VIE OBLATE LIFE

TOME SOIXANTE-TROIS / 3
VOLUME SIXTY-THREE / 3

2004

OTTAWA, CANADA

The Oblate Novitiate in the Mind of the Founder

Tony Bissett, O.M.I.

SOMMAIRE – Dans les débuts de la Congrégation, le noviciat s'est déroulé sous l'oeil vigilant du Fondateur. Saint Eugène a suivi attentivement la formation des futurs Oblats comme nous le laisse amplement voir sa correspondance. L'A. nous montre tour à tour ce qu'étaient pour lui le but du noviciat, la figure du maître des novices, les points fondamentaux de la formation des novices, la sélection et l'évaluation des candidats, et enfin, l'oblation. Saint Eugène tenait ferme aux principes, mais il n'était pas inflexible devant certaines situations particulières. Il ne manquait pas de recourir au bon sens et à son intuition pour porter un jugement final sur les candidats, mais dans les cas discutables, il tendait à protéger la Congrégation plutôt que d'accorder le bénéfice du doute au candidat.

Introduction

In the early days of the Congregation, the Oblate novitiate was close to, and under the watchful eye of the Founder.[1] Eugene de Mazenod took a personal interest in the formation of the novices, as we see in his letter to Fr. Tempier, when he referred to the transfer of the novitiate to be near him in Marseilles: "I will be able to give the novice master a hand and keep my eye on the students".[2] Even when the novices were geographically distanced from the Founder, in later years, he always followed their formation very closely, as the abundance of his correspondence will show.

The primary aim of this work is to allow Eugene to speak for himself about many aspects of the formation of novices. It should be noted that, at the beginning, the novitiate as such did not exist as a specific place or stage of formation, but was something that only evolved gradually. And so Eugene's thoughts on the novitiate are in no way static or fixed, but rather reflect the ongoing search for the most adequate formation of candidates who came to join the Society.[3] Some elements may not be considered so relevant or applicable today (e.g. the lack of contact with other Oblates and with novices of other Orders), while many other aspects remain universally valid (e.g. growth in virtues, insistence on personal accompaniment, etc.). This should be kept in mind, in order to distinguish the lasting values from the specific expression of that particular time and place. Of particular interest in this study will be the Founder's understanding of the process and methods of novitiate formation.[4]

Most of the material used in this study is from Eugene's letters to Oblates.

1. Primary Importance of the Novitiate

Throughout his life, Eugene never ceased to underline the importance of the novitiate for the Congregation:

> … it is the most important there is in the Society; without a novitiate, the Society is done for…all must be sacrificed for the novitiate, because all the good that the Society will be able to do in future depends therefrom, and we ought to recognize that if this one or that had made a good novitiate, they would be far less imperfect than they are.[5]

He insisted time and time again that the novice-master be full-time, and that all other activities be regarded as secondary or even disregarded altogether: "The master of novices must give himself fully to his task. Consequently he must never be diverted from his usual occupations concerning the novices."[6]

2. Goals of the Novitiate

a) Formation of missionaries

Eugene succinctly summed up the essential purpose of the novitiate in a letter to Fr. Tempier:

> …a novitiate which is truly a novitiate, where the subjects are fashioned with a master's hand, where care is taken to inculcate in them all that goes to form a true missionary, whence they will emerge full of virtue, inured to obedience and imbued with attachment and respect for the Rules and all they prescribe.[7]

The novices were expected to "apply themselves seriously to the work of their perfection".[8] "Let the principal concern of the novices be that they work with assiduity to acquire religious virtues and the spirit of a true missionary in accord with our Rules".[9] "At the novitiate an apprenticeship must be made in all the virtues, including mortification. People have to learn to do without many things".[10]

The virtues particularly highlighted by the Founder[11] were: obedience,[12] self-abnegation and detachment,[13] love of poverty,[14] devotion for the Church, zeal for the salvation of souls,[15] love, esteem and fidelity to the Rules,[16] love for our Divine Saviour and devotion to Mary.[17]

He described the process of formation in these terms:

> Room must be made for the Lord to work in. Our clay is no good to serve as the building's foundation. Abnegation, humility, and finally holy detachment as to all that God can ask of us, and which he makes known to us through superiors, here is the treasure hidden in the solitude of the novitiate.[18]

b) Initiation into the Oblate charism

For Eugene, the novitiate was in function of a missionary way of life, not a monastic or mendicant:

> Note that you did not enter the Carthusians who make a novitiate in order to accustom themselves to a perpetual solitude. On the contrary, you have been admitted amongst those who, in imitation of the Apostles in whose footsteps they are called to walk, spend only a few months in retreat and that to become more fitting for the very active life of a missionary, for the most varied ministry, fruitful in blessings that are truly miraculous.[19]

It was not a question of simply forming priests or religious in a general sense, but of initiating men into the Oblate religious life, and he was very concerned that this not be diminished in any way in their formation:

> Another area which you will have to remedy is that we be not content merely to form good clerics, good religious if you will; but that we endeavour to form good members of our Congregation who absorb its spirit and adhere to it.[20]

He was clearly conscious of handing on a specific charism, which was to be distinguished from all others in the Church:

> This spirit of being wholly devoted to the glory of God, the service of the Church and the salvation of souls, is the spirit that is proper to our Congregation, a small one, to be sure, but which will always be powerful as long as she is holy. Our novices must steep themselves in these thoughts, which must sink deep in them and be often meditated. Each society in the Church has a spirit which is its own; which is inspired by God according to the circumstances and needs of the times…[21]

> Just as we have in a Society a common dress, common Rules, so must there be a common spirit which vivifies this particular body. The spirit of a Cistercian is not that of a Jesuit. Ours also is our own. Those who have not grasped this, through not having made a good novitiate, are among us like dislocated members.[22]

3. The Novice Master

a) Qualities expected

Most Oblates preferred the active apostolate, and so it was with a sense of sacrifice that many of them assumed the role of novice master, especially as most of those chosen were relatively young.[23]

Eugene had to remind the novice masters time and time again of their first commitment:

> I have not sent you to Switzerland to exercise the exterior ministry but to direct, instruct and look after the community that is entrusted to you.[24]

> You will never, my dear son, have too lofty a concept of the task of a religious chosen to form those whom God is choosing for piety and the practice of every religious virtue. The Congregation's future depends on having a good novice master.[25]

The duties and expectations of the novice master were very specific at times, especially in regard to accountability to the superiors:

> You will have to give me an account each month of the conduct of your novices, each one by name. At the same time, you will give me your opinion on their dispositions, character, the hopes they give you, etc. You will consult me on that which appears doubtful to you. Unless there is an urgent case, you will not send anyone away without forewarning me. You will receive those whom you judge, in agreement with the local Father Superior, as inspiring some hope of becoming apt to the service that the Congregation has as mission to fill in the Church. Even though you are as young as you are, you must, nevertheless, be a father to your novices, you must be close to them in their difficulties and encourage them, but not spoil them.[26]

Some of the qualities that Eugene sought in a novice master were: "gentleness, goodness, but without weakness and wishy-washiness. Courageous firmness towards everyone…";[27] "zeal";[28] "A master of novices needs as much patience as he needs charity".[29]

His letter to Fr. Dassy is particularly enlightening:

> Take firm resolutions that to the regularity that you must exact from each, you add a degree of moderation, much goodness, and fatherly sentiments for those who, faithful to the voice of the Lord, leave their country and their family, and give up everything to consecrate themselves to the service of the Church in our Congregation. They must find with us a true family, brothers and a father; we have the obligation to represent Divine Providence to them…[30]

Eugene was not afraid of challenging novice masters when he perceived flaws in their character or methods:

> You may perhaps tell me that if I gave you a good assistant you could take on this task [of novice master]. I believe in your piety, regularity, zeal, but I fear your severity, your demands. Though gentle in appearance, you lack suppleness in your character, you hold too much to your ideas, you do not know how to give way in certain small things that it is best often to ignore in order to attain major matters more easily. I fear that your command in your usual contacts with the novices might be difficult to endure. You might perhaps not be sufficiently on guard against certain prejudices. In a word, you would have much and perhaps too much of introspection to win the confidence of young men; the latter is of primary necessity in the functions of a Master of Novices who must be considered a saint in his own novitiate, but also a good father…[31]

b) The Novice Master's relationship to the local Superior

Novitiate communities were normally inserted into larger communities, which had a separate Superior. Apart from the novice master, "the superior alone is to have open access to the novitiate; he alone may penetrate into its precincts which must be closed to all others".[32]

While the superior had overall authority in the community, the novice-master had a certain amount of autonomy with regard to the novices:

> Although the superior must always have the last word in the house, he will nevertheless leave a large measure of independence to the master of novices in his

> novitiate with regard to his novices.[33]

Eugene at times gave very specific instructions regarding the relative roles of these two figures, which may not have been easy to follow in practice:

> …so far as concerns the general order of the house, the novices depend directly on the superior; so when they have to go out of the house or when they come back, when they have to do some penance in the refectory, etc., they will ask the consent of the superior.[34]

On another occasion he had to counter-balance this position:

> I recommend you give [the master of novices] great latitude in the exercise of his functions. That he consult you is good, but you must never interfere between him and his novices, that would ruin his authority completely.[35]

As we saw above, the novice master had to send a monthly report to the Superior General on each novice,[36] but the Superior also had to submit his own independent report: "At least once a month I will receive a report on everything".[37] He was very specific regarding the distinct and confidential nature of reports on the state of the novitiate:

> It is not proper that the report on the state of the novitiate that the master of novices is to make to the Superior General be the result of his view arrived at in conjunction with the local superior. On the contrary, the local superior and the master of novices must each write on their own without consulting each other and according to their own personal points of view.[38]

What was clear and desirable for Eugene was not always so for the people on the ground:

> I see with sorrow that you scarcely get along with the superior. It seems to me, however, that your position is clearly defined. It would be disturbing were anyone to perceive such disunity as being quite a source of evil. You owe every deference to the superior. It is fitting that you consult him about the decisions you have to take. He has the right to make to you the observations that he deems appropriate about those subjected to your direction. He has the duty to give his opinion about them to the Provincial and the Superior General. You should not send a novice away without consulting him and, on this point, unless the case is urgent, you should send a novice away only in agreement with the Provincial or the Superior General. Precipitation sometimes leaves regrets.[39]

The lack of unity between the novice master and superior caused Eugene considerable distress:

> Two novices from Belgium, according to what I have received in writing, were so scandalized by the dissent which occurred between the local superior and the Master of Novices, that it is quite possible they will not return…So take care, I say this in passing, to treat such matters among yourselves, and never let anything be perceived by your young men, who are highly scandalized when there is discord that should not exist.[40]

4. Basic Conditions in the Novitiate

a) Novices separated from the rest of the community

The novitiate was considered a very distinct stage of formation, with its own nature and goals. Conditions were such as to minimize contact with people outside, and even with other members of the community: "…the novices may never have the occasion to enter into relationships outside their novitiate…it is essential that the novitiate be entirely separated from the priests who form the rest of the community".[41] Eugene was consistent in this opinion: "… the novices ought to be as unknown to the Fathers of the community as if they lived in another house. They should meet each other only in the church and in the refectory. Never, and I mean never, for recreation or walks".[42]

On a few occasion he reluctantly accepted, by way of exception, that one or other candidate do

his novitiate elsewhere, such as the Seminary at Ajaccio. “The only drawback is an insufficient novitiate which is necessarily imperfect in a seminary”.[43] For this kind of arrangement, in a previous similar case, he had laid down strict conditions to the Superior of the Major Seminary:

> … there must be one especially in charge of him, to initiate him to the duties and practices of the religious state; in a word, he must be a novice and not a seminarian. If you are too busy to take care of him, put Father Bellon in charge of him, but let him be a real master of novices in this regard.[44]

Some years later, however, the Founder showed a bit more leniency in regard to admitting some novices to Montolivet Scholasticate:

> The house where the Oblate scholastics are is a real novitiate by its regularity and the care that our Brothers receive there. Thus I see no problem in admitting some novices there who would be given special attention befitting their condition.[45]

So while the principle of a special place for novitiate was important, Eugene was nevertheless not inflexible on the question.

b) Separation from novices of other Orders

Eugene could see the value of having contact with other religious orders in a general sense, but he also saw the practical dangers or possible consequences of his novices intermingling with other novices:

> I am going to tell you, dear son, that I see a certain problem in having too close relationships with the novitiate of another Order. It is a good thing, as you have discovered, to live on good terms with each other and to prayerfully support each other, but so far as possible the best arrangement is for each group to live in their own place. I cannot forget what the Lazarist novice master told me in Rome: four of his novices left him for the precise purpose of becoming Dominicans, attracted solely by the beauty of the habit of the Fathers of that Order. Here you have other attractions to fear. The reputation of Father Lacordaire, the mission he has undertaken to revive a great Order that is famous throughout the Church, etc. We are really babes and tiny tots beside these colossus. Let us be happy with our humble status and let us do our work in all humility, without worrying what others are or might be doing.[46]

A few months later, he reiterated his position on this matter: “Whatever edification the Dominican novices may have afforded you, I persist in my recommendation that each should attend to his own”.[47]

c) Pastoral activity

Although the 1826 Rule stated that “the novices who are in orders cannot be employed in the missions during their novitiate”,[48] in practice, there was some limited pastoral experience, particularly for the priest novices. In the early days, writing to Fr. Tempier about the novices, Eugene referred to “some works of zeal such as catechism for the poor, for the sick and for prisoners, visits to hospitals, etc”.[49] On other occasions, he had no objection to the priest novices doing some preaching[50] and reluctantly tolerated some collaboration in missions.[51] It was one thing for a novice himself to want to do pastoral work on his own initiative, it was another to do it in obedience to one’s superiors; Eugene clarified which form was acceptable: “in congregations like ours, it is admissible that novices may be employed during their novitiate in a given work of zeal commanded by obedience”.[52]

d) Spirit of recollection

A spirit of recollection was essential: “Act quickly to re-establish a spirit of recollection among our novices, the kind of recollection that should always reign in a novitiate”.[53] The Rule prescribed turning away from “frivolities, amusements and profane maxims of the world”,[54] but Eugene did not always find commitment in this regard up to standard: “At l’Osier, you will have to recommend that more seriousness be required from the novices. They are all young, inclined therefore to dissipation and to childish pranks. I insist that this defect be corrected”.[55] He was rather intolerant of a boisterous-type atmosphere:

> Wanting to keep them happy by prolonging their childhood, I mean, the dissipation of youth, the noisy games from the colleges, etc., is a bad system. Nothing is more contrary to the contemplation that is indispensable to novices than such child's play. That's a habit that must be lost at the novitiate. Seriousness has been the practice in every single novitiate that I have ever heard about; I want it finally introduced in our houses, as well as basic politeness which is also lacking.[56]

Again, he was rather explicit on his expectations in this regard: "I detest buffoonery, especially in houses like ours".[57] This did not, however, exclude the element of joy in the novitiate community. In fact he positively promoted maintaining a light side - within certain limits: "we must have joyfulness amongst us, but let it be joyfulness that is mild, not noisy, at least not uproarious…"[58]

e) Spirit of regularity and mortification

"Extreme regularity"[59] and the "strictest silence"[60] seemed to be the order of the day. Eugene had clear expectations in regard to the atmosphere of the novitiate: "I intend the novitiate to be a place of extreme regularity. Be severe".[61] He was aware, however, of the difficulty in finding the right balance in this, and did not hesitate to reprimand a novice master whom he considered to be too strict:

> I hasten to say that I find you somewhat severe towards your novices. No doubt it is necessary, especially in England, to instil in them the spirit of mortification but one must not, however, go too far in putting them to the test. You will risk discouraging them and losing their confidence if, by your repeated acts, they can and actually become persuaded that you exaggerate … so change your ways, my dear friend, and you will arrive at your goal by condescension, mildness, marks of interest and affection. You know the proverb: more flies can be caught with honey than with vinegar. The novices must be persuaded that they have in you a father who truly loves them, who is concerned for their health and well being, who even knows how to diminish the severity of the Rule in view of their needs.[62]

Mortifications had their place, but he insisted that "the spirit of mortification should not be demanded but inspired, each one being allowed to follow his own initiative without any pressure".[63]

5. Some Concrete Elements of the Formation Programme

a) Beginning and duration of the novitiate

At the beginning of the novitiate, Eugene recommended eight days of exercises according to St. Ignatius.[64] Each was given the cassock and cincture, as distinctive signs of membership of the congregation.[65]

While the 1818 Rule of the Missionaries of Provence prescribed two years' novitiate for those who were not in orders, one year for those who had received sub-deaconate, and six months for the priests,[66] the 1826 Rule prescribed the fixed duration of one year for all candidates.[67] In practice, however, a few made a shorter novitiate, especially those who were already priests,[68] and many, especially after the 1856 Chapter, did a second year.[69]

b) Day-to-day programme

The regular novitiate program included classes, spiritual exercises, prayer, manual work, study, and even in some cases, as we saw, pastoral work. There were classes on various subjects of importance: "One must also teach them the elements of Christian doctrine, give them what they call a reasoned catechism, continue to have them learn by heart several verses of the New Testament every day…"[70] A certain amount of study was permitted by the Rules,[71] but experience led him later to leave aside all scholastic books during the novitiate, and concentrating instead on instructions specifically in preparation for their vows:

> … on entering the novitiate they must leave their textbooks unopened…. there isn't enough time, when they have to follow and prepare classes, to be instructed in so many things that they have to learn in order to be well prepared for their oblation.[72]

In replying to various questions on the novitiate, Eugene once wrote to Fr. Vincens about Scripture classes: “I willingly agree that instead of the explanation on Holy Scripture, you substitute some other exercise that directly helps in training the novices”.[73] The emphasis was thus more on “imbuing oneself with the spirit of the Society”, and less on academic study: “Study can scarcely be associated with deep recollection and with the heavenly and supernatural thoughts on which the novices ought to dwell continually”.[74]

Eugene seemed to debate within himself over the amount of study allowed in the novitiate:

> I am annoyed that the whole time of the novitiate or at least an entire year is not exclusively devoted to the study of perfection. It is a drawback that during this time we are obliged to tolerate profane studies and even theology…. If they do not acquire religious virtues while in the novitiate, it is all up for the future. One must also teach them the elements of Christian doctrine, give them what they call a reasoned catechism…[75]

c) Personal accompaniment

Following timetables and giving classes was not enough in itself to ensure a solid formation of novices;[76] the novice master also needed to accompany each of the novices individually, “and at all times he ought to be with them or within reach of them throughout the day”.[77]

> We must look after [the novices] closely, almost exclusively, be continually with them, in a word, train them both by instruction and direction and even by conversation.[78]

> … give all your time to the novitiate. I know that they are not lacking in instructions, but guidance has been defective for one reason or another, and thus the novices generally do not change, do not improve, which is a great misfortune.[79]

On more than one occasion, he expressed concern about the lack of personal accompaniment given to the novices:

> Exhort our genial Father Vandenberghe to show some interest in his novices. Young people need this kind of encouragement. With priests, he need not be so self-effacing.[80]

Eugene considered this as an essential dimension of formation: “…you have to work on each one in particular as though you had only that one person to form”.[81] The novice master was expected to resist the ever-present temptation to be involved in pastoral or missionary work:

> So I urge you not to leave the novices by themselves when the crowds of pilgrims start coming. I know your zeal and understand what in particular drives you to exercise it in these circumstances. That is why I am taking the precaution of reminding you that your little family has more need than ever at such times for watchfulness and looking after.[82]

In short, Eugene expected the novice master to be close to his novices: “…you must be a father to your novices, you must be close to them in their difficulties and encourage them, but not spoil them”.[83] While the structures and exercises were important, nothing could substitute one-to-one accompaniment, where the novice master could encourage and challenge each novices to grow.

d) Care for the health of novices

Considering that the novices were, for the most part, quite young, Eugene saw the importance of looking after their health: “Keep a close eye on your novices’ health, but don’t allow any pampering when there is no need of it”.[84] In the same vein:

> I would be quite opposed to their being pampered: that we don’t need for missionaries who are not supposed to be overly concerned about themselves; but as soon as minor health problems arise, they should be seen to immediately.[85]

He recommended, for instance, sometimes rest, other times exercise or fresh air.[86]

e) Discipline

Eugene did not mince his words when talking about the strictness of the novitiate: “We have a very strict novitiate. If men are judged unfit for religious virtues, they are simply sent away”.[87] In a letter to Fr. Honorat in Canada, Eugene highlighted the importance of discipline for the formation of novices:

> Give particular attention to the training of the novices that Providence will send you. Remember that it is by exact discipline and assiduous care that they will become attached to you. If you let them wander aimlessly, if you leave them unbridled, if you are not especially solicitous of them, you will see them slip away, the flower will wither and the fruit will not form.[88]

Correction was considered an important part of formation but, when exercised in an inappropriate way, it was apt to do damage to the person. He tried to exhort the novice masters to be sensitive in this sense:

> Permit yourself only rarely and for grave reasons to make public remonstrances. They are more apt to exasperate than to correct. Keep your reprimands, if it is suitable to make them, for a private interview and even then, make them with much mildness and care. Do not begin by scolding. On the contrary, begin always by assuring the person of the interest you take in his good and the sorrow you experience in being obliged to bring him to realize that he has conducted himself badly in such and such a circumstance. The human heart is made this way. God himself does not enter it by force but knocks at the door: *Praebe, fili mi, cor tuum mihi*.[89]

One had to find a balance in all things, taking into consideration the varying capacities and qualities of the candidates:

> We cannot test our candidates too much lest we risk the unpleasantness of discovering when it is too late that we have been mistaken in their regard. All the same we must not tempt God by asking too much from human weakness. What I want to say is that not all are fit to be put through extraordinary tests. However, all must pass those tests designed to ground them in the virtues which they must practice, namely obedience, poverty, self-denial, holy indifference towards everything that could be required of them in terms of work, place, persons, etc.[90]

6. Candidates

a) Selection

A serious discernment had to be made before accepting candidates into the novitiate: “Be careful to discern well the motives which bring them to us, to weigh their virtue and to judge if their talents are sufficient”.[91] Certain minimum standards were required: “We are not looking for men of outstanding talents; nevertheless, they must be capable, well instructed, of good character, zealous for the glory of God and the salvation of souls.”[92]

Eugene was very keen on having as many candidates as possible, but also insisted on careful selection: “Nothing upsets me more than having to send anyone away after the ceremonies of entry into the novitiate. Why not give ourselves enough time to form a reasonable judgement on them?”[93]

He considered the question of acceptance of candidates into the novitiate so important that, apart from the fact that the local superior had to consult the novice master, the express authorization of the Superior General was required.[94] The early Rule specified the qualities required of a candidate:

> He must have an ardent desire for his own perfection, and a great love for Jesus Christ and his Church, a burning zeal for the salvation of souls; he must have a heart that is free from every disordered attachment to the things of this world, a great detachment from parents and the place of his birth, a disinterest which goes as far as a disdain for wealth; the will to serve God and the Church either in the missions or in the

> other ministries embraced by the Society, and have the intention of persevering until death in fidelity and obedience to the holy Rules of the Institute.[95]

Due consideration had to be given to their physical and mental health, to their sound judgement, intellectual capacity, etc. The qualities he most looked for in candidates were: devotion, generosity, detachment from family and relatives, obedience,[96] full of virtue, respectful of the Rules,[97] etc. It was not enough to be models of virtue, however, but they should also have some talents for the work of a missionary: "…even though virtue is preferable to talent, missionaries should not be without the latter."[98]

In a letter to an Italian priest, Bishop de Mazenod summed up some of the qualities required for admission to the Oblates:

> One must have a true base of solid virtue, great zeal for one's own sanctification and the salvation of souls, sufficient capacity for study and preaching, great detachment from relatives and all worldly things, the spirit of mortification, indifference so as to accept whatever ministry is proposed by obedience.[99]

b) Maturity

He was cautious about taking in candidates who were too young and immature:

> We must absolutely reach the point of having as novices only those who truly wish to be such, who solicit this favour as a grace, on whose determination we can rely. What are these children who come without at all knowing what it is about, who have no taste for recollection, who are flighty in spirit, in a word, in a very poor frame of mind.[100]

In regard to one promising candidate, apart from the fact of having a Protestant background, Eugene was concerned about his age:

> I think that a person is rather young at 16 years of age for us to be able to count on his perseverance… Even so, I am not going to oppose his admission if, on the one hand, you can be sure on the constancy of his determination and, on the other hand, you dispose of the means to have him learn Latin without delay.[101]

On the other hand, a particular feature in the early years was that many aspirants were already priests. With regard to their age, Eugene was rather wary of accepting those past middle-age: "Your 55-year-old man does not fit in. With 500 francs you cannot feed and clothe him, and soon age and infirmities will make him a burden."[102] but, in another case, he took the opposite stance:

> I think that I can promise the arrival of two priests whom I have authorized to enter your novitiate, notwithstanding their age… It is a question of one very advanced in age who, in sanctifying himself amongst us, will give us the good example of his virtues. He will not be a burden to the Congregation.[103]

In the final analysis, he recognized the risk involved, but it was their virtue rather than their age that seemed to count most at the end of the day. He was aware of the greater difficulties in forming men who had already firmly established patterns in life, but on the other hand the needs of the mission could never easily discount any such possibilities:

> If for the conversion of souls are added vocations from among the priests, we desire nothing more. We must have them make a novitiate that is more severe than that for young students, since it is more difficult to shape them; yet it is indispensable that at the end of their novitiate they be completely what we should be ourselves. If it were to be otherwise, I would prefer not to have any priests in the novitiate. It is all the more important to insist on this point since our novitiate lasts but a year and we have so little time to bring about this transformation. The Jesuits obtain this result, the Lazarists also, but they take two years to do it.[104]

In the latter years of his life, vocations were more plentiful and Eugene, aware of the greater selection of candidates available, was quite demanding and decisive in his approach to selection:

> I must tell you that the great number of mature men who are presenting themselves from all sides for our novitiate, dispenses us from seeking future candidates among children. So do not receive any more new ones, and be rather severe in your assessment of those you have already received. Send away all who are below average. You would uselessly spend yourself and our monies on them; you would have the chagrin of seeing them rejected later on, for we have taken the resolution to admit none but the good candidates: Providence is giving us the chance to choose. There are some 45 novices at l'Osier of whom six are priests, and some are deacons, sub-deacons, etc. It would be foolishness to spend time and money and wait years upon years for a child who is then rejected in the end.[105]

7. Special Consideration for Certain Categories of Novices in the Course of the Novitiate

a) Brother Novices

Brother novices were given some special consideration, but Eugene insisted that there be no compromise on the essential elements of formation for religious life.

