

ASSOCIATION FOR OBLATE  
STUDIES AND RESEARCH

# *Dictionary of Oblate Values*

*under the direction of*

*Fabio Ciardi* O.M.I.



MISSIONARY  
OBLATES OF MARY IMMACULATE

DICTIONARY  
OF OBLATE VALUES



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OF  
OBLATE VALUES

A collaborative work  
of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate  
under the direction of Fabio Ciardi, O.M.I.

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## FOREWORD

The charism of a religious institute is a reality of faith lived by individuals and their communities in ongoing fidelity to the gift received and interpreted by the Founder. This is done with a creative versatility so as to respond to the new missionary needs in symbiotic relationship with the growth of the Church.

The charism of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate has already been lived for 180 years from that time when, led by the Spirit, Eugene de Mazenod gathered his first companions around him at Aix in 1816. It has been the source of inspiration for thousands of Oblates from many diverse cultural environments, now working in some seventy different countries. It has also given rise to numerous Institutes of Consecrated Life, as well as attracting thousands of lay people to become collaborators in the mission of the Oblates whose values of life inspired them.

A conscious awareness of how the charism is lived fosters a better knowledge of the institute's identity. The expression of the charismatic values, seen in their original outpouring and in their historical evolution, not only enables taking root in them but also building a future on their solid foundation. Expressing these values also helps one to understand the Gospel and to grow "in personal relationship to Jesus", as we read in one of the Constitutions. The novice "comes also to contemplate God at work in the life and mission of the Founder, as well as in the Congregation's history and traditions" (C. 56). This is the goal of the Dictionary of Oblate Values – which could prove very useful to all Oblates and, in particular, for those being introduced into Oblate life and who are initiating and forming themselves to share the life and the mission that flows from the vision, daring and holiness of Eugene de Mazenod. The laity, who in ever greater numbers feel called to live this spirituality and this mission, will find inspiration here.

The Dictionary of Oblate Values has been written under the auspices of the Association for Oblate Studies and Research, an organization that officially began in 1982. It was this organization that took on responsibility for and encouraged this project that was conceived and promoted by Father Fabio Ciardi, with whom I lived for several years in the same community of formation, the Italian scholasticate.

The various articles are the end result of studies carried out for a number of years, reaching a high point in the years that followed the beatification of Eugene de Mazenod (18 October 1975) until his canonization (December 3, 1995). In this Mazenodian Year, this publication is a tribute of gratitude to the Founder who has been declared a saint by the Church. It is also a tribute to all the Oblates who, drawing their inspiration from him, have served the Church with creative fidelity. It is a harbinger and a sign of hope for the new generations of Oblates and Associates called to be co-workers with Christ in the third millennium.

*Marcello Zago, O.M.I.  
Superior General.  
Rome, January 25, 1996.*

## INTRODUCTION

A dictionary of Oblate values? Too lofty an ambition perhaps! Is it, in fact, possible to codify in a systematic fashion the lived charism of a religious community such as that of the Oblates? Is not life always in ongoing evolution? And who can capture the Spirit, the Spirit whose voice we may hear without knowing where it comes from or where it is going?

In simple terms, we would like to take note of the values that inspired and continue to inspire the Oblates: values that hark back to the origins of the Congregation and which became more sharply defined and progressively enriched as history puts them in contact with new milieus and new sensitivities, values with which we can all identify and which map out the contours of the Oblate countenance.

We have identified fifty of them. We could have chosen others, but we wanted to limit ourselves to those which we considered essential and which seemed adequate to describe a vocation.

We chose not to give this work a more classical title such as "Dictionary of Oblate Spirituality", or a more contemporary title such as "Dictionary of the Oblate Charism". The first title would have involved us in the ticklish and no doubt outdated question as to the existence of an "Oblate spirituality"; the second would have encumbered the work with a designation too restricted in scope.

In contrast to what we find in similar dictionaries of other institutes, the analysis of values does not limit itself to the thought of the Founder, but also researches its evolution in time. In fact, the charism of the founder, as *Mutuae relationes* reminded us, must not only be preserved and more thoroughly studied, but it must also develop in the course of history (cf. n. 11). The expression "charism of the institute" is currently being used to describe and characterize this stage of ongoing development to the foundation of a religious family. My understanding of this expression is the development of the genetic potential contained in the charism of the founder.

In its course through history, the founder's charism, lived in its identity and in total fidelity by the institute, develops unexpected potentialities and is enriched by an ever new creative capacity. This development is the manifestation, the evolving and the growth of this power of the Spirit that the charism, "gift of God", contained in itself from the beginning and of which the founder and his companions were not fully conscious.

The charism of the institute is reflected as a collective image of the charism of the founder who engages life along with the charism of the individuals called by the Spirit to perpetuate in time in a dynamic way all the potentiality of the original inspiration and to display everywhere its possible historical expressions. It constitutes the identity of the vocation expressed by the entire community which embodies in different ways and different times the same inspirations and the same charismatic intentions of the founder.

It is at this point that we can speak of the constituent elements of “the institute’s patrimony”, an expression used by the Second Vatican Council and adopted by the Code of Canon Law in preference to the expression charism of the institute. The “institute’s patrimony” is made up, on the one hand, from the designs and projects of the founder and, on the other hand, of its “sound traditions”. We can find the “sound traditions” in the contributions made by the General Chapters, the communities and members of the institute who charge the charism of the founder through their own personal charisms, as it is expressed in *Mutuae relationes*: “The rank and file religious themselves are certainly not lacking in personal gifts, also flowing from the Spirit, to enrich, develop and rejuvenate the life of the institute in the unity of the community and concern for renewal” (n. 12).

In historical and cultural changes, the life of the institute expresses and concretizes the experience that the Spirit has bestowed upon the founder to live out. There is, therefore, a substantial continuity between the charism of the founder and that of the institute.

The idea of this kind of a dictionary came to me ten years ago while I was working in the ministry during my first formation. In order to pass on to young Oblates the ideals that animated the Congregation, it seemed useful to me to have at hand a work, easy to consult, containing basic references to the writings of the Founder, Eugene de Mazenod, and the studies carried out in the course of the institute’s history.

Although the Oblates are known as men of action, and more particularly as missionaries, they have always reflected on their own vocation and have produced a vast literature on that subject. I became increasingly aware of the need for a synthesis capable of garnering what had been carried out in the course of what will soon be a period of 200 years. When the Association for Oblate Studies and Research (AOSR) was born in 1982, I immediately saw in it the means which would enable this project to become a reality.

This work is appearing today thanks to the collaborative effort of 35 Oblates from every continent. It is a synthesis of all the previous works, but does not exhaust their riches. In this way, it becomes a guide for the study of sources and Oblate reflection. It also blazes new paths for Oblate reflection.

The description of Oblate values is not limited to the past; it also opens up to present-day sensitivities. Consequently, it takes tradition into account as well as the requirements which have emerged in a special way in the course of the most recent General Chapters and synthesized in the new Constitutions and Rules. In this way, traditional themes are examined in relation to the way they have been lived in the past, without losing sight of the more outstanding realities of today. This blazes new paths to be followed in the future.

Research has been carried out with diligent reference to the sources. As much as possible, each article is developed according to the following plan: a historical development of the theme being treated, followed by the concrete living of it. That is:

- the life and writings of the Founder, because it is in his experience and his teaching that the nucleus of the Oblate charism is found;
- the first companions and co-workers of the Founder, such as Fathers Tempier, Guibert, Jeancard, Albini, Suzanne, Fabre, etc., who made an important contribution to mapping out the Congregation's countenance;
- the Rule in its different editions;
- circular letters of the Superiors General;
- the concrete contribution of Oblates who, everywhere in the world more or less, have more intensely incarnated the charism – first of all, but not exclusively, those whose causes have been introduced for beatification;
- the writings and studies of some Oblates, particularly in the area of spirituality.

The working out of each of these themes was carried out taking into account its biblical, theological and spiritual setting as well as its relationship with the Church's thinking and present-day circumstances.

The diversity of the authors (nationality, age, training, ministry, work milieu) images the different sensitivities present today in the institute. Each article clearly shows forth this diversity, be it in methodology (some concentrate more on the study of the source while others concentrate more on contemporary development), be it in the way they interpret each one of the values. These different approaches dovetail and mutually enrich each other.

As a collaborative effort, this dictionary is destined for everyone as a

tool for study, meditation and the fuller development of one's personal identity. It could also prove useful for animation and ongoing formation. Nevertheless, this dictionary targets in a special way Oblates in first formation and at the same time envisions itself as a tool at the service of educators. In particular, we wish to place in the hands of the novices and scholastics a text which will help them to study and assimilate "the Oblate charism and traditions" of the Congregation (C 65).

It is our hope that it will prove to be a valuable tool, appropriate for the fostering of a fruitful return to our origins and an ever more dynamic consciousness of our charism in the Church today.

*Fabio Ciardi, O.M.I.  
Marino, February 17, 1996.*

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## INTRODUCTION TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

The English translation of *Le Dictionnaire des Valeurs Oblates* has taken many years and the hard work of many people to produce. The lion's share of the translation work was done by Albert Lalonde. Since many of the articles originally written in languages other than French had been produced on typewriters, Maurice Lesage put the text onto computer. In thanking them for their work, I also thank all the Oblates of 290 Via Aurelia who so generously dedicated many hours to the task of proof-reading the texts and of ensuring its publication.

Please note that the *Dictionary of Oblate Values* is a translation of the French text, and no changes have been made to the text, except in the case of obvious typographical errors. In this connection I draw your attention to two articles which have appeared in *Vie Oblate Life* on the contents of the *Dictionary*: Émilien LAMIRANDE, *Le Dictionnaire des Valeurs Oblats: Un grand ouvrage sur l'esprit de la Congrégation* in Volume 56 (1997), p. 403-411; and József PIELORZ, *Ombres et lumières du dictionnaire des valeurs oblates* in Volume 58 (1999), pp. 391-401.

The quotations from the Founder's letters and diaries have been taken directly from the series, *Oblate Writings*, hence the divergence in style and language, depending on the country of origin of the translator of the particular volume.

Finally, since the publication of the *Dictionary* in French, the *Constitutions and Rules* have been revised. The discrepancies in the numbering between the versions of 1982 and 2000 have been indicated in parenthesis in each article.

Frank Santucci O.M.I.  
Rome, May 21, 2000



## ACTION – CONTEMPLATION

*Summary: I. The correlation between action and contemplation up to the nineteenth century. II Action and contemplation in the life and works of Eugene de Mazenod. 1. Adolescence and young adulthood; 2. Saint Sulpice; 3. Wavering between the apostolic and the monastic life; 4. The Constitutions and Rules of the Missionaries of Provence (1818): a Replacement of religious institutes destroyed during the French Revolution; b. The two parts of an Oblate's life; 5. From 1818 to 1861. III. Action – contemplation in the Congregation from 1861 to the present day. IV. Towards a personal synthesis of the question.*

This article on one of the Oblate spiritual values of yesterday and today addresses a topic of utmost importance as much for the missionary character of the Congregation as for the individual Oblate concerned with as faithfully as possible living up to the vocation he has received. The question is this: How to balance the pursuit of the contemplative dimension which is integral to the universal call to holiness with all the activity we are called to engage in?

Few Oblates have difficulty understanding what "action" means. From the inception of the Congregation, we have been missionaries in every sense of the word. Being an apostolic community is an essential and incontrovertible characteristic of our Oblate charism and self-identity.

What "contemplation" means, however, is much more problematic, not only for the Oblates, but also for virtually everyone. Throughout the history of the Church the term has been subjected to widely divergent interpretations. Consequently, the first section of this article will strive to identify some of those meanings so as to discern more accurately their relationship to our mission.

### I. CORRELATION BETWEEN ACTION AND CONTEMPLATION UP TO THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The word "contemplation" as such is not found in Scripture. When theologians search the Scriptures for what is generally understood as contemplation, they usually speak of knowledge of God – especially the spiritual knowledge of the believer. In this case, the notion of contemplation approaches that of beholding, prophesying or experiencing a particular revelation.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, as this term is understood today, a number of correlative meanings can be found in biblical expressions like "coming", "listening", "loving", "seeing", "here I am".<sup>2</sup> In Scripture, we find examples of contemplation without any word to designate it. For instance, Luke is perhaps recounting Mary's contemplation of the mystery of the Incarnation when he mentions in the midst of all the activity surrounding the birth of Christ: "[his mother] treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2:18). In the context of pressing activity, Mark is probably indicating the contemplation of Jesus when he notes:

“In the morning long before dawn, he got up and left the house to find a solitary place where he could pray” (Mark 1:35).

In Greek, the word for contemplation is *theoria*. Its basic meaning suggests viewing with wonderment and delight a show such as a parade or religious ceremony. By extension then, it can apply to meditation, reflection or philosophic discourse. The Latin term *contemplatio* comes from *temple* which originally designated a place used by augurs to read omens. Consequently, in verb form, it denotes focusing attentively either with one’s eyes or with one’s spirit. In both languages, contemplation takes on a mystical tone when it designates to see God with the eyes of the heart.

In the patristic era<sup>3</sup>, the School of Alexandria, it seems, was the first to correlate action and contemplation in the context of the spiritual life. In both Clement (+215) and Origen (+254), however, we find a certain hierarchy between the two notions – the one being inferior and a stepping stone to the other. Origen is the first to use Martha and Mary as well as Peter and John as types of the active and the contemplative life.

St. Augustine (+430) proposed three different ways of understanding the active and the contemplative life: 1) We live the active life here on earth, whereas we are destined to experience the contemplative life in eternity. In that sense, there is a radical division between the two. 2) The Bishop of Hippo also sees them as two aspects, functions or forces within every Christian life. Those forces can come into conflict insofar as certain actions may be incompatible with contemplation at a given moment. Nevertheless, there is usually something of both operating simultaneously within the entirety of human existence. In this context, he speaks of the

objective superiority of contemplation over action. 3) Subjectively, however, and in terms of habitual modes of living, Augustine presents three authentic Christian lifestyles: a) the leisurely contemplation or study of truth; b) the active involvement in the management of human affairs; and c) a combination of the two, a certain mixed life.

St. Gregory the Great (+604) builds on the insights of Augustine with this nuance: the active life embraces the direct implementation of the moral virtues (justice, temperance, fortitude, etc.). In this context, it corresponds to what theologians would later characterize as the purgative and the illuminative ways. The contemplative life, on the other hand, is characterized by the operations of the theological virtues and constitutes the unitive way subsequently described by the scholastics. More than his predecessors, Gregory insisted that the contemplative life was for everyone regardless of class or vocation. The two lives are considered normal stages of spiritual growth for everyone. Thus he admitted the possibility of contemplation for everyone.

St. Thomas Aquinas (+1274) elaborated extensively on the theology of Gregory and Augustine<sup>4</sup>. On the one hand, he saw the active and the contemplative lives as two “states of life”, hence the division of religious institutions into active and contemplative. On the other hand, he viewed them as aspects, functions and internal forces within the maturing life of an individual.

In this context, three inter-relationships are possible: 1) action can prepare one for contemplation, 2) one can alternate with the other, 3) action can flow from contemplation. Thus action has an ascetical value in relation to the mystical grace of contemplation. Action may also have a spiritualizing value of its own as

the expression of love of God and neighbor in the apostolate. Seen in this light, the active dimension of life accentuates the ascetical, behavioral and practical; whereas the contemplative aspect stresses the mystical, aesthetic and speculative. For St. Thomas – who, when he defines contemplation, bases himself on the charism of the Order of Preachers – one engages in contemplation in order to share its fruit with others through some activity: *contemplata aliis tradere* (communicate to others what one has contemplated).<sup>5</sup>

St. Ignatius of Loyola (+1556) completely revolutionized the theology and the practice of the active or apostolic life, together with the understanding of its correlation to interior life. Furthermore, his usage of the terms “meditation” and “contemplation” differs from that of his predecessors. Meditation is a very active reflection on some Gospel values. Contemplation, on the other hand, stresses entering into a Gospel scene by trying to imagine, see, feel, etc., what actually occurred at the time of Jesus. Thus, his view of contemplation, while being more receptive and affective than meditation, contemplation is still highly discursive, i.e., active.<sup>6</sup>

St. John of the Cross (+1591) goes to the very heart of the problem. Following in the footsteps of Gregory of Nyssa, the Pseudo-Dionysius, the Rhine-Flemish mystics, the author of the *Cloud of Unknowing*, etc., John brings out the fact that contemplation – from the point of view of God – is the immediate and direct, the transforming and purifying activity of the Father, Son and Spirit within us.<sup>7</sup> From our perspective, contemplation consists in a state of loving receptivity to divine intimacy and in abandoning oneself to the love of God. Thus, contemplation both epitomizes and radically dif-

fers from all modes of discursive prayer. The Mystical Doctor would consider the Thomistic and the Ignatian approaches to contemplation to be basically discursive in nature. For John of the Cross, the contemplative life must not only favor contemplation, but the contemplation of God is its sole reason for being. Every detail of the contemplative life derives its meaning from the goal to which it tends “to remain lovingly in the presence of one’s Beloved”.<sup>8</sup>

## II. ACTION AND CONTEMPLATION IN THE LIFE AND WORKS OF EUGENE DE MAZENOD

When Charles Joseph Eugene de Mazenod (1782-1861) came upon the scene, all the above notions regarding contemplation and its relationship with action were widespread. According to the different traditions within the Church, the two terms were understood in different ways. Not all these views and ways are immediately reconcilable.

As for the Founder himself, “contemplation” was not exactly an everyday word in his vocabulary. In fact, his use of it was rare in the extreme. Nonetheless, the *issue* that has come to be called action – contemplation is found consistently throughout his life and his writings. The principal contexts in which he uses the word contemplation are the 1818, 1826 and 1853 editions of our CC and RR.

How, then, did the Founder live and understand the problem of action – contemplation? In other words, how did he see the harmonious balance between our exterior and interior life, between the demands of the ministry and the observances of a regulated religious life, between helping others and personal sanctification?

## 1. ADOLESCENCE AND YOUNG ADULTHOOD

Eugene's first significant exposure to part of the question of action – contemplation occurred in Venice (1794-1797) during the long sessions he spent with his mentor Don Bartolo Zinelli.<sup>9</sup> Don Bartolo was a member of Society of the Fathers of the Faith (Paccanarians)<sup>10</sup>, a group of priests aspiring to become Jesuits when the Society would be canonically reestablished. His spirituality was therefore, particularly Ignatian. The priest drew up a monastic-like program for his young disciple. Besides class, study and recreation, specific time was allotted for prayer. This prayer included not only set prayers to be recited but also periods of quiet meditation and possibly a simplified form of Ignatian contemplation as well. Along with the above, Eugene was given a strict ascetical program. He fasted every Friday and three times weekly during Lent. On Saturdays, he slept on the stone floor with a single blanket. He even spent occasional nights stretched out on a bed of hearth logs. Eugene took to that discipline, frugality and regularity like a fish to water. His program was rigorous and demanding, but the young teenager was spontaneously at home with the challenge.

Then, after a wasted year in Naples, came the luxurious life of Palermo from 1799-1802<sup>11</sup>. A noteworthy development took place during his stay in Sicily. Exteriorly, his lifestyle was the exact opposite of that in Venice. He experienced the full princely comfort and glorious prestige enjoyed by the Cannizzaro family. The Count de Mazenod, as he liked to call himself, slept in sumptuous quarters and dined in luxury. He even had a villa and servants at his disposal. It was the good

life in aristocratic circles. The eighteen-year-old spent a lot of time studying coats-of-arms and genealogies in the hope of finding the origins of his family's nobility. Eugene savored the company of Princess Marie-Amélie as well as the gala celebrations of Sicilian high society.

Yet, life surrounded by such riches, pleasures and prestige awoke in the young de Mazenod a certain feeling of emptiness. His memoirs offer a concrete example of this on the occasion of the feast of St. Rosalie, patroness of Palermo. The context of this passage, however, suggests that the following sentiments were not isolated, but part of a growing and gnawing awareness.

"It is a strange thing, but whenever I found myself in the midst of it, its noisy music and its completely worldly gaiety, I would feel my heart contract and sadness would take hold of me; whereupon I would slip off to some quiet spot and there, away from all those who seemed foolish to me, I gave myself over to serious and even melancholy thoughts, almost to the point of weeping. [...] It was simply that I was out of my element. I felt as though I were being forcefully thrust into a world towards which I felt no attraction. I hated the dissipation I saw all around me, for it was repugnant to all the yearnings of my soul for an entirely different kind of happiness. The greater the dissipation I saw in others, all the more strongly did I yearn for the opposite. That is the only way I can explain this phenomenon".<sup>12</sup>

Eugene was not schizoid. He did not have two personalities: one the fun-lover and the other the staunch ascetic. Count de Mazenod really fancied the good life like any normal young man. Yet, amidst it all, the created was beginning to open his heart to the Uncre-

ated. The finite was causing him to become increasingly conscious of the Infinite.<sup>13</sup>

Eugene returned to France in 1802 to begin a new chapter in his life. Then, on Good Friday, March 27, 1807, he encountered the Crucified Savior in a deeply personal and touching manner. Along with the other effects of that conversion experience, we can say that for him it had considerable bearing upon the reconciliation between the exterior and the interior life. This is not to imply that the issue of action and contemplation was resolved either in theory or in practice at that time. No, what happened, however, was a radical personalization of his ministry and prayer. That is, henceforth both yearnings in his life converged directly and with affective intimacy upon the person of Jesus. Eugene had always loved Christ. Now, that love was catapulted into a new stage of intensity and a whole new dimension.

## 2. SAINT SULPICE

The years that young de Mazenod spent at Saint-Sulpice in Paris from 1808 to 1812 were decisive with regard to the question of action and contemplation. There, the various dimensions surrounding service to others and a vigorous interior life were integrated into a theological framework. At Saint-Sulpice, the Founder garnered one of the best ecclesiastical formations available in the France of his day. With regard to ascetical and mystical theology and its practice, he was without a doubt deeply imbued with the spirituality of the French School.<sup>14</sup> As far as the correlation between ministry and prayer are concerned, Eugene was probably exposed to a thoroughly Sulpician view of contemplation. We do not possess his

class notes precisely on this subject, but we can reasonably surmise that he was drilled in the difference between what was called “natural” and “supernatural”, “acquired and infused” contemplation.<sup>15</sup> In all likelihood, he was also taught the “parts of contemplation”: reading, meditation and prayer.

At Saint-Sulpice, Eugene learned furthermore that he was not alone in trying to understand and to diffuse the tension which characterized his frustrated attempts to balance action and contemplation. He was wrestling with a universal problem. Everyone had experienced similar difficulties, each according to his experience and charism.

During those four years, the Founder probably came to identify the word contemplation with all that bears upon a dynamic spiritual or interior life. Moreover, through classical Thomistic eyes, he saw the fruit of contemplation – that is, the gleanings of his study, meditation and prayer – as gifts destined to be used directly for others.

In that light, a truly apostolic life would have to be a “mixed” life: a blend of action and contemplation. Thanks to this scholastic teaching, the truths which Eugene had learned from Don Bartolo, these same truths tested at Palermo and internalized on the occasion of his conversion experience of 1807 were integrated into a workable theological context.

Nonetheless, despite the value of that framework, two factors in particular contributed to its inadequacy. First of all, it did not supply people with the means of attaining the desired harmony. No doubt, it taught that zealous action and intense contemplation must be reconcilable, since many saints had found that harmony. Yet for most people the practical solution would be to exercise the two in parallel lines, switching from

one to the other. Moreover, that scholastic approach was rooted in a deeper problem: the theology of the age was still coming out of a basically static world view with fundamental dichotomies between natural and supernatural, body and soul, matter and spirit. Thus, everything that is exterior, physical or active was inherently suspect of being a threat to what is interior spiritual or contemplative.

### 3. WAVERING BETWEEN THE APOSTOLIC AND THE MONASTIC LIFE

Eugene de Mazenod was ordained a priest on December 21, 1811. He returned to Provence in October of 1812. The following March, we find him totally immersed in his first apostolic initiatives. This included simple instructions in Provençal to the poor of the area and the foundation of the Society of Christian Youth in Aix. That ministry was new in two senses: first, it was new to him, for he had just left the seminary. Second, it was new in the region because no one else in recent memory had attempted those ministries.

However, the young Father de Mazenod was having difficulty bridging the transition from seminary life to missionary life. Here for example, is the daily schedule which he meticulously observed during January and February of 1813: “Six hours of sleep, six hours of religious exercises, eight hours for study of literature and theology, with the rest of the day [four hours] for meals and recreation”<sup>17</sup>.

Father de Mazenod was living a quasi-monastic life while preparing himself for full-time active ministry. To add fuel to the fire, he was at this time sharing his house with a monk. Brother Maur was a Camaldolese expelled from his monastery of Grosbois, a monastery

suppressed by Napoleon in 1811 because the monks maintained a steadfast loyalty to the exiled Pius VII. We can only conjecture what influence this uprooted religious had on Eugene’s monastic aspirations. Whatever the case, the brother returned to his monastery about the same time that the Founder resolved the vocational crisis which we shall now describe.

In the midst of his intense activity and equally intense attempts to live a quasi-monastic existence, in two letters to a close friend – Charles de Forbin-Janson, the founder of the Missionaries of France – Eugene revealed his inclination towards life in a cloistered community.<sup>18</sup>

In the first letter, September 12, 1814, Eugene gives several reasons why he is unable to join his friend in Paris: his father and uncle need him and he is completely taken up with his apostolate. Then, he adds:

“I do not know if this will make me change my vocation. I yearn sometimes for solitude and those religious Orders which confine themselves to the sanctification of the individuals who follow their Rule without concerning themselves with people, other than by prayer, are beginning to be attractive to me. I would not mind thus spending the rest of my days [...] Who knows! Perhaps that is how I shall end up. When I shall no longer be confronted by the extreme needs of my poor sinners, I shall feel less sorry about not coming to their aid. Besides I may be persuading myself that I am more useful to them than I am in reality. In the meantime, however, my time and energies are theirs”.<sup>19</sup>

The above passage sounds like the musings of a man weighing the pros and cons of a discernment process. Father de Mazenod was seriously ques-

tioning the direction of his vocation at the time. Two factors were converging to cause him to re-examine his calling. First of all, he was experiencing a crisis of conscience. His ministry was taking too much time and energy away from the intensity which he believed he should be dedicating to this interior development. He could not balance the two. Then again, he had a connatural liking – indeed, a need! – to follow a “regular life” in the religious scholastic sense of the phrase. He was not completely at home unless he was rigorously observing, not only the spirit, but also the letter of some “rule”. His love for schedules and regulations for discipline and strict observance – already evident in Venice with Don Bartolo – stayed with him all his life.

At this time Father de Mazenod sized up the situation in this way: Strict observance of a rule equated leading a life conducive to personal holiness. But, the most regular compliance with such a rule was to be found in certain monasteries. Therefore, he felt obliged to explore that possibility.

Note that the Founder did not refer to “the contemplative life” in the sense of St. John of the Cross. He rather spoke of the regularity of those religious orders which restricted themselves to the sanctification of their members through what John would call ascetical practices. Canonically and institutionally, many of those religious orders are still designated in our day as centers of “the contemplative life”.

The second letter, written in response to Charles de Forbin-Janson’s urging him to join his Missionaries of France, stated in reply: “I still do not know what God wants of me but I am so resolved to do his will that as soon as it is known to me I will leave tomorrow for the moon, if I have to. I keep noth-

ing secret from you. So I will tell you without ado that I am hesitating between two plans: either to go off and bury myself in some well-regulated community of an Order that I have always loved; or do in my diocese exactly what you have done successfully at Paris. [...] I was feeling more inclined to the first plan because, to tell the truth, I was quite sick of living solely for others. [...] the second plan, however, seems to me more useful, given the dreadful plight to which the people have been reduced”.<sup>20</sup>

As became evident very shortly, God clearly chose the second project for Eugene. Once he realized the will of God in this regard, he responded by putting his whole heart and soul into its implementation. A year later, October 23, 1815, Father de Mazenod offered the following explanation to Forbin-Janson: “Now I ask you and I ask myself how I, hitherto unable to make up my mind in this matter, suddenly find myself setting wheels in motion, renouncing my comfort and risking my fortune by launching an enterprise of which I know the worth but for which I only have a liking negated by other and diametrically opposed views! This is a riddle to me and it is the second time in my life that I see myself moved to resolve something of the utmost seriousness as if by a strong impulse from without. When I reflect on it, I am convinced that it so pleases God to put an end to my irresolution”.<sup>21</sup>

As we know, the actual founding of the Missionaries of Provence had occurred three weeks earlier on October 2, 1815 when Father de Mazenod had bought part of the old Carmelite monastery of Aix to be the first house of the Congregation. It was there that on January 25, 1816 he and Tempier took up formal residence. In view of the Founder’s monastic leanings, it is ironic that

the first Oblate residence was a former monastery. No doubt, some of the reasons for its purchase were practical. It was the right size, in the right place, for the right price, at the right time. Nevertheless, there must have been something very deep within his heart which rejoiced in a special way. At long last he had his own monastery to live in and from which to go forth to work in his chosen field of the apostolate.

The phrase “impulse from without” referred to above means outside his selfish interests or apart from the partisan desires of anyone else. That force sprang from deep within him, from an undeniable sense of vocation. The other time something similar had happened was probably his decision in 1808 to study for the priesthood in spite of the persistent objections of his mother.

#### 4. CONSTITUTIONS AND RULES OF THE MISSIONARIES OF PROVENCE (1818)

By October 1815, Father de Mazenod had resolved his vocational crisis. Nonetheless, it was not until three years later, in the formulation of the first CC and RR, that he expressed his resolution of the issue of action – contemplation. The formulation which he arrived at in 1818 remained basically the same for the rest of his life. Furthermore, it endured fundamentally intact for the Congregation until Vatican II. Underlying that solution was a certain dualism. Nevertheless, it also marked an important step forward.<sup>22</sup>

In the first edition of our CC and RR, we find a spontaneous and vintage de Mazenod. The document itself is a combination of basic principles, general rules, specific regulations, daily schedule and mission ceremonial manual – all rolled into one. Two specific points in it have special bearing on the ques-

tion of action – contemplation, that is, the aim of the Congregation to replace those Orders which had been destroyed by the French Revolution and the division of a typical missionary’s life into one part strenuously activity and the other intense “regular” observance.

#### *a. Replacement of religious institutes destroyed during the French Revolution*

After a brief Preface, the Founder began chapter one with “The End of the Institute”. That terminology represented traditional Thomistic procedure: always start with the final cause. The end of the Congregation, he specified, was to preach the word of God to the poor.

In the second paragraph, the Founder did not speak of the “second end”, but rather wrote:

“Article 1: The end of this society is also to make up as much as possible for the absence of so many inspiring institutions which have disappeared since the Revolution. The Church experiences more every day the terrible vacuum which that lacuna has caused”.

“Article 2: That is why our members will try to rekindle in their own persons the piety and fervor of the religious Orders destroyed in France by the Revolution. Our members will strive to follow their virtues as well as their ministry. They will imitate those institutes by practicing a life based on the regular observance of the rule, for example: the living out of the evangelical counsels the love of silence and solitude, the disdain of worldly honors the distancing of self from frivolous conduct, the abhorrence of riches, the practice of mortification, the public and communal recitation of the Divine Office, the assistance of the dying, etc”.<sup>23</sup>

That aspect of the end of the Congregation became articles 3 and 4 in the

official 1826 Latin edition of our CC and RR. There, it is referred to in typical Roman ecclesiastical style as the “second end” of our society. The Founder’s thought is repeated in the 1853 and 1928 editions of our CC and RR. We no longer find it explicitly stated in the 1966 edition or thereafter.

In Father de Mazenod’s mind as expressed in the first French CC and RR, those are not two ends of the Congregation – much less one following upon or subordinate to the other. Rather they represent the one and the same end of our apostolic life from two complementary viewpoints. That emphasis is important, for it highlights the depth of harmony between action and contemplation which the missionary must strive to achieve. Thus, zealous ministry and vibrant interior life are two sides of the same coin for an Oblate.

The types of work which Father de Mazenod mentions regarding those Orders manifest a strong monastic tone. He does not, however, distinguish one canonical category from another. Yet we can see the writing between the lines. Achilles Rey, one of the first biographers of the Founder, gives the following explanation of what he had been taught in the mid-1840s: “They told me from the day of my admission to the novitiate that one of the ends of our society was to imitate as far as possible the examples left us by those old congregations which no longer exist in France: the poverty of the Franciscans, the obedience of the Jesuit, the zeal of the Dominican, the love of silence and solitude of the Cistercian, the mortification of the Trappist”.<sup>24</sup>

On October 8, 1831, the Founder circulated a brief commentary of select articles and phrases of our CC and RR. This is what he wrote regarding action and contemplation: “My God, give me

the grace to really understand what this third article in *De Fine Societatis* means. We read it so often without reflection [...] Let us pass in review all those Religious Orders which the Revolution wiped out in France. Let us remember the diverse ministries they exercised, the virtues they practiced. Some accomplished their vocation through contemplation and prayer in the seclusion of God’s house. Others fulfilled their calling by ministering to people in innumerable works of zeal. I urge you, therefore, to apply to yourselves the lesson of this third article”<sup>25</sup>.

The lesson which the Founder wants us to draw from the above quoted passage is not that some Oblates be contemplatives and others active. He prayed rather that every Oblate be zealously apostolic, an attitude which necessarily includes fostering the full development of the contemplative thrust within him.

One last detail with regard to the restoration of the old Orders. The Carmelite monastery which became the first house of the Congregation – wittingly or unwittingly – turned out to be a symbolic fulfillment of this desire of the Founder. It had been confiscated by the anti-royalists during their uprising. The old monastery was declared national property and sold to the highest bidder. At least twice, it changed hands between the Revolution and October 2, 1815 when Eugene purchased part of it. By bringing the former monastery back into God’s service, Father de Mazenod physically restored something sacred which had been taken away by the French Revolution.

#### *b. The two parts of an Oblate’s life*

In the 1818 edition of our CC and RR, in the context of the particular ob-

ligations of missionaries, the Founder stressed the following:

“Imitating these great models [Jesus and the Apostles], one part of their life will be spent in prayer, interior recollection and contemplation in the seclusion of God’s house which they share in common”.

“The other part of their life will be entirely dedicated to those works outside the house to which ardent zeal calls them. These works include conducting parish missions, preaching and celebrating the sacrament of reconciliation, catechizing, directing youth, visiting the sick and prisoners, spiritual retreats and other works of this kind”.<sup>26</sup>

In the re-editing process, the paragraphs on the ends of the Congregation were *rewritten* from the point of view of the two parts of Oblate life. Similar to the pattern above regarding the end of the Congregation, these thoughts on the two parts of an Oblate’s life became articles 1 and 2 under the heading “Chapter III, Part Two, Other Principal Observances, n°1: Charity, Humility and Flight from the World” in the Latin 1826 and 1853 CC and RR. In our 1928 CC and RR, the two articles are found under the same heading enumerated as 288 and 289. The formulation of those two articles disappears in the 1966 and 1982 revisions of our CC and RR. As we shall see later, however, they preserved what is most positive in their spirit.

As far as the relationship between action and contemplation is concerned, the above text is without doubt the most significant expression of the Founder on the subject. In a sense, that text epitomizes all his preceding struggle over this issue. Furthermore, virtually all his later expressions on the topic either flow from it or echo it. That text does not represent the most integrated solu-

tion to the question of action and contemplation. Nonetheless, it marks a major threshold in both the personal life of the Founder and the corporate life of the institute. Despite its limitations, that text remains one of the most poignant descriptions of what the *Preface* calls the “apostolic man”.

To most contemporary minds, the two-part ideal sounds dualistic, and to some degree it is. It presents a fragmented picture. On the mission, you work yourself “entirely” to death. Then, once safely back home, you pursue a quasi-monastic lifestyle until you are sent out again. And so on, back and forth. In a sense, Father de Mazenod may have been laying down for others what worked for him, or at least what he believed should work. Yet, what he was stressing was not a blend of two modes, but rather an exhaustive concentration of two co-equal portions: now the one, then the other. If an Oblate were to carry that parallelism to an extreme, he could burn out both ministerially and spiritually.

Let us not, however, be unduly critical for there is more than dualism here. There is also insight and practicality, the voice of experience and the utterance of a prophet.

— *Insight and practicality.* The two-part ideal does make some sense. The immediate context of its formulation was intense evangelization in a limited area of southern France. Those first Oblates knew well what they were up against. So, in order to sustain the hard days and long weeks of that ministry they needed an equally intense way to restore their strength. This strength was not only spiritual, but also physical, emotional and psychological. The Founder had observed something along this line in the example of Christ and the Apostles. In

the midst of his most active ministry, “[Jesus] was constantly going off to some spot where he could be alone and pray” (Luke 5:16). The Lord told the Twelve: ““You must come away to some solitary place all by yourselves and rest awhile”; for there were so many coming and going that the Apostles had not time even to eat” (Mark 6:31).

— *The voice of experience and the utterance of a prophet.* Most really zealous people need a timetable, a schedule, a rhythm – something! – to keep their drive from running away with them, to hold their enthusiasm within reasonable bounds. There is no limit to what needs being done, but there certainly is a limit to what God is calling any one of us to do. Even the Savior did not remedy all evil at one time. An Oblate is a savior in the Savior. Therefore, his ministry is limited by God. It is limited by common sense. It is limited by his need to be with fellow Oblates and to be alone with his Lord.

To my knowledge, the Founder did not put a numerical value on his two-part ideal. He never intimated that it should be specifically 50/50 or 70/30, etc. No doubt, he had twenty-four hour days in mind and seven-day weeks. Fundamentally, however, he was referring to a qualitative rhythm, like breathing in and breathing out. That rhythm would naturally differ from missionary to missionary, from ministry to ministry. As a matter of fact, the more diverse the Congregation’s ministries became – foreign missions, teaching in seminaries, parish priests, etc. – the less the literal observance of that rule was possible. Its spirit, however, is with us still, but in a different way and in a form easier to assimilate.

In 1818, Oblates did not take vacations or a weekly day off. If we add up

all the days that an average contemporary Oblate takes off from ministry – including retreats, seminars, district meetings – they would probably come close to three months out of the year. Perhaps all that Oblates do during our time off is not exactly what the Founder had in mind when he wrote the Rule, but hopefully it has something to do with its spirit.

## 5. FROM 1818 TO 1861

The history of trying to balance action and contemplation in the life of the Founder and in the practice of the Congregation before his death could easily take a hundred pages just to outline. The first section of the bibliography at the end of this article indicates some of the more obvious examples. Suffice it to say, however, that there was gradual improvement both personally and corporately, even if a subtle dualistic and subordinationalist attitude persisted.

There is, however, one instance in the life of the Founder after 1818 which remains a particularly striking example of the tension which continued between the two parts of an Oblate’s life. The incident involved Marius Suzanne, an especially close friend of Father de Mazenod. The two had met in 1816 and had hit it off immediately. The Founder was so interested in him that he took personal charge of his formation. De Mazenod had great plans for the talented young man. He was grooming him to be superior of the scholasticate where the future of the Congregation would be in his hands.

Ordained in 1821, Suzanne was put in charge of one of the most important mission centers of the institute: the Calvaire in Marseilles. He was a zealous speaker and had tremendous appeal with the people. Besides being superior

and a busy missionary, he was given the added responsibility of building a new church and of raising the necessary funds. Obviously, it was impossible for Suzanne to be present at all community functions. When the Founder heard of this, he descended personally on the community and convened a chapter of faults. At that session, it became apparent that Suzanne was missing a lot of community exercises, including the office in common. The Founder's fiery temper exploded, and in a very emotional scene he deposed Suzanne. De Mazenod, furthermore, announced that henceforth he himself would fulfill the functions of local superior in order to remedy the disorder. Suzanne, humiliated and crushed, was left only with the duty of preaching missions. The condemnation, which was as unexpected as it was brutal, indescribably wounded the young religious. Suzanne took his knocks humbly and used his new freedom to redouble his efforts at evangelization. His health soon gave out, however, and he died on January 31, 1829, in Marseilles with his remorseful friend and spiritual father at his side.<sup>27</sup>

Perhaps the Founder was justified in being upset by Suzanne's conduct. But nothing can justify the rage and ruthlessness which he exhibited. Maybe the Founder believed that he had to make an example of Suzanne. Only God knows. Any way we look at it, however, it seems that Eugene de Mazenod was the one who learned the greatest lesson. He learned never to do such a terrible thing again. He also learned that there had to be a more evangelical manner to reconcile action and contemplation than the way he had adopted in Suzanne's case. All indications are that the Founder did heed both lessons.

At the end of his life, Bishop de Mazenod left us his final testament:

"Among yourselves practice charity, charity, charity – and, outside, zeal for the salvation of souls".<sup>28</sup>

The bequest testifies that he personally came to a peaceful harmonization of the two parts of an apostle's life, at least on his deathbed. Charity at home; zeal for others. Charity is the quintessence of contemplation which loves and serves God in himself and all others in him. Zeal is the quintessence of apostolic action which loves and serves others and God in them. Agape – love of God, love of self, love of others – is the core of the apostolic life in all its dimensions.

### III. ACTION-CONTEMPLATION IN THE CONGREGATION FROM 1860 TO THE PRESENT DAY

After Bishop de Mazenod's death, the text related to replacing those Orders destroyed by the French Revolution remained virtually unchanged in our CC and RR until Vatican II. Yet, already in 1861, the Congregation was so international that the specific reference to the French Revolution had little impact beyond that of being an interesting historical fact of our beginnings. As the twentieth century dawned and progressed, the accent fell more on adapting to the enormous changes of the present and on straining toward a revitalized future. The ministerial and spiritual dimensions of the end, however, have not been lost. Here are a couple of examples:

— *Ministerial dimensions.* "The entire Congregation is missionary in character and its principal aim is to help those souls who are most in need [...] Toward this end the Congregation, true to its living traditions, is prepared [...] to respond to all the needs of the world and the Church" (CC and RR 1966, C3).

— *Spiritual dimensions*. “We are [...] ready to leave everything to be disciples of Jesus. The desire to cooperate with him draws us to know him more deeply, to identify with him, to let him live in us. We strive to reproduce in ourselves the pattern of his life” (CC and RR 1982, C 2).

The two-part ideal of the Founder also remained intact practically verbatim in our CC and RR until Vatican II. In a circular letter dated March 21, 1862, Joseph Fabre the second Superior General, stressed the following points:

“We are called to become saints so that we can effectively work for the sanctification of the most abandoned [...]. We are priests, we are religious. This double quality imposes on us serious consequences [...]. Never forget that our holy Rules prescribe that we pass a considerable part of the year within our houses so that by practicing all the religious virtues we can become worthy instruments of God’s graces”.<sup>29</sup>

Three points stand out in that text: Our interior life serves our apostolate. Yet, nothing is said about sanctification by and through ministry – a truth greatly stressed today. The terms “priests” and “religious” tend to replace “action – contemplation”. The latter terminology does not, however, entirely disappear. There remains insistence on the side-by-side partition of our lives coupled with a two-fold underlying suspicion: that the contemplative is innately better than the active and that contemplation is somehow threatened by ministry.

The above third point was becoming an increasing dilemma, as Father Fabre’s report to the General Chapter of 1887 attests: “One of the serious obstacles to the observance of the Rule is the multiplicity of exterior works. According to our Constitutions, after having given

ourselves to our active ministry for a part of the year we must spend the other part within our communities nourishing ourselves by a life of prayer and study. No doubt, in many houses, especially those outside France, the ministry which we exercise lasts throughout the whole year. Nonetheless, in those circumstances where we cannot observe the letter of the Rule, do we let ourselves be permeated by its spirit and strive to reconcile our exceptional works with this essential element of our life?”<sup>30</sup>

In the above text, it is not clear what Father Fabre means by “exceptional works”. He could mean that our ministries are exceptionally well done or that those year round activities are exceptions to the Rule. What is clear, however, is that the observance of that aspect of the Founder’s ideal was not “regular” enough in his view.

Our 1982 CC and RR preserve very well the spirit Father Fabre and all other sincere Oblates wanted to see carried on. Three situations contribute to a re-animating expression of that spirit.

One contemporary reason we cannot return to our respective houses for a considerable part of the year is that fewer and fewer of them exist as such anymore. Since the 1970’s, the majority of local Oblate communities are districts rather than “houses” in the canonical sense.

Today we realize more than ever that prayer – especially contemplation – is not only an essential aid to ministry, but also is itself an authentic ministry within the Church.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, ministry is a formidable matrix of personal sanctification not only for the recipients of our efforts, but also for the ministers themselves.<sup>32</sup> Ministry is a continuous source of challenge, purification and transformation for those who listen to God within others.<sup>33</sup>

The Founder envisaged a two-part division of an Oblate's life. Within a given year, we were to dedicate ourselves to an alternating concentration between mission and a quasi-monastic existence. The spirit of that dialectic of the apostolic life has been recast in the 1980's into a flowing rhythm of ministry and prayer, of work and relaxation, of sharing with God's people and with fellow Oblates, of participating in meetings, gatherings and seminars.

Some of that rhythm takes place on a daily basis. For example:

"We will live such lives as to be able worthily to celebrate [the Eucharist] every day [...]. In the prolonged silent prayer we make each day, we let ourselves be molded by the Lord" (CC and RR 1982, C 33).

Some of the rhythm occurs on a periodic basis. For example:

"We will set aside special times each month and each year for deeper personal and community prayer, for reflection and renewal" (CC and RR 1982, C 35).

That rhythm – whether daily or periodic – can be compared to the binary code used in computers. The interrelated pairings between zeros and ones form the basis of unbelievably simple interaction for an incredibly complex world. The rhythm between communion with God and service toward others in the apostolic life can also be compared to the interaction of binary stars. Binary stars consist of two energy masses which revolve around each other in a dialectical interchange. The harmony of their interdependence is sustained by the mutual gravitation.

The Founder insisted that each Oblate be at the same time both *a missionary and a saint* (Preface). Our 1982 CC and RR express that dimension of living in faith in two ways: in terms of a gen-

eral principle and in six concrete suggestions to implement that principle:

— *General principle*. "We achieve unity in our life only in and through Jesus Christ" (CC and RR 1982, C 31). That principle presupposes an abiding intimate relationship with the person of Jesus "who through us gives himself to others and through them gives himself to us" (CC and RR 1982, C 31).<sup>34</sup>

— *Concrete suggestions*. "1) While maintaining within ourselves an atmosphere of silence and inner peace, 2) we seek the Lord's presence in the hearts of the people [we serve], 3) in the events of daily life, 4) in the Word of God, 5) in the sacraments and 6) in prayer [both communal and private]. We are pilgrims, walking with Jesus in faith, hope and love" (CC and RR 1982, C 31).

Regarding the day-to-day working out of the binary rhythm between action and contemplation our 1982 CC and RR do not impose a detailed list of *a priori* regulations. Our CC and RR insist rather on honest discernment. On the one hand, our "living conditions" should "favor inner recollection and a personal" flow of life which permits a balance of the two interconnecting thrusts. On the other hand, "each Oblate, with the help of his Superior or spiritual director, will give due attention to these aspects of his life, since both effectiveness in ministry and progress in religious life depend on them" (CC and RR 1982, R 22) [R 33c in CCRR 2000].

#### IV. TOWARDS A PERSONAL SYNTHESIS OF THE QUESTION

The question of action – contemplation is a difficult one to address. It is

difficult on a personal level because it requires so much gift of self and honest discernment. It is difficult on a theological level because it touches so many intricate issues which have such far-reaching implications. It covers our life from birth to death.

I wish to share a few brief thoughts which have helped me understand better and to live more peacefully the balance between ministry and prayer in my Oblate life. I hope these insights will assist others to live that mystery more consciously and voluntarily in theirs.

In virtue of the universal call to holiness, every person – *a fortiori* each Oblate – is called to contemplation<sup>35</sup>. At least in death, God invites everyone to loving surrender to him.

All prayer contains within its inner dynamics a movement toward that loving surrender which the mystics term “contemplation”. Moreover, there is in all human life a developing contemplative thrust, a steadily increasing propensity to remain affectively receptive to God’s initiative.<sup>36</sup> As that contemplative thrust intensifies, so too does our awareness of its presence and our willingness to allow it to overtake us.

We must, however, distinguish three interrelated notions: contemplative prayer, contemplative thrust, contemplative life. Contemplation is that affectively receptive mode of praying toward which all prayer spontaneously tends. Contemplative thrust refers to loving openness to God in every detail of our being and doing throughout this mortal existence. Contemplative life is a vocation in its own right to which only a few are called. As a distinct vocation, the contemplative life is a relatively self-contained, self-integrating all-embracing life-style<sup>37</sup> whose sole reason for being is the contemplation of God. As such the contemplative life

is not better, higher or more perfect than any other authentic Christian life-style. As a way of life, it is God’s choice for a few, even though something of its inner dynamics permeates all human existence.

When we look at our calling to be Missionary Oblates, our corporate vocational life-style is clearly apostolic rather than contemplative or eremitical. We are apostolic religious, not monks or hermits<sup>38</sup>. God, however, is free to call an individual Oblate from his apostolic life-style to a contemplative mode of living or in extremely rare cases to an eremitical life. As a spiritually vibrant Congregation, we must expect the Lord to do that from time to time. Nevertheless, a candidate would not normally be admitted into our ranks if he were to come to us seeking either the contemplative or the eremitical life.

If the above assertions are correctly understood, we no longer have to refer to our life as “mixed”. Our vocational life-style is apostolic with all that that entails. Furthermore, there is a contemplative thrust within our life – whether we are awake or asleep, working or praying, doing something or undergoing something. That contemplative thrust is God’s direct and immediate activity within us, inexorably moving all that we are becoming and all that we do toward transforming union in him.

Certainly, our formal prayer is different from our apostolate. Nonetheless, both are ministries to which we need to give of our time and of ourselves. Yet, no matter how discursive our prayer or how active our apostolate, both will ultimately be epitomized in an eminently contemplative act of loving surrender to God in death<sup>39</sup>.

So much for a theology of action – contemplation. Regarding its practice,

I cite an observation made by Father Teilhard de Chardin, S.J., in 1924. His statement expresses a growing worldwide consciousness regarding the integration of action and contemplation to which our 1982 CC and RR bear eloquent witness: "Whether I am active or whether I am praying, whether I laboriously open my soul to God through work or whether he assails my soul with passivities from within or from without, I am equally conscious in all instances of being united to/in Christ Jesus [...] First, foremost and always I am in *Christo Jesu*, and only then do I act or do I suffer or do I contemplate"<sup>40</sup>.

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## NOTES

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<sup>3</sup> AUMANN, J., *St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, volume 46, Action and Contemplation*, New York, 1966, p. 90-102; *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, XIII-XV, 1716-1948.

<sup>4</sup> *Summa Theologiae*, 2a2ae, ques. 179-182, 186-189; AUMANN, J., *Action and Contemplation*, New York, 1966, p. 85-123; *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, vol. II, XIV-XV, col. 948-2023.

<sup>5</sup> *Summa Theologiae*, 2a2ae, ques. 188, art. 6 & 7.

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<sup>9</sup> ROCHE, A., (A. Hubenig, trans.), *The Blessed Eugene de Mazenod*, Lyon, 1975, p. 22-27; LEFLON I, p. 94-109.

<sup>10</sup> ROCHE, *Blessed Eugene*, p. 32-36; LEFLON I, 186-235.

<sup>11</sup> See LEFLON I, p. 220.

<sup>12</sup> "Souvenirs de famille" in *Missions*, 5 (1866), p. 295-296.

<sup>13</sup> NEMECK, Francis Kelly *Teilhard de Chardin et Jean de la Croix*, Desclée and Cie-Bellarmin, Paris-Tournai-Montreal, 1975, p. 34-40.

<sup>14</sup> That is, especially along the lines of Pierre de Bérulle (+1629), Charles de Condren (+1679) and Jean-Jacques Olier (+1657). See BREMOND, Henri, *Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux en France*, Paris, 1967, vol. III & IV, p. 22-35; "France" (du 17e au 19e siècles) in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, vol. 5, XXXV-XXXVI, col. 917-997.

<sup>15</sup> See "Contemplation, VII. La contemplation dans l'école sulpicienne", in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, vol. II, col. 2144-2159; LEFLON I, p. 287-388.

<sup>16</sup> St. Thomas, *Summa theologiae*, 2a2ae, ques. 180, art. 3.

<sup>17</sup> *Missions*, 83 (1956), p. 202. LEFLON I, p. 403-425.

<sup>18</sup> CIANCIULLI, Francesco-Saverio, "Aspiration au cloître dans l'âme du Fondateur", in *Etudes oblates*, 13 (1954), p. 228-231; JETTE, Fernand, "La vie spirituelle d'Eugène de Mazenod (1812-1818)", in *Etudes oblates*, 20 (1961), p. 87-91.

<sup>19</sup> September 12, 1814 letter to Charles de Forbin-Janson in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, no. 1, p. 1 & 2.

<sup>20</sup> October 28, 1814 letter in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, no. 2, p. 2 & 3. The cloistered community of the strict observance which he had in mind was probably the Trappist monastery of his friend Brother Maur.

<sup>21</sup> October 23, 1815 letter in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, no. 5, p. 8.

<sup>22</sup> JETTÉ, Fernand, "La vie spirituelle d'Eugène de Mazenod (1812-1818)", in *Etudes oblates*, 20 (1961), p. 87-91.

<sup>23</sup> “Constitutions et Règles de la Société des Missionnaires de Provence” Part one, Chapter One, par. 2, in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 13-14. In the context of preaching, the same thought is capsulated later in the same document (*idem*, p. 35).

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<sup>25</sup> “Nos saintes Règles” in *Circ. adm.*, I (1850-1885), p. 125.

<sup>26</sup> “Constitutions et Règles de la Société des Missionnaires de Provence” Part Two, Chapter One, par. 4, in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 55. See LAMIRANDE, Emilien, “Les “deux parts” dans la vie de l’homme apostolique d’après Mgr de Mazenod”, in *Etudes oblates*, 25 (1966), p. 177-204.

<sup>27</sup> See LEFLON II, p. 586-589.

<sup>28</sup> FABRE, Joseph, Circular letter no. 9, May 27, 1861 in *Circ. adm.*, I, (1850-1885), p. 9 (54).

<sup>29</sup> Circular letter no. 11, March 21, 1962 in *Circ. adm.*, I, (1850-1900) p. 2-3 (70-71).

<sup>30</sup> Circular letter no. 42, June 29, 1887 in *Circ. adm.*, II, (1886-1900), p. 46-47.

<sup>31</sup> See NEMECK, Francis Kelly and COOMBS, Marie Theresa, *Contemplation*, Michael Glazier Inc., Wilmington, DE, 1984, p 141-146.

<sup>32</sup> See TEILHARD DE CHARDIN, Pierre, *The Divinization of our Activities in The Divine Milieu*, New York 1957 p. 49-73, 95-111.

<sup>33</sup> See C 1-5, 9, 11, 12, 24, 31; R 8-10 [R 8-9 in CCRR 2000].

<sup>34</sup> See also C 1, 2; R 8.

<sup>35</sup> See NEMECK, Francis Kelly and COOMBS, Marie Theresa, *Contemplation*, Michael Glazier Inc., Wilmington, DE, 1984, p. 13-20; *idem*, *Spiritual Journey*, p. 19-52.

<sup>36</sup> See *idem*, *Contemplation*, p. 27-35; *Spiritual Journey*, p. 75-95, 114-124; *The Way of Spiritual Direction*, Wilmington, 1985, p. 15-32.

<sup>37</sup> See *idem*, *Called by God*, vol. I, *A Renewed Theology of Vocation*, Wilmington, 1989, p. 92-103.

<sup>38</sup> See *ibidem*, vol. I, p. 11-16, vol. III, *Discerning Vocations to the Apostolic, the Contemplative and the Eremitical Life*, p. 15-74.

<sup>39</sup> See *idem*, *Spiritual Journey*, p. 39-52, 223-226.

<sup>40</sup> “My Universe”, in *Science and Christ*, New York, 1968, p. 75.

