

L. J. C. ET M. I.

OUR VOCATION AND OUR LIFE  
OF INTIMATE UNION WITH  
MARY IMMACULATE

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CIRCULAR LETTER

of the

Most Reverend Father LEO DESCHÂTELETS  
*Superior General of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate*



ROME (629)

GENERAL HOUSE O. M. I.

290, Via Aurelia, 290

— 1951 —

**NOTA BENE.** *This Circular Letter is to be read in each Community as soon as possible after its reception. It will also be read during each annual retreat until the meeting of the General Chapter in 1953.*

**LEO DESCHÂTELETS, O.M.I.**  
**Superior General.**



L. J. C. et M. I.

Rome, 15th August, 1951.-

*Feast of the Assumption of the  
Blessed Virgin Mary.*

CIRCULAR No. 191.

## OUR VOCATION AND OUR LIFE OF INTIMATE UNION WITH MARY IMMACULATE

*« Does it not seem to you a mark of predestination, to bear the name of Oblates of Mary, which means those who are consecrated to God under the patronage of Mary?—Her name has become our family name, it is held in common by the Congregation and the Most Holy and Immaculate Mother of God. Here is a privilege to arouse the envy of others. This beautiful title has been given to us by the Church, we receive it with respect and love and gratitude; we are proud of our dignity, and proud of the right which it gives us to the protection of her who is all-powerful with God. »<sup>1</sup>. (Letter of Father de Mazenod to Father Tempier, Rome, 20th March, 1826).*

*Dear Fathers and Brothers,*

Ever since the day of our election to the office of Superior General, we have cherished the desire of fulfilling a twofold task; we have longed to stimulate, within our beloved Congregation, the fervour of our religious life, and, at the same time, to foster a deep

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<sup>1</sup> Missions, Vol. 78, 1951, p. 742.

and filial devotion to Mary Immaculate. We wished to make known to you all our thoughts and desires on this subject, and we have been grievously disappointed that circumstances outside our control have prevented us from doing so.

Now, we are able to carry out this long-cherished project. In this Circular, while we address you on the spirit of our vocation, we shall also try to point out how we should endeavour to live this vocation in intimate union with Mary Immaculate, towards whom we should cultivate a very special devotion, and whom we, as missionaries, should make known and loved by the peoples we evangelize or among whom we exercise our zeal.<sup>2</sup>

We humbly beg Jesus, and Mary, and our holy Founder, to inspire us with such thoughts as will penetrate every Oblate heart and bring to life, or to a more intense life, a truly enlightened love for our vocation as Oblates of Mary Immaculate. If we wish to live our vocation to the full, surely this means that, as Oblates of Mary Immaculate, we should be consecrated to God, totally consecrated to God, by a life lived in union with Mary and by an apostolate conducted under the influence of Mary and dedicated to her service. Moreover, this life and apostolate should be so developed and perfected that they can successfully meet the actual needs and demands of the Kingdom of God in the modern world. To convince ourselves of this, let us place before ourselves our vocation in all its fulness, and let us study it seriously and in detail. When we have completed this examination, we shall realize more vividly the force of those inspiring words of our holy Rules — *Nihil linquendum inausum*. (Preface).

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<sup>2</sup> Articles 10, 62, 112, 221, 257, 258.

In the light which radiates from our holy Rules themselves<sup>3</sup>, and from our Tradition which has been developing for more than a century, and from our history which, from many points of view, is seen to be wonderfully rich, in this light let us take up our Constitutions, which are approved by the infallible Church, let us study them in a spirit of simplicity, and let us try to penetrate into their innermost meaning.<sup>4</sup>

The length of this Circular may outrun our original intention, but we shall not attempt to treat our subject exhaustively. We shall simply express the ideas and convictions which have grown out of our long-sustained effort to grasp the true mind of the holy man whom Divine Providence has given us as our *Father* and *Lawgiver*. And it is his mind which ought to be our constant guide in the noble task which we attempt.

The precise purpose then, of this Circular, is to envisage, in its entirety, our vocation as religious, as priests, as missionaries; and to envisage it under one particular aspect, namely, in its relation to Mary Immaculate. Furthermore, it is our purpose to renew the sublime glory of our vocation, and to arouse a still greater love for it in the heart of every Oblate.

As a means to this end, we set forth two questions which we believe can be answered satisfactorily and from which the division of this work arises:

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<sup>3</sup> Speaking of the Rules, our Founder said — «For myself, on seeing assembled within a few pages, all that can constitute perfection in this world, and, reflecting that our Constitutions present all this to us as the prototype of the true Oblate of Mary, I rejoice that I have been called to such great perfection.» *Missions*, Vol. 77, 1950, p. 366.

<sup>4</sup> Of set purpose, we shall not quote from the many excellent works of worthy Oblates which have been published in our various reviews. We shall confine ourselves to the holy Rule, the traditions which have grown out of it, and the writings of Bishop de Mazenod.

1. In the Oblate way of life as it is presented by the holy Rule, are there any *truly characteristic elements*, and what are they?
2. Considering this Oblate way of life under both its aspects, namely, as our personal interior life, and as our missionary life of apostolic activity, *why and how should we live it in intimate union with Mary Immaculate?*

## 1. The unique character of our Oblate way of life: its characteristic elements.

During recent years, some members of the Congregation have affectionately and devotedly studied the characteristic features of our spirituality, and we have followed their work with lively interest. They have, indeed, arrived at tentative conclusions, and, in the course of their investigations, they have discovered new horizons, revealing large areas still to be explored. All this arouses a more intense love for the Congregation and a stronger esprit de corps among its membres who labour unremittingly and patiently to reach clearer and more precise conclusions in this enquiry.

Among the questions raised is that of the relation of Oblate spirituality to the various classical types, especially those of the outstanding schools of spirituality recognized by the science of ascetical and mystical theology. That such a relation exists is undeniable, research has established it. And how could it be otherwise? Was it not Father de Mazenod's desire to accept the rich heritage of spiritual and religious life of the ancient Orders and Institutes, and thus, in a way, to prolong their existence? Was not the very birth of our Congregation due to this desire?<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> « Another object of this Congregation is to... carry on, as far as possible, the work and functions of the many great Religious Institutions... The missionaries will make every effort to revive and foster in their own persons the primitive piety and fervor of those Religious Institutions... » Articles 3 and 4.

Let us leave to one side the theoretical question of our descent from, and greater or lesser dependence upon other religious families and schools of spirituality. Even if our spiritual life had no distinctive mark, our esteem for it should be in no way impaired. Is it not in itself, a very great thing for a Christian or a religious to live an integral life as a member of Christ's Church, even though he add no new note to that life? Our Institute would lose nothing of its prestige if it had no other end than to exploit to the full, and by those means which the Church places at the disposal of everyone, the resplendent life of grace which courses so vigorously through the Church herself. Nevertheless, one fact, and it is intimately linked with our existence as a truly autonomous Congregation within the Church, one fact imposes itself upon our acceptance. Who can fail to see that there is a way of life which is proper to our Institute? Is there not, in our spiritual life, both religious and apostolic, a particular spirit, a special mentality, a distinct kind of life with its lines clearly defined, with its own graces and requirements and principles of action, its continuous tradition, its own technique of personal sanctification and truly individual methods of ministering to souls.

An examination of this fact and an attempt to assess its value claim our immediate attention. One has not to look far afield in order to discover the structural elements of this Oblate way of spiritual life. These elements exist, they are evident, they are as simple as they are striking and delicately inter-related. We set them forth here as we confidently believe they are to be seen in the Rule, and in doing so, we give, in its main outlines, the portrait of a religious which ought to be recognized immediately as that of a Religious Oblate of Mary Immaculate. The type of spiritual and apostolic man described by the Rule is

- a) a priest:
- b) a religious:
- c) a missionary:

d) an oblate, a man dedicated, as were the Apostles themselves, to the pursuit of holiness and to apostolic labours:

e) a man aflame with love for Jesus, our divine Saviour, and for Mary Immaculate, the Mother of God and our Mother also; and a man in whom this love is unceasingly nourished by a profound spirit of prayer:

f) a man who, in his profound spirit of prayer, learns complete detachment from self by obedience and poverty and a simple and upright intention:

g) a man whose genuine Christian charity embraces the members of his own religious family and all his fellow men:

h) a man whose heart, because of its intimate union with Jesus and Mary, overflows with unlimited zeal and boundless mercy which urge him to seek out particularly all those who are poor and most abandoned.<sup>6</sup>

Although these traits are here stated separately, there is no opposition among them; on the contrary, each one demands all the others, each one attracts all the others to combine with it in forming the complete picture of an Oblate of Mary Immaculate. Even when they are separated, they must be considered as parts of a whole; one may not disregard the way in which each trait influences all the others so that, in their totality, they form what is in itself a unity.

First and foremost, we are — *priests*. « Art. 1. The end of this humble Congregation... is that *priests*, living together... in community... ». Priests among countless

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<sup>6</sup> Father Yenneux, in «Les Saintes Règles», finds seven characteristics of our Congregation: it is 1) humble, 2) Marian, 3) Religious, 4) devoted to fraternal charity, 5) Missionary, 6) particularly devoted to the poor, 7) intent upon imitating the virtues and examples of our Saviour.

other priests, but priests with a special inspiration which gives a particular outline to the priesthood of an Oblate. We are made priests that we may restore to the priesthood all its glory, all its prestige, and, by the example of our lives, carry along with us all those who, like ourselves, are signed with the sacred character of Holy Order. In laying the foundations of his Institute, our Founder did indeed plan to work for the conversion of the masses, but he also had in mind the reform and sanctification of the clergy. It was for this reason that, from the very beginning, he demanded that his disciples follow so high, so perfect a standard of priestly life. It may be that, in the course of time, this element in our foundation has receded into the background; let it be brought forward again and it will be of great service. We should not lose sight of an ideal which fired the heart of our Founder with holy zeal and which is capable, now, of stimulating us to a life that is truly and properly a priestly life.

To understand this ideal in its entirety, as it existed in the mind of Father de Mazenod, we must place it in its historical setting; and we must make our own the thoughts which he entertained when he wrote our holy Rules, especially the Preface, which was written first of all. Then we shall have a better idea of the type of priest he desired for his Congregation, which, at that time, existed only in embryo. Then also, we shall understand his passionate longing to renew and revivify a priesthood which was languid and lukewarm, and to do this by raising up an army of priests, well formed and intent upon exploiting, to the full, the riches of sacerdotal grace. Then indeed, we shall understand that, if we are to preserve intact the ideal of our Father, we can never rest content to be merely ordinary priests.

Every Oblate has read the letters exchanged between Father de Mazenod and Father Tempier during the

initial stages of our foundation.<sup>7</sup> They reveal the spiritual atmosphere in which the new Society was coming into existence. «It will be easy to find priests to replace you, but not so easy to find devoted men who would wish to consecrate themselves to the glory of God and the salvation of souls, with no earthly reward, only endless toil and all that our Lord foretold for his true disciples... We must have at least six... Would anyone say it will be too difficult to find them? It is true, we are hard to please...»<sup>8</sup>. It was in these words that Father de Mazenod invited Father Tempier to join him. That he was understood is clear from the latter's reply: — «My views are in complete agreement with yours... I understand also that, in choosing collaborators, you seek men of the highest qualities... you want priests who do not merely follow the beaten track... men who are ready to walk in the footsteps of the Apostles, expecting no earthly return, but only much toil and hardship. By the grace of God, I feel this desire in myself...»<sup>9</sup> So, the Founder heard his own desires echoed from the heart of this priest who was to be his first companion, and his confidant till the day of his death; and he completed the expression of his views in what was probably his last letter before the association was formed which each so eagerly desired: — «We ourselves must simply be saints. This one word comprises everything that could be said. But, are there many priests who wish to be saints in this way? Only someone unacquainted with them could believe this. For myself, I am convinced of the contrary. The greater number wish to go to heaven by another way than the way of self-sacrifice... It may be that they are not obliged to do more than they do, not bound to act differently; but at least, they should not be so

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<sup>7</sup> Rey, I, pp. 181-188, passim.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p. 182. Letter of 9th October, 1815.

<sup>9</sup> Rey, I, p. 183; letter of 27th Oct. 1815.

offended because other priests believe that the needs of the people demand still more, and believing this, wish to devote themselves completely to the salvation of the people... I am so sure we shall always understand one another that I would not be afraid to promise always to conform to your opinions in all that concerns the interior life and *the obligations, more extensive than is commonly supposed, of a priest who wishes to live up to his state.* »<sup>10</sup>

The birth of the new Congregation, on the 25th of January, 1816, was a very humble affair. Did the Founder still cling to his ideal of using it to renovate the priesthood? Discretion, probably, led him to omit mention of this end of his Institute, when, on the very day of its foundation, he asked for authorization from the Vicars General of Aix.<sup>11</sup> But it is only necessary to read that document to be convinced that one would have to possess a very high ideal in order to accept the programme of priestly and missionary life which it prescribes.

Two years pass by. Experience has been gained, experience yielding definite conclusions. The spiritual aims and the apostolic purposes of the little society of the Missionaries of Provence must be synthesized, and in clear-cut terms. His hand guided by the Holy Spirit<sup>12</sup>, our Lawgiver and Father in God pours forth his mind, and his ideas take shape in the Rules which he presents to his companions, ideas expressed in surprisingly vigorous terms. We quote him here verbatim, for his words leave no doubt as to what was uppermost in his mind.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid. I, p. 187; letter of 13th Dec. 1815.

<sup>11</sup> Rey, I, pp. 190-192.

<sup>12</sup> Concerning the authorship of our holy Rules, the Founder said (8th Oct. 1831): «He who wrote them does not recognize in them anything that came from himself...» Missions, Vol. 77, 1950, p. 362.

« There is an end of their Institute which is not of less importance, an end which they will strive to achieve with as great zeal as they employ in pursuing the principal end. It is — to reform the clergy, and, as far as they are able, to repair the harm which has been done, and is being done, by bad priests who lay waste the Church by their thoughtlessness, their avarice, their impurity, their sacrileges, their crimes, their heinous crimes of every description. »

« At first, because of their inexperience, the efforts of the Missionaries to cure this deep-rooted sore will necessarily be indirect; they will use gentle suggestions and prayer and good example. But, after some years, please God they will make a frontal attack on these terrible vices; with sharp steel and searing-iron, they will probe the very roots of this loathsome cancer which is gnawing at the vitals of the Church of Jesus Christ. »

« They will conduct retreats for priests; the Mission House will be an ever open refuge, a place of cleansing where those infected with this purulent malady will come to be purified, and to begin a new life of penance and reparation. »<sup>13</sup>

« It is true that, for the past century, diabolical means have been used to undermine the foundations of religion in the minds and hearts of men. It is also true that the French Revolution has enormously helped this evil effort. Nevertheless, if the clergy had remained constant, and this was their bounden duty, religion would have been upheld and would have withstood this terrible assault; more than that, it would have triumphantly resisted every attack, it would have emerged from the struggle more radiant, more glorious. »

« The causes of the evil being known, it is easier to furnish a remedy. »

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<sup>13</sup> Constitutions et Règles de la Société des Missionnaires de Provence; first manuscript, in French: Missions, Vol. 78, 1951, pp. 14-15.

« It is necessary to form apostolic men, who, being first of all convinced of the necessity of reforming themselves — Take heed to thyself — will afterwards devote all their energy to the conversion of others — Take heed to thyself and to doctrine: be earnest in them. For in doing this, thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee. (I Tim., IV, 16). And, as we have seen that the real source of the evil was the carelessness, the avarice and the corruption of the clergy, once these abuses are rectified, the others will disappear. Let the priests be zealous, free from self-seeking and truly virtuous, and in a short time, the people who have gone astray will be led back to their religious duties... »

« The remedy must go further still, it must penetrate into the sanctuary. The gates of the sanctuary, the holy place itself, and even the steps leading to the altar whereon the sacred Victim is immolated, all must be cleansed from the filth with which they are soiled. In that holy place, the sacred fire of pure love must be re-enchanted. At present, the few remaining embers are lovingly tended by a small number of holy priests but the last sparks will soon be extinguished for these pious men are passing away. Their ranks must be strengthened quickly. Others must join them, men who will compensate the living God for so many crimes committed against Him by offering Him the most complete service and devotion, by completely sacrificing themselves for the glory of the Saviour and the service of His Church. » <sup>14</sup>

Is this long quotation from the first version of the Rule inopportune? Is it not rather a revelation to many of us when we read these words which, in our day, seem so severe? And does it not prove unquestionably that the Founder looked for priests who would become perfect in order to bring about a reformed priest-

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid. pp. 17-19.

hood? Can we have any doubt that, from the beginning of our Institute, it was a characteristic note of the Oblate priest that he be outstanding in his fervour and zeal for the conversion of souls, but especially the souls of priests? In our judgment, it is undeniable that this point is established in our very foundation.

On this point, have we maintained the same mind as our Founder? Perhaps the point is less stressed nowadays, because so many circumstances have brought about a change in the state of the priesthood; but it is still true to-day, that, if the Oblate is to remain faithful to the grace which accompanied the foundation of this Institute, he should not overlook his obligation to work for a spiritual renewal of the priesthood. The Rule desires that every Oblate should be a priest of finer temper, of higher quality, of greater strength, of greater resistance, so as to be, within the Church, a support and an example for all his brethren in the priestly state. The Oblate may not be as other priests, he must be the model priest. The grace of his special vocation sweeps him upward to the very heights, it calls on him to set the standard and to assist in the formation of a worthy priesthood.