> I highly recommend that you give a solid formation in piety and the religious virtues to your Brothers. Do not neglect their instruction. During the year of novitiate, manual labour must give way to a lavish spiritual concern. Without the latter, we get only poor men-servants, difficult men without virtue but full of pretensions. A good sense of vocation, an attachment to the Congregation which is raising them in the spiritual order above the ordinary condition; but also humility, love of work, fulfilling their service with a spirit of faith, etc.: that is what we must impress upon them .[106]

There was often the temptation to fill in their days with manual labour, but Eugene insisted that they partake of all the normal exercises of the novitiate:

> I have always considered it an injustice to make men, who have come to us to become religious, work from morning till evening. Surely they have to work but they must also pray and be interested in the duties of the religious life. They are not common labourers, they cannot be treated as hired domestics who are paid so that they work the whole day. Our Brothers must be present at the *oraison* and before they go for their work, say the *Pater*, etc., that correspond to *Prime* and *Terce*… The Brothers must also assist at the spiritual conferences and in the evening give in their turn an account of the day's events.[107]

On another occasion he reacted strongly to the plan of sending a Brother novice to work outside the novitiate:

> I haven't given approval to your project of sending the Brother cobbler to Marseilles. If you judge him unfit, he must be sent away; if not, keep him at the novitiate for a full year. The novices, irrespective of who they are, must live under the care of the master of novices up to their oblation. What can this man do at Marseilles? Make slippers to sell to the shoe shops or make a profit for the house? I never heard anything more ridiculous. It isn't a question of knowing if one can utilize them sufficiently in the novitiate house during the year of their testing, they have to learn what it is to be a religious and a year is not too much for that, but it is vital to take pains with them, the more uncouth they are the more unremitting care they need. If they don't shape up – then out, and that's the end of the matter.[108]

b) Priest-novices and other older candidates

Numerous priests and ex-religious entered the Congregation, especially in the early years. Not only was Eugene not in favour of giving these candidates special treatment in the novitiate, but he even went to the other extreme:

> We must have them make a novitiate that is more severe than that for young students, since it is more difficult to shape them; yet it is indispensable that at the end of their novitiate they be completely what we should be ourselves.[109]

> This separating of the priest novices from the other novices seems to me to be a bit odd. I have difficulty approving it. Why was this established? Tell me the justification for it before taking any decision whatever.[110]

On another occasion, he upheld the principle of having no distinctions, but allowing leniency with regard to some particular exercises. One had to carefully distinguish the relative importance of rules and regulations:

> If Father Tudès is a decent chap as you say he is, he will yield cheerfully to the indispensable observances of the Rule. He must make it a point to delve deeply into the spirit of the Institute he wishes to join… He must renounce his own self and show that in all things he comes up to the standard. I don't see anything wrong in your dispensing him from walks… With regard to the lesser chores, since it is an exercise of humility, I would not like him to be dispensed as a rule, but you must have some consideration for his age and obesity.[111]

Some years later, he seemed to go even a step further in his advice regarding a candidate that he himself had recommended:

> I am letting you know that he is not suited for heavy manual work, there must be no question of giving him such assignments as farm work or gardening, etc. He has another kind of talent that has to be put at the service of the Congregation, perhaps in some house where we are in the education ministry… Make a good religious of him and ask of him only that of which he is capable and that for which he is suited.[112]

With the gradual arrival of more and more novices from other countries, new distinctions had to be made about the style of formation offered in the novitiate. On one occasion Eugene was upset when the novice master sent away an Italian candidate that he had personally sent:

> How could you decide so quickly that he won't do for us when we have judged here that he could very well be formed for the task in which we wanted to employ him? It was not a matter of shaping him up in the French way; it was not in France that I wanted to use him .[113]

The language may not yet have developed the terminology, but we can recognise here Eugene's sensitivity to the issue of inculturation.

8. Discernment and Evaluation of Candidates

In the course of the novitiate, a serious evaluation of the candidates had to be conducted for acceptance to vows. It was not enough that they be "models of virtue", but one had to ask "do they have any talent? We cannot any longer accept anyone who is deprived of such for this is what our ministry demands."[114] The novice master had to be very alert in his accompaniment of the novices: "Do not overlook the little warnings that are sometimes under one's nose."[115] Eugene laid down some clear criteria:

It is important that we admit only men who are devoted, generous, detached so as to do everything that is required by obedience, especially detached from relatives whom they must love in God and for God, without the affection we continue to have for them ever influencing our course, activities, will, or even our thoughts… Stress very much the importance of the obligation undertaken by oblation…Those who do not attach themselves wholeheartedly to the Congregation are not made for it.[116]

He willingly accepted those who had good health, and even those in poor health if they were good religious and gifted in other ways.[117] What he seemed to fear more were those whose mental state left much to be desired:

> … sound judgement is an indispensable quality, so much so that we have no right to overlook its absence in presenting candidates. What price any good quality when the intellect is damaged?[118]

> I do not claim that we should admit only geniuses, but there is a degree of ignorance and incapacity that is not admissible.[119]

In one case he was doubtful about a candidate with scruples,[120] while in another similar case he was rather lenient.[121] A minimum of human qualities was essential for living in community: in regard to one particular candidate, Eugene could recognize the good qualities of the man, but was reluctant to admit him to vows because of his great difficulty in living community life:

> … from the picture you give me of this man, don't you have any reason to fear this new scandal? If he is never satisfied with anything that is done, if he cannot get along with anyone of the Society's members, can we flatter ourselves and say that he will change his exaggerated and unjust view on so many points?[122]

He put the novice masters on guard against deceitful candidates:

> I see you have allowed yourself to be fooled by the trickery of little Ginies. The information I have received about him tells me that he is a real hypocrite, a thief and a liar, not to say more. He does not lack ability, but what is talent worth when virtue is totally absent. We risk too much in trying to bring him to good behaviour. Can we rely on a villain who uses all his skill to betray those he depends upon. Do not let yourself be taken in…[123]

He did not favour unduly prolonging the presence of unlikely candidates, and even demanded decisive action in their regard:

> You should have sent Brother away a long time ago. We are not bound by gratitude to the point of burdening the novitiate with a useless member who shows no sign of promise. What can be hoped from a man of his age and character? You must try to part good friends, that is all .[124]

When in doubt about a candidate, he tended to favour the protection of the Congregation, rather than giving the benefit of the doubt to the candidate:

> I think, my dear Father Vincens, that when on the eve of profession we are undecided about the qualities or the merits of a candidate, it is better to send him away. I only regret that we wait a whole year before coming to such a decision.[125]

> We must absolutely reach the point of having as novices only those who truly wish to be such, who solicit this favour as a grace, on whose determination we can rely. What are these children who come without at all knowing what it is about, who have no taste for recollection, who are flighty in spirit, in a word, in a very poor frame of mind.[126]

As we saw already, he did not tolerate misbehaviour, frivolity and childishness.[127]

By the end of the year, Eugene expected the novice master to be clear and decisive in his evaluation of the novices:

> We must give these young people all possible means of perfection and after a short trial, if they do not take to it, send them away without pity. What is the good of having subjects who eat away and who in return for our care give us nothing but grief.[128]

One important quality sought for in candidates was attachment to the Congregation.[129] Many other virtues are indicated in his writings, such as charity, regularity, obedience, observance of the Rules, indifference, mortification, detachment, chastity, penitence, fervour, piety, poverty, humility, self-denial, love of God and of the brothers, imitation of the Apostles, devotion to the Church, zeal, poverty, chastity, etc.[130]

9. Oblation

Formation in the novitiate concluded with oblation or giving oneself to God, and Eugene insisted much on the importance of this act:

> Keep repeating to the novices that by their consecration they give themselves to the Church without reservation, that they completely die to the world, to their families and to themselves; that they vow a perfect obedience by which they sacrifice unreservedly their own will so as to wish only what is prescribed by obedience; it is not only a question of obeying, but also of heart and spirit acquiescing with obedience, of being detached from places, things, even persons whom they should all love with the same charity; that they vow also voluntary poverty which obliges them to demand nothing, to be content with everything, to consider themselves blessed if something is wanting to them and if they suffer, as a result of holy poverty, privations and even destitution. Without this disposition, poverty is only a word void of meaning. Chastity obliges them not only to avoid everything that is forbidden in this matter, but to preserve them from the least harm that could befall this beautiful virtue. It is in accord with this principle that we hold in such horror the sensual tendencies that bear the stigma of particular friendships, to call them what they are, for they really wound this most delicate virtue that the slightest breeze can harm .[131]

Congratulating one of the newly-professed, he explained the significance of consecrating oneself to God in terms of a contract of predestination:

> By making this blessed profession, you have signed the contract of your predestination. Be faithful for your part, God will keep his word in your regard. He has accepted your consecration and he has promised you eternal life…Your vocation, therefore, is a grace that we cannot fully appreciate.[132]

Religious life was considered a "great privilege… the greatest grace that God's goodness could grant you…",[133] and the novitiate was the privileged time to prepare for consecration to this life:

> By the end of the novitiate, the subjects should have acquired such a degree of virtue that no uneasiness whatever remains about his qualifications. If there is a time of fervour in one's life, it should certainly be that at which, after having spent a whole year in spiritual exercises, one presents oneself for consecration to God.[134]

For most of the founder's time, the vows taken at the end of the novitiate were perpetual, apart from those of the brother novices. Eugene considered the vows already as a serious and indeed a permanent commitment: "Stress very much the importance of the obligation undertaken by oblation. They are free not to advance that far, but this consecration cannot be revoked. It is perpetual."[135] In relation to the renewal of the brothers' vows, the 1826 Rule stated: "A lay brother will make his vows for one year, after which the superior general can authorize him to make them for another five years; after the five years have elapsed, he may be admitted to perpetual vows as the other oblates".[136] Eugene went out of his way to explain the sense of this:

> I want to tell you again, however, that in your instructions to the novices, at the proper time, you explain that the renewal of vows in our practice does not presuppose that there is a need to renew vows that have been pronounced definitively the first time; they would be certainly and duly perpetual even though they were never renewed. This practice has been established among us as an exhortation to greater fervour; but an important thing to note is that the intention of the Rule is that, if by chance something had been lacking in the first vows in legitimising their value, it is understood that by this renewal any such deficiencies are rectified and dispositions wanted by the Constitutions are established.[137]

What was proposed in the novitiate was not meant to be limited to that stage of formation, but as a way of life to be continued after. To a recently-professed member, the Founder clarified this point, exhorting him to maintain the high level attained during the novitiate:

> Only be faithful in the exact observance of the Rules which you have come to know during your novitiate. These Rules are not made only for novices; when one has finished the novitiate, we need to encourage each other to continue living them out for common edification.[138]

Eugene abhorred “apostasy”,[139] but on the other hand he had no regrets dispensing the vows of a young priest “who from a state of near imbecility had fallen into lunacy”.[140]

Conclusion

It is clear that the Founder gave a high priority to the novitiate, where future missionaries became grounded in the life of the Oblate Congregation. He was keen to have as many candidates as possible, to meet the growing needs of the ever-expanding missions, but he always insisted on their careful selection and evaluation. He gave many clear criteria, especially regarding the virtues and the basic capacity and talents required for the missionary life. We saw that, in practice, it was not always possible for him to be fully consistent in following or implementing his own norms in this regard. Eugene was strong in his principles and opinions, but not inflexible in a given concrete situation.

It was important for novices to abide by the structures and Rules, but discernment was much more than mere compliance. The novice master was expected to follow each novice individually, to look beyond external behaviour and to verify as much as possible the internal motivation of the candidate. Common sense and one’s “gut feeling” were not to be ignored in coming to a final judgement on a given candidate. In cases that were unclear, the Founder tended to protect the Congregation rather than give the benefit of the doubt to the candidate.

Eugene had a deep sensitivity to the work of formation, and was keenly aware of the limitations imposed by human nature, both on the part of the novice and the formator. To offset the possibly flawed judgement of any individual novice master, he insisted on having the independent opinion of the local superior, and both were directly accountable to the Superior General.

Il in all, we can see how much Eugene was aware of the responsibility of handing on a charism to the members of the missionary society that he had founded, and he considered the novitiate as the privileged place for laying a solid foundation. He himself and Fr. Tempier acted as the formators of the early members who joined,[141] but then he gradually delegated that task to others. Through his close contact and copious correspondence, he continued to give a major input into the life of the novitiate, especially through his guidance of the novice masters, with whom he shared his spirit and expertise in the ways of formation.

Notes:

---

[1] Apart from the two years 1820-1822 at Notre-Dame du Laus, the novitiate was located alternatively in Aix and Marseilles up until 1830. Then it was transferred to Billens (Switzerland) for a year, 1830-1831, followed by many changes until 1841, when it was finally located at Notre-Dame de l’Osier. For a succinct history of various transfers of the novitiate, see M. CAMARDA, “La formazione dell’Oblato negli scritti del Beato Eugenio de Mazenod”. Frascati, 1982, *Quaderni di Vermicino*, n. 12, pp. 18-21.

[2] Letter of Eugene de Mazenod to Fr. Tempier, 10 January 1826, in *Oblate Writings* (hereafter referred to as *OW*), Vol. 7, p. 11.

[3] É. Lamirande writes: “At the beginning, in principle at least, the novitiate was not so much a fixed period of probation for the candidates as a somewhat extended period of preparation for the apostolate”, in “Le noviciat et la formation des recrues chez les Missionnaires de Provence (1816-1823)”, in *Vie Oblate Life*, 63 (2004), p. 5.

[4] Two studies have been made on the Founder and the formation of novices: Y. BEAUDOIN, *The novitiates, novice masters and the novices at the time of the Founder*, an unpublished talk delivered at the Novice Masters’ Congress, 15-27 March, 1998, General House, Rome; É. LAMIRANDE, *op. cit*. pp. 5-31. Besides, two other works deal with formation in a more general sense, including novitiate formation: M. CAMARDA, *op. cit.*; J. B. MUSUMBI, *Les signes de la vocation oblate dans les lettres du bienheureux Eugène de Mazenod (1814-1861) et les normes générales de la formation oblate (1984)*, Rome, 1992. Thesis for Licentiate at the Claretianum, 200 pages, Oblate General House Archives.

[5] Letter to Fr. Honorat, 4 May 1828, *OW* 7, p. 154. Cf. also letter to Fr. Courtès, 2 February 1826, *OW* 7, p. 25.

[6] Letter to Fr. Courtès, 2-3 October 1834, *OW* 8, p. 127. Cf. also letter to Fr. Guigues, 28 October 1841*, OW* 9, p. 188; to Fr. Guigues, 27 September 1842, *OW* 9, pp. 234-235; to Fr. Richard, 22 July 1852*, OW* 11, p. 91; to Fr. Vandenberghe, 22 September 1854, *OW* 11, p. 244.

[7] Letter to Fr. Tempier, 26 November 1825*, OW* 6, p. 200.

[8] Letter to Fr. Casimir Aubert, 11 October 1834, *OW* 8, p. 132.

[9] Letter to Fr. Courtès, 6 December 1825*, OW* 6, p. 208.

[10] Letter to Fr. Vincens, 19 December 1847, *OW* 10, p. 196.

[11] For a detailed presentation of the principal virtues expected of the novices, cf. J.B. MUSUMBI, *op. cit*., pp. 89-154.

[12] Cf. Letter to Fr. Courtès, 2 February 1826*, OW* 7, p. 25; to Fr. Tempier, 18 June 1828, *OW* 7, p. 157.

[13] Cf. Letter to Fr. Mille, 1-3 November 1831, *OW* 8, p. 41; to Fr. Courtès, 2 February 1826*, OW* 7, p. 25; to Fr. Dorey, 15 October 1848, *OW* 10, p. 238; to Fr. Bellon , 13 June 1849*, OW* 3, p. 39.

[14] Cf. Letter to Fr. Courtès, 2 February 1826*, OW* 7, p. 25; to Fr. Tempier, 18 June 1828, *OW* 7, p. 157.

[15] Cf. letter to Fr. Tempier, 18 June 1828, *OW* 7, p. 157; to Fr. Dorey, 15 October 1848, *OW* 10, p. 238.

[16] Cf. letter to Fr. Tempier, 18 June 1828, *OW* 7, p.157.

[17] Cf. letter to Fr. Dorey, 15 October 1848*, OW* 10, p. 238.

[18] Letter to Fr. Mille, 3 November 1831*, OW* 8, p. 41.

[19] Letter to Fr. Grandin, 4 December 1855, *OW* 11, pp. 296-297.

[20] Letter to Fr. Tempier, 14 August 1844*, OW* 10, p. 80.

[21] Letter to Fr. Tempier, 22 August 1817, *OW* 6, p. 35.

[22] Letter to Fr. Guibert, 29 July 1830*, OW* 7, p.202.

[23] In his Doctoral thesis, Francis Santucci includes a section entitled: "Eugene communicates his spirit through the young novice masters". See F. SANTUCCI, *Eugene de Mazenod, Co-operator of Christ the Saviour, Communicates His Spirit*, Association for Oblate Studies and Research, Rome 2004, pp. 253-255.

[24] Letter to Fr. Mille, 21 April 1832, *OW* 8, p. 59.

[25] Letter to Fr. Richard, 21 October 1852, *OW* 11, p. 105.

[26] Letter to Fr. Dorey, 15 October 1848, *OW* 10, pp. 237-238.

[27] Letter to Fr. Fabre, 8 August 1854*, OW* 11, p. 226.

[28] Letter to Fr. Santoni, 18 March 1845, *OW* 10, p. 97.

[29] Letter to Fr. Richard, 22 July 1852, *OW* 11, p. 92.

[30] Letter to Fr. Dassy, July-August 1848, *0W* 10, p. 230.

[31] Letter to Fr. Dassy, 23 June 1848, *OW* 10, p. 227.

[32] Letter to Fr. Courtès, 2-3 October 1834, *OW* 8, p. 126.

[33] *Ibid*.

[34] *Ibid*.

[35] Letter to Fr. Dassy, 15 October 1848, *OW* 10, pp. 235-236.

[36] Cf. letter to Fr. Dorey, 15 October 1848, *OW* 10, p. 237.

[37] Letter to Fr. Courtès, 2-3 October 1834, *OW* 8, p. 127.

[38] Letter to Fr. Vincens, 23 November 1841, *OW* 9, p. 197.

[39] Letter to Fr. Boisramé, 11 November 1860, *OW* 3, pp. 159-160.

[40] To Fr. Dassy, 28 March 1848, *OW* 10, p. 220.

[41] Letter to Fr. Courtès, 2-3 October 1834, *OW* 8, p. 126. Cf. also letters to Fr. Tempier, 10 January 1826, *OW* 7, p. 11; to Fr. Guigues, 12 January 1842, *OW* 9, pp. 203-204; to Fr. Richard, 22 July 1852, *OW* 11, p. 91, etc. Further references can be found in Y. BEAUDOIN, *op. cit*., note 11, pp. 3-4.

[42] Letter to Fr. Richard, 21 September 1852, *OW* 11, p. 103. M. CAMARDA analyses the possible motives for this separation, cf. *op. cit*., pp. 65-66.

[43] Letter to Fr. Moreau, 13 June 1844, *OW* 10, p. 69.

[44] Letter to Fr. Moreau, 10 November 1841, *OW* 9, p. 190.

[45] Letter to Fr. Mouchette, 5 August 1855, *OW* 11, p. 278.

[46] Letter to Fr. Richard, 29 May 1852, *OW* 11, p. 83.

[47] Letter to Fr. Richard, 26-27 August 1852, *OW* 11, p. 96.

[48] 1826 Rule, Part III, Ch. 2, § 2, art. 9, published in M. LESAGE and W.H. WOESTMAN, *The Rule of Saint Eugene de Mazenod*, Ottawa 1997, p. 106.

[49] Letter to Fr. Tempier, 26 November 1825, *OW* 6, p. 202.

[50] Cf. letters to Fr. Santoni, 18 March 1845, *OW* 10, p. 97; to Fr. Tempier, 30 March 1859, *OW* 12, p. 151.

[51] Cf. letter to Fr. Jean-Louis Grandin, 4 December 1855, *OW* 11, p. 297. In a letter to Fr. Richard, he was specific on this point: "Make sure that they are not made to do more than one mission in the course of the novitiate", 22 June 1852, *OW* 11, p. 85.

[52] Letter to Fr. Tempier, 30 March 1859, *OW* 12, p. 151.

[53] Letter to Fr. Vandenberghe, 17 March 1853, *OW* 11, p. 130. Cf. 1826 Rule, Part III, Ch. 2, §2, art. 23-26, LESAGE and WOESTMAN, *op. cit*., pp. 107-108.

[54] 1826 Rule, Part III, Ch. 2, § 2, art. 30, in M. LESAGE and W.H. WOESTMAN, *op. cit*., p. 108.

[55] Letter to Fr. Tempier, 14 August 1844, *OW*, p. 81.

[56] Letter to Fr. Vincens, 23 July 1844, *OW* 10, p. 78. Cf. also letter to Fr. Vincens, 26 May 1843, *OW* 10, p. 12.

[57] Letter to Fr. Richard, 26-27 August 1852, *OW* 11, p. 96.

[58] Letter to Fr. Courtès, 2 April 1823, *OW* 6, p. 110.

[59] Letter to Fr. Vincens, 20 October 1847, *OW* 10, p. 189.

[60] Letter to Fr. Courtès, 2-3 October 1834, *OW* 8, p. 126.

[61] Letter to Fr. Vincens, 20 October 1847, *OW* 10, p. 189.

[62] to Fr. Boisramé, 30 September 1858, *OW* 3, p. 149-150.

[63] *Ibid*. p. 149.

[64] Cf. letter to Fr. Vincens, 23 November 1841, *OW* 9, P. 197.

[65] Cf. letter to Fr. Vincens, 29 July 1842, *OW* 9, p. 230.

[66] Cf. Constitutions et Règles de la Société des Missionnaires de Provence, 1818, Part III, Ch. 2, §2, lines 129-132, in *Missions des Oblats*, (78), 1951, p. 85. For this early period cf. É. LAMIRANDE, *op. cit*., esp. pp. 7-9 and 11-12.

[67] 1826 Rule, Part III, Ch. 2, §2, art. 1, and §4, art. 3, cf. M. LESAGE and W.H. WOESTMAN, *op. cit.,* p. 104 and p. 112. Cf. also letter to Fr. C. Aubert, 21 April 1836, *OW* 8, p. 224.

[68] Cf. letter to Fr. Richard, 25 September 1851, *OW* 11, p. 58; to Fr. Vincens, 10 December 1843, *OW* 10, p. 45; to Fr. Grandin, 4 December 1855, *OW* 11, pp. 296-297.

[69] Cf. Y. BEAUDOIN, "Le Scolasticat de Montolivet", in *Études Oblates*, 27 (1968), pp. 142-144. The 1826 Rule states: "**...**the novitiate can be prolonged until the reception of the subdiaconate for those who have not received this order", Part III, Ch. 2, § 2, art. 2, in M. LESAGE and W.H. WOESTMAN, *op. cit*., p. 105. The 1856 Chapter included a canon on the profession of novices who are not in orders: "their profession will be postponed at the end of the year's novitiate, or up to the sub-deaconate**...**", Canon IX, in G. COSENTINO, *Nos Chapitres Généraux*, Éditions des Études oblates, Ottawa 1957, p.64.

[70] Letter to Fr. Tempier, 18 June 1821, *OW* 6, p. 80.

[71] Cf. letter to Fr. Tempier, 26 November 1825, *OW* 6, p. 202.

[72] Letter to Fr. Honorat, 9 May 1828, *OW* 7, p. 155.

[73] Letter to Fr. Vincens, 23 November 1841, *OW* 9, p. 197.

[74] Letter to Fr. Honorat, 4 May 1828, *OW* 7, p. 154.

[75] Letter to Fr. Tempier, 18 June 1821, *OW* 6, p. 80.

[76] Cf. 1826 Rule, Part III, Ch. 1, § 8, art. 10, M. LESAGE and W.H. WOESTMAN, *op. cit*., pp. 94-95.

[77] 1826 Rule, Part III, Ch. 1, § 8, art. 6, M. LESAGE and W.H. WOESTMAN, *op. cit*., p. 94.

[78] Letter to Fr. Tempier, 26 November 1825, *OW* 6, pp. 201-202.

[79] Letter to Fr. Casimir Aubert, 3 June 1837, *OW* 9, p. 36.

[80] Letter to Fr. Vincens, 20 June 1853, *OW* 11, p. 144.

[81] Letter to Fr. Vandenberghe, 22 September 1854, *OW* 11, p. 244.

[82] Letter to Fr. Casimir Aubert, 18 May 1836, *OW* 8, p. 232.

[83] Letter to Fr. Dorey, 15 October 1848, *OW* 10, p. 238.

[84] Letter to Fr. Richard, 21 September 1852, *OW* 11, p. 104.

[85] Letter to Fr. Vandenberghe, 12 December 1852, *OW* 11, p. 110.

[86] Cf. letters to Fr. Tempier, 26 July 1817, *OW* 6, pp. 28-29, and 12 August 1817, *OW* 6, p. 33.

[87] Letter to Bishop Miollis of Digne, 10 March 1828, *OW* 13, p. 86.

[88] Letter to Fr. Honorat, 26 March 1842, *OW* 1, p. 20.

[89] Letter to Fr. Boisramé, 30 September 1858, *OW* 3, p. 150.

[90] Letter to Fr. Santoni, 18 March 1845, *OW* 10, p. 97.

[91] Letter to Fr. Vincens, 12 August 1847, *OW* 10, p. 167. Among the talents and dispositions listed by J.B. MUSUMBI are: good health, intellectual aptitude, love for the Congregation and devotion to the Blessed Virgin. See *op. cit*., pp. 155-171.

[92] Letter to Tit. Bishop J. Novella of Patara, 23 august 1858, *OW* 13, p. 202.

[93] Letter to Fr. Courtès, 30 November 1834, *OW* 8, p. 137. Cf. also letters to Fr. Tempier, 26 November 1825, *OW* 6, pp. 201-202; to Fr. Vincens, 23 November 1841, *OW* 9, pp. 197-198; to Fr. Santoni, 27 March 1850, *OW* 11, p. 7.

[94] Cf. letter to Fr. Vincens, 23 November 1841, *OW* 9, p. 197.

[95] 1826 Rule Part III, Ch. 2, § 1, art. 19, M. LESAGE and W.H. WOESTMAN, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

[96] Cf. *ibid*.

[97] Cf. letter to Fr. Tempier, 26 November 1825, *OW* 6, p. 201.

[98] Letter to Fr. Boisramé, 25 June 1858, *OW* 3, p. 142. Cf. also letters to Fr. Honorat, 9 May 1828, *OW* 7, p. 155; to Fr. Vincens, 12 August 1847, *OW* 10, p. 168.

[99] Letter to Abbé Lusso, 17 May 1855, *OW* 13, p. 158.

[100] Letter to Fr. Tempier, 26 November 1825, *OW* 6, p. 201.

[101] Letter to Fr. Richard, 29 May 1852, *OW* 11, p. 82.

[102] Letter to Fr. Guigues, 2 October 1843, *OW* 10, p. 34.

[103] Letter to Fr. Richard, 29 May 1852, *OW* 11, pp. 83-84. In another case of an elderly candidate, he spoke of easing the severity of the novitiate, cf. letter to Abbé Lusso, 22 May 1856, *OW* 13, p. 166.

[104] Letter to Fr. Vincens, 17 April 1845, *OW* 10, p. 101.

[105] Letter to Fr. Dassy, 14 August 1847, *OW* 10, p. 170.

[106] Letter to Fr. Guigues, 24 April 1843, *OW* 10, p. 11.

[107] Letter to Fr. Vincens, 8 December 1842, *OW* 9, pp. 239-240.

