these publications, whatever subject they may deal with, the concern of Novalis is to express the message in simple language which is accessible to everybody and at a reasonable price.

At sixty-two years of age, Novalis is a respectable lady. She has not lost her keen insight and she knows how to satisfy the thirst for the Gospel in the world of today.

Note: The publishing house Novalis has no connection with the German poet Novalis. The name takes its inspiration from a Latin word meaning "new growths".

Mission and Interreligious Dialogue - The Oblate Ashram

Aanmodaya Ashram – Enathur, Kancheepuram, India

Swami Joseph A. SAMARAKONE, o.m.i.

Introduction: What is an Ashram?

Hearkening (*Sruti*) to the Divine Voice (*Adi Shabda*) within, people at all times and in all places have given themselves totally to the ultimate goal of Union with God. It is this relentless pursuit of the Divine, aided, no doubt, by God's Grace, that has given birth to 'Ashram' within our Indian/Hindu Spiritual Tradition.

There is freedom, spontaneity, and flexibility in the lifestyle of the Ashram. Ashrams are characterized by their hospitality and total openness to all without any discrimination of caste or colour, creed or code, race, sex or religion.

The ideal of the Ashram that has evolved within our Indian/Hindu Tradition has been a life of *Sannyasa*: a life of total detachment and renunciation, a life characterized by deep *interiority* and *simplicity*, a life which is a sign of the transcendence of all created beings and the opening of the heart to the Divine Transcendence. *Sannyasa* is thus the ideal of Religious Life in our Land (and the *Sannyasin* gives an existential exegesis of the call to Discipleship of our Master Jesus).

Ashrams have thus been the cradles where the life of *Sannyasa* flourishes. Concerted efforts at *inculturation* in our Land over the past fifty years or so have given rise to many a Christian Ashram dotting the face of India today. Christian Ashrams have, therefore, become today the natural setting for the development of Indian Christian Spirituality and Contextual Theology.

Oblate Ashram: Aanmodaya Ashram

1. A Historical Overview

The thrust given to Inculturation in our Formation programme sowed the 'seeds of the Ashram Ideal' in many members of our Delegation, to varying degrees of course, with late Swami Amalraj Jesudass, manifesting a great predilection for the Ashram way of life.

At the Delegation Meeting of February 20/21, 1989, chaired by the then Provincial Fr. Anselm Silva, it was unanimously decided that our Oblate Indian Delegation should have an Ashram – something quite compatible with the Oblate way of life, which would be a viable form of Evangelisation: *Evangelisation of Presence*.

The Ashram christened '*Aanmodaya*' (Awakening to the Divine Self within) was blessed open on February 17, 1992, with the late Swami Amalraj Jesudass as the Guru of the Ashram. In July 1993 Swami Joseph Samarakone joined the Ashram Community. Swami Amalraj Jesudass 'crossed to the Other Shore' on March, 9, 1995. At the end of April 1997, Fr. Francis Xavier joined the Ashram Community. A group of DMI Sisters help in the administration of the Ashram; they too form the core-group of the Ashram.

2. The Goal of the Ashram

The goal of our Ashram is to provide a '*sacred space*' – a congenial atmosphere of silence and solitude where people of all walks of life could come in and spend time in quiet silence or Meditation and /or engage in Dialogue of Life or just *be*: 'rest awhile' and resume their life's journey (cf. Mark 6:30-32).

Our Oblate Ashram is thus an *open space* where a group of Oblates, along with the Ashramites – both men and women, forming the core-group, live a life marked by deep Interiority and Simplicity; a life which reflects the Ashram lifestyle of our country adapted by the Christian Ashrams of our Land; a life which is deeply rooted in the gospel and embedded in the Spiritual Heritage of India: Inculturation.