## APOSTLES

*Summary: I. The thought and teachings of Bishop de Mazenod on the Apostles: 1. "To walk in the footsteps of the Apostles"; 2. The Apostles, "our first fathers": a. Chosen and called by Jesus; b. Formed by the Lord; c. Sent to proclaim the Good News. 3. Other references to the Apostles in the writings of the Founder. 4. Devotion to the Apostles, particularly to Peter, Paul and John, and an interest in their writings. II. The Apostles in the tradition of the Congregation. Conclusion.*

Bishop de Mazenod refers to the Apostles more than fifty times in his writings. What is at the root of this interest? No doubt, it was his love for the Church founded upon the Apostles...

Upon his return to Aix in 1802, Eugene found that the Church in his country was in such a "deplorable situation" that he instinctively thought evangelization would have to start afresh just as it had at the beginning of Christianity. Thus, in the beginning of his 1818 Rule he poses to himself the question: "How, indeed, did our Lord Jesus Christ proceed? He chose a certain number of apostles and disciples whom he formed in piety, filling them with his spirit; and after having trained them in his school and in the practice of all virtues, he sent them to conquer the world which they soon brought under the rule of his holy laws. What must we do, in turn, to succeed in winning back for Jesus Christ so many souls who have cast off his yoke? Work seriously to become saints; walk courageously in the footsteps of so many apostles who have left us such beautiful examples in the exercise of a ministry to which we too are called; completely renounce ourselves [...] and then, full of confidence in God to enter the lists and fight to the point of extermination for the greater glory of God"<sup>1</sup>. As a result, Father de Mazenod and his co-workers make their own the

goal, like the Apostles: work to become saints and then to evangelize the poor.

We see here the combined influence of the French and the Sulpician school of spirituality. In his biography of M. Olier (1608-1657), M. Faillon wrote: "Adopting the view that the seminary was like the Cenacle where the Spirit of God would descend afresh to form apostolic men who would revitalize the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ, it was M. Olier's desire that all the clerics would take on the sentiments and attitudes of the holy Apostles and that they would become perpetual students of the Apostles' virtues. He had them depicted [...] in the chapel's main painting so that the seminary would have recourse to them as to full flowing channels of apostolic grace whose first fruits they had received for future ages, and so that they should honor them with a special devotion as being, after Jesus Christ, the foundations of the Church [...]"<sup>2</sup>.

Saint John Baptist de la Salle (1651-1719), another important follower of the Berullian school of spirituality, considered Christian educators as successors of the Apostles in their ministry. He left his spiritual sons extensive spiritual texts in which he said over and over again: "Those who educate youth are cooperators with Jesus Christ in the work of saving souls [...]; what Jesus Christ told his holy Apostles he tells

you yourselves as well [...]; you are the successors to the Apostles in their task of catechizing and instructing the poor [...]; thank God for the grace he has granted you in your task of sharing in the ministry of the holy Apostles and of the leading bishops and pastors of the Church [...]"<sup>3</sup>.

To walk in the footsteps of the Apostles, to imitate them both in their virtues and in their ministry, there, as well, lie the key concepts of de Mazenodian spirituality<sup>4</sup>. Let us take a look at his teaching on this topic and what impact his exhortations had on the Congregation.

## 1. THE THOUGHT AND TEACHINGS OF BISHOP DE MAZENOD CONCERNING THE APOSTLES

### 1. "TO WALK IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE APOSTLES"

This expression is one that flows frequently from the pen of the Founder. It almost always means to imitate their life of union with Christ and their mission. The first time we find this expression is in his first letter to Father Henry Tempier: We "have laid down the foundations of an establishment which will steadily furnish our countryside with fervent missionaries. These will ceaselessly engage in destroying the empire of the demon, while providing the example of a life worthy of the Church in the community which they will form [...]. You will have four companions. If presently we are not more numerous, it means we wish to choose men who have the will and the courage to walk in the footsteps of the Apostles"<sup>5</sup>.

The clearest expression of this idea is found in the text of the 1818 Rule

which we have already cited. Father de Mazenod's interpretation of this expression is subsequently developed in the paragraph entitled *Other Observances*: "It has already been stated that the missionaries should, as much as human weakness will allow, imitate in everything the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, the principal founder of the Society, and of his Apostles, our first fathers. In imitation of these great models, one part of their life will be devoted to prayer, interior recollection and contemplation in God's house where they will lead life in common. The other will be entirely devoted to external works of the most active zeal such as missions, preaching and hearing confessions, teaching catechism, directing youth, visiting the sick and the prisoners, spiritual retreats and other exercises of that sort. But, whether on mission or within their house, their main occupation will be to make progress in the ways of ecclesiastical and religious perfection [...]"<sup>6</sup>

In the letter that Father de Mazenod wrote to Father Joseph Augustin Viguier on January 6, 1819, he explains what he understands as the missionary vocation. "The missionary, being specifically called to the apostolic ministry, should aim at perfection. The Lord destines him to show forth anew, amongst those of his own time, the marvelous things that were done of old by the first preachers of the Gospel. He ought, then, to walk in their footsteps while being firmly persuaded that the miracles he must do are not the effect of his eloquence but of the grace of the Almighty who will communicate himself through him with all the more abundance if he is more virtuous, more humble, or, to say it all in one word, more holy."<sup>7</sup> We have here an idea which was already expressed in the Rule and which the

Founder ceaselessly repeated: the grace of God is conferred through the missionary all the more abundantly to the extent that he is "more virtuous, more humble, more holy".

During his annual retreat toward the end of October 1831, Father de Mazenod reread the Rule. On November 4, he wrote to Father Hippolyte Courtès, superior of the house in Aix. He exhorted him and the fathers and brothers of his community to read the Rule attentively: "Perhaps they will have some surprises and make some fresh discoveries. As for myself, here is one of the meditations I entered in my retreat notes: 'I said to myself while meditating on our Rules that we would never be able sufficiently to thank the divine bounty for having given them to us, for God alone indisputably is their author. [...] I am no longer astonished at the *saluberrimi operis*,<sup>8</sup> when I consider that the end of our Institute is the same as Our Lord proposed to himself when he came into the world. I come across I don't know how many passages which are proof again and again of the perfection of our Institute and the excellence of the means it puts at our disposal to follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ and his Apostles. I could go on for ever on this subject'.<sup>9</sup>"

On August 25, 1837, Bishop de Mazenod gave Father Jean-François Hermitte his obedience for Notre-Dame du Laus. He gave him the mission to "hear the confessions of both the pilgrims and the people of the place who may come to you". He invites him to "be everything to everyone," that is, to always be available like "the divine Master whom we serve and the holy Apostles in whose footsteps we follow"<sup>10</sup>.

Towards the end of 1840, the Founder was considering establishing the

novitiate at Notre-Dame de l'Osier. He gave Father Ambrose Vincens, the novice master designate, permission to accept the first postulant, Father Melchior Burfin. He cautions him, however, to check out thoroughly the attitudes of this cleric: "All we ask God is to send us priests after his own heart, who, filled with the holy desire for the joy of living in conformity with the divine Master's counsels, wish to travel the same path the Apostles and the favoured disciples who followed them had trod. The person you mention in your letter to Father Tempier seems to be of this caliber [...] I can only bless the Lord for inspiring him to associate himself to a Society of evangelical labourers whose number is not sufficient to reap the great harvest entrusted to it by the Father of the family"<sup>11</sup>.

Around 1845, Bishop de Mazenod wrote some *Recollections on the beginnings of the Congregation*. This is an important work, the original text of which has been lost to us. In it we read as follows: "[...] My intention when I devoted myself to the ministry of the missions, working especially to teach and convert the most abandoned souls, had been to imitate the Apostles in their life of dedication and self-denial. I had reached the conviction that to obtain the same results in our preaching we had to walk in their footsteps and practice the same virtues in the measure possible for us. I, therefore, considered the evangelical counsels which they had followed with such fidelity essential for us to embrace [...]"<sup>12</sup>.

After the Oblates had been sent to the foreign missions, such reflections sometimes took on the force of rules of conduct or else an acknowledgment bathed in wonder and gratitude. On January 25, 1848, he wrote to Father Étienne Semeria in Ceylon: "Do not

allow yourselves to be weakened by the heat of the climate. God must be served everywhere with fervour. If I could believe that you would degenerate in that land which you are to soak with the sweat of your brows to recall some to their duties, and to bring the light to others who do not know the true God, I would declare you unworthy of your great vocation and I would regret having chosen you in preference to so many others for your wonderful mission of making Jesus Christ known and extending his kingdom as you walk in the footsteps of the Apostles. But no, you will never cause me that pain.<sup>13</sup>

In 1848, he congratulates Father Eugene Dorey who has been appointed master of novices at Nancy: "What more beautiful ministry than that of forming in virtue, especially in the religious virtues, the chosen souls called by God to walk in the footsteps of the Apostles to spread the knowledge and the love of Jesus Christ!"<sup>14</sup>

In 1855, Father Jean-Louis Grandin entered the novitiate of Notre Dame de l'Osier with the intention of being reunited with his younger brother who had left a short time before for the Canadian Northwest. Accustomed to "the activity of serving in a parish," he suffered from the overly tranquil life of the novice. Bishop de Mazenod invited him to make good use of this "momentary respite". He specified: "You did not enter the Carthusians who make a novitiate in order to accustom themselves to a perpetual solitude. On the contrary, you have been admitted amongst those who in imitation of the Apostles, in whose footsteps they are called to walk, spend only a few months in retreat, and that to become more fitting for the very active life of a missionary, for the most varied minis-

try, fruitful in blessings that are truly miraculous"<sup>15</sup>.

It would seem to be in a letter to Father Antoine Mouchette, moderator of the scholastics, that the Founder used the expression "*To walk in the footsteps of the Apostles*" for the last time. "The satisfying news which you give me of your community of Montolivet fill me with consolation. My eyes and my heart even more are always intent on these dear children who are the hope of our family. I am happy to see that they grasp the sublimity of their vocation and are courageously working to become holy religious. I am confident that they will honor their great ministry, and that they will all prove themselves worthy to have been chosen, some to fight the Lord's battles among the degenerate Christians of Europe, the others to walk in the Apostle's footsteps and become themselves true apostles to proclaim the good news to unbelieving nations in different parts of the globe".<sup>16</sup>

## 2. THE APOSTLES, "OUR FIRST FATHERS"

In the Rule of 1818 and in the comment he made on it during his annual retreat at the end of October 1831, Father de Mazenod characterized the Apostles as "our First Fathers".<sup>17</sup> It is not often that he shared his thoughts on how he interpreted *Apostles*. Nevertheless, he uses this term to describe exclusively the *Twelve Apostles*<sup>18</sup> who were chosen and called by Jesus<sup>19</sup>, who followed him and lived with him<sup>20</sup>, and whom He subsequently sent throughout the world to continue his mission and to preach the Gospel.<sup>21</sup>

The Oblates, just like the Apostles, are in turn called by Jesus, molded and sent by Him to announce the Good News.

### a. Chosen and called by Jesus

The first condition to be an apostle in the strict sense is to be chosen by God.<sup>22</sup> This was a conviction Eugene already held shortly after his entrance into the seminary. On January 6, 1811, he wrote to his mother that “a sensual priest is in my eyes a deformed monstrosity”. He invited her to pray the Lord to “grant to his Church, not so much a larger number of priests, as a small but well chosen number. Twelve Apostles were enough to convert the world...”.<sup>23</sup> In the course of his years of preparing for the priesthood, Eugene often wrote his mother to speak to her of his vocation, this call from the Lord. In his case, it was a call that he could refuse to answer only at the risk of his own salvation<sup>24</sup>. Later on, in some letters to candidates for the Oblate life, Father de Mazenod stressed the importance of this call.<sup>25</sup> Caught in the crisis which struck in the wake of his departure with Father Tempier for Marseilles in 1823, the novice Hippolyte Guibert, like some of the others, was considering leaving the Congregation. The Founder writes to him: “[...] Persuaded as I am that the good God has given you to us in answer to our prayers, that he called you like the Apostles with the most evident signs of a truly divine vocation to follow him and to serve him in the ministry which resembles most that which he prescribed for his apostles, with whose work he willed to associate you”.<sup>26</sup>

When foreign missions had been accepted, Bishop de Mazenod marveled at the thought that his sons, like the Apostles, were announcing the Good News of salvation to those who had never heard it. He reminds them that they are “chosen”<sup>27</sup> and “called

by God”<sup>28</sup>, that their vocation is “apostolic”.<sup>29</sup>

### b. Formed by the Lord

The second condition for being an Apostle was to have “seen the Lord” (1 John 1:1-3), to have lived with him and listened to his teaching, etc. In his *Nota bene* of the 1818 Rule, Father de Mazenod wrote: “How, indeed, did our Lord Jesus Christ proceed? He chose a number of apostles and disciples whom he himself trained in piety, and he filled them with his spirit; and after having trained them in his school and in the practice of all virtues, he sent them to conquer the world [...]”.<sup>30</sup>

In half of the texts in which he mentions the Apostles, the Founder focused on their life of intimacy with Jesus during which He instructed them, sharing with them his virtues and his holiness. The Founder understood that, in order to proclaim adequately the Good News of salvation like the Apostles did, he and his followers should, first of all, seek the Lord’s company, then be attentive to what He told them through prayer and study, and finally to allow themselves to be formed by Him through their imitation of Him and their practice of the evangelical counsels. Moreover, one can say that the Founder’s frequent urging of people to observe regularity<sup>31</sup> had no other end in view than to live in intimate union with Christ in prayer, in meditation on the Gospel and the virtues of our Lord, in mortification, etc. It was to this end that he often spoke of the necessity of employing the same means as the Apostles to obtain similar results.<sup>32</sup>

During his stay in Paris in 1817 to obtain governmental approval for his Institute, he often wrote to Father Tempier who at the time was responsi-

ble for the formation of the novices and the scholastics. He stated that they should give a good example at the major seminary in Aix where they were taking their courses: “[...] All their actions ought to be done with the dispositions which guided the Apostles when they were in the Cenacle waiting for the Holy Spirit to come and inflame them with his love and give them the signal to go forth swiftly and conquer the world, etc.”<sup>33</sup>

It was evidently in the Rule that the Founder best explained how he understood the meaning of imitating the virtues of the Apostles. The longest paragraph of the *Nota bene* of the Rule of 1818 is devoted to this theme: “What must we do [...]? Work seriously to become saints; walk courageously in the footsteps of so many apostles who have left us such beautiful examples in the exercise of a ministry to which we too are called; completely renounce ourselves [...]; ceaselessly renew ourselves in the spirit of our vocation; live in a habitual state of self-denial and in a constant will of arriving at perfection [...]”.

At the beginning of the paragraph on the *Other Principal Observances*, he explains once again how the Oblates should imitate in all things the example of our Lord Jesus Christ and “the holy Apostles our first fathers”. He specifies, “following in their footsteps, the Missionaries will give one portion of their life to prayer, recollection, and contemplation in the secrecy of God’s house, in which they dwell together”.

In a note dating from the years 1818-1821 and preceding the introduction to the vow of poverty in the Rule, he wrote: “It is believed that the holy Apostles made a vow of poverty and that following their example the first faithful did likewise. Selling their prop-

erty, they brought the proceeds to the Apostles so that everything might be held in common”.<sup>34</sup>

Before accepting the direction of the sanctuary Notre-Dame du Laus in 1819, when he was presenting his missionaries to M. Arbaud, Vicar General for the diocese of Digne, he did not hide the fact that they were religious who practiced the evangelical counsels: “We need men who are detached, zealous for the glory of God and for the salvation of souls, in a word, intent on following and practicing the evangelical counsels. Without this, little or no good can be expected of them. The missions are the apostolic work par excellence. If we wish to achieve the same results as the Apostles and the first followers of the Gospel, we must use the same means as they...”<sup>35</sup>

To imitate Christ and the Apostles also meant to share in their sufferings. During the mission of Rognac in November of 1819, the fathers encountered many difficulties. Father de Mazenod wrote to Father Tempier: “God be praised, my dear friends and true apostles! My heart is afflicted by your situation, but rejoices at the same time to see you sharing the fate of our first fathers, disciples of the Cross”.<sup>36</sup>

In 1823, he stressed one particular aspect of intimate union of the Apostles and of the Oblates with Jesus. In Paris where he was with his uncle who had been appointed Bishop of Marseilles, he was not edified by the Holy Thursday celebration at the Tuileries. He wrote Father Tempier to tell him that he would have much preferred being with his own community in Aix. “I betook myself in spirit to that room that truly resembles the Cenacle where the disciples, prepared by the lessons they constantly receive in the Society, imbued with the spirit of the Saviour who lives in them, gather in the name of their

Master and represent the Apostles of whom Jesus Christ could say *vos mundi estis* (John 13:10), waiting silently and devoutly for the representative of the Master amongst them, who after hearing the Lord's commandment, *mandatum*, kneels at their feet, washing and touching these feet that were blessed and mandated several thousand years previously by the prophet because they are the feet of evangelizers of good, of preachers of peace...".<sup>37</sup>

After 1823, it was the young Father Courtès who was in charge of the novices and scholastics in Aix. The Founder enjoined upon him to hide nothing from the postulants, to let them know "all that we demand in the way of perfection from those who wish to be enrolled in our militia which can only fight the demon and vanquish him with the arms of Faith in the manner of the Apostles".<sup>38</sup>

During his 1825-1826 stay in Rome, he learned that the novice Nicolas Riccardi returned home because he was too attached to his mother. On February 17, 1826, he wrote him a long letter to invite him to rejoin the Oblate community where "some of the members were preparing themselves by the practice of the most excellent virtues to become worthy ministers of the mercy of God to the people [...]". And he adds, "There would surely have been no Apostle who could have followed Jesus Christ in such a manner. Since Christianity began, how many disciples, and later how many religious, who sanctified themselves in the practice of the evangelical counsels would have been lost for ever with their mothers?"<sup>39</sup>

During the October 1826 retreat, Father de Mazenod examined himself on his obligation to tend toward perfection and exclaimed, "For what holiness does not come from within the apostolic vocation, that vocation which dedicates me

to work unremittingly for the sanctification of souls with the means employed by the Apostles!"<sup>40</sup>

In the course of his October 1831 retreat, he meditated on the Rule. After having talked about the aim of the Congregation, he wrote: "The means that we employ to attain this end share in the excellence of this end. They are unquestionably the most perfect since they are precisely those same means used by our divine Saviour, his Apostles and his first disciples: the strict practice of the evangelical counsels, preaching and prayer; a happy blend of the active and contemplative life of which Jesus Christ and the Apostles have given us an example [...]".<sup>41</sup>

In the month of August 1838, the Bishop of Marseilles rejoiced at having received a letter from Bishop P. T. E. d'Astros, Archbishop of Toulouse, who looked with a jaundiced eye on the setting up of teams of diocesan priests to preach missions. He suggested as a better course of action to provide vocations to the congregations founded for this purpose "who have the mission and consequently the grace to carry out this difficult ministry which can be carried out worthily only by men specially consecrated to God and following the example of the Apostles in the evangelical counsels".<sup>42</sup>

### c. *Sent to proclaim the Good News.*

As Jesus was sent by the Father, and the Twelve sent in turn, so also in their wake the Oblates are sent by Jesus to proclaim the Gospel to the poor (John 20:21; 2 Corinthians 5:20).

— *Greatness of this mission.* After accepting foreign missions in 1841, Bishop de Mazenod saw especially the loftiness of the mission of the Apostles

and the Oblates. From the beginnings of the Congregation, he did indeed consider parish missions as an "apostolic" and "evangelical" ministry. He was even in awe as he became aware of the good they were working for souls. For example, in 1819, he wrote to Father Viguier that the Lord destines the missionary "to show forth anew, amongst those of his own time, the marvelous things that were done of old by the first preachers of the Gospel".<sup>43</sup> In 1823, for example, he reminded the novice Hippolyte Guibert who was ambivalent about his vocation that God had called him to "serve him in the ministry which resembles most that which he prescribed for his Apostles".<sup>44</sup> The same idea is contained in the letter he wrote the deacon Nicolas Riccardi in 1826. How can one hesitate in his vocation when he sees some of his confreres "reproduce the marvels operated by the preaching of the first disciples of the Gospel".<sup>45</sup> During the season of Lent of 1844, the Bishop of Marseilles issued a pastoral letter on parish missions. In this letter, we read: "For some months now, this holy word has been resounding in our diocese with the most admirable results. It has been heard in the towns and countryside as well as in our episcopal city and its impact showed that, handed on by Jesus Christ to his Apostles and their successors through the course of the centuries, it has lost none of its power".<sup>46</sup>

But the acceptance of foreign missions brings about a change of emphasis in his letters. It was the same missionary vocation that the Oblates carried out in the footsteps of the Apostles: "to re-awaken sinners" in the countries where Christianity has been long established, and in the case of unbelievers, "to proclaim and to make Jesus Christ known".<sup>47</sup> However, in his opinion, the

foreign missions brought about this common goal of making Jesus Christ known and loved in a stronger and fuller sense.<sup>48</sup> Bishop de Mazenod spoke with much enthusiasm about the loftiness of the missionary vocation. Let us just give some extracts from his letters. On the occasion of Father Pascal Ricard's departure for Oregon in 1847 in response to the request of Bishop Magloire Blanchet, Bishop of Walla Walla, the Founder wrote: "I say nothing of how magnificent in the eyes of Faith is the ministry you are going to fulfill. One must go back to the birth of Christianity to find anything comparable. It is an apostle with whom you are associated and the same marvels that were wrought by the first disciples of Jesus Christ will be renewed in our days by you, my dear children, whom Providence has chosen amongst so many others to announce the Good News to so many slaves of the demon who huddle in the darkness of idolatry and who know not God. This is verily the real apostolate which is renewed in our times. Let us thank the Lord for our having been deemed worthy to be participants therein in so active a manner".<sup>49</sup>

In 1851, in a letter to this same priest, he gives an even clearer exposition of his thought: "Foreign missions compared to our missions in Europe have a special character of a higher kind because this is the true apostolate of announcing the Good News to nations which have not yet been called to knowledge of the true God and his son Jesus Christ... This is the mission of the Apostles: *Euntes, docete omnes gentes!* This teaching of the truth must penetrate to the most backward nations so that they may be regenerated in the waters of baptism. You are among those to whom Jesus Christ has addressed these words, giving you your mission as

he gave the mission to the Apostles who were sent to convert our fathers. From this point of view, which is a true one, there is nothing higher than your ministry".<sup>50</sup>

The most arduous missions were those of the Canadian Northwest. There the missionary suffered loneliness, hunger and cold. It was especially those missionaries that Bishop de Mazenod felt the need to encourage, even if it usually took two years to get an answer to one's letters. May 28, 1857, he congratulated Father Henry Joseph Faraud in the mission of the Nativity near Lake Athabaska. "What a reward you will have beyond this world, when one thinks of the wonders that have been brought about by the power of your ministry. One has to go back to the first preaching of Saint Peter to find anything similar. An apostle like him, sent to proclaim the Good News to those savage nations, the first man to speak to them of God, to bring them to a knowledge of Jesus the Saviour, to show them the way that leads to salvation, to give them rebirth in the holy waters of baptism - one can only prostrate oneself before you, so privileged are you among your brothers in the Church of God by reason of the choice that he has made of you to work these miracles. [...] I know that you are offering all your sufferings to God for the salvation of those poor lost souls whom you are leading by grace to the knowledge of the truth, to the love of Jesus Christ, and to eternal salvation. It is this that consoles me most of all when I consider that you have been chosen as the first apostles to proclaim the good news to nations which, without you, would have never known God ... It is wonderful, it is magnificent to be able to apply in so real a way the beautiful words of the Master, *Elegi vos ut eatis*. What a vo-

cation! If, as I do not doubt, you know how to respond to it, what will be your recompense?"<sup>51</sup>

To Alexandre Taché, Bishop of Saint Boniface, he wrote on July 16, 1860: "The Bishop of Satala [Bishop Vital Grandin] has told me of the great feats of our Fr. Grollier and of the success of his zealous efforts. He has really a cause for joy when he sees the good news reach in this way by the ministry of our men to the very ends of the earth. That is true apostolic work, and our men have been sent just as the Apostles were".<sup>52</sup>

— *Nature of the mission of the Apostles*. The Apostles were sent to teach (Matthew 28:19-20), govern (Matthew 18:17-18) and sanctify people (Luke 12:19-20; John 20:21-23). In Bishop de Mazenod's view, the Oblates followed in the footsteps of the Apostles because they strove for perfection by following the evangelical counsels, etc., but also because they carried on the Apostles' mission of teaching and sanctification.<sup>53</sup>

He presents this double mission through the use of a wide variety of expressions in most of the texts that treat the Apostles. Some texts speak of the mission in general. For example, "Twelve Apostles were enough to convert the world"<sup>54</sup>; scholastics should prepare themselves like the Apostles to "go forth swiftly to conquer the world"<sup>55</sup>; "What must we do [...]?" Filled with confidence in God, enter the lists and fight to the point of extermination for the greater glory of God [...]; bring back into the fold so many strayed sheep, [...] teach these degenerate Christians who Christ is, to wrest them from the slavery of the devil and show them the path to heaven [...]"<sup>56</sup>; "bring back those who have gone astray by the

splendor of our virtues"<sup>57</sup>; "to gain souls for Jesus Christ"<sup>58</sup>; "fight the demon and vanquish him"<sup>59</sup>; "so generous an advanced contingent that makes conquests for Jesus Christ by so many sacrifices [...]"<sup>60</sup>; "extend the kingdom of Jesus Christ", "to fight the Lord's battles".<sup>61</sup>

The majority of the texts making reference to the Apostles deal with the mission of teaching. One expression comes back ceaselessly, that is, "to proclaim the Good News of salvation"<sup>62</sup>, but we do find several others as well: "to lead to the knowledge of the true God and to the practice of virtue"<sup>63</sup>, "to illuminate", your "wonderful mission of making Jesus Christ known"<sup>64</sup>, "to spread the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ"<sup>65</sup>, to be "propagators of the teaching of Jesus Christ"<sup>66</sup>, etc. Obviously, it is in the Rule that the Founder's teaching is most complete on this subject. In the *Nota bene* at the beginning, after having asked: What must we do? he wrote: "The peoples wallowing in the crassest ignorance of everything concerning their salvation [...]. It is therefore urgent [...] to teach these degenerate Christians who Jesus Christ is [...]." He then devotes a chapter of the Rule to preaching and sets forth in a powerful way what he understands good preaching to be: "We should have but one anxiety - to instruct the faithful, to consider who those are who form the majority of our hearers, and to assist them in their spiritual needs. We should not only break for them the bread of the Word of God, but (as it were) grind and chew it for them, making it our earnest endeavour to secure that those who hear us may not go away foolishly admiring what they have not understood, but may return to their homes instructed and well-disposed, and able to repeat in their families what they have learned

from our lips." Already in one of his Lenten instructions of 1813, he had told the faithful that, following the example of Saint Paul, he had not come to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ in elevated discourse and with human wisdom, but "the simple Word of God stripped of every ornament, placed so far as in us lay within the grasp of the simplest".<sup>67</sup>

The expressions that deal with the mission of sanctification are fewer and less varied, but sufficiently clear. During his days at the seminary, Eugene often invited his sister and his grandmother to receive communion as frequently as possible. This, he wrote, was one of the means of sanctification practiced by the first Christians according to the mind of our Lord which "was handed down to them by the Apostles"<sup>68</sup>. In a Lenten instruction of 1813, he dealt with confession: "Every Christian knows that there is a sacrament of penance instituted by O.L.J.C. for the remission of sins committed after baptism. That approved priests are the only ministers of this sacrament in virtue of the power that was given them by the Lord [...] How can I possibly fail to afford you the opportunity of seeing the constant tradition and the crowd of witnesses which demonstrates the uniformity and perpetuity of this teaching going back to the time of the Apostles?"<sup>69</sup>

After the founding of the Congregation, he speaks rather often about this mission of sanctification. For example, he states that our vocation consists in working "unremittingly for the sanctification of souls with the means employed by the Apostles"<sup>70</sup>; that the novices and the scholastics are preparing themselves to become "worthy ministers of the mercy of God to the people"<sup>71</sup>, that "there is no doubt that

you are buying souls at the price of your blood"<sup>72</sup>; that we are sent "to show them the way that leads to salvation, to give them rebirth in the holy waters of baptism [...]".<sup>73</sup>

Several paragraphs of the Rule set forth in detail the various Oblate ministries which have to do with sanctification of the faithful: missions, confession, direction of the youth, apostolate for the prisoners and the dying, divine office, etc. Even when speaking to missionaries, the Founder rarely mentions baptism. That was due to the fact that he preferred to see them following the example of the Apostles as totally devoted "to prayer and to the service of the word" (Acts 6:4).

### 3. OTHER REFERENCES TO THE APOSTLES IN THE WRITINGS OF THE FOUNDER

Bishop de Mazenod also drew his inspiration from the Apostles in other circumstances. In 1830, he had some dealings with Father J. A. Grassi, a Jesuit from Turin, about the possibility of establishing a foundation in the Sardinian states, that is, in Sardinia, in Piedmont or in Savoy. He offers a rebuttal to some anticipated objections: "Would someone want to oppose us as foreigners? The members of a Congregation recognized by the Church, whose Superior is named by the Pope, are Catholic before all else. Their lives are dedicated according to the spirit of their vocation to the service of souls without preference for persons or nations; their ministry is entirely spiritual; they belong to the country that adopts them, and live there under the protecting mantle of the law as faithful subjects, solely occupied with the purpose of their heavenly mission which strives to accomplish every duty, whether to God or to the Prince,

God's representative among men. The Apostles were foreigners in the countries to which Our Lord Jesus Christ assigned them to preach the Gospel".<sup>74</sup>

In 1837, Father Vincent Mille accompanied Archbishop J. Bernet of Aix on a pastoral visit of his diocese. The Archbishop's predecessor had allowed foreign priests to preach missions in the diocese, but Father Mille told him that these preachers had already left after having stirred up a lot of talk and laid out elaborate plans. As a result, the Founder notes in his Diary: "That is the second installment of the Missionaries of France to which group some of these newcomers belong. Why should we wish to act other than our models, the Apostles, have done? It is written that they did not harvest in the fields planted by others. In addition, God has not blessed their works and we will have at least earned some merit for our resignation or for the support that I so highly recommended to our members in those difficult moments that we have to put up with".<sup>75</sup>

In his circular letter of December 1845 which prescribed that public prayers be said for the return of England to Catholic unity, the Bishop of Marseilles noted "upright and sincere souls" had perceived that a Church "would be false if she were not founded on the Prophets and the Apostles with Jesus Christ as cornerstone of the edifice [...] These men of whom we speak have not wished to confuse the shepherd's staff of the spiritual pastor with the scepter of a temporal king, the keys which open to souls the kingdom of heaven with the sword that safeguards their bodies. The powers of the world do not appear to them to have received from heaven the mission to feed the sheep and lambs of the Lord but only he to whom God expressly says: Feed my lambs and my

sheep (John 21:16 &17) and also they who with him have been invested with the pastoral ministry: that is to say, the Pope, successor of St. Peter and centre of unity, together with the Bishops, successors of the other Apostles. To them it has been said: Go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost".<sup>76</sup>

Often enough Bishop de Mazenod used the word Apostle in the broader sense of a great missionary of the Gospel. A first usage is found in two places in the *Nota bene* of the 1818 Rule: "Since these causes are known, it becomes easier to apply the remedy. To do this, we must form apostles [...]". "What must we do [...]? To follow courageously in the footsteps of so many apostles who have left us such splendid examples [...]".<sup>77</sup> In 1819, in a letter to Father Tempier and his confreres preaching a mission at Rognac, he wrote: "God be praised, my dear friends and true apostles" or yet again at the beginning of 1826: "Recommend to our fathers who are preaching the jubilee that they conduct themselves like saints, like real apostles".<sup>78</sup> In the month of February of 1848, he wrote to Father Louis Toussaint Dassy in Nancy giving him news of the fathers and brothers in Ceylon and Oregon. He ends his letter by saying, "Let none among us complain anymore of anything, for we have so generous an advanced contingent that makes conquests for Jesus Christ by so many sacrifices, and what merits do they not acquire in the eyes of the Lord and of the Church. Dear Brothers, how admirable they are! Let us pray much for them, and let us be proud to be one with such apostles of the Lord".<sup>79</sup> The same thought is found in a letter to Father Charles Baret in 1852: "You will not find anywhere a group of

wiser and more fervent youngsters [young fathers] ... We have never had such a large number of them in the Congregation. We encompass the whole world with our apostles whose zeal and devotedness wring from me tears of joy and tenderness".<sup>80</sup>

The Founder rarely made use of the adjective "apostolic". Only on a few occasions did he call the Oblates "apostolic men"<sup>81</sup> and spoke of their "apostolic vocation"<sup>82</sup>; or yet again characterized their mission as "apostolic work", "apostolic ministry".<sup>83</sup>

#### 4. DEVOTION TO THE APOSTLES, PARTICULARLY TO PETER, PAUL AND JOHN, AND AN INTEREST IN THEIR WRITINGS

In the first *Directory for Novices and Scholastics*, the authorship of which Oblate tradition attributes to Father Casimir Aubert who was a close collaborator and beloved disciple of the Founder, we find in the chapter on devotions that we should nurture intense personal devotion to the Apostles, especially Saint Peter, Saint Paul and Saint John<sup>84</sup>. Their names already appeared in the litanies of the saints special to the Congregation, recited during particular examen from the first days of the Institute.

Already in 1805, in an effort to confirm his friend Immanuel Gaultier de Claubry in his faith, Eugene sent him a series of Scripture texts and added: "It is by no means Eugene, it is Jesus Christ, it is Peter, Paul, John, etc., who send you this wholesome food which when received with that spirit of faith of which you are capable will certainly not be without effect".<sup>85</sup>

Eugene loved Saint Peter because Jesus entrusted to him the keys of his Church<sup>86</sup> and because, like himself, he

was a special object of the mercy of the Lord. He took him as his "specially chosen patron" during the retreat when he was preparing for the priesthood in December of 1811.<sup>87</sup> To his friend Father Charles de Forbin-Janson who was visiting Rome in 1814, he wrote: "I still have space to beg you to make an offering of my heart with yours to Saint Peter and all the other saints with whom the Holy City is filled".<sup>88</sup> During his own stay in Rome (1825-1826), Father de Mazenod celebrated Mass on the tomb of the Prince of the Apostles on December 21, 1825, and in his letters and Diary he noted that there were memorials or relics of Saint Peter in a dozen churches.<sup>89</sup>

"Inflamed with the zeal which burned in the Apostles", according to the expression coined by Canon Cailhol<sup>90</sup>, it was natural for Bishop de Mazenod to have a special devotion to Saint Paul, Apostle of the gentiles. Again during his stay in Rome, he went to pray at the tomb of this Apostle on January 29, 1826, and found memorials of him in some other churches.<sup>91</sup>

Saint John, the beloved disciple, received the homage of the Founder's veneration especially because of his intimate union with the Lord. Upon the occasion of the death of Dauphin, one of his servants, Bishop de Mazenod poured forth his sorrow in his Diary and felt the need to explain: "I have every reason to thank God for having endowed me with a soul capable of understanding better the soul of Jesus Christ, our master, who formed, enlivened and inspired mine, than all those cold, selfish intellectuals who seem to think the heart resides in the head and who do not know how to love anyone because, in the final analysis, they love only themselves. And it is in the wake of the teaching of Jesus Christ, and

after the example of Saint Peter and the teaching of Saint John, that they come to pawn off on us a kind of perfection more worthy of the Stoics than of authentic Christians!"<sup>92</sup>.

The Founder knew well the writings of these three Apostles. Often in his letters and more frequently still in his circular letters, he quoted passages from their letters and the Gospel of Saint John. We find in his writings about fifty quotes from Saint Peter, a few hundred from Saint John, and more still from Saint Paul.<sup>93</sup>

## II. THE APOSTLES IN THE TRADITION OF THE CONGREGATION

The Oblates who were the Founder's contemporaries did not seem to have shared to any great extent his interest in and devotion to the Apostles, but they were energized by the same zeal. Of course, one would have to have perused all their writings to make an objective judgment on this point, but the little that we do know through biographies and their necrological notices allows us, it would seem, to make this statement. Indeed, in the published writings of the main collaborators of Bishop de Mazenod, Fathers Tempier and Casimir Aubert, the Apostles are practically never mentioned. In response to Father de Mazenod's first letter, Father Tempier used the same terminology: "I see what your are looking for most in choosing your collaborators: you want priests [...] who are ready to follow in the footsteps of the Apostles [...]".<sup>94</sup>

Father Casimir Aubert also made a single mention of them. On Holy Thursday 1833, Bishop de Mazenod extended to him the invitation to serve as deacon at the cathedral. He wrote in

his retreat notes: "It is no longer in a church that on celebrating the wonderful institution of the Eucharist; you enjoy the blessing of being with the Apostles in the great hall where our beloved Jesus will give the most outstanding proof of his love for men".<sup>95</sup> We also know that Father Dominic Albini, as a gesture in imitation of the Apostles, strove to go on foot to all the places where he would preach.<sup>96</sup>

In a letter written in 1863 to Father Joseph Fabre, Bishop Jean-François Allard spoke about the Basotho having ideas which presupposed on their part a good grasp of the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles: "The Basotho find the celibacy of the Catholic missionaries very proper. We know, some among them have told us, that the Apostles left everything and that several were not married. Besides, when we saw our Protestant ministers, we asked ourselves where the successors of the Apostles were who had renounced everything and lived a life of poverty? But when we saw the Catholic missionaries coming, we said among ourselves: These are more likely to be the true successors of the Apostles, because they walk more closely in their footsteps".<sup>97</sup>

In 1868, Father Mark de L'Hermite said that Father Tempier had been the beloved disciple of the Founder like Saint John had been the beloved disciple of Jesus. Father Joseph Fabre makes the same comparison in 1870 in Father Tempier's necrological notice<sup>98</sup>, but in his many circular letters, he mentions the Apostles only once in speaking of obedience.<sup>99</sup> In the circular letter of March 21, 1863, he reminds his readers that the goal of the Congregation is to evangelize. However, as examples he does not point to the Apostles, but rather to Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Francis Régis.<sup>100</sup>

Father Louis Soullier mentioned the Apostles more frequently. From his very first circular letter of May 24, 1893, he said that he was elected by the Chapter which he compared to the Cenacle "to which the Apostles had retired when they came down from the hill of the Ascension. In silence and recollection, closely united in the bonds of charity and united in prayer with Mary, the Mother of God, they awaited with confidence the fulfillment to the divine promises and a marvelous transformation took place [...]".<sup>101</sup>

In his important circular letters on *Preaching* and on *Studies*, Father Soullier mentioned the Apostles several times in the same way the Founder did. He published his letter on *Preaching* in February of 1895. After holding forth at length on the dignity and the fruitfulness of preaching, he added: "The Apostles, sent by Jesus Christ, held the sublimity of preaching in high regard. When they were forced to choose, they entrusted the work of charity to subordinates and reserved for themselves the task of preaching [...]".<sup>102</sup>

About ten times in his December 8, 1896 letter on *Studies*, he mentioned the Apostles who did not baptize, but reserved for themselves the ministry of the word (p. 32). He stated that "the best means for regenerating the world was to come back to the method of the Apostles", and went on to explain (pp. 45 and 46) what this method entailed. In chapter V treating of study and the Oblate in the foreign missions, he said: "You find yourselves in the same situation as the Apostles who had the whole world to win over to the faith [...]; your role is, in a sense, more difficult than that of the Apostles" because "you have to face paganism before you, you have heresy at your elbow [...]" (pp. 58-59). In several places he spoke of the "apostolic man"

who is the "propagator and defender of the faith" (pp. 64, 106).<sup>103</sup>

When the Oblates were expelled from France in 1903, Father Cassian Augier wrote: "Should we not, like the Apostles, rejoice for having been judged worthy to suffer for the sake of Jesus Christ?" (Acts 5:14).<sup>104</sup>

Once in his circular letters, Bishop Augustine Dontenwill quoted the well-known text from the Founder's *Memoirs* concerning the beginnings of the Congregation: "My intention in devoting myself to the ministry of the missions [...] had been to imitate the example of the Apostles in their life of dedication and self-denial [...]"<sup>105</sup>

Father Leo Deschâtelets spoke of the Founder in the majority of his circular letters and mentioned the Apostles several times. In circular no. 191 on our vocation, he called them "our first fathers"<sup>106</sup>; in his 1968 letter on the Spirit of renewal, he quoted the *Preface* with regard to the way our Lord chose and formed his Apostles; he stressed the "asceticism which finds its source in the teachings of the Gospel and the holy Apostles"; he then invited the Oblates to "follow in the footsteps of Christ and the Apostles" and added that "the saints, the Apostles, our first fathers, always considered that they were never doing enough to follow in the footsteps of Christ".<sup>107</sup>

In the letters during the last years of his superiorship, the period between 1969 and 1972, in addition to the traditional expressions of "apostolic men" and of "apostolic life", Father Deschâtelets coined new ones such as: "apostolic commitment", "apostolic community life", "apostolic community".<sup>108</sup>

We find once the expression "apostolic community" in the few circular letters of Father Richard Han-

ley<sup>109</sup>, whereas Father Fernand Jetté often spoke of "apostolic men"<sup>110</sup> of "apostolic works"<sup>111</sup>, of "commitment" and of an "apostolic body"<sup>112</sup>, of "periods of apostolic activity for the novices"<sup>113</sup>, and, together with his Council, spoke of "the Apostles, our first fathers", and that "Oblates endeavor to follow in the Apostles' footsteps".<sup>114</sup>

The Constitutions of 1982, drawn up and approved under the superiorship of Father Jetté, mentioned the Apostles in three articles. The third, *In Apostolic Community*, presents an idea which is not explicitly found in the writings of the Founder: "The community of the Apostles with Jesus is the model of our life. Our Lord grouped the Twelve around him to be his companions and to be sent out as his messengers (cf. Mk 3:14). The call and the presence of the Lord among us today bind us together in charity and obedience to create anew in our own lives the Apostles' unity with him and their common mission in his Spirit." Father Jetté came back to this thought in circular letter no. 299, the letter of convocation for the 1986 Chapter: "The Chapter is, therefore, first of all, a *family gathering around Christ*, like that of the Apostles gathering on the evening of Easter [...]"<sup>115</sup>

Article 6 of the Constitutions, "In the Church", draws its inspiration from the Founder's thought, a mindset very devoted to the Church and to the Pope and which wanted to see the Oblates at the service of the bishops.<sup>116</sup> The article reads as follows: "Our love for the Church inspires us to fulfill our mission in communion with the pastors whom the Lord has given to his people; we accept loyally, with an enlightened faith, the guidance and teachings of the successors of Peter and the Apostles".

Article 45 on formation which is evangelical on spirit takes up again the expressions that one often found flowing from the pen of the Founder: "Jesus personally formed the disciples he had chosen, initiating them into "the mystery of the Kingdom of God" (Mk 4:11). As a preparation for their mission he had them share in his ministry; to confirm their zeal he sent them his Spirit. This same Spirit forms Christ in those who endeavour to follow in the Apostles' footsteps. As they enter more deeply into the mystery of the Saviour and his Church, he moves them to dedicate themselves to the evangelization of the poor."

Father Marcello Zago, like Father Jetté, occasionally mentions the Apostles.<sup>117</sup> He also uses the traditional expression "apostolic men"<sup>118</sup> and above all, those more recent expressions "apostolic spirituality"<sup>119</sup>, "apostolic priorities" and then very often "apostolic communities"<sup>120</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

In his circular letter of February 28, 1848, the Bishop of Marseilles wrote: "The apostle is more perfect than the monk. The virtues of those who preach the truth, says Pope Saint Gregory, are heaven's adornment. It can happen that the apostle under the inspiration of a lofty charity may forget himself on occasion and wholly renounce everything that is his to dedicate himself entirely to the task of saving his brothers. Like Saint Paul, he would choose to become anathema for their sake [...]"<sup>121</sup>.

After his return to Aix in 1802 and his conversion between 1805 and 1808, grace enkindled in the heart of Eugene de Mazenod the flame of zeal. He then devoted his life to the salvation of souls

and shared in the solicitude for all the churches.<sup>122</sup> The reaction of Bishop L. Berteaud, Bishop of Tulle in 1850 was not lacking in justification when, after coming from a meeting with Bishop de Mazenod, he expressed himself in these words: "I have met Paul".<sup>123</sup>

The Oblates have always been animated by the ardent zeal that burned in the heart of the Apostles and of Bishop de Mazenod. The latter often rejoiced at their dedication and their apostolic successes. The secretary of the 1837 Chapter tells us that in the report of the first session the Founder spoke to the capitulants in fatherly fashion. "In his address, he could not, at first, contain his deep-felt emotion which was shared by all, as he saw gathered around him his children whom he had seen born before his very eyes, had formed with his own hands, and now saw as apostles, conquerors, men of miracles, since by an outstanding protection shown by the Lord, wonders appeared as they passed by [...]"<sup>124</sup>

Upon his return from a trip to America in 1895, Superior General Father Louis Soullier issued a circular letter in which he wrote: "Yes, our missionaries have walked in the footsteps of the Apostles; with the cross and the divine Word, they have converted entire nations and through the Mother of Mercy have brought them to Jesus, the Son of God".<sup>125</sup>

The Superiors General and the Popes have often made the same observations. The Oblates have courageously proclaimed the Good News to the poor and shaped Christianity in several countries. In 1932, Pope Pius XI expressed his admiration in these words: "Once again we have seen how you have held to your beautiful, glorious and holy characteristic which is that of dedicating your energies and your tal-

ents and your lives to the souls of the most abandoned in the most difficult missions [...]”.<sup>126</sup> At the General Chapter of 1986, Pope John Paul II invited them to remain faithful to their heritage: “Sons of Eugene de Mazenod, whose zeal to proclaim the Gospel has been compared to the Mistral wind, heirs of a lineage nearly two centuries old of Oblates impassioned for Jesus Christ, let yourselves be drawn more than ever by the vast and poor masses of Third World regions, also by the Fourth World of the West, stagnating in misery and in the ignorance of God”.<sup>127</sup>

YVON BEAUDOIN

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Nota bene* of the 1818 Rule in *Missions*, 78 (1951) p. 15-19.

<sup>2</sup> Faillon, *M. Olier*, III, 1873, p. 81-82.

<sup>3</sup> Texts quoted by DEVILLE, R., in *L'école française de spiritualité*, Desclée, Bibliothèque d'histoire du christianisme, no. 11, 1987, p. 129-130.

<sup>4</sup> See GILBERT, Maurice, “Sur les traces des Apôtres”, in *Etudes oblates*, 16 (1957), p. 294.

<sup>5</sup> Letter to Abbé Henry Tempier, October 9, 1815, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, p. 6 & 7.

<sup>6</sup> Constitutions and Rules of 1818, second part, chapter one, end of par. 4.

<sup>7</sup> In *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 6, p. 55.

<sup>8</sup> An expression used by Pope Leo XII in

the apostolic letters of approbation of the Rule, March 21, 1826, see *Missions*, 79 (1952), p. 167-173.

<sup>9</sup> In *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 8, no. 407, p. 43.

<sup>10</sup> In *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 9, no. 636, p. 52.

<sup>11</sup> In *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 9, no. 717, p. 154.

<sup>12</sup> In RAMBERT I, p. 187.

<sup>13</sup> In *Oblate Writings*, vol. 4, no. 2, p. 8 & 9.

<sup>14</sup> Letter of October 15, 1848 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 10, p. 237.

<sup>15</sup> Letter of December 4, 1855, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 11, no. 1302, p. 296 & 297.

<sup>16</sup> Letter of March 11, 1860 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 12, no. 1447, p. 180. Note here that, by way of exception, the Founder states that those who walk in the footsteps of the Apostles are not those Oblates working in Europe, but exclusively those who go to proclaim the Good News to the unbelieving nations.

<sup>17</sup> See Constitutions and Rules of 1818, the *Nota bene* p. 15 and the paragraph entitled *Other Principal Observances*, p. 54; retreat notes at the end of October 1831 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 15, no. 163, p. 191; the letter to Father Vincent Mille, November 3, 1831 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 8, no. 406, p. 41.

<sup>18</sup> A few times only, as we shall see later on, the Founder uses the word in the broader sense of great missionaries for the Gospel.

<sup>19</sup> Matthew 4: 18-22; Mark 1:16-20; Luke 5:1-11; John 1:35-52.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem* and 1 John 1:1-3: have “seen the Lord”.

<sup>21</sup> Matthew 10:1-4, 28:16-20; Mark 3:13-19; 16:19-20; Luke 6:12-16.

<sup>22</sup> See “Apôtres” in *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, I, col. 1647-1649 and the *Nota bene* of the 1818 Rule.

<sup>23</sup> In *Oblate Writings*, I, 14, p. 154.

<sup>24</sup> See especially the following letters: April 6, 1809 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 14, no. 50, p. 117; end of September 1809, *ibidem*, no. 60, p. 137; October 11, 1809, *ibidem*, no. 61, p. 140. In his March 28, 1813, instruction at the Madeleine, he would state again: “called by my vocation to be the ser-

vant and the priest of the poor", in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 15, no. 115, p. 40.

<sup>25</sup> Lettres to Abbé Viguier, January 6, 1819 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 6, no. 38, p. 55; to X, January 8, 1830 in YENVEUX, VIII, p. 24.

<sup>26</sup> Letter of June 26, 1823 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 6, no. 109, p. 117, 118, 119.

<sup>27</sup> Letters to Father Pascal Ricard, January 8, 1847 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 1, no. 74, p. 148; to Father Étienne Semeria, January 25, 1848 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 4, no. 2, p. 8; to Father Henry Faraud, May 28, 1857 and December 9, 1859 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 2, no. 234, p. 146 and no. 268, p. 218; to Father Theodore Végreville, April 17, 1860, *ibidem*, no. 273, p. 228.

<sup>28</sup> Letters to Father Semeria, January 25, 1848 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 4, no. 2, p. 8; to Father Eugene Dorey, October 15, 1848 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 10, no. 990, p. 237; to Father Antoine Mouchette, February 17, 1859 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 12, no. 1404, p. 129.

<sup>29</sup> Letters to the Oblates of Red River, June 28, 1855 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 2, no. 211, p. 102; to Father François-Marie Le Bihan, September 3, 1860 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 4, no. 31, p. 220.

<sup>30</sup> In the Latin text of 1825-1826 and in the French translation that follows, we no longer find the phrase, "in the practice of all the virtues".

<sup>31</sup> See BEAUDOIN, Yvon, "Le Fondateur et l'observance des Constitutions et Règles, d'après ses écrits", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 43 (1984), p. 81-112.

<sup>32</sup> See especially *Nota bene* of the 1818 Rule; the letter to M. Arbaud, January 1, 1819 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 13, no. 22, p. 30; retreat notes of October 1826 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 15, no. 157, p. 183 and the letter to Father Hippolyte Courtès, November 4, 1831 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 8, no. 407, p. 43.

<sup>33</sup> Letter of November 4, 1817 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 6, no. 29, p. 45.

<sup>34</sup> "Pauvreté évangélique" in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 15, no. 150, p. 161.

<sup>35</sup> Letter of January 1, 1819 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 13, no. 22, p. 30.

<sup>36</sup> Letter of November 16, 1819, see *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 6, no. 47, p. 62.

<sup>37</sup> Letter of March 27, 1823 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 6, no. 98, p. 107.

<sup>38</sup> Letter of July 30, 1824 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 6, no. 149, p. 149.

<sup>39</sup> In *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 7, no. 225, p. 35 and 37.

<sup>40</sup> In *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 15, no. 157, p. 175.

<sup>41</sup> In *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 15, no. 163, p. 184. The same reflections are found in his letters to Father Mille, November 3, 1831 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 8, no. 406, p. 40 and to Father Courtès, November 4, 1831, *ibidem*, no. 407, p. 43.

<sup>42</sup> *Diary*, August 24, 1838, Ms., A.G., JM 1838, p. 69-71. After 1841, when he spoke of the Apostles, the Founder stressed less the imitation of their virtues than he did the sublimity of their mission.

<sup>43</sup> Letter of January 6, 1819 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 6, no. 38, p. 55.

<sup>44</sup> Letter of June 26, 1823 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 6, no. 109, p. 114.

<sup>45</sup> Letter of February 17, 1826 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 7, no. 225, p. 36. See also letter to Father Mille, November 3, 1831, *Oblate Writings*, vol. 8, no. 306, p. 36.

<sup>46</sup> Circular letter of February 14, 1844, p. 4, 19, etc.

<sup>47</sup> Letter to Father Anthony Mouchette, February 17, 1859 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 12, no. 1404, p. 129.

<sup>48</sup> See LAMIRANDE, Emilien, "L'annonce de la parole de Dieu..." in *Etudes oblates*, 18 (1959), p. 108-109.

<sup>49</sup> Letter of January 8, 1847 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 1, no. 74, p. 148.

<sup>50</sup> Letter of December 6, 1851 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 2, no. 157, p. 29 & 30. See also the letter to the Fathers in Ceylon, November 17, 1851 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 4, no. 25, p. 85 and *L'instruction de notre vénéré Fondateur relative aux missions étrangères*, ed. 1936, p. 1.

<sup>51</sup> In *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 2, no. 234, p. 146. See also the letters to Father Augustine Maisonneuve, March 13, 1857 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 2, no. 230, p. 141 and to Fathers Faraud and Isidore Clut, December

9, 1859 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 2, no. 268, p. 218.

<sup>52</sup> In *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 2, no. 276, p. 234. See also the letters to Father Végreville, April 17, 1860, *ibidem*, no. 273, p. 228 and to Father Anthony Mouchette, March 11, 1860 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 12, no. 1447, p. 180.

<sup>53</sup> The mission of governing is especially carried out by the bishops. In the retreat he made in preparation for taking over the See of Marseilles, Bishop de Mazenod wrote: "The episcopate is the apogee of perfection on earth. They should be saints like the Apostles whose successors Bishops are to exercise worthily their functions, to accomplish as one ought all the obligations". May 1837 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 15, p. 238.

<sup>54</sup> Letter to his mother, January 6, 1810 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 14, no. 66, p. 154.

<sup>55</sup> Letter to Father Tempier, November 4, 1817 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 6, no. 29, p. 45.

<sup>56</sup> *Nota bene* from the 1818 Rule in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 17-19.

<sup>57</sup> Letter to M. Arbaud, January 1, 1891 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 13, no. 22, p. 30.

<sup>58</sup> Letter to Abbé Viguier, January 6, 1819 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 6, no. 38, p. 55.

<sup>59</sup> Letter to Father Courtès, July 30, 1824 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 6, no. 149, p. 149.

<sup>60</sup> Letter to Father Toussaint Dassy, February 12, 1848 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 10, no. 966, p. 211.

<sup>61</sup> Letters to Father Maisonneuve, March 13, 1857 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 2, no. 230, p. 140 and to Father Anthony Mouchette, March 11, 1860, *ibidem*, vol. 12, no. 1447, p. 180.

<sup>62</sup> Letters to Father Pascal Ricard, January 8, 1847 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 1, no. 74, p. 148 and December 6 1851, *ibidem*, vol. 2, no. 157, p. 29; to Father Charles Baret, January 24, 1852 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 11, no. 1098, p. 74-75; to Father Henry Joseph Faraud, May 28, 1857 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 2, no. 234, p. 146 and December 9, 1859, *ibidem*, no. 268, p. 218; to Father Anthony Mouchette, February 17, 1859, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 12, no. 1404, p. 129 and March 11, 1860, *ibidem*, no. 1447, p. 180; to Father Francis Mary Le Bihan, Sep-

tember 3, 1860 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 4, no. 31, p. 104.

<sup>63</sup> Letter to Father Tempier, November 4, 1817 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 6, no. 29, p. 45.

<sup>64</sup> Letter to Father Semeria, January 25, 1848 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 4, no. 2, p. 8.

<sup>65</sup> Letter to Father Eugene Dorey, October 15, 1848 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 10, no. 990, p. 237.

<sup>66</sup> Letter to Father Végreville, April 17, 1860 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 2, no. 273, p. 228.

<sup>67</sup> Instruction of March 28, 1813 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 15, no. 115, p. 40.

<sup>68</sup> Letters to his sister, July 12, 1809 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 14, p. 130, to his grandmother, December 3, 1810, *ibidem*, p. 167.

<sup>69</sup> Instruction of March 28, 1813 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 15, no. 115, p. 42-43.

<sup>70</sup> Retreat of October 1826 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 15, no. 157, p. 175.