[108] Letter to Fr. Casimir Aubert, 21 April 1836, *OW* 8, p. 224.

[109] Letter to Fr. Vincens, 17 April 1845, *OW* 10, p. 101. Cf. also letters to Fr. Richard, 22 June 1852, *OW* 11, p. 85; to Fr. Vandenberghe, 11 March 1853, *OW* 11, p. 125.

[110] Letter to Fr. Vandenberghe, 10 March 1853, *OW* 11, p. 126.

[111] Letter to Fr. Vincens, 3 December 1841, *OW* 9, p. 198.

[112] Letter to Fr. Vandenberghe, 6 December 1852, *OW* 11, p. 108.

[113] Letter to Fr. Richard, 22 July 1852, *OW* 11, p. 92.

[114] Letter to Fr. Honorat, 9 May 1828, *OW* 7, p. 155.

[115] Letter to Fr. Santoni, 27 March 1850, *OW* 11, p. 7.

[116] Letter to Fr. Vincens, 23 November 1841, *OW* 9, p. 197.

[117] Cf. letters to Fr. Vincens, 6 November 1841, *OW* 9, pp. 188-189; to Fr. Courtès, 17 July 1846, *OW* 10, p. 139; to Fr. Richard, 3 August, *OW* 11, p. 46, and 20 November 1851, *OW* 11, p. 66.

[118] Letter to Fr. Courtès, 23 March 1832, *OW* 8, p. 55.

[119] Letter to Fr. Vincens, 20 May 1849, *OW 10*, p. 253.

[120] Cf. letter to Fr. Courtès, 12 February 1843, *OW* 10, p. 3.

[121] Cf. letter to Fr. Merlin, 27 January 1853, *OW* 11, p. 116.

[122] Letter to Fr. Guigues, 12 January 1842, *OW* 9, p. 203.

[123] Letter to Fr. Vincens, 12 August 1847, *OW* 10, p. 168.

[124] Letter to Fr. Boisramé, 25 June 1858, *OW* 3, p. 141.

[125] Letter to Fr. Vincens, 9 June 1848, *OW* 10, p. 224.

[126] Letter to Fr. Tempier, 26 November 1825, *OW* 6, p. 201.

[127] Cf. e.g. letter to Vincens, 26 May 1843, *OW* 10, p. 12.

[128] Letter to Fr. Tempier, 26 November 1825, *OW* 6, p. 201.

[129] Cf. letter to Fr. Mille, 6 June 1831, *OW* 8, p. 27; to Fr. Vincens, 23 November 1841, *OW* 9, p. 197.

[130] Cf. e.g. letter to Fr. Tempier, 12 August 1817, *OW* 6, pp. 31-32; to Fr. Guibert, 29 July 1830, *OW* 7, p. 202; to Fr. Dorey, 15 October 1848, *OW* 10, p. 238; to Fr. Santoni, 18 March 1845, *OW* 10, p. 97; to Fr. Richard, 26 August 1852, *OW* 11, p. 96. A more detailed study of some of these virtues is found in J.B. MUSUMBI, *op. cit*, pp. 89-146, and in M. CAMARDA, *op. cit.*, pp. 68-69.

[131] Letter to Fr. Santoni, 16 March 1846, *OW* 10, pp. 123-124.

[132] Letter to Fr. Bovis, 29 October 1859, *OW* 12, p. 170.

[133] Letter to Fr. Médevielle, 3 January 1859, OW 12, p. 118.

[134] Letter to Fr. Vincens, 11 May 1845, *OW* 10, p. 103.

[135] Letter to Fr. Vincens, 23 November 1841, *OW* 9, p. 197. The 1826 Rule states that "these vows and oaths will always be made with the tacit condition that they can be released or dispensed only by the sovereign Pontiff or by the superior general...", Part III, Ch. 2, § 3, art. 6, M. LESAGE and W.H. WOESTMAN, *op. cit*., p. 110.

[136] 1826 Rule, Part III, Ch. 2, § 4, art. 15, M. LESAGE and W.H. WOESTMAN, *op. cit*., p. 114.

[137] Letter to Fr. Vincens, 19 December 1847, *OW* 10, p. 196. Cf. also Diary, 20 December 1847, *Écrits oblats* 21, p. 291.

[138] Letter to Fr. Desbrousses, 29 October 1859, *OW* 12, p. 169.

[139] Cf. letter to Fr. Vincens, 16 October 1842, *OW* 9, p. 235.

[140] Letter to Fr. Moreau, 29 August 1844, *OW* 10, p. 82.

[141] For the personal role played by de Mazenod, cf. É. LAMIRANDE, *op. cit.*, pp. 28-31.

St. Eugene de Mazenod,
a Supporter of Saint Alphonsus Liguori's Moral Theology

Giuseppe Orlandi, C.SS.R.[1]

Writing to his father, Charles Antoine, in Palermo, on November 8, 1815, Eugene de Mazenod informed him of an establishment "that I am forming at Aix for Provence. It is a foundation of Missionaries whose duty it will be to cover the countryside and bring people back to the religious sense that they have lost"[2].

About four months later (exactly on February 27, 1816), his father replied, giving him some advice on his role as founder, and he added:

> "We have here a similar group of holy priests who have gathered to give missions in the surrounding area and are doing a lot of good. As well there is also a similar Institution called Missionaries of the Redeemer established *all'Uditore*. They recognize their Founder as Bishop Liguori of St. Agatha in the Kingdom of Naples, who died in the odour of sanctity and whose beatification they are presently working on in Rome by the Pope's command"[3].

On May 1, 1816, Eugene asked his father to find the Rules and Constitutions of the Redemptorists, and the life and the office of their "saint"[4] Founder, some relics or at least a picture large enough to be put in the community room while awaiting its transfer to the church. He also adds that he has some of the writings of Alphonsus and in particular his moral theology "which I like very much and of which I make a special study when I have time to study, because at present I have no time for anything other than action"[5].

First Contact with the "Venerable Liguori"

Historians have been asking when Eugene first came to know about St. Alphonsus and they found that in a letter written on July 12 1809 to his sister, Eugenie, he gave her some advice based on the teachings of the "Venerable Liguori"[6].

Supposedly, Eugene first came to know about St. Alphonsus and the Redemptorists during the time he spent in Naples (1798-1799). I take the liberty of excluding that hypothesis since the de Mazenods frequented the court of the Bourbons from whom they hoped to receive some relief in the financial straits in which they were at that time. It was, therefore, highly unlikely that simultaneously they would have frequented the Redemptorists who, in any case, did not have a house in Naples. Moreover, the Redemptorists were considered, rightly <u>and</u> wrongly, to be sympathetic to revolutionary ideas. I have purposely written "rightly <u>and</u> wrongly". "Wrongly", because the sentence of exile to the Camaldolese monastery in Vico Equense passed on the Redemptorist Superior General, Fr. Pier Paolo Blasucci, was not deserved. This was acknowledged, in due time, by the Bourbon regime when they lifted the sentence. "Rightly", because among the Neapolitan Redemptorists, as, indeed, among religious of other Congregations such as the Vincentians, whose membership included Fr. Domenico Vincenzo Troisi (1749-1799), an authoritative member also of the Directory of the Parthenopean Republic and a victim of Bourbon oppression, there were quite a few who shared the hopes for renewal and for political and social redemption which had been raised by the Great Revolution.

As missionaries in close daily contact with the people, especially the people of the countryside, they had reason to know their miserable living conditions, of which the people themselves do not seem to have been fully aware.

It seems more than likely that Eugene first came in contact with the personality and the work of St. Alphonsus during his stay in Venice from 1794 to 1798. We know that during that period he frequented the Zinelli family and developed a close relationship with the brothers Don Pietro and Don Bartolo who placed their well equipped library at his disposal. It should also be remembered that Venice was the home of the

publisher Remondini who published and distributed the works of Saint Alphonsus in Italy and abroad, beginning with his *Theologia Moralis*. It is therefore likely that the Zinelli brothers were in possession of these works. Both of them were soon to enter the Company of the Faith of Jesus founded by Fr. Niccolò Paccanari (which in a certain sense took the place of the Society of Jesus which had been suppressed), and this society was known to follow the teachings of Alphonsus de Liguori.

At the Saint-Sulpice Seminary

We also know for sure that Eugene, during the period he spent in the Seminary of Saint-Sulpice in Paris (which he entered in 1808), was prefect of the association known as Aa, which belonged to the Congregation of Fr. Delpuits and which participated in the Catholic resistance on behalf of Pius VII[7]. Besides, in 1809, he made friends with Cesare d'Azeglio and the noble Luigi Provava di Colegno who had a major role to play in "Amicizia Cattolica".[8] All of the abovementioned movements were engaged in the distribution of "good" books, including those of Saint Alphonsus, and saw to it that they were reprinted. Already in 1805, even before he entered the seminary, Eugene had tried to procure the works of Alphonsus through the good offices of Baron Talleyrand[9].

In the seminary of Saint-Sulpice, which Lamennais considered to have been the only institute in France where ecclesiastical studies were seriously promoted[10], the teaching in Saint Eugene's time was markedly stamped with the principles of anti-jansenism and anti- gallicanism. Moral theology, however, followed the more rigid teaching of *more probabilism* (which held that, in case of doubt, decisions should be made in favour of the law unless there were particular reasons to the contrary). *Probabilism*, which was the doctrine taught by the Jesuits, and *equiprobabilism* as taught by Saint Alphonsus (which held that if there was a conflict between law and freedom the option should be for freedom when the arguments for and against were equally convincing) were both equally rejected[11]. In Saint-Sulpice, and throughout France[12], Saint Alphonsus was known and quoted, but he did not exercise any particular influence[13].

After his ordination on December 21, 1811, and on his first contact with the problems of the people, Saint Eugene became aware that rigid opinions did not help to bring souls closer to God, but rather to drive them away.

In fact, after the Restoration, two very important facts became evident: the return of the aristocracy and part of the bourgeois to the faith, and the progressive alienation of the poorer classes.

The aristocracy which previously had been "libertine, sceptical and drunk on philosophy" were brought back to Catholicism because they were convinced that the Revolution was the result of illuminism.

> "The emigrants had convinced themselves that their cause was identical with the cause of religion as well as the cause of the monarchy and that by detaching themselves from the former and opposing the latter, they had contributed to the ruin both of the Church and the throne to their own detriment".
>
> "They must therefore devote their efforts to restoring the authority of both these powers, so as to re-establish their own authority and their own privileges. So they became at one and the same time *ultras* and clericals. That was the equivalent of forcing into the opposite camp the bourgeoisie who had been the real beneficiaries of the Revolution, and who had not the slightest intention of abandoning the position they had acquired by taking advantage of the people in revolt: in reality there was a certain moving closer to Catholicism on the part of the bourgeoisie, which had been inspired by the teaching of Lammenais and by romanticism: "Romanticism exuded warmth, enthusiasm and emotion: the final outcome was a similar growth in the prestige of that Catholicism which until then had been despised and seen as shameful but which was now held up as a source of art and a principle of social energy"[14].

The whole of religious history, from 1815 to 1830 was to feel the negative influence of this antagonism and it would not be until 1848 that another antagonism was to take its place, that between the bourgeoisie supporters of Orleans and the republicans who were unwilling to give up the advantages gained in the days of February. The bourgeoisie would then seek to side with the Church while the working class became increasingly alienated from it, even to the extent of becoming hostile"[15]. That alienation was gradual.

> "Up until 1848, as far as the worker was concerned, even though he did not go to Mass, he continued to respect the faith, but afterwards, with the coming of anticlericalism and socialism, irreligion and even hostility began to develop"[16].

In these conditions, Saint Eugene was not slow to realise that rigorism did not serve any useful purpose. For example, according to the principles of the moral code of the time, admission to Holy Communion required that the candidate be at least 14 years of age, since there was no certainty that he or she would have reached the use of reason before that age. A penitent was required to go to Confession before receiving Holy Communion if he or she had forgotten to confess a mortal sin. There were very rigorous regulations with regard to admission to the sacraments of occasional sinners or recidivists. If a priest were not fasting he was forbidden to celebrate Mass in order to provide Viaticum for a sick person.[17] There were even extreme cases such as that narrated by Oblate Fr. Guibert who went to the minor seminary of Embrun to preach the retreat and realised that many seminarians had not received Communion even at Christmas since they had not been given absolution for the boyish mischief perpetrated during the Summer holidays. It was enough to make the Oblate exclaim:

> "We are living in the midst of what is Jansenism in practice and that is one hundred times worse than dogmatic Jansenism"[18].

That mentality made it difficult for the Restoration clergy to resolve the problems with which they were faced. There were, for instance, marriage problems (the validity of weddings celebrated during the Revolution, civil contract and sacrament, the norms of the Napoleonic Code and the norms of Canon Law, civil and canonical impediments, dispensations, divorce etc.). Other problems were financial (payment of debts, payments made by devalued cheques, state property, interest loans etc.)[19].

It was indeed a Sulpician – and it goes to show that in the Institute not all were adherents of the *more probable* doctrine[20] – who pointed Eugene in the direction of the teachings of Saint Alphonsus. He was an anti-Jansenist and moral theologian pastor of souls. His name was Fr. Bonys and Saint Eugene appealed to him for advice (beginning in 1814[21]) when he was about to undertake his work of the parish missions and was looking for a sound model and sure guide on whom he could depend[22].

The more diligent observers, among whom were Saint Eugene and the first Oblates, became aware that the contrast was not so much, or at least only, between two generations of clergy: the older one with Gallican tendencies which had been decimated by the Revolution and who, in spite of their weaknesses, had succeeded in one way or another in getting Catholicism to survive during the period of the Revolution and the Empire, and the younger generation with its ultramontane tendencies which had been recruited during the period 1820-1835, and whose formation had been haphazard and abridged due to the circumstances of the time. The contrast existed within the same generation. It was between new *clergy* and new *faithful*. The situation of the latter had changed profoundly since 1789. The effects of the Revolution could not be undone.

After 1830, the illusion that a political restoration would nullify (the results of the Revolution) was brutally dissipated. Quite a few responsible members of the clergy then became aware of the fact, particularly after the first surveys of religious practice. It became necessary to face reality, that is, that an increasingly large proportion of the population were becoming estranged from the Church. It was necessary to begin questioning the responsibility of the clergy in their ordinary pastoral work and it was in this general context that the rigorism of confessors had to be questioned. The new clergy were not at all in a position to meet the new situation. The text books available to them, the models for preaching and the guides for confessions, were for the most part set in a previous century. They had been hurridly reprinted, badly corrected, and, above all, they were fundamentally rigorist[23]. The rapid formation received in the seminaries after the Restoration did not enable the new confessors to make their own judgements (as required by the *most probable* opinion) as to what they should do in the face of the new moral problems of a largely secularized society which was now on the way to industrialization. Rigorism, as can be seen from the attitude of the young Curé of Ars, was the simplest position for these young priests"[24].

The Moral Teology of Saint Alphonsus: Equiprobabilism

Even the moral theology writings of Saint Alphonsus were dated. It must be remembered that the first edition of *Theologia moralis* was from 1748, even though it was later continually updated by the author until the final edition of 1779[25]. But it is to the credit of Saint Alphonsus that he adopted a position

> "half way between those theologians who gave absolute emphasis to the role of human free will in salvation and its role in moral decisions, and their adversaries who developed a theory of predestination in salvation and a rigorist morality, while he sought a mediating formula"[26].

The motives of Saint Alphonsus were pastoral and he distanced himself both from the rigorists who used the refusal of absolution as a moral weapon, and from the laxists who let the people go their own way without guidance. Saint Alphonsus did not invent a new moral system. His merit lay in instilling a new breath of fresh air into an already tried and tested system.

In a very much shortened synthesis, the contribution of Saint Alphonsus may be summarised in the following three principles:

> 1. "The general principle is the search for truth; therefore if the opinion in favor of the law is more probable, we must follow it";
>
> 2. "In the life of the individual, the dignity of conscience is of supreme importance, insofar as the person must act, in the last analysis, according to external norms and his decision must be based interiorly with regard to the goodness of the action";
>
> 3."at every level of morality we must respect freedom, for example, if a law has not been duly promulgated, it cannot be binding, because an uncertain law cannot impose an obligation which is certain"[27].

Jean Delumeau has written that the fame of Saint Alphonsus is due to the courage with which he opposed the rigorists, even though he was not a laxist. Wishing to proceed "with clarity in such a sordid matter", he specified the five instances in which it is permitted to follow an opinion which is merely probable:

> 1)in the area of matters of faith;
>
> 2) when dealing with sick people to whom the doctor must, if possible, administer the more reliable medicines;
>
> 3)in judicial matters, when the judge must sentence according to the more certain teaching;
>
> 4) in the administration of the Sacraments, with the exception of cases of necessity;
>
> 5) when the adoption of a probable opinion would be harmful to one's neighbour"[28].

It may happen, however, that two different opinions with regard to a moral decision are "equally probable" and this is the "equi-probabilism" to which the name of Saint Alphonsus has been linked. In this instance it is the individual conscience which must decide. The natural law is not always as obvious as the rigorists would have us believe".

When the doctors dispute among themselves in a concrete case, it means that the law is not sufficiently promulgated and therefore is not binding (*lex dubia non obligat*). In such circumstances the individual is free to choose.

> "With this statement as his starting point, the Neapolitan bishop proceeds to conclusion which he regards as fundamental: man's freedom takes precedence over the law. The latter is for man and not the other way around. "God" according to Saint Alphonsus "first created a free man, later he imposed upon him laws which cannot be binding if they are not manifest and of a certitude which is shorn of doubt"[29].
>
> "In this context, Fr. Rey-Mermet speaks of "a humanism of lights" and "Christian personalism". It is precisely in this way that alphonsian morality has been understood. It invites modern man to take upon himself personally his ethical responsibility and its consequent risks. But, at the same time, it makes him feel reassured, excusing him when his decisions are made in good faith and after having taken serious precautions"[30].

It follows that, apart from what was deficient in the teachings of Saint Alphonsus because it was strictly connected with the era in which he lived, its inspiring principles were considered valid by those who promoted its spread in France during the Restoration.

A Sense of Liberation

The sense of liberation produced by the adoption of the alphonsian moral system has been well described by Bishop R. Devie (1767-1852), of Beviers (1823-1852). Ordained priest in 1781, he received

his formation in the Sulpician seminary of Viviers. At the beginning of ministry he was very rigorist, as he himself writes: "We required such a perfect disposition for the reception of Holy Communion that it was beyond human strength. Lending money and dancing were mortal sins as far as we were concerned and did not permit any extenuating circumstances[31]; it was required that ecclesiastical property (which had been confiscated and sold to private persons) should be restored even though that was now morally impossible and the obligations not all clear ... As for dancing it was not sufficient to get away from it gradually but a promise had to be made to avoid it at all costs. Young men and women, even though well disposed, would not dare to make such a promise and kept away from the sacraments, which only added to their weakness and their dissipation. A person would make a promise at Easter but then

they would be overcome by the celebration of a wedding or a Baptism and they would not dare to go to confession for fear of receiving a reprimand. As a result they abandoned Holy Communion, the Confraternities and the frequentation of the church".

Having become bishop of Belley, Bishop Devie advised his clergy to read and re-read the *Praxis confessarii* of Saint Alphonsus[32].

> "From this book you will learn to observe the correct medium which is so rare and so necessary in the holy ministry: you will learn that one can get lost and that others are lost if absolution is given without discernment to all who present themselves; but you will also learn that it is possible to become holy by practising this goodness, this kindness, this charity, this indulgence of which Saint Francis de Sales has given us the example, and of which this holy man, whose example Blessed Alphonsus (de Liguori) has followed in his conduct and his teaching about the Saviour of the World"[33].

There have been a number of phases to the campaign fought by the supporters of the moral system of Saint Alphonsus. The first coincides roughly with the second decade of the 1800s. It was fought on two fronts which we may refer to as the "practical" and the "theoretical". Among those distinguished in the latter area we mention Pio Brunone Lanteri, author of *Réflexions sur la sainteté et la doctrine du bienheureux Alphonse de Liguori* (1823) and Thomas Gousset, future archbishop of Reims and Cardinal, author of *Justification de la théologie morale du bienheureux Alphonse de Liguori* (1832), and also, as has been shown by recent studies, Jean-Baptiste Bouvier (1783-1854), bishop of Le Mans (1834-1854), author of *Institutiones theologicae ad usum seminariorum*, 6 volumes, with 15 editions from 1834 to 1880, and *Dissertatio in sextum Decalogi praeceptum*, with17 editions (1827-1864).

The Early Oblates Supported Saint Alphonsus' Moral System

On the battle front which I have inaccurately defined as "practical", Saint Eugene and his Oblates (e.g. Frs. Albini and Guibert) distinguished themselves.

> 1) Especially by the publication of the biography written by Jeancard[34] which did not neglect the outline of the teaching of Saint Alphonsus[35]. Beginning in 1818 Saint Eugene wanted to have this work published and it was only a series of adverse circumstances which prevented the printing until 1828[36]. One of his merits was that he prepared the ground for the acceptance of writings of those who were committed to popularize the moral teaching of Saint Alphonsus in France, as were Lanteri and Gousset.
>
> 2) The second contribution was that of practical pastoral. Wherever the missionaries went to give missions they applied the teachings of Saint Alphonsus. They showed how useful they could be to the faithful with whom they came in contact, but especially to the clergy who were initially sceptical and reluctant: in Aix-en-Provence, for example, the older parish clergy were accustomed to teaching only "quod traditum est a maioribus Ecclesiae gallicanae"[37].
>
> 3) The third contribution was to the teaching in seminaries, beginning with that of Marseilles (but also in that of Ajaccio where Fr. Albini taught), which was under the direction of Saint Eugene's sons from 1827 to 1861. Fr. Beaudoin has illustrated clearly the teaching followed by the Oblates in this field, as they were encouraged to do by their Founder. Even though prudence motivated the use of the older text book by Bailly[38], so as not to upset the clergy, it was interpreted in the light of the teachings of Saint Alphonsus[39].

The General Chapter of 1837

This practice was confirmed by the Oblate General Chapter of 1837, which nevertheless avoided adopting the moral teaching of Saint Alphonsus as the official teaching of the Congregation, being content to establish that its principles should continue to be followed[40]. It was a big step forward if we consider that a text book published in Amiens in 1827 stated "would to heaven that the moral theology of Liguori had never seen the light of day, since it could be better defined as immoral"[41].

The commitment of Saint Eugene and his Oblates was not without risks, especially since the rigorists decided to react. Lanteri's offensive reached its apex in 1826 and then rapidly declined. The Jesuits, who had adopted the moral system of Saint Alphonsus in 1824 (although they did not declare that publicly) were, in 1828, removed from their minor seminaries-colleges and subjected to some violence in the Revolution of 1830 so that they were obliged to reduce their activity[42].

> "The missionaries suffered the same fate: the great missionary movement lost its impetus after 1828 and the missions came to halt after 1830. Now in Savoy and even more so in Provence where the Oblates of de Mazenod were present, the missionaries proved to be the most effective upholders of the teaching of Saint Alphonsus. The disciples of Lammenais also played a major role in spreading his doctrine, but from 1830 onwards they became increasingly suspect by the hierarchy after the condemnation in *Mirari vos* in 1832, and they found themselves in difficult circumstances"[43].

It has become customary to set a definite date for the triumph of the teaching of Saint Alphonsus in France: 1844 was the year in which Gousset published his *Théologie morale à l'usage des curés et confesseurs*, the first text in moral theology inspired by the doctrine of Alphonsus, adapted to the French context and published in French.

> It was an immediate success. Considerable! The triumph of the teaching of Liguori was now irreversible. As Montalembert noted in 1846, a real revolution had taken place"[44]. Some years later, December 7, 1852, the text book of Bailly was placed on the Index ("donec corrigatur")[45].

Anybody who wished – as did Gousset – that the clergy embrace the doctrine of Saint Alphonsus, proclaimed greater freedom, especially for the laity. The stricter form of legalism was questioned since it tended to multiply the regulations and thereby make the burden of Christians unbearable. This was the context in which Oblate Father Guibert, expressed the desire, to give an example, that each person should be able to go to confession to any priest of their choice and not necessarily to their parish priest[46].

However, the problems which could arise in this new atmosphere of freedom were of a totally different kind. I shall mention only two of them: in the matter of what may be defined as the "privatization of social behaviour", there is the matter of *conjugal sexuality* (exculpation of women in matters of contraceptive practice); and the acceptance of a legal tax for loans made with interest[47].

Saint Alphonsus, Doctor of the Church

When negotiations began which were to lead to the declaration of Saint Alphonsus as a Doctor of the Church, the Superior General of the Redemptorists commissioned the Provincials to collect the signatures of the Bishops in their respective countries according to a specific timetable. The Provincial of France was among the last to carry out this duty and he did so in 1867. There were doubts as to the willingness of the Bishops to do so and it was feared that the refusal of many of them would have a negative effect on the process. In fact, these fears proved to be unfounded, given that, of about ninety Bishops, only ten refused to submit their signature. Among the latter was Bishop Place, the successor of Saint Eugene on the See of Marseilles: he refused even to receive the Redemptorist who came to collect his signature. To make up for that, Bishop Jeancard, auxiliary to Bishop Place and author of the biography of Saint Alphonsus, willingly added his own signature. Archbishop Guibert of Tours, later to become Cardinal Archbishop of Paris and one of the first companions of Saint Eugene, also willingly signed the petition[48].

The success of this initiative among the Bishops of France – which would have been unthinkable at the beginning of the century – was a confirmation of what Guerber has described as "the rallying of the French clergy to the moral theology of Liguori" and what Boutry has defined as a real Copernican revolution in sacramental field"[49]. Bishop de Mazenod and his Oblates of Mary Immaculate played a major role in this success; further studies will determine it more precisely. Saint Eugene had no hesitation in stating that role as he did in a letter to Cardinal Gousset dated July 21, 1852: "May I quote for you Saint

Alphonsus de Liguori, whose theology I have caused to be taught and practised, long before your books were published on the matter, and devotion to whom I was the first to establish in France"[50].

As can be seen, and as Saint Therese of Avila taught, humility and truth go hand in hand in the lives of the saints.

(Translated from the Italian
by Edward Carolan, O.M.I.)

Notes:

---

[1] Conference given on April14, 1996 at the small Court theatre of the Royal Palace of Naples by Fr. Giuseppe Orlandi, C.SS.R ., member of the Historical Institute of the Redemptorists and professor at the Latran University, Rome.

[2] E. de Mazenod, *Letters to Various Correspondents on the Congregation of the O.M.I. (1815-1861)*. (Oblate Writings, XIII), Rome 1993, p. 1.

[3] *Ibid.,* p.1, footnote 3.

[4]It may seem strange that Eugene gives the title of "Saint" to Alphonsus. He was beatified on September 6, 1816 and canonized only on May 26, 1839.

[5] *Ibid.,* p. 6. Eugene was not content with appealing to his father in Palermo. From letters addressed to him on April 24 and July 15 we learn that Provana di Collegno had sent him the writings, a picture and a relic of Alphonsus who was to be beatified on September 15. See J. Pielorz, "Le rôle du Fondateur dans la publication de la première biographie française de S. Alphonse de Liguori", in *Etudes oblates,* 18 (1959), p. 164. See footnote 36.