When the original mind of our holy Founder is thus set forth, the Preface and many Articles of our Rule Book stand out in bold relief. True, one does not find the identical words and phrases which first expressed the mind of Father de Mazenod, but, in our judgment, the Rule does keep his ideas vividly alive. In it, you can discover his passionate desire to restore fervour to a lukewarm clergy; to raise up, by word and example, an army of priests, well formed, and bent upon a full exploitation of priestly grace.

The Founder's argument remains the same: «The Church... has in our days experienced cruel desolation... Faced with this most deplorable state of things, the Church earnestly appeals to those ministers whom the

herself enrolled in the cause of her Divine Spouse to do all in their power, by word and example, to arouse the faith that slumbers in the hearts of the greater number of her children. But few, alas! are those who heed this urgent plea of their Mother. Many even increase the evils of the Church by their own disgraceful conduct and instead of leading the people back to the ways of justice, they themselves frequently need to be reminded of their own duties. » (Preface).

Let us give the Church holy priests, and there will be a great change. These holy priests will be men who cherish the same desires as Father de Mazenod. « The sight of these evils has so touched the hearts of certain priests, who are *zealous* for God's glory and have an *ardent love for the Church*, that they are willing, if need be, to give their lives for the salvation of souls. » (Preface).

But, alone, they would not be able to meet the immense need. They must have additions to their ranks. And again, these recruits must be fitted for the rude conflict in which they are to engage. Therefore, « It is their conviction that if priests could be formed, *glowing with zeal* for men's salvation... » and the Founder goes on to describe the qualities required in these ministers of God. Then he concludes with the wish which expresses his whole soul: « ...there would be reason to hope that in a short space of time the people who have gone astray might be brought back to their long-neglected duties of religion. « Take heed to thyself and thy teaching, » was the charge given by Paul to Timothy, « be earnest in them. For in doing so thou wilt save both thyself and those who hear thee. » (Preface).

The Preface is indeed a synthesis of the Rule. Moreover, it reminds us in terms which admit no ambiguity, of our obligation to priestly holiness, *verbo et exemplo*, so that wherever and whenever the priesthood falls into a feeble state, we may be able to restore it. Article 6

points out that many evils of the present time are due to the fact that the clergy have fallen from fervour. Our Society proposes to raise them again, and by definite means well suited to the purpose. Our Missionary Oblates must not be afraid to undertake this difficult ministry, and our houses will always welcome these priests «... who feel themselves drawn by the grace of God to purify their consciences and to embrace a new life of penance and reparation.» (Article 7). We must be ready, then, to preach retreats to them in our houses. (Articles 8 and 175).

But no other labour for the sanctification of the clergy is comparable to that which can be accomplished in a Seminary. But, Father de Mazenod's first aim was to preach missions among the people, and he was loath to detach any of his early companions from this work. He hesitated to undertake the direction of a Seminary. God's will, however, was made known to him, the direction of Seminaries should be one of the ends of his Institute. Mindful then of his plan to reform and renew the clergy, he expressed his mind in Article 48. Among our Rules, it is one of the most beautiful and contains much that is important and sublime. We quote it here because it shows the logical sequence in the mind of our Founder: « After the missions, the most important work of our Congregation is undoubtedly the *direction of seminaries*, in which clerics receive their own special training. For it is in these seminaries, in the seclusion of God's house, and under the protection, of the Most Holy and Immaculate Virgin Mary, that formation is given to those who are to teach sound doctrine to the people, and to guide them along the way of salvation. In vain would the missionaries labor for the conversion of sinners, if the parochial clergy were not men filled with the Holy Spirit, earnestly following in the footsteps of the Divine Shepherd, and feeding with watchful and constant care, the sheep that have returned to Him.

So far as we are able, we shall courageously devote ourselves, with all our mind and heart, to this undertaking, which is so sacred and of such great importance.» Here is clearly seen the place to be given, in our Institute, to the direction of Seminaries. This work is shown to be in full accord with the desires of Father de Mazenod. Here is the proof that, when we devotedly labour to fulfil this end of the Congregation, we are directly following the true Oblate tradition begun by our holy Founder himself. From this Chapter, dealing with the direction of Seminaires, one could quote many Articles in which is sensed Father de Mazenod's concern that those preparing for the priesthood should be assured of the best possible formation and that their knowledge should be truly sound and orthodox. The last Article of the Chapter must be quoted in full. It treats of the Directors in the Seminary, but every Oblate should ponder it and engrave it in his mind, for it is the most vital expression of our Founder's desire to see his Oblate sons working for the perfection of the priesthood.

« The Superior and Directors of the seminarians will neglect nothing to enhance the dignity of the clerical state, to strengthen its spirit, and to multiply its fruits. Thus it will come to pass that the Church, nourished and protected by worthy and holy ministers, will grow in vigor, for the glory of her divine Spouse and the salvation of a multitude of souls. » (Article 93).

If anyone should think that this matter is overstressed, that the duty of edifying our brethren in the priesthood ought to be left entirely to those Oblates who are engaged in the Seminaries, we need only remind him of the Article which follows: « As the end of our Institute is not only to give missions, and to take part in the training of the clergy, but also, so far as our little flock is able, to replace the Religious Orders and to repair the evils that have crept in among the clergy, *all should be convinced that it is easier to achieve this*

*end by example than by words.* Hence, all will carefully bear in mind that they should practice all the virtues, and not be unacquainted with any of them.» (Article 94).

We have treated at some length, this theme of our priesthood which, at first sight, seems so simple. Surely, it is necessary to stress the particular type of *our* priesthood as it existed in the mind of Father de Mazenod, as he set it up in the Church, like a lighted candle, so placed that all might see and profit by its light. Here, one may well recall the Gospel words: « *So let your light shine before men that they may... glorify your Father, who is in heaven.* » (Matthew V, 16). Was not this phrase in the Founder's mind when, on the 13th December, 1819, he used a similar expression in inviting Father Tempier to join the nascent society: « *At this meeting, we shall draw up the regulation which we are to follow; we shall consider how we are to carry out our good works; by exchanging counsels and pooling the inspirations which the good God sends us, we shall help each other towards our common sanctification; then we shall light our first torch for the edification of the people and the Church.* »<sup>15</sup>. These words would be rash and pretentious if spoken by a man of lesser holiness than Father de Mazenod. They proclaim anew the persistence of this idea — to rescue the Church, the priesthood must be raised to the highest possible level. When our holy Rule is meditated and understood, and when it is compared with his other writings, Father de Mazenod is seen to have gone far beyond the idea of the priest as simply a good man, leading a life that is pious and decorous. How clearly his words set forth the Oblate priesthood as always straining forward towards perfection, so as to carry with them those who are priests already, and then to attract others to the priest-

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<sup>15</sup> Rey, Vol. I, pp. 187-188.

hood. The priest who is a *leader* and a *model*, the priest who understands that « his first duty is to remain transcendent », <sup>16</sup> such is the Oblate priest as envisaged by the Apostle of the poor of Provence. We know that emphatic insistence upon the necessity of sanctity in the priest is no new thing within the Church. On this, as on many other points, Father de Mazenod is in perfect accord with all the great apostles of the priesthood, holy men who had a true veneration for the priesthood and who demanded that the priest should be a man of very advanced virtue. Let us try, dear Oblates, to grasp the full import of our Founder's message. Let us be the priests in the very front rank of the Church's priests. Let us not be mere mediocrities, priests whom our Founder described as « *common goods of little value* »; he did not want such men as his associates. That we may attain the standard he desired, let our spiritual life be firmly based upon the richest elements of a priestly life which draws forth from the Sacrament of Order a most intense vitality. The Founder himself knew well all the power, all the apostolic potentialities of this force which resides in the soul of the priest when he wrote in the Preface, every phrase of which is a masterpiece: « ... while devoting themselves to all the good works which *priestly charity* can devise... these priests purpose to obey the Rules and Constitutions.. » *Priestly charity!* This phrase did not flow casually from Father de Mazenod's pen, it was first stamped upon his zealous heart; it was used deliberately, for it is the résumé of all that he desired. As we are his followers, priestly charity should saturate our lives, it should be the motive of all our actions, it should be the very air we breathe. It is true we are religious as well as priests, but even our religious mentality itself is conditioned by priestly charity to such an

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<sup>16</sup> Cardinal Suhard: « Priests among Men. ».

extent that the Oblate who would subordinate sacerdotal grace to the grace of his religious vocation would falsify his Oblate life. The Oblate is, and ought to remain both priest and religious. Neither status can be separated from the other if he wishes to remain a true Oblate of Mary Immaculate.<sup>17</sup>

We are religious as well as priests, « ... priests living together... *bound by the vows of religion*,... » (Article 1). If we were to stress the distinctive traits of Oblate religious life, we should have to quote almost the entire Rule. Let us take particular note of at least those characteristics which our Founder emphasized from the very beginning. He considered that if we are to achieve the end of our Institute it is essential that we be outstanding among the religious orders of the Church.

We have just studied his ideas on the renewal of the priesthood; his views of the religious life are similar. We find them expressed not only in the Rule, but in his other writings also. He was bent upon a reform, a resurrection of the religious life.

Let us take up the first manuscript of the Rule. The heading of the first chapter is « The End of the Institute », and the title of the second paragraph states clearly as an « End », « To replace the absent Religious Institutes ».

Article 1. *It is also an end of this society to replace, as far as is possible, the many great Institutions which have disappeared since the Revolution, and whose absence leaves a terrible void, of which Religion is daily more conscious.* »

Article 2. *Therefore, they will endeavour to show*

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<sup>17</sup> Let us remark, in passing, that this shows that, in order to be truly Oblate, our Lay Brothers must live in very intimate union with the Oblate priestly life. Here is a mystique, a spirituality which will vitalize the religious and missionary life of our Brothers.

forth in themselves a revival of the piety and fervour of the Religious Orders destroyed in France by the Revolution. They will make every effort to be worthy successors of those men, in their virtues as in their ministry, and also in the holiest observances of the regular life such as — the practice of the evangelical counsels, withdrawal from dissipation, abhorrence of riches, the practice of mortification, the public recitation of the Divine Office in common, assisting the dying... »<sup>18</sup>

You will all have recognized here, dear Fathers and Brothers, almost the exact text of Articles 3 and 4 of our present Constitutions. It is clear, therefore, that we have a role to play in the Church of Christ, for it is the Church herself who has given us these texts as a rule of life. Our role is to maintain the religious life in all its force, in all its splendour, in all its vitality and in all its efficacy. Better than any other, our Founder knew the magnitude of this task, and therefore he pointed out the surpassingly great effort we must make in pursuit of a purpose so noble, so difficult of attainment.

Just as he would banish mediocrity from our priestly life, so he would have it shut out from our religious life. He would exclude it not only in the observance of our holy vows, but also in all the exercises of a religious life which should continually advance towards perfection. Among the most saintly founders of religious orders, has any one spoken more forcefully than our Founder when, like a general exhorting his troops before the battle, he says:

« They should *seriously* strive for their own sanctification, and  
*courageously* walk in the paths trodden by so many apostles...

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<sup>18</sup> Constitutions et Règles de la Société des Missionnaires de Provence; first manuscript, in French: Missions, Vol. 78, 1951, pp. 13-14.

They should *wholly* renounce themselves,...

They should *continually renew themselves* in the spirit of their mind, and

*live in a state of habitual self-denial, seeking at all times to reach the very summit of perfection.*

They should labor *assiduously* to become

humble,  
meek,  
obedient,  
lovers of poverty and penance,  
mortified,  
free from inordinate attachment  
to the world or family,... (Preface).

Is it possible to find words more trenchant, more exacting, with which to express so briefly a whole programme of life based on the Gospel teaching? After this, is it possible to doubt that our Oblate religious life, in spite of its many links with that of other Religious Institutes, has a character peculiar to itself? And the source of our differentiation lies precisely in this fervent and impassioned appeal in which Father de Mazenod exhorts us to *engage ourselves totally* in the pursuit of religious perfection. Do not his words urge us to be the most perfect of all religious? Does he not, with holy daring, desire that there should be concentrated, in his followers all the perfection of all the Orders and Institutes for whose absence they are to supply? <sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Father de Mazenod says: «...try to imagine a procession of all the Religious Orders which have been destroyed in France by the Revolution: call to mind the varied ministry they fulfilled, the virtues they practised; the latter within the seclusion of the house of God, in contemplation and prayer; the former, in the service of their neighbour, by every good work which highly sustained zeal could inspire. Do this, and you yourself will arrive at the conclusion of this third article, which makes known to us a second and very important end of our Institute.» «Our Holy Rules», Missions, Vol. 77, 1950, p. 370.

Have we sufficiently understood his objective and its relation to our whole life? Are we not inclined to consider and to live our religious life just as so many others do? Are we sufficiently determined that we must not be merely « ordinary religious », that we must ceaselessly aspire to be among the most perfect religious in the Church of Christ? Is the Founder's ideal realized in our lives, or has it remained a noble aspiration which no one has thought worth following, even though it has been approved and blest by the Church?

Dear Fathers and Brothers, let us keep this noble ideal ever before us. Each Oblate should be a pattern for all religious to follow, he should be a living embodiment of the Gospel of Jesus Christ., Here is an ideal which is at once noble and inspiring. Perhaps, unknown to ourselves, we are afraid to follow it! Is it not true that both local and major Superiors often find it difficult to maintain in our Communities those elements of the religious life which are absolutely essential? And is this not a sign that timidity, or perhaps languor, deters us from ascending the heights to which we are summoned by our holy Founder? Do we not far too readily ignore the regulations concerning silence, and recollection, and mortification; regulations whose purpose is to maintain and foster the initial enthusiasm and vitality of our religious life? Can we truly claim to be religious of the same stamp as Father de Mazenod and his first companions, if, among the prescriptions of the Rule dealing with the vows and their observance, there are many which, to-day, are merely evidence of a fervour that is past and gone? Or, can we make this claim, if these same prescriptions are now a source of uneasiness, a constant reproach to a generation of Oblates who are gradually discarding their most sacred obligations?

To end this point; let us, dear Fathers and Brothers, bestir ourselves; let us, hearken to our Founder's words; he reveals the means to renew the fervour which should

burn incessantly within us. After the Approbation, he wrote:

« *The conclusion we ought to draw, dear friends and Brothers, is that we should strive, with fresh ardour and more complete devotedness, to add to God's glory as far as it lies in our power to do so,... heart and soul, we should cling to our Rules, and practise with exactitude everything they prescribe. To do this thoroughly, we should all make our noviciate again, so that we would have ample time to meditate upon the entire content of our Rules... they are no longer mere regulations, nor simply pious directions: they are Rules which the Church, after very careful examination, has approved. They have been proclaimed holy, and well fitted to lead to their proper end all those who undertake to observe them. They are become the property of the Church, for she has adopted them. In approving them, the Pope has become their guarantor, and the instrument God used for their composition no longer matters; ...* ».

« *Recognize your dignity, and be very careful never to dishonour your Mother... grace will make her fruitful, she will bring forth many children, provided that we are faithful and do not, by our treachery bring upon her a shameful sterility. In the name of God, let us be saints!* »<sup>20</sup>.

Remembering all other Religious Institutes as well as our own, let us, dear Fathers and Brothers, use the prayer which our beloved Founder repeated daily, let us say with greater fervour than ever before:

« *Reduc omnes religiones ad fervorem et perfectionem in qua fuerunt institutae. Da Superioribus zelum disciplinae, subditis obedientiam, ut professione sua omnes digni inveniantur.* »<sup>21</sup>.

« The end of this humble Congregation of the Mis-

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<sup>20</sup> Letter to Father Tempier, 18th Feb., 1826. Missions, Vol. 78, 1951, pp. 714-715.

<sup>21</sup> Oratio pro Clero, Manual of Prayers.

sionary Oblates... is that priests, living together as brothers in community, bound by the vows of religion,... *may devote themselves principally to the preaching of the Gospel to the poor.* » The same holy inspiration which has made us priests and religious, calls us to be *missionaries*, and our missionary life is to be as intensive as our priestly and religious life. Here, there would seem to be an opposition of widely divergent ideals. In fact, it has always been one of the problems of our Institute to harmonize these two aims; the first, of intense recollection, of almost monastic seclusion, where everything seems to be concentrated inwards, to be centred on the spiritual life; the second, where the same divine force urges us *ad extra* and consecrates our life to works which apparently deny us the silence and peace necessary for contemplation. « The whole life of the members of our Society ought to be *a life of continual recollection*... the missionaries will give one portion of their life to *prayer, recollection, and contemplation*, while living together in the seclusion of God's house. » (Articles 246 and 288). Thus the Oblate is piously constrained to recollection within the narrow limits of his cell, but, it is the same holy impulse which almost hurls him forth in pursuit of souls: — « ... *full of zeal and ready to sacrifice goods, talents, ease, even life itself for the love of our Lord Jesus Christ, the welfare of the Church, and the sanctification of their brethren. It is supremely important... that we bring back to the fold the multitudes of sheep that are lost...* We must spare no effort to extend the empire of Christ... » (Preface). « Hence the members of this Congregation will *make every effort* to provide spiritual aid especially for the poorer classes of the rural districts, every member of the Congregation ought to have an *ardent desire* to spread the Gospel of Christ, and to procure the salvation of the most abandoned souls,... The other portion of their life *they will zealously devote to the works of the ministry*... » (Articles 2, 47 and 289).

Is there not here some stirring of the « mighty wind » which shook the house where the Apostles were assembled on Pentecost day? And these are not the only passages in which this divine breath is felt. Our Founder did receive special graces from above, and it is under their guidance that he makes special demands on us. He wished us to understand his meaning clearly and he seems to have chosen with deliberation the most forcible and significant words to convey his meaning. We are essentially priests and religious and not in an ordinary, but in an extraordinary way; the same thing is true of us as missionaries, that is the mind of the Rule, and it is similarly stated in equally dynamic and authoritative terms.