<sup>71</sup> Letter to novice Nicolas Riccardi, February 17, 1826 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 7, no. 225, p. 36.

<sup>72</sup> Letter to Father Maisonneuve, March 13, 1857 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 2, no. 230, p. 140-141.

<sup>73</sup> Letter to Father Faraud, May 28, 1857 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 2, no. 234, p. 146.

<sup>74</sup> In *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 13, no. 76, p. 95-96.

<sup>75</sup> *Diary*, September 6, 1837, A.P., JM.

<sup>76</sup> In *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 3, *Appendix*, no. 1, p. 170-171.

<sup>77</sup> "To do that one must form apostles", translated in the 1825-1826 Rule by "viri apostolici".

<sup>78</sup> Letters of November 16, 1819 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 6, no. 47, p. 62 and March 30, 1826 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 7, no. 233, p. 73.

<sup>79</sup> In *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 10, no. 966, p. 211.

<sup>80</sup> Letters to Father Charles Baret, January 24, 1852 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 11, no. 1098, p. 74. See also November 9, 1856 letter to the same person in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 12, 1331, p. 28; to Father Maisonneuve March 13, 1857 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 2, no. 230, p. 141; to the Oblates of the

Vicariate of Colombo, November 17, 1851 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 4, no. 25, p. 85.

<sup>81</sup> *Nota bene* of the 1818 Rule.

<sup>82</sup> Retreat of October 1826 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 15, no. 157, p. 175; letter to the Oblates of the Red River, June 28, 1855 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 2, no. 211, p. 102; letter to Father Le Bihan, September 3, 1860 *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 4, no. 31, p. 220.

<sup>83</sup> Letter to Abbé Arbaud, January 1, 1819 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 13, no. 22, p. 30; to Abbé Viguier, January 6, 1819 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 6, no. 38, p. 55; to Father Mouchette, December 2, 1854 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 11, no. 1256, p. 253.

<sup>84</sup> Manuscript of about 1835, A.P., DM IX 6, 34 pages. See also *Etudes oblates*, 16 (1957), p. 263-279.

<sup>85</sup> In *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 14, no. 13, p. 25.

<sup>86</sup> Letter to M. de Mazenod, August 16, 1805 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 14, no. 10, p. 19 and Instruction of March 28, 1813 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 15, no. 115, p. 42.

<sup>87</sup> In *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 14, no. 95, p. 213.

<sup>88</sup> Letter of June 1814 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 15, no. 125, p. 69.

<sup>89</sup> See "Index of names", in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 6 & 7; *Diary* of 1825-1826.

<sup>90</sup> Speech made by Canon Caihol, Bishop de Mazenod's Vicar General, on the occasion of Father Henry Tempier's fiftieth anniversary of the priesthood, April 7, 1864 in *Missions*, 3 (1864) p. 155.

<sup>91</sup> See "Index of names", in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 6 & 7.

<sup>92</sup> *Diary*, September 4, 1837. The same reflections can be found in a letter to Father Tempier, December 9, 1825 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 6, no. 211, p. 218.

<sup>93</sup> See MOTTE, René, "Textes bibliques utilisés par le Bx Eugène de Mazenod dans ses lettres et mandements", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 48 (1989), p. 335-392.

<sup>94</sup> Letter of October 27, 1815 in *Oblate Writings*, II, vol. 2, no. 1, p. 20.

<sup>95</sup> Retreat in preparation for the priesthood, March 24 to April 7, 1833 in *Oblate Writings*, II, vol. 5, p. 183-184.

<sup>96</sup> Letter from Father John Alexander Du-

puy to Father de Mazenod, January 14, 1826. A.G., Dupuy file.

<sup>97</sup> Letter from Bishop Allard to Father Fabre, January 13, 1863, quoted in BEAUDOIN, Yvon, *Le bienheureux Joseph Gérard, O.M.I., l'apôtre des Basotho (1831-1914)*, coll. *Oblate Writings*, II, vol. 3, p. 52.

<sup>98</sup> BEAUDOIN, Yvon, *François de Paule Henry Tempier*, coll. *Oblate Writings*, II, vol. 1, p. 186, 244,

<sup>99</sup> Circular letter no. 15, March 19, 1864 in *Circ. adm.*, I (1850-1885), p. 145.

<sup>100</sup> In *Circ. adm.*, I (1850-1885), p. 84. In 1887, when Father Fabre was Superior General, Father Prosper Boisramé published his *Méditations pour tous les jours de l'année à l'usage de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*. In this work, we find two meditations on Saint Peter and on Saint Paul (June 29 and 30). They bear the title: *Our First Fathers* (June 28), vol II, p. 434-448.

<sup>101</sup> In *Circ. adm.*, II (1886-1990), p. 123-124.

<sup>102</sup> Circular letter no. 59, February 17, 1895 in *Circ. adm.*, II (1886-1990), p. 216.

<sup>103</sup> Circular letter no. 61, December 8 1896 in *Circ. adm.*, (1886-1900).

<sup>104</sup> Circular letter no. 76, May 3, 1903 in *Circ. adm.*, III, (1901-1921), p. 16.

<sup>105</sup> Circular letter no. 113, December 25, 1915 in *Circ. adm.*, III, (1901-1921), p. 177.

<sup>106</sup> Circular letter no. 191, August 15, 1951 in *Circ. adm.*, V (1947-1952), p. 324-325.

<sup>107</sup> Circular letter no. 240, March 19, 1968 in *Circ. adm.*, VIII (1967-1972), p. 152, 158 and 159; see also: p. 165 (poverty of the Apostles) and 168 (apostolic men).

<sup>108</sup> See especially circular letters no. 241, April 1, 1969 in *Cir. adm.*, VIII (1967-1972), p. 198, 200, 201, 204-207; no. 245, January 15, 1971, *ibidem*, p. 317, 321-326; no. 246, February 17, 1971, *ibidem*, p. 330, 331, 355, 368, 372; no. 247, April 11, 1972, *ibidem*, p. 433, 440.

<sup>109</sup> Circular letter no. 248 in A.A.G., 1972, p. 26.

<sup>110</sup> A.A.G., 1975, p. 409; 1976, p. 36; 1978, p. 57-58.

<sup>111</sup> A.A.G., 1976, p. 36.

<sup>112</sup> A.A.G., 1978, p. 191; 1979, p. 419. 1982, p. 24, 37.

- <sup>113</sup> A.A.G. 1982, p. 53.
- <sup>114</sup> A.A.G. 1980, pp. 109-110; 1981, p. 283.
- <sup>115</sup> A.A.G., 1985, p. 48.
- <sup>116</sup> See CIANCIULLI, Francesco Saverio, "Mgr de Mazenod et le Pape. Sentiments romains du Fondateur", in *Études oblates*, 15 (1956), p. 204-220; Emilien Lamirande, "Les Oblats, hommes des évêques d'après Mgr de Mazenod", in *Études oblates*, 16 (1957), p. 302-320.
- <sup>117</sup> For example: "to walk in the footsteps of the Apostles", in A.A.G., 1986, p. 81, no. 116; 1990, p. 94; "Mary presided at the common prayers as she had presided at those of the Apostles in the Cenacle", in A.A.G., 1988, p. 38, "Jesus chose the Apostles", in A.A.G., 1991, p. 26-27.
- <sup>118</sup> A.A.G., 1986, p. 82, no. 118.
- <sup>119</sup> A.A.G., 1986, p. 81, no. 116; 1989, p. 14.
- <sup>120</sup> A.A.G., 1986, p. 80, no. 109; 1988, p. 175, 141, 163 & 164; 1989, p. 72; 1990, p. 162; 1992, p. 52-65, 88, 186-190, 215-216, 219, 267; 1993, p. 11, 134, 138, 143.
- <sup>121</sup> Circular letter of February 28, 1848, p. 4.
- <sup>122</sup> See LAMIRANDE, Emilien, "Le zèle de toutes les Eglises chez Mgr de Mazenod", in *Études oblates*, 19 (1960), p. 108-146.
- <sup>123</sup> See VERKIN, Henry, "Messieurs, j'ai vu Paul", in *Études oblates*, 25 (1966), p. 250-255.
- <sup>124</sup> See PIELORZ, Józef, *Les Chapitres généraux au temps du Fondateur*, Ottawa, ed. des *Études oblates*, 22 (1968), p. 122-123.
- <sup>125</sup> Circular letter no. 59, February 17, 1895 in *Circ. adm.*, II, (1886-1900), p. 204-205.
- <sup>126</sup> In *Missions*, 56 (1932), p. 675.
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## BISHOPS

*Summary: I. Eugene de Mazenod and the episcopacy. II. Oblate bishops. III. Oblates, men of the bishops.*

In 1854, a fourteen-page publication appeared in Marseilles; its object was to make known the spirit and the works of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. It was published anonymously, but it would be difficult for us to conceive that the Founder, Eugene de Mazenod, did not at least review it.

When the text endeavors to describe "the spirit of the Congregation", it reads as follows: "The spirit which most especially characterizes the rules of the Oblates is that of a great loyalty to the authority of the Holy See and the episcopacy. They must consider themselves as being in a special way the men of the Pope and the bishops, that is, of the Church of Jesus Christ. They should make this spirit prevail to the extent their influence allows [...]"<sup>1</sup>

If, according to Eugene de Mazenod, the Oblates are first and foremost men of Jesus Christ, their love of Christ cannot be dissociated from the love of the Church. They are also led to carry out their ministry in strict union with the Pope and the bishops and in constant cooperation with those others who labor for the Gospel. Article 6 of the 1982 Constitutions accurately and effectively communicating the thinking of the Founder stresses the communion of the Oblates with the leading pastors of God's people, loyalty towards them, along with the spirit of cooperation and dialogue.

### I. EUGENE DE MAZENOD AND THE EPISCOPACY

Respect for the bishops and making himself available to them were attitudes

which developed early on in Eugene de Mazenod. In addition to the fact that respect for authority was drilled into him from his youth by a family and social milieu steeped in royalist sentiments, from the Sulpicians in the seminary in Paris he would imbibe as well a spirit of unconditional loyalty to the Pope and the cardinals confined in France by Napoleon and a spirit of respect for the bishops faithful to the successors of Peter. His natural generosity would lead him to render them every service it was in his power to offer.

After his ordination to the priesthood in 1811, Eugene was initially involved in the formation of seminarians at Saint Sulpice, then with the youth of Aix, and he strove to communicate the same spirit to them. Later on, he would write to the Bishop of Quimper: "[...] before I had the honor of being raised to this dignity after I had taken a path leading away from it, and was far from thinking that later on I would be obliged to accept this burden; I told my students while stressing the grandeur of bishops in the Church, that I would like to be their step-ladder to exalt them in the eyes of the faithful. My greatest preoccupation has always been to instill the greatest devotedness and filial affection towards the Prelates who would call them to work in their dioceses"<sup>2</sup>

Father de Mazenod himself was eminently qualified to be presented as a candidate for the episcopal office, but from his very first years in the priesthood he had made the resolution to accept no ecclesiastical dignity whatever in order to devote himself totally to

parish missions. It was only later, when he was faced with the need for protection from a high level ecclesiastical source for his tiny society, that he set about seeking the appointment of his uncle Fortuné as Bishop of Marseilles and that he himself became successively his vicar general, his coadjutor and finally his successor.

When he actually became a bishop, Eugene became more fully aware of the responsibilities that were to be his. In exchanges with his intimate friends, he constantly spoke of the greatness and dignity of the episcopacy. Called by the Vicar of Jesus Christ to share the responsibility entrusted to the Apostles, the bishop receives the Holy Spirit to become a pastor who teaches, sanctifies and guides his people. From this flows his greatness and formidable responsibility. This would be the sentiment that would profoundly and continuously enliven Bishop de Mazenod's spirit his whole life through. In the days which followed his consecration, he wrote to Father Henry Tempier: "All my life I had been filled with respect for the episcopate, I had always considered it in a great spirit of faith; it was, so to speak, an instinctive reflex of my soul. [...] and now the Lord raises me to the summit of this greatness and what is more, he is making me understand that I still fell short in my estimate of this plenitude of the priesthood of Jesus Christ".<sup>3</sup> And so, according to Bishop de Mazenod, in order to be faithful to his calling, the bishop must aspire to a higher level of sanctity. In particular, he must distinguish himself by his spirit of prayer, his zeal, his participation in the liturgy, his presence among the people, the simplicity of his tastes and the poverty lived in his personal life. Those were the characteristics he would later

bring to the attention of his sons called to follow him in the episcopacy.

## II. OBLATE BISHOPS

Indeed, the Church soon came calling to request that the Congregation provide a number of bishops. For the Founder the Holy See's choice was flattering,<sup>4</sup> but in some ways he felt it was a loss for the Congregation still too few in number. He was being asked to give up some of his best subjects, talented and wise men, good administrators, whose loyalty to the society was beyond reproach. In the Founder's lifetime, six Oblates were called to the episcopacy: Hippolyte Guibert (1842), Eugene Guigues (1848), Alexandre Taché (1851), Jean François Allard (1851), Etienne Smeria (1858) and Vital Grandin (1859).

On the other hand, just as in his own case, the issue was one of the advancement of the Church and the Congregation. In any case, for the father of the family, it was enough that the Pope had spoken for him to accept to go along with it. Later on, he would admit that in certain cases these appointments were providential in assuring the survival of the missions entrusted to these bishops. In 1847, he wrote to Father Guigues whose appointment he had hesitated to approve: "I see in your promotion a benevolent disposition of Providence towards our Congregation [...] I thank the good God for having arranged your promotion in His all powerful wisdom".<sup>5</sup> With reference to the appointment of Bishop Taché when the Founder was on the point of withdrawing the Oblates from Red River, he wrote: "Since the Vicar of Jesus Christ has chosen one of our members to guide

this Church which is being born we will not abandon it".<sup>6</sup>

The first feeling experienced by those chosen was their unworthiness. The Bishop of Marseilles would have none of this. He called them to obedience, confidence and simplicity. To Bishop Allard, he wrote: "You must humbly submit to what God has decided through the voice of his Vicar and reply with confidence and simplicity: *Ecce adsum* [...] It is a consolation to walk thus in the way of obedience".<sup>7</sup> To Father Semeria, he wrote: "It is not your personal merit that makes you suitable for this burdensome dignity: it is simply the position in which the Congregation, or I, if you wish, have placed you. If you were a religious without virtues, without resources, I would not have trusted you with a mission of such importance [...] I am not helping this project along, or rather pressing it to a conclusion, for any other reason than the greater good of your mission, and for the honour and greater independence of the Congregation."<sup>8</sup> Finally, to Father Grandin, he wrote: "I can see you from here prostrating yourself, your face to the ground, tears pouring from your eyes, humbly refusing the pontifical crown that is to be placed on your head. Be reassured that it is being imposed on you by obedience [...]"<sup>9</sup>

The bishops who had been named protested that above all they wanted to remain Oblates. The Founder's reply was unanswerable. To Bishop Taché he wrote: "No one is more a bishop than I am, and rest assured that no one is more an Oblate than I am. Am I ignorant, then, of the spirit that I wanted to instill in my Congregation? You will be a bishop; I will it. Do not force me to write to the Pope about this, and you will even be more an Oblate because of

it [...]".<sup>10</sup> "It is not being a bishop which prevents anyone from being a genuine Oblate. I do believe I am an Oblate, more than anyone else, and I believe that my duty of being a bishop has in no way suffered from it. Like me, you will be a genuine Oblate, and I hope, a worthy bishop."<sup>11</sup>

In his memoirs, Bishop Taché clearly expressed the sentiments of bishops as members of the Oblate family: "One does not cease being an Oblate by the simple fact of being a bishop. The Founder of the Congregation told this to all of those whom he ordered to accept the episcopacy [...] Oblates elevated to the episcopacy were not chosen because they were considered rebels in the Congregation. Quite the contrary is true, their loyalty and their devotion to the religious family that adopted them permitted them to accept the episcopacy only on the condition that this dear mother of theirs would continue to lavish on them her tenderness and trust [...] Bishop though I am, I am ever an Oblate of Mary Immaculate, an Oblate by right, an Oblate in my heart, an Oblate in actual fact."<sup>12</sup>

To emphasize their link to the Congregation the Founder enjoined his sons who became bishops to clearly identify themselves as Oblates in their coat of arms and when they signed their names.

The principles which guided Bishop de Mazenod when he accepted to have his Oblates consecrated bishops were adopted by the General Chapter of 1879 and set forth as norms for future conduct: "The needs of our missions" and ultimately "the will of the Holy Father". In all other circumstances, declared Father Joseph Fabre, "we wish to remain within the humble confines of our vocation."<sup>13</sup>

From the outset and for many years, a number of Oblate bishops

were simultaneously ecclesiastical as well as religious superiors. Among other things, it was a way of reminding them of their membership in the Congregation. Nonetheless, this two-fold authority was not always well defined. It often led to conflict of interest and consequently to painful situations when it came to persons or property, for example, in Canada and in South Africa. Such conflicts were sometimes the cause of special canonical visits. This also led to contracts between dioceses and the Congregation for the safeguarding of reciprocal rights and for the maintaining of good relations. In general, these agreements guaranteed the respect, good order and harmonious functioning of apostolic activity. Following the spirit of Bishop de Mazenod, they always acknowledge the bishop as the holder of primary responsibility for the mission; they express the availability of Oblates to serve the local Church in specific tasks approved by the bishop. On the other hand, by accepting the Oblates into his jurisdiction, the bishop recognizes the Congregation with its specific character and commits himself to respect, encourage and protect it. He assists in making its charism known and fosters the recruiting of vocations for it.

Based on *An Instruction concerning the Foreign Missions* added as an appendix to the 1853 Rule, and from refinements added by the Chapters of 1873, 1898 and 1907, a provisional *Statutum pro missionibus* was arrived at. It was drawn up at the request of the Holy See and approved by the Sacred Congregation of the Propaganda in 1912. This *Statutum* would remain in force until 1934 when, as a result of a careful revision it was definitively approved January 30 of that same year and promulgated by the Superior Gen-

eral, Father Theodore Labouré by his letter of January 6, 1935. Certain administrative difficulties were subsequently the object of special contracts with nine apostolic vicariates which were approved by the Sacred Congregation of the Propaganda on April 12, 1940. Later on, the Chapters of 1947 and 1959 reminded the Congregation of the importance of a faithful observance of the *Statutum*.

Nonetheless, because of numerous developments in the Church as a result of Vatican II, the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples in its February 24, 1969 directive requested a careful revision of the relations between local ordinaries and missionary institutes. This study culminated in the 1972 and 1973 directives drawn up by the General Administration<sup>14</sup>. Finally, in a much broader context, the document *Mutuae relationes* was published in 1978 conjointly by the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes and the Congregation for Bishops. The document treated of the mutual relationships between bishops and religious in the Church.

### III. OBLATES, MEN OF THE BISHOPS

Oblates as "men of the bishops" or "at the service of the bishops" were expressions often found in the Founder's letters to the heads of dioceses where he was preparing to send Oblates and in the letters to the missionaries themselves. "They are essentially men of the bishops. It is with this in view that I have founded them and, thanks to God, they are all imbued with this spirit that belongs to their institute".<sup>15</sup> "Our missionaries are priests who are most devoted to the bishops".<sup>16</sup> "Our Oblates

have been founded especially for the service of the bishops [...].”<sup>17</sup>

Herein we find concrete expressions of devotion to the Church which must characterize Oblates. The Founder’s unconditional attachment to the Pope and to the Holy See, as well as the very lively sense he possessed of the dignity and authority of the bishops, drove him to desire that his sons should be “men of the Pope as they are men of the bishops, that is, men of the Church, men of God”<sup>18</sup>. Towards the end of his life, he declared once again that God had inspired him to found the Congregation “for the sole purpose of serving the bishops at a time when they were in such great need of collaborators in their dioceses bereft of assistance”<sup>19</sup>. This concern, often repeated by the successors of the Founder and illustrated by so many of his sons throughout our history remains a precious element of our Oblate heritage.

As the primary pastors of their people, the bishops are constituted as heads and fathers of the Gospel workers who come to assist them. The Oblates recognize in the bishops those who give them their mission: “We exist only through them and for them [...] to alleviate their preoccupations by all our zealous efforts”.<sup>20</sup>

It was Eugene de Mazenod’s understanding, then, that his Oblates recognize the authority of the bishops as the rule of their apostolate. They would like to receive from the pastor of the diocese the inspiration for their ministry and to act only according to his views and his will, to go to him in their difficulties. “[...] They know the value of obedience to the one who represents God in the diocese...”<sup>21</sup>

But above and beyond what obedience and service require, the relations between the bishop and the missionaries

were to be cordial, like the relationship between fathers and sons. “We consider the bishops as our fathers from the moment they adopt us; their diocese becomes our family, and I can state that these children of adoption witness to it before anyone by their affection and attachment”.<sup>22</sup> When he was on the point of sending the first Oblates to the Americas, Eugene de Mazenod assured the Bishop of Montreal that he would be the object of this affectionate cordiality: “We are all entirely for you. The ties of charity which unite us could not be more binding. Hence it is with complete trust that I confide our beloved missionaries to you. They set forth full of ardour, disposed to work with all their might in support of your pastoral solicitude. Be mindful that you have adopted them as your children. You will not have priests more obedient and more devoted”.<sup>23</sup> The Bishop of Marseilles considered the Bishop of Montreal as “the affectionate father who takes to his own heart the interests of the Congregation”.<sup>24</sup>

The idea of episcopal fatherhood seems basic and simultaneously rules the attitude of the bishops and that of the missionaries. If the former are genuinely pastors and fathers, the latter are expected to bear toward them the sentiments of devoted sons, to be their executive assistants<sup>25</sup>, instruments in their hands<sup>26</sup>, defenders of their authority.<sup>27</sup>

Article 1 of the 1982 Constitutions states that God’s call is heard through men’s needs for salvation, but the response of the Oblates should draw its inspiration from the directions set by the Pope and bishops. The Congregation’s tradition is distinguished by its love for the Church and collaboration with the pastors of the Church. But, if Bishop de Mazenod wrote to Father John Viala telling him that “one must

never forget the deference due a Bishop even when one has a complaint about him"<sup>28</sup>, he also reminded Father Pascal Ricard that it "does not mean that you should renounce your legitimate rights, nor that you should abstain from saying what you judge suitable".<sup>29</sup>

The 1986 Chapter document, *Missionaries in Today's World*, makes the observation that faced with "the call we have received to respond creatively to new needs" (87), the Oblates sometimes experience tensions in their relations with the heads of local churches. In certain cases, these tensions find their source in a different understanding of the Church itself, of the perception one has of pastoral needs; other tensions have their origin in the concrete circumstances of persons and places.

The publication of *Mutuae relationes* in 1978 offered the Oblates an opportunity to evaluate their relationships with their local churches. At the time, the Superior General, Father Fernand Jetté, invited them to do just that by suggesting that they should ask themselves up to what point they were integrated into the overall pastoral plan of dioceses and to what extent they were "a sort of constant reminder in favour of the most neglected groups".<sup>30</sup> Always, as for the Founder and the first Oblates who wanted to be cooperators with the Savior and the consolation and hope of a Church in distress, the mission is mediated by the humble and generous service of the bishops, pastors of the people of God.

ALEXANDRE TACHÉ

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<sup>1</sup> p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to His Excellency Nicholas Mary Sergent, Bishop of Quimper, August 25, 1857 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 13, no. 157, p. 184-185.

<sup>3</sup> October 20, 1832 letter in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 8, no. 437, p. 76.

<sup>4</sup> See the December 27, 1846 letter in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 1, no. 73, p. 146.

<sup>5</sup> June 7, 1847 letter in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 1, no. 84, p. 169-170.

<sup>6</sup> TACHÉ, Bishop Alexandre, *Vingt années de missions dans le Nord-Ouest d'Amérique*, Montreal, Saint Joseph's Bookstore, 1888, p. 51-52.

<sup>7</sup> January 13, 1851 letter to Father Allard in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 4 (Africa), no. 17, p. 189.

<sup>8</sup> November 10, 1849 letter in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 4 (Ceylon), no. 13, p. 43.

<sup>9</sup> January 8, 1858 letter in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 2, no. 244, p. 171.

<sup>10</sup> TACHÉ, Alexandre, *Vingt années de missions...*, p. 51.

<sup>11</sup> Bishop Taché's project reported by Bishop Grandin in "Notes sur Monseigneur Taché" and quoted by CARRIERE, Gaston, in "L'élévation du père Vital-Justin Grandin, o.m.i. à l'épiscopat", *Etudes oblates*, 32 (1973), p. 160.

<sup>12</sup> TACHÉ, Bishop Alexandre, *Vingt années de missions...*, p. 52.

<sup>13</sup> Superior General's Report to the 1879 General Chapter in *Missions*, 17 (1879), p. 311-312.

<sup>14</sup> See "The Mission. Policies of the General Council" in A.A.G., I (1972) Part One, p. 102-105 and "Relations between Ordinaries and Oblates in Mission Territories" in *O.M.I. Documentation* 42 (1973) October 15, 1973, p. 10-13.

<sup>15</sup> Letter to His Grace Joseph Signay, Archbishop of Quebec, August 10, 1843 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 1, no. 22, p. 54-55.

<sup>16</sup> Letter to Father John Baptist Bellanger, November 10, 1849 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 4 (Africa), no. 10, p. 171.

<sup>17</sup> Letter to His Excellency J. A. Gignoux, Bishop of Beauvais, October 18, 1853 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 13, no. 131, p. 154.

<sup>18</sup> Letter to Cardinal Gousset, Archbishop of Reims, July 21, 1852 quoted in LAMIRANDE, Emilien, "Les Oblats, hommes des évêques" in *Etudes oblates*, 16 (1957), p. 302.

<sup>19</sup> Letter to His Excellency Sergent, Bishop of Quimper, August 25, 1857 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 13, no. 157, p. 185.

<sup>20</sup> Letter to His Excellency C. A. de Richery, Bishop of Fréjus, November 12, 1823 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 13, no. 44, p. 61.

<sup>21</sup> Letter to His Excellency A. B. Menjaud, Bishop of Nancy, July 24, 1847 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 13, no. 112, p. 138.

<sup>22</sup> Letter to Mr. Testou, Vicar General of Grenoble, June 17, 1828 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 13, no. 68, p. 88.

<sup>23</sup> Letter to Bishop Ignatius Bourget, September 28, 1841 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 1, no. 7, p. 11.

<sup>24</sup> Letter to Bishop Ignatius Bourget, June 7, 1844 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 1, no. 37, p. 88.

<sup>25</sup> See the letter to Father Tempier, April 7, 1825 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 176, p. 168.

<sup>26</sup> Letter to His Excellency Phelan, Coadjutor Bishop of Kingston, August 8, 1844 and to His Excellency Bourget, Bishop of Montreal, January 20, 1847 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 1, no. 44, p. 101 and no. 76, p. 151.

<sup>27</sup> Letter to Bishop Menjaud, June 14 and July 24, 1847 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 13, no. 110, p. 137 and no. 112, p. 138.

<sup>28</sup> Letter of March 5, 1849 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 4 (Africa), no. 6, p. 168.

<sup>29</sup> Letter of May 12, 1853 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 2, no. 177, p. 55.

<sup>30</sup> In *The Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate*, General House, Rome, 1985, p. 287-288.

## BROTHERS

*Summary: I. History and evolution of the vocation of the Oblate brother: 1. At the time of the Founder, 1816-1861; 2. Brothers from 1861 to 1961; 3. Brothers since 1961. II. Specific elements of the spirituality of the Oblate brother: 1. Being a brother: A special vocation? 2. Brother – Fraternity – Solidarity; 3. Some considerations on Rule 3 of our Constitutions and Rules. III. Formation of the Oblate brother: 1. A few observations in this field; 2. Various areas of formation; 3. Stages of formation.*

### I. HISTORY AND EVOLUTION OF THE VOCATION OF THE OBLATE BROTHER<sup>1</sup>

#### 1. AT THE TIME OF THE FOUNDER, 1816-1861

##### *a. Legislation and the life of brothers from 1816 to 1861*

It seems that when he was laying the foundations of the future Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate Eugene de Mazenod never revealed the full extent of his plans to the small number of fellow priests who surrounded him. The only exception, perhaps, was Father Henry Tempier. In his first letter of October 9, 1815, Eugene told him: "We will live together in one house, the one which I have bought, under a Rule we shall adopt with common accord and for which we will draw the basic principles from the statutes of St. Ignatius, St. Charles for his Oblates, St. Philip Neri, St. Vincent de Paul and Blessed Liguori"<sup>2</sup>

Three years later, at Saint-Laurent du Verdon, from September 2 to 16, he wrote the Constitutions and Rules and submitted them to the members for approval on the occasion of the first General Chapter, October 24, 1818. The capitulants, whose attention was especially focused on the vows, did not protest. Undoubtedly they hardly no-

ticed that in five of the articles the matter of brothers was taken for granted since the religious congregations known to Father de Mazenod, the Redemptorists in particular, were made up of priests and lay brothers.

Nevertheless, nowhere in this first text of the Rule is it stated that the Society would henceforth be made up of priests and brothers. It could be said, then, that juridically the brothers tiptoed discreetly into the Congregation without raising a lot of discussion. However, in the Rule, two pages remained empty where it was stated the Rule for the brothers should be.

As a result, the first brief legislation on the brothers actually preceded their concrete existence. In like manner, their beginnings were very discreet.

Ignatius Voitot, the first novice brother, entered the Congregation at Notre-Dame du Laus about 1820 and it was only in 1828, two years after the approbation of the Rule, that the first brother, John Bernard Ferrand, made his vows. He was also the first to make perpetual vows in 1834, some twenty years after the Congregation was founded.<sup>3</sup>

The first rule or paragraph of the twenty-nine articles of the Rule treating of brothers was written by Father Tempier after the reception of the first novice. It was a summary of the 1818

Rule with article one finally announcing the existence of brothers in the Congregation and three articles written by the Founder himself in which he gave clear expression to his thinking.<sup>4</sup>

The first article reads as follows: "The Society accepts receiving within its ranks men of good will, men lacking in the education necessary for becoming missionaries and accepting the fact that they will never acquire it but who still wish to work effectively for their own salvation under the direction of the holy Rules of the Institute while working at the tasks set aside in religious orders for those known as lay brothers".

The articles written by the Founder read as follows:

"Article 11: In our Society, lay brothers must not be regarded as house servants. They are members of the Institute given the responsibility of manual work in the houses just like the other members are charged with more noble tasks for the common benefit of the Society and the Church."

"Article 12: Consequently, they will dine in the refectory and will be present at all the exercises in keeping with their work and adapted to their intellectual capability."

"Article 13: In the same way, all matters of the Rule which they are capable of observing apply to them and they are held to observe them as strictly as the other members of the Institute."

In its general lines, we have here the very simple legislation for the brother for the period of 1818-1821. Throughout the lifetime of the Founder, this legislation endured with almost no change.

Before the definitive approbation of the Rule in 1826, a few articles were added concerning the spiritual prefect of the brothers. And in the second edition of 1853 a line was added to article

one; the line read as follows: "The society agrees to receive [...] men [...] who [...] wish to work at tasks reserved in religious orders to those whom we call lay brothers and to the teaching of poor children when it will be judged appropriate".

This is a matter where lived experience preceded legislation. In fact, already in 1850-1853, brothers were teaching in Canada and in England. In the period between 1841 and 1861, at least twenty-five brothers taught catechism in France, at Vico and in Sri Lanka.<sup>5</sup>

The brothers were so much a part of the Congregation after 1841 that Bishop de Mazenod distributed as many as possible in the houses in France and made them a part of every missionary contingent. Two fathers and Brother Ferrand were sent to Ajaccio in 1834; four fathers with Brothers Basil Fastray and Louis Roux went to Canada in 1841; two fathers and Brother Louis Dubé went to Red River in 1845-1846; four fathers and Brother Celestine Verney went to Oregon in 1847; three fathers and Brother Gaspard de Steffanis went to Sri Lanka in 1847; two fathers and Brother Augustine Chalvesche went to Algeria in 1849, four fathers and Brother Joseph Compain went to Natal in 1851, etc.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, more and more brothers joined the Congregation after the acceptance of foreign missions. At the time of the death of the Founder, of the four hundred and fourteen Oblates, there were eighty-seven brothers, giving a total of twenty percent.

In the appendix of the 1853 Rule on foreign missions, Bishop de Mazenod did not forget the brothers. He even opened up a new field of apostolate for them by asking that in all our missions the priest should never be alone, that he be accompanied by at least one brother.

He added that the Oblates should turn their attention to teaching the youth and striving to lead the nomadic tribes to give up their wandering life, establish settlements where they would learn to build houses, cultivate the land and learn the rudiments of civilization... He continued: "Superiors will not fail to send along with the fathers lay brothers already conversant with the different trades and as a result equipped not only to help them but even to take over for the fathers in this entire sphere of their activity".<sup>7</sup>

The 1850 Chapter and the Rule of 1853 changed a third point with regard to the brothers. An article taken from the Rule of Saint Alphonsus which specified that in communities there should be a maximum of twelve priests and seven brothers was suppressed.<sup>8</sup> Seven brothers would, in fact, suffice to take care of the material needs of a house, but in the missionary perspective which was the perspective adopted by the Founder more and more after 1841, the number of brothers in a house could be greater than that of the fathers if missionary work demanded it. Consequently, several houses, several mission vicariates and the Province of Germany in its beginnings numbered more brothers than priests.

So great was the interest for having brothers teach and so numerous were the brothers engaged in this work that at the 1856 Chapter the capitulants suggested forming in the Congregation a special branch distinct from the fathers and lay brothers with the intention of providing them with an adequate formation. The capitulants opposed the setting up of a branch of teaching brothers because of the great difficulties of administering their relationship with the lay brothers strictly speaking, but they did affirm that all the

brothers who showed an aptitude for this could be called to this ministry.<sup>9</sup>

*b. Brothers such as the Founder wanted them*

In the Congregation, at the time of the Founder, the brother bore all the traditional characteristics of brothers of clerical Institutes of the XVI to the XIX centuries. In point of fact, Bishop de Mazenod drew his inspiration from the text and spirit of the rules of five founders: Saints Ignatius, Vincent de Paul, Philip Neri, Charles Borromeo and especially Alphonsus Liguori.

The Oblate brother also enjoys an association with the monastic tradition through participation in the Divine Office (minor office) to which the fathers are obliged and also by the obligation that they have in common with the fathers to reproduce in themselves all the virtues of the religious orders which disappeared during the Revolution. Indeed, the Congregation numbered among its ends the making up for those religious bodies that had disappeared. No doubt, the Founder came upon this idea and its return to the original sources because of his daily association from 1812 to 1815 with his house servant, Brother Maur, a Camaldolese, forced out of his monastery by Napoleon.

The brothers are members of the Congregation on equal footing with the fathers, and the family spirit which the Founder desired in the Congregation was also to be the fundamental norm for the relationship between fathers and brothers. In every way possible, he showed his interest in them, his concern for their health and especially for their spiritual growth.

However, in clerical Institutes, the distinction between fathers and broth-

ers had always been that of one social class to another. In this regard, we find something very unique to the Founder, a dichotomy characteristic of him. For example, a dichotomy between very grave bodily penances such as those practiced by the monks and the penances of the heart, the will and labors of the active life; between the very demanding life of prayer and contemplation and the life brimming over with apostolic activities. For the brothers, there was the life of a son of the family on the one hand and of numerous instances of a lack of equality. In fact, the brothers were not on the same footing as the fathers when it came to prayers for the dead. They did not have the full text of the Rule. The lowliest scholastic novice was superior in dignity to the brothers and could make remarks about them at the coulpe. All of them, even the teaching brothers, did not eat at the fathers' table. They did not take their recreation with the fathers and did not enjoy any consultative vote at all, etc. It was a case of a sociological distinction entirely normal at the time, but Bishop de Mazenod, son of a nobleman, who had inherited the spirit of order and hierarchy of his class drew some strict conclusions from the eminent dignity of the priesthood.

Means adopted to ensure serious supernatural vocations: a) Seriousness was ensured by demanding six years of temporary vows as opposed to the custom of the time, except for the Brothers of the Christian Schools. b) The supernatural aspect was ensured by a retreat in preparation for the vows, the appointing of a prefect with responsibility for the formation and spiritual interests of the brothers, contact maintained with the brothers by letter in order to urge them on to perfection.

A principle according to which the brothers were to be given work according to the aptitudes they showed and a direct introduction into apostolic work and the teaching of catechism. In this regard, Bishop de Mazenod was a man ahead of his time.

In conclusion, if he followed previous models, he did not come up with a stereotype. He was able to come up with something original. Nor did he create a lifeless rigid copy of something else. He knew how to be adaptable and how to adapt the Rule to the demands of life and the growth of the Institute.

## 2. BROTHERS FROM 1861-1961

For one hundred years, from 1861 on, the brothers lived the Constitutions and Rules and the spirit of the Founder. There was, however, a gradual evolution. It went smoothly, starting from the needs of the Church and not from theological reflection or theoretical planning.<sup>10</sup>

Here are a few considerations based on the bibliography prepared by Father Yvon Beaudoin and the references found in *Missions*, a rather faithful reflection of the history of the Congregation.

### *a. The number of the brothers, recruiting and formation*

#### *Statistics*

During the life of the Founder and previous to 1841, the vocations to the brotherhood came to us in a trickle, subsequently it set a rate producing a percentage which has remained more or less constant for the last one hundred and fifty years.

At the time of the death of the Founder, brothers counted for 20% of the Oblate personnel, 18% in 1899, almost 25% in 1933. In 1964, when the total membership of Oblates was at its highest peak, that is, 7,526, there were 1,309 brothers, about 17%. In 1987, there were only 14%, that is, 728 in a total of 5431 Oblates.

### *Recruiting*

Rarely was the recruiting of brothers done in a methodical way, even though the superiors of all the missions have always asked the General Administration for brothers.

Postulants joined the Congregation especially from their contacts with mission preachers preaching parish retreats and missionaries in the field. In the course of his famous recruiting tour in Europe from 1846 to 1848, Father John Claude Léonard only visited the seminaries and brought in practically only scholastics to the tune of one hundred in two years.<sup>11</sup>

In his report to the 1873 Chapter, the provincial of France-Nord complained of the lack of brother vocations because of the military regulations and also because little effort was made to find any.

At the time, the provincial of Canada admitted that he still had only one Canadian lay brother in perpetual vows and there was not a single one in the United States. The cause for this, he stated, was related to the "low regard in which house service was held in America, a condition rather easily equated with the condition of our brothers."<sup>12</sup>

In 1883, Bishop Vital Grandin took the measures necessary to obtain brothers. He got the bishops of Quebec where more than two-thirds of the

Catholics in Canada resided, to issue in common a pastoral letter for the purpose of collecting money and of speaking about the vocation to the brotherhood. Among other things, we read in this letter: "[...] these young chosen ones of the Lord [...] will be welcomed with open arms [at the novitiate in Lachine] and will learn silence, humility and self-denial with a view to dedicating themselves to the salvation of the poor savages [...]. They will bring highly valued help to the missionary by teaching the children of the forest to work under the gaze of God and to make themselves useful to society. When seen in a faith perspective, what a wonderful mission it is! What a fine calling even in the eyes of men [...]"<sup>13</sup>

Until 1950, the problem of recruiting brothers was not often mentioned. But a number of books were published on a regular basis with this in view, starting with *Hidden Apostles*, by Father Peter Duchaussois in 1924, a book which sold very well in the bookstores and was translated into a number of languages. A dozen biographies of brothers were published as well with this object in view.<sup>14</sup>

Nevertheless, in their reports to the 1953 Chapter, several provincials spoke of the lack of brothers and the fact that they were aging. But it was at the 1959 Chapter that one saw for the first time a concern shared by several provinces in Europe, the United States and Canada for the lack of brother vocations, their lack of perseverance and the search for new solutions. At the same time, recruiting was still very good in Eastern Canada and Germany where there were a few fathers given the responsibility of recruiting brothers and a specialized school of formation for them in Hünfeldt as at Rougemont in Canada.

### *Formation*

During this period, especially during the pre-Second World War period, the formation of the brothers seems to have been treated as the poor relations in the hierarchy of concerns of superiors. Little was said about professional formation except in the General Chapters of the XIX century when it was a case of brothers as teachers. Religious formation took place at the novitiate and from then on, for the most part, was left to the initiative of the spiritual prefect in the various houses.

The first text of some importance on this subject was found in the draft of a circular letter of Father Euloge Blanc on the brothers in 1939. In it, it was stated that the brothers should receive the same formation as the scholastics and that this formation should continue after the novitiate.

From 1950 on, the provinces of Germany, Eastern Canada and Italy which had a large number of brothers, dedicated themselves in a concrete way to give them a better formation in special schools.<sup>15</sup> In 1951, general interest was aroused by the survey and report on the novitiate for brothers drawn up by Father Daniel Albers, Director General of studies. He set forth a wide-ranging program of formation. According to the reports presented at the General Chapters of 1953 and 1959, everywhere people were making an effort to advance in that direction. In 1962, there were already nine professional schools for brothers.<sup>16</sup>

### *b. The brothers' work, their apostolate*

#### *Manual work*

On the occasion of the brothers' congress in 1985, Father Jetté said:

"As far as I am concerned, the Congregation is incomplete if it is lacking brothers".<sup>17</sup> This is very true. In the correspondence of superiors throughout Oblate history, the important and even indispensable role of brothers was always stressed and praised.

In 1958, Father Jean-Marie Larose published a long article on the work of the brothers. Their activity, like that of the fathers, was carried out on three levels:

— activity specific to religious life, that is, to imitate Jesus Christ and to sanctify oneself by observing the Constitutions and Rules and carrying out one's duties of state

— activity within the community: fraternal charity and taking care of the house;

— external activity: to evangelize the poor.

Later on, we will pick up the theme of religious life again. This is the aspect the Founder cared the most about. Oblate correspondence stressed especially the indispensable role of brothers for building houses, their work to feed the communities and to watch over all material needs. If we examine the reasons given to praise the indispensable contribution of the brothers to community life, we find two or three which come back again and again.

The first is that of poverty. Without the brothers there would not be enough money to build, feed and maintain communities and their works. Often superiors made the observation that spiritual progress of the missions was linked to a great extent with their material progress.

A second reason which often surfaced was that they did not like having women doing the work in communities and in addition to that, always and everywhere, hired help both men and

women did not do half the work carried out by a brother or in the mission context, they are not trained to do specialized work. Finally, the missionaries often spoke of the value of brothers even if they were ill; they at least offered companionship to lessen loneliness, labor and privation.

### *Intellectual work*

According to Bishop de Mazenod's principle which stated that each one was to be allowed to use his talents for the benefit of the common good, a number of brothers served as community treasurers, secretaries and especially teachers. Fathers Larose and Cosentino made a study, superficial though it may have been, of this question. The teaching brothers are often mentioned in *Missions*, especially up until the end of the last century. For a few years, there were at least seventy-five who worked in this area. But in 1958, Father Larose counted only twenty who were left. This kind of work declined because it demanded too specialized a training and the Congregation was not able to provide it. And even, in some fashion, after Father Louis Soullier's term as superior, the Congregation did not want to provide this training for fear of creating a third kind of Oblate. In 1893, it was even said that when lay brother teachers lived together with priests in the same Congregation, it always generated inevitable divisions or a decline in the religious spirit".<sup>18</sup>

In 1928, faced with a decline in the number of teaching brothers, the passage in the Rule which speaks of teaching was replaced by a text more open to the apostolate. Formerly, it read: "The Society accepts to receive within its ranks [...] men who will work

at tasks set aside in religious orders for those we call lay brothers [...] or even rendering assistance to the missionaries according to what the superiors judge suitable" (article 9).<sup>19</sup>

### *Direct apostolate*

With the exception of the teaching brothers who conducted catechism classes, few of the brothers exercised a direct apostolate, as for example the leading of prayer meetings.

Father Jean-Baptiste Honorat sometimes had a brother as his co-worker in the missions he preached in the diocese of Nîmes in 1829. In 1868, Bishop Henry Faraud left Brothers Alexis Reynard and Louis Boisramé alone charged with responsibility for the temporal and spiritual needs of the Providence mission. In 1875, at Caribou Lake, Brother Celestine Guillet made missionary journeys to lead prayer for isolated groups. Brother Joseph Patrick Kearney was doing the same thing at Good Hope about 1880-1890. They designated him by the same name as they used for the fathers: *yaltri*. Sometimes in the parishes, in the houses of education or the houses for closed retreats, superiors made the observation that by their example of prayer the brothers exercised a strong influence – even spiritual – on the faithful and the young people.

The brothers never complained about their very limited participation in the direct apostolate. Indeed, it seems that in the Congregation fathers and brothers always acknowledged that all were missionaries and apostles, evangelizing abandoned souls, each one in his own way and according to his talents. On May 5, 1870, Brother Boisramé, handy man at Providence mission wrote to Father Joseph Fabre that he was happy earning his salvation through

his work to the extent of his ability for the salvation of the poor savages.

In 1909, in a report on the mission of Cumberland in the Keewatin, Father Henry Boissin praised the work done by the brothers in the missions, saying: "His work is an apostolate, the apostolate of prayer and good example, sometimes no less fruitful than that of the word".<sup>20</sup>

In 1924, in his well known work *Hidden Apostles*, Father Duchaussois entitled his first chapter: *Religious*; the second chapter he called: *Missionaries*. In this second chapter, he wrote: "Missionary as the guardian of the priest, the brother is a companion as well, a man of example and counsel, a catechist, teacher, a person who works with his hands".<sup>21</sup>

Father Beaudoin gives many other examples that speak for themselves and enables one to see the missionary spirit among the brothers. Even their direct apostolic activity is nothing new or born after the Second Vatican Council.

#### c. Sons of the family

We do not often find in the pages of *Missions* or in other writings references to the fact that the brothers are genuinely sons of the family. The Founder stressed fraternal charity so strongly and showed his love for all, fathers and brothers, that it became a family tradition and not much time was devoted to examining the humble and dutiful situation of the brothers, for a long time treated as members of an inferior social standing.

During a retreat for superiors in Autun in 1864, Father Mark de L'Hermite said: "And you too, dear lay brothers, humble and untiring children of the family whose virtue we silently admire".<sup>22</sup> It is interesting to see how in 1939 already, Father Euloge Blanc in

the draft copy of his circular letter on the brothers wrote that they were sons of the family but they did not enjoy full equality; brothers were not suited to wield authority or take part in government, he said. Yet he concluded by saying that superiors did not always show the brothers the same goodness the Founder did.<sup>23</sup>

Social barriers fell little by little, especially in small communities where, for example, the brothers ate at the fathers' table. During the last century, this point was more strictly observed. In the death notice of brother Anthony Jouvant (+1885) who had often lived as the only brother in small communities, we see that he spent part of his life eating alone at his own table.<sup>24</sup>

#### d. Religious life

The observation has been made that in the Congregation the priests began by being missionaries and subsequently became religious; the brothers, on the other hand, accepted to be religious in order to work more effectively toward their salvation; subsequently, they became missionaries.

The Founder always stressed the religious life of brothers. In all the *Notices nécrologiques*, their religious life is given more prominence than their work.

In their correspondence with the General Administration, superiors were generally satisfied with the religious life of the brothers and praised their untiring devotion. In 1863, Bishop Jean François Allard, always dissatisfied with the fathers whom he did not find religious enough asked Father Fabre to send him six brothers. He added: "[...] I know the Irish Oblate brothers that we had in Canada; they are imbued with an excellent spirit and are just as I would have them for the Basotho".<sup>25</sup> In corre-

spondence and reports, we often find expressions such as the following: "We admire in silence their virtues", "unshakable good will", "what an inestimable treasure is a lay brother faithful to his vocation", "admirable devotion ... tireless", etc.

In 1904, on the occasion of the golden anniversary of vows of Brother Roux, the first lay brother in Canada, Bishop Adelard Langevin, Archbishop of Saint Boniface made this general statement about the brothers: "Faithful and prudent men, worthy of all confidence, worthy to be in charge of the temporal things of the house of God; a necessary and highly valued complement to our religious communities, worthy of unlimited respect both for the nobility of their unconditional dedication and for the uprightness of a life entirely consecrated to God, living a life of prayer and work, a life in which the world has no part".<sup>26</sup>

In 1907, speaking about the founding of the house of Engelpport, Father Scharsch wrote: "Ah! Our good lay brothers. It is difficult to relate in these pages all their dedication, their life of sacrifice [...]".<sup>27</sup> In reports to the Chapters of 1953 and 1959, the provincials paid a continuous tribute to "the humble and steady dedication" of the brothers. They paid tribute "to their spirit of sacrifice", to their generosity, their religious spirit which leads them to discover the true value of their lives beyond their work, beyond their concrete situations: the gift of self to God.<sup>28</sup>

As one can see from the bibliography on the brothers, from 1949 on, the spiritual prefects of Eastern Canada published several works on the spiritual formation of brothers.

In spite of departures, problems of all kinds such as we find everywhere in the human race, many brothers achieved

a high degree of perfection. About 1935, Father Gerard Paris made an analysis of the first seven volumes of the *Notices nécrologiques*. He noted that, according to the authors of these notices, a dozen or so of the brothers were considered genuine saints; a dozen were considered truly good brothers; and many others were considered good brothers. This amounts to a good half being excellent religious and, as Bishop de Mazenod used to say about the scholastic Louis Morandini, some of them, if they had been Jesuits, would have been canonized.

#### *e. Happy in their vocation*

In the past, there never was a survey such as that of 1985-1986 to find out whether the brothers were happy in their vocation. Yet the *Notices nécrologiques* seemed to indicate this in the majority of cases.

Here is an interesting anecdote dealing with this topic. In Mackenzie toward the end of the last century, there was a well-known Protestant minister, Bompas by name, who was very aggressive and who used to continually struggle against the Catholic missionaries. In 1870, he encountered Brother Boisramé in Fort Simpson. Brother Boisramé himself tells us about this exchange: "Since all Bompas could think about was quarreling and debate in matters of religion, he offered me a New Testament in order to be able to discuss the Sacred Scriptures. I thanked him for his offer and apologised for not accepting it by telling him that I could not read English and that I had not engaged in higher studies and that I was not able to engage in an argument with him. He then began to bemoan our lot in life of us, poor lay brothers. He told me that we were a pitiful lot, that we

were slaves of the Catholic priest, etc. 'No, Sir', I answered him, 'we are not slaves and we are not treated as such; and besides, if we were, we would be so entirely willingly. The fathers did not seek us out; on the contrary, it we who begged them to allow us to help them in material matters, while they took care of the spiritual matters. They hold us in high regard and treat us like brothers, and what is even better, is the fact that we share in their merit. There, in a word, Sir, is what we are and how we are considered; so stop complaining'.<sup>29</sup>

### 3. THE BROTHERS SINCE 1961

Rapid evolution of the post-war society and the gradual spread of a secular mindset have made a large contribution to very significant changes in the life and legislation regarding the brothers. Everywhere intellectual formation has been developed, allowing almost all young people to attend junior colleges and technical schools and earn degrees from these schools. On the other hand, we have seen developing everywhere a spirit of equality and brotherhood which does not tolerate a system of social classes.

In the Church, it was the Council which changed mentalities bringing them a new theological vision, or at least, stressing points of doctrine previously left in obscurity. For example, the notion of mission was broadened. This brought about that all Christians, in virtue of their baptism and confirmation, are missionaries of some kind. All the more so would the brother, a member of a missionary Congregation, be such. Then, there was the fostering of the ministries of the Christian laity and the priesthood of the faithful and finally, the possibility for laymen to become deacons, celibate or married.

#### a. *The 1966 Chapter*

Changes in society and in the Church had their impact on the Congregation which, during the 1966 Chapter, completely transformed the Constitutions and Rules of the past with regard to brothers.

During the years preceding the 1966 Chapter, this is the kind of development that had been desired and proposed, especially in the numerous articles written by Father Larose and by a significant critical analysis and study on the brothers carried out by Brother Cyril Bernier in 1965 and again by the surveys conducted before the Chapter. In his circular letter of May 1, 1966, Father Leo Deschâtelets wrote that the 1966 Chapter had available a number of documents and three hundred suggestions concerning the brothers.

It must be said, however, that the changes in the Constitutions and Rules of 1966 were rather more theological and psychological than juridical.<sup>30</sup> Fathers Leo Deschâtelets, Irénée Tourigny and Maurice Gilbert in various writings commented on the Constitutions and Rules and pointed out clearly the important changes with regard to the brothers. Father Gilbert summarized in two points the general directions adopted:

— Focusing once again on Christ. The brothers are no longer called lay or coadjutor; fathers and brothers are co-operators with Christ.

— Full integration into the apostolic community. This was one of the strong features of the Constitutions and Rules of 1966.<sup>31</sup>

This integration into the community, however, was set in the traditional structures of the Congregation. It remained and still remains restricted at least with regard to government.

Integration into the apostolic community was more pronounced with regard to the brothers sharing in the mission of the Congregation at the service of the Church. The Constitutions and Rules of 1966 set the true value of the brothers' vocation on a higher level than the tasks they carried out. In turn, these tasks were seen rather from their apostolic perspective. Indeed, as Father Gilbert explained, the brothers are missionary:

— in virtue of their life witness (R 17). It was clearly stressed that their work often brings them in close contact with the daily life of people. In this way, they are led to give special witness to the evangelical life and can exercise a very fruitful apostolate complementary to that of the priests.

— in virtue of prayer, in particular in view of the fact that from now on brothers can recite the Divine Office in the vernacular with the fathers and by their more intense participation in the communitarian concelebration;

— in virtue of their professional activity, always more highly developed because of a higher level of education;

— in virtue of tasks in the field of the direct apostolate. On this topic, Father Donat Levasseur wrote in 1972: "A new avenue is opening up for the brothers with the style of evangelization which is developing at present, that is evangelization while working on the socio-economic, cultural and human levels (development). The action of brothers in such an area of activity can become the same as that of the Oblate priest, although that calls for specialized training".

However, Father Levasseur also pointed out that if this field of apostolate is opening up for brothers, another is closed to them: "The works or apostolic community endeavors in which the

brothers used to work in close collaboration with the Oblate priest are becoming less numerous"<sup>32</sup>, teaching establishments, closed retreats, etc.

#### *b. Since 1966*

This latter period stands out because of three characteristics:

— Numerous surveys, meetings of brothers and studies to make adjustments to the Constitutions and Rules and a life lived according to the demands of the Council and especially the needs for evangelization of the world.

— Constitutions and Rules more juridically developed and still further developed along the lines of integration of the brothers and their apostolic activities.

— The concrete life of the brothers which, in certain aspects, in its development has lagged behind the legislation.

Let us briefly examine these points:

#### *Numerous surveys, meetings of brothers and studies on the brothers*

As we can see in the bibliography on the brothers, the majority of writings and studies were conducted after the war. From 1947 to 1965, there were about thirty of them and as many since 1966.

Surveys and meetings as well have been numerous:

In 1968, a conference for the brothers was held in Europe.<sup>33</sup> The theme of the meeting was: *The Oblate brother: Is he an apostle?* That same year saw a survey on the brothers and the permanent diaconate.<sup>34</sup>

In 1969, a seminar or gathering of brothers was held at San Antonio with a focus on formation and the importance of the religious life as opposed to the kind of work or apostolate.<sup>35</sup>

In 1971, a consultation was conducted by the Precapitular Commission. In it were found some important considerations on religious, communitarian and apostolic life, formation and recruiting.<sup>36</sup>

In 1974 there was a three day meeting of the German brothers and a meeting of the American brothers in Texas.<sup>37</sup>

In 1983, a new survey was conducted among the brothers on the theme: Why did I become a brother? Am I happy? And if I had to do it all over again...<sup>38</sup>

Finally, in 1985, there was a congress held in Rome for the brothers.<sup>39</sup>

*Constitutions and Rules which are more juridically developed and more advanced in the direction of integration of the brothers*

The Chapter of 1972<sup>40</sup>:

— mitigated the distinction between coadjutor brothers and scholastics. There is no longer any talk of two categories of members: religious priests and those who are not priests.

— made the decision that brothers in vows also have a passive voice at the Chapter. If six of them have not been elected, the Superior General extends a special invitation to them;

— brothers in vows are eligible for the position of local assistant, provincial consultor, members of the General Council and, with an indult, can become local superiors;

— Finally, it introduced the permanent diaconate for those brothers qualified for it and have a vocation to the diaconate.