[6] E. de Mazenod, *Spiritual writings 1794-1811*, (Oblate Writings, XIV), Rome 1994, p. 130.

[7] J. Guerber, *Le ralliement du clergé français à la morale liguorienne,* Roma 1973, p. 355;
M. Courvoisier, *"*Audace, le Fondateur et son époque"*,* in *Vie Oblate Life, 54 (1995),* p. 60.

[8] *Ibid*., p. 356.

[9] This can be gathered from Baron Talleyrand's letter to Eugene dated September 9, 1805. See Y. Beaudoin, *Le Grand Séminaire de Marseille (et Scolasticat Oblat) sous la direction des Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, *1827-1862*, Ottawa 1966, p. 240, footnote 81.

[10] J. Leflon, *Crisi rivoluzionaria e liberale (1789-1846)*, XX/2 (Restaurazione e crisi liberale 1815-1846), Torino 1970, p. 965-966. (Our translation).

[11] A number of authorities in the history of moral theology hold that Saint Alphonsus was also among the probabilists and that he defined himself as equiprobabilist so that he would not become involved in the persecution which led to the suppression of the Society of Jesus.

[12] G. Humbert, "Jalons chronologiques pour une histoire de la pénétration en pays francophone de la pensée et des oeuvres d'Alphonse de Liguori", in AA.VV., *Alphonse de Liguori, pasteur et docteur*, Paris, 1987, pp. 369-401.

[13] J. Leflon, *Eugène de Mazenod, évêque de Marseille, fondateur des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée, 1782-1861*, I, Paris 1957, pp. 348-350. In the opinion of Gousset, probabilism was "the tendency to base oneself on the common opinion of theologians, in keeping with the objective situations of opinion in the Church", while *more probabilism* was the tendency to be persuaded by the opinion of the individual";
J. Guerber, *Le ralliement du clergé français à la morale liguorienne*, Roma 1973, p. 355.

[14] J. Leflon, *Crisi rivoluzionaria*, p. 963.

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 610: "The lay intellectual element among the bourgeoisie, composed mainly of people of the law, in the period immediately preceding the Revolution, fell massively under the influence of illuminism and unbelief. But following the Revolution and the Empire, the capitalist bourgeoisie especially, the commercial element which had developed through industry and capital, slowly evolved and sided with the Church, not only for political reasons (after the events of 1830-31), but for deeper reasons, in virtue of the alternating law which puts sons in opposition to their fathers as a reaction against the assumptions and disillusionment of Voltaire's philosophy" , P. Callari, *Introduzione a P. B. Lanteri*, Carteggio 1, Turin 1976, p. 174. (Our translation).

[16] *Ibid.*

[17] J. Leflon, *Eugène de Mazenod,* op. cit., I, p. 350.

[18] Y. Beaudoin, *Le Grand Séminaire*, op. cit., p. 101.

[19] J. Leflon, *Eugène de Mazenod*, op. cit., I, p. 351.

[20] Y. Beaudoin, *Le Grand Séminaire*, op. cit., p. 101.

[21] It is commonly accepted that the foundation of the Oblates dates from January 25, 1816, even though some have suggested other dates such as October 2, 1815. Saint Eugene showed his intention to found the Missionaries of Provence on October 28, 1814 in a letter to his friend Charles de Forbin-Janson. See J. Pielorz, "La Congrégation OMI a-t-elle été fondée le 25 janvier 1816?", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 54 (1995), p. 161.

[22] P. Lecrivain, "Saint Alphonse aux risques du rigorisme et du liguorisme", in AA.VV., *Alphonse de Liguori, pasteur et docteur*, op. cit., p. 255, writes: "Contrary to what has often been written, Mazenod was not initiated in the teachings of Saint Alphonsus during his stay in Italy but was introduced to them by a Sulpician in Aix, that is by M. Bony who was himself a follower of those teachings. Whatever may have happened, it was only in 1816, on the occasion of the Beatification (of Alphonsus) that he started his search for his writings and his foundation". (Our translation).

[23] Napoleon had re-opened the theological faculties in 1808 and established that each metropolitan diocese should have one. In fact only six (including that of Aix) were to last beyond the end of the Empire, but in fact they became dormant because of a lack of professors and students. Rome did not recognise the degrees issued by them. It was not until 1842 that France had a "school of higher ecclesiastical studies and therefore the intellectual formation for the clergy was limited to what was offered by the seminaries". The minor seminaries proved to be able to meet the situation while the major seminaries suffered from a serious lack of professors, who for the most part were recruited on a provisional basis. "Most of them limited their courses to commenting as best they could the old text books which were outdated and terribly dry", for example, *Théologie* by Bailly. The professors followed the old text books which they had studied before the Revolution and were content to launch into some tirades against the Jansenists, the quietists and the philosophers of the XVIIIth century. They refuted the errors of bygone days, gave solutions to old problems, but failed to take account of the fact that the historical evolution which had taken place had created new and more formidable ones. Church-state relations were presented from the viewpoint of the Gallicanism of 1682, when it was necessary instead to define to what degree Catholicism could accept the dominant liberalism of the present day. In another context, the moral theologians, just as they had before the Revolution, continued to take sides for or against the lawfulness of lending for interest, a question to which Gousset devoted his first work at the very time when capitalism and industrialization were raising problems of moral and social economics which were to dominate the modern world". J. Leflon, *Crisi rivoluzionaria*, op. cit., p. 964-965. (Our translation).

[24] C. Langlois, "La difficile conjoncture liguorienne de 1832", in AA.VV., *Penser la foi. Recherches en théologie aujourd'hui. Mélanges offerts à Joseph Moingt*, Paris 1993, p. 653-654.

[25] The ninth edition (1785) was issued while the author was still alive but he did not have anything to do with it. See M. Vidal, *La morale di Sant'Alfonso. Dal rigorismo al benignismo*, Roma 1992, p. 103.

[26] R. Gallagher," Il sistema manualistico della teologia morale dalla morte di Sant'Alfonso ad oggi", in AA.VV., *Morale e redenzione*, a cura di Alvarez Verdes e S. Majorano, Roma 1983, p. 256.

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 257.

[28] J. Delumeau, "Morale et pastorale de saint Alphonse. Bienveillance et juste milieu", in AA.VV., *Alphonse de Liguori, pasteur et docteur*, op. cit., p. 158.

[29] *Ibid.*, p. 158-159.

[30] *Ibid*., p. 159.

[31] Strangely, it had been forgotten that Saint Francis de Sales had already given a solution to the licitness of dancing, in Chapter XXXIV (When gambling and dancing are permitted), of the *Introduction to the devout life* (1609).

[32] Published in 1757, as the Latin translation of *Pratica del Confessore* (1755), published for the first time at the end of Vol. II of the 2nd Edition of the *Theologia moralis (1753-1755).*

[33] P. Lecrivain, *Saint Alphonse aux risques du rigorisme*, op. cit., p. 259.

[34] This biography uses that written by Giattini (really written by Marsella), and that by Tannoia. See O. Weiss, "Alfons von Liguori und seine Biografen. Ein Heiger zwischen hagiographischer Verklärung und Historischer Wirklichkeit", in *Spicilegium historicum Congregationis Ssmi Redemptoris,* 36-37 (1988-1989), p. 181-182.

[35] See *Ibid.*, p. 183; J. Pielorz, *Le rôle du Fondateur*, op. cit., p. 163-180.

[36] J. Pielorz, "Les rapports du Fondateur avec les curés d'Aix (1813-1836)", in *Études oblates,* 19 (1960), p. 340. Eugene's father brought the biography of Saint Alphonsus (written by Giattini) with him on his return to France in December 1817. The biography (by Amici) which had been forwarded in September 1816 had been lost when a storm at sea sank the ship on which it was being carried. J. Pielorz, "Le rôle du Fondateur", op. cit., p. 165. See footnote 4 on biographies.

[37] *Ibid.*

[38] Louis Bailly (1730-1808) from the diocese of Digne was the author of *Theologia dogmatica et moralis,* 8 volumes in 8° (1789); 8 volumes in 12°, Lyon 1804. His moral teaching was quite rigid, in spite of later adjustments and especially in the Receveur edition. For half a century it was the text book in most of the seminaries of France. See *Dictionnaire de*

théologie catholique, II, Paris, 1923, col. 37.

[39] By advising the use of the text books which had been in use until then, he contributed to their being adapted by comparison with the teaching of Saint Alphonsus, which, in the Paris edition of 1824 was in 9 volumes. See Y.Beaudoin, *Le grand Séminaire*, op. cit., p. 102-103, 242.

[40] *Ibid.*, p.103; J. Pielorz, *Les Chapitres généraux au temps du Fondateur*, typed copy, Ottawa, 1968, p. 139-140. The method was that used by the professors of Saint-Sulpice at the time when de Mazenod was a student there. J. Leflon, *Eugène de Mazenod*, op. cit., I, p. 353-354.

[41] Y. Beaudoin, Le Grand Séminaire de Marseille, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

[42] J. Leflon, *Crisi revoluzionaria*, op.cit., p. 709-711.

[43] C. Langlois, *La difficile conjoncture*, op.cit., p. 649.

[44] *Ibid.*, p. 661.

[45] Voir *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, II, Paris 1923, p. 37.

[46] C. Langlois, *La difficile conjoncture*, op.cit., p. 655.

[47] *Ibid.*, p. 655.

[48] Writing about him, the Redemptorist Provincial notes: "It must be said of him, as was said of the Archbishop of Toulouse, in adding his signature, his Excellency expressed his great esteem and appreciation for the Redemptorists". This is the account he gives of his visit to the Bishop of Toulouse: "He showed that he was one of the greatest admirers and most sincere friends of Saint Alphonsus; he declared that he was very pleased to contribute to his glory and expressed his hope that our enterprise would be successful". G. Orlandi, "La causa per il dottorato di S. Alfonso. Preparazione, svolgimento, ripercussioni (1866-1871)", in *Spicilegium historicum Congregationis Ssmi Redemptoris,*, 19 (1971), p. 127-128.

[49] Ph. Boutry, *Prêtres et paroisses au pays du Curé d'Ars*. Paris, 1986, p. 377.

[50] Y. Beaudoin, *Le Grand Séminaire*, op. cit., 100-101. Saint Eugene said the same thing to Pius IX on April 17, 1853. For his commitment to the cause of Saint Alphonsus, he had received congratulations from Cardinal Castiglione, later to become Pius VIII. See *Ibid*., p. 240. See Delpeuch, "Saint Alphonse de Liguori et Eugène de Mazenod", in *Missions*, 14 (1876), p. 206.

In memoriam
Pierre Chevroulet, o.m.i.[1]
(1924-2004)

ROLAND JACQUES, O.M.I.

Le 2 janvier 2004, le père Pierre Chevroulet m'a transmis un long texte de réflexion – une quinzaine de pages – qu'il avait rédigé concernant la persécution des chrétiens au Laos et les causes de cette persécution[2]. Les douloureux événements des années 1960, au cours desquels six ou sept de nos confrères oblats ont donné leur vie pour le Christ à côté de plusieurs Laotiens et d'autres missionnaires, ont marqué le père Chevroulet pour toujours. Je crois même que c'est là la véritable clé pour comprendre sa vie et son rayonnement apostolique. C'est en tant que responsable qu'il a vu le départ tragique de Jean Wauthier et Joseph Boissel, puisqu'il fut de 1965 à 1971 le Provincial de notre ancienne province du Laos. De son texte, je retiendrai particulièrement l'une ou l'autre citation.

La première est le récit par Jean Subra d'une réunion des missionnaires de Sam Neua, le 18 septembre 1960; ce jour-là, le supérieur Yves Bertrais avait rappelé:

> «Les directives venant de Rome, par le père [Jean] Hanique, provincial, et confirmées par Monseigneur [Étienne Loosdregt], demandent à tous les pères qui ont charge d'âmes de rester sur place, quoi qu'il arrive, même au péril de leur vie.»

Pierre Chevroulet était de cette génération de grands missionnaires qui ont vu la mort en face; comme eux, il avait décidé une fois pour toutes qu'il vaut mieux perdre sa vie avec le Christ, pour ses frères, que de la garder pour soi. Pierre n'a pas connu la mort violente par les armes mais bien cette autre forme de violence qu'est la maladie. Il a vécu cela avec un courage étonnant, sans jamais cesser de travailler pour l'Église du Christ et de témoigner de sa vocation oblate. Je crois que c'était là pour lui une manière de se racheter, en quelque sorte, d'avoir eu la vie sauve alors que d'autres Oblats mouraient autour de lui.

Une deuxième citation complète la première. Elle est extraite d'une lettre de 1953, adressée par Mgr Loosdregt à Henri Rouzière, qui était supérieur de la mission de Xieng Khouang. Une attaque communiste sur la Plaine des Jarres mettait directement en danger la vie des missionnaires et de leurs communautés. «TENEZ LE PLUS LONGTEMPS POSSIBLE, écrivait l'évêque, mais il faut également faire vie qui dure pour continuer ou recommencer après la tempête.»

Dans son texte, Pierre Chevroulet souligne les mots 'Tenez le plus longtemps possible'. Quand il est arrivé au Laos en 1956, cela était déjà devenu une tradition transmise par les aînés aux plus jeunes. Pour Pierre, cette petite phrase est aussi la seule véritable réponse à la question que les Oblats se posent depuis une quarantaine d'années: 'Pourquoi sont-ils morts?' Pour plusieurs des jeunes missionnaires pleins de dynamisme, que Pierre avait côtoyés, servis et aimés comme des frères, le bout du possible ce fut la mort, la mort dans une fidélité absolue et une obeissance inconditionnelle.

Quant à Pierre lui-même, par la grâce de Dieu il a été appelé à mettre en pratique la seconde partie de la phrase: «Il faut faire vie qui dure pour continuer ou recommencer après la tempête.» Cela, il l'a vécu avec une fidélité tout aussi admirable, et dans un esprit d'obéissance tout aussi réel «Vie qui dure pour continuer», ce furent les dernières années de la présence des Oblats étrangers au Laos. Ce ne furent pas des années glorieuses à la manière des «épopées missionnaires» dont on parlait autrefois; mais ce furent des années cruciales pour préparer la petite Église du Laos, encore dans l'enfance, à voler bientôt de ses propres ailes. Ce furent des années de grande souffrance aussi, à cause de l'indifférence ou de l'incompréhension de plusieurs confrères. Pierre a témoigné de ces années avec beaucoup de pudeur et de retenue dans son grand texte de 1999, «Oblats témoins de la foi au Laos», largement diffusé dans la famille oblate.

«Vie qui dure pour recommencer après la tempête», pour Pierre, ce fut sa nouvelle carrière missionnaire au service de l'Église en Thaïlande, si proche et si différente de celle du Laos: vingt-neuf longues années après les presque vingt ans passés dans la mission du Laos. Il a dû penser bien souvent aux paroles prophétiques de Mgr Loosdregt! De son apostolat en Thaïlande, je ne dirai rien, puisque d'autres en parleront avec bien plus de compétence. Mais je peux témoigner de ce que j'ai vu moi-même lors de mes nombreux passages à Bangkok depuis 1989. Pierre Chevroulet était, au sein de la Délégation oblate de Thaïlande, une présence vivante, priante, rayonnante. Le rencontrer n'était pas pour moi une formalité ni un geste de politesse. C'était toujours un événement attendu, un moment de lumière dont je ressortais enrichi. Sa connaissance de la mission en Asie du Sud-est n'avait rien de livresque. Il s'est intéressé d'emblée aux nouvelles initiatives auxquelles j'ai été mêlé. Ses conseils, loin d'être un prêche, étaient discrets et chaleureux. Sa présence auprès des jeunes générations de Samphran constituait un point de référence stable. Toujours au travail, sans une plainte, il a tracé son sillon jusqu'au bout.

Nous savions tous les deux que, sans la mission du Laos, la mission oblate du Viêt-nam n'aurait sans doute jamais vu le jour. Il y a entre les deux de vrais liens de parenté. Dans le dernier message verbal reçu de lui (via Bernard Dullier) avant que la maladie ne le réduise au silence, il redisait combien la présence de novices vietnamiens était précieuse pour la Délégation de Thaïlande. Ce que Pierre Chevroulet a semé par toute sa vie, d'autres devront l'irriguer, et d'autres générations encore pourront le moissonner. Mais il savait bien lui-même que Dieu, et Dieu seul, donne la croissance. C'est pour cela que, dans les difficultés, il a toujours continué à prier et à espérer.

J'aimerais terminer sur une dernière citation. Reprise à Jean Subra, elle figure elle aussi dans le texte de janvier 2004 que Pierre m'a envoyé sur le Laos: «Quand le père [Louis] Morin est mort, il a dit à père [Étienne] Loosdregt: 'Je ferai plus au ciel pour les Phu-Theung qu'ici.'» Le père Morin était mort en 1950 à Xieng Khouang, premier Oblat resté en terre laotienne. Quant aux Phu-Theung, ce sont bien sûr les Kmhmu', qui ont ouvert leur coeur à l'Évangile et qui ont donné à l'Église du Laos un de ses plus beaux témoins: le catéchiste Luc Sy, tué par les ennemis de la foi le 7 mars 1970, sous les yeux du futur Mgr Louis-Marie Ling. Aujourd'hui, Pierre Chevroulet rejoint sa famille. Je suis certain qu'il se retrouve en compagnie du Père Joseph Tiên, auquel il donnait avec admiration le titre de protomartyr du Laos. Je crois qu'il partage la joie de son Maître, avec les Oblats «martyrs» Mario, Louis, Michel, Vincent, Jean et Joseph, avec leurs compagnons Shiong, Luc Sy et Po Inpeng, avec le Frère Alexis, Mgr Étienne Loosdregt, Jean Subra, Henri Rouzière, avec Gérard Fortin et tous les autres, auprès de Marie, Reine des Martyrs et Mère des Oblats. De là, avec cette foule immense de témoins, il est désormais à même de faire, pour nous, pour notre mission et les peuples de cette région du monde, plus encore que ce qu'il a fait au cours de sa longue vie de service. Bien sûr, il nous manque ici, mais il nous est déjà rendu dans la communion des saints.

R.I.P.

Ottawa, le 21 septembre 2004

Notes :

1 Missionnaire au Laos du 17 novembre 1956 au 9 avril 1976.

2 Né à Ben Then (Sam Neua, Laos) en 1922 et ordonné prêtre à Hanoi en 1949 pour le Vicariat apostolique de Thanh Hoá (Viêt-Nam), il fut en poste à Sam Neua de 1950 à 1954. Le 2 juin 1954, quelques semaines après Diên Biên Phu, il fut appréhendé, mis dans un sac et frappé de coups de bâton, jusqu'à ce que mort s'ensuive.

Étude sur la persécution au Laos (1954-1975)

PIERRE CHEVROULET, O.M.I..[1]

SUMMARY – The author is a firsthand witness of the persecution of Christians in Laos from 1954 onward. He was a missionary there from 1956 to 1976, and Provincial of the Oblates from 1965 to 1971. He mentions the death in 1954 of a diocesan priest, Joseph Tiên, who is considered as the protomartyr of Laos. Several others followed, held also as martyrs, among whom six Oblates between 1960 and 1969, members of the Foreign Missionary Society of Paris, and catechists. Many others suffered in various ways until 1975 and 1976 when foreign missionaries were expelled from the country, and nationals sent to jail or "reeducation" camps. Since 1950 there exists in Laos a continuing situation of persecution of Christians in spite of official denials on the part of the political authorities.

I – Persécution objective (1954-1959)

Il convient de reprendre l'histoire de la persécution au Laos un peu en amont, c'est-à-dire à l'époque de la mort du p. Joseph Thao Tiên2, au temps de la guerre dite française qu'un bref moment de répit séparera de la guerre américaine. On ne peut faire abstraction du fait que cette double guerre, même si elle est dite de libération, est menée par un régime, celui du Viêt-Nam-Nord, qui est communiste athée et 3 Voir ce qui se passera effectivement à Sam-Neua où il n'y a pas eu de prêtre présent entre 1954 et 1958, et depuis l960 jusqu'à aujourd'hui. ne cache pas sa détermination antireligieuse et, spécifiquement, anticatholique.

L'Histoire retiendra l'exode des chrétientés du Viêt-Nam-Nord en 1954: il devait y avoir de vraies raisons pour un tel déplacement de populations. Par ailleurs, au Laos, tant qu'il n'y a pas eu d'autorité communiste constituée, on ne peut parler de persécution officielle, mais seulement d'incidents successifs. La localisation de ces incidents dans le temps et dans l'espace laisse tout de même peu de doute sur une politique bien coordonnée qui semble viser en premier lieu l'élimination des missionnaires, mais en vue d'une suppression progressive des activités religieuses.

Dans les circonstances trop prévisibles de cette guerre, comment réagissaient les missionnaires? Je transcris ici le passage d'une lettre adressée par l'un d'eux, le p. Jean Subra, o.m.i., à son supérieur, le p. Henri Rouzière, o.m.i., à Xieng-Khouang. Elle est datée du 10 avril 1953, alors que se dessinait une attaque de grande envergure sur la Plaine des Jarres et vers Louang-Prabang. La menace était si sérieuse que Mgr Étienne Loosdregt, o.m.i., avait renonçé à faire venir au Laos

les deux jeunes pères Oblats qui venaient de recevoir leur obédience pour cette Mission; l'un d'eux fut alors dirigé vers le Cameroun et ne vint jamais au Laos, le second, Paul Sion, s'arrêta à Sri Lanka pour quelques mois et pourra rejoindre le Laos l'année suivante. Je cite:

> Durant ces heures de marche, j'ai pensé et repensé maintes fois à l'attitude à adopter au cas où l'orage éclaterait. Au risque de vous 'embêter' et prêt à accepter ce que vous déciderez, voici ce que je pense:
>
> Je ne crois pas perdre de vue les intérêts du Vicariat apostolique en défendant mes gens, ceux dont je suis chargé. Si une invasion se déclenche, combien de temps le ministère va-t-il être empêché, nul ne le sait. Prévoir un bref délai ou un temps très long? Moi, je prends comme principe que du moment où j'aurai quitté mes gens, je ne vois pas que je puisse les rencontrer, et de longtemps.[3]
>
> On dira qu'en France il y a des cas où le prêtre est séparé de ses gens (mobilisation par exemple...), mais il y a encore des prêtres dans les environs et cela toujours.

Ici, ils n'auront plus personne, sauf le Saint-Esprit, ce qui est évidemment le principal. Mais il ne faut pas oublier que le prêtre est nécessaire dans l'économie habituelle et ordinaire de l'Incarnation, et aussi tenir compte [de ce] qu'ils sont des néophytes, inhabitués à être séparés du prêtre.

On risque donc une perte de personnel pour le Vicariat ... Irremplaçable? Humainement ce sera peut-être dur.

Mais si on fait FOI en la Providence, il y aura de la relève.

Que le ministère de ce prêtre ait été long ou bref ou très bref ou inexistant … son sacrifice, s'il a été nécessaire, aura été pour les gens une leçon, la meilleure de ma part ou celle des supérieurs:

- pour les chrétiens: ils sauront quel est leur devoir, et cela autrement que par des exhortations ou des directives données à la hâte, au moment d'aller se réfugier dans le camp retranché;

- pour les protestants: ils verront que quand on leur dit que le prêtre reste avec les gens, c'est vrai. Et ils auront l'occasion de voir où est le Bon Pasteur;

- pour les païens: la leçon sera aussi évidente.

Ce sacrifice a aussi sa valeur intrinsèque ... Quand le père [Louis] Morin est mort, il a dit à père [Étienne] Loosdregt: 'Je ferai plus au ciel pour les Phu-Theung (=Kmhmu') qu'ici.' Et la suite le prouve. Je ne crois pas que n'importe quel père soit irremplaçable. Quand je suis arrivé ici, j'ignorais le phu-theung et je ne connaissais que des rudiments du laotien. Je serais bien prétentieux de croire qu'un autre qui a de la bonne volonté ne puisse pas faire aussi bien que moi, sinon mieux.

Cela dit, je ne prêche pas pour moi. Si on me dit de rester, je le ferai malgré la frousse que j'ai, pour que les gens ne soient pas abandonnés. Et je crois que j'aurai la Grâce de faire mon devoir jusqu'au bout quoiqu'il arrive, bien que je sache par expérience que mes lâchetés peuvent aller loin et jusqu'à l'apostasie. Mais la grâce est puissante. Si on dit à un autre de rester ici à ma place, je serai heureux de savoir que les gens ne sont pas abandonnés. Si on décide l'évacuation, à ce moment-là le S[ain]t Esprit sera avec les gens envers et contre tout.

Respectueusement à vous en Jésus et Marie ...

signé: J[ean] S[ubr]a

NOTE: et ne pas oublier que IN CASU EXTREMAE NECESSITATIS ou bien de GRAVE NÉCESSITÉ PUBLIQUE, le pasteur est tenu d'exercer son ministère, même «cum certo mortis periculo.»

Cette lettre me semble mettre en lumière la gravité de la situation telle que ce missionnaire la comprenait, sa détermination de rester au service des chrétiens, même dans des circonstances très difficiles, et aussi les raisons de cette détermination, qui ne doivent rien à un enthousiasme romantique. C'est bien le devoir, la fidélité à la Mission qui commande. N'est pas exclu le *'certum periculum mortis'*. Voyons la réponse du supérieur à cette lettre; elle parvint à son destinataire à Ban-Nam-Mon le 16 avril 1953.[4]

Carissime Père Subra,

Depuis longtemps déjà, tu le sais, je retournais dans ma tête tout ce que tu exposes clairement dans ta lettre du 10 avril, surtout depuis que Monseigneur m'a écrit: TENEZ LE PLUS LONGTEMPS POSSIBLE, mais il faut également faire vie qui dure pour continuer ou recommencer après la tempête. IN PRAXI ... vous êtes le meilleur juge! ... Tout bien pesé, je suis d'accord avec toi en ce qui concerne ta chrétienté. Jusqu'à nouvel ordre (ou contrordre de Monseigneur) et quels que soient les événements *tu resteras dans la région*.[5] Et je crois que c'est ton désir. C'est au nom de Notre Seigneur, dans l'esprit et dans la lettre de son enseignement sur le Bon Pasteur, que je te communique cette décision, elle n'exclut pas toutes les mesures de prudence pour faire vie qui dure. Elle ne préjuge pas non plus de modifications essentielles de ma part ou de celles des supérieurs. Si, pour des raisons personnelles ou motifs graves, tu devais un jour ou l'autre entrevoir toute autre décision sans possibilité d'en référer, je laisse à ton jugement cette décision. Ce que je veux aujourd'hui, c'est te donner avec les mérites et grâces attachés à l'obéissance, des instructions nettes.

Prends connaissance au passage de la lettre destinée au père [Joseph] Boissel. Dans quelques jours, je rappellerai sans doute aussi le père [Benjamin] Rancoeur. Pour le père [Marcel] David, je ne sais encore ... Si tu peux venir jusqu'ici, j'aurais plusieurs choses à mettre au point avec toi. Il ne me sera pas possible cette semaine d'aller à Ban-Nam-Mon, comme je pensais le faire ... La semaine prochaine?