Following the pedagogy of our Master Jesus, from our own experience of the Divine (*Ishwar Anubhava*) we call others: we provide spiritual animation to people, especially to Religious and Priests, Scholastics and Major Seminarians who come here quite regularly, to

groups of lay people coming from the parishes, as well as people from abroad. These come mainly to experience life in the Ashram and /or to spend some time in spiritual retreat. This is our principal Ministry.

3. Life in our Oblate Ashram

Life in our Oblate Ashram revolves around the '*Tri-Samdhya*' (*Samdhya* means *Encounter of God and man*) – the three important hours of prayer in the morning, midday, and in the evening. These hours of prayer consist mainly of '*Dhyana*' (Meditation) and the celebration of the Word. The day in our Ashram begins before sunrise with '*Yogasanas*' (Body Postures) and '*Pranayama*' (regulation of breath) in preparation for *Dhyana*, and ends at night with '*Nama Japa*' – chanting of the name of God/Jesus.

Dhyana (= Meditation)

Realizing that the words in praying, preaching, or teaching will neither be able to transform us nor bind us to God (*Yoga/Religio*), nor be able to carry the Word of God to the hearts of the people unless they are constantly nourished by the hidden streams of contemplative silence and mystical experience (cf. Jn 7: 37-39), our Ashram lays special emphasis on meditation – *Dhyana* as evolved and perfected within the spiritual tradition of our Land. *Dhyana* is at the heart of Indian Spirituality.

The Latin word '*meditare*' meaning 'to be taken to the centre' very aptly describes what meditation is: *Dhyana* is the ecstasy of the Divine in the core of our being. Meditation thus helps one to be awakened to the Divine Self in the 'cave of the heart'. *Dhyana* leads one to a '*Darshan of the Divine*' (to see the Reality with the 'Third Eye').

Incidentally quite a number of people, both Christians and others, people from India as well as from other lands come to our Ashram to be initiated into *Dhyana*. A book on '*India*' written by Roger Hansden and published last year in the USA, makes a special mention of our Ashram as a good place for initiation into *Dhyana*.

Celebration of the Word

Taking inspiration from our Constitutions and Rules, "the Word of God nourishes our spiritual life and apostolate" (C 33), we spend some time during each *Samdhya* for the celebration of the Word. The evening *Dhyana* is followed by the celebration of the Eucharist, where again the Liturgy of the Word receives very special attention.

For the Celebration of the Word we draw not only from the Biblical tradition which naturally holds the pride of place, but also from the rich spiritual traditions – the Sacred Scriptures of other Religions, especially of our Land. Experience has shown that when we allow these two 'Spiritual Streams' to meet and merge, the enriched Word drawn from the '*Sangamam*' (point of confluence) helps us to understand the Word of the Bible, especially the Gospels, in fresh, and new, and deeper ways, while enabling us 'to drink deep from our own wells nourished by the Spirit'.

Interreligious Dialogue

Our total openness to all permits us to be totally open to the Religious Traditions and Spiritual Heritage of other Religions and Ideologies too, recognizing in them the *salvific* content. This permits us to enter into Inter-religious Dialogue as equal partners.

Hospitality

Hospitality is an important characteristic of an Ashram and an essential ingredient of our *Evangelization of presence*. The hospitality of our mind and heart, and our whole person, allows us to be open to all without any distinction or discrimination. This openness pervades all the activities of our Ashram including the sharing of meal. All the ashramites and '*Sadhakas*' (God-seekers), and all who come to the Ashram, along with the members of the domestic staff, sit on

the floor and partake of the simple vegetarian meal of the Ashram.
Prophetic Witness

Our simplicity of life, our spirit of Contentment (*Santhosa*) and Joyfulness (*Ananda*) (cf. C 39) helps us to root out Desire (*Kama*) in all its forms

the evil of acquisitive instinct from our hearts: '*Aparigraha*' (Non- Possession). This enables us to be in solidarity with the poor and silently bear prophetic witness against all forms of injustice and consumerism. "*We announce the liberating presence of Jesus Christ and the New World born in His Resurrection*" (C 9).