We are, then, hurried forth into the very thick of the battle which is waged for souls: — « *It is supremely important,...* and... *imperative* that we bring back to the fold the multitudes of sheep that are lost,... ». And who are those whom we must snatch from the hands of the enemy? Our members will « ... devote themselves principally to the preaching of the Gospel *to the poor.* » Even among these, there are some who have first claim to our ministry. Who are they? The most abandoned! First and foremost, we must rescue them: — « ... every member... ought to have an ardent desire... to procure the salvation of *the most abandoned souls...* We are never to forget that the principal aim of our Institute is to help *those whose need is greatest.* » (Articles 47 and 134). What shall be our plan of campaign if we are « ... to extend the empire of Christ... to destroy the empire of the devil... to check the manifold malice of sin and establish the honored observance of every virtue... to give men, first of all, understanding, then Christian piety, and finally the science of the saints. »? (Preface). The answer, also from the Preface, is perfectly clear: — « ... devoting themselves... above all to *the work of the missions, which the Society regards as its principal aim,...* » *From the very beginning of*

our vocation, then, we are missionaries. But our Founder would not restrict us to one sole way of warfare. In a phrase which reveals the flexibility of his zealous soul, he leaves the door wide open to every apostolic initiative: — « ... devoting themselves to all the good works which priestly charity can devise... » (Preface). Their pious enthusiasm will lead them « to hold themselves in readiness to perform any good work that may be prescribed by their Superiors. » (Article 95). Should the missionaries set any limit to their devotedness? — « ... they should... fight even unto death... » (Preface).

Let us sum up: — as Priests, as Religious, no limit to our personal holiness: « ... *the very summit of perfection* ». As Missionaries, no limit to our zeal: « *fight even unto death* ».

Moreover, in our missionary work, there are to be no merely human motives: « ... *strive solely for the glory of God, the welfare of the Church, and the salvation of souls.* »

Everywhere, we find the same appeal, a call to the height of perfection in every detail of our vocation. As often as we honestly confront ourselves with the Oblate depicted in the Rule, we shall feel that we are flabby creatures, wallowing in mediocrity. To be such a missionary as was St Paul cried out « ... *woe... unto me if I preach not the Gospel* »; and again. « *I most gladly will spend... myself for... souls.* » One thing is certain, no one becomes such a missionary by half-hearted efforts; this standard is attained only by men who « *do all in their power, by word and example* ». (Preface).

From all that has been said so far, is it not evident that the title — *Oblate* — is fully justified? The life portrayed by the Rule, the life of Priest, Religious, and Missionary according to the mind of our Founder, is it not *a total giving of one's whole self*? Can one

think of it as a partial commitment rather than an *oblation without reserve*? It should be noted that this ideal of « oblation » existed in the Founder's mind from the very beginning; it dominated him, for, even when our Institute was known as the Missionaries of Provence, he spoke of « oblation », not « profession ».<sup>22</sup> When a change of name became necessary, the new title was « Oblates » of St Charles, and afterwards, « Oblates » of Mary Immaculate. Possibly he himself did not explicitly realize it, but, by the word « Oblate », he added the final, definitive characteristic to the type of priest, religious and missionary which, under God's influence, he was to introduce into the Church.

Let us penetrate beyond the word, let us try to grasp what « Oblation » actually is. We must seek this knowledge from the « so perfect » code of our Rules, and it is to be hoped that they are not, for us, a « sealed book. ».<sup>23</sup> Let us resume our meditation and discover what this *absolute oblation* meant to the Patriarch of our Congregation.

It is clearly indicated in the Rules. That which definitely establishes us in our special vocation is—*that our engagement in the service of God and of souls is unconditional, it is absolute*. It is a kind of « reckless » giving of ourselves to the glory and service of God, to the ministry of His infinite love and mercy. It is a holy and impulsive giving, without restraint, a peculiar intensity of priestly charity, of zeal for the most difficult undertakings. It is, and these are the strongest terms we can find, it is such an *unreserved oblation of ourselves* that it can be said truly of us: « These are « *the* »

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<sup>22</sup> A Register was kept in which each postulant signed the customary declaration. The first entry is that of the Founder himself, and he wrote in the margin: — « I made my *oblation* at Aix, 1st November, 1818. Eugène de Mazenod, Priest and Missionary. » We were, in fact, *Oblates* before we used the title.

<sup>23</sup> « Our Holy Rules », Missions, Vol. 77, 1950, p. 362.

Oblates, they surpass all others *in the completeness of their oblation.* »

We do not deny that in every other Religious Institute there is a striving towards complete dedication to God. Nevertheless, in so far as a sustained trend towards perfect oblation, by every fibre of one's being, and in every possible domain, in so far as this constitutes a special vocation, that special vocation is ours. This is the reason why the name of the Oblate of Mary Immaculate is written, in bold characters, in the story of Christ's Church. If you do not realize this, you need only consider the heroic stature of Bishop de Mazenod, and read his letters, and study our holy Rules; then you will understand.

We do not weary of repeating that our most characteristic attitude is one of *oblation without reserve*, as our title proclaims: and, unquestionably, this mentality is to be found in the letter and in the spirit of our Constitutions from beginning to end. You have seen it in the Preface; you will find it in Article 697, which is a pouring forth of the Founder's burning love and zeal.

« He who wishes to become one of our members, must have an ardent desire of his own perfection, and be inflamed with a love of our Lord Jesus Christ and his Church. He must have a burning zeal for the salvation of souls. He must have a heart that is *free from every disorderly affection for things of earth, and from excessive attachment to parents and native land.* He must not be desirous of riches, nay more, he will regard riches as dung, that he may gain Christ. His one desire must be to spend himself in the service of God and the Church, whether in the Missions or in the other works of the Congregation. He must have the will to persevere unto death in devoted obedience to the Rules of our Institute. »

This spirit of *oblation* implies a special aptitude, a gift which is the fruit of that charity which appears

in the « ardent love » of the « Preface »; a gift from God, the gift of a love that is whole and entire, and it is bestowed upon each member individually and upon the Congregation as a whole; a gift which enables the Oblate *giver* to forget himself entirely and continuously so that he can devote himself freely, cheerfully and boldly to all the good works which *priestly charity can devise*. He does not choose for himself, he accepts the tasks chosen by his Superior without regret or distaste; he never needs to wear the mask of the man who submits outwardly and inwardly rebels.

Wherever God calls, wherever His honour is at stake or His love ignored, wherever there are souls in distress, there, by the very fact of being *Oblates*, we are ready, at the command of our Superiors, to throw ourselves devotedly into the work and sacrifice ourselves, « *even unto death.* »

This has been acknowledged and proclaimed by the late Pope Pius XI, during the audience which he granted to the members of the General Chapter of 1938. Evidently, His Holiness could have little inside knowledge of the works of one Congregation among so many others, yet, this Pope of penetrating mind and incisive speech, by a deliberate and considered judgment, pronounced us — « Specialists in difficult Missions. »<sup>24</sup>

Are not these words a declaration by Christ's Vicar that there is in us a spirit, an ardour, a driving force which enables us to undertake the most exacting tasks?

Specialists in difficult Missions! In the mind of the Holy Father, this glorious title was earned by our Oblates who work in the Foreign Missions. But all of us are religious, priests and Oblates, we must not divide ourselves into two different groups, we must not have Oblates who live a life of sacrifice and others who follow an easy way of life.

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<sup>24</sup> Missions, Vol. 72, 1938, p. 411.

In the Preface, the Founder rounds off his idea of an Oblate by pointing out the special qualification he desired: « ... *in a word, ... apostolic men, ...* » In a word, then, *we must be apostolic men, apostolic Oblates*. We must be men, religious, priests, who offer themselves for the ministry of souls *exactly as the Apostles did*: « ... *leaving all things, they followed him.* » (Luke, V, 11); like St Paul, each one an « *apostle of Jesus Christ.* » (I Cor., I, 1).

The Founder returns time and again to this cherished idea which welled up in his heart from the earliest days of our Institute. In a sentence of the Preface where you can almost sense the intensity of his ardour as he depicts the virtues appropriate to our state, he says: « They should... courageously walk in the paths trodden by so many *apostles and evangelical laborers...* » One feels that he was searching for the words which would express exactly his deep-rooted sentiment and conviction; how could he exemplify, for himself and for his followers, the complete donation of self? It is among those who are closest to Christ that he sought and found the models, and he dared to write it, for he was sure his spiritual sons would respond to his cherished ideal; so he traced the words:— « ... *the holy Apostles, our first Fathers* » (Article 287). The Oblate are to follow in their footsteps:— « *In imitation of the Apostles, they will glory in their infirmities, in reproaches, in persecutions, in distress, for Christ's sake* » (Article 263). Here is spiritual wealth to be exploited! Here is encouragement in our efforts towards personal and apostolic holiness! How clearly we are shown the end to be attained! Here are exemplars worthy of imitation! We are to rise to the level of the Apostles in zeal, in devotedness, and, let us say it bluntly—*in oblation, « apostolic men »*. How we should thank God for a Lawgiver who knew how to speak clearly, and who could rise to the heights of supernatural bravery!

Dear Fathers and Brothers, consider *oblation* as we have described it, an ardent and absolute engagement in the service of Divine Love, in the service of the Church and of the most abandoned souls; reflect upon it and you will realize that we cannot truly make such an oblation of ourselves, nor live up to it, nor perfect it, unless we live in closest union with Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Redeemer, Love and Mercy personified. And we will be equally powerless, if we do not live in closest union with Mary Immaculate, whom we must always look up to as « *our beloved Mother* » and the « *Queen of our Congregation.* »

For us, as indeed for all, Christ ought to be the centre of all things, the very heart of all our activities, the very soul of our apostolate. The first lines of the Preface speak of the Church as the glorious inheritance of « *Christ the Saviour* »; it is on Christ that our attention is to be centred. If the Church is being laid desolate, by the « shameful defection » of her own children, *it is Christ* whom we are to console by our laborious efforts to lead these erring children back to the fold. It is only *from Christ* that we can obtain the power to regenerate the world, and, before we can begin to save souls, we must begin to follow Christ:— « In what way should men *desirous of following in the footsteps of their divine Master Jesus Christ* conduct themselves, if they in their turn are to win back to Him the many souls who have thrown off His yoke? » We must be ready to sacrifice all that is dearest and best in life, and « ... even life itself *for the love of our Lord Jesus Christ.* » It will be part of our apostolic duty to teach degenerate Christians « *who Christ is* ». « We must spare no effort » *to extend the kingdom of Christ*; and « *for the glory of His holy name* », « we should enter the combat... and fight even unto death... »

The first Article of the Rule impresses on us again the necessity of « diligently striving to imitate the virtues and example of our Savior Jesus Christ... » Article 48

will have the same doctrine taught in the seminaries under our care so that the parochial clergy may be priests « *earnestly following in the footsteps of the Divine Shepherd*, and feeding with watchful and constant care, the sheep that have returned to Him. » Seminary Directors will try to mould the souls of the clerical students *after the pattern of Christ*, the Divine Exemplar, and « lead them... by degrees to the higher virtues... » (Article 69). The Directors « ...will also *venerate the priesthood of Christ* in all those who share therein... » (Article 60). And « ...they will labor without ceasing *to form Christ* in the clerics... » (Article 62). We must quote the striking final Article (No 93) of this Chapter: « The Superior and Directors of the Seminarians will neglect nothing to enhance the dignity of the clerical state, to strengthen its spirit, and to multiply its fruits. Thus it will come to pass that the Church, nourished and protected by worthy and holy ministers, will daily grow in vigor, *for the glory of her divine Spouse* and the salvation of a multitude of souls. »

Our preachers! They, like the Apostle, must have only one end in view, *to preach « Jesus Christ, and Him crucified... »* (Article 98). Moreover, they must « ... pray and get others to pray to *the Divine Master of hearts...* » for, if their preaching be not accompanied by His moving grace, it will bear little fruit (Article 117).

The Oblate who is « ... called to hear confessions... » performs a delicate and difficult ministry. Article 118 beautifully describes the sacrament of Penance as « .. the abundant fountain of salvation... » and reminds us that *it is Jesus Christ* who has made us the « source » of its « healing waters ». We must keep in mind the unwilling guests of Christ's parable, and try to win sinners, even by constraint (Article 120).

It is *in Christ* that we must love our friends and benefactors (Article 139). Again, it is in the church or chapel « ... *where Jesus Christ is truly present...* » that

we should say our Office, so as to offer Him the homage of becoming prayer (Article 155).

Our churches, whether public or semi-public, will be centres of earnest piety » where souls will be « trained in the love of God and his Divine Son *Jesus Christ...* » (Article 166).

We will invite the faithful to join us, *in the presence of Jesus Christ*, at the beginning of each new year and when the year ends, we will again assemble them *before Him*, in penance and reparation and thanksgiving (Articles 170-173). At Carnival time also, we will ask the people to come into our churches, so that, « ... *in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ...* » they may take part in our acts of reparation (Article 174).

To be worthy priests, religious and missionaries, we must imitate *the poverty of our Lord Jesus Christ*, and we bind ourselves by vow to do so (Article 176). We also bind ourselves to chastity, *a virtue « ... most dear to the Son of God... »* (Article 219). And it is when a Superior formally gives a command « *in the name of Christ, the Lord* », that we are bound to the most absolute obedience (Article 224).

Our whole life, then, *should be centred on Jesus Christ*. It is before *Christ*, present in the Blessed Sacrament, that we are to make our prayer and meditation. « We will meditate especially... *on the virtues of our Lord Jesus Christ*, for these should be exemplified... » in our lives; and each month, we « ... will choose *one particular virtue of this Divine Model*, and... endeavour to practise it... » (Article 254).

Every day, we should read, thoughtfully, some portion of Holy Scripture, which St Augustine calls « *the body of Christ* » (Article 255). And is it not Christ whom we seek in our daily spiritual reading? (Article 256).

At least once a day, we will pay a special « ... visit of adoration to Christ the Lord » (Article 257). The ministers of the Gospel cannot work effectively « unless they hold in highest esteem, and always bear about in their body, *the mortification of Christ...* » (Article 263). Among us, *it is Jesus Christ* who is represented by the Superior. (Article 279).

Moreover, it is *Christ the Lord* who is « ... the chief Founder of our Congregation... » and we should « ... spread abroad everywhere the fragrance of his amiable virtues » (Article 287 and 290).

All our members will so live that they may be worthy to immolate the *Divine Victim* each day (Article 299). The preparation, the sacrificial act itself, the thanksgiving, all will be conducted with the greatest possible reverence, for this is « ... due to the sacred mysteries... » (Articles 301-305).

As a perpetual reminder of our vocation, we will always wear the *Cross of Christ*, and we should always treat this sacred image with great devotion and reverence (Articles 309-311).

We should always accept willingly the lowest place, in imitation of Him who did not come to be ministered unto; He came to be the servant of all (Article 668).

We have already quoted Article 697; it is a stirring summary of the Preface, it is a résumé of the entire Rule. Read it again, and you will see that Jesus Christ is truly the centre, the inner force, the inspiration of all Oblate life and activity.

To complete this point, we should quote every one of the Articles in which our Founder describes the spirit which is to be formed in our novices. These Articles could well be studied and appreciated singly, for they contain a wealth of enlightenment on the spirit of our Congregation. We shall quote only Article 707,

which gives the fundamental principles of formation in the noviciate. « The novices ought to cultivate in themselves a special esteem for the hidden life of our Lord Jesus Christ. And it should be a source of happiness for them to recall that their own life, in some small measure, resembles that of our Savior, who from His twelfth to His thirtieth year remained unknown to almost the whole world. »

Finally, all that has been said is summed up in our formula of Oblation. It is Jesus Christ whom we call first of all, to witness our total engagement in the service of God:— « *In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ...* » (Article 742).

In our Obate life, there are many other details which could be put forward to demonstrate the Christo-centric spirituality of our Rules. To give one example, this spirituality is contained in our morning prayers, which themselves are a preparation for the meditation which the Rule advises us should be upon the virtues and example of Jesus Christ (Article 254). The meditation is usually followed by the incomparable prayer:— « O Jesu vivens in Maria », a masterly expression of all our sentiments towards Jesus, our King, our Master and our Model.

Dear Fathers and Brothers, it is of set purpose that we have written at such length on this point of our spiritual life; we have tried to display before you the vast spiritual wealth of our Rules for, alas, many remain unaware of this treasure. During the course of this analysis, we have realized more vividly than ever before, that our holy Rule is rich in powerful and vivifying principles, and that it leads us, by a sure path, to intimate union with Jesus Christ. How sad it is that some members of our Congregation do not discover in the Rule the treasure which Father de Mazenod stored there, helped and guided by the Holy Spirit of God!

It is now the task of our masters of spirituality to make a synthesis of this, and to elicit the conclusions

latent in all these principles of interior and apostolic life. For ourselves, we are convinced that the elements we have treated above are quite sufficient to constitute the distinctive traits of a special mode of spiritual life.

While continuing to analyse the Oblate portrayed by the Rule, we should say here, that, if our whole life is spent in intimate union with Jesus, our Saviour and Redeemer, it should also be lived in union with Mary Immaculate, our Patron, our Mother. But we desire to leave the development of this point to the latter part of our Circular.

If our spirit of Oblation is to be maintained in all its efficacy, if it is to lead us to a greater love for God and a more complete giving of ourselves to Him, if it is to enable us to bring God more fully into the souls of men, particularly into the most abandoned souls, it must be developed in an atmosphere of intense, supernatural brightness, for it proceeds from Jesus Christ—  
« *Lumen cordium.* »

This spirit of Oblation is born of a life of prayer. The Missionary must be a man of prayer. If anyone forgets this, he is not living within his vocation:— « The whole life of the members of our Society ought to be a life of continual recollection » (Article 246). Every Oblate house should be a house of recollection, of silence, of peace, for it is only in such an atmosphere that the life of prayer can flourish. Our every house should be a home and centre of piety where our missionaries, returning from their outside labours, can renew their spiritual strength in silence and prayer. Is it not true that we have lost this sense of silence and recollection?