N'attends pas la première alerte ou visite importune pour prendre toutes dispositions de prudence pour toi et ton matériel; envisager dispersion du vin de messe, farine, médicaments, ravitaillement, refuges.

J'ai mis de côté pour toi des vivres, médicaments, etc., que je te destine; envoie des porteurs (six au moins).

Dimanche, les enfants iront chez eux comme d'habitude et rentreront lundi matin. Je les garderai tant que le danger n'est pas imminent.

Monseigneur m'a écrit: 'Pour les catéchistes, s'ils ont la frousse u qu'on évacue aussi les Laotiens, laisse-les partir. On ne peut leur demander de l'héroïsme... [sous-entendu: que l'on peut exiger des missionnaires]. Tâche de venir jusqu'ici passer une nuit, j'aurais un certain nombre de choses à te dire que je ne puis pas écrire. Pour la viande, ne compte plus sur le marché de Xieng-Khouang. Le peu qui y apparaît est aussitôt requis par les militaires.

Je devine la complexité des sentiments qui doivent t'agiter à la lecture de cette lettre. Je te confie à la Providence et à notre Mère Immaculée.

Bien fraternellement,

H[enri] R[ouzière]

La typographie – ponctuation et usage des majuscules – assez fantaisiste de Jean Subra ne permet pas de déterminer ce qui dans cette lettre revient au Vicaire Apostolique. Je tends à croire que la phrase: "TENEZ LE PLUS LONGTEMPS POSSIBLE ... jusqu'à ... IN PRAXI ... vous êtes le meilleur juge!" est tout entière de l'évêque, en suppléant ainsi à l'absence de guillemets.

On sait comment Jean Subra appliquera, à la lettre, le "*Tu resteras dans la région",* puisqu'il se cachera tout un mois dans la forêt à proximité de ses gens.

Telle était donc la situation en 1953. Elle n'aura pas changé l'année suivante lorsque la province de Sam-Neua, après Diên Biên Phu, tombera sous la coupe de Hanoï; je remarque simplement que les consignes de Thanh Hoa devaient être les mêmes que celles de Vientiane,

puisque c'est en désobéissant à l'ordre des Viêtnamiens de sortir de la province que le p. Joseph Tiên, resté au milieu de son peuple, devint le protomartyr du Laos. C'est cette même campagne militaire qui vaudra au p. Jean-Baptiste Malo[6], des Missions-étrangères de Paris (m.e.p.), fait prisonnier avec trois confrères et une religieuse française, de mourir au cours de la longue marche vers le Nord. Pour le reste, les accords de Genève de juillet 1954 devaient ménager un certain répit qui permit à la Mission, au sud comme au nord, de repartir d'un meilleur pied. En fait, les accords de Genève ne furent appliqués que partiellement, et avec réticence, sinon mauvaise foi, par la partie communiste, dont le but final restait bien la mainmise totale sur tout le pays. On s'en rendit compte lorsque, en 1959, deux bataillons Pathet-Lao qui, aux termes des accords, avaient été intégrés dans l'armée royale et se trouvaient à Xieng-Khouang, firent sécession et que, dans le meme temps, en août, des combats sporadiques reprirent à Sam-Neua. Cela mettait directement en question le travail apostolique auprès des chrétiens Thai Deng de cette province, tout comme les débuts prometteurs de la Mission chez les minorités Kmhmu' et Hmong. On sut dès lors que les jours tranquilles avaient fait leur temps.

II – Persécution proprement dite: chronologie (1959 – 1969)

Il a été question dans l'introduction à ce travail d'incidents successifs dont on peut soupçonner la coordination. Les voici dans l'ordre chronologique:

A. Dès avant l'état de guerre civile ouverte, déclenchée par le coup d'État du 9 août 1960

1. Le 19 décembre 1959, le p. René Dubroux, m.e.p.[7], est tué d'une balle tirée d'un fourré voisin, dans la sacristie de la chapelle de Palay, région de Paksé. Ce père n'était dans ce poste que depuis deux ans, après avoir missionné de 1948 à1957 au village de Nam-Dik dans le nord du Vicariat de Thakhek.

2. En mai 1960, disparition du p. Mario Borzaga, o.m.i.[8] J'ai raconté, dans *Oblats témoins de la foi au Laos*[9], ce drame avant-coureur de la suite de coups durs qui vont s'abattre bientôt sur la Mission.

Voici comment se fit le départ de Mario Borzaga du poste missionnaire de Kiou-Kacham, à quelque 80 km de Louang-Prabang au bord de la route Astrid. Je me trouvais personnellement sur les lieux, ayant profité des vacances de Pâques pour aller visiter les familles des séminaristes de Paksane, parmi lesquels se trouvait le jeune Tite Banchong, aujourd'hui administrateur du Vicariat apostolique de Louang-Prabang. J'étais arrivé au village avec le p. Bramante Marchiol, o.m.i., également en vacances, le samedi 23 avril, veille du dimanche de Quasimodo. Nous y avions trouvé le p. Mario, en charge du poste, et le p. Antonio Zanoni, o.m.i., jeune missionnaire qui apprenait la langue hmong. Bramante et moi comptions passer une semaine au village.

Le dimanche 24, après la messe du matin, Mario était fort occupé à soigner les malades qui se pressaient au dispensaire attenant à sa maison aux murs de tôle ondulée. Vers la fin de la matinée, arrive un groupe de Hmong qui venait d'un village situé au sud de la route. Je me souviens très bien d'un temps de discussion, dans une langue que je ne comprenais pas, suivi des explications données par Mario. Ces gens venaient l'inviter à se rendre dans leur village, car ils se disaient intéressés à la religion. Mario ajouta que ce n'était pas la première fois qu'ils faisaient cette démarche, mais jusqu'ici il avait cru devoir refuser pour ne pas laisser Antonio seul au village. Mais, cette fois, il commençait à bien se débrouiller avec la langue, et puis Bramante pourrait prolonger son séjour; il avait donc décidé d'accompagner ce groupe qui l'invitait dès le lendemain. Il comptait, nous dit-il, être absent une quinzaine de jours car, après le village où il allait se rendre, il continuerait vers l'ouest et remonterait la vallée du Mékong pour rejoindre Louang-Prabang. Il emmènerait avec lui le catéchiste Shiong, que j'avais connu trois ans auparavant sous son nom laotien de Khamsè alors qu'il était élève-catéchiste à Paksane. Le lendemain, lundi 25 avril, fête de saint Marc, tandis que je célébrais la messe, je vis Mario s'éloigner avec le groupe et le catéchiste. Il était vêtu de noir, comme un Hmong, mais aussi comme la plupart des missionnaires à cette époque, sac au dos et béret; il remonterait sur la route quelques centaines de mètres, jusqu'au monument de la reine Astrid, et puis ce serait la descente vers la rivière Nam Ming, la brousse et le sacrifice suprême dont les circonstances ont

peut-être été éclaircies aujourd'hui. Personnellement, je passai la semaine prevue au village de Kiou-Kacham, puis je redescendis à Louang-Prabang le dimanche 1er mai, jour d'élections générales, en profitant du passage d'un camion. De là, je regagnai Vientiane, puis Paksane, et ce n'est qu'en juin, au retour au séminaire de Tite Banchong et de ses compagnons, que j'appris que Mario n'avait plus reparu.

B. Après le coup d'État du capitaine Konglé (9 août 1960)

La situation générale se détériore rapidement et dégénère en guerre civile, non plus larvée, mais au grand jour avec la formation de deux gouvernements:

– celui de Vientiane, officiellement neutraliste et dirigé par le Prince Souvanna Phouma, auquel s'est rallié immédiatement la faction Pathet-Lao, dont le Prince Souphanouvong, dit le Prince Rouge, demi-frère du précédent, est le chef visible;

– d'autre part, s'est formé dans le sud du pays un autre gouvernement, reconnu par le Roi; à sa tête on trouve le Prince Boun Oum Na Champassak; il tient la partie méridionale du Laos jusqu'à la rivière Nam Kading, du moins la vallée du Mékong, et il va s'atteler à la reconquête de Vientiane. Ce sera chose faite en décembre, avec l'appui encore assez discret des Américains, à la suite d'une bataille meurtrière.

De son côté, le gouvernement neutraliste qui, dès le mois d'août, a établi des relations diplomatiques avec l'Union Soviétique, bénéficie de l'aide diplomatique et, déjà, logistique de l'URSS. C'est la période, confuse s'il en est, des tractations menées entre les trois Princes. Ce gouvernement, avec la partie des troupes qui a suivi le capitaine Konglé, dites Forces Armées Neutralistes (= les FAN), s'est replié sur la Plaine des Jarres et Xieng-Khouang; mais il y a été précédé par les Pathet-Lao communistes, et va commencer avec eux une cohabitation difficile. Celle-ci aboutira finalement à la scission de cette faction, une partie rejoignant le camp communiste, tandis que l'autre, tout en restant neutraliste, sera totalement soutenue par les Américains. Nous n'en sommes pas encore là en cette année 1960, mais l'important est de comprendre comment en toute cette affaire les vrais et uniques bénéficiaires sont les forces communistes Pathet-Lao, conseillées, sinon contrôlées, par les Viêtnamiens de Hanoi. Cela leur valait d'ailleurs l'appellation courante de 'Lao-Viêts', c'est celle don't usaient de préférence de bons connaisseurs de la scène indochinoise, comme le p. Gérard Sion, o.m.i.

1. Dès septembre, toute la province de Sam-Neua tombe aux mains des Pathet-Lao.

Le chef-lieu de la province, menacé depuis le 10, tombe pratiquement sans combat le mercredi 28. Selon les décisions qui avaient été prises sous la responsabilité du p. Yves Bertrais, le supérieur et plusieurs pères ont quitté la ville pour atteindre Ban-Ban, puis Phone-Savan dans la Plaine des Jarres en six jours de marche. Ne restent à Sam-Neua que les pp. Yves Bertrais, pour les Hmong, Jean Subra, pour les Kmhmu', Charles Loison et Ernest Dumont, pour les Thai Deng. En fait, ces derniers se trouvaient encore dans leur poste respectif, à Meuong Soy et Meuong Phoun, déjà 'libérés'; et ils ne rejoindront le chef-lieu que le 6 octobre, munis de laissez-passer des nouvelles autorités qui se sont montrées très correctes avec eux. Toutefois, les choses ont commencé à se gâter au centre dès le 1er octobre quand des soldats Pathet-Lao sont venus faire une première visite à la Mission, un peu en-dehors de la ville: selon un scénario qui se reproduira ailleurs, ils ont demandé les armes, réaffirmant plusieurs fois sur la dénégation des pères: 'Si! vous avez des armes!' et confisquant pièces d'identité et passeports malgré les protestations. Ensuite ils ont procédé à la perquisition de la maison, à la recherche d'armes, sans en trouver, bien sûr, tandis qu'ils tenaient les pères, bras levés sous la menace des leurs. 'Pendant deux heures, la maison est mise sens dessus dessous, un vrai pillage... Toute la maison a été mise à sac', écrit Jean Subra. Et ils ont emporté, entre autres, le poste de radio.

Cela se passait le matin. Dès le début de l'après-midi, un autre groupe est arrivé toujours à la recherche d'armes, et la perquisition pillage a repris. Le capitaine, chef de ce second groupe, déclare ensuite aux pp. Yves Bertrais et Jean Subra: «Pour ce qui est de la religion chrétienne,

c'est fini! Jamais nous ne la tolèrerons au Laos. Que ceux qui veulent la pratiquer partent en France!» Dans les pages qu'il consacre à ces semaines passées sous le régime communiste qui s'installe, Jean Subra décrit l'atmosphère de peur et de suspicion qui s'empare alors de la population. C'est ce qui se produira dans tout le pays au moment de la 'libération' entre mai et décembre 1975.

Vers le 25 octobre, des indications sont données aux pères par des gens qui leur veulent du bien sur l'arrestation que les Pathet-Lao leur préparent. Le 28 octobre, à l'aube, Jean Subra remarque deux soldats qui, en se cachant, inspectent les abords de la maison. Le danger semble si imminent que le p. Yves Bertrais, aussitôt prévenu, donne l'ordre de quitter la maison selon le plan prévu. Il est le dernier à partir au moment même où la maison est sur le point d'être encerclée. Grâce aux catéchistes Hmong qui connaissent les pistes, tous, pères et catéchistes, échapperont à la poursuite que les soldats Pathet-Lao vont déclencher et se retrouveront le 31 octobre dans le camp retranché du Pha-Thi. Et ce sera le début d'une autre aventure.

J'avais à raconter longuement cet épisode car il est typique des situations qui ont prévalu là où le régime communiste avait les mains libres. C'était le cas alors à Sam-Neua, bien que l'on prétendît y suivre le gouvernement de Vientiane: on y annonçait la venue prochaine du Premier Ministre, le Prince Souvanna Phouma, et il y vint effectivement, mais quelques jours après la fuite des pères; mais avait-il quelque autorité sur la faction Pathet-Lao appuyée par les Viêtnamiens? Entre-temps, on préparait pour les missionnaires la prison de Ban-Ta-Lang, là même où, six ans auparavant, le p. Joseph Tien avait été détenu avant de connaître la fin que l'on sait. Les missionnaires de Sam-Neua, sous la gouverne de leur supérieur, le p. Yves Bertrais, dont tous connaissaient le zèle apostolique et la volonté de faire ce que veut l'Église, avaient dès le début de la menace, le 18 septembre, tenu réunion. Ici encore je transcris la relation de Jean Subra:

> Pour nous la situation est suffisamment grave pour prendre les décisions qui s'imposent. Nous nous réunissons en séance plénière dans l'après-midi. La situation est encore tragique, malgré l'arrivée des paras... Que faire si l'armée abandonne Sam-Neua? Les directives venant de Rome, par le père [Jean] Hanique [le provincial oblat], et confirmées par Monseigneur, demandent à tous les Pères qui ont charge d'âmes de rester sur place, quoi qu'il arrive, même au péril de leur vie.

Après délibération et examen de la situation des pères et des chrétientés il est décidé que deux missionnaires seulement resteront sur place à Sam-Neua, Yves Bertrais pour les Hmong et Jean Subra pour les Kmhmu'. On est par ailleurs sans nouvelles, à ce moment-là, des pp. Charles Loison et Ernest Dumont, présents dans leurs villages déjà 'libérés'. Rien n'est donc décidé pour eux et on ne peut les joindre. Plus tard, lorsqu'ils seront revenus au centre (cf. ci-dessus), et qu'ils manifesteront l'intention de regagner leur poste respectif, c'est leur supérieur, Yves Bertrais, qui les retiendra à Sam-Neua; du coup, ils se trouveront pris dans la souricière tendue par les militaires Pathet-Lao, et embarqués dans l'aventure du Pha-Thi. Il est à remarquer que pendant tout ce temps, à partir de l'installation des Pathet-Lao à Sam- Neua, aucune communication n'est possible avec Vientiane.

Jean Subra continue sa relation, les quatre pères étant rendus au camp retranché du Pha-Thi:

> Durant cette attente, nous demandons au lieutenant Efuey [un des chefs du camp] l'autorisation d'entrer en contact avec les Pères de Xieng-Khouang, puisque le Pha-Thi est coupé de Vientiane, toujours aux mains de Konglé. [...] Parfois encore, nous nous demandons si nous n'aurions pas dû essayer de rester plus longtemps à Sam-Neua, car nous savons toujours que le Prince Souvanna Phoumma doit y venir. Nous sommes anxieux, nous demandant si nous avons bien fait de quitter Sam-Neua; si nous ne nous sommes pas effrayés trop vite. [...] Nous apprenons alors ce qui s'est passé là-bas après notre départ: le pillage, les arrestations, la profanation de l'église, ainsi que les trois embuscades sur notre chemin [...] auxquelles nous avons providentiellement échappé.

Nous envoyons donc un télégramme au père [Henri] Rouzière qui est à Xieng-Khouang, pour qu'il informe Monseigneur de notre arrivée à Pha-Thi. Et nous demandons des directives [...] En même temps, nous lui demandons des habits, du linge, des médicaments et autres objets de première nécessité, surtout le nécessaire pour célébrer la messe. [...]

Le télégramme pour Monseigneur, par l'intermédiaire du père [Henri] Rouzière, a dû partir le 1er novembre. C'est vers le 4 ou le 5 que la réponse nous parvient. Télégramme difficile à comprendre: il nous est demandé des explications sur les motifs de notre départ de Sam-Neua, ajoutant que seules des raisons pastorales peuvent justifier notre séjour à Pha-Thi. Enfin, il nous est dit que le père [Henri] Rouzière est habilité à prendre toute décision à notre sujet. [...]

Devant ce télégramme, j'ai tout de suite cru que notre décision de quitter Sam-Neua avait été désavouée par Monseigneur, par suite de l'incompréhension qui régnait à Vientiane [...] Une communication en phonie avec le Père [Henri] Rouzière, le dimanche 6 novembre, justifie ces craintes. Ce fut un moment **très douloureux** pour nous tous. [...]

Le père [Yves] Bertrais fut alors autorisé par le capitaine Efuey à envoyer un nouveau télégramme confidentiel dont voici la substance:

Père Bertrais à Monseigneur Loosdregt – Mission Catholique. Les Pères voulaient rester à Sam-Neua dans la chrétienté. STOP. Le 1er octobre, nous avons été pillés à main armée par capitaine Don et autres chefs Issara[10]. STOP. Durant les derniers jours d'octobre, mesures vexatoires de la police, très fréquentes envers nous, et menaces continuelles proférées contre nous en ville. STOP. Le 28 octobre, certitude arrestation imminente par 'P.L.' STOP. Avons fui non pour motifs politiques. STOP. Mais pour éviter sort du Père Borzaga, sort qui est bien connu de monsieur Chao Souk Vongsak[11]. STOP. Dès notre départ, poursuite par les Issara avec ordre de nous tuer. STOP. Maison pillée par les Issara. STOP. Église profanée par les Issara. STOP. Bouaphan et Thao Houng immédiatement arrêtés par les P.-L.[12] STOP. Sommes prêts à retourner à Sam-Neua à condition d'avoir garantie efficace de sécurité du gouvernement Lao. STOP. Filialement. STOP."

Quelle n'est pas notre joie enfin de recevoir deux ou trois jours après, un nouveau télégramme de Monseigneur en personne. Le voici en substance:

Monseigneur à Père Bertrais. STOP. Approuve pleinement votre conduite passée. STOP. Situation de Sam-Neua bien connue à Vientiane. STOP. Vous habilite à prendre toute décision en comptant sur votre esprit missionnaire. STOP."

Donc le malentendu est terminé, et terminé d'une façon heureuse ... Monseigneur nous approuve, c'est la seule chose qui nous importe!"[13]

* * *

Cette longue histoire n'est pas inutile car elle nous fait voir comment, dès que la faction communiste était libre de ses mouvements, s'installait une situation de non-droit dont les victimes potentielles étaient tous les opposants au régime, qu'ils soient réels ou presumes tels. Il faut savoir qu'en pays communiste une des tâches essentielles est toujours de savoir reconnaître les amis des ennemis; et les ennemis sont partout, qu'il faut éliminer d'une manière ou d'une autre; pour cela, la manière forte étant privilégiée, avec délations, jugements populaires auxquels la population est tenue de participer. On aura remarqué que, dans son télégramme au Vicaire

apostolique, Yves Bertrais parle de ‘menaces continuelles proférées contre nous en ville’. On sait que c’est là le prélude obligé à un jugement populaire avec des accusateurs bien préparés. Après cela viendra l’envoi en camps de rééducation, les fameux ‘sammana’, ou, plus simplement, le Poteau d’exécution. Ce qui nous amène à l’incident suivant.

2. En février 1961

Dans la région de Xieng-Khouang qui vient de tomber aux mains des Forces Neutralistes, mais où les Pathet-Lao, leurs alliés de circonstance, ont pris les devants, deux missionnaires vont précisément se trouver face au poteau d’exécution dans les circonstances suivantes, relatées une fois de plus par Jean Subra:[14]

> Le village [chrétien] de Ban-Khangsi [...] s’était trouvé entre les forces communistes, les soldats du gouvernement [de Vientiane = neutralistes] et des partisans Hmong qui tenaient la montagne. Au moment d’un bombardement fait par les forces communistes, des obus tombèrent sur Khangsi. Alors le père [Jean] Wauthier, accompagné du Père [Jean-Marie] Ollivier qui était sur place, allèrent [sic] avec les anciens du village se plaindre au PC de l’armée communiste. Père Wauthier et père Ollivier furent immédiatement arrêtés et mis en face d’un peloton d’exécution des soldats du Pathet-Lao et Viêts. Une jeep d’un commandant du bataillon de parachutistes neutralistes (de Konglé) vint immédiatement s’interposer entre les deux pères et le peloton d’exécution. Père Wauthier et père Ollivier échappèrent ainsi à la mort.»

Une fois de plus, on peut voir la manière de procéder de ces gens-là lorsqu’ils ont les coudées franches. Inutile d’insister.

3. En avril-mai 1961

C’est dans les semaines d’avril-mai 1961, tragiques pour la Mission, que se produisirent les événements les plus graves. On peut en tirer quelques conclusions:

a) Les missionnaires, c’est-à-dire les pp. Louis Leroy[15], Michel Coquelet[16] et Vincent L’Hénoret[17], tous trois o.m.i., ont appliqué strictement la consigne romaine de rester au milieu des chrétiens, même *in periculo mortis.* Cela est particulièrement clair dans le cas de Louis

Leroy.

b) Comme à Sam-Neua, comme à Khangsi, on voit que lorsque les communistes sont seuls aîtres de la situation, ils agissent de la façon la plus brutale dans la ligne des consignes reçues du Parti, même si le missionnaire est parfaitement en règle avec les prescriptions sévères qu’eux-mêmes ont édictées, par exemple pour la circulation à l’intérieur de la zone qu’ils contrôlent. Ainsi le p. incent L’Hénoret est muni d’un laissez-passer en bonne et due forme qu’il a présenté sur réquisition. Mais c’est pour l’abattre qu’on l’attendait au bord de la piste.

c) On peut et même on doit parler de consignes reçues du Parti, car le faisceau de ces événements, spécialement ceux dont nous parlons ici, concentrés dans la même région, celle de Xieng-houang et de la Plaine des Jarres, et dans un espace de temps restreint de quelques semaines, entre le 18 avril et le 11 mai, ne laisse guère de place pour l’excuse de faits perpétrés par des éléments incontrôlés dans le feu d’une action de guerre. On a vu, à Sam-Neua, les chefs eux-mêmes agir.

d) Un autre élément à souligner est la méfiance des neutralistes à l’égard des Pathet-Lao, pourtant leurs très officiels alliés. À Khangsi, c’est un officier neutraliste qui sauve les pères de l’exécution. Il ne doutait pas de ce qui allait suivre. À Ban-Ban, ce sont eux encore, ‘ceux du 2ème Bureau’ nous dit le p. Jean-Baptiste Khamphanh, ou encore ‘ceux du Cdt Leuong’, c’est-à-dire du capitaine Konglé, qui viennent l’avertir de l’assassinat du p. Vincent L’Hénoret et l’accompagnent sur les lieux du crime pour procéder à l’enterrement de la victime, mais rapidement, car ils ne sont pas eux-mêmes les patrons du coin.

e) Jamais ces faits n’ont été reconnus officiellement, ni par les Pathet-Lao, bien sûr, ni

même par le gouvernement du Prince Souvanna Phoumma, raison d'État oblige! Longtemps, on parla de détention dans tel ou tel camp pour des pères morts depuis des semaines. Lorsque, à Xieng-Khouang même, Mgr Loosdregt eut l'occasion d'élever une protestation contre les exactions des troupes Pathet-Lao auprès du Prince Souphanouvong, ce dernier se récria fortement: «Vous nous prenez pour des assassins!», mais ses dénégations n'allèrent pas plus loin. Lui-même, sans doute, n'était pas d'accord avec cette façon d'agir, mais ce n'était pas lui le patron.

4. Le 17 avril 1961, dans la région de Thakhek

Le p. Marcel Denis, m.e.p.[18], en charge de plusieurs villages du secteur rural, quitte Thakhek pour aller au secours de son catéchiste et de sa famille, restés au village de Phôn-Sa-at. Il sait ce village directement menacé par les Viêt-Cong qui descendent sur Mahaxay. Bientôt arrêté et emmené par les communistes, il n'y aura plus de nouvelles de lui, sinon des bruits colportés, comme pour Mario Borzaga, qu'il a été vu ici ou là, mais rien de consistant.

5. De même, en avril 1961

Le p. Noël Tenaud, m.e.p.[19], missionnaire à Savannakhet, faisait une tournée le long de la route RN 9 qui mène de Savannakhet à Tchépone et, au-delà, à la frontière viêtnamienne, pour visiter ses chrétientés. Il est accompagné de son catéchiste Outhay et d'un autre jeune chrétien. C'est une région réputée peu sûre depuis toujours. Tandis qu'il fait route, on l'avertit qu'une attaque de troupes nord-viêtnamiennes serait en préparation. Il interrompt alors sa marche vers Tchépone et rebrousse chemin pour regagner Savannakhet. Mais la route a été coupée au-delà de Phalane à une cinquantaine de kilomètres de Savannakhet. Il se réfugie alors dans un village en retrait de

la route. Dénoncé par les villageois, il est arrêté par les soldats nordviêtnamiens qui l'emmènent vers Phalane. En route, ils tombent toutefois sur une embuscade: le Père est blessé au jarret et le catéchiste au cou. Ils sont soignés sur place et se remettent de leurs blessures. Une semaine après, le Père demande à rentrer à Savannakhet où se trouve, à ce qu'on dit, l'administration Pathet-Lao. Des témoins ont vu le groupe, père et catéchistes, partir accompagnés de soldats Pathet-Lao. Ils ne sont jamais revenus à Phalane et ils ne sont jamais arrivés à Savannakhet. Après cela, mêmes bruits sporadiques et inconsistants que pour les autres disparus. On peut remarquer que, dans ces deux derniers cas tout comme à Sam-Neua, dès que la frontière viêtnamienne est proche, les troupes Pathet-Lao sont épaulées par leurs amis et maîtres. Et cela s'est produit dans la même période troublée que celle des assassinats des pères de Xieng-Khouang.

* * *

Il faudrait maintenant considérer ce que sont devenues les communautés chrétiennes restées derrière le rideau de bambou et désormais totalement privées de la présence du prêtre. C'est, en premier lieu, le cas des communautés Thai-Deng de Sam-Neua. On sait que des personnes ont été arrêtées et envoyées en camp, d'autres ont pu s'échapper qui ont raconté comment toute vie hrétienne extérieure est désormais interdite, donc pas d'assemblées de prière. Chaque famille fait ce qu'elle peut à la maison, mais la pression sociale aidant, l'absence de tout enseignement religieux régulier perdurant pendant des années tandis que s'intensifie la propagande marxiste, bientôt il n'y a plus que les vieilles personnes qui restent fidèles. Les lieux de culte, après avoir été profanés, comme à Sam-Neua même, sont mis au service de l'administration ou transformés en marchés, salles de réunion, etc. Dans ces cas-là, où la religion n'a plus d'existence légale,

on peut dire que la persécution est largement parvenue à ses fins. Disons tout de suite qu'il en sera ainsi à Louang-Prabang après l'expulsion des missionnaires oblats italiens en 1975, puisque même des prêtres laotiens et, qui plus est, originaires de cette province même comme Tite Banchong, y seront interdits de résidence.