Conclusion

In our *Evangelization of presence*, Jesus is very central to our life. "We strive to reproduce in ourselves the pattern of his life" (C 2). Thus our Ashram Spirituality is the contemplative participation in the unique '*Abba Experience*' (*Atmabodha*) of Jesus: "The Father and I are *One*" (Jn 10:30).

This Inner Experience of the Divine (*Atmabodha*) begins to radiate its lustre from the centre of one's heart – our sages called this the '*Atmabodh Prakasam in the Hirdguhayam*' – to everything in oneself, transforming oneself into the Divine Light, 'with no part of it in darkness' (cf. Lk 11:35-36), and through oneself radiate God's Light and Life, Love and Peace (*Shanti/Shalom*), to all, and to the whole Cosmos: "*Our life in all its dimension is a prayer that in us and through us God's Kingdom Come*" (C 32).

Aanmodaya Ashram, De Mazenod Nagar, Enathur, Vedal P.O., Kancheepuram-631 552, Tamil Nadu, India.

July 22, 1997, Feast of St. Mary Magdalene.

Mindanao\Sulu Frontier Missions

I. Kulaman Valley Tribal-Filipino Mission:

Kulaman is a big river valley situated in the lush, once virgin forests of the Daguma mountain range that borders the Empire Cotabato Provinces of Maguindanao, Sultan Kudarat and South Cotabato. It lies at 700-1,300 meters above sea level and is around 170 km. south-west of Cotabato City. Created a new Municipality in 1989, it has a land area of 52 sq. km. with a population of ca. 50,000 – 30% of which are the native Dulangan Manobo. The rest of the population are lowland settlers that came in droves to 'possess' land beginning in the 60's.

The Manobo was once a proud warrior-tribe that roamed the mountain chain of southwestern Mindanao. They were a tough, strong-willed highland group that traded and also made war with the coastal tribal groupings that converted to Islam in the 14th c. when Arab missionaries came to proselytize. The Manobo remained in the interior fortress of their forests and continued to be 'natives' until the coming of the big logging companies that ultimately paved the way for the setting-in of the lowland settlers.

Studies made by archaeologists in the late 1960's on secondary burial urns that are found in the area suggest a civilization dating back from the 5th

c. AD However, no formal scientific inquiry was made regarding these prized burial jars from antiquity and its connection to the present day Manobo. Because there really is no laudable Government Program for them, the Manobo is left to weather alone to die against a supposedly forwardlooking 'new' Philippines.

When Kulaman became a Parish in 1984, our involvement with this people was zero. We were ministering to the Christian settlers who were mostly Catholic. And we knew why we were

Oblates in this mission territory. The Manobo showed his face to us. They were then living in the outer fringes of 'lowlander' society who have made it out in the fertile valley. They became second-rate citizens, hired-hands of the settlers with almost no place to go. Their once limitless forest habitat was now off-limits because of the guns of the logging companies. Since they couldn't read nor write the settlers could always bargain their way into their lands. Literally, they were a people on the brink of extinction.

Our approach began with learning their 'language'— meaning staying and living with them. This was the more difficult part since they always were wary and suspicious of settlers. And we were one of those. But truth and sincerity has no language barriers. We were accepted in and our trail together commenced. We have come up with a program of action that was fundamentally local and village-based. Since they lived as clans in more than 70 villages around these mountains, the approach would have to be village-oriented. The target was to go into each individual village. Very tall order!

This also meant a decisive 'conscientization' aspect in our ministry to the Catholic settlers. A re-orientation of the Manobo question. The settlers were used to looking down at him. Not many of them have been exempted from dealing underhandedly with the Manobo – albeit innocently and without malice maybe. The Catholic community and the Manobo had to meet somewhere. It is not the exclusive work of the Oblate to render justice and acceptance to people who have a different culture. This was what was driven in our ministry to the settlers.