We confess to a feeling of grave anxiety whenever an Oblate seeks permission to retire to a monastery in whose peaceful quiet he may practise recollection. If this must be sought elsewhere, must we not admit

that we have failed to establish in our Communities what is both described and commanded by our Rule? Let us say it frankly, it seems we have not known how to maintain in our Communities the atmosphere of recollection, of monastic silence which certainly existed in the early days of our Institute, and which led Father Tempier, and our Founder himself, to describe an Oblate house as paradise on earth. Does it not appear that we have lost even the idea of this life of prayer and the silence necessary for prayer and meditation? If we visit a Trappist or a Benedictine monastery, we are filled with admiration, we come away highly edified. Yet, what we admired there is commanded by our own Rule. Do we ever think of this? Let us, dear Fathers and Brothers, re-establish a *community spirit* of prayer and silence; without this, our houses can never be houses of prayer. Let us all return to the practice of prayer and meditation; let us realize that to dispense ourselves from them is a great failing, that not to apply ourselves to them is to retard our spiritual advancement. If some of our Communities are noticeably mediocre, is it not due to neglect of prayer and meditation? The members do not meditate upon Jesus, they do not keep Him in their thoughts, they make no effort to imitate Him. In consequence, the Community is ill-regulated, the members are worldly minded and lacking in discipline, charity has disappeared from their midst, the name of God is seldom spoken and His interests are forgotten. When the life of prayer and meditation is abandoned, when the Community is seldom to be found in the chapel, God is thrust into the background, and worldly preoccupations leave no room for spiritual and apostolic interests. Intermittent zeal and piety may be possible in such an atmosphere, but this is not life according to the Oblate spirit, there is no longer that *established tendency towards perfection* which is demanded by our Founder and our Rule.

Perhaps you think we are over severe? We are not as severe as the Rule itself. There are too many of

our Communities, which, judged by the Rule, stand condemned. There are too many of our members who stand condemned when the same test is applied. Let every one read once again all those Articles of the Rule which oblige us all to a life of recollection and prayer; then let us look at ourselves as individuals and as Communities; and then, let us ask ourselves what remains of the ideal of almost monastic life which our Founder envisaged for his sons, yes, even for his sons whose vocation is essentially missionary. It is very sad to have to say that, in some Provinces, it would be hard to find even one house in which spiritual life rises to the heights, one refuge in which a man's spiritual strength could be renewed. We repeat the question, why do Oblates seek elsewhere what they ought to find in their own houses, namely, the silence and recollection which are so necessary for all of us?

Is there any reason why we should not start afresh, and, with one common mind, re-establish the ideal of our holy Founder? Why not create in our Communities the silence, the recollection, the spiritual atmosphere which arouses our admiration when we see it in other religious institutes? This would mean nothing more than a return to the ideal of our Rule in its original purity.

Our ideal is an enthusiastic and absolute engagement to be completely at the disposition of God and of souls. It is based on and proceeds from contemplation, interior union with God. From this point of view, the spiritual life of the Oblate is identical with that of the most contemplative Orders. If an Oblate will live his Rule, particularly by the life of prayer and recollection which it preaches, and if he will respond to the graces which will certainly be given him, then he will become familiar with all the graces and gifts of the mystical life, he will ascend Mount Carmel. The Rule will lead him there by a sure and safe path; « *the very summit of perfection* » of which it speaks is the summit of that mys-

tical mount. Perfection means perfect charity; perfect charity demands, necessarily demands, union and contemplation. The Rule does not need to describe the mystical ascent, it enables us to scale the heights. Alas! we are too hesitant, too timorous to accept this fact. Let us bestir ourselves, dear Fathers and Brothers, let us climb to « *the very summit of perfection* », to the topmost peak of divine love. Why do we accept the idea that the interior life of the Oblate is not concerned with contemplation? In our personal spiritual life, and when we actually live in Community, are we not, according to the mind of the Rule, contemplatives? If we are not in fact contemplatives, it is because we have deformed the ideal set forth in the Rule. Ponder this well; let us return to this ideal, realizing that it does concern our vocation. Sometimes one gets the impression that this ideal is hardly accepted simply because it is so high, so noble. That our Oblation may be a true giving of ourselves to God, a lifelong giving, we must be men of prayer, of continual prayer.

The spirit of our Oblation to Divine Love gives rise to a great spirit of *renunciation*, of *mortification*. The whole Rule proclaims this, especially the Preface, the compendium of our entire life. This is the ascetical part of our spiritual life. If we keep the Rule in all its details, it leads us to become men who are mortified and stripped of all things. Article 263, another echo of the Preface, lays down a fundamental principle:— « ... the ministers of the Gospel cannot hope to reap abundant fruits from their labors, unless they hold in highest esteem, and always bear about in their body, *the mortification of Christ...* » If you once grasp this well, you will not drift into rejecting as useless or cumbersome all those details of the Rule by which the Founder would teach us how to mortify ourselves. If you have the goodwill to study the Rule from this point of view, you will be moved to wonder at Father de Mazenod's spirit of mortification. It is he who prescribed these

details, and it is deplorable that we sometimes consider as trifles, prescriptions which are prudent and well-balanced. It is because we have acted thus that some earnest souls believe that the Oblate way of life does not permit them to satisfy their sincere desire for **renunciation and mortification**. And nevertheless, these *are* contained in the Rule, which says explicitly that the individual Oblate and the Oblate Community should be, as it were, clothed with the mortification of Christ. Have we really believed in this ideal of penance and mortification, proposed by our Founder as an essential means to success in our apostolate? Have we sufficiently reflected that to assure constant progress in charity, to reach the summit of perfection, we must travel the purgative way of penance in all its forms, especially those indicated by the Rule? If we followed to their fulfilment such principles as the detailed prescriptions of our Rule, we would rival the most penitential Orders in the Church. We must not make penance an end in itself, but we should remember that it is an indispensable means to apostolic progress and success. To offer ourselves completely to God in a spirit of complete mortification is certainly one of the traits of our Oblate spiritual life.

Here again, is a subject which should attract the attention of our spiritual writers. For our present purpose, we must be content to note the principal points of our renunciation in their relation to some other elements of our religious and apostolic life.

The sacrificial *oblation* of ourselves demands the accompaniment of perfect *obedience*. Would our Oblation be complete if we reserved to ourselves the domain of our own will? If we did not renounce our own will by subjecting it completely to our lawful Superiors, and if we did not make this renunciation in the interests of God and the Church and souls, would we ever attain the apex of perfection? Our Founder positively rejoiced

at the very thought of complete and total obedience, and he pointed out to us the perfect way to practise it, namely, the observance of our holy Rule. Here are his words:— « ... in obeying our Rules, we obey the Church... Consequently, he who would fail to obey them, would disobey the Church and its Head. Let such a one judge himself—I shall not be answerable for his salvation. Woe to him! I pity him. What a consoling thought this is—in obeying our Rule, we obey the Church! And, as our Rule covers—our entire conduct—and also the spirit which ought to animate our conduct, it follows that all our actions have in them something of the wonderful merit of obedience to the Church. Furthermore, as the Church commands nothing but what is good, nothing that does not lead to eternal salvation, in obeying our Rule, we advance steadily along the road to heaven. This conclusion cannot be challenged. »<sup>25</sup>.

How painful to poor human nature is the effort to reach this degree of obedience! More than to anything else in the world, we cling to our own will. Nevertheless, the effort must be made. Without obedience, we cannot be religious. It is obedience which « ... *really establishes a religious in the religious life...* » (Article 222). For us, without obedience, there is no Oblation as our Founder understood Oblation. And that explains why he seems to have almost revelled in giving precise and minute details regarding the Oblate practice of this renunciation so intimately linked with our Oblation. For a deeper understanding of its meaning, everyone should re-read the paragraph entitled—« *The Vow and Virtue of Obedience.* »

Of the many points which this suggests, we choose one:— if there is no obedience, there are no Oblates and there is no Oblate Congregation. There are no Oblates, for, if one maintains the right to act according to his own will (in this context, it matters little whether

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<sup>25</sup> Missions, Vol. 77, 1950, p. 364.

his will be good or evil), there is no giving of himself, there is no total engagement, no complete dedication. If one has not surrendered his will into the hands of God and those who represent God, he has given nothing. The Founder, a veritable master of the spiritual and apostolic life, understood this well and he is forcefully insistent on this point. Assuredly, we shall try to do as much good as possible, to be ready for « ... *any good work...* » But, the good works will be those « ... *prescribed by... Superiors* » (Article 95).

Again, the Rule demands that whoever « wishes to become one of our members... must have the will to persevere unto death *in devoted obedience* to the Rules of our Institute » (Article 697). Is not this logical? If the pursuit of perfection is to be our lifelong task, we cannot hope to succeed without the practice of the vow and virtue which all theologians consider the most important. They consider obedience the most important, and the most difficult, because it penetrates one's innermost self in order to destroy, or at least neutralize, all those tendencies which oppose the full giving of one's self to God—self-love, self-seeking, pride, ambition, and attachment to one's own will. We repeat, if obedience is left out of consideration, the very concept of an Oblate is impossible. Let us try to grasp this point firmly, for we live in an age in which the notion of obedience tends to become falsified and distorted. A religious thinks it is a sign of strength to choose some work of apparent, or maybe real difficulty; he takes great pleasure in it, he is attached to it; all this against the will of his Superior who has given him other work to do. Is he a strong man? In reality he is weak, very weak, too feeble to face up to the task of detaching himself from his own will. The tendency to prize our own will above everything else is common to all; we are ready to undertake anything except what is asked of us by the representatives of God, the legitimate authorities who can issue commands *in nomine Domini*. How far this

is removed from the spirit of the Gospel as it is expressed in our holy Rule!

If there is no obedience, there is no longer a Congregation. There could be, perhaps, a loose kind of union, formed by a number of individuals, each remaining free to follow his own will. But, in no sense could it be called a Congregation of Oblates. Our Founder considered this very point, and wrote:— « Obedience... is the bond of union in every well regulated Society. If it be faithfully observed, it produces that close union whereby various societies endure. But if obedience is to be so fruitful of good, it must be such as the saints have practised it, and have prescribed it for the practice of others, in the various Institutes with which they have enriched the Church » (Article 222). If we follow Father de Mazenod's line of thought, we shall see clearly that obedience is the perfect means of rendering the priestly soul so agile that it can fulfil all the demands of total Oblation to God and souls. As we deliberately restrict the teaching of this Circular to what is contained in the Rule and the other writings of Father de Mazenod, we make no apology for our repeated appeals to the Rule in support of our arguments, so we quote again:— « They ought to be so submissive... that they may be truly said to have no will of their own, but to have given it into the hands of those placed in authority over them » (Article 229). This is essential if the Institute itself is to maintain continual progress towards perfection and fulfil the ends for which it was established, ends which are so necessary for the welfare of the Church and the most abandoned souls.

By all means, let us study carefully the nature of the vow and virtue of obedience, but let us never depart from it as it is taught by our own Rule. There may be various conceptions of obedience, and various ways of practising it based on different systems or methods; there is not one modality fixed for all Institutes. Our Founder, with his impetuous straining towards holiness,

wishes for his subjects and for his Institute the very perfection of obedience, and he describes its conditions with great precision. Once for all, let us abolish from our midst every discussion which tends to minimize the enormous and awesome demands of obedience. Obedience, as set forth in the Rule, has been established in the Congregation by the Church, and, within the Congregation, there exists neither right nor duty to alter the nature or qualities of that obedience. Whoever desires alteration does not wish to be an Oblate, for our Founder knew better than any other what is required in his Institute. On this point, he has expressed himself so clearly that there is no place for discussion. Undoubtedly, there are many ways of sanctification, but, for an Oblate, there is only one form of obedience. No department of his life may be kept under his personal control; he must practise effective and affective obedience to the will of God which is manifested by the will of his Superiors. If one wishes to be an Oblate, this is the price one must pay. The Congregation cannot carry out good works within the Church, unless she has at her disposal the will of every one of her members; then, she can send them forth to execute even the most difficult tasks.

A whole volume could be written on this theme.

In our houses of formation, we must ceaselessly insist upon training in holy obedience in spite of the present day tendency which would give it an inferior importance. It remains the principal, the most important virtue for the apostolate. How could it be otherwise? To save the world, the Son of Man became obedient unto death, death on the Cross. He was the first Oblate, and, if there had been a better way to save the world, He would have found it.

There is no total giving of one's self, no Oblation, without *poverty*:— «... since covetousness is the root of all evils in the Church, let it be observed, that our

Institute... urges us in imitation of the saints to embrace voluntary poverty... » (Article 176). It is not possible to work for the poor and the most abandoned without the spirit of poverty. The Founder understood this thoroughly. To be a true Missionary, one must be detached from everything; from all earthly goods and also from the comforts they afford. Efficacious work as a Missionary among the poor and the most abandoned is impossible without true poverty, it demands a true spirit of poverty, and sometimes, it demands that we live *in the same conditions* as the poorest of the poor. This is being increasingly recognized by workers in the modern apostolate. The people who have become paganized, the working people who have been more or less forced into poverty, these will never be won back except by men who accept poverty joyfully. Only too often, there is a terrible depth of misery to be found among these people. How can we present ourselves to them if we appear as well-to-do priests, comfortably installed in an easy life? Jesus Christ acted very differently.

Our poverty has its own special mode. It is not Franciscan, not Sulpician but *Oblate*. The Rule is lavish of detail. It preaches no vague poverty which would allow us to live in a very comfortable fashion, enjoying nearly everything we desire. The poverty of our Rule is very clearly defined and eminently practical for those who would be Missionaries. The Rule does not conceive it possible for us to be Oblates unless we be poor. On this point, the Rule contains a mystique which, *in se*, fits us admirably for the apostolate in the world of to-day. Everywhere, Oblates should be in the vanguard of the wonderful movement which is stirring the Church and the clergy to an apostolate of the great masses of the poor people — and they are truly poor — by a zeal based upon actually living the life of poverty. Every one of us should feel something of the agitation of the Founder as he saw the masses awaiting evangelization, our hearts should be moved as

his was. Not in Mission lands only, but everywhere, Oblates should be the Missionaries of the Poor: this is our title, and our Founder gloried in it. Let us all live up to it, even those whose duties keep them apart from the poor. Let us have a healthy fear of frequent recourse to feats of interpretation by which we would have it believed that one can be a missionary of the poor without being such in reality. Let us be poor; otherwise, we are no longer true Oblates, true missionaries, true soldiers of Christ: the Founder himself would condemn us, having already taught us « ... how necessary poverty is... » (Article 176).

Throughout the Congregation, let us return to the observance of the Rule. If we follow it to the letter, there will be no danger that our Institute will drift away from its original spirit. Have we already begun to drift? Do we find in our midst the type of priest who is unwilling to endure any privation, who will not accept the renunciations which are imposed by the practice of poverty in a Community under a religious Superior? The absence of personal renunciation, and the thoughtless acceptance of a comfortable life which bears no resemblance to a religious life, these two facts in our midst endanger voluntary poverty — the virtue which still remains the foundation of religious perfection, the bulwark of the religious life and the means which render more easy the practice of all the other virtues. (Article 176). The conduct of certain members, and sometimes the conduct of whole Communities, might well make one ask if Oblates do make a vow of poverty.

Dear Fathers and Brothers, it is with full knowledge and with full deliberation that we raise this cry of alarm, for we see the foundations of our religious and apostolic life being undermined. Let there be a universal return to the complete observance of the Rule. Let our Provincials and Superiors put aside all timidity,

all fear; let them exact from their subjects the observance of the Rule in all its details. Abuses contrary to poverty must be pointed out and condemned at the retreats. These abuses exist, and some of them are grave; they emanate from certain members who propound a doctrine diametrically opposed to the Gospel as well as to the life of poverty laid down in our Rule. There are some members who need a fresh introduction to the words of Christ: « *Go sell what thou hast* », (Matthew, XIX, 21), « *Every one... that doth not renounce all that he possesseth cannot be my disciple.* » (Luke, XIV, 33). Once again, dear Fathers and Brothers, let us take up the Rule, and, with it in our hands, let us make an honest examination of conscience; let us compare our actual conduct with what is prescribed by the Rule. In some regions, Providence endows us with an abundance of material goods: woe betide us if we abuse these gifts, if we become satisfied souls living in the enjoyment of plenty. All of us, no matter where we are, should live as poor men and we should be glad when we sometimes feel the pinch of want. Woe to the Communities imitating the individual religious who is no longer interested in the practice of poverty; they shut themselves off from perfection, and from the apostolate, and from all true priestly ministry, for the latter becomes nothing more than a means to make life more comfortable. Whoever does not live as the poor live, does not love the poor and cannot dedicate himself to the evangelization of the poor. Can it be said that such a priest is still an Oblate? It is high time, dear Fathers and Brothers, to look into this matter, for, like all the other Institutes, we too are in danger. Wherever it is necessary, let us shake off our lethargy, let us return to an increasingly perfect practice of holy poverty, let us be Oblates in fact as well as in name.