B. Entre 1961 et 1975

Entre 1961 et 1975, l'insécurité continuera à régner dans toutes les zones du pays, même celles réputées calmes et, en principe, sous le contrôle du gouvernement de Vientiane et de ses forces armées. Il y avait, par exemple, des périodes où il était prudent pour les missionnaires de ne pas s'aventurer sur une route aussi fréquentée que celle de Paksane à Vientiane, environ 150 kilomètres. Les militaires, qui savaient les risques que nous courions alors, nous déconseillaient fortement, le cas échéant, de p rendre la route et, s'il y avait urgence, pouvaient mettre une place à notre disposition sur un de leurs avions.

Trois prêtres et un catéchiste furent assassinés durant cette période. Si nous éliminons d'emblée le cas de Jean Wauthier[20] qui relève d'une autre problématique, bien que cet acte criminel ait été perpétré dans des conditions telles qu'il devenait vraisemblable de l'attribuer, comme il advint, à la partie communiste, nous nous trouvons devant trois situations similaires où un missionnaire est tué dans une embuscade:

1. Le samedi 5 décembre 1968

Le p. Lucien Galan, m.e.p.[21], est tué dans la région de Paksé. Ce père missionnait parmi les communautés montagnardes, appelées habituellement 'Khà' dans le sud du pays. Il rayonnait à partir de son village de Nong-Sim, à la limite du territoire contrôlé par le Pathet-Lao. Ce samedi, il s'était rendu dans ses villages de Nong-Mot et Nong-IOu et, au retour, il tombe dans une embuscade au km 19 de Paksong. Grièvement atteint, il succombe peu après des suites de ses blessures.

2. Le samedi 5 juillet 1969

Le P. Joseph Boissel[22] tombe lui aussi dans une embuscade. Il n'est pas nécessaire de revenir ici sur le récit qui en a été fait, accompagné de témoignages circonstanciés.

3. Le samedi 7 mars 1970

Près de Dène-Din sur la route au nord de Vang-Vieng, le diacre Louis Ling[23] et le catéchiste Luc Sy[24] sont eux aussi pris dans une embuscade. Le catéchiste y trouve la mort, le diacre Louis Ling n'y échappe que par une sorte de miracle.

On peut pour ces trois cas souligner des similitudes: la plus apparente est que chaque fois l'attaque a lieu un samedi, est-ce un hasard? Même s'il n'est pas certain que les attaquants aient pu supposer que Louis Ling et Luc Sy reviendraient au village de Houei-Phong pour le dimanche, ni qu'ils aient pu deviner qu'ils avaient pris place sur un camion militaire, par contre il ne peut faire de doute que ceux qui en voulaient aux deux Pères, Lucien Galan et Joseph Boissel, savaient fort bien que le samedi était le jour où on pouvait les cueillir sur la route. Tous deux étaient en chemin pour la célébration dominicale avec les chrétiens dont ils avaient la charge.

Deuxième similitude, une fois de plus, la présence de soldats viêtnamiens: elle est supposée dans le récit que donne Jean Subra de la mort de Luc Sy; elle est plus que probable dans le cas de Lucien Galan en raison de l'endroit où se produit l'attentat, sur le plateau des Bolovens; elle est avérée enfin pour l'embuscade tendue à Joseph Boissel, comme en a témoigné une des Oblates qui l'accompagnaient.

Plus tard, en 1975, lorsque s'établira, pour de bon et sur tout le pays, le régime communiste, officiellement déclaré marxiste-léniniste athée, l'opposition à la religion chrétienne, qu'elle soit catholique ou protestante, s'épanouira au grand jour. Le temps des meurtres sera certes terminé, encore que le lancement d'une grenade à Vang-Vieng, le 28 mai, dans la chambre du p. Jean-Marie Ollivier, celui-là même qui avait fait face au peloton d'exécution quatorze ans auparavant, soit une manière assez brutale de lui signifier qu'il n'avait plus qu'à quitter les lieux. Mais l'expulsion, à bref délai, de tous les missionnaires étrangers la prouvera suffisamment. Les accusations fallacieuses habituelles proférées contre eux: possession d'armes, de postes émetteurs radio, coopération comme membres actifs avec la C.I.A., voire d'être des officiers américains, ne peuvent tromper personne.

Même les missionnaires oblats italiens, qui se croyaient assez naïvement à l'abri de tels reproches, furent ironiquement les tout premiers à se voir mis dehors, sous ces mêmes prétextes, parce que tel était le plan du nouveau régime: celui-ci voulait faire du nord du pays une zone fermée à la religion chrétienne et même, dans un premier temps du moins, fermée à toute religion même bouddhique. C'est ainsi qu'en novembre 1975 les pères laotiens, Pierre Douangdi, o.m.i., et Tite Banchong furent expulsés de Louang-Prabang, ainsi que les soeurs laotiennes qui s'y trouvaient en poste. Faut-il rappeler les sept longues années de prison de Mgr Thomas Khamphan, Vicaire apostolique de Paksé? Les huit années de 'sammana' (camp de rééducation par le travail forcé) de Mgr Tite Banchong, actuel Administrateur apostolique du Vicariat de Louang-Prabang, qui n'est toujours pas autorisé à résider sur un territoire dont il est pourtant natif? Et les deux ou trois années du même régime subies par Mgr Louis Ling, aujourd'hui Vicaire apostolique de Paksé?

On pourrait raconter les vexations, les spoliations, les contraintes de toutes sortes, pour montrer qu'il n'y eut pas place pour le hasard lorsque des missionnaires, laotiens ou étrangers, des catéchistes ou de simples chrétiens ont simplement, en accomplissant leur devoir, fait le sacrifice de leur vie pour l'Évangile. Il y a en tout cela une continuité qui ne permet pas de mettre en doute qu'il y ait eu, de 1950 jusqu'à aujourd'hui, une vraie situation de persécution, en dépit de toutes les dénégations officielles.

Samphran, Thaïlande,

le 2 janvier 2004

Notes :

---

[1] Missionnaire au Laos du 17 novembre 1956 au 9 avril 1976.

[2] Né à Ben Then (Sam Neua, Laos) en 1922 et ordonné prêtre à Hanoi en 1949 pour le vicariat aposotolique de ThanHoá (Viet-Nam), il fut en poste à Sam Neua de 1950 à 1954, quelques semaines aaprès Diên Biên Phu, il fut appréhendé, mis dans un sac et frappé de coups de bâton, jusqu'à ce que mort s'en suive.

[4] Cette lettre et la précédente sont reprises de *Mission des Oblats de Marie chez les Kmhuh',* important ouvrage *pro-manuscripto,* par Jean Subra, conservé aux Archives générales OMI à Rome.

[5] Je souligne. P.Ch.

[6] Né en 1899 au diocèse de Nantes, au Laos depuis 1934. Il mourut d'épuisement le 28 mars 1954 au camp de Cua Ràò (Nghê An), Viêt-Nam. Outre le p. Malo ont participé à cette marche tragique du Laos au Viêt-Nam: Mgr Rosière-Jean Arnaud, préfet apostolique de Thakkek, les pp. Louis-François Mainier et René Cozien, tous trois m.e.p., et Soeur Jeanne-Antide du Noyer, des Soeurs de la Charité de Ste Jeanne-Antide Thouret. Voir R. Cozien, *Huit mois de captivité du Laos au Nord-Vietnam*.
Paris, Missions-Étrangères de Paris, 2000.

[7] Né en 1914 au diocèse de Nancy et ordonné à la prêtrise en 1939, il partit au Laos en mars 1946.

[8] Né en 1930 à Trente, en Italie, il fit profession en 1953 et fut ordonné prêtre en 1957. Il arriva au Laos en novembre 1957.

[9] Voir *Les Oblats témoins de la foi au Laos,* (Documentation OMI, no 229, Rome, septembre 1999). Le même texte a été publié sous le titre de *Oblats au bord du Mékong,* dans la Collection *Héritage oblat,* no 14, Rome, 1998.

[10] Issara, un des noms donnés encore à cette époque par les gens aux Pathet-Lao.

[11] Chao Souk Vongsak : chef Pathet-Lao en place à Sam-Neua depuis la 'libération'.

[12] Ces deux personnes étaient au service de la Mission ; le second étant le père d'une Oblate missionnaire de Marie Immaculée.

[13] La citation ci-dessus , avec la transcription des deux télégrammes, provient de l'ouvrage de Jean Subra , *op.cit.*

[14] *Mission des Oblats de Marie chez les Kmhmu',* p. 110.

[15] Originaire du diocèse de Coutances, né en 1923, il fit profession en 1949 et fut ordonné prêtre en 1954. Il arriva au Laos en novembre 1955.

[16] Né en 1931 au diocèse de Cambrai, il fit profession en 1949 et fut ordonné prêtre en 1956. Il arriva au Laos en avril 1957.

[17] Né au diocèse de Quimper en 1921, il fit profession en 1941 et fut ordonné prêtre en 1946. Il arriva au Laos en 1947

[18] Né en 1919 au diocèse de Sées et ordonné prêtre en 1945, il part pour le Laos en 1946. Présumé mort pour la foi le 15 décembre 1962.

[19] Né en 1904 au diocèse de Luçon. Ordonné prêtre en 1931, il part pour le Laos la même année. Présumé mort pour la foi le 15 décembre 1962.

[20] Né en 1926 au diocèse de Cambrai, il fit profession en 1945 et fut ordonné prêtre en 1952. Il arriva au Laos en 1952. Il mourut de deux coups de feu reçus en pleine poitrine le 16 décembre 1967.

[21] Né en 1821 au diocèse de Rodez et ordonné prêtre en 1948, il partit pour la Chine en décembre 1948, puis au Laos en 1952.

[22] Né en 1909 au diocèse de Rennes, il fit profession en 1931 et fut ordonné prêtre en 1937. Il arriva au Laos l'année suivante.

[23] Né en 1944 à Bonha Louang, Laos, ordonné prêtre en 1972, il est membre de l'Institut *Voluntas Dei.* Le 30 octobre 2000, il est nommé Vicaire apostolique de Paksé, Laos.

[24] Né en 1938 à Pha-Hôk, Laos, et baptisé le 28 octobre 1951. Élève au Séminaire de Paksane (1053-1958), il sera instituteur et catéchiste, puis se mettra au service des Kmhmu'. Il sera tué le 7 mars 1970.

One Hundred Years of Oblate Presence in the Diocese of Duluth, MN, U.S.A.

RICHARD PAUL COTÉ, O.M.I.

SOMMAIRE – Les Oblats de Marie Immaculé ont célébré en 2003 le centenaire de leur présence à la paroisse Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Duluth. C'était leur première fondation dans l'État du Minnesota où ils multiplieront plus tard leurs établissements. En 1903, ils ont succédé au clergé séculier qui, depuis 1870, avait assuré la charge pastorale d'une population de langue française, principalement originaire du Canada. Depuis le p. Didace Guillet en 1903 jusqu'au p. Denys Jubinville en 1958, la responsabilité pastorale de la paroisse releva de la Province oblate du Manitoba. Quarante-neuf prêtres et Frères Oblats y sont passés pendant ce temps. La paroisse passa ensuite aux confrères de la Province centrale des États-Unis, dont le p. John Louis fut le premier curé américain. On calcule qu'une centaine d'Oblats des Etats-Unis ont servi le diocèse de Duluth depuis ce temps. Un processus de réunification commencé en 1970 a conduit à la fusion de la paroisse Saint-Jean à un nouvel ensemble érigé comme paroisse Sainte-Famille en 1985.

Praised be Jesus Christ and Mary Immaculate! This brief prayer uttered daily by close to five thousand Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate was the theme chosen for the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Oblates' arrival in the Diocese of Duluth, Minnesota, U.S.A., in 1903. Praised be Jesus Christ! We give thanks for our special Oblate charism which we humbly have manifested to the People of God in Duluth during the past one hundred years. Praised be Mary Immaculate! We give thanks to our Immaculate Mother for her heavenly protection during the past one hundred years.

I. "The Zenith City of the Unsalted Seas": Duluth, Minnesota

September 1, 1678, Daniel Greysolon, Sieur du Luth, for whom the City of Duluth is named, left Montreal for the Great West. On September , 1679, du Luth and his party attained what is now Minnesota Point on Lake Superior. Here they planted the Cross of Christ and the flag of France.

As early as 1672, a fur trading post had been established at the base of the falls of the St. Louis River, on the site of the current Fond du Lac Ojibwa (Chippewa) Reservation. Since that time French missionaries and traders visited regularly this important post of religion and commerce. A permanent white settlement at Minnesota Point on Lake Superior was formed in 1852, and by 1856 an era of unexpected prosperity began for Duluth. The community developed as a commercial center in 1855 with the opening of the Soo Locks at Sault St. Marie, Michigan. The discovery of iron ore and the exploitation of the forests, and the construction of the railroad linking St. Paul and Duluth in 1870 attracted a multitude of workers. These included French Canadians from Quebec and the Maritime Provinces along with Germans, Irish, Polish and other nationalities. With the opening of the Duluth Shipping Canal in 1871, commerce greatly improved in the Twin Ports. With the opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway in 1959, the Zenith City of the Unsalted Seas incorporated as Duluth, Minnesota (1868), and its standing at the head of the Great Lakes (2,650 miles from the Atlantic) became a major port for Midwest raw materials such as iron ore, grain, coal, petroleum and lumber. The rocky bluffs above the modern city rise to 600 feet above the lake.

II. Duluth's Early Catholic History: the First Missionaries

1) Irenaeus Frederic Baraga – "The Snowshoe Priest"

On May 28, 1831, Fr. Frederic Baraga[1], from Austria, arrived at Arbre Croche, today Harbor Springs, Michigan to work among the Ottawa Nation. Next he was sent in 1833 to found a mission which would develop into the City of Grand Rapids, Michigan. The third mission he founded on July 27, 1835, was to his beloved Chippewa at Holy Spirit Mission on Madeleine Island in Lake Superior where he served eight years, baptizing 981 Indians and Whites.

It was while at Holy Spirit Mission that Father Baraga undertook a 90 mile walk in his snowshoes to the Indian settlement at Fond du Lac near present day Duluth, Minnesota. There he met Pierre Cotte and his wife, a devout Catholic couple. Pierre had obtained a catechism written in the Ojibwa tongue by Father Baraga, and together with his wife taught the faith, Mass prayers, and hymns to the Indians. They waited eagerly for the day when a Catholic priest would come to them. Their prayers were answered in the Fall of 1835. Impressed with the progress they were making with the Chippewa, Fr. Baraga decided to baptize all twenty-one Indians the next Sunday.

Father Baraga was appointed Vicar Apostolic and Bishop of all Northern Michigan, on July 29, 1853. At the time the Vicariate included all of the Upper Peninsula, a good section of Lower Michigan, Northern Wisconsin and the north shore of Lake Superior. Bishop Baraga labored in this vast area for fifteen years, and was called to his Maker on January 19, 1868.

It is said of him: "No Indian missionary of modern times was more beloved and revered by both Indians and Whites than Baraga. He oved his Indians with a warm-hearted devotion, which they reciprocated. Men of all positions in society, Catholics and non- Catholics revered him as an ideal man, Christian and Bishop. The Church owes him a great deal and considers Frederic Baraga as the "Grandfather of [2] Jean-Baptiste Genin was born in France on October 29, 1837, made his religious profession as an Oblate on June 23, 1860, and immediately left for Canada where he was ordained to the priesthood in Ottawa on June 19, 1864. The next year he left for the Oblate missions of Western Canada where he labored among the Cree and the Montagnais Indians until 1867. the Diocese of Duluth". His cause for canonization has begun in Rome.

Meanwhile, the following appeared in *The Minnesotan* of 1866 published in St. Paul: The Reverends Albert Lacombe, O.M.I., and Laurent Simonet, O.M.I. on their way to the western Canadian Provinces reunited the Catholics of the village (Duluth) for Mass where they "broke the Word of God" for them.

2) Fr. John Cebul (1868-1870)

In 1868, Fr. John Cebul, missionary in Superior, Wisconsin, crossed the St. Louis River into Duluth to begin his monthly visits to the Catholics whom he gathered in a house on St. Croix Avenue. In 1870, he built a modest chapel on the site where The Sacred Heart Music Center stands today. Fr. Cebul's successor, Fr. Keller, stayed only two years in Duluth and left with the first snows of January, 1872. Catholics of Duluth would have to wait a whole year before receiving their third pastor.

3) Fr. Jean-Baptiste Genin (1873-1882)

In 1873, Bishop Seidenbush, O.S.B., Vicar Apostolic of Northern Minnesota, in need of a French-speaking priest for the growing number of French Canadians of Duluth, Minnesota., appointed Fr. Jean-Baptiste Genin, O.M.I.[2], third pastor of Sacred Heart Church. While in Duluth he made significant improvements to the church and rectory and, in 1881, petitioned Bishop Seidenbush for aid in establishing a Catholic school. Because of Fr. Genin's zeal, the Benedictine Sisters from St. Benedict Monastery in St. Joseph, Minnesota, opened the first parochial school at Sacred Heart Parish in Duluth in 1884.

Although Fr. Genin was the first Oblate missionary to reside in Duluth, he was attached to the Oblate community in St. Boniface, Manitoba. Unable to adapt to the rigors of missionary life and due to the great distances separating him from his Oblate confreres, he left the Oblate Congregation in 1876 and continued to serve the Church

as a secular priest in Duluth until 1882. Fr. Genin spent the remaining ears of his priestly life establishing parishes along the railroad being built from St. Paul to Bismarck in the Dakota Territory. He died at Bath, South Dakota , on January 19, 1900.

A more permanent Oblate foundation in Duluth would come in 1903 when such names as Didace Guillet, Omer Robillard and Zachary Lacasse would carry their Oblate crosses across the Canadian border into the State of Minnesota .

4) Fr. Murphy (1882-1885)

During the administration of the fourth pastor of Sacred Heart, Fr. Murphy, important events are registered in the annals of the Catholic Church in Duluth, the foundation of three new parishes: St. Peter

established in 1883 for Catholics of Italian origin, and in 1885, in the West End, St. Clement for the Irish-German population, and St. Jean Baptiste for the French Canadians. He was succeeded by Fr. P.B. Champagne as pastor of St. Jean Baptiste[3] who served until June 10, 1886. The following priest in charge was Fr. F.R. Beland who built a rectory, but then, due to poor health, was obliged to leave in December 1886.

5) Duluth becomes a Diocese

The year 1889 saw a major event for the Catholic Church in Northern Minnesota. Pope Leo XIII, concurring with the Archbishop of St. Paul, created a new Diocese on the shores of Lake Superior and chose the city of Duluth as the See of the new Bishopric. Rev. John Mc-Golrick, Pastor of St. Mary's Church, Minneapolis was appointed first Bishop of Duluth.

The following priests served the parish during the last decade of the 19th century: Rev. W.T. Roy (1887-1891), Rev. Charles Giroux (1891-1895), Rev. L.J. Grandchamp, (1895-1900), and Rev. Albert Leuret (1900-1902).

6) Fr. Albert Leuret (1900-1902)

However, Fr. Leuret alone could not respond to the needs of the 2,500 souls scattered over eighteen square miles. As early as 1895, the bishop had been contemplating the idea of having a religious order of French priests take charge of St. Jean Baptiste Parish. He was aware of the great work accomplished by the Oblates of Mary Immaculate in the Red River Valley and by Fr. Genin in Duluth from 1873 to 1882; he was sure that the Oblate zeal in other parts of the world could be made manifest also in Duluth. In the Fall of 1902, after Fr. Zachary Lacasse, O.M.I.[4], of Winnipeg, had preached a very successful mission to the French Canadians of the city, the bishop spoke to him of his idea, and correspondence began immediately between the diocese and Fr. Prisque Magnan, O.M.I., Provincial at St. Boniface, Manitoba, in view of transferring the parish of St. Jean Baptiste to the Oblates.

Fr. Leuret, therefore, was the sixth and final diocesan priest to care for the French Canadians at St. Jean Baptiste. On February 11, 1901, a fire destroyed the wood-framed church, but the Canadians were determined to rebuild. The labours of rebuilding and frail health consumed Fr. Leuret's energies and on November 26, 1902 , Fr. Lacasse was named "interim" pastor until the arrival of the first Oblate pastor. Fr. Leuret died at St. Mary's Hospital on February 9, 1903.

III. Arrival of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate

During the four months he served as acting pastor, Fr. Lacasse visited the Canadians in their homes, met with them at church socials and in family soirees. He even went to visit them at their places of work; his words always warm and his good sense of humor gained many hearts. The chronicler of the Oblate annals in 1903 writing about Fr. Lacasse, said: "He was at the post four months and during those months he did the 'work of an apostle'."

1) Fr. Didace Guillet, first Oblate Pastor (1903-1906)

Fr. Didace Guillet, O.M.I.[5], was appointed seventh pastor of St. Jean Baptiste Parish and Superior of the first Oblate foundation in the State of Minnesota. He arrived in Duluth on March 13, 1903, accompanied by scholastic Brother Omer Robillard. Fr. Zachary Lacasse was assigned as Associate Pastor. With the arrival of these first missionaries a new era of Oblate presence in Duluth began.

The following day the three founding Oblates found their way to the bishop's residence to present their credentials and the filial obedience of the community. The bishop received the Oblates with open arms and imparted to the new missionaries his fatherly blessing. This gracious blessing was not in vain as on the evening of March 22 the Canadians, reunited in the basement of the old church, presented Fr. Guillet with an address of welcome and saluted the Oblates as the 'dawn of renewal' for their dear parish and promised generous and constant collaboration for the work ahead. With determination, Fr. Guillet prepared the work of renewal and reorganization. On the following Sunday he announced: "The Oblate Fathers accept the complete administration of the parish affairs."

Bishop McGolrick considered the Oblates a great asset to his diocese especially in the mission work they later undertook. Soon reinforcements began to arrive with Fathers Alphonse Hartmann (1903-

1906) and Omer Plourde (1903-1907). Fr. Prisque Magnan, Provincial Superior at St. Boniface, Manitoba, on a visit to his confreres in Duluth, signed a contract with Bishop McGolrick on March 20, 1903. The following May 9, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate were incorporated in the State of Minnesota.

St. Jean-Baptiste church, having become too little for its increasing population, and its rectory too small for a religious congregation, it became necessary to build, but where? Fr. Guillet had a way of uniting men of good will and chose a committee who visited different lots in the West End. They found a magnificent plot of land near Lincoln Park on West Third St. between 24th and 25th Avenue West. The committee consulted Bishop McGolrick who authorized its immediate purchase. Because of the shrewd efforts of Fr. Guillet and his committee, the asking price of $28,000 was reduced to $20,000. On May 26, 1903 , the land became the property of St. Jean Baptiste Parish. The City of Duluth gave its approval the following July 27th.

After a successful Bazaar at the Duluth Armory which netted $3,800, the council under the presidency of Fr. Guillet voted for the immediate building of a new rectory for the Oblate Missionaries. Construction began in May 1904, and on August 8, 1906, the Oblates entered their new home. Now the construction of the new church could begin and the Fathers would be on the spot to see to its completion. Fr. Ernest Croisier, in charge of the mission at Cloquet between 1910 and 1911, became a member of the Oblate community in Duluth.

The church/school type of construction was built on the corner of West Third and 25th Ave. opposite Lincoln Park. The cornerstone of the new facility was blessed by Bishop McGolrick on August 28, 1904. On January 6, 1905 Fr. Guillet sang the last parochial Mass in the old church at 11th Avenue West. The new church, a spacious building measuring 130 by 60 feet with a seating capacity of six hundred, was opened for worship on January 8, 1905, and was solemnly dedicated on the following February 12. The day long ceremonies began with a morning Mass celebrated by Fr. Prisque Magnan, Provincial Superior. He was assisted by Frs. Omer Robillard and Omer Plourde as Deacon and Sub-deacon respectively. Most Rev. Adélard Langevin, O.M.I., Archbishop of St. Boniface, Manitoba, preached for the occasion. At 3 o'clock in the afternoon, a large number of faithful gathered in the well-decorated church for the solemn dedication and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament presided over by Bishop McGolrick who recited the customary prayers of dedication, thus consecrating for all time the new St. Jean Baptiste church.

Among the other dignitaries present were Fr. Michael Fallon, .M.I., Provincial Superior of the First American Province at Buffalo, New York, and future bishop of London, Ontario, who preached in English. On the evening of the dedication, Archbishop Langevin, O.M.I., writing in the annals of the Oblate community of Duluth, noted: "The grounds and buildings give honor to the generosity of the parishioners and the profound dedication of the Oblate Fathers, especially Fr. Prisque Magnan, O.M.I., Provincial, and Fr. Guillet." Through the efforts of Fr. Guillet and parishioners, the second school in the parish was opened on September 11, 1905, and placed under the direction of the Benedictine Sisters, initiators and pioneers of Catholic education in the Diocese of Duluth. One hundred children were enrolled.

2) Fr. Jean-Baptiste Frigon, O.M.I. (1906-1908)

On April 1, 1906, Fr. Jean-Baptiste Frigon succeeded Fr. Guillet as pastor. Among his contributions to the Oblate parish was the establishment of the League of the Sacred Heart. Due to ill health and fatigue, Fr. Frigon retired from active ministry and was replaced temporarily as pastor by Fr. Lucien Laganière who finished the interior decoration of the church. Associate pastors during this time included Frs. Alphonse Hartman (1906-1907) and Moïse Blais (1907- 1909).

3) Fr. Didace Guillet, O.M.I. (1908-1914)

On June 10, 1908, Fr. Guillet returned to Duluth for a second term as pastor and superior. On this occasion he purchased a new Casavant organ at a cost of $475.00, which was his personal Christmas gift to he parish. Soon it became necessary to build a parish hall for the many societies and social functions. After the necessary approvals of Bishop McGolrick and the Oblate Provincial, Fr. Guillet proceeded. The parish hall inaugurated November 9, 1909 was used not only for plays and commencement exercises but also, under the guidance of Fr. Joseph Thibaudeau, for showing weekly movies from 1919 until 1936. These movies, begun primarily to combat the irreligious and secular influence of the non-censored films shown in local theaters, were not only a protection for youth but a source of revenue for the parish.

The Oblates of Duluth had cause to rejoice on November 20, 1910, at the solemn festivities marking the 25th anniversary of St. Jean-Baptiste Parish. A solemn High Mass of thanksgiving was presided over by Bishop McGolrick with Fr. Henri Watelle, O.M.I., Pastor and Superior of the French Canadian St. Joseph Parish, Lowell, Massachussets, as guest homilist. In his homily Fr. Watelle said: "The name Didace Guillet is synonymous with that of St. Jean-Baptiste Parish. For in the Oblate family, we have a great esteem and affection for him. The flame that devours his heart is his love of the poor and is zeal for salvation of souls."