It is hard to evaluate and be objective and look at what is happening after these years with them especially if you are from the 'inside' yourself. Yet, the fact remains that now, we dare to hope for a future. We have learned the ways of the settlers in tilling our land. We have organized ourselves against further encroachment of our ancestral domain. We have learned the basics of reading and writing to get us along the merchants during our produce times. Our kids are off to school at the Notre Dame of Kulaman. Some of us have gone through a 'catechumenate' program and are now baptized. But also there have been many setbacks. Some of us remain prey to the dreaming that we once used to do when the settlers weren't here before. We have to find our way in, painful as it already is, in this contemporary world of ours. And still remain Manobo by heart.

II. Sulu/Tawi-Tawi Mission:

Sulu and Tawi-Tawi are the two Muslim Provinces in the Southernmost tip of the Philippines comprising some four-hundred islands. It has a total population of 500,000 of which 96% are Muslims, 3% Christians and 1% of other religious persuasion and belief. The Muslim population is composed of three ethnic groups – the Tausugs, in the Sulu province, the Samals in Tawi-Tawi and the Badjaos or 'sea nomads' who ply the Sulu seas in their home-boats or live in their houses on stilts in the many shorefront waters of the islands. The Christians are mostly from the Visayas region of the country who have come to Sulu as teachers, medical practitioners and as government employees.

The mission in Sulu has always been a ministry of 'presence'. A silent yet decisive presence seen in our string of Notre Dame schools, our Cooperatives among the masses, our housing programs and our Medical clinics. We are helped in this work by other religious communities like the Marist Brothers, the Dominican Sisters, the FMM Sisters, the Associates of Notre Dame (lay institute), the Oblates of Notre Dame Sisters, the Medical Mission Sisters and the Martinian Brothers. We have also enlisted the help and collaboration of our lay leaders and our parishioners.

Travel has always been difficult to the island stations and this adds to the isolation of the missions. We have always tried to send at least two men to each mission and this is being implemented as much as possible. We can, at least, communicate with each other now by radio. Truly, this is a ministry of a different kind. One that compels us to live out our Christian calling in a non-Christian milieu and asks us to connect with lucidity to the roots of Prayer.

With the advent of the opening of the Southern Philippines 'free port zone', a recent development project of the Ramos government, technology and business have come in volumes. This meant an influx also of more Merchants – mostly Catholics from the Visayan region. This is an area that we are looking at present. We have to respond to this new 'market-oriented' phenomenon vis-à-vis our traditional ministry to the Samals, the Badjaos, the Tausugs, etc. Indonesia and Malaysia, our Muslim neighbors to the South, are opening doors for our people here to do business with. The whole Asian boom is being felt especially in these places of free-ports. It seems to be a gateway to a millennium of uncertainty – at least, to a people who have always been constant in their traditions and customs. It is also asking us what to do next. Where are we headed in Jolo?

It seems that we have been given an answer: the martyrdom of Bishop Ben and the death of Bishop Tony. The whole Province is grieving and is still reeling in disbelief over these events. It also seems that this is too much for us to take. And yet, we will believe, we will try to believe, rather, we believe that ministry is born from the seed of martyrs' blood.

And so we will continue with our mission in Sulu/Tawi-Tawi!

The Oblate Province of the Philippines
(Details of this program cf. Fr. Provincial)

New Foundations of Missionary Oblates

Established Since the General Chapter of 1986

Ryszard SZMYDKI

Appeals from bishops sent to the Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate during the past decade to establish a mission in their dioceses, have been very numerous. Since the General Chapter of 1986 missions have been founded in thirteen new countries. This fact is of importance especially if one considers that the Congregation continues to diminish world-wide, and that some Oblate units experience difficulty in maintaining their present commitments owing to a lack of personnel. Before introducing new foundations, it would be well to recall the stages and criteria which are used in the discernment of the acceptance of a new mission.