In this regard, when he was Vicar General, Father Jetté published on January 6, 1973 the rescript from the Holy See approving the introduction of the permanent diaconate into the Con-

gregation. This took on the form of article 67 of the 1980 Rule which speaks of the call of brothers to the permanent diaconate and, in certain circumstances, to the priesthood.

The Constitutions and Rules of 1980-1982 added nothing new to this. This is how Father Jetté summarized legislation concerning the brothers: "On the level of life, it is [...] the fullest relationship of brotherhood without discrimination from one person to the other because of his specific vocation; on the level of activity, responsibilities are complementary with everyone working together for the evangelization of the world and the establishment of living Christian communities, while always keeping in mind that such a work is brought to completion only by the celebration of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, 'source and summit of the Church's life' (C 33), which calls for the action of the ordained priest to achieve this end".<sup>41</sup>

*A concrete life which, in certain aspects, in its development lagged behind the legislation.*

— With regard to certain issues, the brothers wanted to see more concrete and rapid changes, for example in community life and in participation in government. At the conference of the brothers of Europe in 1968 which had as its theme the apostolic life, the brothers from Holland proposed a complete and radical elimination of all categories of Oblates and requested that everyone receive the same formation. They even proposed that only those be ordained priest who, in fact, carried out priestly functions and not teachers, for example, and that, on the other hand, those candidates suitable for such a ministry be ordained priests or deacons.<sup>42</sup>

In the 1971 survey, all reports stressed equality, understanding, dialogue and brotherhood. It was found that on these points as well as on those of participation in government a lot of progress needed to be made and that old habits were showing signs of dying too slowly.<sup>43</sup>

— On the other hand, in other areas, the brothers were not rushing to take advantage of the possibilities of changes that were made available to them. This can be explained by the fact that there were few men joining the Oblates in those regions where brothers were the most numerous. Communities had grown older without undergoing renewal; consequently, old ways of doing things changed slowly. Here are a few examples related especially to work and the apostolate.

Evidently, brothers with more education were given work of a more intellectual nature. The work of maintaining our houses was done rather by lay people because the Congregation has money today and the brothers are fewer in number. Moreover, brothers were always given work according to the talents they possessed.

Nevertheless, the conference of the brothers of Europe in 1968 which dealt especially with the apostolate of the brothers was very revealing as to their wisdom and good judgment. The majority asked for more responsibility in their own areas and more dialogue with the treasurer, but they admitted they felt they were really participating in the mission of the Congregation and the Church by means of the different material tasks entrusted to them. Not only did they find genuine human growth, but the expression of their consecration to God in the Church as well.

Reports from the three provinces in France proved especially interesting;

they even expressed the concern of seeing the brothers being involved too directly in the apostolate.

On the occasion of the survey on the diaconate in 1968 as a follow-up to the *Motu proprio* of Paul VI on reinstating the permanent diaconate, only four provinces were very much in favor of the diaconate for the brothers; six others were simply in favor and all the rest were opposed to it. The reasons brought forth were of two kinds: firstly, the bishops already have laity responding to this need; secondly, as was already pointed out in the 1966 Chapter, if some brothers are ordained deacons, would we not be running the risk of creating two categories of brothers which would be to the detriment of the common life.<sup>44</sup>

In the 1971 survey conducted in preparation for the 1972 Chapter, it was surprising to see how the brothers still valued work within their own communities as a means of creating an atmosphere of brotherhood. This work was viewed as being an apostolic activity. Even the diaconate still held very little attraction for them. It was stated that deacons should emerge from the community of the local church and that this was not generally the case for the brothers.<sup>45</sup>

### *Conclusions*

The brothers among us, just like the Congregation as a whole, owe a great deal to Bishop de Mazenod. He is the one who willed them into existence, who contributed the family spirit which characterizes our religious society and directed the work of the brothers toward the direct apostolate.

The century following the Founder's death did not produce much development from the juridical point of

view. It was a century of living, a century during the course of which the Oblates worked hard to save souls and to extend the Kingdom of Christ without indulging in self-analysis or self-adulation, that is, little was written about their activities. It was then the brothers showed what they were capable of with regard to the greatness of their vocation, or yet again showed their ingenuity and boldness especially in the area of maintaining the material aspects of the missions.

Recent times will fade into history recognized for their great changes, especially juridical changes, but also real changes in the vocation and concrete lives of the brothers. Unfortunately, it will also record a significant decline in the number of vocations. At the Congress of the brothers in 1985, Father Jetté drew an array of conclusions concerning our recent development: "[...] Personally, I see the importance of the brothers in the Congregation, today more than ever when the Congregation is turning more toward collaboration with the Christian laity. If I consider the future, I remain confident that this vocation will grow among us and I can only strongly encourage the provinces, all provinces, to be welcoming of such vocations".<sup>46</sup>

## II. SPECIFIC ELEMENTS OF THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE OBLATE BROTHER<sup>47</sup>

### 1. BEING A BROTHER: A SPECIAL VOCATION?

In a conference on the vocation of the Oblate brother, Father Hans Josef Trümper first asked the question whether we are justified in speaking of a special vocation. He acknowledged

that the activities are different which implies that one should plan a diversified curriculum of formation, but for all that, should we see in this a special vocation at all costs? Here is his answer to these questions<sup>48</sup>:

There exists a series of texts that speak of this specific vocation: "During the years which follow the novitiate, brothers study in depth the meaning of their own vocation" (C 67). "To be an Oblate brother is a vocation recognized by the Church; it is a unique expression of the call a man receives from God to devote his entire life to the following of the Lord Jesus [...]"<sup>49</sup>; "[...] without any discrimination from one person to the other because of their particular vocation"<sup>50</sup>; "it is our duty[...] to help them to discern their vocation as priests or as brothers [...]"<sup>51</sup>

To speak of vocation in this particular context seems to be the appropriate terminology for the following reasons:

— Each person has a particular, unique relationship with God, a relationship not interchangeable with anyone else.

— In the present case, we have all been led to the Oblates. Our personal charism is set within the charism of a religious family with which the individual interacts in a living fashion. We all have a vocation that shares similarities, but it is not the same vocation! In the roles we play, we can be replaced, but we are not interchangeable in our own individual personalities.

— In a similar fashion, it can be said that being a brother or a priest are not interchangeable functions, but the existential expressions of the same vocation distinctive of a religious family. As for being a priest, I believe a wide consensus can be achieved on this. As for being a brother, in a congregation

made up exclusively of brothers, no one would claim that we are dealing here with a simple role. I am convinced, Father Trümper said, that in a clerical congregation, things cannot be different.

## 2. BROTHER – FRATERNITY – SOLIDARITY

It is understood that all are children of God and therefore brothers and sisters. Brotherhood is an essential element of being Christian. The Founder gave us an example of this. That is what he proclaimed while still a young priest in his first Lenten sermon at the Madeleine in Aix: “My brothers, my dear brothers, my respectable brothers [...]” “The spirit of brotherhood” is to be found as well among the authentic characteristics of the apostolic man.<sup>52</sup> But it was the day when for the first time I had the honor of preaching the homily for the jubilee of oblation for a brother, said Father Trümper, that the grandeur, the “nobility” of this designation came clear for me. And I understood what a challenge this was – *noblesse oblige* – to bear in some way as a social designation this aspect of the Christian and missionary life.

All Oblates have the responsibility of “helping [others] to discover “who Christ is” (C 7). That is to make Christ present, to re-present him. The Oblate priest, whether he wishes it or not, “represents” the hierarchy by that very fact and in a certain manner. To be sure, it is not something to be ashamed of, but it is true that for many of our contemporaries this hierarchical dimension causes problems in terms of allowing a free and untrammelled access.

This is how a young Oblate brother described his experience: “In speaking with a lot of young people, most of them far removed from the Church, I

learned that we need consecrated individuals who can bridge the gap between those who are far away from the Church and the priest. Most of them admitted to me that they would never have had the courage to make the first step and to contact a priest directly”.

By studying the replies of the young brothers to the questions asked by the European Bureau for Formation, we see that, for the most part, there is a significant motivation in the choice they made of becoming Oblate brothers.

From this point of view, it is perhaps unfortunate that in the 1982 version of Rule 3 [R 7c in CCRR 2000], they removed the phrase: “Their work in the technical, professional or pastoral domains often gives them the opportunity to exercise a fruitful ministry in areas which are not always accessible to the priest”. To comment on the new article 3 of the Rules, we have to go to No. 50 of *Missionaries in Today's World*: “In our world, which is sometimes hostile to the Church and careful to keep its distance from the institutional Church and from those who exercise authority in it, Oblate Brothers will often have a gospel influence which the priest could not have”.

This idea is also substantially contained in the Constitutions. For example, in Constitution 7: “As priests and Brothers, we have complementary responsibilities in evangelizing”. And in Constitution 38: All of us “priests and Brothers [are] interdependent in our lives and missionary activity”. If we want to consult other texts and events in our history, we can confirm this: the task of evangelization which is incumbent on the Church is inconceivable without the cooperation of the laity. Similarly, the Oblate mission of evangelizing in the manner it has gradually defined itself in history and through ec-

clesiastical mandate is no longer conceivable without the cooperation of the laity who unite themselves to this work of evangelization in virtue of their oblation.

This idea was confirmed by the Pope's exhortation contained in his speech to the members of the 1986 General Chapter, October 2: "Be vigilant also to call not only to Oblate missionary life in priestly ministry but equally to the well prepared and very precious service of Oblate Brother". In the same vein, Father Jetté stated: "Not to show an interest in such a vocation, not to foster such a vocation, would bring upon the Congregation an impoverishment and would constitute a failure in fidelity to correspond to our history as well as to the grace of God"<sup>53</sup>.

This spirituality of complementarity is very much alive among our young Oblates. For them, it is not solely a case of cooperating with the Oblate priests in their involvement in direct missionary and pastoral work. It is a question as well of the missionary dimension of our community life. Many of the answers received make explicit mention of the fact that communitarian life shared between Oblate brothers and Oblate fathers is one of mutual enrichment and a complementary element among us within our communities and that it portrays in general lines the fulfillment of what Paul described as a model of the Church under the image of the Mystical Body of Christ.

In his speech to the brothers in 1985, Father Jetté strongly stressed as well this highly valued contribution of the brothers: "Will the present development [in our way of seeing our vocation] safeguard this value? With all my soul I hope it will [...]"<sup>54</sup> In the same manner, Father Jetté confirmed that the external broadening of the field of ac-

tivity of the brothers in the pastoral realm, a movement that has happily grown stronger for several years now, should not lead us to discount the internal services rendered by the brothers within our communities: "That would be a bad thing".

The expressions *brotherhood*, *fraternal* appear in our Constitutions and Rules as being used almost exclusively in relation with our community life (without making any distinction between fathers and brothers). Generally, the terms *solidarity*, *in solidarity with* have been chosen to express the missionary aspect of this spirituality of brotherhood reaching beyond the community.

Constitution 7 tells us that the Oblates "spare no effort to [...] help them [those to whom they are sent] to discover 'who Christ is'." This way of describing our missionary task allows every brother to fully identify himself with it no matter what may be the activity in which he may be engaged. The spirituality which emerges from this for the Oblate brother seems to me to find an accurate expression of it in the text of 2 Corinthians 3:3: "It is plain that you are a letter from Christ [...]"

We touch here the challenge that such a spirituality represents. A letter in its writing and style must be legible for contemporary human beings. A life radically consecrated to the task of becoming everyone's brother for the love of Christ can have the value of a sign and no more, but it makes a powerful contribution in communicating in an understandable way the message of Christ. We live "in a world in which explicit reference to God disappears slowly but surely and religious structures cease to be an indispensable framework for social life [...]"<sup>55</sup> "In some places where indifferentism and

practical atheism reign, courageous actions and a clear witness of love and solidarity are imperative".<sup>56</sup>

### 3. SOME CONSIDERATIONS ON RULE 3 OF OUR CONSTITUTIONS AND RULES

[Note that this refers to R 7c in CCRR 2000]

#### a. *The first paragraph*

In the first paragraph, there are three key words: priesthood, consecration and reconciliation.

##### — *Priesthood – consecration*

The theology behind Rule 3 is very simple: the priesthood of Jesus Christ is unique. All those who are in Christ participate in it, but in different ways according to their calling. The Oblate brother shares in it in his own way. In his case, we can see three sources for this participation: 1. In virtue of baptism as is the case for all Christians; 2. In virtue of his consecration through the vows; 3. In virtue of his oblation through which he shares in the priestly mission of the Oblates.

This is not the place to comment on the first point. As for the second, in his speech of January 12, 1980 to a thousand brothers belonging to a multiplicity of different Institutes Pope John Paul II stressed the relationship between baptism and religious consecration; as for religious consecration, he stated that the two-fold priesthood common to all the laity is fully expressed in it, that is: a) the offering of the spiritual sacrifice, adoration in spirit and truth; b) the proclamation of salvation (see Romans 12:1; 1 Peter 2: 5, 9). From the fact of his sharing in the one priesthood of Christ with the specific character which it confers on religious consecration, the

life of the brother is centered on God and on others, following Christ who lives entirely for God and entirely for all persons.

The energy for implementing this double objective is "the love of God poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit" (Romans 5:5). In this context, the reference to the love of God makes us think of what the Founder said in the preface of the Constitutions and Rules: These priests gathered in a society to pledge "themselves to all the works of zeal which priestly charity can inspire".

When he used the expression *priestly charity*, the Founder was not thinking of the brothers. But he was most certainly convinced that the priestly charity of the Oblate is firmly rooted in the priestly charity of Christ ("The love of Christ which urges us on", 2 Corinthians 5:14). Nor can it be doubted that he fully held to the teaching of the Church on the common priesthood of the faithful and what the Pope said to the brothers. We can, therefore, without fear of incurring his displeasure and without modifying his wording understand it today in the following way: These Oblates, priests and brothers, have come together in community to devote themselves to all the works of zeal that priestly charity...

As for the third point, oblation, we can refer to *General Norms on Formation*, chapter I, no. 2: [Oblate formation] leads us to understand in a manner specific to each group, the quality of the unbreakable link [of the unique Oblate charism] with the priestly ministry". The Oblate brother does not live out his religious consecration among the Brothers of Christian Schools, but among the Oblates. From the very fact of this oblation, his participation in the priesthood of Christ takes on a new character. In fact, this oblation is directed to the

mission of the Oblates such as it is described here and in as much as it finds its fulfillment in the priestly service of the mystery of salvation.

The new Code of Canon Law applies the term "clerical" to Institutes which live out this vocation. The expression is regrettable as well as are one or the other of its juridical consequences, but that does not justify rejecting its deep significance.

— *Reconciliation*

Rule 3 makes a specific reference to the epistle to the Colossians 1:20: "Oblate Brothers [...] are called to cooperate in their own way in reconciling all things in him". In the speech already quoted, the Pope told the brothers: "Be conscious of the special vocation that the Lord has entrusted to you in the Church. Let yourselves be imbued with a spirituality which allows you to discover the action of God in the world and which cooperates in a responsible fashion to the realization of his plan of salvation".

We could especially stress two aspects of this spirituality. It is a case of a spirituality of incarnation and a spirituality of reconciliation.

*A spirituality of incarnation.* Through their work in the young Churches, missionary brothers have made their contribution. We often notice among them a keenly developed insight into the mentality of the people with whom they work and they make a concrete contribution to present awareness in this area.

One of the aspects of priestly service can be translated by "service of the Word". The brother's service, as well, is a service of the Word clothed in flesh. That was the kind of service rendered by Mary. In some way, it was in her that the Word took on hands and

feet: the hands which worked in Nazareth, healed the sick, broke bread with others, blessed children and which finally bore the stigmata of the Passion. The feet which trod the dusty road from Galilee to Jerusalem, from Mount Tabor to the Mount of Olives, and finally, to Calvary.... We can clearly see here a definite focus of activity which is capable of influencing spirituality because it leads the eyes of the heart to gaze in a specific direction when it is contemplating Christ.

This approach in understanding the vocation of the brothers and this spirituality are not theoretical. Here is an example offered to us by an aging brother: "I always understood my vocation as a brother in this way: I wanted to participate through the work of my own hands in building the Kingdom of God". And a young brother had this to say: "My vocation gave me a kind of "physical expression" of the call I had received: to put my head, my hands, my feet entirely at the service of one task alone which is that of responding to the manifold calls of the community and of the mission".

*A spirituality of reconciliation.* The Pope conceived the place of the brother as being at the juncture (this is the word he used) between human reality and Church reality, between the kingdom of people and the Kingdom of God; at the connection, so to speak, of what is "of this world" and what is of God. It is at this juncture that a spirituality is necessary and expected. To be reconciled means to overcome divisions, antagonisms, conflicts. As co-workers in the work of Redemption, we cannot legitimately remain indifferent to this. Here lies a field of action for the missionary brother who cannot administer the sacrament of reconciliation, but who can act as the leaven of reconciliation in a

great many ways. On the occasion of his oblation, he receives the same Oblate cross as a sign of the mission he is receiving from the One who "made peace by his death on the cross" (Colossians 1:20).

*Ability and selflessness.* Constitution 67 reads: "Thus, in his own community as well as outside it, the Brother can give witness of solid faith and of service that is competent and selfless". If the brother finds his place at the juncture of earthly and divine realities, and if he is called to overcome opposition and exercise a ministry of reconciliation, it is understandable that for him a solid faith is essential as well as genuine professional and technical ability. Neither ideas, nor argumentation nor prayer alone can span the gap which separates science and faith, the world of work and the world of the Church, daily life and religious practice. To achieve this there is a need as well for individuals capable of dealing competently with created realities while respecting their legitimate autonomy. The need is for persons who, when confronting people formed by these realities, display an authentic openness and a genuine sensitivity for these issues, problems and aspirations and who in all uprightness enter into solidarity with them.

It is this openness, this focus on the future because of God which enables the religious to offer his selfless service in the "secular" sphere (world of labor, education, health, science, culture...). We have often heard Christian laity who take their faith seriously express the difficulty they experience in putting Christian principles into practice in the everyday reality of work. The example of religious, brothers and sisters is very important in this domain. Their life must be a living witness of the dignity of the worker who

takes control of his working situation rather than being controlled by it and who refuses to become simply a cog in the wheel of productivity.

The selfless character of one's service is also a way of putting into practice the words of Jesus: "Set your hearts on his kingdom first, and on his righteousness" (Matthew 6:33). Our age has developed a certain kind of aversion for the "hidden life" type of service. But the history of salvation has its own inescapable reality: It is in secret that the Word took on flesh. Every incarnation takes place for the most part in a hidden way and it is in secret that the seeds of the budding world break through the surface. Brothers are often experts in their field, but their life manifests the word "[...] You have only one Master, and you are all brothers" (Matthew 23:8).

The issue is not that of relegating the brother to the role of a hidden servant. The spirit of service and humility is at least as necessary for the priest as the compelling example of the washing of the feet shows us in the course of what we could call the priestly ordination of the Apostles. But experience does show us that the brothers are often our teachers in this matter.

*b. Rule 3, second paragraph.*

The second paragraph of Rule 3 was modified by the General Chapter of 1986, upon the request of the then Superior General, Father Jetté. The former wording, "Everywhere the Brothers have an important missionary role to play in the building up of the Church" was replaced by "The Brothers share in the missionary work of building the Church in the universe".

The expression "an important role" seemed awkward and somewhat conde-

scending. In the Chapter debate the suggestion was made to replace "important" with "essential". This had a better ring to it, but basically, the simplest form is the best form and this is what was adopted. Its meaning is richer because it grants to the involvement of the brother the same missionary value as that of all the other groups of Oblates. The *General Norms for Formation* (chapter IV, 1 B) states: "The brothers are missionaries of equal status with all the other members of the Oblate Congregation [...]" The Pope's wording: "It is important that each one of you be fully aware of the fact that his activity, no matter what it may be, is essentially ecclesial in nature", conveys much the same meaning.

### III. FORMATION OF THE OBLATE BROTHER<sup>57</sup>

#### 1. A FEW OBSERVATIONS IN THIS AREA

First of all, it must be said that the formation of brothers has always been a little neglected and not sufficiently well defined in its programs, but that interest in it has increased in recent years in those places where brother vocations have become more numerous today.

A survey conducted in Italy produced these conclusions:

— The need for a well ordered formation integrated into the various stages and different areas: spiritual, theological, human, cultural, professional... was strongly stressed;

— The programs need to be well defined as well as the places, people in charge, their preparation for this work and the entire development through which the candidates are to be led;

— The documents of the Holy See with regard to the training of future

priests cannot be applied to all the candidates for religious life. It is imperative to have directions and adequate instructions on the formation specific to religious;

— The lack of religious vocations to the brotherhood in the last twenty years is due especially to this lack of adequate direction.

The Provincials themselves noted:

— a lack of human, religious and cultural formation;

— a great lack of intellectual training in specific disciplines;

— a lack of formation programs in a number of Institutes.

Finally, this is how the religious brothers expressed their desires:

— to encourage human, religious, apostolic and professional formation;

— to promote vocations to the religious life to a greater extent and not to concentrate solely on the priesthood;

— to foster cultural and spiritual meetings between priests and brothers within the Institute and among Institutes for purposes of an improved ongoing formation;

— to set up a plan for first formation which includes both brothers and scholastics in accordance with the charism of the Congregation.

#### 2. VARIOUS AREAS OF FORMATION

Every formation program should be well unified and well integrated in all its dimensions. The integration of its various aspects or areas such as those of human, spiritual, doctrinal, apostolic and professional formation should help to achieve a deeper understanding of the missionary vocation of the Oblate religious to better serve the needs of men of our day.

With regard to brother formation, before all else, it must be said that the ma-

jority of these aspects must be the same as those for the priest religious because there is only one vocational call in our Institute. It is true that there are differences, but these are only partial.

The common aspects have to do with human formation, character, affectivity, the sense of coresponsibility and sharing, relationships with others, development of talents..., spiritual formation, sacramental and communitarian life, the sense of the Church, formation in our specific charism, values of the Institute and apostolic vision.

The specific aspects are in relation to the individual traits of the brother. We could group them as follows:

*a. Theological and pastoral formation*

A religious needs the kind of theological training that will provide him with a basic culture capable of having "an answer ready for people who ask you the reason for the hope that you all have" (1 Peter 3:15). Simple catechism instruction is not enough today. There is a need to study one's faith in depth and be able to communicate it adequately.

On the other hand, there exist many possibilities today to take theology courses at various levels according to the needs and capabilities of individuals.

Certainly, there are some differences in the case of the religious who is preparing for the priesthood. Of necessity such a person must have undergone a full course of theology while the brother may feel himself called rather to specialize in other areas, evidently without excluding the fact that an individual might feel himself attracted to a particular field of theology and might want to devote himself to a

teaching career or to any other kind of pastoral activity.

The brother's pastoral formation should take into account the different fields open to him whether it be catechetics, group animation, liturgy, social work, care of the sick, the prisoners, etc., or vocation work or even formation work for those who show some aptitude for it.

*b. Formation for communitarian and Church life*

Two possibilities exist here: service within the Institute and service outside the Institute according to the specific charism.

The first kind of service is related to the internal affairs of religious communities and houses such as the task of treasurer, upkeep of the house, working in the kitchen, secretarial work, etc.

The second kind implies involvement in the specific mission of the Institute such as charitable work, teaching, evangelization, liturgy and prayer, etc. If the brother is gifted with social skills and is able to carry out some of the activities indicated above, he should be allowed to take professional training so that he can make his specific contribution in this field. This holds true especially in a context of first evangelization where, in virtue of his technical and professional training, he would be able to contact people and witness effectively to them the values of the Gospel.

Preparing brothers for a specific work does not mean excluding them from other community activities whether internal or external in as much as they are compatible with his specific responsibilities. What must be avoided is that a religious be trained to do only one thing.

*c. Formation and certain specific attitudes*

In addition to his doctrinal and professional formation, during his period of formation, the brother ought to work to learn some of the attitudes appropriate for brothers, attitudes to which we have already referred such as a "Marian" devotion, the Gospel meaning of service, hospitality, a sense of family, being close to the people, the primacy of charity, etc.

These are especially the attitudes that will give a distinguishing character to the interior life of the brother and will allow him to find his proper role within the Institute and the Church, endowing him with serenity, joy and growth no matter what his ministry might be.

### 3. STAGES OF FORMATION.

The first stages of formation, pre-novitiate and novitiate do not present any special problem. They are the same for all members of the Institute.

The period that gives rise to the most problems is the one after first profession until perpetual profession. There have been a wide variety of experiments here. However, there are a few important elements worth highlighting:

- an ongoing relationship with the religious who are preparing themselves for the priesthood in order to achieve a genuine integration into the same family while preparing oneself for the same mission;

- a theological and spiritual formation;

- a personal journeying with them with an ongoing evaluation;

- professional formation;

- a direct experience of the ordinary life of the Institute during a period of integration into a community and in the pastoral activity of the Institute.

Problems arose especially when an attempt was made to concretely integrate a structure into a self-contained and demanding program:

- houses of formation for brothers seemed to contradict the principle of one vocation for all;

- the choice of only one house for all raised a number of questions. How does one respond adequately to the different needs of candidates and how does one avoid the negative influences of some individuals on others? How can one achieve the integration of professional and theological formation?

Nevertheless, in the Congregation today, there do exist valid experiences in houses of formation for candidates for both the priesthood and the brother's vocation which are working well in an atmosphere of good relations among the members as they follow different courses of study. But we also find situations which are different. What is especially important for the formation of brothers is the idea the members of the Institute have of it.

SANTIAGO REBORDINOS

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Father Yvon Beaudoin has developed this aspect in "Les frères dans la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 50 (1991), p. 3-38.

<sup>2</sup> In *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 4, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> LAROSE, Jean-Marie, "Etude sur l'origine des frères convers chez les Oblats", in *Oblate Writings*, 12 (1953), p. 77-78, 84-87, 90-91.

<sup>4</sup> IDEM, "Les sources des articles des Règles concernant les frères coadjuteurs" in *Etudes oblates*, 14 (1955), p. 211-244, 278-301.

<sup>5</sup> IDEM, "Etude sur l'origine des frères...", p. 101, 107-115; "La place des

frères...”, in *Etudes oblates*, 24 (1965), p. 138.

<sup>6</sup> See BEAUDOIN, Yvon, “Les frères au début de la Congrégation (1818-1843)”, in *Vie Oblate Life*, 45 (1968), p. 142-143; LAROSE, Jean-Marie, “Etude sur l’origine...”, p. 101-104.

<sup>7</sup> “Instruction de notre Fondateur relative aux missions étrangères”, French text published in 1936, p. 13.

<sup>8</sup> See CC and RR of 1826, “De voto paupertatis”, art. 43.

<sup>9</sup> LAROSE, Jean-Marie, “Etude sur l’origine...”, p. 112-115.

<sup>10</sup> See JETTÉ, Fernand, “La vocation du frère oblat, hier et aujourd’hui”, in *Vie Oblate Life*, 45 (1986), p. 154-155.

<sup>11</sup> VERKIN, Henry, “La tournée de propagande du père Léonard”, in *Etudes oblates*, 26 (1967), p. 55-88.

<sup>12</sup> In *Missions*, 11 (1873), p. 294-323.

<sup>13</sup> In *Missions*, 21 (1883), p. 205-206.

<sup>14</sup> BEAUDOIN, Yvon, “Essai de bibliographie sur les frères dans la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée”, in *Vie Oblate Life*, 50 (1991), p. 27-38.

<sup>15</sup> Father Athanase Francoeur then published a small work on the choice of books for use by the Brothers and Father Gilbert published an article on the house in Hünfeld.

<sup>16</sup> See *Etudes oblates*, 21 (1962), p. 184-188: Hünfeld, 1949; Santa Maria a Vico, 1950, Rougemont, 1954; Sevenum, 1956, Velaines, 1957, Notre-Dame de Lumières, 1957, Pass Christian, 1958; Caen, 1959, Pocos de Caldos, 1961.

<sup>17</sup> “La vocation de frère oblat, hier et aujourd’hui”, in *Vie Oblate Life*, 45 (1986), p. 159.

<sup>18</sup> See LAROSE, Jean-Marie, “Les travaux des frères”, in *Etudes oblates*, 17 (1958), p. 144; “Etude sur l’origine des frères...”, p. 115; COSENTINO, Georges, “Histoires des Règles”, Ottawa, Oblate Studies Edition, p. 26-29, 80.

<sup>19</sup> See LAROSE, Jean-Marie, “Etude sur l’origine des frères...”, p. 115.

<sup>20</sup> In *Missions*, 47 (1909), p. 249-250.

<sup>21</sup> *Apotres inconnus*, Paris, Spes, 1928, p. 33

<sup>22</sup> In *Missions*, 3 (1864), p. 229.

<sup>23</sup> See BLANC, Euloge, Circular Letter, 1939, p.3-4, 9-10, ms., Oblate General Archives.

<sup>24</sup> *Notices nécrologiques*, VI, p. 127.

<sup>25</sup> In *Missions*, 3 (1864), p. 17.

<sup>26</sup> In *Missions*, 42 (1904), p. 31.

<sup>27</sup> In *Missions*, 45 (1907), p. 122.

<sup>28</sup> In *Missions*, 80 (1953), p. 6, 401, 417-418; 86 (1959), p. 39-40.

<sup>29</sup> In *Missions*, 11 (1873), p. 180.

<sup>30</sup> See WOESTMAN, William H., *The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, a Clerical Religious Congregation with Brothers*, Ottawa, Saint Paul University, 1995, p. 241.

<sup>31</sup> See GILBERT, Maurice, “Le Frère oblat”, in *Etudes oblates*, 27 (1968), p. 225-237.

<sup>32</sup> LEVASSEUR, Donat, “La vocation apostolique du Frère oblat”, in *Documentation OMI*, 36, 1972, p. 22-25.

<sup>33</sup> The acts of this conference appeared in *Missions*, 95, (1968), p. 665-669.

<sup>34</sup> Father Joseph Schulte gave a report on this in *Documentation OMI*, no. 3 (1969), p. 66-67.

<sup>35</sup> See *Missions* 96 (1969), p. 373-78.

<sup>36</sup> The synthesis of the responses and several studies were published in *Documentation OMI*, no. 36 (1972), p. 3-30.

<sup>37</sup> See *Documentation OMI*, no. 51 (1974), p. 2-7.

<sup>38</sup> Father Larnicol made a good synthesis of three hundred and fifty answers received in *Vie Oblate Life*, 45 (1986), p. 209-233.

<sup>39</sup> The acts appeared in French and in English in *Vie Oblate Life*, 45 (1986).

<sup>40</sup> See TOURIGNY, Irénée, “Le Frère oblat selon le Fondateur et la tradition oblate”, in *Vie Oblate Life*, 39 (1980), p. 50-60.

<sup>41</sup> “La vocation de frère oblat, hier et aujourd’hui”, in *Vie Oblate Life*, 45 (1986), p. 159.

<sup>42</sup> In *Missions*, 95 (1968), p. 671-675.

<sup>43</sup> In *Documentation OMI*, 36 (1972), p. 8-9.

<sup>44</sup> In *Documentation OMI*, 3 (1969), p. 66-67, 71.

<sup>45</sup> In *Documentation OMI*, 36 (1972), p. 6-8.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 159; also p. 155-157.

<sup>47</sup> Father Hans Josef Trümper developed

this aspect more at length in "La vocation de l'Oblat-frère: conception et spiritualité, réflexions à partir des *Constitutions et Règles et des Normes générales de la formation*", *Vie Oblate Life*, 50, (1991), p. 357-383; Father Fabio Ciardi also touched on some points dealing with this issue in *Quaderni di Vermicino*, no. 28, p. 17-28.

<sup>48</sup> In "La vocation de l'Oblat-frère...", p. 357-372.

<sup>49</sup> *Normes générales de la formation*, IV, 1 B.

<sup>50</sup> JETTÉ, Fernand, «La vocation du frère oblat, hier et aujourd'hui», in *Vie Oblate Life*, 45 (1986), p. 159.

<sup>51</sup> *Missionaries in Today's World*, no. 152.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem*, no. 118.

<sup>53</sup> «La vocation du frère oblat, hier et aujourd'hui», in *Vie Oblate Life*, 45 (1986), p. 160.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>55</sup> *Missionaries of Today's World*, no. 34.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibidem*, no. 44.

<sup>57</sup> Father Ciardi has given this aspect further development in *Quaderni di Vermicino*, no. 28, p. 28-33. At the end of Father Trümper's article, «La vocation de l'Oblat-frère...», we find an interesting appendix: «Critères pour le discernement de la vocation du frère», in *Vie Oblate Life*, 50 (1991), p. 374-383.

## CHARISM

*Summary: I. A Specific Identity:* 1. The spirit; 2. The spirituality: a. The existence of a spirituality or of a school of spirituality; b. The sources of Mazenodian spirituality. *II. The Possible Articulations of Oblate Spirituality:* 1. The Superiors General; 2. Oblate literature. *III. Oblate Values and the Missionary Outlook.* *IV. The Oblate Charism.* *V. Ongoing Research.* 1. Dynamic description of the charism; 2. The object of our interpretation: Charism of the Founder and of the Institute; 3. The mediator of the charism: Oblate community.

The Holy Spirit animates, renews and continually gives life to the Church in Christ in such a way that it can always accomplish more fully its mission of being a sign and sacrament of salvation and unity for the entire human race. It is the Spirit that guides it on its way to the Father, towards a new heaven and a new earth where justice will reign. In this plan of salvation, the Spirit gives the Church the necessary charisms for it to adequately fulfill her mission according to the needs of the times.

In this mystery of salvation, Eugene de Mazenod emerges as a person who allowed himself to be docilely led by the Spirit and became the Spirit's instrument to raise up in the Church a new way for the charism of evangelizing the poor to be present.

Reflecting on the nature of the Oblate vocation in terms of charism is a relatively recent development. For more than a hundred years we commonly spoke of the "spirit". It was only from 1940 on that the use of "spirituality" slowly replaced the word "spirit". We had to wait until the post-conciliar period to come to the point of rethinking the Oblate vocation in terms of "charism".

Beyond the terminology which does have its importance, we will seek to understand how the Oblates perceived the identity proper to them in the Church.

### I. A SPECIFIC IDENTITY

For the Oblates it is life which always comes before reflection. Throughout their history they have concentrated on living and on carrying out their particular missionary work with dedication and courage, more concerned with promoting life around them than with intellectualizing about their own life. Recently the following question has been asked: "Should we express our identity in words, in slogans, or through means of the life and pastoral directions we have already implemented? The immediate response was: "The challenge is found in living".<sup>1</sup>

In 1959, speaking to the Oblate educators of the United States, Father Leo Deschâtelets denounced the lack of critical analysis in the area of Oblate spirituality: "Our venerated Founder never wrote any scientific treatise on this question. It has only been during these last few years that some of our theologians have attempted to capture in words exactly what it is we call Oblate spirituality".

"If the Founder himself has left us no classical account of our spirituality, we can reasonably suppose that he expected that the Superiors General who followed him would give an official interpretation of what it really was. But that has not been the case. My predecessors have

written a number of inspiring circular letters on various aspects of our religious and spiritual life. But the circular letter or the document unveiling for us the true meaning of Oblate spirituality has yet to appear. And it will not appear as long as our theologians and our specialists will not have conducted exhaustive research in the area of our religious and spiritual teachings. At the present moment, in spite of the publication of a certain number of serious articles based upon trustworthy documentation, and the fact that certain ideas have been definitively established, the study of our spirituality simply resembles a great cathedral under construction where a number of qualified workers have laid the foundations while the construction site is covered with material awaiting the hands of other workers. Research in this area is going forward. But we are still looking for an architect capable of carrying out this monumental task [...]"<sup>2</sup>

The priority given to life does not prevent reflection on what has already been lived; on the contrary, this kind of reflection is necessary. It can be affirmed that "it is better to be imbued with the Oblate spirit rather than knowing its definition"<sup>3</sup> But there is no denying the necessity of understanding more in depth the elements connected with lived experience if one wishes to experience a harmonious and progressive growth, and as the needs arise, to make the necessary new choices in the journey through history and in response to the impact of new cultures.

### 1. THE SPIRIT

At the time of the origin of the Institute, in spite of the absence of an explicit and systematic doctrinal reflection on the identity proper to it, the awareness of its existence has always been very clear.

Eugene de Mazenod spoke with conviction and as though it was something taken for granted when he spoke of a spirit specific to the Congregation. Already in 1817, he wrote to Father Henry Tempier: "Each Society in the Church has a spirit which is its own; which is inspired by God according to the circumstances and needs of the times wherein it pleases God to raise these supporting bodies or rather it would be better to say these elite bodies [...]"<sup>4</sup>

And later on, to Father Hippolyte Guibert: "We must be filled with our spirit and live by it. This is so evident that it needs no explanation. Just as in a Society there is a common dress, common Rules, there must also be a common spirit that gives life to this particular body. The spirit of the Bernardine is not that of the Jesuit. Ours spirit is also something particular to us"<sup>5</sup>

In the period which followed the Founder's death, the Oblates, beginning from the Superiors General, continued spontaneously to talk about the Oblate spirit or the spirit of the family<sup>6</sup>. It was simply the affirmation that such a spirit existed as if it was something tangibly evident. The awareness of belonging to the Congregation was clear. Similarly there was complete continuity between what the Founder held up as a model of life and the family tradition which became established, little by little. The question as to whether or not a special spirit existed was not even asked, it seemed all too evident.

Father Joseph Fabre, Eugene de Mazenod's successor in directing the Congregation, made a decisive contribution in keeping alive the sense of family, the memory of the Founder and his spirit<sup>7</sup>. He was recognized by his contemporaries as being the one who genuinely continued Eugene de Mazenod's work – to such an extent that the first

companion of the Founder could say: "No doubt, we will always mourn our first Father, and you will mourn him with us. But nevertheless, allow us tell you that this Father has not entirely abandoned us, he left you his spirit and his heart".<sup>8</sup>

Aware that he was not able to fill the void left by the death of the Founder, of not being able to speak with the same authority and the same ardor, Father Fabre declared that he was ready to let himself be "imbued with his spirit", in order, simultaneously with all the Oblates, to be constantly renewed "in the spirit of our holy vocation" and to walk in his footsteps<sup>9</sup>. From here came his firm resolution to keep alive the heritage received: "To renew ourselves in the love of our holy vocation, to confirm ourselves in that filial affection which constitutes its strength and its life, that is the goal of my constant concerns and I consider it my primary duty to take advantage of all circumstances to rekindle these sentiments in your hearts".<sup>10</sup>

He demanded the same attitude on the part of all superiors and asked them to "maintain the family spirit", to instill "love of our holy vocation", to demand observance of the Constitutions and Rules because "one cannot love the Congregation without loving the Rules which constitute it and make it live with real life".<sup>11</sup>

To keep the spirit of the Founder alive and to safeguard the unity and identity of the Congregation, he wrote some fundamental letters in which he carefully explained themes related to our vocation such as fidelity to the Rule, evangelization of the poor, love of one's religious family, charity and fraternal unity. Moreover, he set up a whole series of concrete tools for animation. He regularly published the *Necrological Notices* which made it

possible to come to know the spiritual experiences of Oblates. He founded the review *Missions O.M.I.* which immediately became a very rich mine of knowledge about the life of the Congregation. He established the custom of annual retreats in the provinces. He realized the publication of the first prayer manual and ceremonial for Oblate use.

Thereafter, the Superiors General, like all Oblates in general, continued to speak of the Oblate spirit and the family spirit. They were aware of being heirs to values that fully characterized their particular life and they found them contained especially in the Constitutions and Rules, and in the Preface in particular. All through the history of the Congregation, people constantly turned to the Preface as an especially authentic source for the identification of the Oblate spirit.

## 2. THE SPIRITUALITY

Whereas the Oblate "spirit" has always been spoken about, the question of the existence of a specifically Oblate spirituality is of more recent origin. The General Chapter of 1939 had felt the need of a more thorough, systematic study in this vein. In one of its proposals, "the desire was expressed to see the development of a spirituality that was specifically Oblate, elements of which would be drawn from our Holy Rules, the writings of our venerated Founder and our family traditions; the suggestion was made that a special body be constituted to get this development under way".

"The Chapter does not believe that the principles and practices of our Oblate spiritual life are already sufficiently organized into a body of doctrine able to take its place among the first ranks of the great schools of classical spiritual-

ity. It declares, however, that the Oblates have a spirit particular to them which should be ceaselessly cultivated in the annual and monthly retreats, in spiritual conferences, especially in our houses of formation, and above all, through the explanation and the practice of the Rule, of our traditions and our Oblate history”.

But it seemed that the time had not yet arrived. “As for the structures destined to establish an Oblate spirituality, it [the Chapter] does not think the time has arrived to set them up. But it is anxious to encourage the personal initiatives and individual efforts aimed at developing this Oblate spirituality, however, under the special supervision of the Reverend Fathers Provincial and the General Administration”.<sup>12</sup>

One would have to wait for the years immediately after the Second World War to see the first results of this research, at a time when studies aiming to define Oblate spirituality were taking place in a much broader ecclesial context, where each religious family was seeking its own identity. In the domain of theology, the academic studies of spirituality initiated in the 1920’s began to bear their first fruits and to be applied by a large number of religious families to the search for their spirituality.

If, until this time, it was “spirit” that was generally spoken of, now under the influence of this new ecclesial awareness, people preferred to speak of “spirituality” in the sense of a systematic, scientific reflection on the spirit which animated lived experience. As a result, the following questions we asked: Can one speak of Oblate spirituality? Does an Oblate spirituality really exist? Can one speak of the Oblate spirit in terms of a school of spirituality? Furthermore: from which sources did Oblate spirituality draw?

Certain internal factors in the Congregation inspired this new period of reflection as well. It was during this period that an intense research took place on the person, the writings and the works of Eugene de Mazenod – a work demanded by the historical section of the beatification process and stimulated by the new Superior General’s marked interest in the subject. Work was earnestly going on to prepare a biography of the Founder under the authorship of Jean Leflon, to research newly found documentation, to systematically organize the fruit of this research, and to publish the Founder’s writings and the studies done on him.<sup>13</sup> The first doctoral theses on Oblate spirituality began to appear in Rome. It was also during these years that the review, *Etudes oblates* and *Oblate Studies Editions* were born. They immediately became mandatory sources for reflection on Oblate life.<sup>14</sup> Rome and Ottawa became the major centers of attraction and training.

#### *a. The Existence of a Spirituality or of a School of Spirituality*

Father Marcel Belanger was one of the first Oblates who, in this new context and this new ecclesial awareness, asked himself: “Is there a spirit that is uniquely our own, a spirit which characterizes us all and distinguishes us from other Institutes?”<sup>15</sup>

It was a question which would guide the research of several authors from now on.

By identifying the originality of the founding with that of its associated spirituality, Father Ovila A. Meunier acknowledged that a school of Oblate spirituality does exist: “In the same way that the foundations made by Eugene de Mazenod are clearly recognizable by their particular and original traits, so

does its spiritual doctrine, in its major features, constitute an original synthesis, a personal way of approaching God".<sup>16</sup>

Nonetheless, preference, in general, was to speak of a *special* spirit, a *new* spirit, a *new* spirituality, and even more, of "a spiritual doctrine truly unique to us"<sup>17</sup>, of "a whole, complete, balanced and organic".<sup>18</sup> From the point of view of the Oblate, such a spirituality is seen as a supernatural instinct; from God's point of view, it is seen as a plan he has, a divine idea, a vocation, an economy, "God's designs" on us.<sup>19</sup>

Yves Guégen, in his modest yet profound book, *Missionnaire Oblat de Marie Immaculée*, does not speak of a school of spirituality any more than he sets forth a system. We do not have, he states, "a system neatly outlined and distinct from the major spiritual currents [...] In this sense, it has no spirituality unique to it". But there does exist among the Oblates "a certain set mentality, clear enough, though not exclusive, a certain theoretical and practical idea of union with God through charity and of the means to use to get there". It is only in this sense that we can speak of an Oblate spirituality. Understood in this sense, "There can be no doubt we have an Oblate spirituality".<sup>20</sup>

In 1950, the review, *Etudes oblates*, launched a survey focusing on the existence, the nature and the characteristics of an Oblate spirituality by presenting an initial definition of it: "By 'Oblate spirituality', we understand a doctrine of the spiritual life embracing the aspects of the interior and apostolic life, the means of sanctification, an asceticism and a mysticism which especially suits the members of our religious family"<sup>21</sup>. At the same time, it offered a good questionnaire for the purpose of research<sup>22</sup>. One of the questions was: "Can one and should one

speak of an Oblate spirituality?" The answer, once one has excluded the possibility of considering the Oblate experience as a "school of spirituality"<sup>23</sup>, is clearly positive – even if some difficulties were voiced about the use of the term "Oblate spirituality" – with a preference expressed for other expressions such as "the Oblate way" of viewing the spiritual life, or the more traditional and concrete expression: "the spirit of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate".<sup>24</sup>

The following year, a circular letter from Father Deschâtelets appeared. It could be considered as the summit of this period of research on Oblate spirituality, research which would, however, continue. Circular no. 191, *Our Vocation and our Life in Intimate Union with Mary Immaculate*, in effect, establishes a determining step in the growing awareness of the whole Congregation concerning its identity. It encompasses "the originality specific to our life as Oblates", "a kind of life special to our Institute", "a spirit, a special kind of mentality, spiritual life as religious and apostolic, a very distinct lifestyle with clearly defined features, with its graces, its demands, its principles of action, its uninterrupted tradition, its technique for personal sanctification, its ministries with well defined methods", "a kind of man who is spiritual and apostolic".<sup>25</sup>

The fact that an Oblate spirituality really does exist now remains a firm conviction confirmed in some way by Paul VI in his speech to the members of the General Chapter of 1966.<sup>26</sup>

Whatever the case may be, the question of which terminology to use remains an open question, and in fact, one of secondary importance with regard to the awareness of the existence of a particular Oblate identity. In this regard, we could re-read a perfectly clear page written by Emilien Lamirande

which seems to synthesize the ground already covered in the course of the study of "Oblate spirituality". At the same time, it expresses a new awareness which will find its full expression in reflection on the Oblate charism: "For some people, the very word *spirituality* conjures up the idea of a closed system, or even of some sort of *recipe* or *formula*. It would cause us to lose sight of the unity of the Christian life, animated by the unique Gospel of Jesus Christ. So it is that some people take pleasure in stating that their Order has no spirituality of its own, but nourishes itself directly at the purest sources of the great Catholic spirituality".

"Rather than use the term *spirituality*, a number of people prefer to speak of the style of life or action, of the spirit, of the way of living, of the tradition of the family, of the mentality or of the particular distinguishing features".

"I will not hide my preference for the old word *spirit*, used a number of times by Bishop de Mazenod with reference to the Congregation, a word, as Bishop Garonne stressed, which has the advantage of pointing to the Spirit. It is a word which speaks to us of the spontaneity of life, as a study on Saint Vincent de Paul very well shows: 'The spirit is at once a force and movement, insight and expression. It does not allow itself to be bound and no one can imprison it. It is perpetually creating and revealing itself through new forms. It lives only by transforming itself in order to remain itself. Mysteriously, it conceives itself and gives birth to itself in order to survive'."<sup>27</sup>

### *b. The sources of Mazenodian Spirituality*

Research on the existence of a specific spirituality clearly necessitates the

study of its sources as well. From the very first issue of *Etudes oblates*, we find on this subject a synthetic but nonetheless complete study. According to this article, in Eugene de Mazenod's formation "three great schools worked in fraternal collaboration. The French School at Saint Sulpice gave shape to his piety and, through Saint Vincent de Paul, it contributed to the development of his Rule.

"The Italian School entered into our religious legislation with Saint Philip Neri, Saint Charles Borromeo and Saint Leonard of Port Maurice; then, with Saint Alphonsus de Liguori this School extended its action and stamped its mark on the whole domain of our family life".

"Finally, through the Rule and the spiritual exercises of Saint Ignatius, through the spiritual works of Fathers Judde and Rodriguez, the Company of Jesus exercised an undeniable influence on the disciple of Father Magy, and through him, on the whole family of which he became the head".

"And if we accept the claim that the French school, in turn, drew its inspiration from Saint Teresa of Avila and the German Mystics of the fourteenth century and that the Liguorian school is tied not only to Saint Philip Neri and Saint Vincent de Paul, but also to Saint Teresa, Saint John of the Cross and Saint Francis de Sales, might one not be allowed to conclude that the Founder of the Oblates belongs to one of the richest, purest, most brilliant spiritual lines of Christian sacred writing"<sup>28</sup>

The more extensive studies that followed – better documented from the critical point of view – have substantially confirmed the contribution made by all these spiritual currents.<sup>29</sup>

As a result, one would be tempted to see Eugene de Mazenod as an eclectic

without any identity of his own. On the contrary, it would be more fair to bring out the ecclesial spirit of the Founder and the positive aspect of his being rooted in the great Christian spiritual tradition. Already, Father Deschâtelets noted: "In this regard, was not our Congregation born from the desire to assure a continuation of the old Orders and Institutes by accepting the weighty heritage of their spiritual and religious life?"<sup>30</sup> That is what would allow each generation of Oblates to remain continuously open to the spiritual movements of the past and the present without being untrue to its own identity. Moreover, this is a protection from the "myth of independence" and the "seduction of monopoly", as Father Bélanger put it: "In addition to being an illusory claim, it is an unconscious attempt at spiritual suicide to want to assert one's personality in strict contrast to other religious families. Such an attempt could only lead to an impoverishment and a refusal to avail ourselves of the spiritual treasures amassed by the Church through the centuries". With reference to the seduction of monopoly, the same author wrote: "Of course, our personality is made up of elements and of traits which undoubtedly belong to us [...] But, taken separately, none of these elements is exclusively unique to us. They are all found elsewhere in one Institute or other [...] Consequently, our personality or the distinguishing features of our spirituality do not consist in an exclusive possession of one element or other. It would be the taking of a wrong direction to seek to define the Oblate in this manner, even if one feels instinctively drawn to do so [...]. Personality [...] is more about the unity of the whole rather than a putting together or a juxtaposition of qualities which exist in greater or lesser quantity; un-

able to be substituted with anything else, this unity of the whole is expressed concretely in a unique, personal way of existing or having – which others already are or possess in a different way".<sup>31</sup>

The problem will thus be that of knowing whether there exists a characteristic mode of living these elements, common to all, and if there is an integrating element that gives unity to the spiritual experience of the Oblate. We now move on to look at different attempts which have been made to organize and synthesize the components of this spirituality.

## II. THE POSSIBLE ARTICULATIONS OF OBLATE SPIRITUALITY

Reflection on the Oblate spirit or spirituality is clearly not limited to an abstract discourse on whether it exists or not, or to research into the sources upon which it might depend. This preliminary work has been carried out with the purpose of defining the central content of Oblate spirituality, of schematizing it and working it into a synthesis, in a consistent and systematic fashion.

While going through the Oblate bibliographies, we notice that until the middle of this century, no effort has been made to make a synthesis or an overall coherent presentation. In the letters of the Superiors General, as well as in the writings of other authors, the authors restricted themselves to speaking of Oblate virtues such as zeal, unassuming manner, humility and especially charity. In other instances, what was stressed was the spirit of family, almost always understood as the spirit of charity and unity with constant reference to the testament of the Founder. More

generally, reference was made to the spirit of Eugene de Mazenod to be communicated to the Institute or to that of our holy vocation. They preferred a concrete presentation through lived reality rather than an abstract description of the Oblate vocation. In this regard, it was quite significant to read the description of the Oblate given in one of the first brief works designed to make the Congregation known, *Notice sur la Congrégation OMI*, which had already made its appearance in the Founder's time and was, therefore, certainly under his direction<sup>32</sup>. A further way of describing Oblate spirituality would consist in a commentary of a few articles of the Constitutions and Rules and the Preface in particular, which, as has been written, "would in itself alone suffice to characterize a school".<sup>33</sup>

Naturally, it was Eugene de Mazenod who initially on a number of occasions sketched out a concise description of his own ideal of life. The description presents from time to time slightly different variations, different perspectives. For example, commenting on the first article of the Constitutions and Rules, he wrote: "Everything is there: *Virtutes et exempla Salvatoris Nostri Jesu Christi assidua imitatione proseguendo*. Let them carve these words on their hearts; let them write them everywhere so that they have them always before their eyes".<sup>34</sup>

At other times, the synthesis was built around the specific mission of the Institute: "Will we ever have an adequate notion of this sublime vocation? For this, we must understand the excellence of our Institute's end. The latter is, beyond doubt, the most perfect that could be proposed here below since the end of our Institute is the very same as that which the Son of God had in view when he came on this earth, namely, the

glory of his heavenly Father and the salvation of souls [...] He was especially sent to preach the Gospel to the poor, '*Evangelizare pauperibus misit me*', and we have been founded precisely to work for the conversion of souls, and particularly to preach the Gospel to the poor".<sup>35</sup> Another concise synthesis which flows from his pen like a refrain is a reflection of the three basic ideas of the glory of God, the good of the Church and the salvation of souls: "This spirit of being wholly devoted to the glory of God, the service of the Church and the salvation of souls, is the spirit that is proper to our Congregation".<sup>36</sup>

At other times the synthesis organizes itself around the interior profile of the Oblate: "For the love of God, never cease to inculcate and preach humility, abnegation, forgetfulness of self, disdain for worldly esteem. May these be ever the foundation of our little Society which, combined with a truly disinterested zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, and the most tender, affectionate and sincere charity amongst ourselves, will make of our house an earthly paradise and will establish it in more solid a manner than all possible orders and laws".<sup>37</sup> In addition, we might consider the description given of a candidate to become an Oblate: "Whoever wishes to become one of us must have an ardent desire for his own perfection and be enflamed with love for our Lord Jesus Christ and his Church and a burning zeal for the salvation of souls. He must free his heart from every disorderly affection for things on earth, and from excessive attachment to parents and native land; he must have no desire for money, but will rather look upon riches as so much rubbish so as to seek no gain other than Jesus Christ; his desire must be to commit

himself to the exclusive service of God and of the Church whether in the Missions or in the other ministries of the Congregation. Finally, he must have the will to persevere unto death in fidelity and obedience to the Rules of the Institute".<sup>38</sup>

The unifying element and almost the key to interpret this internal dimension of the Oblate vocation comes back to charity, which "is the pivot on which our whole existence turns"<sup>39</sup>. It is charity which guides and energizes consecrated life, community life and evangelization. Nevertheless, the Founder does not worry about formulating his own thought in a systematic way, convinced as he is of having passed on his spirit with sufficient clarity in the Constitutions and Rules.