Another aspect of our life of Oblation includes *humility* and *simplicity*. It is from our Founder that

we, as a Congregation, have inherited these virtues. Our numbers have increased, our works have developed and multiplied. Even so, let us maintain the humble and simple attitude that we find expressed in the writings of Mgr de Mazenod, and in the Rule also. Our Congregation should remain « little » and « simple » in the Gospel sense of these words. This was certainly in Father de Mazenod's mind when he wrote: « The end of this *humble Congregation...* » (Article 1); and again: « our *little flock* » (Article 94); and yet again: « ...whatever *small atonement..* » our Institute is capable of. (Article 176). The Founder, forcefully at times, kept his Oblates in humble posts and self-effacing duties; and it was not his wish that we should daringly liken ourselves to the great Orders whom he called « giants in the Church of God ». Are there not many Articles of the Rule which should be read in this spirit? The march of time, and the very force of our apostolate have wrought great changes in the external aspect of our Congregation. Nevertheless, let us retain its spirit of humility, for our Congregation is the servant of the Church and of the poor. « *We are never to forget that the principal aim of our Institute is to help those souls whose need is greatest.* » (Article 134).

Humility and simplicity alike should be characteristic of each individual Oblate, for we are called to live « *in a state of habitual self-denial* », and « *to labor assiduously to become humble and meek* ». (Preface). Article 290 places humility first among the virtues which should be especially cultivated, and Article 292 develops this idea which is clearly seen in so many other Articles of the Rule. Once again, we cannot but remark how much could be written to bring to light the vast treasure of ascetical doctrine which lies hidden in our holy Rule.

As to *simplicity* and *purity of intention* in the Oblation of ourselves, it is consequent on the totality of our Oblation and the purposes for which this is

made; we must have but « *one desire* », namely, to spend ourselves « in the service of God and the Church ». (Article 697). Because of this, it is imposed as a duty to « Cultivate... purity of intention ». (Article 290).

As individuals and as a Congregation, we ought then to bear the stamp of humility and simplicity. Over a long period of time, our Institute has carried out works of considerable importance without parading them before the public, or even before the Church. Many of our older members were truly « Unknown Apostles ». The advent of various publications brought fame, this humble simplicity was revealed, its deep spirit of total and completely supernatural devotedness was made known to all. Unfortunately, such publicity is a necessary part of modern life. It should not, however, cause us to lose our humble simplicity, for this virtue is indeed holy and its possessor is blest. Nor should it cause the loss of our fervour, for this also is supernatural, far removed from any merely human and natural spirit.

Within our own Communities, our spirit of Oblation becomes a spirit of warm-hearted *charity*. This is another characteristic of our Oblate life, wherever we are established throughout the world.

Sincere charity of the Oblate type necessarily includes all that is best in human friendship, but its sublime nature puts it on a far higher plane. It is not simply comradeship, nor the team spirit so necessary in every Community. Again, it is not a product of that modern naturalism which influences us all, which endangers true supernatural charity by substituting for it a merely human thing, cheerful good fellowship.

Our Oblate charity is immeasurably greater. It is a grace, a power of deep affection by which we are « *Closely united in the bonds of fraternal charity...* », by which we live as a family, « *..living together as brothers..* » (Articles 291 and 1). This common family

life is the nourishment of our religious, priestly, apostolic and missionary life; it provides the atmosphere in which perfection flourishes, it engenders holiness in the union of souls, in the quickening of minds and hearts, in the offering of our life of renunciation, in the forgetfulness of self so that each member may belong more perfectly to God, in Jesus and through Mary Immaculate.

We would like to develop this theme and to display once again the riches of our holy Rule. Many relevant passages could be quoted. Some Articles are particularly striking, those which deal with the formation of novices. In the noviciate, aspirants are to be formed in every virtue, but, since we have our own distinctive form of the virtue of charity and also of Community life, the Rule insists that novices be formed in *fraternal* and *Community* charity. An entire spiritual code for the regulation of our daily intercourse is contained in these Articles. We should read and re-read them, they should govern our conduct. They could be developed into a volume of meditations on the practice of charity in its Oblate form. What they say on the formation of novices applies equally to every phase of Oblate life. There are not two kinds of Oblate charity; one for novices and another for those who have left the noviciate. There is only one kind, that which is modelled on Jesus Christ in His hidden life, and this, we should all strive to imitate. (Article 707). As He was obedient, we shall be obedient, for the necessary basis of Community charity is obedience to lawful Superiors and to the prescriptions of the Rule. (Article 708). For us, the Superior is more than God's representative, his authority comes from God. The Superior is the unifying principle; without him there would be merely a group of men, but not an Oblate community.

Our fraternal charity rests also on respect for the sacred character of our priesthood:— « *They will mani-*

*fest the most profound respect for all priests, honoring in them the person of the Son of God... »* (Article 709). Here is shown clearly the Founder's concern that the priesthood should be highly honoured. His idea of the priesthood included both its dignity and the respect due to it. Charity, brotherhood among priests! Yes, but always accompanied by mutual respect, especially for the priesthood with which each one is ennobled. This has many practical applications which we would do well to study. Because we are missionaries to the masses of the poor, some of us are inclined to omit the mutual deference which gives to priestly life an air of dignity and nobility. Our Founder certainly wished us to be the priests of the plain common people, but always mindful of our dignity, always conscious that the priesthood clothes us with a second nature, but not as with a garment which sometimes becomes tiresome and may be discarded while we take our ease. In Community, let us preserve priestly demeanour. There should be nothing stiff or formal in our conduct, affectation should be excluded; but we should be dignified in a simple and humble manner. We shall not emphasize nor comment on Articles 714-716; we simply quote them with the exhortation that each Oblate weigh them, word by word, for they are an invaluable guide to fraternal and Community charity.

*« They will bear with one another in much patience and meekness, and strive to outdo one another in kindly acts. Charity also will be joyfully practised by them. »*

*« All will avoid whatever may wound the feelings of their brethren, and they will gladly yield to the wishes of others, so that the peace of God and the charity of Christ may always exist among them. »*

*« They will have a mutual love and respect for one another, anticipating one another in honor. »*

It is not possible to describe more precisely the practice of true Oblate charity. When we read these

words, St Paul's saying comes readily to mind:— « ... *the fruit of the Spirit is charity, joy, peace...* » (Galatians, V, 22).

The prayers we use after the particular examination of conscience, these also should be studied. Where else can we find fraternal charity so perfectly expressed! What a high and noble ideal they suggest to us!

Let us remember also that there is no Community life without *Community prayer*. For us, the chief practice of Community prayer, the expression of our fraternal charity is « *the public recitation of the Divine Office in common...* » (Article 4). The holy Rule justly styles it our public prayer (Article 777). While some members of the Oblate family engage in open warfare for the kingdom of God, others assemble in the chapel, and their prayers go up to heaven to obtain protection and victory for their brothers who must do battle if souls are to be saved. Listen to the beautiful and inspiring thought of our Founder:— « *This holy exercise (i. e. the Divine Office in common), is to be regarded in our Institute as the source of heavenly blessings poured out upon all the works of our Congregation* » (Article 144).

We are bound, then, to the Office in common, and it is only a very grave reason that would excuse from this obligation. When such a grave reason exists, he who says the Office privately should be mindful of his brothers who fight for Christ's Church, « ... *in order that this important duty may be fulfilled in such circumstances, and in such dispositions, as to bring greater profit to one's self, to the Congregation, and to the whole Church* » (Article 155).

By inserting in the Rule these two Articles (144 and 155), the Founder gives practical effect to what he had laid down in Article 117, already quoted. The first to pray for our missionaries, the first to be invited to pray for them, are obviously our priest members. But our Brothers also are included in the invitation, for, by

reciting the prayers prescribed for them, they share in the benefits of the Office:— « ... lest they be deprived of what may be termed the public recitation of the Divine Office practised among us, and of its inestimable advantages, and in order that they may share in the merits of such an excellent exercise, they (i. e. the Brothers) will instead of saying the Divine Office, recite the following prayers » (Article 777).

Do you not think, dear Fathers and Brothers, that we have a long way to go before we regain the spiritual outlook of our Founder when he penned these words? Does it not seem that we no longer understand it? If only we had goodwill and determination!

Our spirit of Oblation, the total giving of ourselves to Divine Love which raises us so far above our natural selves, by the aid of its accompanying qualities and virtues, becomes a *spirit of mercy and pity*; and this spirit urges us forth in search of the most abject and miserable, to devote ourselves unsparingly to their relief. Through every sentence of the Preface runs this deep emotion in face of the miserable state of the poor. The second half of Article 134 is explicit and decisive:— « *The unfortunate inmates of prisons have a rightful claim upon our charity.* » This whole Paragraph, Articles 134-138, is important. The Founder selects these poor people, the poor outcasts who are at the very bottom of the social scale and shows we should love them and help them, devoting ourselves without stint to their service. This Paragraph is very inspiring for our apostolate, it gives a true picture of mercy urging us to seek out the most abandoned. The wretched, simply because they are wretched, have a positive claim on the charity of the Oblate. The sentiment of pity, of apostolic mercifulness, is it not a due characteristic of our missionary life? It was impossible for Father de Mazenod to imagine an Oblate, except as a man whole-heartedly devoted to the poor; it was for the poor that he founded his Society. For an apostolate among

the poor, which virtue could be more appropriate than mercy, boundless mercy! From this point of view, we are the specialists of the Divine Mercy, whence springs our own love for the poor. We are the specialists too of the mercy of Mary, whose heart ever turns towards those who are most in want. More than other apostolic workers, we should spread abroad the infinite mercy of God, it should show visibly in our lives so that we may lead back to Jesus and Mary the great masses who have become paganized. We should never forget that Jesus is the Saviour, and Mary is the Mother, of all those who have been led into desert places by false shepherds.

All this presupposes that the interior life of each one of us is centred on this apostolate and on this spirit of charity which would make us ready to sacrifice ourselves for mercy's sake:— «... *they are willing, if need be to give their lives for the salvation of souls... ready to sacrifice goods, talents, ease, even life itself...* » (Preface).

We shall not stress this point further; to do it complete justice would require a long treatise. If God allows us to carry out our desires, we shall speak to you on another occasion of our apostolic life and work.

## **II. Why and how we should live our Oblate life in intimate union with Mary Immaculate**

Dear Fathers and Brothers, all that has been said so far was necessary to clarify what we mean when we talk about our Oblate spirituality. In a sense, it was but an introduction to what we consider the principal part of his Circular.

The spirit of Oblation which embraces our religious, priestly, missionary, and apostolic life; the whole-hearted and complete dedication of ourselves to the God of infinite love, which is made in Jesus Christ and by a devoted apostolate to the poor; this spirit of Oblation

must fulfil itself by and through Mary Immaculate. She is our Patron, our Mother, and towards her we « *should foster in our hearts a special devotion...* » (Article 221). We are called Oblates of Mary Immaculate, and the name is much more than a label. You can readily call to mind many such titles; the « Priests of the Blessed Sacrament » denotes a society of priests consecrated particularly to the worship of the Blessed Sacrament, the « Marist Fathers » is an apt title for a community of priests devoted to the cult of the Blessed Virgin Mary. So too, our title is at once a name and a definition.

Before explaining all that it implies, we assert that *we are Oblates of Mary Immaculate* in the strictest sense of these words. It is by and through Mary Immaculate that we are Oblates, men completely offered and dedicated to souls, to Jesus Christ, to Divine Love.

If we are to be truly Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, we must accept and establish in our lives all that has been said so far in this Circular; but secondly, we must do all this in complete union with Mary. If we would understand our vocation aright, we must realize that it is in no way concerned with what might be called an ordinary devotion to Mary Immaculate. Our vocation is to a kind of identification with Mary Immaculate, to be of one mind and heart with her, « *Sentire cum Maria* ». Our vocation is the Oblation of ourselves to God through Mary *and in the same manner as she gave herself to God*; a giving which includes every particle of our Christian, religious, missionary and priestly life. To put it another way, we should look upon our Rule as a code which Mary, our divine Mother, commands us to observe fully all through life; and we should remember that she has exemplified in her life all the virtues which we are to practise. Moreover, we should always be serenely confident that all the graces necessary for the complete observance of our Rule will come to us through Mary.

Perhaps some will think that we are going beyond the mind of our Founder? We must justify, therefore, the striking role which we attribute to Mary in our spiritual and apostolic life; and we shall adhere to our resolution not to assert anything but what is in accordance with the mind of our Founder and with our holy Rules. In speaking of the Oblate way of Marian devotion, we must base all our assertions upon our traditions and our Rules. Let us see how far this can be done.

First of all, it is certain that our Congregation was not established for the cult of the Blessed Virgin, nor for some particular way of honouring her Immaculate Conception. The first Article of our Rules has never undergone any substantial change. In the beginning we were called « Missionaries of Provence », and the reason for this is well known. Then, for a similar reason, our title was changed to « Oblates of St. Charles ». One other thing is equally certain, and it is this, from the very inception of our Institute, its members have had a very great devotion to Mary Immaculate. This is proved by Article 257, which dates back to the earliest manuscript of the Rules. Further on, we shall see the full meaning of this significant Article, here we simply quote it:— « At least once a day they will pay... a visit to a statue or altar of the Blessed Virgin, *towards whom all the members of the Society will cultivate a special devotion, and to whom they will always look up as to their beloved Mother.* » The mind of our first Father is shown clearly also by Article 258 which is of equally early date:— « *They will recite the rosary every day, and will leave nothing undone to make the faithful most fervently and trustfully devout to this Immaculate Virgin, the Most Holy Mother of God.* »

Article 112, also part of the first Rule, is interesting and important for it establishes a positive obligation:— « *We must... urge the faithful... to be devout to the Blessed Virgin...* » The same is true of Article 166, which

says we must train our hearers « ... *in devotion to our Blessed Lady...* »

Two Articles were added by General Chapters; first, the explicit Article number 10, and then the impressive words of Article number 221. But, most of all, we must keep in mind the writings of Bishop de Maenod himself, especially those letters in which, for the first time, the relation of our Institute to the Blessed Virgin is mentioned. To reach their full meaning, these letters must be examined in detail, and analysed, and this work we leave to our historians and spiritual writers. Here it will suffice to quote some of the more important passages. In his memorable audience with Pope Leo XII, on December 20th, 1825, the Founder had asked that our name be changed from Oblates of St. Charles to Oblates of Mary Immaculate. Writing a few days later to inform Father Tempier of the Pope's approval, he said:— « *Above all else, let us all renew our devotion to the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, so that we may be in very truth the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. Is not this name a passport to heaven! How is it that we did not think of it before? To bear her name, to be consecrated to her in a very special way, admit it my Friend, is not this as glorious as it is consoling? The Oblates of Mary! the name satisfies both the ear and the heart. There is something I must confess to you now: when it was decided to take the other name, which I have since thought we should give up, I was astonished that it failed to move me; I was surprised that I felt so little pleasure in it, surprised that I found it almost distasteful to bear the name of a saint who is my own patron, and to whom I have a great devotion. Now I understand those feelings. We were making a mistake; we were not doing justice to our Mother, our Queen, our Protector, to her who is able to obtain for us all the graces which her divine Son authorizes her to bestow. Let us rejoice then, to bear her name and livery.* » <sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Missions, Vol. 78, 1951, p. 229.

He returns to this theme in a letter dated March 20th, 1826. That he was moved by some sentiment of special devotion to Mary is evident; all previous letters bore the heading — « L.J.C. » — while this one begins — « L.J.C. et M.I. » Then he writes:— « *Does it not seem to you a mark of predestination, to bear the name of Oblates of Mary, which means those who are consecrated to God under the patronage of Mary? Her name has become our family name, it is held in common by the Congregation and the Holy and Immaculate Mother of God. Here is a privilege to arouse the envy of others. This beautiful title has been given to us by the Church, we receive it with respect and love and gratitude; we are proud of our dignity, and proud of the right which it gives us to the protection of her who is all-powerful with God. Let us not hesitate any longer to use this beautiful name.* » <sup>27</sup>

Eleven years later, in 1837, the Founder, and the General Chapter representing the entire Congregation, gave a clear manifestation of Oblate devotion to Mary. It was decided to petition Rome to grant a scapular which would be proper to the Oblates. Here is the minute as given in the record of the Chapter:— « *Moved by respect for our gracious Mother, by a desire to proclaim that we are truly the sons of the holy Virgin conceived without original sin, it is proposed that we seek a special sign or badge, not to be worn on the habit but carried underneath, around the neck. Each Religious Order, each Congregation has something which distinguishes it: as our family is beloved of the Most Holy Virgin, we desire to wear some sign, proper to ourselves, to remind us of the august Patron of our Institute. Of the various suggestions made, the most acceptable was that of a scapular to be worn constantly by each member. It is requested that the Most Reverend Superior General will kindly ask the Sovereign Pontiff to attach rich indulgences to the sca-*

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<sup>27</sup> Missions, Vol. 78, 1951, p. 742.

*pular, and that, as soon as possible, each Superior will confer the scapular on the members of his Community. A decree was drawn up and put to a vote. The following are the terms in which it was unanimously adopted: On the day of Oblation, along with the cross, the true sign of our mission, the scapular of the Immaculate Conception will be conferred. It is to be worn underneath the habit.* » (Records of the General Chapters. General Archives. Rome).

In a letter dated August 18th, 1843, Mgr de Mazenod spoke of this scapular to Father Honorat, Superior of Canada:— « *This hidden habit, which is proper to ourselves, should be cherished by all the members of the Congregation. It will be as a uniform which distinguishes us from those who are simply the servants of Mary. It will be the external badge which establishes us as her picked troops.* »

The grant of this Oblate scapular, the sign of their personal devotion to the Mother of God and of men, did not fully satisfy the pious wishes of the Congregation. In another General Chapter, that of 1856, again with the Founder at their head, the members desired that the Holy See would grant them some special means of spreading among the faithful devotion to the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Mgr. de Mazenod drew up a petition of which we quote the principal part; it leaves no doubt about the nature of the Marian apostolate which we ought to practise, and to which we are bound by the Rule also.