A. The process of discernment of a foundation in a new country

Generally the initiative for the foundation comes from the diocesan bishops who apply directly to the General Administration. Indeed it returns to the Superior General in Council to accept the new foundations. The request is at first examined by the Mission Committee, one of the internal committees of the General Council, who presents its recommendations to the General Council. If their first impression is favourable, the major superiors of the Oblate Region from where the request comes are consulted. If they are in favour, an Oblate unit is sought which could take the responsibility of this new foundation. After an on the spot visit, and after fixing the details of the foundation, the Superior General in Council officially accepts the new mission at the request of the Oblate unit which takes the responsibility of it.

The initiative to found a mission can also come either from an Oblate province or from the Superior General and his Council. In any case, the process of discernment is customarily done at three levels: The General Council, the Oblate Region, and the Province concerned.

B. Criteria of discernment

Faithfulness to our missionary charism is the principal reason which brings about accepting new Missions. In the choice of new foundations one resorts to several measures. Most often one responds to the urgent needs of the Church: the existence of groups that the Church hardly reaches, lack of pastors, the call to first evangelization. We assure ourselves at the same time that the mission be carried out in and by the apostolic community and that its goal be really evangelization of the poor with many faces. We are also sensitive to the works and places which have a particular strategic value for the Church of our time and for the Congregation.

C. The thirteen new Missions

1. Guatemala – 1988

While wishing to found a mission in Central America, the Mexican Province was ready in 1988 to open a mission in Honduras. At the last moment, the episcopal conference of that country reconsidered its invitation and the Provincial Administration turned towards Guatemala. The bishop of the diocese of El Quiché entrusted four parishes to the Oblates in a vast area of the country, with some 70 villages. The population of the area, 90% indigenous, was very afflicted at the time of the military regime. The General Council accepted this mission in June 1988.

2. South Korea – 1989

The initiative was taken here by the Superior General and the question of a foundation in Korea was discussed several times during the Plenary Sessions of the General Council. The reasons put forward in favour of a foundation were: the strategic position of South Korea for mission work in Asia, the possibilities of evangelising the poor, the sharing of our charism with the local Church, the promotion of missionary vocations in Korea then the taking part in dialogue with

the prevailing and other Asiatic cultures.

Following contacts with several South Korean bishops, the diocese of Suwon agreed to welcome an Oblate community. The decision for an Oblate foundation in South Korea was passed in General Council in June 1989. The Mission was joined to the Province of Japan and entrusted to the Italian Oblates who arrived in May 1990. The Mission has subsequently been reinforced by the Oblates of Sri Lanka.

3. Nigeria – 1989

The first Nigerians began knocking at the door of the Oblates at Cameroon at the very beginning of the 1980's. After the 1986 Chapter the idea of opening a mission in Nigeria arose. The aim of this would be a missionary activity in the line of the Oblate charism and the reception of local vocations. This plan was studied several times by the General Council and by the Provincial Administration of Cameroon-Chad. After contacts with five dioceses and an on the spot visit, the diocese of Orlu was accepted for the first establishment. The new Mission was accepted in February 1989 and entrusted to the Province of Cameroon-Chad.

The international foundation team of five Oblates arrived in Nigeria at the beginning of 1990. Some months later, because of difficulties relative to staying visas, the non-Nigerian Oblates had to leave the country. The team was restructured two years later, to be divided into two communities, one in the diocese of Orlu and the other in the diocese of Jos.

4. Venezuela – 1990

At the time of the Provincial Congress in 1987, the Province of Spain expressed the desire to found a mission abroad. It then made clear its preferences: a poor mission in Latin-America among the indigenous people, and in a country where there were not yet any Oblates. The General Administration presented the requests of the bishops to the Province: those of Barrancabermeja in Colombia, and Machiques in Venezuela. After a consultation of the Latin-American Region and a visit to two bishops, the Apostolic Vicariate of Machiques in Venezuela was chosen for the new foundation. It is a vast region where some indigenous tribes live and numerous Colombian immigrants who were suggested to the Oblates. The mission was accepted by the General Council in September 1990. In December of the same year the three Spanish missionaries arrived in Venezuela and they undertook the work of the new evangelization.