#### 1. THE SUPERIORS GENERAL<sup>40</sup>

To arrive at a first synthesis, we had to wait until the arrival of the Founder's successor, Father Joseph Fabre. His reflections concentrate on the Constitutions and Rules. His expressed purpose was to remain as faithful as possible to their letter, convinced as he was that the Rule "is the family treasure, its most prized possession".<sup>41</sup>

It was precisely from the first article of the Rule that his description of the Oblate spirit began: "There is the goal assigned to us by our Venerated Father. We must evangelize the poor, the most abandoned souls, and to succeed in this sublime vocation, we must imitate those virtues of which our Divine Master offered us such a wonderful example. To be missionaries of the poor and to live the religious life, such is the true vocation of the Oblate of Mary Immaculate, such is your vocation, such is ours"<sup>42</sup>. The key of interpreting the Oblate spirit is summarized in these two phrases

which constantly appear in his writing: "We are priests, we are religious"<sup>43</sup>. From this follows "that which we must do: evangelize the poor, and that which we must be: real religious".<sup>44</sup>

This is the kind of double emphasis which lies at the heart of the refrain of his circular letters. At the beginning of his mandate in 1862, he wrote: "To what are we called, my very dear brothers? To become saints, in order to be able to work effectively for the sanctification of the most abandoned souls. That is our vocation; let us not lose sight of it and let us apply ourselves, first and foremost, to achieving a good understanding of it".<sup>45</sup>

This double emphasis would remain constant in the teachings of all the Superiors General who would follow him<sup>46</sup>, right up to Father Fernand Jetté who would develop his own synthesis around two themes: "The Oblate, an apostolic man", "The Oblate, a religious"<sup>47</sup>. Before continuing any further, we have to point out that bipolarity does not necessarily imply dualism, even if in practice there was more than once the risk of doing so. Rather, it expresses the richness, complexity and fertility of a life which is part of the paradox of Christianity of which it radicalizes some aspects of its most paradoxical elements. Here, we could skip over the Congregation's journey through history, by re-reading what Father Jetté said to the General Chapter of 1980: "Many are still apprehensive of dualism. Unity between prayer and action, between religious life and the apostolate is essential in a vocation such as ours. [...] Our prayer, our community life, our vows, far from taking us away from people and from activity, rather impel us thereto; and the reverse is also true: meeting people and apostolic activity become a source and nourishment for our prayer. [...] this uni-

fication of our being [...] is the work of an entire lifetime".<sup>48</sup>

Father Louis Soullier's thinking was certainly influenced by his experiences and his contacts with the concrete world of the missions. For twenty-five years he held the position of first Assistant General. He also had the opportunity of visiting almost all the provinces and mission territories, something he was to continue doing even as Superior General. As a result he had become particularly aware of the reality of evangelization. That is why in his synthesis of the Oblate spirit, he approached it rather from the point of view of evangelization: "And we too, Oblates of Mary, we are sent by the Holy Church to preach; that is our purpose, our mission; it is our duty".<sup>49</sup>

"If the distinguishing aspect of our apostolate [...] is the mission; our special vocation is to be missionaries; but what especially makes the missionary is preaching".<sup>50</sup> It was to preaching that he dedicated one of his most important circular letters. In it, he outlined the profile of the apostolic man. Basing himself on the Preface and the Rule, he tried to describe its characteristics and to put in relief the necessary tools to achieve the holiness essential for an apostolic man: "Our holy Constitutions outline for the Oblate of Mary a complete plan for a life of piety which should animate our ministry". The spirit of total dedication which incarnates the word 'oblation' is the first feature of the apostolic man: "When God creates an apostle, he puts a cross into his hand and tells him to go and show it abroad and to preach it. But before doing this, he plants that cross in his heart and in the measure in which that cross is more or less deeply embedded in the heart of the apostle, the cross he holds in his hand works more or less conquests".

"Oblates of Mary, you who bear the cross on your breasts as an authentic sign of your mission, look upon it as the symbol of all the sacrifices your holy ministry imposes upon you to fulfill it worthily and faithfully"<sup>51</sup>. Then, in his letter, the description of the internal profile of the Oblate follows, "a living mirror of all the virtues"<sup>52</sup>, as well as the means of sanctification.

Father Cassien Augier took up again the double emphasis in the Oblate vocation. Toward the end of the acts of the Chapter of 1899, he wrote: "We know that it is made up of two elements so closely united that one would not be able to separate them with out incurring danger: the religious element and the apostolic element. The Oblate must be a man of the rule and sacrifice while he is at the same time a man of zeal and of dedication".<sup>53</sup> To prove it, one has only to quote at length from the Preface in order to then end off with the description of the internal features of the sons of Bishop de Mazenod: "Zeal for our own sanctification, the spirit of self-denial and of self-sacrifice, the life of prayer and of recollection, charity toward our brothers, supernatural respect and filial submission toward our superiors, the love of souls and the attitude of never shrinking from any sacrifice to save them".<sup>54</sup>

Bishop Dontenwill followed the same line: "We are missionaries, but we are also religious. What am I saying? We are religious before being missionaries and we should be fervent religious in order to be and remain fervent missionaries".<sup>55</sup> In his circular letter written on the occasion of the first centenary of the Congregation's foundation, he outlined the ideal of the Oblate vocation following this double parameter.

We could find one other important description of the Oblate, especially of

his interior profile, in the circular letter presenting the acts of the 1920 Chapter. In it are also indicated the means of growth in the spiritual life to the point of achieving sanctity.<sup>56</sup>

Father Theodore Labouré put heavy emphasis on the Congregation's dimension of evangelization, seeing in it the unifying element of his own program of life. At the beginning of his term as General, he wrote: "At the beginning of my term as General, there is no need to speak of a program of action: It is all set out in our Holy Rules and by our traditions '*Evangelizare pauperibus misit me*'; and in my last hour, when I will render an account to God for my administration, I hope to be able to say as my venerated predecessors have said: *Pauperes evangelizantur*."

"It is because the Oblates have always shown themselves to be faithful to their vocation that the Holy Father entertains for them the esteem of which you are familiar. How many times has he not, in public and in private, praised the zeal of our fathers and their spirit of poverty, self-denial, dedication and sacrifice which has made of them 'specialists of difficult missions'!"<sup>57</sup>

And again, "Love of the poor is our sole and unique reason for existing: Bishop de Mazenod founded the Congregation of the Oblates to evangelize the poor; it was to evangelize the poor that the Church received us into her bosom; it is to our love of the poor that we owe the fact of being today an active, flourishing, numerous, fine and glorious society. Let us not forget what the Pope spoke to the representative of another very worthy congregation, which, in view of its lack of personnel saw itself obliged to refuse some poor missions: 'I already asked a number of others; you, yourselves, you refuse me; consequently, I have only one recourse

left to me, that is to speak to my dear Oblates. They never say *No.*'!"<sup>58</sup>

Evangelization derives its distinguishing feature precisely from this boldness and this preference for the poor: "My very dear Fathers and Brothers, if we ever have the opportunity of making a choice between a fine, rich, dazzling work in the heart of our urban centers, and a poor, neglected, discouraging, difficult work, be it in our Communist suburbs, be it in the foreign missions, let us not hesitate: Let us opt rather for that which is humble, obscure, arduous. Are we not pioneers of the Gospel, missionaries of the poor, sons of Bishop de Mazenod? In a word, are we not Oblates?"<sup>59</sup>

For Father Labouré, another characteristic element of the Oblate spirit was fraternal unity. At this stage of the Congregation's history, we were on the verge of the Second World War; fraternal unity was called to fully manifest itself in response to the challenge of the different nationalist sentiments which had become more and more evident within the Congregation. If, at a previous time, Father Augier had expressed fear about "the spirit of nationalism" within the Congregation<sup>60</sup>, Father Labouré could subsequently give witness to a different attitude and awareness on the part of Oblates: "The Oblate spirit is expressed not only externally by the union of resources and wills in the field of the apostolate; it is expressed as well in the need we feel to get to know each other better to remain strictly united in the bonds of one charity. [...] In the past as in the present, our family has been made up *ex omni tribu, et lingua, et populo, et natione*; and yet the work of evangelization was always carried out successfully because it was done *more Oblatorum*. At that time, we were not worried about channeling our efforts

according to our nationality: an Oblate went wherever obedience called him and he devoted himself totally to the work of God and the Church to evangelize the poor without asking himself whether or not his companions came from the same country as he did. They were Oblates; that was enough and unity of hearts brought unity of action".<sup>61</sup>

Immediately after the Chapter of 1939, Father Labouré also stressed the most outstanding interior characteristics of the Oblate vocation in such a way as to "raise the level of our spiritual life [...] in the light of our Holy Rules and of our family traditions".<sup>62</sup>

Father Deschâtelets' long and intense term of office marked a basic phase in the understanding of Oblate spirituality, not only because it was the period when, for the first time in the Congregation, they were studying this theme thoroughly and explicitly concentrating on it, but also because he himself played a determining role in this orientation. His thought underwent a gradual evolution – at least in regard to the systematic organization of the Oblate vocation. He, in fact, stood at the helm of the Congregation in a period of profound changes: the years of post-war growth, the pre-conciliar unrest, the crucial years of the Council and the post-conciliar years.<sup>63</sup>

His most notable and complete systemization of our spirituality is found in his circular letter no. 191 which bears the significant title *Our Vocation and our Life of Intimate Union with Mary Immaculate*. In this work, he described the model Oblate of Mary Immaculate as a spiritual and apostolic person as he perceived him through his intense, gripping and attentive personal reading of the Rule which he cut down to the following characteristics: "The type of

spiritual and apostolic man as described by the Rule is a) a priest, b) a religious, c) a missionary, d) an Oblate, that is, one dedicated to the pursuit of holiness and apostolic endeavors like the Apostles themselves, e) burning with love for Jesus, our Savior God and for Mary, the Immaculate Mother of God and our Mother, a love constantly nourished by a profound spirit of prayer, f) learning in prayer a total detachment from himself by obedience, poverty, a simple and upright intention, g) with the most authentic family and fraternal charity, h) drawing from them a heart filled with limitless zeal and inexhaustible mercy, especially to hasten to the poor and most abandoned masses". The whole of this long letter is a commentary on these distinguishing elements.

These are characteristics which make up a harmonious and unified framework, as he himself was bent on stressing: "Although they are listed here separately, these traits, far from being in opposition to each other, have an affinity for each other and all contribute to make up the complete notion of the Oblate of Mary Immaculate. Even when we separate them, we must at the same time consider them in their overall context and in the light of the influence they exert upon each other in the make-up of the entire picture".<sup>64</sup>

Later on, he would set forth a new synthesis: "We are religious who live in community, religious dedicated to the apostolate and to the missionary life. Special is this formulation of the contemplative life which should be ours and that of the missionary life which is ours as well [...] By vocation, we are active-contemplatives [...] contemplative missionaries".<sup>65</sup>

After the Second Vatican Council, Father Deschâtelets summarized his thought at the conclusion of his circular

letter on the evolution of religious life: "A religious, priest, missionary, the Oblate does not live a compartmentalized life, but always and everywhere, he bears in his person and in his works this triple characteristic of being a consecrated person [religious], a sanctifier [priest], a preacher of the Gospel message [missionary]. Oblates are priests and co-workers with the priesthood who, in view of satisfying more adequately the demands of the apostolic ministry have taken on the religious life as the most suitable means to becoming genuine apostles".<sup>66</sup>

In 1969, in a concise formulation according to a scale of values, he would give the five criteria for the Oblate vocation: We are "missionaries – to evangelize – the poor – according to the urgent needs of the Church and the world – in apostolic communities".<sup>67</sup>

Towards the end of his life, Father Deschâtelets seemed to come back to his original insight. At the beginning of his term as General, he had summarized the Oblate ideal in one word: charity: "Dear Fathers, what is Oblate spirituality? Charity! Charity! Love! Love! Charity and love abound in the pages of the Founder's life and the Rules he left us to guide our lives and our apostolate. We can make all kinds of distinctions, but Oblate spirituality means love!"<sup>68</sup>

At Ottawa, not long before his death, he set forth once again the same magnificent synthesis in a letter to the Italian novices.<sup>69</sup>

The teachings of Fathers Fernand Jetté and Marcello Zago will be presented further on when I will address the final phase in the Congregation's reflection on its own identity which would express itself as "Oblate values", "missionary outlook", and "charism". The contribution made by these two Superiors General in this new phase of

reflection was decisive. Father Jetté worked carefully to achieve a definition of Oblate values and Father Zago worked on the themes of the missionary outlook and charism. Without making explicit mention of them, we have reproduced their thought in the fourth part of the present article. Suffice it here to restate the key words while referring the reader back to their writings for a more thorough exposition of their thought. Father Jetté stressed the "clearly apostolic" dimension of our vocation. "In the Church of God, the Oblate is an apostolic man; everything else must be understood in that light"<sup>70</sup>. Father Zago especially highlighted the typically missionary dimension of the Oblate vocation.<sup>71</sup>

## 2. OBLATE LITERATURE

Those who have studied Oblate spirituality and written about it have, for the most part, sought to present it in an organized fashion. Their work has developed in three directions. A first area of research has been historical research on Eugene de Mazenod's spiritual journey to get a grasp on the basic and constant elements of that journey. Authors who have developed this aspect are people like Maurice Gilbert<sup>72</sup>, Joseph Morabito<sup>73</sup>, Jozef Pielorz<sup>74</sup>, and Alexandre Taché<sup>75</sup>. Among those who have worked on the second aspect, names that stand out are Emilien Lamirande, Maurice Gilbert once again, Fernand Jetté and others. These authors have investigated in depth the different themes of our spirituality such as our relationship with Christ, the Church, the poor, religious life, the priesthood, our Marian spirit and so on. A third aspect dealt with an overall organic presentation of our spirituality. We will now endeavor to pursue this third train of

thought by selecting from it the most important examples and by going in chronological order, without however claiming to give it an exhaustive treatment.

In his commentary on the Rule, Alfred Yenveux was one of the first to define in a clear way the main distinctive traits of the Congregation<sup>76</sup>. In large part, he anticipates the results of subsequent research. This work was probably unknown by most people because of the misfortunes suffered by this manuscript when it was published<sup>77</sup>. For example, we will be impressed by the convergence between the results of his research and those presented on the occasion of the Congress on the Charism of the Founder, held at the General House in 1976. In his comments on the first article of the Constitutions and Rules, Father Yenveux wrote: "According to the first article of our Holy Rules, the Congregation ought to bear seven main distinctive characteristics: 1. It should be poor and humble; 2. It should be especially devoted to Mary; 3. Its members should be diocesan priests bound to the Society by the vows of religion and 4. closely united among themselves by the bonds of fraternal charity; 5. Their function is to be missionaries, and especially, 6. missionaries to the poor and the abandoned souls, following the example of Our Lord Jesus Christ 7. In fact, a complete conformity with the virtues and example of our divine Savior should be the object of their constant efforts".

— The first distinctive trait of the Institute flows from its quality of *parvae Congregationis* (small Congregation). *Parvae* does not refer to the small number of its members or to the importance of its works, but to "their humility, their unassuming manner and their simplicity", without seeking grounds for competing with other Orders or Congrega-

tions for which, on the contrary, they maintain great esteem.

— The second distinctive trait, the Marian trait, derives from an analysis of the name itself of the Congregation.

— The third concerns its priestly nature.

— The fourth deals with fraternal charity, considered "the special mark of the Oblate of Mary Immaculate", "their family spirit", "the particular physiognomy" of the sons of Eugene de Mazenod.

— The fifth distinctive character – missionary – is drawn once again from the name, *Missionaries*: "The title of *Missionaries* is their main characteristic and is truly characteristic of them". Here, Father Yenveux makes reference to imitation of the Apostles and concludes in this way: "We can say that the title of *Missionaries* explains all the Rules Bishop de Mazenod left us and which constitute the rule of life of the *Oblate Missionary*. We can even add that the Rule of personal sanctification which he outlined for us has as its exclusive goal to make the Missionaries powerful in work and word".

— The sixth distinguishing trait has to do with those who receive evangelization: the poor. An analysis of the Founder's writings leads us to define them as follows: "By the poor, *pauperibus*, we must not understand only those who suffer spiritual indigence, even though they may be blessed with material wealth, but the poor strictly speaking".

— The seventh and last character is that of conformity to Christ as the distinctive trait of the Oblate's perfection: "Each religious society, while setting for itself in a general fashion, Christ as its model, usually chooses from the life of the Divine Master a special virtue which it makes its special character; it is usually the virtue which shone with

the greatest brilliance in the life of the founder of that institute. So it is that the followers of Saint Francis have poverty as their special virtue. Since the Oblates of Mary have as their goal to replace, in a certain measure, all of the old Religious Orders destroyed by the upheavals of 1793, they should strive to reproduce the virtues of all these societies by making themselves a perfect and complete copy of our Lord Jesus Christ. We must be able to say of them: *Oblatus alter Christus*".

In addition, Father Yenveux lists the virtues which are required in a special way of the Oblate: self-denial, humility, gentleness, patience, obedience, chastity, poverty, detachment from the world and his family, love of solitude, prayer, study, purity of intention, presence of God, spirit of penance, strength of spirit, fidelity to the Rule, the theological virtues, charity and the spirit of family, good example, love of our Lord Jesus Christ with the most tender devotion to the Church and the most ardent zeal for souls.

Father Meunier sets forth four characteristic traits of the spirituality or, if one prefers, of Oblate piety.

— A piety of salvation through which the whole life of the Oblate gravitates around the mystery of the Redemption.

— The primacy of love. It finds its origins in the temperament peculiar to Eugene de Mazenod – his spirit is "a dialectic of love" – where "everything flows from love and flows back to love". From such a love flows the relationship of love among the Oblates themselves, love for our Lord Jesus Christ, and finally, love for those to whom the Oblates are sent.

— A Christian optimism which reveals itself either in the proclamation of the love of a redeeming God through preaching, or in the mercy-filled atti-

tude which stands in sharp contrast to the rigorism of Jansenism.

— Veneration for Mary and the Holy See. "We must go to Jesus through Mary Mediatrix and the Church of Rome". The ecclesial aspect of the Oblate vocation is seen especially in relation to the See of Peter, with the Church of Rome, to which the Oblates are called to show a special fidelity.<sup>78</sup>

Father Bélanger based his thesis on three elements. That which above all characterizes the Oblates is their missionary character. They present themselves as apostolic men. There is the basis of their personality. The specific character – second element in the description of the Oblate – is given by his particular missionary orientation: evangelization of the poor. The third accent in the picture comes from the models to follow: the Savior and Mary Immaculate. Thus the synthesis presented is found in three passages of the Constitutions and Rules of 1928: "Apostolic men [...] evangelical laborers" (*Preface*, article 263); "devote themselves, above all things, to the preaching of the Gospel to the poor, diligently striving to imitate the virtues and example of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (article 1); "under the title and patronage of the Most Holy and Immaculate Virgin Mary" (article 10). Everything is lived in the light of mercy: the Oblate is willed, chosen and sent by God to pour forth his divine mercy in our age. From that moment on, the plan of salvation is seen as a plan of mercy where Christ appears as incarnation of mercy and Mary as the first fruits of that mercy.<sup>79</sup>

Father Germain Lesage set forth "ten elements which seem to constitute the basis of our interior life: 1. Imitation of the virtues of Jesus Christ and of the Apostles; 2. Veneration for the glory of God; 3. Dedication to the service of the

Church; 4. Salvation of the poor and the most abandoned souls; 5. Love of the Savior in his work of Redemption; 6. Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus; 7. Devotion to Mary Immaculate; 8. Obedience to the Pope and the bishops; 9. Fraternal charity within the family; 10 Zeal and dedication for souls”<sup>80</sup>

The unifying element for all of these different aspects is the orientation towards the work of Redemption. Each element of Oblate spirituality finds here its specific character: “Our devotion to the Sacred Heart and to Mary Immaculate, our veneration for the glory of God, of the Church, of the papacy and the episcopacy as well as our practice of fraternal charity have as their object the salvation of souls, especially the most abandoned, in conformity with the example given to us by Jesus Christ in his work of Redemption”<sup>81</sup>. The other orientation which determines our spirituality is that of going to evangelize the poor in particular: “Our zeal for the salvation of souls should lead us especially to the poor, to those who are the most abandoned, in such a way as to make us walk in the footsteps of our divine Savior”<sup>82</sup>

In conclusion, Father Lesage says: “Mazenodian spirituality is the spirituality which has as its goal to reproduce the apostolic life of the Savior by imitation and by the love which makes reparation – in a hierarchical and Marian apostolate. More briefly still, Oblate spirituality would be the one that seeks to concretely reproduce the apostolic life of the Savior”<sup>83</sup>

In another study, the same author tries to make a more systematic philosophic and theological organization of the spirituality, defining it from the point of view of the three causes (pre-supposing that the material cause of spirituality is found in the Christian life

itself and that it is a common element to all spiritualities).

The final cause is found in the commitment to save souls through the communication of the truth, that is, through evangelization. The formal cause is to be found in the example of Christ and the Apostles. The efficient cause is found in the mixed life where anthropocentrism and theocentrism counterbalance each other. In this way, he arrives at the following definition of Mazenodian spirituality: “A particular form of Christian life whose goal is to cooperate with the Savior in the redemption of the human race by seeking the glory of God, the service of the Church, the salvation of souls obtained by evangelizing the poor and through the virtues and the ministries of the old Religious Orders; thanks to some exercises that make use of both the dynamism of the goal and a powerful asceticism, it directs souls to reproduce the apostolic life of Jesus Christ by means of the key idea of collaboration in his concrete work: 1. by recourse to powerful mediators through devotion to the Sacred Heart and Mary Immaculate, 2. by the exercise of a hierarchical apostolate through obedience to the Pope and the bishops, and 3. by an apostolic action whose unifying elements are fraternal charity and zeal for one’s neighbor”<sup>84</sup>

In his book, *Missionnaire Oblat de Marie Immaculée*, Father Yves Guéguen especially shows how the spirit of family is characterized by fraternal charity, apostolic zeal and simplicity. The spirituality is then described through four traits: Marian, Christocentric, Eucharistic and Apostolic.<sup>85</sup>

Father Robert Becker points to three Oblate characteristics: the breadth of its missionary horizons everything that the

Church and the glory of God demands; zeal, boldness, total gift of self; Mary. At the conclusion of his study he presents a concise definition: "The Oblate is a religious who is always and everywhere present where the glory of God and the salvation of souls summon him, irresistibly urged on by a love which neither counts the cost nor hesitates, which dedicates itself without reservation to his own personal sanctification and to the apostolate which is animated by a burning zeal for the salvation of souls and held together by the bonds of a profound charity for his brothers, a love guided by the motherly hand of the Immaculate Virgin Mary, relying upon her and recognizing one great goal only: *Ut in omnibus glorificetur Deus, qui omnes homines vult salvos fieri* [So that in all things, God may be glorified, the God who desires all men to be saved]"<sup>86</sup>

The survey carried out in 1950-1951 through the review, *Etudes oblates*, revealed a basic convergence among the different authors in their choice of the main elements of Oblate spirituality. The agreement is complete not only with regard to the double Christological and Marian characteristic, but also on several other points which move from the missionary dimension to community life and right up to a few characteristics of family such as friendliness, joviality, availability for service to the Church, the total gift of self through oblation... Much more complex and varied are the attempts at establishing a hierarchy and uniting the different components around a central point, with the constant underlying problem of unification of the apostolic-active and the contemplative aspects. The report of the survey remains a text of prime importance in the understanding of the entire question surrounding Oblate spirituality.<sup>87</sup>

A number of authors based their studies on an analysis of the name of the Institute, emphasizing in this way its missionary, Oblate and Marian dimensions.<sup>88</sup>

Father Gerard Fortin, in turn, put forth a more explicitly detailed synthesis: "The Oblate is an imitator who is totally committed to the Savior and his Apostles. He imitates their ministry, his vocation is to preach the Gospel to the poor. He imitates their methods; he dedicates himself so that the souls of the most abandoned might also be consecrated in the truth".

"The religious life provides the best possible means for his dedication to the apostolate. Most of the time, hard at work, it is especially in the exercise of his ministry that the Oblate acquires and practices the religious virtues that ensure its fruitfulness. But the community to which he joyfully returns after his apostolic endeavors does not fail to make him 'exercise' these same virtues [...]"

"The effort on the part of the missionary [...] is the matter of charity among Oblates, of zeal for the most abandoned souls, of obedience to superiors [...]"

"This religious and apostolic life centers around the Eucharist".

"All the other virtues – especially prayer which lingers over considerations of the virtues and examples of the Savior – flesh out the life of charity and zeal. That is how Oblates want to become other Jesus Christs, spreading everywhere abroad the good odor of his gracious virtues".

"Their missionary cross [...] constantly reminds them that as 'co-workers of the Savior' and sons of an Institute whose spirit is a spirit of reparation, they should be ready to sacrifice their very lives for the love of Jesus

Christ, the service of the Church and the sanctification of their neighbor. Martyrdom! That is an example of genuinely heroic apostolic charity".<sup>89</sup>

The research to achieve an in-depth, systematic understanding of the spirituality and to express it in objective, and I would say, scholastic terms, covered the period from 1940 to the Council. This research was fruitful. It addressed the areas of history, theology and psychology. The interest focused on historic evolution, to thoroughly study the different components and doctrinal architecture, has led to broad knowledge and a doctrinal grasp of Oblate spirituality. Even if these syntheses and the overall presentations that have been developed differ from each other, the fact is that these years of research and study have, for all practical purposes, covered the whole field of Oblate spirituality, offering a body of elements which make up the fundamental values.

### III. OBLATE VALUES AND THE MISSIONARY OUTLOOK

The new cultural, spiritual and pastoral awareness of the years of the Council has led Oblates to rethink their own vocation in more existential terms. The interest shown for a systematic, almost scholarly presentation of Oblate spirituality gave way to new interests such as *aggiornamento* and renewal. The Congregation was completely absorbed in the redrafting of the Constitutions and Rules asked for by the Council, an enormous work which, once again, demanded a reflection on our vocation from the point of view of new ecclesial horizons and new missionary demands. The work was destined to last for some twenty years. During this period, we note various tendencies which we can group

around three themes: Oblate values, missionary outlook and charisma.

In an early stage, a change of rhythm is noticed. Up until that time, the direction of study was rather that of the past (the Founder and Oblate tradition). It now turns toward the future. Research of the essential elements which characterize the Oblate was carried on, but in view of the new needs of society and the Church. The words "spirit" or "spirituality" were then replaced by another key expression: "Oblate values". Research concentrated on the permanent values that characterize the Oblate in order to be able to re-incarnate them in a new way. Consequently, it was no longer a case of a systematic construction, and under certain aspects, of a spirituality, but rather of attention focused on its dynamic components.

A second movement developed around the idea of "missionary outlook". The view of the world – which is simultaneously sociological and of the order of faith – offered a new basis of unity and a particular sense to the body of Oblate values.

A third movement used the information provided by research on the values as perceived by Oblates with their contemporary awareness and of the studies on missionary outlook. At the same time, it reintroduced the historic dimension of the past. This third movement revolved around the idea of "charisma".

These three movements overlap and succeed each other in time. It was especially the General Chapters of 1966, 1972 and 1980 which established the main points of reference in the study of the new awareness and of the new development of Oblate spirituality and charisma.

The General Chapter of 1966 – cer-

tainly the most revolutionary in the whole history of the Institute – was studied with a particular attention because it entirely redrafted the Constitutions and Rules by completely reinterpreting the data of the Oblate tradition. In referring back to the studies on the subject, we only point out here the overall structure of the first part of the Constitutions. The six articles which make it up “are built around five key words which the Chapter considered the essential characteristics of the Congregation: article 1. To the call of Christ who gathers us, article 2. members of the Church, article 3. to evangelize the most abandoned, article 4. and especially the poor, article 5. in apostolic community, article 6. under the patronage of Mary Immaculate”.<sup>90</sup>

The Chapter of 1972 was another beacon on the post-conciliar road. Preparatory work for this Chapter was more extensive than for any other. The Extraordinary General Council of 1970 had invited the General Conference on Mission to prepare a working document for the Chapter where the doctrinal part would be centered on the theme of missionary outlook in view of “helping the next Chapter to make of this missionary outlook an important factor of unity among all Oblates, no matter what their ministry, and to bring out in a synthetic way the values of our religious consecration, lived in apostolic community at the service of the mission”.<sup>91</sup>

The following year, a complete issue of *Etudes oblates* was dedicated to the theme of the missionary outlook.<sup>92</sup>

Again as part of the preparatory work for the Chapter, the Extraordinary General Council held from October 28 to November 8, 1970, outlined the profile of “the Oblate, missionary in today’s world”. In the report, we read: “Under this title, three basic realities are

evoked: Oblate (a consecrated person); missionary (for evangelization); today (confronted with the situation of today), re-appropriating the insight of the Founder which was born from a three-fold vision: 1. A view of Christ, the Savior (union with his person and his mission of love and of salvation for men); a view of the Church (on the mission which we share according to our own limitations, in the present circumstances); a view of the world (on its poverty, its spiritual straits)”.<sup>93</sup>

Always in the context of preparation for the General Chapter of 1972, Father John King, on behalf of the pre-capitular commission, summarized the meaning of Oblate commitment in four fundamental values<sup>94</sup>: the primacy of the religious dimension of life; identifying with Christ Savior; life and apostolate in community; the priesthood.<sup>95</sup>

Another preparatory work for the Chapter consisted in the drawing up and circulation of a detailed questionnaire whose accumulated responses (collected in three volumes) constituted a precious storehouse to find out what was the perception that Oblates had of their own vocation.

In the body of the responses, before all else, we can note a categorical refusal to describe the Oblate vocation in dualistic terms: “Our apostolate, in fact, is religious in nature and our religion is apostolic [...] Either our mission is religious or it is not. Either our religion is missionary or it is not”.<sup>96</sup>

Even in the extreme variety of responses, we can see a convergence on a few fundamental values, perceived as common to all Oblates and an inalienable inheritance: religious-apostolic life in a full living out of the evangelical counsels; community life; a Congregation priestly in nature; a lively relationship of profound communion and fidel-

ity to the Church; evangelization of the poor; Marian spirit.<sup>97</sup>

On the other hand, for certain people, the research of values still seemed rather “a fine abstract question which resurfaces constantly and which, in practice, changes almost nothing”. That is why they preferred to speak of “the meaning of our Oblate commitment”<sup>98</sup>. Others revealed a certain weariness about reflecting on their own identity: “There exists a certain feeling in the Province to the effect that our values and our Oblate orientations seem geared to maintain the system rather than to renew it by putting us like ostriches with our head in the sand of the goals and structures of the past rather than seeking new goals or even entirely new forms of Oblate life”.<sup>99</sup>

We notice yet again a different accent. Some people showed themselves more aware of the missionary dimension, others to the interior values which animate and guide missionary choices.

The first group starts from the fact that “a good number of us have been attracted to the Oblates by their essentially missionary work. We are missionaries first and foremost, and the Oblate life permits us to fulfill this desire”.<sup>100</sup> The second group prefer to stress the dimension of being from which was born commitment for evangelization.

As was quite rightly pointed out, the reasons giving rise to choosing the Oblate life can be subjective; in any case, they must fit into the Oblate project as a whole: “We have to adopt a *kind of life*, a particular life style, one that is not dictated by our own personal reflections alone, but channeled by the Institute to which we have chosen to belong. It is a function which presupposes a style of life. It is a *way of living the Gospel* which enables us to *preach it*. Each

Oblate is aware of the values which attracted him to the Oblate community. Among us, certain people admit that they asked to be admitted to the Oblates and not to some other group because they wanted to go and work in the missions in northern Canada (Indian missions). Others joined the Oblates “to achieve holiness”, “to follow Christ”, “flee the world”, and they were ready to do everything the Institute asked them to do to achieve this ideal. We need not base ourselves on the ambitions of one or the other to determine the true meaning of Oblate commitment. This commitment is not a simple one; it is complex; it embraces more than one *mission*, a *life style*.<sup>101</sup>

In general, these answers tended to stress the integration of the different components of the Oblate vocation in a systematic, unified whole. “Insofar as what concerns us, our commitment is a commitment for a ‘mission’. But for us, the mission is not ‘simple dedication to one function’. It embraces a fundamental way of life and we are involved in this form of life only to the extent that it showed itself to be essential in the effective service of the poor. We are *missionaries* for the poor and that implies more than the functions of ‘doing’.”<sup>102</sup>

At the end of its work, this Chapter, in one of its documents, *The Missionary Outlook* – a profile of the Oblate using descriptive terms rather than giving a profile through a scholastic definition – states: “We see ourselves as apostles according to the spirit of Father de Mazenod and the teaching of the Word: men called to be witnesses of the living God to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8, 21, 22); men who have already experienced in their own life the generous love of God made visible in the person of Jesus (Titus 2:11, 13); men urged on by their love to risk their lives for the

Gospel (2 Corinthians 5:14; Acts 15:26); men who live their apostolic poverty in order to free themselves from everything that could be an obstacle to their mission (Matthew 10:9-10); men who celebrate their common hope in the Kingdom by breaking bread in the Lord, together and in joy and simplicity of heart (Acts 2:44, 47) like the first Apostles, gathered around the Virgin Mary (Acts 1:14)".<sup>103</sup>

Finally, going beyond the attempts of systematization of the 1940-1960 period, we again took up talking about the Oblate vocation by following the descriptive method or narration of the beginnings of the Congregation.

#### IV. THE OBLATE CHARISM

Unbelievable, but true, after all of this immense labor, in the Chapter of 1974 "some Oblates [...] spoke of a lack of 'spirituality' and others asked, in rather abstract terms, for a clarification of our 'fundamental values' or for an official affirmation of our 'consecrated life'."<sup>104</sup> Was this the sign of a certain confusion around the resignation of the Superior General, Richard Hanley, of the need of rediscovering historic and traditional foundations through the process of up-dating going on in the Congregation? Whatever it was, to dispel any ambiguity and dichotomy between religious life and the apostolic life, "the General Administration [...] decided to situate Oblate mission [...] in relation to another context: not only the Church's teaching and the actual situation of mission in the world today, but also, thirdly, the Founder's charism".<sup>105</sup>

Thus it was that the General Administration announced a congress on the charism of the Founder to be held in Rome from April 26 to May 14, 1976.

That inaugurated the third stage of post-conciliar reflection on the part of the Congregation, a stage that would lead the Congregation to a new understanding of the Oblate vocation, starting this time from the charism. The fruit of this new understanding would be the Constitutions and Rules of 1982.

In 1972, an entire issue of *Etudes oblates* was devoted to the theme of charism<sup>106</sup>. In this issue, the key to a new understanding, already used by the General Chapter of 1966 in the wake of Vatican II, was thoroughly put to the test. However, the congress in Rome reflected on the Oblate charism with a methodology and perhaps a thoroughness unknown until that time.<sup>107</sup>

The congress unfolded in four stages, stages which revealed a dynamic and fruitful interpretative method. An introductory phase to provide a climate of genuine discernment of the charism grew to a crescendo of fraternal relationships. During this first stage, through an analysis of personal experiences and life such as it was found in the geographic region of each one, there already emerged the different aspects which characterize the Oblate charism. Based on lived experience, the method showed itself to be a particularly suitable way of introducing the interpretative process. In fact, it helped the participants to become aware immediately of the fact that the charism is not a fossilized fact from the past, but rather a living reality, lived by those who are called, through a special vocation, to become a part of the Institute.

Then, came the second stage devoted to the study of the charism of the Founder, especially from the historical point of view, thanks to the input from experts by lectures or in round-table discussions. It was a matter of a basic moment, a necessary moment like that

of the existential approach. The presentation of origins and history in the context of lived experience allowed them to recover the dimensions that had not appeared clearly in the analysis of the actual awareness of charism. Measured by lived experience, the other elements presented by the historical studies seemed to be irremediably outdated. The joint and discreet use of the method of experience and the historic method proved fruitful and led to a description of the Founder's charism with new essential traits.

In a third stage, the participants entered into the interpretative work specific to discernment of the charism such as it can be lived today in the Congregation, according to the appeals from the Church and the needs of the world. The new essential traits used to describe the charism of the Founder were studied in depth in groups with common interests or special expertise, starting from six different and complementary approaches: the historical approach, to accurately define the precise meaning of each element of the Founder's thought; the missionary approach, to get a grasp on the needs of the world on the basis of each one of the characteristics of the charism and to compare the values with the appeals of the world; the Oblate approach, to discern the needs of the Congregation in relation to the various aspects of the charism; the Biblical approach, to get a grasp on the Gospel dimensions handed on to us by the Founder and the Biblical resonance with the characteristics of the charism; the theological approach, to discern the meanings given to the elements of the charism and the new basic emphases in today's theology; the evaluation approach, to analyze how the congress had perceived the values of the charism to indicate the constant elements and

the divergent elements. Done successively in full assembly, this work permitted the participants to go on to the final phase.<sup>108</sup>

The search for new paths for the future of the Congregation and the pointing out of new concrete avenues for renewal and animation were the matter treated during the last phase of the congress.<sup>109</sup>

In their final statement, the members of the congress selected the essential elements that make up the charism of the Founder in the form that the Oblates intend to live it today<sup>110</sup>. Here they are in summarized form:

1. Christ
2. to evangelize
3. the poor
4. the Church
5. in community
6. religious life
7. Mary
8. Priests
9. most urgent needs.

The ten first articles of the Constitutions and Rules of 1982 take up these themes again and give unity to the first chapter "Mission of the Congregation" and the second, "Apostolic religious life" under the one title "The Oblate Charism".<sup>111</sup>

The road laid out by the congress of 1976 was then followed with the thorough study of the different components of the charism. Consequently, there followed two study sessions, each on a different aspect of the charism: *Evangelization* and *Oblate apostolic community*. The first theme was addressed during a congress held in Rome August 29 to September 14, 1983<sup>112</sup> and the second was held in Ottawa August 6 to 11, 1989.<sup>113</sup>

A final text, outstanding in value because of its description of the Oblate charism was made available to us as a

fruit of the 1986 General Chapter: "Missionaries in Today's World".<sup>114</sup> In this text, the ministry for justice finds its place completely and harmoniously in the context of the Oblate charism, as an explanation and an inalienable component.

The most recent General Chapters, those since 1966, laid out a new road different from the one followed by previous chapters. Their distinguishing quality was that, in point of fact, they were directly devoted to a reflection on our Oblate identity. They are, therefore, established as fundamental authoritative reference points when it comes to understanding the Oblate charism.

## V. ONGOING RESEARCH

To speak of the Oblate vocation in terms of charism seems to be the best way to describe it in its entirety and avoid the always latent dichotomy between action and contemplation, mission and interior life, in other words, between the ends of the Institute and its spirit or its spirituality.

Leaving the development of the notion of "charism" to another study<sup>115</sup>, in concluding, I would like to point out some avenues of reflection to follow up on the work of research on the Oblate charism. Here it is a question of a never-ending journey. In fact, it is because a charism is something living that each generation is called to reinterpret and update the one handed on to them as their inheritance.

### 1. DYNAMIC DESCRIPTION OF THE CHARISM

Since, in the words of *Mutuae relationes* (no. 11), it is an "experience of the Spirit", the charism of the Founder

is, of its very nature, dynamic: an evolutionary process reducible with difficulty to the form of a rule or a definition. In this sense, I believe that the methodology followed at the beginnings of the Congregation and for so many years after that in presenting the Oblate charism is legitimate. It simply consists in "telling" the experience (even if this is not the term used) lived by Eugene de Mazenod and shared by his first companions and then by the Institute as a whole.

That was the methodology adopted in excellent fashion by Father Jetté who carefully avoided defining the Oblate charism, preferring to describe it and to tell its story. From 1962 on, he recalled the origins of Oblate spirituality<sup>116</sup>. Since that time, he has remained faithful to that method. For example, the first letter he wrote to the Congregation as Superior General is revealing<sup>117</sup>, as are his other texts for orientation, such as the "Oblate charism" of 1975.<sup>118</sup>

It is certainly legitimate and even necessary to distinguish the components of the charism and to organize them in such a way as to enable an ever deeper understanding of them. Each individual needs to express his own experience, to clarify for himself his own journey and the motivation which is his driving force<sup>119</sup>, but each organizational attempt remains provisional. We can make no claim to determining the charism once and for all, any more than we can the Spirit who, of its very nature, enables it to escape the limitations of a definition and remain dynamic. No one can define life. We can understand charism by experience, by grace, by sharing in its own special dynamism. That is why definitions are nothing other than "limited formulations" which, from time to time reinterpret and express the ever living experience of the

Spirit in the light of new needs. Each new formulation should, however, be seen in the light of the historic journey of the Founder and, after him, of the whole Congregation. We could have recourse to the analogy of formulations of faith. They express the Gospel in a movement that goes from the Gospel to the Creed. But the Creed must always be re-read in the light of the Gospel, traveling the same road in reverse: from the Creed to the Gospel.

Each generation is called to re-read this history and to reinterpret it. It is called to consider its own past with his own roots, in such a way as to be able to extend ever more energetically its branches and to bear fruit in the present time. As Father Deschâtelets wrote, using an especially appropriate image: "The tree lives from its roots"<sup>120</sup>. The past is a root, a living reality which helps us live; it is not a tomb, something definitely dead, archival material! We study the past to interpret the present and to have the key of how to respond to contemporary needs and to prepare in a creative way for the future: the Founder does not hold back, he is "ahead of us, calls us, leads us".<sup>121</sup>

It is at this point that the problem of interpretation emerges: how can one study the past and make it live in the present?

## 2. THE OBJECT OF OUR INTERPRETATION: CHARISM OF THE FOUNDER AND OF THE INSTITUTE

The problem of interpretation embraces determining the object, the subject and the methodology of interpretation.<sup>122</sup>

The charism of the Founder makes up the main object of the process of interpretation. By the charism of the Founder, we understand the substance

of the experience born from a supernatural inspiration which served him as a guide in the existential understanding of the mystery of Christ and of his Gospel. It made him sensitive to certain signs of the times and led him to determine the character of a work which, while responding to precise needs, took concrete form in a service of the Church and of society.

The object of interpretation of the charism is not limited to a study of the Founder. Often in a decisive way, other persons at the Founder's side, the first companions, made a contribution to the birth of a religious family.

Normally, the inspiration at the beginning of a work in the Church takes on its visible expression and its character in the measure that it becomes visible in its concrete form, in its passage from inspiration as a moment of illumination to its "incarnation" in the structures and forms of expression. The first companions contributed their collaboration in giving concrete expression to the content and the essential lines of a particular charism given to a founder. They have experienced it in their own lives and in their own endeavors to the point that the inspiration took on an ever better defined appearance with easily identifiable characteristics. In order to understand the Oblate charism, we should, therefore, always keep before us the influence and the contribution of individuals like Fathers Henry Tempier, Hippolyte Courtès, Hippolyte Guibert, Domenico Albini, etc.

While confining itself to the origins the moment of foundation and of basic models, the study of charism cannot limit itself to an investigation of the first phase. As *Mutuae relationes* (no. 11) reminds us, the charism is not meant to be conserved and thoroughly studied, but to be developed throughout

history. The charism of a founder becomes the charism of an institute. In this second expression we see the historic journeying of the different ways of adaptation of the charism of the founder, that is, of the charismatic content lived and expressed by the founder as such. The charism of the institute is like the collective reflected image of the charism of the founder. It sets up a relationship with life and the charisms of people destined by the Spirit to perpetuate in a dynamic way in time the full force of the original inspiration of the founder and to work out everywhere the forms in which it is able to be expressed. It constitutes the identity of his vocation expressed by the entire community which incarnates in time and in different ways the same inspiration and the same charismatic intentions of the founder.

In its journey through history, the charism of the founder, as it is lived by the institute, in its identity as well as its fidelity, develops unforeseen qualities and enriches itself with an ever new creativity.

To completely understand the Oblate charism, one would have to go through the entire history of the Congregation. The issue at stake is a growth in holiness and in the different ways of adaptation to the times, to places and to ever new pressing needs. Indeed, we discover an entire evolution and development of Oblate life.<sup>123</sup>

It is above all, the openness to new fields of apostolate, either in new territories, or in new activities or ways of evangelizing, which contributed to the development of the charism of the Congregation. Taking on responsibility for the sanctuary of Montmartre in Paris, for example, brought to the Congregation a remarkable development of devotion to the Sacred Heart. Toward the

end of the XIX century, the 1898 General Chapter drew the attention of the Congregation to two particular ministries: youth ministry and evangelization of those farthest away from the Church "in order to not fall behind the pace set by our century".<sup>124</sup>

In like manner, the Chapter of 1904, faced with the changes at the beginning of the century, the industrial revolution, the social and working men's issues, urged the Institute on to new ministries, saying: "Even though missions are the first and main end of the Institute, the apostolate to the working men in all its approved forms [...] is not only in conformity with the end of the Institute, but also must be strongly encouraged in the present times".<sup>125</sup>

The 1938 Chapter focused on the issue of Catholic Action and on the need to become actively involved in the new movements which constitute a new priority to respond to the contemporary needs of the Church. The Chapter of 1947 issued the invitation to renew the methods of apostolate in view of getting back in touch with the masses who from this time on were abandoning the Church.<sup>126</sup>

The witness of the life of our "saints" contributed, in turn, to give emphasis to and develop certain aspects of the charism. The introduction of causes for beatification also helped the whole Congregation to become aware of its spirituality. A great number of factors stressed certain aspects of the spiritual life. I am thinking, for example, of the development of the Marian aspect of Oblate spirituality as, among other things, the introduction of the scapular or the act of consecration of the Congregation requested by the Chapter of 1906 bear witness. The Chapter of 1932, as well, recommended to "the body of the Fathers of the Con-

gregation to teach and to preach more often and with more insistence to the minor seminarians, novices and scholastics and to all the faithful we evangelize, the cult of devotion to the Immaculate Conception of Mary".<sup>127</sup>

Naturally, this is not a question of information developed on a working chart, but rather of privileged moments which give witness of an awareness already present and which, at the same time, constitute a point of departure for new developments.

One must also take into consideration the impact that the charism had beyond the confines of the Oblate community, as for example, on the members of the Missionary Association of Mary Immaculate<sup>128</sup> or in the religious families and institutes of consecrated life born from their contact with the Oblates.<sup>129</sup>

It is clear that the charism makes its own way without losing its identity which is in constant growth. We could say that the Congregation, like the Church itself, instead of always being reformed is always in evolution.

### 3. THE MEDIATOR OF THE CHARISM: OBLATE COMMUNITY

Since it belongs to an institution which is communitarian in nature, the charism can only be interpreted by the institute as a whole.

Above all, it is a case of the body of the institute which finds its times of singularly important interpretation in the General Chapters. Then come the local communities called to a constant reflection on themselves in view of making daily choices, the concrete details of life and of ministry which respond to the ever new concerns. Finally, what is needed is the constructive contribution of each individual member of the institute.

While remaining united to the entire Congregation, a body of communities, living in a specific milieu, can be called a particular interpretation of the charism which would take into account the particular appeals coming from a defined territory or a particular culture. It is in this context that one should understand the attempts made by various regions of the Congregation. The contribution made by the Latin American region are revealing examples.<sup>130</sup>

In order to fulfill its particular interpretative function, the community should submit itself to the dynamic of community discernment based on the presence in its midst of the Risen Lord. The Emmaüs event narrated by Luke remains the model for that type of a communitarian interpretative process. When the Risen Christ joined up with the disciples, *diermèneusen*, that is, he explained and interpreted the Scriptures to them. (See Luke 24-27). "The presence of the Lord among us" (C 3) brings to the community the gift of the Spirit to understand the charism as well. Since the charism is a work of the Spirit, it cannot be understood without being vivified by that same Spirit.

The study and the implementation of the charism also requires a special methodology in order not to lapse into subjectivism and arbitrariness. This, however, is not the place to set forth such a method.<sup>131</sup> In any case, it will be necessary that each work on the Oblate charism be carried out keeping in mind the needs and appeals of people in their cultural milieu today and in the broader perspective of the Church. The Oblate charism is, in fact, a charism of evangelization, a charism in the Church and for the Church; a charism which evolves "in harmony with the Body of Christ in perpetual growth" (*Mutuae relationes*, no. 11); a charism among

many other charisms with which it is called to live in intimate communion.

I think I can bring this study to a close by reaffirming that the understanding of the Oblate vocation should, therefore, always start from the story of our origins and return to them. As for myself, when I am asked: "What is your charism?" I can do nothing other than to tell the story of a young man, Eugene de Mazenod, who experienced in his depths the merciful love of God in Christ crucified, and Savior. Redeemed by him, he felt called to become, in him and with him, an instrument of redemption, co-worker with Christ, the Savior. In the light of this mystery, with his new eyes of faith, the very eyes of the Savior because he identifies with Him, he looks at the Church and recognizes her as the Spouse of Christ, fruit of his martyrdom; he sees her state of abandonment, hears her calling loudly to her sons and he declares himself ready to respond. He is moved with compassion at the sight of the poor for whom Christ poured out his blood and decides to dedicate his life to them in the priesthood to make known to them through the ministry of evangelization who Christ is in order to make them aware of their dignity as sons and daughters of God. He gathers around him other priests, then laity as well, with whom he chooses to live the evangelical counsels and the common life modeled on that of the Apostles in order to live, radically and in its fullness, the Christian vocation of sanctity and to launch together the ministry of evangelization of all, all persons, especially the poorest and most abandoned. Gradually, he discovers the presence of Mary in his own life and in his ministry, recognizing that he is an instrument of her merciful love for others and he feels called to lead to her, Mother of Mercy, the scattered children

of God. In this way, with his brothers, he begins to go toward those whom the ordinary pastoral outreach of the Church has difficulty reaching, areas where others do not or cannot go, with a bold, pioneering, style of evangelization. By daring everything, he is able to blaze new paths where he commits himself totally.

FABIO CIARDI

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> ZAGO, Marcello, "Quel type de missionnaires sommes-nous?" in *Etudes oblates*, 29 (1970), p. 45.

<sup>2</sup> DESCHÂTELETS, Leo, "Oblate Spirituality", in *Etudes oblates*, 8 (1949), p. 155-156.

<sup>3</sup> BELANGER, Marcel, "Vocation oblate", in *Etudes oblates*, 3, (1944), p. 83.

<sup>4</sup> Letter to Father Henry Tempier, August 22, 1817, in RAMBERT, I, p. 237; *Selected Texts*, no. 448, p. 503.

<sup>5</sup> Letter to Father Hippolyte Guibert, July 29, 1830, in YENVEUX, V, p. 205; *Selected Texts*, no. 450, p. 505.

<sup>6</sup> It would be enough to consult the analytic index of *Missions*, under the words: *spirit of the Congregation, Oblate spirit, family spirit; spirit of the Founder; Father de Mazenod's ideal* (vol. I); *family spirit, family (spirit), Oblate of Mary Immaculate* (vol. II); *Oblates* (vol. III). In volumes IV and V the word *spirit* is no longer to be found – a sign of a changing awareness. In volume V, we find the expression *Fundamental Oblate values*.

<sup>7</sup> BOUDENS, Robrecht, "Le centenaire de l'élection du T.R.P. Fabre", in *Etudes oblates*, 20, (1961), p. 309-313; BEAUDOIN, Yvon, "L'élue du Chapitre de 1861 et la joie des Oblats", in *Etudes oblates*, 21 (1962), p. 97-120.

<sup>8</sup> Speech addressed to Father Joseph Fabre on the occasion of the first anniversary of his election, in *Missions*, 2 (1863), p. 140.

<sup>9</sup> Circular letter no. 11, March 21, 1862, in *Circ. adm.* I, p. 2 (70).

<sup>10</sup> Circular letter no. 15, March 19, 1865, in *Circ. adm.* I, p. 131.

<sup>11</sup> Circular letter no. 24, March 5, 1872, in *Circ. adm.* I, p. 242-243.

<sup>12</sup> Circular letter no. 164, March 19, 1939, in *Circ. adm.* IV, p. 345-346.

<sup>13</sup> See MITRI, Angelo, *Le bienheureux Eugène de Mazenod*, Henry Verkin, trans., Rome, 1975, p. 181-185.

<sup>14</sup> See GILBERT, Maurice, "Vingt-cinq ans des éditions des Etudes oblates", in *Etudes oblates*, 25 (1966), p. 354-366.

<sup>15</sup> BELANGER, Marcel, "Vocation oblate", in *Etudes oblates*, 3 (1944), p. 81.

<sup>16</sup> MEUNIER, Ovila-A., "La Spiritualité du Fondateur des Oblats", in *La Bannière*, Ottawa, 1941, p. 39.

<sup>17</sup> LESAGE, Germain, "Notre littérature spirituelle", in *Etudes oblates*, 3 (1944), p. 50-52.

<sup>18</sup> *Idem*, "Une spiritualité caractéristique", in *Etudes oblates*, 5 (1946), p. 86.

<sup>19</sup> BELANGER, Marcel, "Vocation oblate", in *Etudes oblates*, 3 (1944), p. 84-85.

<sup>20</sup> GUEGEN, Yves, *Missionnaire Oblat de Marie Immaculée*, Oblate Studies editions (Ottawa), 1947, p. 104.

<sup>21</sup> "Enquête sur la spiritualité oblate", in *Etudes oblates*, 9, (1950), p. 138.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 139.

<sup>23</sup> The denial that a specific school of spirituality existed was once again brought to the fore in a clearly stated text of Stanislas A. La ROCHELLE: "The Oblates cannot claim to have their own school or establishment of spirituality in the way that the Benedictines, the Franciscans, the Dominicans, the Jesuits or the Carmelites have".

"A school of spirituality is also a particular type or style of the spiritual life, but studied and developed much more in depth thanks to the three following advantages. A group of individuals have established and defended an organic system of a way of attaining perfection; it lives this way and shares in common the experiences of everyone. Moreover, this group shows a marked preference for certain ideas, virtues or practices, in meditation and in the apostolate as characteristic means of sanctification. Finally, its way of thinking and of living is already confirmed by a concrete flowering of holiness".

"Bishop de Mazenod has given us some specific directions in spirituality, but without claiming to contribute much of anything new and without setting himself up as the head of a school. None of his successors at the head of our religious family has taught the Oblates a very specific style of the spiritual life". "Spiritualité moderne et Missionnaires Oblats", in *Etudes oblates*, 26 (1967), p. 22-23.

<sup>24</sup> "Pour une spiritualité oblate. Compte rendu des réponses à l'enquête sur la spiritualité oblate", [For an Oblate spirituality. Report of the responses in a survey on Oblate spirituality.] in *Etudes oblates*, 10 (1951), p. 74-76.

<sup>25</sup> Circular letter no. 191, "Notre vocation et notre vie d'union intime avec Marie Immaculée", August 15, 1951, in *Circ. adm.* V, p. 300-302.

<sup>26</sup> February 5, 1966; see the Constitutions and Rules of 1966, p. (3). Nonetheless, some people as for example Father Francesco Trusso remain sceptical with regard to the expression "Oblate spirituality", (but he would be sceptical as well with regard to the word "charism") preferring to speak of particular characteristics; see "Les anciennes et les nouvelles Règles", in *Etudes oblates*, 34 (1975), p. 127-128.

<sup>27</sup> LAMIRANDE, Emilien, "L'actualité des valeurs de tradition", in *Etudes oblates*, 26 (1967), p. 45. Another interesting way of describing the Oblate vocation is that of presenting it as an "inspiration"; see La ROCHELLE, Stanislas A., "Spiritualité moderne et Missionnaires Oblats", in *Etudes oblates*, 26 (1967), p. 22-24.

<sup>28</sup> MEUNIER, Ovila A., "Aux sources de notre spiritualité", in *Etudes oblates*, I (1942), p. 39-40.

<sup>29</sup> For a study of the sources of Mazenodian spirituality, see DELPEUCH, Leon, "Saint Alphonse de Liguori et Mgr de Mazenod", in *Missions*, 14 (1876) p. 203-212; DROUIN, Paul, "Origines ligoriennes de nos saintes Règles", in *Etudes oblates*, 9 (1942), p. 210-220; MORISSETTE, Nazaire, "Rodriguez dans la Règle", in *Etudes Oblates*, 3 (1944), p. 265-271; RESLE, Joseph, "Aux sources de nos règles. Le Père de Mazenod a-t-il copié S. Alphonse?" in

*Etudes oblates*, 25 (1966), p. 231-249. A fundamental work still is Father Georges COSENTINO's study, *Histoire de nos Règles, I, Rédaction et sources de nos Règles (1816-1818)*, Ottawa, Oblate Studies edition, 1955, p. 69-239.

<sup>30</sup> Circular letter no. 191, in *Circ. adm. V*, p. 301.

<sup>31</sup> BELANGER, Marcel, "Regina Congregationis nostrae. Réflexions sur notre vocation et notre esprit marial", in *Etudes oblates*, 16 (1957), p. 104-105.

<sup>32</sup> See LAMIRANDE, Emilien, "La vocation oblate d'après une notice de 1854", in *Etudes oblates*, 18 (1959), p. 186-189.

<sup>33</sup> LESAGE, Germain, "Notre littérature spirituelle", in *Etudes oblates*, 3 (1944), p. 55.

<sup>34</sup> "Nos Saintes Règles", in *Circ. adm. I*, p. 125.

<sup>35</sup> Retreat notes of October 8, 1831, in *Selected Texts*, no. 9, p. 31.

<sup>36</sup> Letter to Father Henry Tempier, August 22, 1817, *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 6, no. 21, p. 35.

<sup>37</sup> Letter to Father Henry Tempier, August 12, 1817, *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 6, no. 20, p. 31 & 32.

<sup>38</sup> Constitutions and Rules of 1853, quoted in *Constitutions and Rules 1982*, p. 54.

<sup>39</sup> See letter to Father Hippolyte Guibert, July 29, 1830, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 7, no. 350, p. 202.

<sup>40</sup> Systematic studies on the thought of our Superiors General have not yet been made. We do, however, have three articles which form the basis for a good point of departure: GILBERT, Maurice, "La charité fraternelle chez les Oblats", 28 (1969), p. 60-79; LEVASSEUR, Donat, "L'évangélisation et les supérieurs généraux de la Congrégation", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 42 (1983), p. 307-320; ROY, Laurent, "La communauté apostolique selon les supérieurs généraux", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 49 (1990) p. 271-298.