« *Carolus Josephus Eugenius de Mazenod... ad Sanctitatis Vestrae pedes provolutus exponit, quod praedicta Congregatio (O.M.I.) tanquam finem peculiarem habet cultum erga Beatam et Immaculatam Deiparam ubique diffundere et propagare imprimis quoad ejus Immaculatae Conceptionis privilegium. Ut autem ad hanc gloriosam ab originali labe immunitatem, ex quo veluti Fidei Dogma, Urbe et Orbe plaudentibus a S. V. conclamata fuit, promptiori animo colendam alliciantur Christi*

*fideles, signum aliquod externum, indulgentiis aliisque gratis auctum quodque sit rei proprium ipsis dare necesse, de die in diem, magis sentiunt praedictae Congregationis Alumni. Quapropter a S. V. postulant, ut ipsis concedatur communicatio privilegiorum Congregationis Clericorum regularium quos Theatinos vocant, circa scapulare caerulei coloris, vulgo de Immaculata Conceptione dictum. »*<sup>28</sup>

In all humility, we claim that this is the most definite and decisive of the texts which treat of our Marian devotion and apostolate.

Let us take one more passage, an important one. It is a paragraph from the last testament of Mgr. de Mazenod.

*« I implore God in his mercy to grant me, through the merits of His Divine Son Jesus Christ, in whom I place all my confidence, pardon of my sins, and the favour of being admitted into heaven at the hour of my death. I invoke for these same ends the intercession of the Blessed and Immaculate Virgin Mary, Mother of God, presuming in doing so to remind her in all humility and tenderest confidence, of my filial devotedness towards her during my whole life, and of my constant desire to cause her to be known and loved, and of my wish to propagate devotion towards her everywhere, through the ministry of those whom the Church has given me as spiritual sons. »*<sup>29</sup>

The last General Chapter, that of 1947, adhered, like all its predecessors, to the spirit of the Founder, and truly summed up his mind when it declared:—

*« In obsequium erga Immaculatam Conceptionem Beatæ Mariæ Virginis, perpetua vota emittens album scapulare, imagine Beatæ Mariæ Virginis Immaculatæ*

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<sup>28</sup> Manuscript Circular of the Founder; 2nd February, 1857. General Archives.

<sup>29</sup> From a copy in the General Archives. Translation by Rev. R. Cooke, O.M.I. in his «Sketches», Vol. II, p. 405.

*ornatum, semper deferendum, simul ac Crucifixi effigiem, vocationis, suae vexillum, accipiet.* » (Acta Capitulum Generalium, 1949, No 133).

Let us analyse these quotations as we did those of the Rule; the dominant ideas in them will have a powerful and inspiring influence on our whole life.

1. There is a special consecration of each and every Oblate to the Blessed Virgin:— « ... *to be consecrated to her in a very special way...* » and « ... *to be consecrated to God under the patronage of Mary.* »

2. The Blessed Virgin Mary is our *Mother*

3. The Blessed Virgin Mary is our *Queen*.

4. The Blessed Virgin Mary is our *Protector*. Our title gives us a « ... *right... to the protection of her who is all-powerful with God.* »

5. The Blessed Virgin Mary is the *Mediatrice* of « ... *all the graces which her divine Son authorizes her to bestow* » on us.

6. The name—Oblates of Mary—is « ... *a mark of predestination* » and « ... *a passport to heaven.* »

7. The name—Oblates of Mary Immaculate—is a title of glory.

8. Devotion to Mary Immaculate flourished in our Institute from its very foundation; « *Above all else, let us all renew our devotion to the Most Blessed Virgin Mary... we were not doing justice to our Mother, our Queen...* »

9. Our title, and all that necessarily accompanies it, should fill our lives with a great and holy joy; « *Let us rejoice... to bear her name and livery.* »

10. We should have a very special devotion to Mary Immaculate.

11. We are the « *picked troops* » of Mary Immaculate.

12. We ought to lead the people to a great knowledge and love of Mary Immaculate.

13. One of the special ends of our Congregation is to establish and spread the cult of the Blessed Virgin,

with emphasis on her privilege of Immaculate Conception.

14. All our works ought to be placed under her protection.

15. We should invoke her aid, particularly in the work of training seminarists, and more particularly, in training our own scholastics.

16. All our members should have a deep interior devotion to Mary « ... *in their ... hearts...* » (Article 10).

17. We should keep Mary always before our eyes in the intimacy of Community life; she is the model in the regulation of our behaviour towards each other.

Dear Fathers and Brothers, we have presented some passages from our Rules and from the writings of our holy Founder. We believe you will find in them, as we have found, that the love and imitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary Immaculate are an essential part of our vocation. Can anyone accuse us of exaggeration when we assert that, in these documents, there is exposed to us a vast treasury of spiritual wealth? Doubtless, some would prefer a synthesis, methodically arranged, with its logical arguments crushingly convincing. But, there is no need for a treatise. The Founder could have written one; would it have revealed to us his mind and heart with greater clarity, greater precision? His words are not obscure, every thought is expressed in clear-cut terms. Is anything more needed? It has always been clearly understood in the Congregation that without sustained devotion to our Immaculate Mother, without constant recourse to her aid, and without a serious effort to imitate all her virtues, our vocation must remain ineffective and unfulfilled. Our predecessors have bequeathed to us a Marian tradition, a symposium of devout practices inspired by the Rule, and these form the golden pattern of our life of consecration to Mary, to Mary Immaculate. Let us follow in their footsteps. Let us, in our turn, enrich this tradition of filial love for our sinless Mother.

If we do this we shall speedily understand why and how we should live our Oblate way of life in intimate union with Mary Immaculate. Within us, her voice will speak in earnest and urgent tones, guiding us in the characteristic Oblate way of life which we have tried to describe with its impressive beauty and attractive obligations.

In the first part of this Circular, we showed that the distinguishing mark of the Oblate is a spirit of complete consecration, of absolute engagement, and we based our argument on our holy Rules and on the writings of our Founder. Now, we desire to consider this spirit in its sacred source, to behold this complete Oblation lived, and lived to perfection, in Jesus our divine Master, and Mary our Immaculate Mother. Divine Providence has given us these Exemplars and opened up the way for us to follow them.

It is not necessary to repeat what we have said above of our Divine Exemplar, Jesus Christ. He, the first of all, lived the life of Oblation, of total self-sacrifice, lived it « *even unto death* ».

We assume all that present to your minds as we offer now what we have to say on Mary, the Immaculate Mother of God and of men, and, as our venerated Founder loved to assert, particularly the Mother of us Oblates. It is by the will of God that Mary has been placed at the very centre of the Mystery of Jesus Christ and that she is the royal way which leads to the Redeemer—« *Via quae ducit ad Jesum Christum Immaculata.* »

As we said in the opening paragraph of this Circular, our desire is to lead you, as far as lies in our power, to a more enlightened knowledge of, and a more fervent love for the Mother of Mercy whom the Church has bequeathed to us in a very special manner.<sup>30</sup> In the

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<sup>30</sup> Apostolic Letter of Pope Leo XII. *Constitutions and Rules*, 1945, p. 230.

school of Mary we shall comprehend much more fully how sublime, and how marvellously fruitful is the vocation which dedicates us completely, in union with Jesus and Mary, to the fulfilment of God's plans. As it is the privilege of our vocation that it is grafted, so to speak, on that of Mary Immaculate, we shall outline the great facts of the Mystery of Mary as God has revealed them. We must remind you of some principles of Marian theology, but we shall do no more than state them briefly, hoping that our theologians will develop and amplify this subject as it deserves.<sup>31</sup>

By pride, the creature tries in countless ways to put himself on a level with God: the history of man, not less the history of our own times, records his repeated aberrations of mind and heart. Against all this, Mary Immaculate has been raised up by God; He has appointed her to oppose it, to oppose it victoriously by the radiance of her spotless holiness, by the influence of her maternal heart, by the power which is hers because of her co-operation with Jesus Christ in the work of Redemption; she is the new Eve as Christ is the new and divine Adam.

The role of Mary in the Church has been willed by God from all eternity, and, as human history unfolds itself, we see that under the guidance of Christ, the mission of Mary stands out more clearly in our own day. So much so that the present age is often spoken of as « The Age of Mary », « The Marian Era ». Furthermore, we are certain that man's consciousness of Mary's mission, far from diminishing, will become deeper and stronger, to the great good of mankind and the increasing glory of our holy Mother. Think of Mary's frequent and world famous apparitions, and the divine

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<sup>31</sup> You will understand our desire not to burden the text with references, and you will see at once that we are drawing from reliable sources the traditional teaching of the Church.

exhortations and instructions which have accompanied them. Think of the extraordinary events in many widely separated countries, and among many different races of mankind, when Mary's statue has been escorted in honour throughout the length and breadth of the land. It certainly seems that Mary herself visited these peoples, that her divine influence turned their thoughts to heavenly things. She has touched the hearts even of those whose only interest was their temporal welfare. In recent times, we have witnessed the Consecration of the Human Race to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, and we have seen her Assumption into Heaven proclaimed as a dogma by Pope Pius XII. Do not all these events force us to realize that the most holy and most loving hearts of Jesus and Mary are closely united in sending forth fresh beams of light and love to save and sanctify our sorely distracted and disordered world?

Again, as often as the struggle between the children of light and the powers of darkness has risen to some tremendous climax, it was never by human means alone that evil was overcome. It was by the power of God, always exercised through Mary Immaculate, that victory was achieved, for she is the Victor who overcomes heresy and crushes the head of the infernal serpent. This is the traditional teaching, even if our words are not exactly those of the biblical text.

Who then is Mary, this Immaculate Virgin occupying such a place in the supernatural order? You do not need to be told the answer; nevertheless, in honour of our Mother, let us recall some elementary truths.

Mary is unique in that she is *the only creature absolutely pure*, no shadow of sin ever touched her soul. She is indeed «full of grace», and, from the first moment of her existence, surpasses all human and angelic holiness.

Mary is thus endowed because God chose her to be the Mother of the Word Incarnate and of the Mystical

Body. Because God chose her, He endowed her with every grace so that she could freely consent to the divine Maternity, so that she could truly co-operate in establishing the present economy of salvation—the Incarnation, the Redemption, the distribution of grace and the divine government of the world.

God has thus set Mary at the very centre of the supernatural order to be fully associated with Jesus Christ in the whole work of Redemption. So intimately is she linked with Him, that what is affirmed of Christ can be affirmed also of Mary, the « *Socia Christi* ». Not a single grace comes to us, not even the least supernatural movement stirs our souls, without the intervention of this sublime artisan of our salvation.

In summarizing thus the grandeur of Mary Immaculate, we do not forget for a moment that Jesus Christ, the God-Man, and He alone, is absolutely the first principle and the one perfect Mediator of the New Covenant. Mary is Immaculate only because she is the first to be redeemed by God Incarnate and because redemptive grace, in all its plenitude, was applied to her in a way that is unique. She concurs in our redemption only because she receives from our Saviour the power to do so.

While it is true that Mary's greatness does not come from herself, it is equally beyond dispute that, dependently on Christ, she has a unique place in God's plans. By His positive disposition, she is the new Eve, standing beside the new Adam, « a help like unto himself ». Even though she is secondary to Christ, she is a plenitude of grace, of life, of mediation, of love and of immolation. From this point of view, is she not justly styled the treasury; the source even, of saving grace: « *Fons divini amoris Immaculate* »! We shall never sound the full depths of this divine plan; God, in His goodness and mercy, has wished to take root, as it were, in Mary, and then to come forth to us from her mo-

therly heart. Mary Immaculate is the bridge by which we go to God, because she is the creature who has given God to us.

Dear Fathers and Brothers, Mary Immaculate is the most exquisite manifestation of divine love. You must allow us to insist on this point. We exhort you to devote to it deep and sustained thought. You will find in it the secret of a fruitful apostolate in these difficult days; you will find in it the secret of a continually developing personal holiness.

Let us realize that God has willed to establish a regime in which Jesus Christ and Mary Immaculate, His Mother and ours, constitute a *single and complete principle of all supernatural life*.

It is not the will of our Saviour Jesus Christ to produce the fruits of Redemption in souls which remain purely passive, souls whose co-operation goes no further than some vague faith or trust in Him. One might say that, by a supreme gesture of goodness, God shows His confidence in us, He wills to associate us in the redemptive task undertaken by His divine Son. He wishes us to take part in that task, acting in concert with Christ. Herein is the real bearing of the Incarnation, it incorporates each and every one of us into the Word made flesh.

There is another truth we should keep well in mind. By virtue of this spiritual unity, of which He is the centre, all our lives have been gathered up into the life of Christ; He lived our lives in expiation, to purify and sanctify them, to make them God-like. And He did so that we, in turn, might live our lives purified, sanctified, and made God-like. We are to do this by personal union with Christ our Redeemer; united to Him—in His life, in His passion, on His cross, in His death, in His resurrection, in His ascension, in His triumphant life in heaven. This is a great mystery, the

divine mystery of the solidarity of the whole human race in Jesus Christ and with Jesus Christ.

Here again, the Virgin Mary Immaculate comes before our admiring gaze, appearing, we might almost say, as the human expression of the divine Heart. In the Incarnation, Jesus remains God. His Mother, Mary, although she is the Mother of God, remains a daughter of man. And, nevertheless, our faith forces us to see her as a perfect co-worker with the Redeemer. She accepted the proposals of God; she clasped the hand of her divine Son, not only to allow herself to be led to the foot of the cross, but also, in a way, to lead Him there, and to immolate the love which her maternal heart has for this Son whose will she has always made her will.

Why did Mary act thus? What led Mary forward to what appears to us to be the ultimate depth of suffering? It is precisely her « sense » of God, her deep penetration into the mystery of love, her urgent desire that this mystery achieve its fulfilment, and lastly, Mary understood thoroughly her special and unique mission.

When she gave her consent to the Incarnation, she saw herself suddenly become the bearer, the « container » of God; in the same moment, she saw herself the bearer of all mankind, all mankind was represented in her. And it was as the representative of all that she was invited to co-operate with God. In God's plan, here is Mary's relation to us; she takes our place, she acts in our stead; by her, mankind has furnished a body for God; by her act, mankind is rehabilitated before God and has regained its original orientation; in her, we discover in all its fulness the message of divine love.

How greatly we would profit, dear Fathers and Brothers, by pondering in our hearts the Mystery of Mary our Mother. We would increase our understanding of significant and important truths—our incorporation with

Christ; our dignity, restored in and by Him; the whole wide range of divine love which again embraces us in ways of mercy beyond our power to describe. Divine love stoops to humanity in all its wretchedness, man does not recoil from the approach of love, but it is in Mary Immaculate that the union of the two is effected. Let us once grasp this truth, and it will be almost impossible for us to go astray.

This is the role which Divine Providence assigns to Mary in the actual economy of salvation and she alone can play this part. What should be our reaction to all this? As we are the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, should we not admire and adore, and, with all the love of our hearts, enter into the ineffable plan of Divine Love? What else could we do than conform our whole spiritual life and our entire apostolate to the designs of Infinite Wisdom and Goodness? We make bold to say that the words of Christ on the cross—« *Ecce Mater tua* »—are addressed to each one of us more particularly than to the generality of men. Similarly, what is said of the beloved disciple John, should be particularly applicable to each one of us—« *Accepit eam discipulus in sua* »—so that Mary may, in fact dwell with us.

Such then, we declare the mission of Mary. And she fulfils her mission whether we reflect on it or not: just as our heavenly Father dwells in our souls whether we advert to it or not; just as Jesus Christ is spiritually and sacramentally present in the oratory of our Community even though hours and days may pass without our heart offering Him the least salutation.

Moreover, if it be true of every priest, it is especially true of us Oblates that, in our priestly lives, we should be vividly aware of Mary. Does not our Rule oblige to have towards her « *a special devotion* », does it not declare our spiritual sonship, and that we should always look up to her as our « *beloved Mother* »? Would it

not be incomprehensible if an Oblate should forget or ignore the existence and the influence of her who is his Mother, his special Protector? If nowadays, even the simple faithful, when confessing, cannot find an excuse for their indifference, what justification could be attempted by a son of Mary Immaculate if he has not reverently studied the life and example of this perfect model, if he has closed his heart to the inspiring lessons she would teach him?

If it be true of any of us that our lives are monotonously mediocre, that our priestly labours bear little or no fruit, that God does not find us pliant instruments of His divine purposes, that instead of bringing joy to the Church and to Mary and to Jesus, we put them to shame, if this be true of any of us, what is the cause of our terrible unworthiness? The answer is, a lack of intimate union with Mary, and a consequent lack of intimate union with Christ and with God.

If we are to live more and more for God, for Christ and for Mary must we not begin by living with Mary, with Christ and with God. And if we are no longer concerned to live for God, if He is a remote being whom we know only in some vague, confused way, will our hearts ever be moved to the unreserved devotion of ourselves to the most difficult tasks and missions?

Our first duty then, is to cultivate an intense awareness of the maternal function of Mary Immaculate and of the mission which Divine Providence has given her. She is the Mother of the God-Man, the Redeemer, and, as the Mother of Men, she co-operates in every phase of the work of Redemption. Throughout our lives, we should see to it that in all things we act in union with Mary, for God, for Christ, and for souls.

Once again, the religious life of our souls can and should be increasingly based upon direct intimacy with the God of love. As a means to this intimacy, we must seek, first of all, union with Mary Immaculate.