5. Botswana – 1991

The Oblates began their apostolic work in Botswana in 1928 as the first permanent missionaries in this country. In 1952 they were replaced by the Irish Passionist Fathers. In 1989 the Bishop of Gaborone asked the Oblates to come to the aid of "their child", – his young diocese spread out where there was still a vast territory for first evangelization. The Superior General in Council, having studied the request during two Plenary Sessions, invited the Province of Lesotho to take charge of this new foundation in Botswana. The principal argument put forward was to give a more missionary dimension to the Province, rich in numerous vocations, and follow the missionary work begun by the Oblates in Botswana. The mission was approved in March 1991. A team of five Oblates were established in January 1992.

6. Czech Republic – 1991

Following the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the Oblates of Austria dreamt of a return to Czechoslovakia where the origins of their Province were situated. Fr. Cizkovsky, a Czech Oblate, who entered the Congregation in South Africa gave his agreement to return to their native country becoming the "pillar" of the plan. In 1990-1991 contacts were made with the dioceses of Budejovice and Olomouc. The offer of the Archbishop of Olomouc to take charge of a parish at Kromeriz in Moravia was welcomed by the Austrian Province as a place for the new foundation. The Mission was officially accepted in March 1991. It began by an international community: an Austrian scholastic and a young Polish priest joined Fr. Cizkovsky in Kromeriz.

7. Angola – 1992

While civil war was taking place in Angola, the population of the border region with

Namibia underwent severe hardships. The Christian communities were victims of breaking up and were deprived of pastors. With the improvement of the political situation in the country, the Bishop of the diocese of Ondjiva who had contacts with the Missionary Oblates in Namibia, requested from the Congregation in 1990 the missionary personnel for his local Church where there were only three priests for 180 000 Catholics. In January 1992, after consultation with the Major Superiors of the English speaking Sub-Region of Africa, the Superior General accepted the new foundation. It was entrusted to the responsibility of the Province of Namibia with the personnel coming from the Province of Zaire.

The beginning of the Mission underwent some difficulties and consequently another solution was sought. In October 1996, the Superior General in Council decided in conjunction with the Province of Namibia, to entrust the Mission in Angola to the Province of Zaire. Owing to problems with visas and entrances to Angola, besides our commitment in the diocese of Ondjiva, the Oblates accepted to take charge of a parish in Luanda, the capital. The idea was to have a pied-à-terre there and to facilitate contacts with the missionaries in the South of the country. The first team of Zairian Oblates arrived at Luanda in February 1997.

8. Ukraine – 1992

From 1989, first two and later three Polish Oblates helped the local clergy in Central Ukraine in the pastoral work with Latin Rite Catholic communities. The catholic dioceses in the Ukraine were established in 1991. In the diocese of Kameneć Podolski the Missionary Oblates were asked to take charge of the parish community at Gniewan, in the diocese of Zytomir a parish at Kiev and one at Chernihov. The objective of an Oblate presence was defined thus: the sacramental pastoral, evangelization under the form of basic catechetics, preaching, the pastoral for vocations, the reconstruction of places of worship and the organization of medical aid.

In May 1992, the Superior General in Council officially established the new Mission in the Ukraine under the responsibility of the Polish Province. The development of this Mission and the good number of local vocations enabled it to establish on September 14, 1997 the Delegation of the Ukraine, subject to the Province of Poland.

9. Colombia – 1993

The initiative was taken by the provincial Administration of Haiti. On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of its foundation, the Province wished to set a missionary gesture: the foundation of a mission ad extra. The responsibility for an outside mission would give a new missionary spirit to that Province owing to a good number of vocations. Encouragement also came from the Oblate Latin-American Region.