<sup>41</sup> Circular letter no. 24, March 5, 1872, in *Circ. adm. I*, p. 243.

<sup>42</sup> Circular letter no. 13, November 21, 1863, in *Circ. adm. I*, p. 84.

<sup>43</sup> Circular letter no. 11, March 21, 1862, in *Circ. adm. I*, p. 7 (71).

<sup>44</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 96.

<sup>45</sup> Circular letter no. 11, March 21, 1862, in *Circ. adm. I*, p. 2 (66).

<sup>46</sup> See LEVASSEUR, Donat, "L'évangélisation et les Supérieurs généraux de la Congrégation", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 42 (1983), p. 308-311.

<sup>47</sup> "The Oblate, an Apostolic Man and a Religious" in *The Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate: Addresses and Written Texts, 1975-1985*, Rome, General House, 1985, p. 71-96.

<sup>48</sup> "The state of the Congregation: Report of the Superior General to the 1980 General Chapter", in AAG, vol. V, prima pars (1980), supplement, p. 14 & 15.

<sup>49</sup> Circular letter no. 59, February 17, 1895, in *Circ. adm. II*, p. 10.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 13.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 20-21.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 24.

<sup>53</sup> Circular letter no. 70, March 19, 1899, in *Circ. adm. II*, p. 35 (379).

<sup>54</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 37 (381).

<sup>55</sup> Circular letter no. 113, December 25, 1915, in *Circ. adm. III*, p. 277

<sup>56</sup> Circular letter no. 127, November 9, 1920, in *Circ. adm. III*, p. 405-411.

<sup>57</sup> Circular letter no. 152, December 3, 1932, in *Circ. adm. IV*, p. 238.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 244.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 245.

<sup>60</sup> Circular letter no. 84, July 2, 1905, in *Circ. adm. III*, p. 76.

<sup>61</sup> Circular letter no. 152, December 3, 1932, in *Circ. adm. IV*, p. 241-243.

<sup>62</sup> Circular letter no. 164, March 19, 1939, in *Circ. adm. IV*, p. 341.

<sup>63</sup> For the development of his thought, see La ROCHELLE, Stanislas A., "L'animation religieuse dans les circulaires du père Deschâtelets", in *Etudes oblates*, 28 (1969), p. 117-134.

<sup>64</sup> Circular letter no. 191, August 15, 1951, in *Circ. adm. V*, p. 302-303.

<sup>65</sup> Circular letter no. 208, September 1, 1959, in *Circ. adm. VI*, p. 226, 274.

<sup>66</sup> Circular letter no. 220, August 15, 1965, in *Circ. adm. VII*, p. 189-190.

<sup>67</sup> Circular letter no. 241, April 1, 1969, in *Circ. adm. VIII*, p. 205.

<sup>68</sup> "Oblate Spirituality", in *Etudes oblates*, 8, (1949) p. 157.

<sup>69</sup> See letter to the novices of Marino, March 15, 1973, quoted in: TOURIGNY, Irénée, *Le père Léo Deschâtelets, o.m.i., 1899-1974*, Ottawa, 1975, p. 128-131.

<sup>70</sup> JETTÉ, Fernand, "Esprit oblat et Règles oblates", in *Etudes oblates*, 21 (1962), p. 17.

<sup>71</sup> From Father Zago's writings, one could read especially the following texts: "Oblats, quel type de missionnaires sommes-nous?" in *Etudes oblates*, 29 (1970), p. 16-46; "Dimension missionnaire de la communauté oblate", in *Etudes oblates*, 30 (1971), p. 9-16; "Missionnaires des pauvres", in *Etudes oblates*, 30 (1971), p. 92-100; "Evaluation et perspectives de la communauté oblate", in *Etudes oblates*, 31 (1972), p. 67-80; "Notre identité religieuse et la mission", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 33 (1974), p. 241-251; "Bishop de Mazenod, a Man and a Message for Today's Mission", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 34 (1975), p. 181-193; "Dimension évangéliste du charisme oblat à la lumière d'*Evangelii Nuntiandi*", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 36 (1977), p. 187-201; "Connection between Popular Missions and the Charism of the Institute", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 40 (1981), p. 155-185. The annual letters that he sends as Superior General to the Oblates in first formation are of particular interest for our subject.

<sup>72</sup> "La vie intime de notre vénéré Fondateur de 1794 à 1808", in *Etudes oblates*, I, (1942), p. 81-99; "Eugène de Mazenod, séminariste", in *Etudes oblates*, 4 (1945), p. 201-228.

<sup>73</sup> "Je serai prêtre", in *Etudes oblates*, 13 (1954), p. 3-200.

<sup>74</sup> "La vie spirituelle de Mgr de Mazenod, 1782-1812", Oblate Studies editions, Ottawa, 1956, 319 p.

<sup>75</sup> "La vie spirituelle de Mgr de Mazenod [...] aux origines de la Société, 1812-1818", excerpts, Rome, Gregorian University, 1963, 102 p.

<sup>76</sup> *Les saintes Règles*, Paris, 1903, vol. 1, p. 25-41.

<sup>77</sup> NORMAND, Louis-Philippe, "Une oeuvre inachevée: Le commentaire des Règles par le P. Yenveux", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 34 (1975), p. 3-19.

<sup>78</sup> "La Spiritualité du Fondateur des Oblats", in *La Bannière*, Ottawa, 1941, p. 39-56.

<sup>79</sup> "Vocation oblate", in *Etudes oblates*, 3 (1944), p. 83-102.

<sup>80</sup> "Thèmes fondamentaux de notre spiritualité", in *Etudes oblates*, 4 (1945), p. 7.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 18.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 25.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 27.

<sup>84</sup> "Une spiritualité caractéristique", in *Etudes oblates*, 5 (1946), p. 85.

<sup>85</sup> S.I., s.d., p. 91-92; Oblate Studies editions, (Ottawa) 1947, p. 105-106.

Not long before this, Father Gaetano Luzzo had written a book on the Congregation which was very well received in Italy: *Missionari di tutti i climi. Gli Oblati de Maria Immacolata nelle terre Infedeli*. (Missionaries of every clime. The Oblates of Mary Immaculate among the Unbelievers). Turin, 1946. At the end of a sweeping overview of the Oblate missions, of so many victorious battles and missionary boldness" He found the hidden key in four words: Christocentrism, Mary, charity and zeal. (pp. 205-217). He wrote: "We think that the ardent spirit of the Oblate family, a spirit centred on Christ and Mary, adorned with a universal charity and zeal, is the great secret of the specialist of the most difficult missions".

<sup>86</sup> "L'idéale de l'Oblat et la spiritualité oblate", in *Etudes oblates*, 8 (1949), p. 195.

<sup>87</sup> See "Pour une spiritualité oblate. Compte rendu des réponses à l'enquête sur la spiritualité oblate", in *Etudes oblates*, 10 (1951), p. 73-126.

<sup>88</sup> In this vein, SERVEL, Jean, - PELLEGRIN, Paul, *La vie du Missionnaire Oblat de Marie Immaculée*, Lyon, 1956, p. 34-39; SIMON, Jean-Marie, "Essai d'une spiritualité oblate", in *Etudes oblates*, 15 (1956), p. 221-259; BELANGER, Marcel, "*Regina Congregationis Nostrae*, réflexions sur notre vocation et notre esprit marial", in *Etudes oblates*, 16 (1957), p. 97-135; 19 (1960), p. 219-241.

<sup>89</sup> "Les Idées-Force de la deuxième partie des Constitutions", in *Etudes oblates*, 23 (1964), p. 92-93.

<sup>90</sup> *Dans une volonté de renouveau, introduction à une lecture des Constitutions et Règles*, Rome, General House, 1968, p. 28; see GILBERT, Maurice, "Réflexions sur la vie oblate à la lumière des nouvelles Constitutions", in *Etudes oblates*, 25 (1966), p.

273-353; LEVASSEUR, Donat, "Les Constitutions et Règles à la lumière de Vatican II", in *Etudes oblates*, 26 (1967), p. 97-202; DE BRETAGNE, Guy, "Impressions d'ensemble d'un professeur de pastorale sur nos nouvelles Constitutions", in *Etudes oblates*, 26 (1967), p. 310-342; GARGANTINI, Fernando, "A propos de la fin de la Congrégation dans les nouvelles Constitutions et Règles", in *Etudes oblates*, 27 (1968), p. 77-88, 116-132; GUTHANS, Jean-Baptiste, "Quelques réflexions sur les "Constitutions et Règles nouvelles"", in *Etudes oblates*, 28 (1969), p. 201-218.

<sup>91</sup> "La visée missionnaire de l'Oblat d'aujourd'hui", in *Documentation OMI*, 22/71, January 25, 1971, p. 3.

<sup>92</sup> "La visée missionnaire", in *Etudes oblates*, 30 (1971), p. 133-216.

<sup>93</sup> "Les Oblats, hommes apostoliques aujourd'hui", in *Documentation OMI*, 22/71, January 26, 1971, p. 4-10.

<sup>94</sup> "By fundamental values [of the Oblate life], we understand here what we are as Oblates: missionaries, religious, priests". Questionnaire accompanying circular letter no. 246, in *Missio*, 98-1 (1971), attached document II, p. IX.

<sup>95</sup> "Le sens de notre engagement oblat, valeurs fondamentales", in *Documentation OMI*, 25/71, February 27, 1971, p. 12-14.

<sup>96</sup> *Missio*, 98-1 (1971), suppl. I, p. 63-64, see p. 13-15, 116-117, 288-289; 98-3 (1971), p. 80-82, 372, 449.

<sup>97</sup> *Missio*, 98-1 (1971) suppl. I, p. 317-318; II, p. 239-242, 458-461.

<sup>98</sup> *Missio*, 98-2 (1971), suppl. II, p. 5, 22.

<sup>99</sup> *Missio*, 98-2 (1971), suppl. II, p. 92.

<sup>100</sup> *Missio*, 98-2 (1971), suppl. II, p. 79.

<sup>101</sup> *Missio*, 98-2 (1971), suppl. II, p. 239.

<sup>102</sup> *Missio*, 98-2 (1971), suppl. II, p. 312-313.

<sup>103</sup> *La visée missionnaire*, p. 33.

<sup>104</sup> AAG., vol. V, prima pars (1980), supplement, p. 124.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 125.

<sup>106</sup> "Le charisme oblat dans le monde d'aujourd'hui", in *Etudes oblates*, 31 (1972), p. 249-326.

<sup>107</sup> See "Actes du congrès sur le charisme du Fondateur aujourd'hui", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 36 (1977), p. 3-310.

<sup>108</sup> See ZAGO, Marcello, "Eclairages sur les valeurs fondamentales de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée", *ibidem*, p. 269-298.

<sup>109</sup> See "Déclaration finale du congrès sur le charisme du Fondateur aujourd'hui", *ibidem*, 299-307.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 298-307.

<sup>111</sup> With regard to the Oblate spirituality and charism as they are set forth in the present Constitutions and Rules, see: MOTTE, René, "Spiritualité oblate selon les nouvelles Constitutions et Règles", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 43 (1984), p. 37-60; JETTÉ, Fernand, *O.M.I. The Apostolic Man: A commentary on the 1982 edition of the Oblate Constitutions and Rules*, Rome, 1992.

<sup>112</sup> See "Actes du Congrès sur les Oblats et l'évangélisation", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 42 (1983), p. 97-394.

<sup>113</sup> See "La mission oblate en communauté apostolique", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 49 (1990), p. 109-373.

<sup>114</sup> AAG, vol. IX, (1986), p. 58-89.

<sup>115</sup> See CIARDI, Fabio, "Theology of the Charism of Institutes", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 46 (1987), p. 153-168.

<sup>116</sup> "Esprit oblat et Règles oblates", in *Etudes oblates*, 21 (1962) p. 2-21.

<sup>117</sup> "The direction of the years ahead", in *Letters to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate*, Rome, General House, 1984, p. 11-20.

<sup>118</sup> *The Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate: Addresses and Written Texts, 1975-1985*, Rome, General House, 1985, p. 45-70.

<sup>119</sup> We can read the relevant comments made by Joseph Mary SIMON, "Essai d'une spiritualité oblate", in *Etudes oblates*, 15 (1956), p. 221-228.

<sup>120</sup> DESCHÂTELETS, Leo, *Documentation OMI*, 38/72, February 17, 1972, p. 2.

<sup>121</sup> GEORGE, Francis, "Critères pour découvrir et vivre le charisme du Fondateur aujourd'hui", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 36 (1977), p. 39.

<sup>122</sup> With regard to the question of interpretation, in addition to the article of Francis GEORGE cited in the preceding footnote, see CIARDI, Fabio, "Indicazioni metodologiche per l'ermeneutica del carisma dei Fondatori", in *Claretianum*, 30 (1990), p. 5-47.

<sup>123</sup> Concerning the historicity and the evolution of the Oblate charism, see: DESCHÂTELETS, Leo, "Oblate Spirituality", in *Etudes oblates*, 8 (1949), p. 156-161; LAMIRANDE, Emilien, "L'actualité des valeurs de tradition", in *Etudes oblates*, 26 (1967), p. 42-54; GILBERT, Maurice, "La tradition oblate comme source de notre spiritualité", in *Etudes oblates*, 19 (1960), p. 97-107; KING, John, "Le sens de notre engagement oblat, valeurs fondamentales", in *Documentation OMI*, 25/71, February 27, 1971, p. 15-18.

<sup>124</sup> Circular letter no. 70, March 19, 1899, in *Circ. adm.*, II, p. 27 (371).

<sup>125</sup> Circular letter no. 84, July 2, 1905, in *Circ. adm.*, III, p. 93.

<sup>126</sup> Circular letter no. 181, November 1, 1947, in *Circ. adm.*, V, p. 174-175.

<sup>127</sup> Circular letter no. 154, February 1, 1933, in *Circ. adm.*, IV, p. 259.

<sup>128</sup> See TOURIGNY, Irénée, "Etude sur la spiritualité oblate et celle de l'A.M.M.I.", in *Etudes oblates*, 10 (1951), p. 49-62; LALONDE, Albert, "Les laïcs associés. Un nouveau phénomène", in *Documentation OMI*, no. 177, December 1990.

<sup>129</sup> See, GILBERT, Maurice, "Congrégations et Instituts à la fondation desquels les

Oblats ont participé", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 47 (1988), p. 177-208, 313-348; 48 (1989), p. 103-137.

<sup>130</sup> See, SULLIVAN, James, *The Charism of Eugene de Mazenod Founder of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, and Liberation Theology*, Saint Louis, MO, 1975, typewritten; REARDON, Francis, *The Charisma of the Congregation according to the Oblates in Latin America in confrontation with the Charisma of the Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate according to the Founder*, Sao Paulo, Brazil, 1975, typewritten, published in part: "Oblate Charisma according to CIAL and de Mazenod", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 35 (1976), p. 243-257. This is the way he summarizes the Oblate charism for the world of Latin America: "We, Oblates in Latin America, we are called by God in his Church, in apostolic, missionary community, to live and tirelessly proclaim the full and complete Gospel of Jesus Christ, the liberator, to the poor and the oppressed".

<sup>131</sup> We could fruitfully adopt the method used at the congress on the charism of the Founder in 1976 with regard to what I suggested in the article cited in footnote 122.

## CHARITY

*Summary: I. Charity in the experience of the Founder: 1. Journeying towards a decisive response to love: a. "Created solely for love," b. "A continuance of creation"; 2. Eugene responds to love: a. A response from the heart, b. A vital response. II. Charity, a distinctive trait of the Oblate family: 1. Fraternal charity at the heart of our charism; 2. Charity and unity in the Congregation. III. The Superiors General. IV. The pedagogy of charity: 1. The characteristics of charity; 2. A witness for today's world.*

### I. CHARITY IN THE EXPERIENCE OF THE FOUNDER

We cannot speak of Eugene de Mazenod's charity solely in terms of moral appreciation or of virtue. In his life, love was much more than simple moral conduct. It was not a virtue, but a Person, God himself.

#### 1. JOURNEYING TOWARDS A DECISIVE RESPONSE TO LOVE.

The object of our study here will not be the moral effort made by Eugene or his spiritual journey to acquire this virtue. Rather, we will examine the workings of God, Love itself, to penetrate gradually, but in an ever more radical way into Eugene's life, capturing his heart and setting it afire.

##### a. "Created solely for love"

Eugene was not born a saint.<sup>1</sup> But it is in the course of reflecting on his life that he would discover at its inception the active presence of God. He loved to stress the fact that God had freely given him certain attitudes which shaped his manner of being: "It is hard to understand, given the portrait of myself I have just painted, how sensitive a heart I have, overly so in fact. It would take too long to give you all the stories of

my childhood traits I have had related to me and which are really rather surprising. It was quite normal for me to give away my breakfast even when I was hungry to satisfy the hunger of the poor, I used to bring firewood to people who complained of the cold and of not being able to afford to buy it, on one occasion I went as far as to give away the clothes off my back to clothe a poor person, and many, many other stories in the same vein. When I had offended someone, even if it was a servant, I never had a moment's peace until I had been able to make reparation for what I had done, with some gifts, or gesture of friendship, or even a hug for the one who had reason to complain about me. I have not changed over the years.<sup>2</sup>" As we see, Eugene was "created by God with a sensitive soul, a tender heart, loving, generous."<sup>3</sup> At the same time, as far back as he could remember, he found in his heart an extraordinary attraction for God, an attraction that envelops his whole life: "God placed in me I would almost say a kind of instinct to love him, my reason was not yet formed when I loved to dwell in his presence, to raise my feeble hands to him, listen to his word in silence as if I understood it. By nature lively and irrepresible, it was enough to bring me before the altar to make me gentle and utterly tranquil, so ravished was I by my

God's perfections as if by instinct, as I said, for at that age I did not understand them."<sup>4</sup>

From the context, we can deduce that the love for which Eugene felt he was created went beyond the depth of feelings and presupposed a total consecration to the service of God: "He wished to give nature a priest, he wanted to create a being who would enter into relations with him [...] able to love him. This being, I told myself, this being is me. My soul is an emanation from the divinity, that tends naturally towards it, and will never find rest outside of it; created solely to love God, etc. And my body equally is formed only for his service, to give glory and homage to God."<sup>5</sup> One could say: here is Eugene as he came from the hands of the Creator. All of these traits were freely given to him as "a talent" (Matthew 25:15) in order that he could make them bear fruit throughout his life.

*b. "A continuance of creation"*

Eugene was nine years old when his eleven year period of expatriation began, a period which he considered a continuation of the creative action of God: "I saw these graces as a continuance of creation, as if God, after he had formed me, had taken my by the hand and given me these successive experiences, saying: I created you to love me, serve me, etc.; I do more, feeble creature that you are, I insert you here and there, so that you may achieve that end more easily [...]."<sup>6</sup>

Let us endeavor to uncover the events and persons the creative hand of God used to continue his work in Eugene. According to the testimonies we have, his stay at Turin was, without doubt, a time of an intense personal encounter with Christ in the Eucharist.<sup>7</sup>

Eugene was far away from his parents in a foreign country, obliged to communicate and study in a language which was not his mother tongue. God was his only friend. He then learned that God alone was enough for him and he learned this lesson well.<sup>8</sup> At the College of Nobles, he got up "every day, one hour before the other students" to pray alone in his room.<sup>9</sup> In Venice, Don Bartolo Zinelli<sup>10</sup> outlined for him a spirituality suited to his age and temperament. He taught him to love God with a love that was genuine, lively, tender, and able to express itself in external gestures.<sup>11</sup> He was free from sentimentality as well as from Jansenism and moral rigorism. He spent a good deal of his time reading and studying certain selected questions. In fact, not only did he know his faith, but he professed this faith with pride and was prepared to defend it.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, faith was not for him merely a question of the heart, nor a matter of convictions, but a very personal relationship with God.

Up until this point, Eugene had had the opportunity to become acquainted with the mystery of God. For the moment, he had to integrate his interior life with his daily social life. He arrived at Palermo. Until now, he had been obliged to live: "without having occasion to meet even one child or having learned any amusement, even the most unworldly."<sup>13</sup> Without exaggerating, we can consider his stay in Palermo as providential. If we take seriously Eugene's admission that "from twelve to sixteen years of age the separation from the female sex had an air of the anti-social"<sup>14</sup>, with the result that he would not "shake hands with ladies, except for those advanced in years"<sup>15</sup>, we must acknowledge that his stay in Palermo contributed an essential element

to his human development. Eugene was not alone in this journey. God, "who always watched over him from his tender years, now opened to him the doors of the Cannizzaro family. The Duke and the Duchess both became very fond of him."<sup>16</sup> It was especially his encounter with the Duchess of Cannizzaro that was providential. A woman in her forties, happily married with three children, this lady considered Eugene one of her own "sons" and he called her his "second mother." He "loved her" and had a "tender affection" for her.<sup>17</sup> He learned to express his feelings through small outward signs, for example, having the thoughtfulness of presenting her "a bouquet".<sup>18</sup>

On her part, the Duchess of Cannizzaro felt she had a responsibility to contribute to Eugene's spiritual formation and human development. She brought him to the theater and on walks. Some nights, she read with him, for example, "the tragedies of Racine".<sup>19</sup> At the same time, she "often" shared her faith with Eugene and offered him advice.<sup>20</sup> Eugene's father characterized the Duchess as: "a mother to the poor and afflicted" who "without keeping anything back for herself", gave "immense amounts to charity". Eugene became "the confidante of all her plans, the co-worker and distributor of all her good works".<sup>21</sup> He also took part in the social scene. The Duchess presented him to her sister, the Princess of Ventimiglia. Her daughter, "angelic in beauty", counted him "among her dearest friends" and he "loved [her] as tenderly as if I were her brother".<sup>22</sup> However, Eugene did not carry on like an empty-headed fool. According to what he tells us, he constantly felt "a kind of abhorrence for any kind of dissipation" and he "deplored it with disgust in others." His

aspirations were directed to "a totally different kind of joy".<sup>23</sup> Upon leaving Palermo, Eugene seemed to have retained the lesson he learned. He showed himself a mature person, open to God and open to the world as well. He viewed man as "the finest of the Creator's works".<sup>24</sup> He was not ashamed to cry<sup>25</sup>, nor to love tenderly<sup>26</sup>, nor to show weakness, of having a hand that "trembles a little"<sup>27</sup>. He could laugh at himself<sup>28</sup>. He had "a deep love of music" and was enchanted "with the superb pieces by Paisiello, Cimarosa, Guglielmi, etc"<sup>29</sup>. He took an interest in books on history and literature, but also had knowledge of "*Les entretiens avec Jésus Christ dans le très saint sacrement de l'autel*"<sup>30</sup> and needed "a prayer book that belonged to his mother".<sup>31</sup>

On October 24, 1802, Eugene returned to France and led an existence that fluctuated between diversion and dejection. During the carnival of 1803, we see him dancing and attending concerts. He wrote to his father to describe how he was amusing himself.<sup>32</sup> But his heart was not at peace. He became ever more sarcastic, sometimes even contentious and cynical.<sup>33</sup> He "often" took "walks alone".<sup>34</sup> "For sometimes three weeks" he remained "sad" and visited no one.<sup>35</sup> From 1804 on, between concerts, picnics and light comedy, he found more and more time to visit churches. The documentation attests that during this period, a very intriguing evolution was taking place within him. In May of 1804, he noted: "When I enter a church to place at the feet of the Eternal God my humble supplications, the idea that I am a member of that great family of which God himself is Head, the idea that I am so to speak in that situation the representative of my brothers, that I speak in their name and for them, seems to give my soul an in-

stant expansion, an elevation that it is difficult to express. I feel that the mission I am fulfilling is worthy of my origins".<sup>36</sup>

Such a text reveals unmistakably a great spiritual maturity. Then, there is the seventeen pages of "Remarques sur le Génie du Christianisme of Mr. de Chateaubriand." These notes date from January 1805. By reading them, "we can recognize Eugene's good judgment and in particular be astonished at his interest in and his knowledge of Christianity, apologetics, etc",<sup>37</sup> and of patristics. We see that faith is not for him a question of poetry, emotion, humanism or of the advancement of liberty, but an "essential matter of life eternal".<sup>38</sup> Likewise, he had a conscience which was sensitive to the exalted dignity of proclaiming the Word of God, the priestly vocation and the centrality of the message of the cross in communicating the Gospel.<sup>39</sup> Finally, during the last months of 1805 or at the beginning of 1806, he committed himself to the apostolate. He went from "garret to garret" visiting the poor and the sick. When the need arose, he made beds for the sick, swept out their hovels, banded their wounds, called the priest at the appropriate time and closed the eyes of "those he had cared for until their dying breath". "Several times a week", he visited the hospital where, he said, he went to "show honor and service to Jesus Christ in his suffering members".<sup>40</sup> On December 30, 1806, the Mayor of Aix offered to make him administrator of the prisons. Eugene accepted; he subsequently offered this consideration: "I cannot tell you how much it costs a heart such as mine to live, so to speak amidst the miseries and sufferings of every kind and especially when I consider the hardness of the people and their perseverance in evil".<sup>41</sup>

## 2. EUGENE RESPONDS TO LOVE

We have seen how, "at various times [...] and in various different ways" (Hebrews 1:1) through persons and events, God showed himself on Eugene's path. That brings us to the year 1807. An objective analysis of Eugene's writings reveals that it was a case of a defining moment in his journey. At that moment, even if we do not know exactly how everything happened, God "spoke through his Son" (Hebrews 1:2) by depicting before his very eyes "the features of Jesus Christ crucified" (Galatians 3:1). One could say that this Good Friday was the day of God's victory in Eugene's life. God, who had been in constant pursuit of him for a long time, finally captured him and made him fall in love with him. Faced with the revelation of the love of God in Christ crucified, stripped and powerless, but filled with inexpressible attraction in a tireless search for sinners which he led with an extraordinary gentleness, Eugene could not remain indifferent. He owed it to himself to respond. His first response came from the heart.

### *a. A response from the heart*

The first response of his heart was silence and tears.<sup>42</sup> Then came wonder. Eugene was aware that words were powerless to express what he had undergone from "this infinite, incomprehensible goodness".<sup>43</sup> But, at the same time, he felt compelled to tell people about it. The first thing to astonish him was the lavishness with which God poured his blessings "without limit" upon him.<sup>44</sup> His astonishment grew when he understood that God was a totally unselfish benefactor. In total awe, he exclaimed: "He put up with me, he affected not to see the damnable injuries that I continually inflicted on him;

never changing, he opened to me his loving heart. [...] How long did it last, this prodigious scene of love on the one hand, of barbarity, folly on the other?<sup>45</sup> He became aware that God, in spite of his “sovereign majesty”,<sup>46</sup> did not look upon our sins; in his omnipotence, he did not want to act toward Eugene as “master as he well could”,<sup>47</sup> but he shows himself to be “a tender and dear father” who struggles for his happiness. Thus Eugene’s wonder went beyond the level of intellect, and embraced his whole being, turning into adoration: “[...] *glorificabo animam tuam in aeternum quia misericordia tua magna est super me* [Forever I will give glory to your name; great is your love for me]”.<sup>48</sup>

Adoration was not “an exercise of piety” in Eugene’s life; his whole life was filled with delight and wonder. Like the lover, he sought the most fitting name he could find for God. He called him: “Excellent, rich, generous Master”. He cried out to him: “O my Savior, o my Father, o my Love!” “my good Jesus.” But never satisfied in his endeavor, he preferred “to admire his goodness”.<sup>49</sup> In his life, adoration therefore became the “happy necessity of centering its thoughts solely on this divine Saviour, of serving him with more ardour, loving him without cease”.<sup>50</sup> Saying a great deal about his experiences, we can say that Eugene loved to remain in silent adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, “touched and permeated by love.” His manner of adoration was that of the silent presence of lovers, side by side. With great intimacy he poured forth “his heart into the bosom of the one who loved him”; he rejoiced “to spend some moments in his company”<sup>51</sup>; he stood in awe of “his excessive [...] goodness”.<sup>52</sup>

Another sentiment “permeated” the heart of Eugene, that is, *gratitude*, the

gratitude of the person who felt he has been pardoned and loved despite his faults. To show his gratitude gradually became one of Eugene’s major preoccupations. It seems that God rightly used this sentiment to introduce him into an ever deeper intimacy. To the Eugene who states that he is appreciative of even “an insignificant favor which flows from the heart”, God simply showed his magnanimous heart and so won his “eternal” gratitude.<sup>53</sup> Contrary to what one could have expected, the relationship between Eugene and God was not that of a debtor and his benefactor, or the sinner and the one sinned against. Not at all. The relationship was one of *a tender love of friendship*.<sup>54</sup> Here is a passage from his numerous retreat notes: “My God, that is all over henceforth and for my whole life. You, you alone will be the sole object to which will tend all my affections and my every action. To please you, act for your glory, will be my daily task, the task of every moment of my life. I wish to live only for you, I wish to love you alone and all else in you and through you. I despise riches, I trample honours under foot; you are my all, replacing all else. My God, my love and my all [...]”.<sup>55</sup> The desire expressed in this prayer is in no way insignificant, just one desire among many others. There is no ambiguity in his words when Eugene says: “My Lord, my Father, my love, bring me to love you; this only do I ask, for I know full well that is everything. Give me your love”.<sup>56</sup> No less eloquent is the experience of celebrating his first Mass with the intention of obtaining “the love of God above all things”.<sup>57</sup>

#### *b. A vital response*

Without a doubt, it was love which infused dynamism into Eugene’s life. Nonetheless, he was far from shutting

himself up in sentimentalism and spiritually exclusive intimacy. He was brought to express his love in daily life.

After his Good Friday experience, we find in Eugene a particularly strong concern to be docile to God. This is merely the expression of the love of one who *desires to form one single will with the Beloved* and who is happy when the Beloved feels free to do what he wants with him. In all things, Eugene wanted to act “only for God”, without “getting back anything” for himself or any thought for men’s opinions.<sup>58</sup> He was not satisfied with external obedience only; he desired to sincerely love the will of God: “[...] I will try to arrive at a loving preference for what is conformed to the will of the Master, which alone must rule not only my actions, but even my affections”.<sup>59</sup> In his seeking the will of God, we can note one more characteristic of those who have fallen in love; along with his docility, we find in him the desire for “total abandonment”. In this abandonment, he wanted to be radical, to the point of “sacrifice of himself” and of “renouncing himself”.<sup>60</sup> If it is true that Eugene sought and abetted the will of God, there were times in his life when he admitted, “The ways of Providence are a deep mystery to me”<sup>61</sup> and that the “decrees” and “secrets” of the Lord are “unfathomable”.<sup>62</sup> His attitude was always the same: “Let us adore the designs of God”.

In pursuing the dynamic of love, Eugene went even further; he felt the desire of *making his own the mission of the Beloved*. Becoming aware that Jesus had been sent especially to evangelize the poor, he conceived the desire to “follow in the footsteps of [...] Jesus Christ”, (*Preface*) and be co-workers with the Savior, the co-redeemers of the human race.<sup>63</sup> As a motto for the Con-

gregation, he chose the words Jesus Christ used to describe his own mission (Luke 4:18). The desire “to follow Christ” made of Eugene a missionary to the poor. This desire led him even further. He was not satisfied with sharing the mission of Christ; he wanted to be united with him. This desire embraced his whole life to the innermost recess of his heart. Eugene dreamed of *uniting himself to Christ to the point of identification*. The term “conformity with Jesus Christ” constantly recurred in his writings. He wanted to be “like” him, to imitate him with all his strength and to “live” from his life.<sup>64</sup> During his preparation to receive the priesthood, he noted: “I applied myself to consider our Lord Jesus Christ, the lovable model to whom I must, as is my desire with his grace, conform myself”.<sup>65</sup> He wrote: “How indeed can I say: *Vivo ego iam non ego vivit enim in me Christus* [Galatians 2:20]. There are no half-measures, if I want to be like Jesus Christ in glory, I must first resemble him in his humiliations and sufferings, like Jesus crucified; let us try therefore to conform in all I do to this divine model so as to be able to address to the faithful these words of St. Paul: *imitatores mei estote sicut et ego Christi* [I Corinthians 4:16]”.<sup>66</sup> This desire for union with Christ to the point of identification with him reached its high point in his aspiration for martyrdom. His whole life long Eugene dreamed of martyrdom. While still at the seminary, it was his desire “to follow my Master on to Calvary”.<sup>67</sup> From the time he became a priest, “every day at the elevation of the chalice”, he asked to die a “martyr of charity”.<sup>68</sup> He “ardently” desired this kind of death,<sup>69</sup> and envied the lot of those who were able “to sacrifice themselves for their brothers [...] like our Divine Master who died for

the salvation of men".<sup>70</sup> In the first article of the original text of the Constitutions and Rules, Eugene communicated his ideal of his Congregation: "The end of this Institute [...] is above all things [...] to imitate the virtues and example of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ".<sup>71</sup> Later on, as he was developing his thought, he expressed himself in even bolder, stronger fashion: "In a word, they will strive to become other Jesus Christs".<sup>72</sup> It would be difficult to say more. For Eugene "it is all there".<sup>73</sup>

Before dying on May 21, 1861, he told his Oblates: "Among yourselves, practice charity, charity, charity – and outside, zeal for the salvation of souls." Spontaneously, we recognize here the spiritual testament which summarizes the true spirit with which he wanted to see the life of his Congregation imbued.<sup>74</sup> To grasp the full richness of this testament, we cannot be satisfied with only the moral aspect of love. We have to see it in the context of "the history of love" which Eugene lived with God. "Anyone who has not personally experienced in his own life what it means to have been loved by Christ and to have cost Him the price of his blood can never entirely grasp the full meaning of the Oblate vocation. [...] But he is not an apostolic man, indeed, he cannot be one, unless he has first of all encountered Christ personally in his own life, and personally known Christ's love for him. Father de Mazenod's initial experience consisted in precisely that".<sup>75</sup> This experience of the love of Christ is the very source from which the charism flowed.

KAZIMIERZ LUBOWICKI

## II. CHARITY, A DISTINCTIVE TRAIT OF THE OBLATE FAMILY

Eugene de Mazenod shared his experience of love with the whole Congregation in such a way that charity has become the distinctive trait of the Oblates.

He forged an unbreakable link between fraternal charity and the missionary work of his Institute. The last testament of the Founder remains one of the moments when his teaching was at its zenith. Indeed, if our personal relationship to Christ is the source of our life and our apostolate, fraternal charity is the fruit and the sign of the new life born from him.

### 1. FRATERNAL CHARITY AT THE HEART OF OUR CHARISM

It is fraternal charity which makes of us a community, which makes us witnesses, which makes us Oblates. It is at the heart of our charism; it is an essential part of our family spirit; it is characteristic of our identity.<sup>76</sup> We are all familiar with the last words of the Founder: "Among yourselves practice charity..., charity..., charity". But it was not only at the end of his life that he achieved this farsighted vision; this, in effect, was the vision he had from the beginning; he adopted it as the foundation of formation and of the animation of the Institute. In 1830, he visited the community of Notre-Dame du Laus. The lack of regularity he saw there distressed him. In a subsequent letter written from Fribourg, he revisited this theme. Reminding his readers of the importance of observing the Rules, he pointed out the uniting principle of our whole life: "[...] So must there be a common spirit which vivifies this particular body. The spirit of Bernardine is

not that of the Jesuit. Ours also is our own. Those who have not grasped this, through not having made a good novitiate, are among us like dislocated members. They make the whole body suffer and are not themselves at ease. It is indispensable that they put themselves back in their place". To illustrate this spirit he speaks of charity in its three-fold expression: towards God, towards our confreres and towards others. "Charity is the pivot on which our whole existence turns. That which we ought to have for God makes us renounce the world and has vowed us to his glory by all manner of sacrifice, were it even to be our lives [...]. Charity for our neighbour is again an essential part of our spirit. We practice it first amongst us by loving each other as brothers, by considering our Society only as the most united family which exists on the earth, by rejoicing over the virtues, the talents and other qualities that our brothers possess just as much as if we possessed them ourselves, in bearing with mildness the little faults that some have not yet overcome, covering them over with the mantle of the most sincere charity, etc., and as for the rest of mankind, in considering ourselves only as the servants of the Father of the family commanded to succour, to aid, to bring back his children by working to the utmost..."<sup>77</sup>

Charity is not a possession exclusive to the Oblates. It is the new commandment given by Jesus to his disciples. Vatican II defines religious life itself in terms of charity. This is the most fundamental rule in the exercise of the mission, as John Paul II reminds us in his missionary encyclical.<sup>78</sup>

So what is particularly new in Oblate charity? Above all, the Founder wanted us to be authentically Christian, genuine religious, zealous missionaries.

It was his desire that our communities should be lived in the likeness of the original Christian community such as is described in the Acts of the Apostles. The expression "one heart and one soul" brings us back to that ideal that was intimately connected with witness and apostolic fruitfulness. He wanted to see us continue the spirit and the works of the suppressed religious orders. In other words, he wanted us to live the soul of consecrated life: "Urged on in this path by the charity which the Holy Spirit pours into their hearts, they always live more for Christ and for his Body which is the Church".<sup>79</sup> It was his wish that we be zealous missionaries, that is, missionaries filled with an active and creative love for the souls loved and saved by Christ.

And yet the Founder demanded something more specific in our way of living charity. This specificity is noticed by others. Those who attend chapters and congresses of different institutes and then visit us tell us that they notice something different precisely in the way we live our fraternity, the way we treat each other, our ever simple and open friendliness in our family life. This fraternal complexion colors our obedience and our way of living community life. Even if we cannot precisely define what it is that particularly distinguishes us from other religious, the important thing is to be ourselves and to live in an authentic manner that to which we are called.

Father Maurice Gilbert, founder of the review *Vie Oblate Life*, and a great specialist on the Founder brought to a close his article on the last words of Saint Eugene by saying this: "Thomas Merton [...] makes this simple observation: 'The Franciscan ideal of poverty seems to play the same role in their spiritual life as silence and solitude

plays for purely contemplative orders.' The two ways, in fact, meet at the end: purification of the soul and union with God. It is equally legitimate to ask: for the Oblate, what is the road to sanctity, the Oblate way of sharing in the paschal mystery of Christ? It is certainly not the silence and solitude of the contemplative, nor even the poverty of the Franciscan. Might it not be precisely the ideal of fraternal and apostolic charity? [...] Taking up again Thomas Merton's wording, we think we can say: the Oblate ideal of charity seems to play the same role in their spiritual life as that of silence and solitude in the lives of the purely contemplative orders. The 'testament of the heart of the Founder' expresses well 'the soul of our soul'.<sup>80</sup> I agree with this conclusion and, to charity I would add zeal. The Oblate ideal of charity and zeal is a characteristic of our charism. It is the main and most important way for our interior purification and our union with God, our road to holiness. It is our way of communicating the paschal mystery.

The Constitutions and Rules of 1982 emphasize even more the demands of charity. They present an ideal of community which is first of all Gospel inspired, and therefore infused by charity, and only then functional and structural. The word "charity" is used to indicate fraternal relationships inspired by faith, whereas that of "love" points above all to relationships with God<sup>81</sup> and with the Church. In continuity with the Founder's thought, the term charity is associated with that of obedience<sup>82</sup> to indicate an important complementarity. The term "brother" or "fraternal" is used to designate all Oblates<sup>83</sup> and their type of relationships.<sup>84</sup>

Constitution 37 points to the essential relationship between charity, community, witness and mission.<sup>85</sup> "By

growing in unity of heart and mind, we bear witness before the world that Jesus lives in our midst and unites us in order to send us out to proclaim God's reign" (C 37). Charity and witness are attached in a special way to the vow of chastity.<sup>85</sup>

The Constitutions and Rules of 1982 present two former texts of the Rule on fraternal charity. The one included in the section on apostolic community is from 1826. It stresses mutual support, a joyful charity and respect for one another (p. 46). The other dates from 1850 and is placed at the end, almost as a synthesis of the Constitutions and Rules. It extends an invitation for a renewal in the spirit of one's vocation and in apostolic boldness. Its final words are as follows: "Mindful of these words, (which marvelously sum up our entire Rule), "all united in the bonds of the most intimate charity under the direction of the superiors", may they form but one heart and one soul" (p. 141).

## 2. CHARITY AND UNITY IN THE CONGREGATION

In the Founder's mind, charity was not limited to the local community, but made of it an intimate and dynamic source of life for the mission. Charity should embrace the entire Congregation in all its members and all its communities. It should create a unity which enables people to overcome difficulties and to make the whole Congregation missionary.<sup>86</sup> In the writings of Saint Eugene, there is a surprising fact which reveals his prophetic sense. At a time when the Oblates were almost all French and all knew each other personally, he insisted on the link between charity and unity. Today, such a unity takes on much greater importance in view of our geographical spread and the diversity of our cultures.

Eugene de Mazenod wanted his Congregation to be one united family, one body, one structure, one tree. Towards the end of his life, he wrote to the Oblates of Canada: "However far away you are from the centre of the Congregation, remember that you must live the life of the family of which you are a part. It is a consolation at the ends of the earth, where you are, to think that you are living the same life as and in intimate communion with your brothers scattered over the entire surface of the globe".<sup>87</sup> Again: "Let us rejoice then mutually over all the good done by our brethren in the four quarters of the world. With us, it is wholly a question of solidarity. Each works for all and all for each. Oh! how beautiful, how touching is the communion of the Saints?"<sup>88</sup>

The person of Eugene de Mazenod became a central element of this bond of unity. His spiritual fatherhood, fruit of his own particular charism as founder, unites all Oblates among themselves.<sup>89</sup> He often mentions the relationship which exists between him and them: "a relationship springing from the heart and which forms true family ties between us [...] this, I have not come across anywhere else. [...] I am saying that it is this sentiment, which I know comes from Him who is the source of all charity, which has evoked in the hearts of my children this reciprocity of love which forms the distinctive character of our beloved family." A little earlier in this letter he had said: "I would want all the scholastic brothers to be imbued with the family spirit which ought to exist among us."<sup>90</sup>

We are very familiar with his last instructions before his death: "Among yourselves practice charity, charity, charity – and outside, zeal for the sal-

vation of souls." Less well known, but every bit as significant was what he enjoined upon Bishop Hippolyte Guibert when the latter was administering the Viaticum to him. He instructed him to tell the Oblates: "[...] two things in his name that he had always loved us and would always love us, and that he wants us, for our part, to love each other as brothers; that this mutual affection would make us happy, holy and strong to do good".<sup>91</sup> He really considered charity among his Oblates as important, and he saw in this the common spirit which gave life to the whole Congregation.

The Founder gave us an example by loving his Oblates intensely. Some superficial readers are even scandalized at the affectionate tenor of his letters to some among his Oblates. On the contrary, this is the kind of love Saint Eugene wanted for all his Oblates – but not only for them – a gift of God, an attitude like Christ's, a means of achieving true sanctity. He wrote to Father Baret: "You are aware, my very dear son, that my big failing is to love with a real passion the children God in his goodness has given me. No mother's love comes close to it".<sup>92</sup> And to Father Anthony Mouchette: "I love my sons immeasurably more than any human person could love them. That is a gift that I have received from God, for which I do not cease to thank him, because it flows from one of his most beautiful attributes [...]".<sup>93</sup> Two years later, he wrote to the same person: "Often I have told the good Lord that, since he has given me a mother's heart and sons who merit my love under so many titles, he must allow me to love them immeasurably. This I do in good conscience. It seems to me, dearly loved son, that the more I love someone like yourself, the more I love

God who is the source and bond of our mutual affection".<sup>94</sup>

In his Diary, he explains the reason for his sentiments that are so strong: "I declare that I cannot grasp how those who do not love human persons who deserve to be loved, can love God. [...] Let him who may be tempted to find fault with me know that I little fear his judgment and that I could forcefully prove to him that I have every reason to thank God for having given me a heart that is able better to understand that of Jesus Christ our Master, who has made, animates and inspires mine better than those cold egotistic logicians who apparently put their heart into their brain, and don't know how to love anyone because, in the final analysis, they love only themselves. [...] There is no half measure, "So this is the commandment that he has given us, that anyone who loves God must also love his brother" (1 John 4:21). Let us study Saint John, fathom the heart of Saint Peter and his love for his divine Master, and especially let us deeply probe all that flows from the loving heart of Jesus Christ not only for all men, but especially for the Apostles and Disciples, and then let them dare to come and preach to us a love that is speculative, without feelings or affection!"

Because of his deep love for them, the Founder demanded that his Oblates write to him regularly. He would respond with marks of affection or of rebuke. He communicated with them in prayer, delighted in their visits, suffered because of their lack of fraternal charity, a failing he judged with great severity.<sup>96</sup> Even if it was only now and again that he set forth his theoretical teachings on charity, for all that, they are nonetheless very rich in content.<sup>97</sup>

### III. THE SUPERIORS GENERAL

The Superiors General came back time and again to the theme of fraternal charity<sup>98</sup>. Father Joseph Fabre, successor to Saint Eugene, wrote: "Our vocation calls upon us to have only one spirit among us; we should be happy about this. But it also requires that there be only one love and it bids us all to love each other like real brothers, sons of the same father. No doubt, when we enter religious life, we take with us our faults and our personal problems; community life helps us to get rid of them or at least teaches us to endure them. It is through the affection we bear for each other that the genuine Oblates of Mary Immaculate are to be recognized. That will be the distinctive sign among ourselves and a distinctive sign to those outside as well. Consequently, we must hold each other in high regard and love each other. To be sure, this affection cannot and should not lead us to entertain illusions about our very real faults, nor about the qualities that we lack. [...] Let us all revive within us the love of our beloved family, in the love of all our brothers, in fond submission to our superiors and to our Rules, in order to bring to fulfillment more and more among us our beloved Father's deathbed wish: "*Zeal for the salvation of souls ... charity... charity... charity...*".<sup>99</sup>

In his circular letters, he returns very often to the theme of love as a characteristic trait of the Oblate. In 1863, he wrote: "One word about the virtue that should characterize the Oblate of Mary Immaculate, fraternal charity, charity for souls: That is our special virtue: *Sicut fratres habitantes in unum... arcissimis charitatis vinculis connexi* (Constitutions). Our venerated Father recommended to us in all sorts of ways the practice of charity. During his

life, he gave us some admirable examples of this. [...] What did his dying lips enjoin upon us? Charity, always charity."<sup>100</sup> Writing in 1865, he exhorted: "My beloved brothers, let us secure the bonds which unite us and which tie us to our superiors: Let us form one and the same family, ordered according to the will of God."<sup>101</sup>

Charity is "the virtue of predilection for his Oblates, who everywhere are distinguished by this sign, just like in former times the early Christians were recognized, and we can say of the Oblates what we said of those Christians."<sup>102</sup> "Always and everywhere, may we be recognized by this sign."<sup>103</sup>

Father Fabre's last exhortation in 1892 is consonant with his entire teaching: "Let us love one another as our Lord Jesus Christ loved us. More and more let us remember our venerated Father's injunction; may charity always be our driving force on earth to continue to be our bond of unity in heaven. Amen!"<sup>104</sup>

Father Louis Soullier continues in the same vein when he states: "May the spirit of love and charity which should be the distinctive trait of the Oblate of Mary Immaculate always reign more and more [...]."<sup>105</sup>

Father Cassien Augier takes up the theme of charity as an Oblate characteristic when he asks the whole Congregation: "Where are we when it comes to the virtue of charity that has been bequeathed to us as the characteristic trait – in some ways the family spirit of the Oblate? How do we rate ourselves? In what manner do we speak about each other?"<sup>106</sup> In France, the suppression of religious congregations and the dispersal of their members gave the Superior General an opportunity to urge even more unity as a fruit of charity: "A union, a stronger more intimate

union of spirits and hearts. That is the grace that Our Lord asked for his disciples: "*Ut sint unum, sicut et nos unum sumus* (John 17:22). May they be one as we are one [...] Let us remain united and we will be strong and the most violent attacks against us will be ineffectual. This union already exists. [...] Circumstances should secure and strengthen the bonds of charity. More than ever, we should be only one heart and one soul with our superiors and our brothers."<sup>107</sup>

Father August Lavillardière's wish was also that of seeing the Congregation united in fidelity to its vocation. "May this union be always the characteristic trait of our beloved Congregation! Union of minds, union of hearts, union in our mutual relationships, union in the observance of our holy Rules, union in our apostolic traditions! [...] It will enable us to attain the goal of our sublime mission: Is it not the source of strength, of peace, of holiness!"<sup>108</sup>

Faced with the growth of the Congregation and its constant expansion, Bishop August Dontenwill felt the need of confirming the bonds of unity, especially by a better communication of news. In the review, *Missions*, he saw one of the most appropriate tools for fostering mutual knowledge, an indispensable element for unity in order to "prevent distance from becoming the cause of the disintegration of fraternal bonds. [...] We might be tempted to say that the providential growth of our Institute makes it even more important for us to become informed as to what is going on in the various parts of our world. When we visit you, it is a pleasure for us to hear from all over concerned questions on the activities of our brothers sent afar off and that we had the joy of seeing in previous years. But it is a hard thing for us to sense in these

inquiries the underlying anxiety or distress that lies hidden or tries to remain hidden, badly concealing this reflection which has sometimes escaped from the lips of one or the other: "The Congregation is growing so large! We no longer know anything about each other!" [...] We have already mentioned the moving concern that we have noted everywhere to have news of the Congregation. Thank God for it! We have been able to visit almost all the provinces and vicariates and we can see the intense union which exists among all the branches of the family. Bishop de Mazenod's work has grown admirably well. His activity has extended itself to the five continents of the world and we could never thank God and our Immaculate Mother enough for this growth, an undoubted sign of blessing. But we should not forget that this prosperity has been given to us only as an additional gift: the final prayer of our venerated Father had as its object, zeal and charity. But before we consider the unrestricted numerical growth of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, it is our duty to desire and ensure their supernatural dedication and their fraternal union".<sup>109</sup>

Father Theodore Labouré stressed once more the link between the international character of the Congregation and its unity. "For the man who has traveled, it is obvious that all over, no matter what their nationality, Oblates are Oblates, beloved and devoted sons of Bishop de Mazenod. This family love was one of the most striking characteristics of our chapter of 1932".<sup>110</sup> In his report on the chapter of 1932, he wrote that he displayed his "concern to preserve and even develop the life of the Oblate family. [...] He made use of printed material, Oblate publications, writings of the Oblate family. These

publications can naturally be classified into two categories: the ones which have as their goal a strong unity among the members and with the head of the Oblate family from every country, every race, of every nation. The others allowed the Congregation to steep itself in its origins by communing more abundantly in the thought, the spirit and the very life of our venerated Founder and his first companions".<sup>111</sup>

In their writings, Fathers Leo Deschâtelets and Fernand Jetté once again studied in depth the traditional vision of charity as a characteristic element of Oblate life. The texts cited here below with reference to the pedagogy of charity express well the thought of Father Marcello Zago. He revisits this theme in his letter on fraternal charity addressed to the Oblates in first formation.

#### IV. THE PEDAGOGY OF CHARITY

Charity, writes Father Zago, is not something automatic or spontaneous. It is not comparable to a certain human love which is often blind. It is the prize of conquest, an asceticism. It is a sharing in the paschal mystery which entails both death and resurrection. It is a gift of the Holy Spirit.<sup>112</sup>

##### 1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF CHARITY

There are two characteristics of this virtue, similar to two sides of the same coin. Oblate charity must be incarnate and consecrated. That is, it must fulfill the requirements of persons consecrated to God and dedicated to the mission. To say that charity should be incarnate is to say that it should be concrete and whole. It includes the mind, the spirit, the heart and the senses, both internal

and external. It must be affective and effective, sensitive and obliging, attentive and creative. It demands mutual appreciation and respect, mutual help in personal growth and fidelity to one's vocation, the sharing of one's own life, one's interior life included. It becomes communion and interdependence that is not limited to specific areas. Basically, it opens up on all dimensions of our life, especially on the more important ones such as mission and consecration, the life of faith and of prayer, one's personal journey and human needs. "I do not say to you: love each other well, this recommendation would be ridiculous. But I do say to you: take care of each other and let each look after the health of all".<sup>113</sup>

Then, our fraternal love should be consecrated. That is, the forms it takes should express our special consecration to God. There are naturally different expressions and demands of love according to whether a person is married or living a celibate life in the world. To love as consecrated persons love, one has to allow oneself to be molded by the Word of God who enlightens our path and points out the way. Not only the texts on charity,<sup>114</sup> but the Word of God in its fullness makes us share in the attitudes of Christ. Measuring ourselves against this Word of God and fostering a genuine friendship with Jesus, we reach the point of being able "to love others as Jesus loves them" (R 12) [R 18b in CCR 2000]. It consists in a progressive identification with Christ who develops in us the habit of seeing "through the eyes of our crucified Saviour [...] the world which he redeemed with his blood (C 4) and setting out, like he did, to love all persons, starting with our brothers. Oblates are, then, ready "to sacrifice goods, talents, ease, self, even their life, for the love of Jesus

Christ, the service of the Church, and the sanctification of their brethren" (*Preface*).

In his love, the Founder allowed himself to be molded by the Word of God that he read and meditated on daily, and by his experience of Christ renewed in constant prayer. In his first commentary on the Rule, he wrote: "Closely united with Jesus Christ, their Head, his children will be one among themselves, very closely united by the bonds of the most ardent charity, living under the most perfect obedience, in order to acquire humility which is so necessary for them, *"arctissimis charitatis vinculis connexi"*. Hence they must not sulk at one another, not sadden one another through expressions of indifference or coldness. *"Arctissimis charitatis vinculis connexi, omnes sanctae obedientiae sub superiorum regimine exacte subiiciuntur"*. This does not apply only to the Superior General. What shall I say about murmuring? What about bias?"<sup>115</sup>

With regard to charity, the most difficult aspects to practice are mutual forgiveness when an injury and fraternal correction is involved. Among us there used to exist the tradition of a community exercise called "the coulpe". Perhaps it is because we forgot the deep meaning of this exercise that we dropped it.

Indeed, the document, *Witnessing as Apostolic Community*, contains statements that many people found impressive: "Hurts springing from our life or ministry are unavoidable and that is why the community plays a role in bringing about healing and reconciliation. When this service is not provided, the accumulation of misunderstandings destroys trust and renders community relationships superficial and formal" (no. 23, par. 4).

The ideal community is, in fact, non-existent; nor does perfect charity exist, not even among consecrated individuals who are in daily communion with the Lord. When faced with the difficulties and misunderstandings that arise among confreres in community, there is only one solution: mutual forgiveness and a fresh start on the road as the disciple of Jesus. The Gospel way is found in reconciliation, in recommitting oneself to love each other as brothers. In these situations, what Jesus said holds true for us as well: "For if you love those who love you, what right have you to claim any credit? [...] You must therefore be perfect just as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:43-48). We will, then, experience in an even greater degree the ideal situation of ancient times. "How good, how delightful it is for all to live together like brothers!" (Psalm 133:1)

Moreover, to carry other people's burdens (see Galatians 6:2), to give life, (see John 15:13), to forgive each other (see Ephesians 4:32), to offer mutual assistance fostering growth and to overcome one's faults are all integral parts of fraternal charity. Community is genuine when there is mutual assistance, forgiveness and fraternal correction. The Founder wrote to a director of the seminary at Ajaccio: "[...] Let us devote ourselves to prayer and humility, and may the charity of Jesus Christ inspire us, without it we run the risk of becoming mere Pharisees, well able to see the speck of dust in our brother's eyes but unable to see the beam which afflicts our own."<sup>116</sup>

## 2. A WITNESS FOR TODAY'S WORLD

Charity is of particular importance in our world as well as in the life of the Congregation today. Indeed, we are be-

coming a Congregation that is ever more international and multi-cultural. It is only due to charity that our multi-ethnic communities can become authentic and witness to our world. International communities are becoming more and more frequent in our houses of formation in Latin America, Africa and even in North America and Europe, because modern society is becoming ever more pluralistic and multi-ethnic. Obviously, this situation brings with it specific challenges for an effective life in common which can overcome not only squabbles but superficial relationships as well. This situation stimulates our communities to build their foundations on the Gospel. Our life in common does not spring from or find its growth in bonds of flesh and blood or of culture, but in the call from Jesus Christ (see C 1) and in Gospel charity (see C 3) that make missionaries of us (see C 37).