In the evening, present at Vespers and Benediction, were Oblate Fathers Portelance of Winnipeg, Zachary Lacasse who returned to St. Jean-Baptiste from 1909 to1919, and Ernest Croisier of Cloquet. The Oblates of the Duluth community had the honor in April 1910 of receiving their Superior General, Archbishop Augustine Dontenwill, O.M.I., who extolled the work of his confreres in Duluth. A second contract between Bishop John McNicholas, O.P. of Duluth and the Superior General was signed on September 12, 1911. A "canonical house" of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate in Duluth was erected in 1912.

Assisting Fr. Guillet in his second term as pastor were the following Oblates who served as Associate pastors: Adéodat Therien (1906-1907), Arthur Therien (1906-1909), Ernest Croisier (1911-1914), Joseph Thibodeau (1910-1942), Urgel Poitras (1911-1926) and Hercule Emard (1911-1913).

4) Fr. Omer Robillard, O.M.I.[6], (1914-1936)

In 1914, Fr. Guillet had to relinquish his pastorate because of poor health. He assumed the chaplaincy of St. Mary's Hospital in Duluth from 1915-1921, which up to that time was served by Fr. Joseph Mc-Carthy (1906-1914). That same year Fr. Omer Robillard returned to Duluth to begin a pastorate that was to last for twenty-two fruitful years. He was assisted throughout this long term by Oblate Fathers Arthur Dallaire (1914-1916), Hector Brassard (1915-1918), Joseph Poulet (1918-1920), Hercule Emard (1919-1920), Alfred Beaudin (1919-1934), Cyrille Pilon (1926-1927), George Desrochers (1935-1936), Fidèle Beaulieu (1933-1940) and Hector Brassard (1934-1939). Fr. Francis Costiou served at Little Fork, Big Falls and Effie (1926-1944). Serving International Falls were Frs. P. Kiley (1918-1919), Patrick Killeen (1909-1918), Frederick O'Donnell, Cornelius O'Dwyer, William Patton (1918-1919) and A.J. LaBonte (1934-1945). The Roman Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith on March 20, 1922, gave the Oblate Congregation charge of St. Jean Baptiste Parish, Duluth, "in perpetuity".

Fr. Robillard, always solicitous to the needs of Catholic education, announced that the parish being debt free was in a position to construct a new school. A tidy sum of $24,275 had already been realized for the proposed school. The new school was built in 1926 and the high school came into being. The school having gained a solid foundation ranked among the most flourishing of the diocese. In 1962, due to the lack of students, the High School grades were terminated and in the Spring of 1986, the Junior High was eliminated, leaving only Kindergarten through 6th grade. It was at this time that the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary returned to Winnipeg and once again the Benedictine Sisters were in charge. Finally, in 1990, that school also closed ending an era of Catholic education in Duluth's West End.

The French-speaking Oblates assigned to the Duluth community were always ready to promote French language and customs. The French Club at Three Lakes, thirty-five miles outside of Duluth and begun in July 1908 during the pastorate of Fr. Guillet, adhered faithfully to its primary purpose of promoting citizenship among the Americans of French descent and developed programs of social activities, industrial aid, and civic participation. To this day Oblates and other priests occasionally celebrate Mass for the summer visitors of the French Club.

Tragedy struck the Oblate community at Duluth with the sudden death of its superior/pastor Fr. Omer Robillard on August 27, 1936. "Through rough ways and plain, he guided his flock for twenty-two years, and anyone who ever knew him mourns his death today," wrote Sr. Mary Clare Alda, S.N.J.M.

The history of the Oblates in Duluth would not be complete without mention of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary[7]. It was also during the pastorate of Fr. Omer Robillard that twelve of them arrived from Montreal in August, 1920, to take over St. Jean-Baptiste School from the Benedictine Sisters.

5) Fr. Georges Desrochers, O.M.I.[8] (1936-1945)

Fr. Robillard's shoes were hard to fill, but Fr. Georges Desrochers succeeded. Owing to his experience as

treasurer of the Oblate community, a debt-reduction plan was put into place whereby for every dollar collected the total indebtedness was reduced by two dollars. Under his leadership the church was redecorated, and many other improvements were made. In 1938, for the first time in six years, the Oblate Fathers of the parish received a salary, even though it was yet only one fourth of the amount they should have received. Fr. Desrochers served as pastor until 1945. It was also during his pastorate that the Home School Association was founded to foster greater collaboration between teachers and parents. The Oblate community of Duluth during this time was comprised of Fathers Julien Jalbert (1939-1945), George Salamon (1941-1945), Cyrille Pilon (1942- 1952), Elie Savoie (1944-1948), with Leandre Gauthier at International Falls.

6) Fr. Alfred Beaudin, O.M.I.[9] (1945-1948)

The year 1945 announced a change in Oblate pastors. Under Fr. Alfred Beaudin's guidance, the plans of Fr. Desrochers were faithfully carried on, and gradually the debt was reduced.

7) Fr. Elie Savoie, O.M.I.[10] (1948-1955)

Fr. Elie Savoie, associate since 1944, succeeded Fr. Beaudin as pastor on August 17, 1948. May 15, 1949 was a happy day in the life of Fr. Savoie, his Silver Jubilee of Ordination. Parishioners and Oblates paid him homage with a solemn High Mass and an evening banquet presided over by Fr. Philippe Scheffer, Provincial Superior. As associates to Fr. Savoie during his tenure as Pastor we find Frs. Paul-Emile Tétreault (1949-1950), Zéphirin Magnan (1950-1958) and Albert Lafrenière (1953-1958). Attached to the house in Duluth and ministering in International Falls were Frs. George Salamon (1948-1960), Emmanuel Duplain (1950-1960), Marcel Jalbert (1947-1950), Edouard Lamontagne (1947-1960) and Cyrille Pilon (1952-1955). Serving at Northome and Effie were Frs. Léon Jalbert (1948-1957) and Gaston Lebleu. Serving at Little Fork was Julien Jalbert (1948-1960).

Under Fr. Savoie's leadership, the dreams and aims of former pastors and parishioners were realized. On October 7, 1952 , the debt was paid in full, and in 1954 preparations were begun for the celebration of the parish's Fiftieth Anniversary at its present site in the West End (the parish had been obliged to forego the commemoration of its Golden Jubilee in 1953). Renovations included, among others, the painting of the church and of the statuary, the redecorating of the altars, and the tiling of the church floor. The spiritual and social needs of the parish were not neglected. Through Fr. Savoie's efforts the parish societies, such as the Children of Mary, the Immaculate Conception Sodality for high school girls, the Ladies of St. Anne for women and the League of the Sacred Heart for men, flourished. Groups such as the Choir, Boy and Girl Scouts, the Union St. Jean Baptiste and Catholic Order of Foresters developed.

On October 12, 1954, a solemn High Mass opened the Golden Jubilee festivities during the Church's Marian Year. Fr. Alfred Beaudin, former pastor, presided. The deacon and sub-deacon were Frs. Raymond Durocher and Julien Morin, both sons of the parish, who served for two months in 1950. The convent, which up to this time had belonged to the Oblates, was sold to the parish for $25,000. On a questionnaire of parish history for the Centennial Book of the Province of St. Paul a notation is made that up to 1949 "seven boys from the parish are O.M.I.s."

8) Fr. Denys Jubinville, O.M.I.[11] (1955-1958)

Fr. Denys Jubinville succeeded Fr. Savoie in September 1955. During his tenure the roof and cornice of the school were repaired, classrooms painted, and new boilers and controls installed for a total cost of $54,500. Fr. Denys Jubinville is the last Pastor from the Oblate Manitoba Province to staff the parish. Serving at International Falls was Fr. Alexander Jossé (1956-1960).

IV. The O.M.I. Central U.S. Province takes over from the Canadian Manitoba Province.

By virtue of a decree issued from the Oblate General House in Rome, May 5, 1958, the Provincials of the Manitoba Province and Central United States Province concurring, the canonical house of Duluth erected as such in 1912, was adjoined to the U.S. Central Province, which at the time comprised a nine-state area including Minnesota.[12]

The new Provincial Superior, Fr. Stanley Sergot, appointed Fr. John Louis as Pastor of St. Jean's and Superior of the house at Duluth. His installation was held on June 20, 1958.

In 1951, Oblates of Polish origin had assumed the pastoral care of Sts. Peter and Paul Church in Duluth's West End . Fr. Paul Latusek was appointed administrator on May 27, 1953 . This parish on Fifth Street and 24th Avenue West had been erected in 1901 to serve Polish immigrants. Also serving Sts. Peter and Paul were Paul Grzesiak (1962-1971) and Lawrence Kaiser (1971-1972). Oblates of the U.S. Central Province cared for the spiritual needs of Sts. Peter and Paul until it merged in 1985 with the West End Catholic Parishes of Sts. Jean and Clement.

1) John Louis, O.M.I. (1958-1964)

During the pastorate of Fr. Louis, with the help of his Oblate confreres, work was begun on the remodeling of the lower church classrooms into a large and spacious hall. Additional Sunday Masses and Masses for school children were begun as well as weekly evening religious instruction for high school students and those interested in the Catholic faith. Fr. Louis was assisted by Frs. James Kohmetscher (1958-1959) and Vincent Ott (1958-1961). All three priests taught religion in the school and were permanent members of the faculty. A reorganization of parish societies was also begun during this time.

Holy Name Sister Mary Claire Alda, author of *Historical Highlights of St. Jean-Baptiste*, notes:

> Since their arrival less than a year ago, our pastor and his two assistant priests have manifested an ardent zeal for both the material and spiritual welfare of St. John the Baptist Parish. These initial steps which our present Oblate Fathers have taken we recognize as but the outpouring of that intense love of God which fills their priestly hearts and we are confident that they will continue to make every effort to form 'the whole Christ' in every member of our beloved St. John the Baptist Parish, and under the capable guidance of our devoted Oblate Fathers the members of St. John the Baptist look to the years ahead with confidence and assurance.

Bishop Schenk shortened the name of St. Jean Baptiste to St. Jean on April 30, 1962. Assisting Fr. John Louis were Oblates Sherman Wall (1959-1962), Dean Dauw (1961-1962), Jerome Datko, Leo Miller and Lavon Jacobs (1962-1963). At various times Frs. Edward Coleman and Michael Hussy had taken over the chaplaincy of Sandstone Correctional Facility in Sandstone, MN.

2) Fr. Noel Payant, O.M.I.[13] (1964-1969)

Fr. Noel Payant arrived January 10, 1965, to replace Fr. Alphonse Hojenski, who served as interim pastor. Fr. Payant is responsible for implementing the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council. He is credited with an extensive remodeling program in 1966 that included the installation of a new altar, new grill work behind the altar and a new lighting system. Associate pastors during the time of Fr. Payant included Frs. Ralph Goniea (1965-1966) and Elmar Mauer.

3) Fr. Jerome Datko, O.M.I. (1969-1971)

Fr. Datko was the last officially named "pastor" of St. Jean's. He led the parish through the difficult days of the post-Vatican II Church.

4) The period of "co-pastors" (1970-1984)

Owing to the changes stemming from the Second Vatican Council, the concept of shared pastoral responsibility or "co-pastors" was implemented in 1970 and continued until 1984.

With significant demographic changes taking place in the West End, the Oblates were asked to assume pastoral care of St. Clement's Parish. To reflect this important change, Bishop Anderson decreed that St. Clement's would merge with St. Jean's to form the "West End Catholic Parishes of Sts. Jean and Clement," canonically erected on June 18, 1972. St. Clement's church was closed in 1976 and its building razed in 1990. Fr. Robert Eimer served the West End Catholic parish the longest from 1978 to 1984. Attached to the house in Duluth and serving at the Brainerd State School were Frs. John Louis (1969-1972) and James Deegan (1972-1975).

5) Fr. Roger Schwietz, O.M.I. (1984-1989)

With a change in diocesan administration came the end of the era of "co-pastors" for the West End Catholic Parish. On July 14, 1984, Oblate Fathers Roger Schwietz and Steve Garrigan were appointed Pastor and Associate Pastor respectively.

The West End Catholic Parish of Sts. Jean and Clement, along with Sts. Peter and Paul, continued to experience significant changes at that time. In order to promote a better pastoral plan for the West End, Bishop Brom with the support of the Oblates decided to consolidate the West End Catholic Parish and Sts. Peter and Paul Parish into the one Holy Family Parish, canonically erected July 1, 1985. Fr. Roger Schwietz was named first pastor of Holy Family. At the same time, Fr. Aloysius Svobodny was assigned as Associate Pastor and served until 1993. Fr. Al, as he was lovingly called, acted as Administrator from December 1989 until July 1990. Priests "in residence" who served in campus ministry at the University of Minnesota – Duluth during this period included Oblates Frs. Louis Studer (1984-1986), Mark Dean (1986-1988) and Robert Aaron (1988-1990).

Fr. Schwietz served as pastor of Holy Family from 1984 to 1989 when he was appointed seventh bishop of the Diocese of Duluth, the first Minnesota Oblate to be appointed a bishop.

6) Fr. Norman Pahl, O.M.I. (1990-1994)

Fr. Pahl arrived on July 13, 1990, as second pastor of Holy Family Parish taking over from the administrator, Fr. Al Svobodny. During Fr. Pahl's pastorate, the parish school, due to declining enrollment, closed. Later the school building suffered a terrible fire. Insurance money from the loss became "seedbed" for the new Holy Family church.

7) Fr. Andrew Knop, O.M.I. (1994-2001)

Fr. Andrew Knop, third pastor of Holy Family with Fr. Anthony Wroblewski (1995-1998) and Brother Paul Daly, are credited with "Building Together in Faith," a construction program that united the two parish facilities of St. Jean's and Sts. Peter and Paul into one new building on the site of the former St. Jean's. These Oblates were instrumental in bringing together the various ethnicities found in the West End parishes into one harmonious consolidation. The new Holy Family church complex was dedicated June 14, 1998, by Oblate Bishop Roger Schwietz.

The Oblates and parishioners celebrated the fifteenth anniversary of Holy Family Parish on the Feast of the Holy Family during the Jubilee Year 2000 with Father Thomas Horan, Director of the Oblate Retreat House, Hudson, New Hampshire as guest homilist.

One of the goals of the Oblate U.S. Province is the fostering of lay vocations. With the encouragement and support of Fr. Andrew Knop, Mr. Timothy Kittleson, already active in the parish as youth minister, began studies for the permanent diaconate.

V. The United States Province of St. Eugene de Mazenod

A new day for the Oblates dawned on February 10, 1999, in the form of an official decree of the Superior General, Father Wilhelm Steckling: "I now by official sanction declare that from this day forward the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate in these United States belong to one province under the patronage of Mary Immaculate and Saint Eugene de Mazenod." Thus all Oblate priests and brothers attached to the former Northern, Eastern, Southern, Central and Pacific Provinces are now united into one geographic province to serve the entire United States .

From 1958 when the United States Central Province took over from the Manitoba Oblate Province, a total of 100 Oblates from the United States have served the Church and diocese of Duluth. And the mission continues… The term "Oblate House" has been replaced with the term "District" to include all Oblates assigned to a particular geographical area within the Province. The following Oblates are currently assigned to the Northern Minnesota District: Fr. Anthony Wroblewski, Pastor of Holy Family, District Superior; Fr. Thomas Meyer and Br. Thomas Ruhmann, of International Falls, as counselors. Oblates belonging to the District include: Frs. Lawrence Antus, St. Mary's, Cook; Roger Bergkamp, St. Thomas, International Falls; James Datko, Holy Family, Duluth ; Alcuin Henger, St. Luke's, Sandstone; and Norman Pahl, St. Mary's, Willow River

Fr. Anthony Wroblewski, O.M.I. (2001- present)

Fr. Wroblewski returned to Holy Family as fourth pastor on July 1, 2001. Fr. James Datko (2000-present) provides Oblate companionship as well as some limited pastoral service to the parish. Bro. Richard Paul Coté served as pastoral associate from July 2000 to July 2002.

An event of note in the history of Holy Family parish occurred on the Feast of Christ the King, November 24, 2002. On that momentous occasion parishioner Timothy Kittleson was ordained permanent deacon for service to the people of God at Holy Family church.

Conclusion

On the occasion of the "Century of Oblate Presence in the Diocese of Duluth", heartfelt congratulations go out to our Oblate confreres from Canada, especially those who brought the Good News of salvation, at times with great sacrifice, into the rural areas of Northern Minnesota from 1903 to 1958. During this period of our history, a total of forty-nine priests and brothers from Canada served the Church and diocese. Chapter fourteen of the Book of Revelation sums it up best: "They shall rest from their labours, for their good works accompany them."

Our thanks and gratitude also extend to those Oblate priests and brothers from the former Central U.S. Province who have served and continue to serve the needs of God's poor in rural Minnesota.

Finally, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate acknowledge with great appreciation the Benedictine Sisters and the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary Sisters who collaborated with them in the area of Catholic education in Duluth's West End .

Buffalo, NY, June, 2004

Notes :

---

[1] Irenaeus Frederic Baraga was born June 29, 1797, at Malavas, Austria, and ordained a priest in 1823. He left for America on October 29, 1830, with the goal of spending the rest of his life among American Indians.

[2] Jean-Baptiste Genin was born in France on October 29, 1837, made his religious profession as an Oblate on June 23, 1860, and immediately left for Canada where he was ordained to the priesthood in Ottawa on June 19, 1864. The next year he left for the Oblate missions of Western Canada where he labored among the Cree and the Montagnais Indians until 1867.

[3] The parish was canonically erected on April 14, 1885, and open for worship on August 15.

[4] Born at Saint-Jacques-l'Achigan (Quebec) on March 9, 1845, Zachary Lacasse made his religious profession on August 29, 1871 and was ordained a priest in Ottawa on April 27, 1873. After 12 years of ministry in Eastern Canada, he went West during which time he resided in Duluth from 1898 to 1905 and from 1909 to 1919. He died in Gravelbourg, Sask. on February 28, 1921 and was buried at Lebret, Sask.

[5] Didace Guillet was born at Iberville, Quebec, on February 25, 1853. He made his first Oblate profession on August 15, 1876 and was ordained a priest in Ottawa on September 5, 1880. He taught at the University of Ottawa from 1880 to 1890, was assigned to St. Pierre Apôtre parish in Montreal from 1890 to 1895, and then left for the Canadian West where he was pastor of St. Mary's parish in Winnipeg from 1895 to 1903. He died in Duluth on December 16, 1923, and was buried in St. Boniface, Man.

[6] Born in Buckingham, Quebec, on December 27, 1877, he made his religious profession on August 15, 1897 and was ordained a priest in Winnipeg on September , 1903. He spent most of his life in Duluth where he was superior twice (1914-1920 and 1934-1936). He died in Buckingham on August 27, 1936.

[7] This Congregation of teaching nuns was founded in Longueuil, Quebec, in 1844 by Blessed Marie-Rose Durocher and Oblate Father Adrien Telmon.

[8] Born in Duluth, Minn., on January 5, 1899. He made his first religious profession at Lachine, Que., on August 2, 1919, and was ordained a priest in Edmonton, Alberta, on December 20, 1924. He exercised his ministry in Kenora and Fort Frances, in Ontario, and Duluth and International Falls, Minnesota. He died in Duluth on April 22, 1947 and was buried in Saint Boniface, Manitoba.

[9] Born in Peabody, Mass., on February 2, 1882, he made his first religious profession at Lachine on August 2, 1902 and was ordained a priest in Ottawa on May 25, 1907. He exercised his ministry in Western Canada, during which time he was

assistant pastor in Duluth from 1919 to 1924 and from 1926 to 1934, and then pastor from 1945 to 1948. He died in Saint Boniface, Man. on May 9, 1965.

[10] Born at Sainte-Anne-des-Chênes, Manitoba, on June 21, 1898, he made his first religious profession at Lachine on May 9, 1919 and was ordained a priest in Edmonton on June 24, 1924. He was assistant pastor at Duluth (1944-1948), and then pastor from 1948 to 1955. He died in Kenora, Ont. where he was pastor (1957-1962) on April 5, 1962 and was buried in the Oblate cemetery at Saint Boniface.

[11] Born at Saint Joseph, Man., on May 15, 1901, he made his first religious profession at Lachine on August 15, 1920, and was ordained a priest at Saint Léon, Man. on June 6, 1925. He died at Fort Qu'Appelle, Sask. on December 2, 1968, and was buried in the Oblate cemetery at Saint Boniface.

[12] History of St. Jean Baptiste Parish (1959), by Sr. Mary Claire Alda, S.N.J.M.

[13] Born in 1918, professed in 1949 and ordained a priest in 1955. He died in Belleville, IL, on April 3, 1992. At the time of the transfer of Oblate authority to the Central U.S. Province, Oblates ministering in Northome, Orr, Buyck, Nett Lake and Duluth, seven priests in all, were attached to the house in Duluth.

Témoignage
Mgr Henri Légaré, o.m.i.

MGR GILLES CAZABON, O.M.I., ÉVÊQUE DE SAINT-JÉRÔME

(Textes de la Parole de Dieu: Job 19, 1,23-27a; Jn 10, 14-16)

Ma dernière rencontre avec Mgr Henri Légaré remonte au début du mois de juillet. En vacances à la maison de campagne des Oblats à La Blanche, je suis allé lui rendre visite comme je le faisais assez régulièrement. Il m'a paru préoccupé par son état de santé qui présentait des symptômes nouveaux inquiétants. Nous avons causé fraternellement, comme nous le faisions toujours en ces occasions, de divers sujets qui l'intéressaient davantage. Nous avons échangé nos perceptions de la vie de l'Église aujourd'hui. Nous avons rappelé aussi le souvenir de confrères Oblats de Marie Immaculée qu'il avait connus davantage,et de collègues évêques avec lesquels il avait travaillé plus intimement et qu'il estimait beaucoup. Comme d'ordinaire, il s'est informé de mon ministère et de mes projets. Il ne parlait plus d'un possible voyage à Willow Bunch, son village natal en Saskatchewan, ou à Edmonton et à McLennan en Alberta. Il s'exprimait avec un détachement inhabituel. C'est comme s'il avait l'esprit ailleurs. Quand je l'ai quitté, je me suis dit à moi-même: c'est la dernière fois que je rencontre Henri Légaré, l'homme, l'Oblat de Marie Immaculée, l'archevêque émérite, le pasteur et le citoyen de ce pays qu'il avait parcouru de long en large. Lorsqu'on m'a annoncé son décès, je n'ai pas été surpris.

La page de l'Évangile qui m'est revenue immédiatement à l'esprit, c'est celle de la parabole du Bon Pasteur: «Moi, je suis le bon pasteur; je connais mes brebis et mes brebis me connaissent, comme le Père me connaît, et que je connais le Père. Je donne ma vie pour mes brebis» (Jn 10, 14-15). Dans l'exhortation apostolique post-synodale *Les Pasteurs du troupeau* (*Pastores gregis,* 2003*)* que le pape Jean-Paul II vient de donner à l'Église, il rappelle à ses frères évêques qu'il leur faut fixer leur regard sur le visage du Christ Bon Pasteur «afin d'être toujours davantage *ministres de l'Évangile pour l'espérance du monde,* nous faisant en cela, leur rappelle-t-il, aussi modèles pour le troupeau que le Pasteur des pasteurs nous a confié» (n5). Ce qui définit la vie et le ministère d'un évêque, c'est d'être pasteur. À l'exemple de Jésus et en son nom, en communion avec le peuple qui lui est confié, l'évêque a pour mission de faire découvrir et apprécier l'éternelle nouveauté du message de l'Évangile, de célébrer la vie qui nous est donnée en abondance dans le mystère de la mort et de la résurrection du Christ, et de diriger le peuple vers les frais pâturages et les eaux vives.

Être pasteur, c'est une chose, mais le devenir vraiment, c'est le chemin de toute une vie. Comme pour tout jeune homme, le milieu familial marquera profondément Henri: «Ma mère, confiera-t-il à un journaliste en 1983, a été vraiment unique; elle avait un sens spiritual et surnaturel très poussé… Elle avait cette capacité de faire confiance. J'ai toujours senti chez elle cet amour très fort qui m'a d'ailleurs marqué ». Le chemin qui l'amènera à être pasteur un jour prit une direction plus claire lorsqu'il décida de devenir Oblat de Marie Immaculée. Il avait connu ces religieux au Collège de Gravelbourg où il avait fait ses études secondaires et collégiales. Il se joignait alors à une famille religieuse et missionnaire à titre de coopérateur du Christ Sauveur, pour en imiter l'exemple et se consacrer à l'évangélisation des pauvres, comme l'affirme le premier article des Constitutions des Oblats. C'est sans doute là qu'il a puisé l'inspiration pour la devise épiscopale qu'il s'est donnée: «*Manifestare quis sit Christus», «Révéler qui est le Christ».* Le coeur du pasteur allait se former dans les premières années de son ministère par un engagement intense dans des domaines variés: des études spécialisées en sciences sociales, les oeuvres de presse, la prédication de retraites, l'administration de l'Association des hôpitaux catholiques du Canada, et l'enseignement dans divers milieux professionnels et diverses institutions universitaires. La contribution majeure du père Henri Légaré, à cette époque, a été faite à l'Université d'Ottawa, oeuvre dirigée alors par les Oblats de Marie Immaculée, où il a été professeur, doyen de faculté et recteur. Par son engagement dans cette institution, il a été en contact avec des personnes de tous les milieux,étudiants, professeurs, chercheurs, administrateurs, et il a évolué avec aise et compétence dans les cercles et les associations qui voient à la promotion de la vie universitaire au niveau national et international.

Il parle de cette période comme du «point culminant» de sa vie. Tout préparait ce prêtre de stature petite et d'allure frêle à d'autres missions de service au plan de l'Église et de la société. Le coeur du pasteur allait s'ouvrir à des espaces insoupçonnés de vie ecclésiale lorsque, en 1967, il devint le premier évêque du diocèse de Schefferville, succédant alors à Mgr Lionel Scheffer, Oblat également, qui en avait été le fondateur en tant que vicaire apostolique.