She is the easy means, the effective, the marvellous, the divine means; she is the Mother given us by God, to watch over our childish helplessness, and to lead us to a wholly supernatural life in which we live for Christ and for God, with Christ and with God. Do we not, in fact, proclaim this every day when we say: « *O Domina mea, ... vitam et finem vitae meae tibi committo; ut per tuam sanctissimam intercessionem, et per tua merita, omnia mea dirigantur et disponantur opera secundum tuam tuique Filii voluntatem.* »

If we have forgotten it, let us remind ourselves that the Blessed Virgin, united to Jesus in glory, knows each one of us intimately for she shares in God's infinite knowledge; she loves each one of us individually for she shares in God's infinite love; she is able to accomplish all things for she shares in God's infinite power; and thus endowed, she fulfils her mission as a divine Mother whose immense love embraces each and every member of the entire human family. In Mary, the mystery of divine love is revealed to us, and we can appreciate it more easily when we see it exercised through the universal Mother. We see her heart made God-like, we renew our faith and admiration, and we open our hearts more lovingly to the influence of her heart in order to repay the great love that is bestowed on us. How shall we ever realize fully the boundless love of our Mother for us, and the infinite love of God for us who are the children of Her who is also His Mother? With ever increasing conviction, we should repeat: « *O Domina mea.* »

In due proportion, these remarks are applicable to all Christians who possess at least some degree of fervour, and especially applicable to all those consecrated as priests and apostolic workers. No person or group within the Church can monopolize our Blessed Lady.

Nevertheless, while we may not attempt to appropriate her exclusively to ourselves, our relation to her

is something special, something proper to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. We should be completely absorbed in the Mystery of Mary, our mind, our heart, our whole life; and in this we should surpass all the other sons of Mary. This is the way we must follow if we are to live adequately our total dedication to the service of Christ and of souls. It is from this point of view that Mary is for us the « *Exemplar totius perfectionis Immaculatum* ». We must therefore examine in greater detail how Mary Immaculate is specially related to her Oblates, and how they should be correspondently related to her.

According to the mind of our venerated Founder, and according to the traditions of our Congregation, Mary is for us the Immaculate one in the fullest sense of these words. Mary is holy in her sinlessness, in her supreme hatred of sin, in her implacable enmity towards the evil serpent, in her absolute disassociation from the struggles of the flesh against the spirit and the spirit against God. Mary wishes to radiate all this holiness, first in us, and then through us, in others. In Mary Immaculate, there is no compromise with whatever is opposed to God, she is filled with the holiness of God, she is totally and perfectly consecrated to God, so that no other human creature belongs so radically and completely to God. Since we are the apostles of the Immaculate one, we must never, in any way, come to terms with any kind of evil. And it is our evident duty to wage relentless war against the empire of sin, to overthrow it wherever it is established.

The world, alas, is overrun by sin. The minds of countless men are led astray by falsehood wearing an attractive garb. This was true in the time of our Founder also, and the Preface shows how deeply he lamented it. If he were to return and regard the world in which we live, would he need to alter what he wrote then? To-day, sin finds its way even into the company of those who are consecrated to God, who

are vowed to the pursuit of Divine Love, vowed to complete holiness; sin finds its way even into the priested souls of those who preach the Gospel. Because of this, there is a deplorable falling away; in many, there is a saddening decline of the supernatural; even the holier men find themselves shaken, or at least, worried, uncertain, hesitant. And sad to say, our own Congregation does not escape this widespread scourge.

We must react against this; first, in order to safeguard ourselves, and secondly, to re-conquer the souls of those who are immersed in a pagan or paganized environment. But we cannot react against it unless we are endowed with the strength and the power which flow from the all-pure Mary Immaculate. No other way is possible, this is God's way, He has decreed the reign of the Immaculate Heart of our Mother along with the reign of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

We are Oblates of Mary Immaculate, we ought to live up to our title by an intensifying union with the Immaculate one who is so particularly our Mother; and, we ought to realize, that perfect purity, the purity which elevates our lower nature by subjecting it to the higher, this perfect purity is a necessity if we are to live in union with Mary, and with her, to fight the forces of evil.

If Mary had not been conceived without sin, she would not have been the fulfilment of God's promise that a virgin's foot would crush the serpent's head, she would not have triumphed completely over sin. Unless there is a continuous spiritualization of our whole being, we shall never fight successfully against sin in ourselves or in others. To save souls who are plunged in an abyss of sin; to entice, to drag them from the downward path which leads to hell; here is a task beyond our power unless we are absorbed in the most pure life of Mary herself.

As we Oblates are consecrated to Mary Immaculate,

we ought to be the shock-troops of the great army of chosen souls who strive to establish the Kingdom of God. This was the Founder's idea of his «humble Congregation», in the line of fire, but invested with the spirit of Mary's holiness, and this is our armour. Mary's attitude to sin is the attitude of our religious family; let us hold fast to this mentality. It cannot be too strongly stressed that we shall never achieve the ends of our Congregation unless we are truly pure and humble and filled with divine love as is our perfect Exemplar, Mary Immaculate. In no other way can we bring men to see the compelling charm of Mary's sinlessness. If we are one with her in purity and holiness, truly we shall take part in the redemption of souls, we shall continue the work of our merciful Redeemer, our every word and act will prove to men that the infinite beauty and goodness of God are preferable to evil, even in its most attractive form.

If you reflect seriously on this, you will be moved by its truth, and yet, you may feel forced to ask what bond can there be between wretched sinners like ourselves and Mary, who is supremely sinless. You may wonder, as some of the faithful do, how can Mary be our model, our exemplar, when she is so far above us by her privileged and unique greatness. At first sight, this seems a difficult problem, but it is not insoluble. That we belong completely to Christ, our divine Exemplar, does not summon us to become equal to Him: so too, our consecration to Mary does not pledge us to attain the supreme heights of holiness in which she dwells Immaculate. We must not be mistaken on this point. Consider it well, and you will be saved disturbing and useless questioning; keep it well in mind, and it will give you the confidence so necessary to your daily and hourly effort to rise above your natural state, and all the while, you will advance in holiness with your eyes fixed on her who is the supreme model. «*Trahe nos, Virgo Immaculata.*»

There is, dear Fathers and Brothers, another reflection which is a great help to us. Mary Immaculate becomes effectively the attractive ideal of holiness when we realize that there is this bond between her and ourselves, namely, that she also needed to be rescued from the wretchedness of original sin.

Of a certainty, from the first moment of her existence, she has always possessed the fulness of grace, so she has never known the misery of contact with sin. But, it is still true that the first of all the graces she received, the fulness of grace, her Immaculate Conception, this grace she owes to her Son inasmuch as He is her merciful Redeemer. As a *daughter of Adam*, the original sinner, she would have come into the world bearing the stain of original sin. That wretchedness hung over her as over us. To preserve her completely from this stain, to establish her as the Immaculate one instead of one destitute of grace and needing a subsequent restoration to grace, to do this demanded the intervention of the Divine Redeemer, it demanded a special loving preference of His Divine Heart, it demanded the effective exercise of His infinite mercy.

At the very moment of her conception, the fullest fruits of Redemption were applied to the soul of Mary, which means that she, too, needed to be redeemed; this is true of her as it is of us, this she has in common with us and with all the children of Adam. She to whom God has given the greatest graces, she who is the recipient of divine mercy in its highest and most perfect exercise, she was conscious and is conscious throughout eternity that she has to thank God and to proclaim the ineffable mysteries which He wrought in her, His humble servant: « *My soul doth magnify the Lord... He that is mighty hath done great things to me.* » Mary Immaculate has been redeemed in every perfection; her Immaculate Conception is the first fruit which grew on the tree of the Cross, a delicious fruit of the merciful redemption accomplished by Jesus

Christ. When Mary beholds our misery, her loving heart is moved, is filled with compassionate sympathy for us because she knows that her own sinlessness is entirely due to a special act of infinite mercy. Does not this relate Mary more closely to us? Does not this help us to realize that Mary is not, never has been, and never will be, a creature whose holiness erects an impassable barrier between her and us? The brilliance of her purity can never mean that the rest of humanity is left to dwell disconsolate in the dark land of sin. That Mary is Immaculate is due to the infinite mercy of God, and although she is raised so far above us, she too is a child of Adam, it is from amongst us that she has been chosen, « *Rosa inter spinas Immaculata.* »

Even if God asked from you nothing more than to work for the salvation of your own soul, you would still find in Mary the finished and perfected type of holiness, and God desires to fashion each one of us so that we resemble her as closely as possible. Contemplation of this perfect model, frequent meditation on this masterpiece of divine mercy would inspire us all: we would see the justification for boundless confidence in God, we would realize His infinite love and goodness towards ourselves, we would discover God afresh, and be able to give ourselves completely to Him. Mary would become truly the cause of our joy in God, the motive for unbounded confidence in Him and a divine promise of salvation: « *Causa nostrae laetitiae, Causa fidei Immaculata, Signum certissimum nostrae salutis Immaculatum.* »

This beautiful doctrine is powerful to lift up the human soul and make it God-like, but, dear Fathers and Brothers, it does not exhaust the significance of the Immaculate Conception. Mary's unique privilege does not mark the limits of the merciful bounty of God. From all eternity, God has wished the all pure, the privileged Virgin to be the perfect *Mother* also. And here, we may fittingly remark that there is

something strikingly providential in a vocation which devotes us to the Immaculate Virgin herself, rather than to any one of the privileges or mysteries of Mary. In the Founder first of all, and then in our Oblate traditions, we find that she who is so lovingly and eagerly proclaimed as the Patron, the Queen, the Protector of Oblates is Mary Immaculate; it is Mary herself, the Mother of God and of men, the Mother of all grace and goodness; the Mother in whom divine mercy first exercised itself in her Immaculate Conception so that it might dwell for ever after in her maternal heart.

Certainly, it is part of our Oblate commission to ponder and proclaim the full significance of the Immaculate Conception. Nevertheless, we would disregard the most impressive of our Marian texts if we did not observe that the emphasis is constantly placed upon *the integral Maternity of Mary*, and if we did not realize that the contemplation of Mary's Immaculate Conception constitutes, in a marvellously providential manner, a necessary prelude to the contemplation of Mary as *the Mother of God and of men*.

Mary's conceptional holiness, an act of the infinitely merciful God, was a prodigious outpouring of grace into the soul of a creature. But, in God's plan, it was more than that. It was also a preparation for something more wonderful; it was the first step towards her vocation of *Motherhood*, and be it noted that when Mary was invited to become the Mother of the Redeemer, she was also invited to co-operate with Him in the work of Redemption. In short, the vocation of Mary Immaculate is not so much that she enjoy for herself the infinite mercy of God, but rather that she transmit it to others; a supremely apostolic vocation by which the merciful love of God reaches out to us, this time through the heart of a Mother. Mary Immaculate means, in fact, that man is offered divine love in its

most compelling form. For mankind, Mary is essentially *the Mother*, sorrowful in her earthly life, glorious in her heavenly life, but always the good, the merciful, the all-powerful Mother.

See then, how the contemplation of the Immaculate Conception leads us straight to the heart of the divine plan for the redemption of man, to the mystery of the redemptive Incarnation which God has wrought for no other reason than His love and goodwill for man. What a privilege then is ours! We are vowed and dedicated to live this mystery that is Mary Immaculate, to live it completely in mind and conduct, by contemplation and by our apostolate.

Dear Fathers and Brothers, as Missionaries, we are the special apostles, the specialists of divine mercy. But, we shall never properly understand this specialization unless we keep in mind the remarkable way in which we belong to Mary Immaculate. Only thus shall we gradually develop the most characteristic trait of the Oblate, a whole-hearted and heartfelt sympathy for the souls who are most wretched of all. The purity learned and practised in the school of Mary Immaculate will urge us to the conquest of the souls who are most neglected and contaminated by sin. The contemplation of the Immaculate one will fill our hearts with an apostolic and ceaseless desire to bring men to a true appreciation of the merciful God who wishes to receive the repentant sinner.

We must make a careful and profound and loving study of the divine plan for man's salvation and the supernatural life of the soul, so that we may live in harmony with it, so that we may make its enlightening power felt in the Church and also in the world of men wherever our vocation sends us.

Let each one of us labour to acquire a theological and affective knowledge of our Immaculate Mother Mary; to know every one of her mysteries, to know

her supreme dignity, her fulness of grace and of holiness and of virtue; to know her transcendent mission, her most merciful Motherhood which is the link uniting her so closely to Jesus that together they may establish the reign of everlasting love.

∨ The Sacred Heart of Jesus, infinite mercy incarnate; the Immaculate Heart of Mary, infinite mercy manifested and exercised by the loving heart of a mother; it is in these that we are privileged to find our Oblate vocation. This is the meaning of the words of Pope Leo XII, in the official charter of our establishment... « *We firmly hope that the members of this holy Family... who claim as their patroness, the Virgin Mother of God conceived without sin, will strive with all their strength and especially by their example, to bring back to the bosom of the Mother of Mercy those men, whom Jesus Christ on His Cross willed to give her as sons.* »

We must train ourselves to live habitually the whole mystery of Jesus Christ who is God and Redeemer, the life of souls and of the Church and of the world: we must live this mystery in intimate union with Mary Immaculate who is our own Mother in a very special way. In all their fulness, these supernatural realities must fill our lives; consequently, we must be a Marian family, conducting a Marian apostolate, and all this according to the true meaning of the doctrine stated above.

As far as we can, let us go into the details of this programme of *Marian life proper to the Oblate*.

We are Oblates of Mary Immaculate. It is in union with Mary, our divine Mother, that we must spend our lives in the spirit of Oblation which is probably the most distinctive trait of our religious and apostolic life; and this spirit of Oblation prompts us to an enthusiastic and impulsive giving of our whole self. As we have given ourselves to this divine and Immaculate Mother, let us keep in mind who she is. It is she

who has first chosen us, along with Jesus, to be her children of predilection, her apostles, her missionaries entirely devoted to her. If we are to actualize our Oblation, to live it, we must do it by living in union with her, by living as she lives, by living for her; thus, day by day, we shall more perfectly live united to Jesus, live as He lives, and live for Him, our God of infinite love: « *Sentire cum Jesu et Maria.* »

We must live *with* Mary Immaculate. Since she is our Mother and we are her loving and beloved children, she should be ever in our mind and heart. We are Mary's priests, and, in imitation of St John, we will look up to her as to our beloved Mother. (Article 257). In the pulpit, in the confessional, in our relations with others, in all our works, and most of all by our prayers and sacrifices, we will be apostles of Mary, ever seeking to make her more and more known and esteemed and loved by men: « Our members... must ever foster in their own hearts, and promote among the faithful, a special devotion to this heavenly Patroness and Mother. » (Article 10).

Leaving out of consideration special graces and special devotions, it is evident that our life *with* Mary is not to be measured by the number of Aves or rosaries that we recite. We should, of course, say the rosary every day as the Rule prescribes. (Article 258). But our life with Mary is more than any devotional practice or set of practices. It is a union of hearts, the special devotion of Article 257; a life-long union which pervades our religious, priestly, and missionary life; an intimate union such as is portrayed in those beautiful prayers we say daily — « *O Domina mea* », and « *O Jesu vivens in Maria.* »

Living with Mary, we must *live as Mary lives*. It seems to us that she says to her Oblates: — Look upon me; in me, you will see what God loves and what He wishes to find in you. See my virginal holiness —

*Domus pudicæ castitatis Immaculata; Puritas Virginum Immaculata.* See my complete self-abasement before Him whose humble servant I am — *Regula perfectissimæ obedientiæ Immaculata.* See my life with Him, poor and unknown to the world; see my complete subservience to all His desires; see how I immolated myself in union with His self-immolation; see, above all, my love which bears the closest possible resemblance to His divine love — *Fons divini amoris Immaculate.* All this I will help you to reproduce in your life if you will live with me. I will help you to live it with ever growing generosity. I will help you to live as I live, to re-live my life, and I will enable you to accept and use all the graces my Son has destined for you — *Exemplar totius perfectionis Immaculatum.*

This, dear Fathers and Brothers, is what we have undertaken by our *Oblation*, and our *Oblation* is the most perfect form of Marian *Consecration*.

It is through love for Mary, our divine Mother, that we shall be faithful to our sacred undertaking. To love her, to serve her, to strive with every faculty to become like her in the way we have just described, this is what she asks of us.

And if we do this, then we shall truly labour to make known and loved and served and glorified this Immaculate Virgin, the Mother of God, our Mother, the Queen of the whole world: «*They... will leave nothing undone to make the faithful most fervently and trustfully devout to this Immaculate Virgin, the Most Holy Mother of God.*» (Article 258).

As we have already pointed out, every apostolate ought to be Marian, since the end of the apostolate is to bring supernatural life to souls and to bring souls to God that they may share His eternal beatitude — *Porta cœlestis Jerusalem Immaculata.*

Let it be our constant aim, dear Oblates, to be united to Mary Immaculate, our divine Mother, in every phase of our apostolate; always bringing into the souls of men their Mother, Mary Immaculate. If we keep to this, He who is mighty will continue to do great things through Mary in us, great things which no human zeal or skill could ever accomplish.

Shall we detail the principal acts of our Marian apostolate?

The first act of our Marian apostolate will be to love souls with a divine love; and we have received this example from our holy Founder. It will necessarily mean suffering in union with Jesus and Mary, for their love for sinners caused them to grieve for the sins and offences committed against the God of love. This is the first act of that true redeeming love for poor souls which Jesus and Mary wish to establish in the heart of the true apostle as it was established in their own hearts. And we find this love displayed in our Rules: «*They are willing, if need be, to give their lives for the salvation of souls.*» (Preface).

The second act of our Marian apostolate will be to *pray for sinners*. During their earthly life, the loving Hearts of Jesus and Mary were constantly engaged in fervent supplication: their Hearts are similarly moved in heaven, and Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament of the altar still intercedes for sinners. So too, our prayer for sinners must be sustained. Here again, we are instructed by our Rule: «*Each missionary... will pray every day for the people to whom he is soon to preach the Gospel.*» (Article 22). «*Finally, the missionary, fearing lest his preaching might be in vain, will pray and get others to pray to the Divine Master of hearts, to deign to accompany the words of this minister with that powerful grace, which moves and converts, and without which all words are but as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal.*» (Article 117). Article 144, 155 and 777 express the same idea.