The community which lives in charity is a response to our world that is divided, turned in on itself, dominated by selfishness and injustice.<sup>117</sup> "In a prophetic way it challenges the individualism found in today's society and the arbitrary use of power that is responsible for the plight of so many poor people. At the same time our community life offers grounds of hope to this world which is struggling to overcome its disintegration and fragmentation. Like Christ's gentle invitation to his banquet, our community life speaks with the meekness of an authority that invites but never imposes or coerces."<sup>118</sup>

A community where charity reigns is a sign of the new life that Christ has brought us. Community charity contributes an element of credibility to our ministry which calls people to reconciliation, going beyond selfishness to

reach solidarity and justice. It normally gives rise to vocations and conversions because it allows the Lord to work in us and through us. In conclusion, we end off like the Founder in his first circular letter of August 2, 1853: "In the meantime, brothers, we wish you happiness; try to grow perfect; help one another. Be united; live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. [...] The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Corinthians 13:11-13).<sup>119</sup>

FABIO CIARDI

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> One can find a first rate characterological portrait of Eugene de Mazenod in PIELORZ, Józef, *The Spiritual Life of Bishop de Mazenod, 1782-1812. A Critical Study*, Ottawa, Oblate Studies Edition, 1956, p. 227-238.

<sup>2</sup> "Portrait of Eugene for Mr. Duclaux, October 1808", in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 14, no. 30, p. 67 & 68.

<sup>3</sup> Retreat in preparation for the priesthood, 1-21 December, 1811, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 14, no. 95, p. 218.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 215-216.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 215.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 218; and Retreat before episcopal ordination, 7-14 October 1832, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 15, no. 166, p. 201 & 202.

<sup>7</sup> RICARD, Anthony Charles, *Monseigneur de Mazenod, évêque de Marseille, fondateur de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, Paris, 1892, p. 12.

<sup>8</sup> REY, I, p. 18-19.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 17-18; ARNOUX, A., in *Positio super virtutibus*, II, Romae, 1936, p. 870.

<sup>10</sup> MAZENOD, Eugene, Diary, in *Ecrits oblats*, I, vol. 16, p. 40-43 and REY I, p. 25.

<sup>11</sup> PIELORZ, Józef, op. cit., p. 89-92.

<sup>12</sup> Diary, in *Ecrits oblats*, I, vol. 16, p. 43. 53-55.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 56.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>15</sup> Letter of Charles Antoine de Mazenod to his son, October 26, 1801. Correspondence between Mr. de Mazenod and his son or his wife can be found in Aix, Méjanes Archives, Boisgeline section.

<sup>16</sup> Diary, in *Ecrits oblats*, I, vol. 16, p. 87.

<sup>17</sup> Letter from Charles Anthony de Mazenod to his son, May 2, 1802.

<sup>18</sup> Letter from Eugene to his father, October 21 & 22, 1799. Only a few letters from Eugene to his father have been published in volumes 14 and 15 of *Oblate Writings*, I. The originals can be found in Aix, Méjanes Archives, Boisgeline section.

<sup>19</sup> Letters from Eugene to his father, November 4 & 7, 1799, May 3, 1802.

<sup>20</sup> Diary, in *Ecrits oblats*, I, vol. 16, p. 87.

<sup>21</sup> Letter from Charles Antoine de Mazenod to his wife, May 14, 1802.

<sup>22</sup> Letters from Eugene to his father, November 15 and December 3, 1806. *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 14, p. 35.

<sup>23</sup> Diary, in *Ecrits oblats*, I, vol. 16, p. 91-94; letter from Eugene to Francis Cannizzaro, July 1816, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 15, no. 136, p. 124 & 125; see BEAUDOIN, Yvon, *L'itinerario spirituale del beato Eugenio de Mazenod*, Frascati, 1988, p. 25.

<sup>24</sup> Notes on "Raison, folie, chacun son mot", in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 14, no. 2, p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> Letter from Eugene to his father, May 2, 1802.

<sup>26</sup> Letter from Eugene to his father, May 3 and 10, 1802.

<sup>27</sup> Letter to his mother, September 3, 1802.

<sup>28</sup> Letter to his father, May 16, 1802.

<sup>29</sup> Letter to his sister, March 12, 1802.

<sup>30</sup> Letter to his father, May 14 and 15, 1802.

<sup>31</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Letter to his father, May 9, 1802.

<sup>33</sup> Letters to his father, April 12, June 7 and 29, 1804, March 21, 1805.

<sup>34</sup> Letter to his father, March 9, 1804.

<sup>35</sup> Letter to his father, April 12, 1804.

<sup>36</sup> "Miscellanées", May 1804, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 14, no. 7, p. 10.

<sup>37</sup> BEAUDOIN, Yvon, note 32 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 14, no. 8, p. 11.

<sup>38</sup> Letters from Eugene to Emmanuel

Gautier de Claubry, in November 1805, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 14, no. 13, p. 24 & 25; to Emile Dedons de Pierrefeu, March 20, 1806; to his father, July 4, 1806, *ibidem*, no. 17, p. 30 & 31, and to his grandmother, August 7, 1806.

<sup>39</sup> See Courtès' reflections on a speech delivered by Mr. Blanche, December 2, 1806, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 14, no. 19, p. 33 & 34.

<sup>40</sup> REY, I, p. 54-55.

<sup>41</sup> Letter to his father, January 19, 1807.

<sup>42</sup> Retreat, December 1814, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 15, no. 130, p. 81.

<sup>43</sup> Retreat, December 1811, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 14, no. 95, p. 216.

<sup>44</sup> Spiritual conference, 1810, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 14, no. 77, p. 173.

<sup>45</sup> Retreat in preparation for the priesthood, "On man's end", December 1811, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 14, no. 95, p. 217-218.

<sup>46</sup> Retreat, December 1814, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 15, no. 130, p. 95.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>48</sup> Spiritual conference, March 19, 1809, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 14, no. 48, p. 107.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibidem*; also retreat, December 1811, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 14, no. 95, p. 214.

<sup>50</sup> Retreat made on entering the seminary, 1808, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 14, no. 28, p. 58-59.

<sup>51</sup> Rule drawn up on my retreat in Aix, December 2, 1812, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 15, no. 109, p. 23.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 23.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 12.

<sup>54</sup> See, for example, ARNOUX, A., *Positio super virtutibus II, Romae*, 1939, p. 875; LEMIUS, J.B., *ibidem*, p. 878.

<sup>55</sup> Retreat in preparation for the priesthood, December 1811, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 14, no. 95, p. 217.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 214.

<sup>57</sup> My Mass intentions, First Mass, Christmas Eve, 1811, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 14, no. 100, p. 230.

<sup>58</sup> Retreat in preparation for the priesthood, December 1811, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 14, no. 95, p. 227.

<sup>59</sup> Retreat of 1816, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 15, no. 139, p. 131.

<sup>60</sup> Eugene's self-portrait, for Mr. Duclaux,

October 1808, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 14, no. 30, p. 65-69.

<sup>61</sup> Letter of the Founder to Father Casimir Aubert, September 26, 1836, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 8, no. 590, p. 253.

<sup>62</sup> Letters to Fathers Vincent Mille, May 29, 1839, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 9, no. 692, p. 125, and Joseph Francis Arnoux, October 22, 1853, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 3, no. 66, p. 104.

<sup>63</sup> Constitutions and Rules, first part, chapter one, par. 3, *Nota bene*, in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 15.

<sup>64</sup> Retreat in preparation for the priesthood, December 1811, General Resolution, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 14, no. 101, p. 231 & 232.

<sup>65</sup> Retreat in preparation for the priesthood, December 1811, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 14, no. 95, p. 225.

<sup>66</sup> Retreat of December 1814, fifth day, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 15, no. 130, p. 97.

<sup>67</sup> Spiritual conference, March 19, 1809, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 14, no. 48, p. 110.

<sup>68</sup> Retreat for the episcopate, October 1832, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 15, no. 166, p. 250.

<sup>69</sup> Letter to Father Tempier, July 19, 1835, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 8, no. 523, p. 168.

<sup>70</sup> Letter to Father Bruno Guigues, August 1, 1835, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 8, 529, p. 175.

<sup>71</sup> Constitutions and Rules, first part, chapter one, par. 1, in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 13.

<sup>72</sup> In Constitutions and Rules of 1818, second part, chapter one, "Of the other principal observances", *ibidem*, p. 55.

<sup>73</sup> Retreat of October 1831, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 15, no. 163, p. 187.

<sup>74</sup> TEMPIER, Francis de Paule Henry, Circular letter no. 2, January 29, 1862, p. 2; DUBOIS, E., *Positio super virtutibus*, II, p. 1034; GANDAR, P. E., *ibidem*, p. 1007; LEMIUS, J. B., *ibidem*, p. 1012; GILBERT, Maurice, "Les 'Novissima verba' du Fondateur", in *Etudes oblates*, 28 (1969), p. 45-59; Constitutions and Rules, 1982, C 32.

<sup>75</sup> JETTÉ, Fernand, *The Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate*, Rome, General House, 1985, p. 52.

<sup>76</sup> The second part of this article contains

part of a letter written in 1994 by Father Marcello Zago, Superior General, to the young Oblates in first formation, in *Documentation O.M.I.*, no. 197, 1994, 23 p.

<sup>77</sup> Letter to Father Hippolyte Guibert, July 29, 1830, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol 7, no. 350, p. 202 & 203.

<sup>78</sup> See *Redemptoris missio*, no. 60.

<sup>79</sup> *Perfectae caritatis*, I; see also 15.

<sup>80</sup> GILBERT, Maurice, "Les 'Novissima verba' du Fondateur", in *Etudes oblates*, 28 (1969), p. 58-59.

<sup>81</sup> See C 2, 12, 33, 34, 59, 63, 73.

<sup>82</sup> See C 3, 38, 81.

<sup>83</sup> See C 42, 71, 80, 81, 84.

<sup>84</sup> See C 18, 35, 53, 89, 113.

<sup>85</sup> See C 15, 16.

<sup>86</sup> See ARENA, Domenico, *Unità e missione nelle lettere del beato Eugenio de Mazenod*, Rome, Gregorian University, 1991.

<sup>87</sup> Letter to Fathers Augustine Maisonneuve and Jean Tissot, November 24, 1858, in *Selected Texts*, no. 350, p. 400-401.

<sup>88</sup> Letter to Father Jean-Marie Fleury Baudrand, January 11, 1850, in *Selected Texts*, no. 346, p. 398.

<sup>89</sup> See DEMERS, Francis, "La paternité du Fondateur", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 54, (1995), p. 17-29.

<sup>90</sup> Letter to Father Anthony Mouchette, December 2, 1854, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 11, no. 1256, p. 253-254.

<sup>91</sup> TEMPIER, Henry, Circular letter no. 2, January 29, 1861, in *Circ. adm.*, I (1850-1885), p. 2, also, in *Oblate Writings*, II, vol. 2, no. 116, p. 172.

<sup>92</sup> Letter of January 17, 1851, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 11, no. 1057, p. 30.

<sup>93</sup> Letter of April 24, 1855, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 11, no. 1268, p. 266.

<sup>94</sup> Letter of March 22, 1857, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 12, no. 1345, p. 49.

<sup>95</sup> Diary, September 4, 1857, in *Selected Texts*, no. 327, p. 381-383.

<sup>96</sup> See *Selected Texts*, nos. 324-326, 329-332, 341, 343-344, 349.

<sup>97</sup> See LUBOWICKI, Kazimierz, *Mystère et dynamisme de l'Amour dans la vie du Bx Eugène de Mazenod*, Teresianum, Rome, 1990.

<sup>98</sup> For this third part, we have relied on

Maurice Gilbert's article, "La charité fraternelle chez les Oblats d'après les circulaires administratives des Supérieurs généraux", in *Etudes oblates*, 28 (1969), p. 60-79.

<sup>99</sup> Circular letter no. 11, March 21, 1861, in *Circ. adm.*, I (1850-1885), p. 8-10,

<sup>100</sup> Circular letter no. 13, November 21, 1863, in *Circ. adm.*, I (1850-1885), p. 13.

<sup>101</sup> Circular letter, no. 15, March 19, 1865, in *Circ. adm.*, I, (1850-1885), p. 15-16.

<sup>102</sup> Circular letter no. 24, March 5, 1872, in *Circ. adm.*, I, (1850-1885), p. 6-8.

<sup>103</sup> Circular letter no. 40, December 8, 1886, in *Circ. adm.*, II, (1886-1900), p. 3.

<sup>104</sup> Circular letter no. 46, September 21, 1892, in *Circ. adm.*, II (1886-1900), p. 6.

<sup>105</sup> Circular letter no. 55, January 1, 1894, in *Circ. adm.*, II (1886-1900), p. 6; see also circular letter no. 60, May 5, 1895, in *Circ. adm.*, II (1886-1900), p. 5.

<sup>106</sup> Circular letter no. 70, March 19, 1899, in *Circ. adm.*, II, (1886-1900), p. 23.

<sup>107</sup> Circular letter no. 76, May 3, 1903, in *Circ. adm.*, III, (1901-1921), p. 13.

<sup>108</sup> Circular letter no. 92, April 21, 1907, in *Circ. adm.*, III (1901-1921) p. 2-3.

<sup>109</sup> Circular letter no. 143, May 17, 1930, in *Circ. adm.*, IV (1922-1947), p. 3-4.

<sup>110</sup> Circular letter no. 152, December 3, 1932, in *Circ. adm.*, IV (1922-1947), p. 7-8.

<sup>111</sup> Circular letter no. 154, February 1, 1933, in *Circ. adm.*, IV (1922-1947), p. 10-11.

<sup>112</sup> This fourth part, like the second part, is taken from a letter written in 1994 by Father Marcello Zago, Superior General, to the young Oblates in first formation.

<sup>113</sup> Letter of Father Peter Nolasque Mye, June 19, 1825, in *Selected Texts*, no. 377, p. 425.

<sup>114</sup> See Matthew 5:43-48; John 13:17; Romans 12:9-16; 1 Corinthians 13; Galatians 5:13-24; 1 John 3:11-18.

<sup>115</sup> Retreat notes of October 8, 1831, in *Selected Texts*, no. 338, p. 392.

<sup>116</sup> Letter to Father Adrian Telmon, October 14, 1836, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 8, no. 594, p. 260.

<sup>117</sup> See *Witnessing as Apostolic Community*, nos. 3 & 4.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibidem*, no. 8.

<sup>119</sup> In *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 12, p. 187.

## CHASTITY

*Summary: Introduction. I Chastity in the life of the Founder. II Founder's rules of conduct. III. Chastity in the Constitutions and Rules: 1. From 1818 to 1966. 2. The Constitutions and Rules of 1966: a. A new context; b. A new "hierarchy of values"; c. A renewed vision. 3. The Constitutions and Rules of 1982: Position taken on the proposed text; b. The new translation of the text; c. Structural modification of the text. IV. Oblate spirituality and chastity: 1. The Christological dimension; 2. The prophetic dimension; 3. The communitarian dimension; 4. The Marian dimension. Conclusion.*

### INTRODUCTION

There is a wealth of written material treating of a great many aspects of celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom of God. In this present article, the issue will not be to present a theology of the vow of chastity, nor to summarize the fruit of the debates on this subject in the Church during the course of these most recent decades. Nor will it be an issue of giving practical advice or of setting forth an ascesis to live according to the evangelical counsels. The goal sought here is solely to present, based on the texts we actually have, the way Oblates have understood and still understand the vow of chastity in the context of their spirituality, taking into consideration the signs of the times while keeping in view the rules of conduct of the Church. Then, we will try to determine the bonds that exist between consecrated celibacy and certain elements of the Oblate charism. And finally, we will encourage our readers to reflect upon the possibilities offered by our spirituality to actually live this form of life so often challenged in our day.

### I. CHASTITY IN THE LIFE OF THE FOUNDER

In a letter treating of their son, Eugene, Charles Anthony de Mazenod,

father of the Founder, wrote from Palermo, May 6, 1814: "He is solid as a rock and pure as a lily".<sup>1</sup> At the time, Eugene was thirty-two years of age and had been a priest for two and a half years. Choice of the celibate life did not seem to have been difficult for him. Before his ordination to the diaconate, he wrote to his mother: "But in the case of the sub-diaconate, what is there to be afraid of? Is it the vow of chastity one takes? But in all conscience, think for a moment."<sup>2</sup> For him, it is not a case of denying the goodness of marriage whose natural and supernatural qualities he acknowledges. "Marriage is holy, therefore, it cannot be an obstacle to holiness", he wrote to his sister on the occasion of her marriage.<sup>3</sup> "Marriage is a good thing for those who are called to it".<sup>4</sup> As for himself, he feels no attraction to it. On the contrary, "I have such an aversion and distaste for marriage that the very idea makes me ill".<sup>5</sup> The marriage plans his mother had hatched for him a few years before already clearly revealed this discomfiture on his part.<sup>6</sup> Nowadays, we warn candidates to the priesthood not simply to "learn to live with" celibacy. They would have been obliged to warn the young Eugene to not simply "learn to live with" marriage merely for "family convenience".

The young nobleman had never indulged in amorous exploits. In his con-

tacts with young ladies his own age, he was so reserved that the friends of his group found it amusing and "he became the butt of some teasing about it".<sup>7</sup> This kind of reserve on the part of a young man could provoke some astonishment. But very much in line with the spirit of the times, was most fitting for a young priest. Did he not write about himself: "I have nothing to correct in regard to women with whom, in general, I have only very distant relationships and then surrounded by many precautions".<sup>8</sup> This reserve, however, is not an instinctive defense mechanism, but rather, no matter what one may think, a clearly chosen attitude.

In any case, he had always had a genuine abhorrence for all corrupted love and all coarse sensuality: He wrote from Paris in 1805: "[...] the mere sight of these things so vilely prostituted and their filthy admirers [...] have kept me away for ever from the Royal Palace at those times that seem to be devoted to debauchery".<sup>9</sup> We do have to point out here that Eugene de Mazenod was in no way a stranger to the secular social scene. In Palermo and Paris as in Aix, he had ample opportunity to make its acquaintance.<sup>10</sup> The reason why he was "solid as a rock and pure as a lily", was not because he had lived a sheltered life, but rather that in all circumstances, he willed to remain true to himself. In any case, he attributes everything to the grace of God. He wrote in the notes of his retreat in preparation for the priesthood: "I wasted my patrimony, if not with the daughters of Babylon, as the Lord, with inconceivable goodness, has always preserved me from [that] kind of stain [...]".<sup>11</sup>

In addition to his strength of character he had a deep yearning for friendship and love. However, the ideal he had and his expectations of it were so

exalted that he hardly touched upon the realm of eroticism or sensuality. "There is nothing carnal mixed up with these desires which issue from the noblest part of my heart. This is so true that I have always disdained any relationship with women, for those kinds of friendships between the different sexes find their origin more in the senses than in the heart."<sup>12</sup> The issue at stake here is not to determine the role played by his psychological dispositions, his education, his self-control, as opposed to the role played by grace. It seems, however, that his overall attitude allowed him more easily to make the decision to dedicate his life to an undivided love of God and of his fellow human beings. In any case, it grew to maturity and transformed itself into this "priestly charity" which, for him and so many Oblates after him, would become the driving force of their missionary commitment.

## II. THE FOUNDER'S RULES OF CONDUCT

To his mother, Eugene, the seminarian, wrote: "[...] the vow of chastity; it would [...] be very easy for me to show its great advantages".<sup>13</sup> It is unfortunate that he never did so. In contrast to the lavish praise and the detailed supporting reasons devoted to poverty and obedience in the 1818 Rule, in the case of chastity, he limited himself to this observation: "The virtue of chastity being most dear to the Son of God, and most necessary for an apostolic man [...]".<sup>14</sup> Significant as typical of the spirit of his time, but less convincing in our eyes, is his reference to "the purity of angels"<sup>15</sup>, that the missionaries are called to imitate. He would not comment further on the "advantages" of chastity.

Rules of conduct of another kind are more frequent, even though they are few in number. They especially concern prudence in dealing with women and “utmost prudence” in the confessional. “Wherefore, in treating with persons of the other sex, they will use the utmost reserve”.<sup>16</sup> Visiting lay people in their homes required the permission of the superior who would appoint a companion. The Founder took the entire text of the Rule concerning chastity from the Rule of Saint Alphonsus Liguori and that of Saint Ignatius Loyola. From the time of the Founder to the time of the reworking of the Rule in 1850, the only thing added has been the explicit reference to the vow. In Circular Letter no. 2 addressed to the Congregation, when it came to speaking about this article of the Rule, he said: “What shall I say about the vow of chastity? To be true to this precious virtue, we must not consider it too much to observe faithfully all that the Rule prescribes in order to make us men of God, true religious. [...] In addition, if one is not imbued with the spirit of mortification and penance, if one does not [...] strive to dominate the flesh, [...] one risks becoming the plaything of concupiscent [...]”<sup>17</sup>

The Founder saw mortification as the most effective means of protecting the virtue of chastity. He complained “with astonishment and grief” that some people “misunderstanding the spirit of our Institute”, relegate the practices of mortification to the novitiate and the scholasticate, whereas they have a much greater need of this “protective measure” than the people.<sup>18</sup> In this context, he reminds the reader once again of the article in the Rule: “It is forbidden to eat outside our own houses”.<sup>19</sup> And on this topic, he wrote: “Otherwise, would

we not be exposed to the dangers that the Rule wants to help the members of the Institute avoid with regard to chastity [...]?”<sup>20</sup>

It seems that the Founder had no reason to warn his Oblates about the dangers of the theater, shows and dancing. In his day and age, it was unthinkable that a religious should attend such events. On the other hand, he never ceased to beseech his sister,<sup>21</sup> his congregationists,<sup>22</sup> the people of his diocese<sup>23</sup> to stay away from them because “Is it not at these shows that this demon, this vice of impurity, since we have to use the word, reveals himself with the fullness of his power?”<sup>24</sup>

As far as religious were concerned, the Founder considered another kind of admonition to be in order. March 16, 1846, he wrote to the Novice Master at Notre-Dame de l’Osier, James Santoni, telling him in what spirit the novices should live their vows: “Chastity obliges them not only to avoid everything that is forbidden in this matter, but to preserve themselves from the least harm that could befall this beautiful virtue. It is in accord with this principle that we hold in such horror the sensual tendencies that bear the stigma of particular friendships, to call them what they are, for they really wound this most delicate virtue that the slightest breeze can harm. Be inflexible on this topic [...]”<sup>25</sup>

The Founder’s rules of conduct are above all encouragement to practice prudence, warnings of danger which he expresses in the form of concrete prohibitions. The best form of protection is to lead a pure religious life, solidly grounded in a “continual recollection of spirit”, and “to walk constantly in the presence of God”. In this regard, the spirit of mortification holds a place of particular importance.<sup>26</sup> “As for the

rest, this article needs no further explanation."<sup>27</sup> The dominant mindset of the times was: the less we talk about it, the better it is.

We can see then, on the positive side, how in the past things were simple and less worrisome, or on the negative side, how many valuable things were ignored and many rich resources remained untapped. The little that is said could easily leave us ill at ease. It all seems negative and charged with fear. One cannot deny that we are dealing here with a one-dimensional view of things and with a certain fixation on the dangers involved. We can be happy that it is now out-dated. On the other hand, the painful experience of the failure of a large number of our vocations to live celibacy for the Kingdom of God should keep us from being presumptuous and judging too harshly. The danger which exists today is a very real one. The saints spoke the language of their time, but their voice strongly urges us to scrutinize our own conduct. When the Founder tells us, "We have vowed to renounce ourselves by obedience, riches by poverty, pleasures by chastity"<sup>28</sup>, we could perhaps think that he is only showing on side of that reality. But if we consider the context in which he sets these words, we soon discover in its requirements and its scope the basis of this attitude of renunciation: "Charity is the pivot on which our whole existence turns. That which we ought to have for God makes us renounce the world and has vowed us to his glory by all manner of sacrifice, were it even to be our lives".<sup>29</sup>

It is based on the essential and absolute character he attributes to charity that the Founder understood his own vocation to the religious life and his vow of chastity.

### III. CHASTITY IN THE CONSTITUTIONS AND RULES

#### 1. FROM 1818 TO 1966

For almost one hundred and fifty years, the text which specified how Oblates were to live chastity remained practically unchanged. It was contained in five very concise articles. Two reasons justify chastity: It was "dear to the Son of God and most necessary for an apostolic man". His goal was a very elevated one: "to imitate the very purity of the angels". The Rule only gave one practical bit of advice: "[...] with persons of the other sex [...] the utmost reserve".

In 1850, an addition was made stating explicitly that the Oblates commit themselves to chastity by vow. In the course of that same General Chapter, the wording of 1826 "*angelicum puritatem fovere*" was dropped and they went back to the original wording of 1818 in its Latin translation "*angelorum puritatem imitari* (to imitate the very purity of the angels)".<sup>30</sup>

In 1910, already in the title of the paragraph, the virtue and the vow of chastity were clearly distinguished. And in the first article (217), in response to the norms of the Church issued in 1909<sup>31</sup>, the obligations flowing from the vow are listed. Practical rules of conduct end off the paragraph: prayer, mortification and especially (*praesertim vero*) devotion to Mary Immaculate help us to live the vow.<sup>32</sup>

#### 2. CONSTITUTIONS AND RULES OF 1966

In the history of our Constitutions and Rules, the new edition of 1966 was a qualitative change. In the case of chastity, it is enough to see the length of the text, which is much longer. The new

edition contains six constitutions and five rules, almost all of them longer than the earlier five brief articles. This is how the new text came to be written.

*a. A new context*

During the decades that preceded the Second Vatican Council, human sciences determined with greater precision the importance of the corporal aspect of human beings and their sexuality. Knowledge of their biological and psychological structures was broadened. They did not limit themselves to a scientific explanation of the conditions, rhythm of growth and the maturation process of the human person. The results had an impact on education, formation and the other forms of knowledge as well. Social consciousness and the behavior that flows from it were modified as well, in the sense that there was an acceptance of the body and an elimination of sexual taboos. There was a stronger insistence on the right to an individual and free development, and much freer relations between the sexes. The equality of rights for women and their place in all areas of social life were its demands and themes that could not be ignored. All of this was not without having some kind of impact on religious life. The theology of religious life continued to develop. It raised the question of the value and the meaning of religious life in relation to other Christian vocations, marriage and family life in particular, of the significant value of the vows and of their relation to baptismal grace.

All of this created an urgent need for *aggiornamento* of religious life in the Church and led to a corresponding reformulation of the rules that govern it. Vatican II met the problem head on.

The dogmatic constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 43-47) and the decree *Perfectae Caritatis* gave the supporting doctrine and pointed the way for renewal of the consecrated life. In the decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, the Council made known its mind on the issue of celibacy. It was in this context and following the norms established by the Council that the General Chapter of 1966, drawing its inspiration from the Council texts, launched into a reformulation of the Constitutions and Rules.

In addition to the texts of the Council, the General Chapter had available a revised text that a commission had drawn up at the request of the 1959 Chapter. In the four constitutions which treated of the vow of chastity (no rules were forthcoming from the Chapter as in other places in this text), the authors of the document acknowledged that "the vow of chastity is not the enshrining of a taboo".<sup>33</sup> Indeed, one can see the effort made to present the issue in a positive light, basing it on a solid motivation and taking into account the anthropological factors and a positive asceticism. In any case, a lot of emphasis was still given to the warnings to be prudent. In the apostolate with women, Oblates were advised to confine their zeal strictly to the demands of courtesy and of duty imposed by genuine charity: "*suam navitatem iis continent limitibus quos urbanitas et officium authenticæ caritatis postulerit*".<sup>34</sup> In the definition of the obligation imposed by the vow, "the negative wording has been preserved to foster precision": "to refrain from every act contrary to chastity".<sup>35</sup>

*b. A new "hierarchy of values"*

Firstly, we must stress that, in contrast to the usual sequence in listing the

vows, the vow of chastity now has the first place. In this regard, the text follows the presentation of the Council in the Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 43) which gives a place of prominence to chastity for the sake of the Kingdom of God. It is a "precious gift of grace which the Father bestows on some" and "an uncommon source of spiritual fruitfulness in the world" (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 42).

The commentators point out that this is the Church's way of clearly expressing that she considers virginity freely chosen "as the foundation stone of the religious life" (R. Shulte). Indeed, poverty and obedience can be lived in various vocations, whereas, through virginity freely chosen for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven, one abandons oneself to God in a particularly radical way. In an era when doctrine and teachers in the Church insist so heavily on the meaning and value of the call to sacramental marriage, it is rather important to present the vocation to celibacy for the Kingdom of Heaven as a balancing element.

We can also state that this preference is in conformity with the Sacred Scriptures: "The New Testament gives evidence of a state of life consecrated to God, a life related to the charisms and which finds its expression especially in virginity" (Jean Danielou). Likewise, we can see in this preference the fact that the calling to the religious life is a vocation to love and not a renouncing of love because in virginity more than any other state, the issue is having an "undivided heart".<sup>36</sup> Father Jetté commented: "It [the vow] is our response – a radical response – to the first commandment: 'You will love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and with your whole self' (Matthew 22:37). It is likewise a privileged

expression of our love for our brothers and sisters here on this earth: [...] Seen in this way, it is a response to the second commandment."<sup>37</sup> It is true that Father Jetté is saying this in another context; but that does not constitute any less a valuable indication of the harmonious and spiritually significant place granted to chastity.

### c. A renewed vision

"By making use of the theological language of the Council in preference to the language of the last century, a formulation that would inspire an attitude rather than dictating lines of conduct was sought, one that was positive rather than negative, encouraging rather than commanding."<sup>38</sup> So what has been said in general about the Rule of 1966 holds true as well for the new formulation of the articles on chastity.

It is not so much a question of protecting oneself but rather one of growth: "He [the Oblate] will not be content merely to remain chaste, but will constantly develop the capacities for love placed in his heart by God" (Constitutions and Rules 1966, C 21).

It is less a case of angelic purity than it is of being a mature human being: "[...] selfless and sincere affection, open and profoundly human [...]" (*ibidem*, C 22).

It is inserted in an apostolic context: "By religious chastity, [the Oblate] ... dedicates himself directly to him [Christ] and to men, his brothers", (*ibidem*, C 19), "to love men with the heart of Christ" (*ibidem*, C 23).

It becomes integrated into a lived ascesis:

— in community: "In developing maturity, community life plays a role of capital importance. Each member

will contribute to community life to the best of his ability" (*ibidem*, R 42).

— in apostolic commitment in which the Oblates "will discover the full flowering of their personality and a genuine safeguard of their chastity" (*ibidem*, R 43).

— in prayer: "The missionaries [...] will have recourse to prayer with all due diligence" (*ibidem*, R 46).

— in mortification: "[...] mortification, sobriety and custody of the senses" (*ibidem*, R 46).

— in a healthy balance between work and rest: "They will avoid excessive fatigue and nervous exhaustion, as well as idleness" (*ibidem*, R 44).

— in relationship with Mary Immaculate: "Mary Immaculate, Virgin and Mother, will be the Model and Guardian of his consecrated love" (*ibidem*, C 24).

Finally, the vow has value as a sign: "The Oblate will thus show forth the Church's living faith in Christ, her only Spouse, and at the same time the apostolic fecundity of this mystical union. He will thus manifest to his fellowmen that perfect charity which will be fully revealed only in the heavenly kingdom" (*ibidem*, C 21).

We could summarize this new vision in a few words, using the three headings placed in the margin along constitutions 19 to 21: "Chastity, vow, charity" or we could use the wording found in Father Maurice Gilbert's commentary on this vow: "Chastity, a consecrated love".<sup>39</sup>

### 3. THE CONSTITUTIONS AND RULES OF 1982

#### a. Position taken on the proposed text

The Constitutions and Rules of 1966 came into force on an experimental ba-

sis. According to the admission of a number of people, they were not much put into practice. Seen as provisional and out of the ordinary, they did not have much impact on the life of the Oblates. No doubt the impact of 1968 added to this by questioning every rule, norm, authority or command, with the frequent result that they were ignored. All of that changed with the preparations for the 1980 Chapter whose main task was the approbation of a renewed and definitive text of the Rule. The whole Congregation was involved in this preparatory work. Taking into consideration the many recommendations they had received, the precapitular commission proposed a text to be submitted to the Chapter.<sup>40</sup> The reactions coming from more or less all over were passed on to the capitulants as a working document for drawing up a definitive text. The reactions to the text presented by the commission certainly did not reflect the whole spectrum of the spiritual life of the Oblates as it was being lived. They were informative enough to be worthy of being mentioned here. They offer a storehouse of information for anyone who wishes to comment on the text of the Rule.

Concerning the vow of chastity, we can discern the following trends of thought.

The Oblates wanted a text which would avoid giving any impression of a superior or elitist attitude with regard to consecrated celibacy, as if this state of life was without question the best and most pleasing to God. All the baptized are called to perfection and all vocations can give witness of the love of God and be signs of the coming of the Kingdom of God.

Chastity, or consecrated celibacy, should not be presented in any way that might give the impression of wanting to

downplay the dignity and importance of sacramental marriage which bears in itself the ability to be a sign which is equally valid.

What was clearly wanted, especially in this domain, was a theological language that was precise, accurate and spiritually encouraging. A good number of observations, expressed the desire that the word chastity be replaced by celibacy; in some others, on the other hand, the opposite was requested. The question of mortification was raised as well. A number of people tried to give it a more positive meaning. Also expressed was a clear and heavily supported desire to use inclusive language.

The importance of community and fraternal life in common was strongly stressed as a means of finding personal fulfillment in the celibate state. On the other hand, some questions were raised about the recommendation with regard to friendships.

The desire was expressed to clearly indicate that we choose this way of life, not only for the love of God, but for the love of our fellow human beings as well. That gives witness to the missionary spirituality of the Oblates.<sup>41</sup>

#### *b. The new translation of the text*

The Chapter accepted the draft presented by the precapitular commission as a working document. Each of the four parts of this text was reworked by a commission which was then to bring the results of their work in stages to the floor of the general assembly. We will treat of the modifications carried out by the Chapter only in as much as they represent insights on the essential aspects of the vow. We will not take into account purely linguistic or stylistic modifications, nor improvements designed to create a more accurate text.

#### *c. Structural modification of the text*

At almost the last minute, the Chapter decided in general assembly to unite parts I and II under the title "The Oblate charism" in order to make it very clear that, for Oblates, being sent on mission and religious life formed a single indivisible whole, that is, we are religious in order to be missionaries and that it is as religious that we are missionaries. This deliberately adopted spiritual innovation gave the vows a place in the overall structure – they form the first section of the second chapter entitled "Apostolic Religious Life". It thus recognized a clear missionary value in them. So it was that the Founder's expression from the first Rule, which states that chastity is "most necessary for an apostolic man",<sup>42</sup> is in a certain sense reconfirmed. Echoing this Oblate tradition, the text on the vows begins with the words: "Our mission requires that [...] through a gift of the Father, we choose the way of the evangelical counsels" (C 12).

— "*Through a gift of the Father*". It was by these words that the precapitular commission's draft introduced the passage on the vow of chastity. In doing this, just like Vatican Council II, it was following a long-standing tradition: "[...] the precious gift of grace that the Father has bestowed on some people".<sup>43</sup> The Chapter in no way wanted to detract from the weightiness of this statement. On the contrary, it was of the opinion that the indissoluble link which existed between the evangelical counsels, expressions of the radical gift of self to God as well as of the "following of Christ", fully justified that as a whole they should be considered a gift from the Father. They, therefore, incorporated this statement in the text which treats of the vows in general.

— *“Mary Immaculate is the model and guardian”*. This statement was set in the context of the vow of chastity in the 1966 text (C 24) as well as in the revised text. The addition of the words, “Virgin and Mother”, implicitly justified it. In this case as well, the Chapter of 1980 followed the suggestion of the precapitular commission to consider Mary as “model and guardian of [all] our consecrated life” (C 13). The meaning of Virgin Mother for a celibate life is in no way diminished. But the danger of a certain kind of mysticism inclined to consider Mary as a “surrogate spouse”, is lessened at the same time as light is cast upon the deeply Marian structure of a life lived in the context of the “following of Christ”.<sup>44</sup>

Let us note here that keeping a healthy balance between work and rest to avoid nervous exhaustion (R 44 from 1966 text) is no longer mentioned in the context of the vow of chastity but in an article which deals with apostolic community (R 25 of the 1982 text) [R 39b in CCRR 2000].

— Consecrated celibacy. Consonant with tradition, it is the word *chastity* which provides the heading for the articles which treat of this vow. In constitution 14, however, the Chapter changed the expression “vow of chastity” to “consecrated celibacy”. For the capitulants, it was perhaps above all due to a concern to keep the terminology consistent. The same result could have been obtained by doing the very opposite, using in a consistent manner the word “chastity”. It is obvious that here the Chapter took into account certain observations that were made. (See above) Correctly and consistently, it presented in parallel fashion the vocation to the sacrament of marriage and the calling to consecrated celibacy for the Kingdom

of Heaven. When it treats of vocation as such, the term “celibate” would seem to be more appropriate. “In our view, the less ambiguous term is that of “celibate”. Chastity, in fact, is a law which concerns all Christians, even married people. As for virginity, that is either a biological or a sacralized term too loaded with ascetical-religious meaning”.<sup>45</sup>

— *Laity and religious depending on one another* The Chapter’s expansion of R 13 [R 18c in CCRR 2000] must be seen in the same context. It is not only we religious who, by being faithful to our vows, bring support and assistance to the married and non-married in their fidelity. We receive, in turn, help and encouragement from the example of the laity. The reason for this broadening stems from the recognition of the dignity of the other Christian vocations which all have perfect charity as their goal and are at the service of the vitality of all the members of the Body of Christ. The call to celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven and the strength necessary to follow this way are a gift of God and not only a result of “supererogation” on the part of people who are particularly holy. It does not lead to a “splendid isolation”, but rather to a fruitful exchange. This broadening, though not important in itself, nevertheless gives Rule 13 more weight since it is opposition to the narrow-mindedness and egocentrism of which the celibate person is often reproached.

#### IV. OBLATE SPIRITUALITY AND CHASTITY

From what we have just said in the preceding section, it becomes quite evident that the text of the Constitutions and Rules of 1982 was composed in an atmosphere of careful consideration of

the teachings of the Church and of a serious reflection on contemporary problems. Consequently, in this final section, we will not give this question any special treatment.

It is obvious there is not a specific Oblate chastity. All religious men and women are called to live a celibate life for the sake of the Kingdom and to train themselves in the practice of the corresponding virtues. The vow of chastity lends itself even less than the vows of poverty and obedience to an expression that would be characteristic of the Congregation. In any case, the sacrament of marriage and the ideal of Christian marriage and the family can be lived in a variety of ways which must be adapted to the times and social conditions. In the same way, the celibate life lived for the sake of the Kingdom will bear the mark of the spirituality of a religious community and its apostolic activity<sup>46</sup>. It is in this sense, based on the Constitutions and Rules that we will now try to give some indications which will permit us to progress in our reflection without in any way wishing to substitute for or play the role of a commentary on the Constitutions and Rules.

With regard to the basics, we will follow the lead of the commission for the revision of the Rule, as the General Chapter did for the most part. In his introduction to the first part of the *Draft of the Constitutions and Rules* which the commission submitted to the 1980 Chapter, Father Alexandre Taché wrote this about the vows: "First of all, the draft presents the evangelical counsels: the Gospel sources for each one; then, its sign value and its eschatological meaning, its community dimension and finally the object of the vow".<sup>47</sup> In like manner, we will arrange our comments under four headings: 1. the Christological dimension; 2. the prophetic dimen-

sion; 3. the communitarian dimension, and finally, 4. the Marian dimension.

### 1. THE CHRISTOLOGICAL DIMENSION

The first and determining reason for the choice of this form of life is the following of Christ, "who was chaste and poor and who redeemed mankind by his obedience" (C 12). The Oblates follow Christ in "radical discipleship", (Heading for C 12), that is, the following of Christ is the condition *sine qua non* of their existence. It is "the call of Jesus Christ ... [which] draws us together as Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate" (C 1). The Oblates are "ready to leave everything to be disciples of Jesus" (C 20). "The community of the Apostles with Jesus is the model of our life" (C 3). "The cross of Jesus Christ is central to our mission" (C 4). "We [the Oblates] achieve unity in our life only in and through Jesus Christ." (C 31).

"In answer" – It is not above all to achieve a greater interior and exterior liberty, nor for a good cause that we choose a life of vowed chastity, but before all else it is for the person of Jesus Christ. This choice is made "in answer to a special invitation from Christ" (C 14). "This invitation is plainly found in Scripture and the Christian tradition"<sup>48</sup>, but it is equally a personal invitation which "manifests itself in a more immediate way through the desire or internal attraction to give oneself to Christ in view of God's Kingdom".<sup>49</sup> This shows from the very beginning the personal relationship that this vow, in particular, establishes between the Oblate and Jesus Christ and which does not, then, allow for a purely functional interpretation. In this way, the vow is put on the same level as the "Yes" that engaged couples exchange

in marriage. Consequently, it calls for a life lived entirely in a "dialogue of love". In fact, this invitation, like all vocations, is not a one time only act, but rather a continuing challenge that calls for an ongoing renewed response. It is an invitation to a lifelong friendship into which the novice must gradually enter (C 56), which forms the basis of the unity of the Oblate's life (C 31) and which, in the spirit of the Founder, has as its final objective "to become other Jesus Christs".<sup>50</sup> In this sense, we can also note the expression "the path of consecrated celibacy" (C 14) which Father Jetté explicitly mentions in his commentary, calling it "a point to be noted".<sup>51</sup> Piet van Breeman also has some significant things to say along these lines: "It is a long and sometimes difficult path to travel, the path of becoming, for the sake of the Kingdom, unsuitable for marriage".<sup>52</sup>

In a Congregation whose task is to be at the service of the Word, this "dialogic aspect" of the vows put forward by the Rule deserves to be further developed. In this context, we will notice that the moralists and psychologists willingly use the conceptual domain of language as a key for a more in-depth understanding of human sexuality as an expression of love. For the one who chooses celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom, sexuality is not simply a foreign language, nor even a dead language. He too must learn to speak it in his own way. In this sense, too, the expression "in answer" (C 14) can be stimulating.<sup>53</sup>

Love become man – The evangelical counsels are an expression of the radical following of Christ. They enable the Oblate "to identify with him, to let him live in us. [...] to reproduce in ourselves the pattern of his life" (C 2). The fundamental structure of Christ's manner of being consists in the following:

he lives entirely in union with the Father, and he is at the same time united with men, with his whole being, by his words and his actions. This is the structure of the Incarnation, of love become man. To live in God and to be present to others: There too lies the fundamental structure of the entire following of Christ to which the Christian, in virtue of baptism, is called and empowered, and to which the religious commits himself in a more radical and irrevocable manner. That is the import of the vow of chastity. "By this option we consecrate ourselves to the Lord and, at the same time, give ourselves to the people we serve" (C 15). "Consecrated celibacy [...] is an affirmation of life and love; it expresses our total gift of self to God and to others [...]" (C 16).

Obviously, this is not specific to the Oblate and applies to the contemplative Carthusian as well as to the active missionary. Nonetheless, the total gift of oneself to others and one's availability to be at the service of others become for the Oblate the concrete content of all apostolate and of the spirit of the Congregation. Every religious chooses "consecrated celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom (C 14); but for the Oblate, this does not only mean "our personal commitment to Jesus Christ, while serving the Church and God's Kingdom" (C 46), but also "to proclaim Christ and his kingdom" (C 5), "to proclaim the Kingdom" (C 11), "to proclaim God's reign" (C 37), "to preach the Kingdom" (C 52). For the missionary Oblate, that means that his entire apostolic activity must be imbued with the love of God and others, a love which consecrated celibacy gives him the freedom to exercise. Experience reveals how our missionary commitment can come under the influence of psy-

chological constraints, how selfish motives or ideologies can take over centre stage and how they can supersede or at least disturb the only genuine Christ-like motive, the motive of love. Thus, we can become “dictators over your faith” rather than “fellow workers with you for your happiness” (See 2 Corinthians 1:24). As a result, the missionary dimension of the vow of chastity becomes clear. Our decision to choose it becomes “a liberating choice” (C 15). The freedom in question is not merely a physical freedom, that is, a freedom of movement or a greater availability, but rather the internal freedom of “an undivided heart”. The wording of Constitution 16 shows clearly that what is at stake here is not merely the living of a moral imperative. It directs our gaze away from a casuistry based on fear and shows us the pathway to a love whose power unleashes life forces.

This “total gift” is perhaps the radical way of taking seriously the words of Christ: “cut off from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). When it is lived in an authentic way, that is, when chastity becomes “priestly charity”, it makes a substantial contribution to the effectiveness of our apostolate. Sociological surveys are useful and even of very great value, and trying out new forms of evangelization and studying them is a necessity. But the former do not automatically lead us to be “close to the people” (C 8) and the latter remain ineffective when they are not supported by “the priestly charity of Jesus”.<sup>54</sup> It is to attain this charity that the vow of chastity seeks to liberate the Oblate. On the other hand, our apostolate has a purifying influence on us and encourages growth in our love of God and others. It enables us to be faithful to our celibacy: “We find support [...] in apostolic commitment to all” (C 18).

“He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor...” (Luke 4:18). There lies the Christological aspect which shaped in a substantial way the charism of the Founder, and as a result, the charism of the Oblates. The term “poor” includes the lonely, the neglected, those who have given up on life and love. Is there any greater poverty than that of not being loved? The celibate life is a form of radical poverty which puts us in solidarity with all those men and women who suffer this kind of poverty. In his commentary on rule 13, Father Jetté wrote: “We are never alone in our consecrated chastity: we bear all our brothers and sisters on this earth”.<sup>55</sup> It also enables us to share in the love of Christ who gives witness to all people that every individual is loved. Obviously, this presupposes that this love is not lived in an elitist manner or as heroic renunciation, but rather in a spirit of thanksgiving for “the gift from the Father” (C 12) and in the joy of answering the invitation extended to us by the Lord; as a “yes” which “is an affirmation of life and love” (C 16).

Chastity and inculturation – To speak of incarnation in the context of mission means to speak of inculturation. Inculturation of the evangelical counsels as an essential element in the following of Christ constitutes an essential part of full evangelization in the Church. The great number of priests and religious men and women in the young churches shows that the Spirit has been and still is powerfully at work.

In this domain, consecrated chastity has raised and continues to raise questions. This is not the place to treat of these issues. For the missionary, it is important to sustain the action of the Spirit and to make the call of the Lord heard by his fidelity to his vocation, as well as by making manifest the joy and

the freedom it gives. This is not always easy to do. The missionary must be up to living his vow in the context of cultures, mentalities and customs which can vary considerably from what he is used to. It seems the Founder had already considered questions related to this issue.<sup>56</sup> At the first congress of scholasticate superiors held at Rome in 1947, the assembly was aware of this question and spoke of "a crisis of transition in the foreign missions" by referring to some difficulties in relation to the vow of chastity (loneliness, climate) and giving some examples.<sup>57</sup> The approved text of Rule 12, par. 2 [R 18b in CCR 2000], gives a brief rule of practical conduct.

In any case, the problem was not limited to the mission *ad gentes*. In the Western world as well, the cultural, religious, moral and social milieu has undergone a significant transformation. The new text of the Constitutions and Rules attempts to address these issues by making a call to inculturate the gift of God in a changing world.

## 2. THE PROPHETIC DIMENSION

Today, when one engages in a discussion on religious life, one often has the impression that the prophetic stance of the religious life is reduced to a commitment to peace and justice. On this point, the basic text for the Oblates, Constitution 9, opens up broader horizons. "We are members of the prophetic Church. While recognizing our own need for conversion, we bear witness to God's holiness and justice". To give witness to holiness means to live one's commitment in such a way that God's holiness is communicated to all and as a result all ten of the commandments are held as holy: the life and dignity of persons, marriage and the family, creation

and its fulfillment, power and dependency, ownership and sharing. The prophet reveals the lie in the person's relationship to God, among people themselves and within each individual person. He stresses God's rights without which people could not live as they should, and he gives witness to the primacy of love of God in all human activity. Not only does he give witness in word, but also by his actions and often through his very existence: marriage or celibacy, witness or counter-witness, insult or consolation, sadness or joy: every bit of that can bear witness. In Jesus Christ, the Prophet par excellence, words, actions and existence form one prophetic reality.

A life lived according to the evangelical counsels is a prophetic gesture in the measure that it lays a radical foundation for the relations of the one who lives this life in harmony with the will of God and on the condition that it not be simply a witness in words, but an existential sign of God's holiness, of the primacy of his love and the coming of his Kingdom. In this way, life itself becomes a challenge.

"The fact that prophecy's first function is not that of foretelling the future is essential to its definition. It consists much more in giving witness to the reality of God before all in word and deed, in a manner that is at the same time challenging. Celibacy is basically only one of the three names given to God's self-revelation to people and to the world. This special gift of the incomprehensible love of God for all has, so to speak, three facets: that is, poverty, obedience and consecrated celibacy."<sup>58</sup>

Celibacy plumbs in a special way the depths of the body/spirit relationship of a person to become the prophetic sign par excellence of the primacy of the love of God.

In the case of the vows of poverty and obedience, this prophetic aspect becomes clearly obvious in the choice of words used: "Our choice of poverty compels us ... to contest the excesses of power and wealth and to proclaim the coming of a new world... (C 20). "Challenging the spirit of domination, we stand as a sign of that new world [...]" (C 25). In the English translation of Constitution 15 on the vow of chastity, this approach is maintained: "challenge the tendency to possess and to use others for selfish purposes", while in the French text it is more lackluster and focuses only on one's personal attitude: "This choice [of celibacy...] helps us to master the tendency to selfish relationships".

The other aspect of the prophetic dimension, that is the eschatological aspect, is presented in a prudent yet still clear way: "We live our celibacy as a sign of the perfect charity which will be fully revealed only in the Kingdom" (C 15). Celibacy remains incomprehensible, and ultimately, unacceptable without this vision of the coming of the Kingdom. This challenge is necessary precisely because this opening up to a broader future is easily lost on the modern and post-modern persons, and by this very fact, their understanding of celibacy tends to be less acute. In this sense, one can no doubt say that the sign value of celibacy surpasses or completes that of marriage. Both marriage and celibacy are signs of the love of Christ for his Church, signs of the intimacy and the fertility of this love. In addition, celibacy is a prophetic existence in as much as it points to the new family of those who do the will of God (See Matthew 12:46-50), the wedding feast of eternal life (See Apocalypse 19:9), and the resurrection of the dead (See Mark 12:25; Luke 20:35; C 16).<sup>59</sup>

The text of the Constitutions does

not treat of the individual aspect of this eschatological vision, even though this is equally important for understanding the vows. In fact, it shows forth the loneliness, the poverty and radical powerlessness which are revealed in death and which harks back to the final fulfillment of love offered and received, in what is mine and what is yours, in the fullness of liberty and communion. Individual fulfillment and the coming of the Kingdom coincide for everyone, because it is then that God is "all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:28).

### 3. THE COMMUNITARIAN DIMENSION

It is impossible to determine without ambiguity what is understood as "communitarian dimension" in the line of thinking indicated above. We would like to understand it in relationship to the community of the Church, with the communities to which we are sent, as well as to the Oblate communities in which we live. Every charism is bestowed for the common good, and as a result, has a communitarian dimension. Consequently, we do not live our vows solely for God and for ourselves, but also and always in and for the Church, as an essential element of our mission. Moreover, Constitution 12 gives us a valuable spiritual thrust in this direction. "Community is the life-giving reality fashioned by the vows..."

This is obvious when we are dealing with poverty and obedience, but it is equally clear that celibacy makes possible an intensity of community life which is surpassed only by the family. On the other hand, psychology and human experience teach us that community life is a powerful support for celibacy.<sup>60</sup> Rule 11 [R 18a in CCRR 2000] stresses the importance for human maturation of living with others and for others. Father Jetté

offers these comments on this passage: "If the Oblate is really happy and at ease in his milieu and deeply attached to one fellow Oblate or other, the changing needs of chastity within him will be met more easily<sup>61</sup>. We read as well in the main document of the 1992 Chapter: "Community living [...] enables us to establish the truth within ourselves and to clarify our motivation. [...] the community plays a role in bringing about healing and reconciliation"<sup>62</sup>. Even though this text does not treat of chastity directly, it confirms what was said before.

But the communitarian dimension goes deeper still. Through his vows, the Oblate takes on three bonds: a link to God through Christ, a link to the people of God which is the Church, a link to community, that is, the Congregation and through the Congregation, to his own immediate community. "Community is the life-giving reality fashioned by the vows which bind us in love to the Lord and to his people" (C 12). Belonging to a community becomes, so to speak, a part of his identity. We do not only live our vows with others who live them as well; we live them in common: "The group as such lives chastity, poverty, obedience, perseverance, if it wishes to fulfill its sign role in the Church and in the world; this goes beyond an individual practice of the evangelical counsels"<sup>63</sup>. The sign value becomes much more obvious through community. In community, we represent the Church; we are "a living cell in the Church" (C 12) and through celibacy lived in community, we give witness to "the depth of the Church's covenant with Christ, her only Spouse, and to the spiritual fruitfulness of her union with him" (C 15). Thus the root and the fruit of consecrated celibacy are revealed: "To witness together 'as a

group' to the Father's love for us and to our enduring love for him" (C16). The Oblate's chastity draws life from the call of Christ to this community<sup>64</sup> and frees him to exercise his charity in his community and to others.

For the individual Oblate, the way of living his chastity is, then, not simply a private affair. The personal contribution he makes is not only due to the Lord and to himself, but also to the community. First of all, to the community that is the Church, because when the root of apostolic love dries up and dies, the "living cell" becomes a cancerous abscess. Then, to the Oblate community, because it is only in this way that it is, according to the example of the Apostles, on its pilgrim way united radically to Christ, the Lord: "We are pilgrims, walking with Jesus in faith, hope and love" (C 31). Finally, to the community of those men and women to whom we are sent, because it is only in this way that we are truly "free [...] for a love which reaches out to everyone" (C 15).<sup>65</sup>

Friendships that bind him in a special way to one or the other person in the community or outside of the community offer no hindrance to this. The Constitutions and Rules even recommend them with a certain insistence, contrary to what had been the custom among Oblates in days gone by, especially in the context of formation (rarely one, never two, always three). It is obvious that friendships can contribute to the development of the essential values which can foster both community life and the apostolate. They build a rampart against developing the bachelor mentality or becoming eccentrics, which is the opposite of being "apostolic men". We have already mentioned how much the Founder valued friendship.<sup>66</sup>

Nevertheless, we have to point out that life as a consecrated celibate is lived in a tension between solitude and community life. It is precisely from this tension that celibacy draws the strength of its prophetic dimension. There is such a thing as fleeing into a relationship of two persons that, as it were, releases the tension on the bowstring and makes the salt of celibacy insipid to the point of losing all its value and of being thrown out as worthless.

Three criteria are useful in judging a friendship. Neither interiorly nor exteriorly should it separate one from the community; nor should it offer any obstacle for apostolic commitment; it should foster friendship with Christ. He is the one who bore all our solitudes to the point of ultimate "abandonment" on the cross. It is he who laid the foundation for all life in common through his Mystical Body.

"I shall not call you servants any more ... I call you friends" (John 15:15). This profound friendship with Christ should be the distinguishing mark of every relationship and all communion. It is equally open to the one who, for whatever reason, has not succeeded in finding elsewhere friends in the proper sense of the word. It is in terms of this friendship that we should, especially and above all, commit ourselves. There is no need of fear or for excessive anxiety for all the rest: The rest will be given to us in addition. It is with this kind of friendship as a starting point that a true community will develop. It will enable the Oblate "to love others as Jesus loves them" (R 12) [R 18b in CCCR 2000].<sup>67</sup>

#### 4. THE MARIAN DIMENSION

Even if, in the Constitutions and Rules of 1982, Mary is not mentioned

in strict relationship with the vow of chastity<sup>68</sup>, we cannot entirely avoid speaking about her even in a short, incomplete article on Oblate spirituality and chastity. Mary is "the model and guardian of our consecrated life" (C 13). This obviously includes consecrated celibacy.