Quel contraste entre le milieu universitaire d'Ottawa et l'immense territoire missionnaire de l'actuel diocèse de Labrador City-Schefferville! Quel éloignement des centres urbains où il avait travaillé jusqu'alors! Quel effort d'adaptation à des populations et des situations pastorales nouvelles serait exigé du jeune évêque! Il s'insérait maintenant dans la longue tradition d'évêques oblats missionnaires qui ontété les fondateurs de l'Église dans la partie septentrionale du pays. Dans ce contexte hétérogène, les qualités de relations humaines, d'éducateur et d'administrateur de Mgr Légaré ont été particulièrement mises à profit. C'est sans doute son admiration pour Mgr Scheffer qui l'a poussé à demander d'être inhumé au cimetière oblat de Richelieu auprès de ce grand évêque missionnaire, son prédécesseur. Le coeur du pasteur allait prendre un nouvel élan d'engagement apostolique à sa nomination, en 1972, comme archevêque de Grouard McLennan, en Alberta. Originaire de l'ouest du Canada, Mgr Légaré retournait dans cette partie du pays qu'il connaissait bien et où il fut heureux d'exercer son ministère épiscopal. Ses prédécesseurs en cette Église diocésaine portaient les noms d'évêques oblats vicaires apostoliques remarquables, tels Émile Grouard, Joseph Guy, Ubald Langlois et Henri Routhier qui, en 1945, devint le premier archevêque de l'archidiocèse de Grouard-McLennan. Très tôt, Mgr Légaré vit le besoin de promouvoir l'éducation de la foi des fidèles par un enseignement renouvelé de la catéchèse, d'appuyer l'action de son valeureux personnel missionnaire, prêtres, Frères et laïcs, et de promouvoir les vocations au sein de son diocèse. Il se fit remarquer très vite par son contact facile et amical avec les gens où se manifestait son ardente charité pastorale. Son leadership a été marqué par une discrétion et une sagesse pratique qui savaient allier douceur et fermeté. C'est ainsi que, durant 24 ans, il sera ce pasteur aimé et respecté de tous. Son expérience et son savoir-faire, il les a mis de multiples façons au service de l'Église au Canada et de l'Église universelle. Sa participation aux visites *Ad Limina* sous les pontificats de Paul VI et de Jean-Paul II, et à deux Assemblées générales du Synode des évêques, son implication active dans les Assemblées épiscopales régionales du Québec et de l'Ouest canadien, et la présidence de la Conférence des évêques catholiques du Canada qu'il a exercée pendant deux ans, l'ont amené à développer en lui et chez ses fidèles le souci de toutes les Églises, ici et ailleurs. Il m'a parlé souvent de son admiration pour le pape Paul VI, le fidèle artisan de la mise en oeuvre du Concile Vatican II, et pour le pape Jean-Paul II, «ce vrai leader chrétien qui répand la Bonne Nouvelle partout dans le monde comme saint Paul».

Devenir pasteur, c'est le chemin de toute une vie parcouru jour après jour dans le réalisme du quotidien marqué par des difficultés de toutes sortes, par les faiblesses personnelles et celles d'autrui, et les divers problèmes reliés aux personnes et à l'institution ecclésiale elle-même. Tel un guetteur, «l'évêque doit vivre sur les hauteurs et sur ses gardes», comme le rappelle Jean-Paul II aux évêques du monde (n 23). Peu porté à partager ses états d'âme, Mgr Légaré s'est forgé un coeur et une âme de pasteur au creuset des souffrances et des contrariétés de la vie. Loin de le broyer, elles ont contribué à affermir sa foi et à rendre plus vivante sa charité pastorale. Homme d'action hors pair, mais aussi homme spirituel et homme d'Église, Henri Légaré laissait transparaître dans toute sa vie une profonde relation avec Dieu nourrie de prière et de contemplation.

Les deux courts paragraphes qui introduisent son testament laissent deviner le secret de son expérience spirituelle de pasteur. Voici ce qu'il a écrit: «C'est une Congrégation mariale – les Oblats de Marie Immaculée – que j'ai choisie en 1937 pour mettre mes pauvres talents au service du Divin Maître. Je remercie le Seigneur de m'avoir prodigué tant de délicatesses et m'avoir donné la force d'accomplir mon devoir d'état en union avec lui. Je remercie la Vierge Marie, ma bonne Mère, de sa constante et maternelle protection». Et il ajoute ceci qui laisse entrevoir sa grande qualité d'âme: «Je demande sincèrement et humblement pardon au Christ de mes nombreuses brisures d'amour, de mon manque de compréhension de l'étendue et de la profondeur de Son Amour pour moi... Si j'ai blessé certaines personnes, je veux qu'elles me

pardonnent comme je pardonne à ceux et celles qui m'ont fait de la peine».

Nous sommes réunis ici cet après-midi en cette église du Sacré-Coeur pour rendre grâce à Dieu d'avoir donné Henri Légaré à l'Église comme son enfant par le baptême, et son pasteur par l'ordination épiscopale. Nous vivons cet instant en communion de pensée et de prière avec tous les membres de sa famille qu'il aimait tant, et avec les Églises diocésaines de Grouard-McLennan et Labrador City-Schefferville, et leurs pasteurs Mgr Arthé Guimond et Mgr Douglas Crosby, o.m.i., présents parmi nous.

Puisse ce serviteur dévoué de l'Église voir face à face le Christ, le Pasteur des pasteurs, qu'il a voulu manifester par son ministère épiscopal: «Je sais, moi, que mon libérateur est vivant,… avec mon corps, je me tiendrai debout, et de mes yeux de chair, je verrai Dieu. Moi-même, je le verrai, et quand mes yeux le regarderont, il ne se détournera pas».

Une mine à explorer et à exploiter: Le *Dictionnaire Historique des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*

PIERRE HURTUBISE, O.M.I.

En 1996, l'Association d'Études et de Recherches oblates (AERO) faisait paraître le *Dictionnaire des Valeurs oblates*, en chantier depuis une douzaine d'années. Un second projet du même type, concernant cette fois l'histoire oblate, était à la même époque en cours, lui aussi sous la responsabilité de l'AERO, et devait normalement aboutir à la parution d'un second dictionnaire consacré aux personnages, lieux, oeuvres et événements ayant marqué la vie de la Congrégation depuis ses débuts. On eut à un certain moment l'impression que ce projet était en panne, et que le dictionnaire en question ne verrait jamais le jour. Ce n'est pas ici le lieu d'expliquer pourquoi on en était arrivé là. L'important est de souligner que ledit projet fut, il y a quelques années, repris en main par l'homme à qui la Congrégation doit peut-être le plus en matière d'édition de sources et de monographies correspondant à la période où vécut le Fondateur: notre confrère, Yvon Beaudoin. Ceux qui le connaissent bien savent qu'il était probablement le seul qui avait les connaissances, l'expérience, la capacité de travail et la ténacité voulues pour sortir ce projet de l'ornière et le conduire à bon port. Les 22 volumes de la première série des *Écrits Oblats* publiés par lui entre 1977 et 2003 suffiraient à eux seuls à démontrer qu'il était, et de loin, l'homme de la situation.

Un projet de longue haleine voit le jour

S'inspirant de la formule adoptée par le *Dictionnaire biographique du Canada*, il décida dès le départ de renoncer à un dictionnaire en un volume sur le modèle de celui des *Valeurs oblates* et d'opter plutôt pour une pluralité de volumes, le premier volume qui vient de paraître est, comme il se doit, consacré aux annés qui vont de la naissance de la Congrégation à la mort du Fondateur et, ce, pour la seule France, un second volume devant suivre qui portera sur la même période, mais s'intéressera plutôt la présence oblate hors de France.

On doit féliciter l'auteur d'avoir fait ce choix qui, dans les circonstances, d'une part, s'imposait, de l'autre, lui permettait de mettre à profit sa longue fréquentation et sa connaissance approfondie des sources relatives à la période en question. Comment aurait-il pu autrement réaliser et, ce, en si peu de temps, le monument historique de quelque 750 pages que nous avons aujourd'hui sous les yeux et qui, à près de 90%, est de lui, et de lui seul?

Ce premier volume du *Dictionnaire historique des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée* comprend 494 articles, la plupart consistant en des notices biographiques consacrées aux 331 Oblats ayant fait leur oblation perpétuelle avant la mort du Fondateur et ayant surtout oeuvré en France, et à 71 non-Oblats ayant eu des rapports avec Eugène de Mazenod et dont les noms figurent dans ses écrits; les autres, portant sur les maisons fondées en France avant 1861 – 25 au total – ou sur des oeuvres oblates, ou encore des événements ou des thèmes ayant eu une incidence sur les directions prises ou les attitudes adoptées par le Fondateur et la Congrégation à l'époque. Chaque article est accompagné des références essentielles aux sources manuscrites ou imprimées à partir desquelles il a été rédigé.

Dans le cas des notices biographiques concernant des Oblats, on trouve en plus en tête de chaque notice, les renseignements essentiels relatifs à chacun des Oblats en question. Ajoutons que plusieurs articles sont agrémentés d'illustrations (reproductions de gravures, de peintures, voire de photos d'époque) permettant de visualiser les personnages, les monuments, les lieux décrits ou évoqués dans ces mêmes articles. À quoi il faut ajouter les précieuses listes des lieux et dates des chapitres généraux (p. 182), des maîtres des novices et noviciats (p. 396), des scolasticats et de leurs supérieurs et modérateurs (p. 667), des supérieurs des maisons de France (p. 685-686), des provinciaux de France (p. 604-605) et des membres du conseil général (p. 55-56). Tous détails qui font de ce premier volume un précieux ouvrage de référence, mais en même temps un très pratique instrument de travail. (Je me

permets toutefois ici une légère critique et une suggestion puisque le p. Beaudoin lui-même nous y invite: de plus fréquents renvois d'un article à l'autre auraient permis de rendre l'instrument en question encore plus pratique. Un exemple: on trouve la liste des Oblats membres du conseil général à l'époque sous le mot: *Assistants*. N'aurait-il pas été utile de faire une entrée *Administration générale* avec le renvoi à cet article, ou encore tout simplement un renvoi à partir du vocable: *Chapitres généraux*?)

Faits et gestes de la Congrégation en France

Parcourir le *Dictionnaire historique*, article par article – je l'ai fait et je conseille à tout Oblat de le faire... à petite dose, naturellement – c'est plonger dans un passé que l'on croyait connaître, mais qui se révèle à la lecture tout à la fois plus complexe, plus riche, plus inattendu que ce qu'on en savait ou ce qu'on nous en avait dit. Commençons par ce que je serais tenté d'appeler les articles de «contextualisation» permettant de situer les personnes et leurs réalisations ou ministères dans l'espace et dans le temps. En tête de liste, je placerais volontiers la remarquable série d'articles sur Aix (p. 4-10), Marseille (p. 405-430) et Ajaccio (p. 20-29), sans négliger pour autant les articles sur Angers (p. 43-46), Autun (p. 73-77), Billens (p. 122-123), Fréjus (p. 279-285), Limoges (p. 381-385), Nancy (p. 499-504), Nîmes (p. 513-515), Paris (p. 571-574), Quimper (p. 606-607), Romans (p. 637-638), Vico (p. 726-731), voire l'Algérie (p. 32-35), ou encore les nombreux sanctuaires mariaux confiés du vivant du Fondateur aux Oblats: Bon Secours, Cléry, L'Osier, Lumières, Sion, Talence, Le Laus (pl. 515-558) et Parménie (p. 574-575), qui, tous, permettent de nous faire une assez bonne idée des aires d'intervention, d'influence et, par le fait même, d'expansion de la Congrégation en France à l'époque. (Dans cette même liste pourrait aussi figurer la célèbre abbaye royale de Royaumont, près de Paris, achetée en 1865 en vue, semble-t-il, d'y loger éventuellement des scolastiques, mais qu'il fallut assez tôt revendre en raison d'emprunts non autorisés faits à ce moment par le p. Jean-Joseph Magnan, supérieur de la maison de Paris, emprunts que la Congrégation n'était pas prête à rembourser, d'où sans doute la decision du p. Magnan de demander en 1866 la dispense de ses vœux «afin de soulager la Congrégation des dettes» qu'il avait contractées, dispense qu'il obtint aussitôt. À ce sujet, voir l'article consacré à ce dernier, p. 394.)

À quoi il faut ajouter les articles, un peu rapides parfois, mais néanmoins éclairants, sur les contextes politique et ecclésial à l'intérieur desquels s'insèrent les faits et gestes du Fondateur et de sa famille religieuse: côté politique, les articles sur les Républiques (p. 614-616), sur l'Empire (p. 254-256), sur Napoléon 1er (p. 505-507), sur la Restauration (p. 617-619), sur la Monarchie de Juillet (p. 481-485), sur Napoléon III (p. 507-508); côté ecclésial, ceux sur les papes Pie VII (p. 587-589), Léon XII (p. 372.374), Pie VIII (p. 581-590), Grégoire XVI (p. 317-318) et Pie IX (p. 590-592), mais aussi sur certains cardinaux romains, entre autres, Barnabò (p. 91-94), Fransoni (p. 278-279), Frezza (p. 292-293), Lambruschini (p. 361-363), Pacca (p. 565-566) et Pedicini (p. 577-578), certains curialistes tels Adinolfi (p. 2-3) ou Marchetti (p. 399-400), certains cardinaux ou évêques français, notamment Arbaud (p. 48-50), Bausset-Roquefort (p. 97-98), Belloy (p. 106-107), Casanelli d'Istria (p. 170-176), Donnet (p. 235-236), Dupanloup (p. 246-247), Menjaud (p. 459-460) et Pavy (p. 576-577). Tout aussi éclairantes et utiles sont les entrées sur les grands courants de pensée ou débats d'idées de l'époque représentés par les articles sur le gallicanisme (p. 295-297), sur le jansénisme (p. 340-341), sur l'ultramontanisme (p. 718-719) ou encore sur Félicité de Lamennais (p. 363-365).

Identifiés et décrits les contextes, lieux et personnages ayant d'une façon ou d'une autre «encadré» ou «accompagné» les faits et gestes de la Congrégation en France au temps du Fondateur, le *Dictionnaire* met en scène les Oblats eux-mêmes, c'est-à-dire les 331 profès ayant fait partie de notre famille religieuse en France du vivant du Fondateur. Il importe, à ce propos, de signaler dès l'abord l'excellent article sur Mgr Charles-Joseph-Eugène de Mazenod (p. 444-456) signé par nul autre qu'Émilien Lamirande dont la compétence en matière d'histoire oblate n'est plus à faire. Mais pour être bien complet, en ce qui concerne précisément le Fondateur, il importe de faire également état de toute une constellation d'articles se rapportant à ce dernier et traitant de lieux, d'événements et de personnages l'ayant marqué personnellement ou ayant servi à orienter ou dicter ses choix comme futur prêtre, prêtre, plus tard évêque.

Qu'il suffise de mentionner ici tout d'abord en ce qui concerne son milieu familial, les articles sur Armand de Boisgelin (p. 130-133), sur les Joannis (p. 349-350), sur Nanon, domestique des de Mazenod (p. 504-505), sur les de Mazenod eux-mêmes (p. 454-458) et, en particulier, Mgr Fortuné, oncle du Fondateur, sur le «cousin» François-Joseph Roze Joannis (p. 649-650) – et peut-être faudrait-il inclure ici

l'«énigmatique» Alexandre Dupuy (p. 248-250) – sans oublier par ailleurs l'article sur Saint-Laurent-du-Verdon (p. 655-656), et, pour ce qui est des autres influences subies ou encore des rencontres ou événements marquants: un Francesco Milesi (p. 469-471), un Bartolo Zinelli (p. 746-748), une reine Marie-Caroline de Naples (p. 403-409), pour les années d'exil; un Séminaire de Saint-Sulpice (p. 657-662), en particulier MM. Émery (p. 251-254) et Duclaux (p. 238-240), objets d'un particulier attachement de la part du Fondateur, pour les années de préparation au sacerdoce; un Jean Joseph Pierre Guigou (p. 326-329), un Pierre-Julien Eymard (p. 259-261), un Charles de Forbin-Janson (p. 274-275), un Pio Bruno Lanteri (p. 366-368), un Jacques Jeancard (p. 343-347), un Pierre Bienvenu Noailles et ses Soeurs de la Sainte-Famille de Bordeaux (p. 677-679), un Joseph-Marie Timon-David (p. 712-713) auxquels il faudrait sans doute ajouter Marc et Mathieu Cailhol (p. 155-157) et Jean Joseph Carbonnel (p. 165), proches collaborateurs d'Eugène de Mazenod à Marseille, pour les années de ministère sacerdotal et épiscopal.

On ne saurait, d'autre part négliger les articles sur le coeur du Fondateur (p. 196-198), sur ses armoiries épiscopales (p. 52-53), sur l'autel des voeux (p. 71-73), sur la Madone oblate (p. 389-391) et sur le cardinalat, bien que, pour des raisons politiques, on le sait, cet honneur lui échappa (p. 165-167). Si l'on ajoute à tout cela les articles déjà mentionnés sur les papes, cardinaux et prélats, de même que sur les représentants des autorités civiles avec lesquels Eugène de Mazenod fut en contact ou eut à transiger à divers moments de sa vie, on se rend assez vite compte qu'il est, et de loin, comme il se devait, le personnage central du *Dictionnaire*.

Là où le *Dictionnaire* innove

Mais pour qui a lu Leflon et les nombreuses publications depuis lors parues sur le Fondateur, les articles en question, bien que très utiles et par ailleurs de bonne qualité, n'apportent rien de très nouveau. Là où le *Dictionnaire* innove, surprend même, et donc intéressera au plus haut point le lecteur et, éventuellement, le chercheur, c'est dans les quelque 400 pages qu'il consacre aux autres membres de la Congrégation. Bien entendu, certains noms sont déjà bien connus et les articles qui les concernent réservent assez peu de surprises. On pense ici, entre autres, à un Albini (p. 29-32), à un Casimir Aubert (p. 56-62), à un Hyppolyte Courtès (p. 209-212), à un Guibert (p. 320.326), à un Honorat (p. 337-339) à un Moreau (p. 488-494), à un Rambert (p. 608-611), à un Achille Rey (p. 619-621), à un Pascal Ricard (p. 626-629), à un Soullier (p. 681-683), à un Suzanne (p. 686-692), à un Vincens (p. 733-737) et, bien évidemment à un Tempier (p. 704-710), inséparable compagnon et «bon génie» du Fondateur, mais que d'autres membres de la Congrégation restés pour nous jusqu'ici de parfaits inconnus, surgissent tout à coup, grâce au *Dictionnaire*, d'un oubli pas toujours mérité, mais dévoilant par le fait même des aspects peu connus, mais en même temps fort révélateurs de la vie de la Congrégation à l'époque.

Quelques itinéraires singuliers

Prenons le cas d'André Marc Sumien (p. 683-689), né à Barjols en 802, entré chez les Oblats en 1820, profès en 1822, prêtre en 1825, qui se consacre ensuite à divers ministères dans la Congrégation, quitte cette dernière en 1831, causant du coup une grande tristesse au Fondateur qui voit en ce départ une forme d'«apostasie», mais que la Congrégation accepte de reprendre en 1849 non sans avoir plus d'une fois à s'en repentir par la suite, et qui, peu avant les expulsions de 1881, quitte la maison des chapelains de Notre-Dame de la Garde pour aller se réfugier chez un neveu journaliste où il meurt en 1883. Ou le cas de Calixte Kotterer (p. 353-355), ancien militaire à ce qu'il semble, probablement originaire de Saint-Jean de Maurienne, qui entre chez les Oblats en 1829, est ordonné prêtre en 1835, mais semble avoir été expulsé vers 1839, après avoir fort indisposé le Fondateur qui n'hésitait pas à parler de lui comme d'un «indigne sujet». Ou encore de ce mystérieux Frère Louis-Joseph Hansen (p. 334-335), né à Copenhague en 1820, converti au catholicisme quelque temps avant son entrée chez les Oblats en 1848, qu'on admet à prononcer ses voeux de cinq ans en 1850, qui fait, semble-t-il, profession perpétuelle peu de temps après, mais dont on perd par la suite toute trace.

Ou, tout à l'opposé, celui du célèbre Charles-Ferdinand Gondrand (p. 311-313), originaire de l'Isère, profès en 1847, prêtre quatre années plus tard, prédicateur et professeur un peu trop grandiloquent et «savant» au goût du p. Tempier, mais fort apprécié du Fondateur de qui il obtient en 1853 la permission de quitter temporairement la Congrégation pour aller s'occuper de la famille de son frère récemment décédé et qui demande finalement et obtient en 1861 la dispense de ses voeux, mais reste en bons termes avec la Congrégation et, cela, jusqu'à sa mort en 1890, se consacrant, comme prêtre diocésain,

aux missions paroissiales dans son Isère natale. Et que dire de François-Joseph-Edwin Bonnefoy (p. 137-138), né à Fréjus en 1836, profès en 1856, prêtre deux années plus tard (il avait fait sa théologie à Fréjus avant de se joindre aux Oblats), sujet de choix au dire de ses supérieurs à l'époque, mais qui en 1863, au grand déplaisir de ces derniers, demande la dispense de ses voeux pour se faire jésuite, obtient cette dispense, mais passe plutôt au clergé de Paris avant de devenir évêque de La Rochelle en 1892, puis archevêque d'Aix en 1902 où il mourra d'ailleurs en 1920.

Exemples, parmi d'autres, d'itinéraires pour le moins singuliers, mais qui sont loin d'être exceptionnels. Qu'il suffise à ce propos de rappeler que des 331 Oblats qui firent profession du temps du Fondateur, 129, soit près de 40%, reçurent dispense de leurs voeux ou furent expulsés de la Congrégation. On sait à quel point Mgr de Mazenod souffrait de ces départs qu'assez souvent il ne se privait pas d'appeler «trahisons», mais il y en eut un certain nombre avec lesquels il se réconcilia assez vite, comprenant qu'il était dans l'intérêt de la Congrégation – dans les cas d'expulsion notamment – ou dans l'intérêt de la Congrégation et de l'Oblat concerné lorsqu'on se rendait compte que ce dernier s'était trompé de voie ou n'arrivait plus à se sentir member à part entière de la famille. On pourrait citer ici de nombreux exemples. Le plus célèbre et de loin le plus probant est nul doute celui de Jacques Jeancard (p. 343-347) qui fut parmi les premières recrues du Fondateur, retourna un moment dans son diocèse: Fréjus où il fut ordonné prêtre en 1823, revint dans la Congrégation en 1824, prononça de nouveau ses voeux, cette fois, comme Oblat de Marie Immaculée au chapitre de 1826, remplit par la suite divers ministères à Notre-Dame du Laus, Aix et Marseille, mais, à l'été de 1834, à la suite d'un séjour de repos dans sa famille, demanda et obtint la dispense de ses voeux, ne perdant toutefois pas pour cela l'affection de Mgr de Mazenod qui n'hésita pas à l'incardiner aussitôt dans son diocèse et à faire de lui un de ses principaux collaborateurs. Nul, de fait, si ce n'est le p. Tempier, ne fut durant toutes ces années plus proche du Fondateur et plus cher à son coeur.

Une invitation à l'exploration

Tous les cas de figure que je viens d'évoquer obligent à s'interroger sur les problèmes que posèrent au Fondateur et à ses premiers et plus fidèles compagnons le recrutement et la formation des sujets qui se présentèrent à eux avant et après l'ouverture des premières missions étrangères en 1841. De toute évidence, il fallut un certain nombre d'années pour que se mette en place un système de recrutement et de formation à même de répondre adéquatement aux besoins de la Congrégation en ce domaine, mais aussi que les hommes chargés de ces tâches acquièrent la compétence et l'expérience voulues. Un indice des difficultés qu'on rencontra à ce propos: il faut attendre 1833 pour voir un maître de novice rester plusieurs années en poste (Casimir Aubert, 1833-1841), ses prédécesseurs ayant tous été remplacés après quelques mois, au mieux une année et, dans un seul cas, deux années de service (Tempier, 1820-1822). Peut-être faudrait-il chercher là une des raisons, la principale, peut-être, permettant d'expliquer le nombre élevé de départs mentionnés plus haut. Chose certaine, il y aurait là une très utile recherche à faire.

Autre sujet d'exploration auquel se prêterait fort bien le *Dictionnaire*: l'origine géographique des 331 Oblats y figurant. On découvre sans surprise que la vaste majorité d'entre eux sont originaires de France, dont, soulignons-le, 12 Corses, mais il est tout de même significatif d'y trouver également 19 Italiens, dont un Sarde, 3 Belges, 2 Suisses, 2 Luxembourgeois, un Espagnol, voire un Danois. Le plus frappant toutefois, est de constater que les Français sont pour la plupart du Midi et que ce n'est qu'à partir des années 1850 que commence à croître substantiellement le nombre de recrues venues du Nord. (À noter cependant que la province du Nord érigée en 1851 recouvrait de fait beaucoup plus que ce qu'il est convenu d'appeler le Nord.) Si nous nous en tenons à l'entourage immédiat du Fondateur: ses hommes de confiance, ses principaux collaborateurs, nous nous rendons assez vite compte qu'ils sont, au moins jusqu'en 1850, à peu près exclusivement du Midi, surtout des régions donnant sur la Méditerranée, les départements les plus mentionnés étant les Bouches-du-Rhône, le Var et les Basses-Alpes. Notons en particulier que Jean-Antoine Bernard, Courtès, Dupuy, Guibert, Honorat, Mie, Moreau, Tempier sont de la ville ou du diocèse d'Aix; Charles-Barthélemy Bellon, Dassy, Fabre, Magnan, Mille, Rambert, Pascal Ricard, de la ville ou du diocèse de Marseille. Est-il besoin de rappeler ici qu'à l'origine nous nous appelions Missionnaires de Provence et que meme si en 1825 on abandonna ce nom pour celui d'Oblats de Saint-Charles, puis une année plus tard, pour celui d'Oblats de Marie Immaculée, la référence provençale perdura sans doute longtemps dans les esprits et les coeurs, qu'on en ait eu pleinement

conscience ou pas. Cela eut-il une incidence sur le recrutement de la Congrégation, du moins jusqu'aux premiers départs vers les missions étrangères en 1841? Il y aurait là aussi matière à investigation.

Il en va de même d'un autre indicateur lié de près au précédent: celui de l'origine sociale. Malheureusement, sur ce point, le *Dictionnaire* nous laisse trop souvent sur notre faim. C'est peut-être d'ailleurs là sa seule véritable faiblesse. Dans un très grand nombre de cas manquent les noms des parents, puis surtout le statut social de ces mêmes parents et la profession du père. Sans doute ces renseignements faisaient-ils défaut dans plusieurs dossiers ayant servi de base à la préparation des notices biographiques des Oblats figurant dans le *Dictionnaire*. Aussi ne peut-on se fonder sur ce dernier pour risquer quelque conclusion que ce soit sur ce point précis. Il serait à souhaiter que l'un ou l'autre confrère disposant du temps et de la curiosité voulus ou s'intéressant à la généalogie cherche à combler cette lacune et permette ainsi de nous faire une meilleure idée du profil social des deux premières générations d'Oblats français.

Il y aurait sans doute beaucoup d'autres pistes du genre à relever à partir des indices de toutes sortes fournis à longueur de pages dans le *Dictionnaire*. J'en ai indiqué un certain nombre qui me paraissaient, en tant qu'historien, dignes d'intérêt. Cela dit, je laisse à chaque lecteur le soin de trouver pour son propre compte celles correspondent le mieux à ses propres curiosités, questionnements ou préoccupations. Car le *Dictionnaire*, on s'en rendra vite compte, constitue, en même temps qu'un important lieu de mémoire, une véritable mine à explorer et à exploiter tant pour les Oblats eux-mêmes que pour tous ceux que pourrait intéresser l'histoire de notre Congrégation.

Une réussite

Malgré ses quelques imperfections, l'ouvrage d'Yvon Beaudoin et de ses collaborateurs mérite à n'en pas douter d'être considéré comme une grande réussite dont nous pouvons tous être fiers. À toute l'équipe qui en a assuré la préparation et la réalisation, au p. Beaudoin en particulier, toute notre gratitude et toute notre admiration. Inutile de dire que nous attendons avec impatience la parution du deuxième volume portant sur la même période, mais consacré, cette fois, aux Oblats hors de France.

Université Saint-Paul

Ottawa, novembre 2004