Humble, fervent, confident prayer will so unite us to Jesus and Mary that our prayers will certainly be granted, while those who are confident of their own powers and those who neglect to pray, will labour in vain.

Let us foster this unshakable confidence which will obtain everything from divine goodness, but always united to Jesus and always united to Mary the *all-powerful* suppliant. If we do so, our power and courage will so steadily increase that we shall be able to face every difficulty that arises in the course of ministry: « *Causa nostrae fidei Immaculata.* » We shall eventually reach the stage where nothing will daunt us in our efforts to promote the interests of God, of Jesus, and of Mary. We shall be able to undertake anything or everything entirely heedless of self, in the spirit of the Preface to our holy Rules. To be occupied and preoccupied with self is to render our apostolate useless. In the school of Mary we shall learn to forget self.

The essence of a true apostolate is to spread abroad, in union with Jesus and Mary, the merciful grace of the good God. One *acts* according to what one *is*. We can act efficaciously in divine things only if our lives give clear and splendid proof that we ourselves are pure and holy and loving and merciful as was our divine Saviour: « ..all should be convinced that it is easier to achieve this end by example than by words. Hence, all will carefully bear in mind that *they should practice all the virtues*, and not be unacquainted with any of them. » (Article 93). « In a word, they will, in imitation of Christ, *spread abroad everywhere the fragrance of his amiable virtues.* » (Article 290).

We must *live* the ideal which we hold up to others; they must see that ideal realized in us; we must « ..*make it evident that our hearts have long cherished the words which issue from our lips, and that we begin to practise, before attempting to teach.* » (Article 98). There is only one thing that can impress the minds and hearts of

those who confusedly seek the meaning of life, and it is to show them divine truth actually lived by a human being like themselves; they must see in our lives a complete affirmation of divine truth and all the supernatural values producing marvellous fruits of holiness. Without this, sermons and carefully prepared arguments are useless; the people will recognize us as mere spinners of words. Evidently we must teach the Gospel truth, but it is equally evident that we must first live with an ever increasing fulness the life of Jesus Christ and share the spiritual parenthood which Mary Immaculate so mercifully exercises. We must renounce all things to do this, we must be « *willing, if need be, to give* » our « *lives for the salvation of souls.* » When we are ready to give this *supreme testimony*, then we shall draw men to God and eternal salvation.

Over and over again, we should remind ourselves of our solemn obligation to bear witness to supernatural realities by our lives, « *We are made a spectacle to the world and... to men.* » (I Cor. IV, 9). The Preface says that « *We must spare no effort... to give men, first of all understanding, then Christian piety...* ». Without understanding, without a « *sense* », an awareness of God; without love for Christ the Saviour; without recourse to their divine, merciful and Immaculate Mother, men cannot be saved and sanctified. And therefore, we, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, we above all others should give the world the witness of lives that are divine, evangelical, and wholly absorbed in Mary.

It is necessary that our Marian spirituality and apostolate should be based on a wide and deep doctrinal knowledge. It is to be desired that in every Scholasticate the treatise « *De Beata Virgine Maria* » should be expounded fully and should be studied with great care. Surely, this treatise should have a very special place in the course of studies! Is it not the theological foundation of our piety and our apostolic life? Possibly it is simply

put on a level with all the other tracts because the whole theological course is considered somewhat « dry ». Among the various treatises which must be studied, are there not some which are of less importance than Mariology? Surely, then, our scholastics have a strict right to a good knowledge of this branch of theology. We appeal to the devotion and family piety of our Scholasticate Superiors and Professors.

We would remind all other Oblates that there is no lack of excellent books on this subject. In every Oblate library there should be a plentiful and judicious selection of these books; they should be consulted, studied, assimilated, according to the needs of each one in the course of his spiritual and apostolic work. If we have the will to do it, we can continue all through life to enlarge and deepen our study and meditation of the mystery of Mary, both in herself and in the special place which she holds in the Church.

Our Oblate periodicals should serve the needs of our Marian apostolate. Those responsible should be at pains to include articles, some doctrinal, others more affective, which treat of the Blessed Virgin. This should be done as frequently as possible; and articles should be fresh in manner and matter, keeping in mind the readers for whom they are intended. Each of these publications should be as a spotlight on Mary.

It is a great joy to us, as indeed it must be for all our members, when an Oblate publishes a book on our Immaculate Mother. We should not lag behind other Congregations. By our vocation, we are missionaries rather than writers and this partly explains why our Marian literature contains but a few works of importance. There are, indeed, other reasons for this dearth. Even so, it is well over a century since our foundation, and surely it is time for the Oblates of Mary Immaculate to be at least on a level with other religious families in offering to the Blessed Virgin

works which bear witness that our knowledge is as profound as our devotion. Does it not seem that we are not sufficiently aware of our position in the Church?

Let us never forget that one of our principal obligations is to be apostles of Mary among the souls entrusted to our care; let us always remember that it is the poor who have most need of their merciful, heavenly Mother. It would be shameful if, in this matter as well as in others, we fail to follow the mind of our Founder. It was for the poor that he established the Congregation and throughout his life his preference was for the ministry among the most abandoned.

Thanks to the Blessed Virgin herself, each of our Provinces is favoured with the guardianship of at least one shrine of our Lady. Some of these shrines are local, some are national; and they fulfil a holy purpose in bringing the people under the sanctifying influence of Mary. The Fathers whose privilege it is to serve these shrines should be great men. As religious, as priests, as apostles, as confessors, they should be outstanding, carrying out their attractive duties with enthusiasm and devotion. By their sound teaching and deep piety, by their zealous and holy lives, let them conduct each of these supernatural centres established by Mary as a continuous Mission, a real source of regeneration and intense Christian life.

Marian spirituality and the Marian apostolate ought to dominate not only the life of each individual Oblate, but also, as far as possible, the life of each Community and the life of the entire Congregation. Those who hold authority in the Congregation will know to advance towards this end.

In the name of all that we hold sacred, let us be faithful to the Marian traditions of our religious family for they are a reliable guide to personal and Community holiness. If need be, let us enrich our traditions by finding fresh ways of proclaiming our faith in Mary

and manifesting anew our filial love for her. Would any Oblate ever tire of prayer and worthy praise of Mary Immaculate? Should we not take a delight in each prayer to Mary that is contained in our Oblate Manual? Let each Community unite as a family in celebrating the feast days of Mary, especially the more important feasts; let the members unite to pay her high homage and offer her their heartfelt gratitude.

We missionaries often recommend the practice of the family Rosary. Should we ourselves be less fervent than the simple faithful? Should we Oblates find this ordinary practice of piety a burden? Whenever and as often as Superiors judge it possible, we should say the Rosary in Community, meditating on the mysteries, avoiding a mere routine recital, and trying to reap the full fruits of this excellent form of devotion to Mary.

Let us also renew our esteem for the Oblate scapular which we received so joyfully when we made our Oblation — *in praesentia Beatae Virginis Mariae*. The beautiful prayers of the investment should be read affectionately on each anniversary of our Oblation and on each feast day of the Congregation. Should we not be both proud and happy to wear the livery of Mary? Should we not be led by our special devotion to Mary Immaculate, and by the remembrance of our Oblation to Mary and through Mary, to wear lovingly and constantly the scapular which reminds us that we ought to renounce all sin — *veterem hominem exuens, ab omni inquinamento mundatus*. These prayers remind us also that we should, with Mary's help, wear this sacred sign without stain of sin till we come to eternal life. This was the prayer of our Superior on the day of our Oblation — *ipsum perferas sine macula et ad vitam pervenias sempiternam* (Manual of Prayers: the Oblation). The scapular can, of course, be replaced by the scapular medal, but why not keep the form of the

scapular as we received it on the blessed and memorable day of our final Oblation?

We could make more use of our Litany of the Immaculate Conception. It is a perfect prayer, full of the Oblate's filial devotion to Mary. True, it is only for the novena that custom prescribes it, but there is no reason why we should not recite it in private and use it in our meditations. On some of our Lady's feasts, we could use it in our Community prayers instead of the other litany. It is something proper to ourselves, let us profit by it for it contains magnificent and inspiring themes. We look forward to the day when some member of the Congregation will enrich it with a good commentary, theological and apostolic, a work worthy of a son of Mary Immaculate.

Let us restore to common use the invocation — *Laudetur Jesus Christus et Maria Immaculata*. Formerly, our members used it frequently every day and this was in accordance with the « Directories » of those times. Mgr de Mazenod prized this prayer, let us imitate him.

If we Oblates have a Marian scapular of our own, we should remember that we are obliged to propagate amongst the faithful the Blue Scapular of the Immaculate Conception. This work should be one of the proofs of our devotion to Mary; such is the wish of our predecessors and it is in keeping with the spirit of our vocation. Every mission house and every Marian shrine under our care should be a centre for the spread of this form of devotion to Mary Immaculate. Other Congregations are not slow to further some special devotion to our Lord or our Lady by the widespread use of a particular statue or picture; why should we be so half-hearted about the scapular of the Immaculate Conception? It would arouse in the people a great confidence in Mary's protecting care.

When Pope Pius XI, on September 21st, 1856, gave us the faculty of imposing this scapular, he added the

power to establish the Confraternity of the Immaculate Conception.<sup>32</sup> Has full use been made of this means of making our Immaculate Mother better known and better loved?

There is another Marian scapular which suits the spirit of modern devotion, the scapular of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. We quote Mgr Dontenwill's announcement of the grant of this scapular to the Congregation, and we make his statement our own for it has the same significance to-day as when it was written.

« By an Indult of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, dated June 21st, 1920, we are authorized to give you the faculty to bless and impose the Scapular of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

« We look upon this new privilege as a grace and as a sign.

« It is a grace, coming directly from the heart of our loving Mother; once again, she shows her love for us, her confidence in us.

« It is a sign, a very clear sign that, through circumstances in which we see the working of Divine Providence, we are invited to make Mary Immaculate more widely known. From this time forward, in every Mission, in every Retreat, we should propagate, along with the Scapular of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, that of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. An additional reason for doing this is that it will place our labours under the protection of our good Mother who is the Patron of all our undertakings. Some of our Fathers never descend from the pulpit without having spoken of our Lady, they set out to be her apostles, her knights. We are happy to congratulate them, to encourage them, and to proclaim them a good example to others. The newly

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<sup>32</sup> See Manual of Prayers.

received faculty will provide both opportunity and incentive to imitate them.

« The Scapular of the Immaculate Heart of Mary is not widely known at present but its use will spread rapidly. We are honoured by the invitation to help in this movement and we would have been deeply disappointed had we had no part in it. Doubtless, you yourselves have already noticed that devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary is greatly increasing; the Scapular will further this increase, and it gives us an opportunity to associate ourselves with it.

« In order that every Father may, without delay, engage in propagating this devotion, we, by these presents, impart the power to bless and impose the Scapular of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, to every Oblate priest, to each Scholastic as soon as he is ordained priest, and to each priest who enters our Congregation as soon as he makes his first vows. »<sup>33</sup>

An important item in our Marian apostolate will be the right use of our Missionary Association of Mary Immaculate, and we spoke of this in one of our first Circulars. We know well that success is not equally attainable everywhere, but it remains true that in several Provinces which have applied themselves enthusiastically to promote the Association, it has become a powerful means of the Marian and missionary apostolate. Do not let us regard the Association as primarily a source of revenue for our Missions or houses of formation. Let us realize it is rather a sort of Third Order, although not canonically erected as such. It is, in fact, a Legion of Mary with a profoundly Oblate spirit. The Association will not attain its end unless those in charge of it are animated by a sincere desire for personal sanctification and fired with a true Oblate and supernatural zeal. Let our priests look for suitable

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<sup>33</sup> Circular, March 1st, 1932.

members, and train them as Associates to be apostles of the Blessed Virgin and willing helpers of the Congregation. Why should we neglect to shed around us the Marian spirit which should animate ourselves? What objection can be made if we communicate to other souls the wealth of our own spiritual life, particularly a deep and filial Marian devotion?

The Association is becoming more vigorous, and this is due, under God, to our zealous Provincial Directors. We rejoice at this growth, for we cannot but think that God will bless our apostolate with greater success because of the prayers and sacrifices offered for our missionaries. For this reason, we always greet the establishment of a new centre of the Association with renewed hope and consolation.

We are frequently moved by similar sentiments when, like our predecessors in office, we think of those pious souls who are more directly dedicated to prayer and sacrifice on behalf of the Oblate missionaries; we mean the members of « *L'Oeuvre Apostolique de Marie Immaculée* ». We like to think of the chapel of this little Community as the *heart* of the Missionary Association, a centre of powerful spiritual life, where, through union with Jesus and Mary, the ideal of apostolic collaboration with our Congregation attains a considerable degree of perfection. For thirty years now, the « *Apostoliques* », in spiritual union with the Oblates, have devoted themselves by prayer and sacrifice to the spiritual welfare of our Congregation. To leave this fact unrecorded, would be a grave lack of gratitude on our part. We pray God to grant this holy work the development merited by its zealous members, that it may extend its spiritual and temporal co-operation. How valuable a support it gives to our Congregation may be judged from its purpose—In union with Mary, the Co-Redemptrix, to help Jesus in His Oblate priests, particularly for their personal sanctification and the supernatural success of their apostolic works.

Like all the great apostles of Mary, we will be led by our Marian devotion to the discover of new methods of making our holy Mother known and loved. In this matter, as in many others, « We must spare no effort », « *Nihil linquendum inausum!* » It is not possible to catalogue the variety of ways in which an Oblate may be an apostle of Mary. Let each one of us be replete with the spirit of our vocation and soon we shall see the Congregation taking her rightful place among the Institutes which are most devoted to Mary and the most powerful in establishing *Her Reign of Mercy and Love*.

And now, dear Fathers and Brothers, before saying the final word, we wish to justify the considerable claims we have made on your time and attention by this lengthy Circular.

You will readily understand that whoever is Superior of a large Congregation like ours has to deal with many matters which demand immediate attention; his time is by no means at his own disposal. The thoughts we have put before you have been in our mind since the General Chapter of 1947; they could have been presented in several Circulars, issued at intervals, but the opportunity to do this was denied us. Now, we have had to include them all in one single letter. The themes we have treated are important, no one of them could have been omitted. You will note however, that some of them have been merely outlined, leaving to your intelligence and goodwill their development and application.

We claim your indulgence for whatever imperfections you may find in this letter, our concern has been the matter rather than the manner of our speaking. We have been moved by one sole desire, to remind you of the truths which are essential to the life and development of our beloved Congregation. God grant that our words may stimulate the spirit which should govern the life of every Oblate of Mary Immaculate.

The great growth of our Institute sets the seal of

God's approval on its ideal. Let each one of us preserve this ideal in all its primitive purity. Let us all return to the complete observance of our holy Rule. If we have departed from it in any way, let us be humble enough to acknowledge our fault. If we have failed to understand all that it demands of us, let us be humble enough to admit our mistake. Wherever anything opposed to the Rule has become an accepted custom, we must not be complacent, we must abolish it. All together—individual members, Communities, Provinces—let all unite in one solemn purpose, to actualize the Rule, to live it in spirit and in truth. Fail in this, and our religious family is in immediate and terrible danger. If we are not animated by the spirit of the Rule, what is the Congregation but a lifeless thing, a corpse which has already begun to decay. Let us not be blind to the fact that there are difficulties and problems in our midst. Our spiritual and apostolic progress; the religious, priestly and missionary perfection of the Congregation; these are matters of the gravest importance. Our saintly Founder was concerned about them, and we, like all our predecessors, have tried to make his strong and compelling tones speak once more in the hearts of his spiritual children. And we dare to add:— « *To-day, if you shall hear his voice, harden not your hearts.* »

Throughout the preparation of this letter, we have constantly invoked the guidance of our Immaculate Mother; now we humbly and confidently place it in her hands. May she be ever thanked for her unceasing beneficence. May she continue to protect and support us. May she maintain us all in unswerving fidelity to our holy vocation, true Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

We assure you, dear Fathers and Brothers, of our continued affection; in Jesus and Mary and our saintly Founder, we bless you with heartfelt sincerity.

LEO DESCHÂTELETS, O.M.I.  
*Superior General.*

## S U M M A R Y

**Introduction . . . . . p. 1**

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of life: its characteristic elements. . . . » 3**

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## SUPPLEMENT to reprint of CIRCULAR No 191

### CORRIGENDA

- Page 27, line 25; after « was », insert « *Father de Mazenod is to feel the urgency with which* ».
- » 33, » 28; after « ministry », insert « *He too, must have Jesus Christ ever before his eyes* ».
- » 6, » 19; for *membres*, read *members*.
- » 13, » 10; for *rectifiel*, read *rectified*.
- » 14, last line; for *the*, read *she*.
- » 17, line 30; for *hooo*, read *hood*.
- » 18, » 32; for *Howe*, read *How*.
- » 20, » 13; for *archieve*, read *achieve*.
- » 23, » 31; for *obeservance*, read *observance*.
- » 26, last line; « *From... of* » should not be in italics.
- » 30, line 6; delete first letter.
- » 31, » 25; « *first Fathers* » should be in italics.
- » 31, » 28; for *distress*, read *distresses*.
- » 34, » 8; after « *year* », insert semicolon.
- » 36, » 14; for *Obate*, read *Oblate*.
- » 95, » 4; for *caracteristic*, read *characteristic*.

NOTE. In the first issue of this Circular, the text begins on page 1; in this re-print, it begins on page 3.