Contacts of the Provincial of Haiti with the Apostolic Nuncio in Colombia and his visits to the Archdiocese of Cartagena in 1992 clarified the foundation plan of a Mission in the territory of the Archdiocese, peopled with Blacks and half-castes most of whom are very spiritually abandoned. The purposes of this was to have an apostolate which corresponds to the indications of the Synod of Santo Domingo as well as to the Oblate charism. In June 1993, the Superior General in Council accepted the new Mission of the Province of Haiti in Colombia. On January 25, 1994 this Mission was inaugurated at Malagana.

10. Kenya – 1995

The Bishop of Meru has several times expressed his desire to have an Oblate community in his diocese to establish the charism of our saintly Founder there. The prospect of a missionary foundation in Kenya, the English speaking hub in East Africa, and the welcome of local vocations pleaded in favour of accepting the Mission. The missionary urgencies touched on the first evangelization, the strengthening of Christian communities, the formation of the laity and the foundation of new parishes.

The Oblate units of the African region who were consulted on the plan were not in a position to reply positively to the invitation. In May 1994, the General Council therefore sent the request to the Oblate Conference of Canada. After a time of discernment and consultation, the Canadian Provincials decided to take charge of this new foundation. The Superior General in

Council accepted the Mission in Kenya in May 1995, under the responsibility of the Region of Canada. In the plan of the foundation, the participation in personnel by the African-Madagascar Region was foreseen. The obtaining of African Oblates being difficult for the foundation team, the Mission began by the missionaries of the Canadian Region. The first ones arrived in Kenya in April 1997.

11. Cuba – 1997

Over the past few years at least four Cuban Bishops applied to the General Administration seeking help in personnel. The consultation of the Latin-American provincials in 1995 concluded that they were favourable to an Oblate foundation on the Island. After a visit of the Provincial of Haiti and the General Counselor for Latin-America to Cuba, the responsibility of the Mission was proposed to the Province of Mexico.

In January 1997, the Superior General in Council accepted the foundation of a new Mission in Cuba in three border dioceses: Cienfuegos, Matanzas and Santa Clara. The Oblates were asked to undertake pastoral work in the rural regions there and also to develop later on the diocesan centres of formation of the laity. The direct responsibility of the Mission was entrusted to Mexico in partnership with Haiti and with the collaboration of the Latin-American Oblates units. The first missionary team arrived in Cuba in December 1997.

12. Turkmenistan – 1997

Turkmenistan, one of the Asian Republics of the USSR since 1924, declared its independence in 1991. The initiative of an Oblate foundation in Turkmenistan came from the Pontifical representative of Kazakhstan, Bishop Mariano Oles. The official request for sending a group of our missionaries to Turkmenistan was sent to the Superior General in April 1996 by Cardinal Tomko, Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. The principal reason was that in this mainly Muslim country are some dispersed Catholics without Catholic pastors or place of worship, nor organised community. The General Council perceived in this request a true apostolic challenge for the Congregation, that of establishing a Catholic Church in Turkmenistan and evangelization in Central Asia.

In January 1997, two Oblates visited the country. In May 1997, the Superior General in Council accepted the new Mission in Turkmenistan which was entrusted to the Polish Province in partnership with the United States' Region. In September 1997, John-Paul II established the Mission *sui juris* in Turkmenistan which was up to that time under the jurisdiction of the Apostolic Administrator for Kazakhstan. Fr. Andrzej Madej omi was named "ecclesiastical Superior" of this Mission. Two Polish Oblates are present at Ashgabat, the capital, since October 1997. Their real challenge is to open new missionary routes.

13. Bielorussia

From 1992, the Polish Oblates, one at first, and later a second, works in a permanent manner in the diocese of Grodno in Bielorussia. They serve two rural parishes and moreover one of them is teaching in the major diocesan seminary while being also director of the diocesan catechetics department. Other Polish priests and scholastics come there occasionally to help in the pastoral work and the preaching of popular missions. Up to the present the Mission has not been officially established.