In the area of chastity, Mary is the model, especially as virgin and mother<sup>69</sup>. She reminds us that our gift of love such as it is expressed in the vow of chastity must become fruitful by offering Christ to the world (See C 10). Our consecrated love must not become something isolated from concrete human living, as for example, a sublimation of our ability to love into a totally supernatural realm. Nor must it be reduced to a tool to attain our own individual perfection. On the contrary, it must serve life in the concrete circumstances in and around us. "The normal atmosphere for chastity is not that of turning in on oneself or an attitude of selfishness, but rather that of openness to one's neighbor and the gift of self to others", writes Father Jetté. Through her maternity, Mary's virginity was very concretely at the service of the Word of life. In the same way, celibacy consecrated to the service of life should grow into spiritual fatherhood, otherwise it will become like salt which has lost its flavor.<sup>70</sup>

Open to the Spirit – The tension between Spirit and flesh obviously cannot be reduced to the domain of genitalia, but it is in this context that Paul himself speaks of the works of the flesh while exhorting us to walk "guided by the Spirit" (Galatians 5:16).

In her virginal maternity, Mary is the spouse of the Holy Spirit. As such, she is for us Oblates, "in her faith response and total openness to the call of the Spirit, [...] the model and guardian

of our consecrated life" (C 13). For the one who is called, chastity is, on the one hand, the way to this Marian availability; on the other hand, chastity can only be lived by the power of the Spirit in view of producing "the fruit of the Spirit" (Galatians 5:22). Our devotion to Mary must be such as to lead us to become truly spiritual men. In this way, it will help us to always have a deeper appreciation of this gift of God and will make it bear fruit.

"They will always look upon her as their Mother" – this heritage left to us by our Founder is a distinguishing element in our Oblate spirituality. To live the celibate life, a healthy relationship with one's mother, after having experienced healing, is of great importance. Facing life with confidence, a mature affectivity, a healthy sensitivity, respect and modesty find in this their deepest roots. Mary cannot be a surrogate spouse or mother, but she can be "one of these beneficent intimate presences who keep us faithful to God most holy in all our sufferings and joys as missionaries"<sup>71</sup>. Such an intimate presence can help us live through the experiences of marginalization, of childhood trauma, to reach a genuine freedom to live a celibate life in peace and joy. Obviously, this presupposes that our relationship with Mary as our mother would not be lived in a childish fashion, but in an adult manner under the guidance of the word of God.<sup>72</sup>

This intimacy with Mary can take on a wide variety of forms according to the human character and spiritual profile of each individual. Where it is lived out in a healthy fashion, it will contribute to the intimacy of the friendship with Christ which is absolutely essential for the celibate person. Without this friendship, the vow would be unable to fully develop its power of freedom and

happiness. Without the experience of an intimate relationship with the Lord, whom one encounters in life and in action one would have to make a psychological effort that would be beyond one's strength. Constitution 36 tells us: "With Mary Immaculate, the faithful handmaid of the Lord, and under the guidance of the Spirit, we enter into closer union with Jesus Christ".

Mary Immaculate – "To instill in them a great devotion to Mary Immaculate", such was the advice given during the congress for superiors of scholasticates mentioned above<sup>73</sup>. To be sure, it would be lethal for Oblate spirituality to attempt to limit the richness of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception to one facet of moral purity no matter how this purity was understood. But there will always be some Oblates who will spontaneously find in this privilege of Mary's a source of spiritual power, including an empowering in regard to their life of consecrated chastity.

This privilege was bestowed on Mary in view of the total gift of herself to Jesus as virgin and mother and enables her to be both at the same time with her whole person, spirit, soul and body. Her whole life was assumed into the "Yes", of her Son<sup>74</sup>. Sin's "No", to God never touched Mary's life. The consequences of original sin never brought disturbance to the untrammelled openness of her entire being to God and to God's Reign. "A structurally ordered person" is the way the Oblate Marian Congress held in Rome in 1954 designated her<sup>75</sup>. "The Immaculate is a ordered person; it is that order which becomes a maternal principle for us."<sup>76</sup>

What is called here "a structurally ordered person" can, no doubt, be seen in relation to what we today call "mature affectivity" or "the mature per-

son", even if the two concepts are not entirely correlative. We know how important the two are for the celibate life. Obviously, it is not just a devotion to Mary Immaculate that will make of our life of consecrated celibacy "an adult chastity"<sup>77</sup>, but one can easily see that it can be useful to live it looking towards Mary Immaculate, and in a way, letting her lead us by the hand.<sup>78</sup>

The object of the concepts developed here is not to lead to a Marian devotion fixated on the aspect of chastity, but simply to indicate a few avenues of reflection showing the relationship between the vow of chastity and the Marian character of our charism.

## CONCLUSION

Chastity is an area which is presently very much in ferment: In the context of an ever changing world, there is a positive effort to correctly understand the individual's sexual identity and the relationships between partners; the overwrought atmosphere that exists in many areas of modern or post-modern society; the almost frantic suppression of taboos, on the one hand, and the quasi-inquisitorial public condemnation of the failings of priest, religious men and women, on the other hand; the intense debate surrounding the celibacy of priests... In our day, these questions, among others, place ever greater demands on the discernment and formation of future priests and religious. It was not possible to address this whole question in the limited scope of this article. The document produced by the General Committee on Formation (Rome, 1994) speaks of the necessity of treating the phenomenon of homosexuality in the context of our vocation to the religious life and recommends that

it be integrated into our program of formation in the form of a gradual psychosexual journeying with the individual.<sup>79</sup> We would like to underline and support these two recommendations.

Independently of this ferment surrounding chastity, we still have the obligation to reflect on what is essential. In my opinion, the following principles are decisive to achieve this end:

1) The basis of everything is and remains the Word of God.

2) The teaching of the Church shows us the way.

3) The primacy of love must always be respected.

4) Prayer and asceticism, missionary commitment and community are indispensable as supporting structures.

5) The mystery of Mary and the example of our saints provide light and encouragement. They teach us that when it is authentically lived as a response to the Lord's call, "the gift of the Father" leads us to the heart of the following of Christ, that is, to "living our Christianity" which is an undivided love for God and for others. "Virginity does not exist simply to be the object of men's admiration. The only thing which counts it to be laid hold of by Jesus Christ and to proclaim the message of his love."<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Letter of November 29, 1809, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 14, no. 64, p. 146.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of December 4, 1808, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 14, no. 35, p. 79.

<sup>4</sup> Letter to his mother, November 29, 1809, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 14, no. 64, p. 146.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>6</sup> Letter to his father, May 10, 1804, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 14, no. 6, p. 9.

<sup>7</sup> *Positio super introductione causae*, p. 640.

<sup>8</sup> Retreat notes of 1813, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 15, no. 121, p. 58.

<sup>9</sup> In PIELORZ, Józef, *The Spiritual Life of Bishop de Mazenod*, Ottawa, Oblates Studies Edition, 1956, p. 135, manuscript translation.

<sup>10</sup> See *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 14, Introduction, p. XXIII and XXIV.

<sup>11</sup> Retreat at Amiens, December 1-21, 1811, "On the prodigal son", in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 14, no. 95, p. 223.

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<sup>13</sup> Letter to Mrs. de Mazenod, November 29, 1809, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 14, no. 64, p. 146.

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 111.

<sup>17</sup> Circular letter no. 2, February 2, 1857, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 12, p. 217.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 218.

<sup>19</sup> See C and R of 1953, part II, chapter III, par. 3, art. 4.

<sup>20</sup> Circular letter no. 2, ..., p. 218.

<sup>21</sup> In *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 14, no. 32, p. 73 and no. 35, p. 78, no. 78, p. 176 & 177.

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<sup>28</sup> Letter to Father Guibert, July 29, 1830, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 7, no. 350, p. 202.

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<sup>30</sup> See COSENTINO, Georges, *Histoires de nos Règles*, III, p. 68.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, V, p. 99. For the history of *Normae*, see *ibidem*, p. 6, 7, 90-100, 283, footnote 340.

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, C 78-81.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 20.

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<sup>38</sup> *Dans une volonté de renouveau...*, p. XIII and XIV.

<sup>39</sup> GILBERT, Maurice, op. cit., in *Etudes oblates*, 25 (1966), p. 322.

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<sup>41</sup> See *Constitutiones et Regulae 1980, Reaciones I, fasc. 3*, Oblate General Archives.

<sup>42</sup> "Constitutions et Règles de la Société des Missionnaires de Provence", part two,

chapter one, par. 2, On the vow of chastity, in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 49.

<sup>43</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, no. 42; see as well, *Perfectae Caritatis*, no. 12, *Evangelica Testificatio*, no. 15, Matthew 19:11; 1 Corinthians 7:7.

<sup>44</sup> See JETTÉ, Fernand, *O.M.I. The Apostolic Man...*, p. 134.

<sup>45</sup> BIANCHI, Enzo, "Célibat et virginité" in *Dictionnaire de la vie spirituelle*, Paris, Cerf, 1983, p. 103.

<sup>46</sup> See *Code of Canon Law*, canon 598.

<sup>47</sup> Commission de révision, *Projet des Constitutions et Règles, présentation du projet*, p. 4, Oblate General Archives.

<sup>48</sup> JETTÉ, Fernand, *O.M.I. The Apostolic Man...* p. 137.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 138.

<sup>50</sup> C and R of 1818, Second Part, Chapter One, Of the other principal observances, in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 55.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 137.

<sup>52</sup> BREEMEN, Piet van, *Gerufen und Gesandt, Gedanken zur Nachfolge*, Würzburg, 1979, p. 66-67; see also, HÄRING, Bernard, *Free and Faithful in Christ*, vol. 2, chapter 10, 4, p. 503-504; The Morality of the Learning Process; Obviously, we must also take into consideration that what John Paul II says about chastity in marriage holds true as well for people living consecrated celibacy: "And so what is known as "the law of gradualness: or step-by-step advance cannot be identified with "gradualness of the law", as if there were different degrees or forms of precept in God's law for different individuals and situations" (*Familiaris Consortio*, 34).

<sup>53</sup> See HÄRING, Bernard, *The Liberating Truth in Sexual Language*, p. 492-564.

<sup>54</sup> John Paul II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, no. 47.

<sup>55</sup> *O.M.I. The Apostolic Man...* p. 151.

<sup>56</sup> See his conversation with Bishop Vital Grandin, in *Etudes oblates*, 18 (1959), p. 357.

<sup>57</sup> See "Problèmes de formation oblate, rapport du congrès des supérieurs de scolasticats, Rome, du 29 septembre au 9 octobre, 1947", in *Etudes oblates*, 7 (1948), p. 147-149.

<sup>58</sup> MEISNER, Joachim, *Christ und Welt*, no. 47, 20, 11, 1992.

<sup>59</sup> See also, *Familiaris consortio*, no. 16, and *Pastores dabo vobis*, no. 29.

<sup>60</sup> "Further, let all, and especially superiors, remember that chastity is preserved more securely when the members live a common life in true sisterly and brotherly love" (*Perfectae Caritatis*, 12).

<sup>61</sup> *O.M.I. The Apostolic Man...* p. 146-147.

<sup>62</sup> *Witnessing as Apostolic Community*, no. 23, par. 4.

<sup>63</sup> *Dans une volonté de renouveau...*, p. 101.

<sup>64</sup> JETTÉ, Fernand, *O.M.I. The Apostolic Man...*, p. 134

<sup>65</sup> See also the document of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life: *La vie fraternelle en communauté*, Rome, 1994, no. 44; also, *Perfectae Caritatis*, no. 60.

<sup>66</sup> See Eugene's Self-Portrait for M. Duclaux, October 1808, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 14, no. 30, p. 68 & 69; also, HÄRING, Bernard, *op. cit.* p. 548.

<sup>67</sup> "The only compensation a religious can seek for solitude of heart [...] is in reality only that "great friendship", the heart to heart relationship with Jesus", in BRETAGNE, Guy de, "Nos nouvelles Constitutions et Règles...", in *Etudes oblates*, 26 (1967), p. 331.

<sup>68</sup> See above III, *Les Constitutions de 1982, Nouvelle version du texte par le Chapitre*, "Marie Immaculée est le modèle et la gardienne".

<sup>69</sup> John Paul II, *Redemptoris Donum*, no. 17; *Redemptoris Mater*, no. 39.

<sup>70</sup> "By preserving virginity or celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven priests are [...] better fitted for a broader acceptance of fatherhood in Christ" (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 16); "In spite of having renounced physical fecundity, the celibate person becomes spiritually fruitful, the father and mother of many [...]" (*Familiaris Consortio*, 16).

<sup>71</sup> JETTÉ, Fernand, *O.M.I. The Apostolic Man...*, P. 118.

<sup>72</sup> DE FIORES, Stefano, "Marie", in *Dictionnaire de la vie spirituelle*, Paris, Cerf, 1983, p. 646-647.

<sup>73</sup> In *Etudes oblates*, 7 (1948), p. 140.

<sup>74</sup> See 2 Corinthians 1:19 (with him it was always Yes.)

<sup>75</sup> ALBERS, Daniel, "Marie Immaculée dans la vie personnelle de l'Oblat", in *Etudes oblates*, 14 (1955), p. 101.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>77</sup> An expression used by Guy de Bretagne in speaking of chastity in the context of his reflections on "The portrait of the Oblate as an authentic adult", in "Impressions d'ensemble d'un professeur de pastorale sur nos nouvelles Constitutions", *Etudes oblates*, 26 (1967), p. 330.

<sup>78</sup> See also, "Maria, Donna totalmente libera per il Signore", in *Il mistero di Maria e la morale cristiana*, Rome 1992, p. 171-179; BIFET, J. Esquerda, "Maria e la vocazione di vita consecrata", in *Spiritualità Mariana della Chiesa*, Rome, 1994, p. 144-118.

<sup>79</sup> See *Communique*, 65 (May 1994), appendix I, p. 11.

<sup>80</sup> BREEMEN, Piet van, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

## CHURCH

*Summary: I. Introduction: 1 The Church in Oblate spirituality; 2. Christ and the Church. II. The Spirituality of Saint-Sulpice: 1. Life in Christ; 2. The Limitations of Eugene de Mazenod's Formation; 3. The Church, Mystical Body of Christ. 4. The Mystical Body Redeemed by the Blood of Christ; 5. The Universal Communion of the Church; 6. The Pope is Christ on the Cross; 7. The Church: Mother and Father; 8. The Church, People of God; 9. The Royal Priesthood of the Laity; 10. Matthew 18:20. III. The Church in the Constitutions and Rules. IV. General Chapters. V. Vatican II, a Turning Point for the Congregation. VI. The Superiors General: 1. Renewal on Looking toward the Future; 2. A New Identity; 3. The Incarnation of the Charism in the Modern World. VII. The Oblate Tradition.*

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### 1. THE CHURCH IN OBLATE SPIRITUALITY

If someone were to ask us to define who is an Oblate, we would not hesitate to answer: "The Oblate is a Man of the Church". From the very beginning, in fact, Eugene de Mazenod established a relationship between the Oblate vocation and the Church.

"I saw the Church threatened by the most cruel persecution [...] So I entered the Seminary of Saint-Sulpice with the desire or rather with the set determination to devote myself, in the most complete way, to the Church's service, in the exercise of the ministry most useful to souls, for whose salvation I was burning to consecrate myself [...]".<sup>1</sup>

The French Revolution had decimated the better elements in the Church; Napoleon had imprisoned Pope Pius VII in Savona and obliged the College of Cardinals to settle in Paris. A few seminarians – among whom we find Eugene de Mazenod – had made themselves available to serve them.

"While still a deacon and then as a young priest, in spite of the most active surveillance of an easily provoked po-

lice force, I had the opportunity of devoting myself to the service of the Roman cardinals through daily contact [...]".<sup>2</sup>

When he wrote the Rule for his budding congregation, his first thought was for the Church: "The Church, that glorious inheritance purchased by the Saviour at the cost of his own blood, has in our days been cruelly ravaged. [...] Faced with such a deplorable situation, the Church earnestly appeals to the Ministers whom she herself enrolled in the cause of her divine Spouse [...]".<sup>3</sup>

In the mind of the Founder, the Oblates were called to bring the Church back to life again; their vocation was identified with that of the Apostles: "On earth, there is no loftier vocation than ours. Amongst religious, some are called to one good work, others to another; some are destined, be it indirectly, to the same end as ourselves. But as for us, our principal end, I would almost say our only end, is the self-same end that Jesus Christ set for himself upon coming into the world, the self-same end that he gave to the Apostles, to whom, without any doubt, he taught the most perfect way. And so our humble Society knows no other founder

than Jesus Christ, who spoke through the mouth of his Vicar, and no other Fathers than the Apostles".<sup>4</sup>

Another indication of the very close relationship which existed between the Oblate and the Church was the Founder's desire to refurbish by means of the Congregation the glory of the Religious Orders destroyed by the French Revolution: "That is why they will endeavour to make alive again in their own persons the piety and fervor of the Religious Orders destroyed in France by the Revolution".<sup>5</sup>

The Oblate's love for the Church is a love of identifying with the Church. In a number of mission areas, the Oblates constitute the only Church presence; they are the Church. It is also a fruitful love. In a number of places in the world, the Oblates have been the community builders, the founders of dioceses and parishes.

The vocation of the Oblate is to build the Church where it has not yet been established, or yet again where it is undergoing trials. The Oblate is therefore called to bring the church into being through the proclamation of the Gospel and through gospel witness. In this sense, one can say that the Oblates are men of the Pope and of the bishops.

The distinctive character of the Oblates is love and evangelization of the poorest; their style is simplicity, their *modus operandi* is mobility, their main objective to create the Christian community and to go towards those who still ignore the message of salvation.

John XXIII stated that Eugene de Mazenod is "worthy of being listed among those who have won a place in the rebirth of the missionary movement of the times, the emulator of those priests and bishops who have felt beat, in their own breasts, the heart of the universal Church".<sup>6</sup>

## 2. CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

One of the characteristics of Oblate spirituality is the intimate union of Christ with the Church: "The experience of Eugene de Mazenod reveals a characteristic trait that we would like to briefly underline. The love of Christ and the love of the Church make up the lifeblood of every Christian. They are the two poles of attraction of the lives of all the saints. These two loves must come to the fore in a more or less explicit way. In the lives of the saints in general, it is only after the encounter with Christ that the encounter with the Church comes gradually to maturity. Just consider – even if we will not treat of these people in depth – Francis of Assisi, Teresa of Avila, Ignatius of Loyola, etc. It was only after their encounter with Christ that the Church slowly came to full bloom, sometimes painfully and after misunderstandings and hesitations.

"From the very beginning, Eugene de Mazenod seems to have possessed a fully realized fusion of these two loves. In his case, it reached such a point that one could apply to him the principle of the two communicating containers: When his love for Christ increased, his love for the Church increased in equal measure and vice versa".<sup>7</sup>

In his famous pastoral letter of 1860, a letter which lays out for us a synthesis of the Eugene de Mazenod's ecclesiology, we read the following: "How is it possible to separate our love for Jesus Christ from that which we owe to his Church?" These two kinds of love merge: to love the Church is to love Jesus Christ and vice versa. We love Jesus Christ in his Church because she is his immaculate spouse who came out of his opened side on the cross [...].<sup>8</sup>"

The union of Christ and the Church also represents the union of Christ and our soul as well.

“Our Lord Jesus Christ wanted to reenact in his mortal life all the fortunes of the sons of men whose nature he had assumed through his mysterious incarnation. In the state to which sin had reduced him, poor, suffering, humiliated, man under condemnation to death, such was the state to which the only Son of God chose to reduce himself. And so he became as well the son of man, a title he gave himself. He espoused our cause to the point of identifying with us, to the point of adopting from us everything human which was compatible with the infinite perfection of his divinity. As the Apostle stated, he accepted to undergo every trial – except sin (Hebrews 4:15). So it is that he is the spouse of his Church and of our souls, that his Church herself is his mystical body and that all of us who have been baptized in the same spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13), together with him, we are all members of this same body (1 Corinthians 12:27) which is his.

“In this admirable union between Jesus Christ and our souls is found the mystery of our participation in his grace and, by his grace, a participation in his glory. But just as he became one with us in humiliation in suffering, in the complete poverty of our fallen nature, it is required that by the faithful cooperation of our wills we unite ourselves to him in the ways of his mercy and of his love in order to raise us up from our fallen state and be led back to his Father.”<sup>9</sup>

## II. THE SPIRITUALITY OF SAINT-SULPICE

The intimate union between Christ, the Christian and the Church is one of

the key elements in the Founder’s spirituality. He borrowed it from the priestly spirituality received at the seminary of Saint-Sulpice.

The seminary of Saint-Sulpice was founded in 1642 by Jean-Jacques Olier in response to the requirements of the Council of Trent for the reform of the clergy. Father Olier’s spirituality insists on the incarnation and the priesthood of Christ: “There must be nothing of me in the priest, for the me in the priest must be changed into Jesus Christ who makes it possible for them to say at the altar this is my body, as if the body of Jesus Christ was the very body of the priest.<sup>10</sup>” The priest is the one who continues the life of the living Christ, a Jesus Christ who is head of his Church.<sup>11</sup>

Imbued with this spirituality, Eugene de Mazenod understood that his love of Christ was to lead him to identify with Him.

“[...] The novices’ devotion should especially concentrate on the sacred person of our adorable Savior. In times of trial, the only thing they should try to do is to establish in their hearts the reign of Jesus Christ and to arrive at the point that they live only by his divine life and that they can say with St. Paul: I live now not with my own life but with the life of Christ who lives in me, *vivo, ego jam non ego*, etc. (Galatians 2:20).”<sup>12</sup>

To identify with Christ means to live His life, to travel with him on the road to Calvary, to endure all the trials that He endured on this earth: the desert, fasting, temptation, suffering, weariness, the conflicts of public life.

“During the night, we will find ourselves assembled on the mountain to gather the fruit of his prayer [oraisons] and, during the day, [...] in recollection, we will listen to his divine word and

like Mary, his holy mother, we will take counsel in our hearts (Luke 2:19); we will imbue ourselves with the sentiments of our Redeemer, we will surrender ourselves to the inspirations of his love; we will mold our souls to conform to his, until that point when he has so taken form in us (Galatians 4:19) that we live his humble, strenuous and penitent life to such an extent that we become so conformed to his image, ceaselessly reproduced before us, that he should be in our regard the firstborn of a multitude of brothers and after having been called, we should be justified, and after having been justified, we should be glorified (Romans 13:29-30)".<sup>13</sup>

The Oblate "cannot resurrect with Christ unless he has first died with him"<sup>14</sup>. His consecration identifies him with Christ, with his life, his virtues, his trials, his body which is the Church.

### 1. LIFE IN CHRIST

Life in Christ, the redemption and the blood of Christ, are three themes intimately linked to one another. They represent the regeneration and the reincorporation of man in Christ through the mystery of salvation and Baptism. Christ, by his blood, gives man new life and renews him. From the cross is born a new man, the "new Adam". It is through Christ's blood and through Baptism that the Christian begins to live in Christ.

Eugene de Mazenod observed, judged, understood the issue and acted with this internal perspective, as it were, from the inner life of Christ.

Man "united to Jesus Christ, proceeding through him to his goal which is God, being enlightened by his light and living with his life, already clothed in Jesus Christ himself [...] would work

to climb ever higher through the process of an internal ascension to transcend his own nature, to the state of the perfect man and the mature age of the plenitude of Jesus Christ".<sup>15</sup>

This union between men and Christ<sup>16</sup> form the theme of his teaching as Bishop and Founder: "My dear children [...] you are all present to me, just as you are, and most willingly I concern myself about you before God! That is where I give you rendezvous. Speak often of me to our common Father who is, with his divine Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, at the centre of our hearts; love him, ever let us love each other more in him".<sup>17</sup>

Father Léo Deschâtelets also stressed this reality: "Above all, the Oblate is one who is consecrated. That summarizes the whole thought of Bishop de Mazenod. The Oblate is bound to the Lord, to Christ, to Jesus, the Son of God. The incarnate Word is everything in the life of the Oblate and, in a certain sense, the Oblate seeks with unflagging persistence to live Jesus in everything and in every way. For me, that is essential. The grace of being an Oblate consists in the fact that he should be a prisoner of the love of Christ in the selfsame way as St. Paul was. For me, he feels compelled to say: to live is Christ. If we have understood that, we have understood what it means to be an Oblate. The Oblate loves Christ; he allows himself to be completely taken over by Him: such is his special grace; it is part and parcel of his charism. If I do not have this love in my heart, if this love of Christ has not taken total possession of me, I am not an Oblate as the Founder wished and according to the way living tradition has interpreted it."<sup>18</sup>

This relationship with Christ was the foundation of Eugene de Mazenod's

“interior castle”. In spite of the limits and the poverty of the ecclesiology of his times, he saw the Church from the starting point of the “life of Christ”, contemplating the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ, the Spouse, Mother, Humanity reborn.

## 2. THE LIMITATIONS OF EUGENE DE MAZENOD’S FORMATION

Gallicanism and Jansenism had left their mark on the theology of the time. Seminary education had been fragile and uncertain<sup>19</sup>; the only spiritual sources worthy of profound reflection had been the theology of Bossuet and the spirituality of Father Olier.<sup>20</sup> There were no courses in church history in the seminaries. Ecclesiology was taught by Father Boyer – accommodating and compliant in regard to the powers of Napoleon, he was of the Gallican school of thought. He also defended openly the thesis of the superiority of the council over the Pope, namely, that the power of the Pope was an abuse, his authority was subordinate to the authority of the universal Church.

On the other hand, even the manuals approved later on by the Founder would not be richer in content. A case in point was the seminary manual approved for use by Eugene de Mazenod as bishop of Marseilles. In a total of two hundred and seventy-seven pages, sixteen treated of the institution of the Church, fifty-four dealt with the marks of the Church and two hundred and seven pages dealt with questions of Canon Law.

The richness contained in the Founder’s spirituality and his thought was evidently the fruit of his experience and his personal insight. Eugene de Mazenod was a practicing Catholic, one with a habit of spiritual reading, of constant study and one familiar with apolo-

getics.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, it seems important to me to stress that the nobles of that time – and Eugene was one of them – never engaged in manual work. Therefore, it was not difficult for him, avid reader that he was, to acquire a well-developed knowledge and erudition.

## 3. THE CHURCH, MYSTICAL BODY OF CHRIST

Even before entering the seminary, Eugene discovered the reality of the Church as the Mystical Body. His spirit soared at the idea of being “a member of this great family of which God himself is the head”.<sup>22</sup>

In 1808, Eugene decided to enter the seminary of Saint-Sulpice. He was already twenty-six years of age. Ready for martyrdom, he brought with him his civilian dress. He did, in fact, foresee that the persecution of the Church, Napoleon’s doing, would become more severe. In the suffering Church, Eugene saw the suffering Body of Christ himself.

“Born from the blood of a God dying on the cross, she will lead an existence worthy of her origins and always, whether robed in triumphant purple or cowering in dungeons, she will bear this cross of suffering upon which hangs the salvation of the world. Inseparably linked to Jesus, the one who was calumniated, persecuted, condemned by the ungrateful people he sought to save, she will go on steadily to the end of time in the ways of his sufferings and in a union which mere words cannot express, a union which Hell, quivering in its rage, will ceaselessly strive to throw into turmoil. Like her divine Spouse who is also for ever and always her model, she will have to contend with all the errors and the passions stirred against her and to firmly uphold the ir-

revocable laws of God which are those of truth and justice".<sup>23</sup>

In 1809, Eugene was put in charge of teaching catechism in the parish of Saint-Sulpice. Among other things, he wrote out a catechetical instruction on the communion of the saints and on the Church as the Mystical Body. Émilien Lamirande considers this teaching "the expression of a mature thought and one that is especially lived in depth".<sup>24</sup>

The language of this young seminarian who spoke of the Church with such conviction surprises us today.

"If you paid attention to the previous lessons, you will have learned that the Church is a body made up of several members classified into three groups which we called the Church triumphant, the Church suffering and the Church militant. Among these three groups there exists the most intimate union, since they form, as we said, one and the same body of which Jesus Christ is the head, so that it is true to say that they are all members of the mystical body of Jesus Christ and members of Jesus Christ".<sup>25</sup>

In his pastoral letter of February 24, 1847, Bishop de Mazenod showed how, in each local community, in each particular region of the earth, the totality of the Mystical Body was expressed. While incarnating itself into the various cultures, the Church remained united as one in Christ: "Let us teach those who are ignorant thereof that in all the regions of the universe, the Catholic Church forms an indivisible body of which Jesus Christ is the head and we are the Members. Let us teach them that none can suffer without our recognizing Jesus Christ himself in his suffering members, without anyone imbued with his spirit of charity not being able to say with Saint Paul: "Who amongst you is in sorrow without I myself being sor-

rowful too?" (2 Corinthians 11:29) Why then distinguish one nation from another in the Catholic Church? There is no distinction, says the Apostle, of Jew and Greek; they all have the same Lord who is bountiful towards those who invoke him (Romans 10:12). "You have all been clothed with Jesus Christ," the same Apostle says energetically elsewhere, "there is not amongst you Jew, or Greek, slave or free man... You are all one in Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:28)".<sup>26</sup>

The expression *mystical body*, frequently used by Eugene de Mazenod, was found only rarely in the writings of Father Olier and never in the writings of Bossuet. In any case, Eugene had read Fénelon and Suarez, both of whom had made accurate use of the term.<sup>27</sup>

Eugene lived this reality so intensely that he transmitted this feeling to the Congregation: "However far away you are from the centre of the Congregation, remember that you must live the life of the family of which you are a part. It is a consolation at the ends of the earth, where you are, to think that you are living the same life and in intimate communion with your brothers scattered over the entire surface of the globe".<sup>28</sup>

"We are all members of one body, let each strive by every means and by making sacrifices, if he must, for the well-being of this body and the growth of all its potentialities. I do not know why I remind you of these things. I am quite aware of the fine spirit which animates you. It is just that I enjoy conversing with you about what we hold in common".<sup>29</sup>

"When it [your letter] was delivered to me, your consecration to God had already taken place and you were decidedly one of us, that is, you had become a member of a body which has Mary for Mother [...]."<sup>30</sup>

#### 4. THE MYSTICAL BODY REDEEMED BY THE BLOOD OF CHRIST

“There [on the cross] the Man-God prayed and died. Through his prayer and his death, he fulfills the most stringent demands of justice and he draws down the most abundant outpourings of grace. Through the grace which flows down from the cross, man, raised to God and in unity with him, prays with God and contributes to his prayer the merit of a divine death. It is done. It is the blood of the Lamb without blemish who cries out to God to ask for mercy. How could his prayer, fail to be granted? This blood, shed for the salvation of the world, reaches our heart and gives it the strength to send up from the depths of its misery an all-powerful cry which resounds right into the very heart of God”.<sup>31</sup>

In the spirituality of the Founder’s time, the blood of Christ, which is a symbol of the redemptive passion of Christ, was a theme with a thousand facets. Blood is the grace which imbues all reality to recreate it and to renew it in the eyes of God. The blood of Christ redeems, frees from death, and creates new relations among Christians.

“This union among the children of men and of Jesus Christ was accomplished on Calvary, while the divine blood was shed for redemption and while through the passion and death of the Savior, grace was merited for them... The Church, therefore, is the price won by the blood of Jesus Christ [...]”.<sup>32</sup>

Blood is an image rich in content which suggests several aspects of the Redemption and of the union of those saved in Christ. “They are all brothers in the most perfect manner, for the same blood runs in their veins and this blood is that of a God. This adorable

blood in which they have been regenerated flows, so to speak, in their souls. It even becomes incorporated into them by actually becoming their drink while the body of Jesus Christ truly becomes their food (John 6:56) in Holy Communion. Among them spiritual goods are their common possessions and a holy common participation in merit, a participation in no way prejudicial to the rights the person already possesses”.<sup>33</sup>

Émilien Lamirande is fully justified, then, in saying that here we are dealing with a central theme of the spiritual doctrine of Bishop de Mazenod.<sup>34</sup>

#### 5. THE UNIVERSAL COMMUNION OF THE CHURCH

The theology and pastoral practice subsequent to Vatican Council II have especially brought forth the dimensions of local church and faith communities. The Council stirred up sweeping changes in the Church by highlighting the role of small communities, of the laity, of the Church’s relationship to the world, of its “inculturation”, of its commitment to build up the Kingdom of God, etc., perhaps to the detriment of its mystery.

It is important to situate Eugene de Mazenod within the context of his own era. Even if certain aspects of his ecclesiology already suggested the Church of today, there can be no doubt that his vocabulary, his thought and his spirituality are of his period in time. When treating of the Church, he focused on and stressed especially its mysterious dimension: the indissoluble union between the Church and Christ, the mysterious transmission of Redemption to all the faithful, the union in Christ of the living and the saints in heaven, the universal union of believers, the sharing in the mysteries of Christ.

In any case, we must point out that another of the basic elements of Eugene de Mazenod's spirituality, the communion of the saints, had been largely consigned to oblivion in his time. To the individualist mentality which was also the fruit of the "humanist" French Revolution, he opposed the communitarian dimension of life and of faith.<sup>35</sup>

"We call the communion of the saints the union which exists between the members of the Church [...] Communion is a Latin word which means the same thing as bond, society, communication, union. That is, through this one word, we express something which belongs to several persons, as for example you might speak of a certain field as belonging to the city of Paris, a field where all the inhabitants of the city can go cut hay, harvest, gather grapes as individuals acting on behalf of the whole group. This comparison is very accurate because Our Lord himself often compared his Church to a field. All the good seeds cast there, that is, all the good works carried out by a member of the true Church and all the good resulting from these actions do not belong exclusively to the author of these good deeds, but to all the faithful in general. Each member of the Church is like a common fund: no one can claim: this is mine; that is yours; but all is held in common among them and each individual has a right to benefit from the good which is accomplished by the others. That is what we understand by communion".<sup>36</sup>

Then, Eugene spoke to the children of his catechism class. He needed only to draw a couple of logical conclusions to formulate, in addition to the spiritual doctrine, a human, psychological, social and political doctrine which was simply revolutionary: the revolution of goods held in common.

It is the communion of the saints which saves. The community and the person are both essential elements in it.

"One drop of the blood of Jesus Christ, one of his tears, would have been enough to redeem the world. On the other hand, the saints practiced penance and made atonement for sins for which they were not responsible. But nothing of this surplus of merit is lost. The Church has gathered up all of these treasures and, by a providential unity, it brings about the participation of those who, strictly speaking, have no claim to it. No doubt, those who gained this merit receive the glory which is their due, but their glory is increased due to the fact that the ownership of their riches is shared with us and thus the infinite charity of God and that of the saints carry off the victory in our favor".<sup>37</sup>

"The communion of the saints, one of the articles of the creed, consists in the participation of all the faithful in the same spiritual benefits and the same merits which can be shared with one another. It is a kind of common possession of goods in the order of grace. Although the bonds which unite them cannot be seen and that distance is no obstacle to them, going even beyond the confines of this world, nevertheless, we find a warm and moving image of this common possession of goods and of this mysterious unity of all the children of God when they gather around the altar, while with a common voice they sing in unison the same praises, sending heavenward the same petitions and at the same time participating in the same sacrifice. Just like in the early Church where they were of one heart and one soul, they were all of one mind united in word and in voice".<sup>38</sup>

The common treasures of Christians were the blood of Christ and the Spirit.

“Not only is the blood of the same human brotherhood common to us but the blood of our Redeemer in which we share as recipients of the same grace and the same sacraments. Let us teach those who are ignorant thereof that in all the regions of the universe, the Catholic Church forms an indivisible body of which Jesus Christ is the head and we are the members. Let us teach them that none can suffer without our recognizing Jesus Christ himself in suffering members, without anyone imbued with his spirit of charity not being able to say with Saint Paul: Who amongst you is in sorrow without I myself being sorrowful too? (2 Corinthians 11:29). Why then distinguish one nation from another in the Catholic Church? There is no distinction, says the Apostle, of Jew and Greek; they all have the same Lord who is bountiful towards those who invoke him. (Romans 10:12)”.<sup>39</sup>

Eugene, a young man at the time, was reacting to the sermon of a priest who praised to the skies the victory of the French armies when he wrote: “In the house of our God who is equally the God of the Italians, the Austrians, and the Prussians, all of them our brothers, whom we are strictly enjoined to love as the children of the same father before whom, according to the Apostle, there is no distinction of persons or of nations when they profess the same belief”.<sup>40</sup>

Eugene communicated to the Congregation and to the Oblates sharing the common life the spirit of the communion of the saints.

“Let us rejoice then mutually over all the good done by our brethren in the four quarters of the world. With us, it is wholly a question of solidarity. Each works for all and all for each. Oh! how beautiful, how touching is the communion of the saints”.<sup>41</sup>

When speaking of the first four Oblates to die, he comes back to the notion that, as a catechist at Saint-Sulpice, he had explained to the children the unity through the common bond which links the living and the dead: “We are linked to them by the bonds of a special charity. They are still our brothers and we are theirs. They now live in our mother-house, our high place. The prayers and the love they retain for us will one day draw us to them and we shall live in our place of rest together with them. I presume that our community up above must have its place very close to our Patroness; I see them beside Mary Immaculate and consequently in the vicinity of our Lord Jesus Christ whom they have followed on this earth and whom they are contemplating with delight”.<sup>42</sup>

Even the Eucharist was seen in the perspective of communion: “You cannot believe how much I think in the presence of God of our dear Red River missionaries. I have only one way of drawing near to them, and that is in front of the Blessed Sacrament, where I seem to see you and to touch you. And you for your part must often be in His presence. It is thus that we meet each other in that living centre which serves as our means of communication”.<sup>43</sup>

Profoundly imbued with the mystery of Christ and the Church. Eugene de Mazenod saw everything in this perspective, considered everything that did not fit into that framework as lost or on the way to perdition.

The Church had not yet examined in depth the reality of the world and consequently was oblivious to an important dimension: that grace followed a path which was uniquely its own and that God was present and active in the heart of each human being.

The Second Vatican Council helped remove this obstacle which separated

the Church from the world. One of the consequences was a new-found freedom for ecclesiastical vocabulary. The words *pagan* and *infidel* no longer found a place in it and in their stead, we find *men of goodwill*.

Nevertheless, we would never have attained to the rich ecclesiology of our day without the forerunners who appeared in the last century and in the first half of the present century. Rosmini, Newman and Congar, are only a few of the host of those who were the forerunners of Vatican II.

With a bit of humility and some pride, the Oblates made their contribution as well. Eugene de Mazenod was one of them. In a world where the Church was running the risk of breaking up into so many national churches, Eugene insisted on its universality. In general, in today's world which is becoming more and more universal, the urgency is rather to develop the incarnation of the Church within the various cultures. That is how we can respond to the danger of seeing people 'lose their identity and their culture.

## 6. THE POPE IS CHRIST ON THE CROSS

The Founder's fidelity to the see of Peter was another mainstay in Oblate spirituality.<sup>44</sup> In the person of the Pope, Christians paid homage to Christ in his zeal for the Church and for the human race.<sup>45</sup> The Pope continued the merciful presence of Christ on earth.<sup>46</sup> He guided the people of the New Covenant; he reawakened faith, stirred up resistance to oppression, preached peace, spoke on behalf of the vanquished, protected the oppressed.<sup>47</sup>

In an era of persecution of the papacy, a few years before the termination of the papacy's temporal power, but at the outset of a golden age of the Church

which would culminate in the Second Vatican Council, Eugene de Mazenod acclaimed the greatness of the papacy by means of comparisons with the great prophets of the Bible: "If, in the meeting place with the living God, he plays the role of Aaron, he plays that of Moses as well, leader of the tribes of Israel. If his peaceful reign denotes a Solomon whose wisdom he teaches, in his militancy, he is a David against whom the nations have trembled and the people have hatched vain plots (Psalm 2:1); more accurately, as the genuine anointed of the Lord, he is Jesus Christ on the cross, victim of the sins of mankind and saving them at the cost of his sacrifice. Thus it is that the disciple is not above his master (Luke 6:40) and that the vicar of the divine Savior portrays the one he represents".<sup>48</sup>

For Eugene, this was not a question of an abstract principle, but the description of a father with the face and the heart of Christ.

"Chosen from on high to represent throughout the earth the Sovereign Pastor of souls, he sees the militant Church ceaselessly obliged to bear the brunt of terrible attacks and sustain rude combats. He feels all the anguish of the spouse of Jesus Christ. His heart is struck by all the blows directed against her and torn by all the wounds that she receives. His head bears the crown of thorns of the divine Saviour under the tiara of the Pontiff King. And like Jesus Christ from the height of the cross, his Vicar from the height of the throne of the Prince of the Apostles gives forth a great cry to the world".<sup>49</sup>

## 7. THE CHURCH: MOTHER AND FATHER

Among the many images used by the Founder to define the Church, the richest in content is that of Church-

Mother. It is an image which he enriched with innumerable subtle elements.

"The new Eve destined to crush the head of this abominable serpent is at the same time a perfect and sublime reality and an exemplification of the Church. Mother of all Christians, just as the most holy Virgin is mother of Jesus Christ and by adoption mother of all Christians as well who form one unity with him [...] She watches over them with unremitting care from the cradle to the grave to ward off all danger, to direct them in their ways, to help them up after their falls, to console them in their afflictions, to strengthen them in their weaknesses, to illumine their ignorance and uncertainty and to sustain them in their struggles against the enemy of their salvation. These helps, these illuminations, this strength, she communicates to them through the word of truth and by the sacraments while she enables them to participate in all the spiritual riches which the divine Spouse has confided to her to guard and to distribute".<sup>50</sup>

It often happened that the literary expressions of the Founder were not the most attractive. He would never be assigned an important place in French literature, but his ability to understand the deep meaning of the faith and to apply it to everyday life is undeniable.

Within the Congregation, he was to the end both father and mother of the Oblates scattered all over the world: "You know, my dear son, that my great imperfection is to love passionately the children God has given me. No mother's love can equal it. Perfection would consist in being unaffected by the desultory response of my children to this maternal affection. There is where I sin".<sup>51</sup>

"I have seen many religious orders and I am in very close and friendly contacts with those of the greatest

regularity of life. Well, I have noticed among them, quite aside from their virtue, a strong esprit de corps. But this more than paternal love of the head for the members of the family, this heartfelt attachment of the members for their head which gives rise among them to relationships that flow from heart to heart and which create among us genuine family bonds of father to son, son to father, that I have discovered no place else. I have always thanked God for this as for a special gift that he has given me, for that is the kind of heart he has given me, that radiation of love which is special to me and which pours out on each one individually without depriving anyone, just as is the case, if I may say so, of the love of God for mankind".<sup>52</sup>

This is not presumption, but rather the characteristic of a Founder who gives life to a new charism, in the same way each missionary gives life to the Church through the grace of God and of the Word.

## 8. THE CHURCH, PEOPLE OF GOD

The main image singled out by the Second Vatican Council is that of the People of God. This biblical characterization highlights the communitarian and human aspect of the Church, the difficult road it must travel, its journey through history, its link with the world, its unity in baptism, its ministerial character.

When Eugene de Mazenod spoke of the Church as People of God, he wanted to stress its universality, its transcendence and its divine origin: "The divine word has infused new life into all these bones; they have received spirit and life, and behold, they have become once again the chosen race, the holy nation, a people redeemed (1 Peter 2:9). After

having been daily instructed in the truth and having confessed its lapses, this people renewed its covenant with the Lord and now comes to partake of the lamb without blemish and to feed on the bread of immortality".<sup>53</sup>

#### 9. THE ROYAL PRIESTHOOD OF THE LAITY

The royal priesthood of the laity was one of the controversial questions in theology because the Protestants had coopted it as their favorite bone of contention, that is, Scripture speaks only about a priesthood which is common to all the faithful. The Catholic Church formulated its official answer at the Council of Trent and the "ignorance" concerning the common priesthood of the faithful lasted until Vatican II. However, is there really such a great difference between the thought of the Founder and contemporary thought on the subject? No! In Eugene de Mazenod's sweeping portrait of the extraordinary riches of the mystery of the Church, we find various elements of the new ecclesiology of Vatican II. Historic and cultural limits notwithstanding, he was a promoter of lay associations, of the common priesthood of the faithful, of a more direct participation of the laity in the work of the Church.

According to the Oblate spirit, the presence of the laity is not incidental; rather, it is an integral part of the charism. The Oblates work with the laity, support them in their work in the world and organize activities, communities, movements, as well as ministries of the laity. Among these latter, the poor are naturally the ones we prefer: "You, the poor of Jesus Christ, the afflicted and wretched, the sick and suffering and covered with sores, etc., whom misery overwhelms, my brethren, my dear

brethren, my dear *respectable* brethren, listen to me.

"You are the children of God, the brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, the co-heirs of his eternal Kingdom, the cherished portion of his inheritance; you are, in the words of Saint Peter, the holy nation, you are kings, you are priests, you are, in some way, gods: *Dii estis et filii Excelsi omnes*".

"Now you know your dignity as Christians, children of God, brothers and co-heirs of Jesus Christ, holy nation, chosen portion of the heritage of the Lord, destined to rule eternally in heaven as kings, priests, in a word, to use the expression hallowed by its usage in Scripture, you have been able to compare these lofty destinies with what the world promises you, that tyrant which sees only your humble external appearance and rewards you by despising the useful services that you ceaselessly render it, perhaps to the detriment of your souls".<sup>54</sup>

As a result, he undertook to have the laity participate more actively in the liturgy: "Those in attendance [...] I during high Mass are not mere listeners, but engaged in everything, they intervene constantly to express loudly their total solidarity with what is going on at the altar and the participation of those in attendance is not limited to the clergy alone, but is the privilege of every individual member of the faithful present in this holy place".<sup>55</sup>

His judgment of the realities of the secular world which have as their goal the building up of the Kingdom of God also springs from this insight. That is what he expressed in a speech about the importance of railways: "Do not think, Gentlemen, that she [the Church] wishes simply to contribute further conveniences to the material existence of people. No, she wants to bring them to-

gether, to lead them to mingle on the physical level in view of bringing them to unity in the moral level. By increasing these means of communication and increasing the number of encounters, the occasions for unity become more frequent and the movement toward this mysterious unity of the children of the human family under the same God, one faith, one Baptism gains momentum".<sup>56</sup>

In a speech to the Chamber of Commerce of Marseilles, he stated: "But the Church, which comes to outline for you the rights of God and the duties of conscience, is certainly not indifferent to the commercial affairs of our city. If commercial transactions increase the relationships of people with each other, if it succeeds in carrying civilization to the furthest shores, it is because it is working in harmony with the faith that unites all peoples in the same family and which has brought civilization to a large part of the world. The trader and the navigator are the missionary's collaborators.

"Your sailboats and steamships are at the service of the Gospel as well as serving your commercial interests. In the designs of Providence, the growth of our commercial relations is linked to the spread of the Reign of God. And if in our day, through modern inventions, God grants to these relations the kind of growth unknown heretofore, it is because He wishes to extend more and more, to all the islands and continents, the spiritual realm of the Church. Do not doubt it; with regard to the various projects on behalf of the faithful, this is the reason for the progress which we admire".<sup>57</sup>

#### 10. MATTHEW 18:20

Saint Matthew's statement, "For where two or three meet in my name, I

shall be there with them", stressed also the fact that the ecclesial dimension is not necessarily linked to the presence of the ordained minister. We find in this text the principle of the particular Church. Naturally, there was contained here another point of disagreement with the Protestants which, through the conciliar revolution became transformed, especially among the laity, into an element contributing to the reunion of Christians.

Eugene de Mazenod's style was to follow his insight, his instinct, his capability of responding to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit. And that is what he did in this case as well.

"Just like in the early Church where they had only one heart and one soul, they share the same sentiment, the same word and the same voice. Upon seeing them thus assembled in the holy place to adore together with the most *solemn* liturgical gestures the mystery which is being worked for them and to partake of the graces which are its fruit, we recognize the brethren happy to share the common life under one roof (Psalm 133:1) and to sit at the same table. Christian brotherhood, their union in God becomes evident in the most tangible way: we feel that we are in the house of the Lord, the only genuine bond of spirits and hearts. Something speaks to the spirit, telling it that in that particular moment is especially realized this word of the divine Master: "For where two or three meet in my name, I shall be there with them", to answer their prayer".<sup>58</sup>

### III. THE CHURCH IN THE CONSTITUTIONS AND RULES

It is the Congregation which conserves and incarnates the charism of the Founder in the history of humanity and of the Church. The guarantee of its

continuing existence depends on its fidelity to the original inspiration of the Founder.

This fidelity has a variety of aspects: respect for the fundamental ideas of the Founder and a regular return to them; the development and deepening required by the passage of the years, by the encounters with other cultures, other experiences and other theologies, the renewal of the charism in the light of the Church.

Already in 1816, at the very beginnings of the Congregation, Eugene de Mazenod understood that God was calling the Oblates to restore to the Church its splendor by leading "the multitude of lost sheep back to the fold"<sup>59</sup>, by bringing "people back to the Faith"<sup>60</sup>, by preaching "the divine word to the poor"<sup>61</sup>, and by poor, he understood the people of rural Provence who were left to their own devices and deprived of the spiritual assistance of the Church.<sup>62</sup>

Eugene de Mazenod wanted to renew the life of the Church of his country where one of the most painful realities was "the defection of such a large number of priests".<sup>63</sup> According to the thinking of his time, the non-Christian was an infidel who needed to be brought back into the fold or to be won to the Lord.

Later on, the Congregation updated this way of thinking: "The Church and the world of today are subject to constant change: this in turn affects our life and ministry as Oblates. The Second Vatican Council in particular and the events which followed it have profoundly modified the life of the Church. The Church has come away from this experience with a greater understanding of herself. As a result, we Oblates have a clearer understanding of the place God has given us in the Church so that we might serve the world".<sup>64</sup>

Just like all other Christians, Oblates are called to live the fullness of the faith they have assumed in Baptism, and as bearers of a charism, they bring out some aspects of it.

One of the concerns of the Founder was, for example, the proclamation of the word of God in a way that took into consideration the people being evangelized: "It is explicitly recommended that only simple, easy sermons be written, sermons characterized by solidity of content and power, in a word, sermons adapted to those to whom they are to be preached".<sup>65</sup>

Treating this reality more in depth, the reality which theology later defined as "inculturation", the General Chapter of 1986 stated: "Inculturation is not only a way of acting, it is also a way of being. It implies a spirituality which affects our entire being as well as our missionary outlook. [...] Inculturation demands the spirituality of an "Oblate", that is, a person completely available to others [...]."<sup>66</sup>

Along with these changes, it is interesting to note the elements that remain constant: relationship with the laity, the merciful attitude toward sinners, the close ties with the local church, the ministry of the mission as a communitarian and ecclesial expression.

The Constitutions and Rules of 1818 treated at length on the relationship between the Oblates and the youth association which they were guiding: "The direction of youth will be considered as an essential duty of our Institute. The Superior General [...] will require that a report be made to him on the state of the Youth Association [...] with the same care and detail as a report made on the novitiate itself. He will make it his duty to know all the youth associates by name. He will have frequent contact with their families [...]."<sup>67</sup>

The 1982 Rule stated: "In various places lay people feel called to participate directly in the Oblate mission, ministry and community. The terms of their association can be drawn up at the provincial level, in agreement with the General Administration".<sup>68</sup>

"They will take care in the administration of the sacrament of penance to avoid too great a laxity as well as too much rigor [...]. The missionaries always welcome sinners with an inexhaustible charity. Let them encourage them by their relaxed manner while showing them a heart of compassion [...]."<sup>69</sup>

The Oblates should submit their ministry of missions to the local church in the persons of the bishops and the parish priests.<sup>70</sup>

"In accordance with the directives of the Church, an effective missionary apostolate can be realized today only within the scope of a comprehensive pastoral program. For this reason, the Oblates in all of -their undertakings will seek to cooperate closely with diocesan, national and international organizations, in the field of evangelization and of pastoral ministry.

"In the spirit of the decrees of the Second Vatican Council, the Oblates will seek to promote an atmosphere of charity and dialogue with neighboring Christian communities, and also with the members of non-Christian religions".<sup>71</sup>

The top priority ministry is naturally the ministry carried out in community: "We will never go on mission alone; there will always be at least two together".<sup>72</sup>

Finally, as builders of the Church and of new ecclesial realities, the Oblates must be an authentic expression of this by being the bishops' men and the Pope's men.<sup>73</sup>

The model of the Church that is proclaimed and that is to be lived is

"the community of the Apostles",<sup>74</sup> the form the early Church took to go and conquer the world. "Our communities, therefore, are apostolic in character".<sup>75</sup>

#### IV. GENERAL CHAPTERS

General Chapters reflect the thinking of the Founder and of the Rule as well as the Church whose illumination permits the charism to renew itself. But they also reflect the missionary experience of the Oblates who, by their lives, continue to deepen their understanding of what it means to evangelize the poor.

In a circular letter on the Rule, Eugene de Mazenod reaffirmed that the end of the mission is "to collaborate in the extending of the kingdom of Jesus Christ and to sacrifice their life to lead a great number of souls into the fold of the Father of the family".<sup>76</sup>

In the mission fields, this central theme is enriched with new elements such as the works of human development that are beginning to be perceived as essential factors in human and spiritual growth.

The presence of missionaries in far off regions difficult of access as well as the diversity of cultures compelled a modification of the rigid model of Church, required changes and adaptations to religious life and church life.<sup>77</sup>

"Even though the missions are the first and main end of the Congregation, nevertheless, the apostolate with the working class [...] according to the principles of Leo XIII's encyclical, *De conditione opificum* [...] is not only in conformity with the end of the Institute, but should moreover be strongly encouraged at the present time".<sup>78</sup>

The General Chapter of 1947 made the decision that the Congregation

should collaborate in the formation of members of Catholic Action.<sup>79</sup>

"No province, even though it may rarely send missionaries to the missions, should dispense itself from the obligation of cooperating concretely in the apostolate with non-Catholics and the native peoples".<sup>80</sup>

In mission countries, the newly arrived missionaries should learn the language, prepare themselves to carry out the tasks of the ministry and, if necessary, become citizens of that country.<sup>81</sup>

The General Chapter of 1953, under the guidance of the expression "renew or die", an expression used by Bishop Larraona during his visit to the Chapter, spoke of renewal.<sup>82</sup>

"Love of the Church was the overriding theme in all our discussions. It was: at the centre of all our debates".<sup>83</sup>

A new expression, "democracy", which the Church had borrowed from Maritain found its way into the Chapter discussions. "The conclusions of our studies and of our discussions will be arrived at in the *most democratic manner possible*: by majority vote. Thus, for all of us, the will of God will be made manifest [...]."<sup>84</sup>

As for the missions that had been founded long ago, the Superior General asked himself whether it would not be better "to let the Church know that we think the time has come, the work has reached the proper stage of maturity and the situation is sufficiently developed for us to relinquish our missionary role with exclusive responsibility for these territories".<sup>85</sup>

## V. VATICAN II, A TURNING POINT FOR THE CONGREGATION

The Chapter of 1966 took place immediately after the Second Vatican

Council. The influence of this Council was so strong that the Oblate tradition was almost overwhelmed by the newness it brought. From his opening speech, Father Deschâtelets kept returning to the central theme of the Council: the Church, the People of God.<sup>86</sup>

His whole speech was centered on the renewal of the Congregation. Five of the numerous images he used had to do with the Church as the People of God and four deal with the Church as the Body of Christ.

There was no longer any talk of making converts. "The Oblates have as their mission to come to the aid of the Church and of the world".<sup>87</sup>

"The Oblates should always carry out a missionary task, proclaiming Christ by the witness of their lives and that of their words in order to awaken or to reawaken the faith and to build upon the foundation of this faith a living Church in a state of striving toward the Kingdom in a community of worship and of charity".<sup>88</sup>

"[The Oblate] must support the laity in their particular role of cooperating in the mission of the Church".<sup>89</sup>

"The Chapter could not fail being strongly influenced by the conciliar thinking of the Church evolving in the divine plan of salvation and inviting its children to a pastoral approach to contemporary humanity".<sup>90</sup>

The influence of renewal of the Church raised up by Vatican II was even more evident in the Chapter of 1972. We already noticed this in the questionnaire of the Antepreparatory Commission: "What doors does the Province presently have opening onto the major world problems that affect the lives of the poor [...]"<sup>91</sup> "Does the need for new ways of doing things in the apostolate [...] spring from the

needs for new kinds of apostolic presences in the world?"<sup>92</sup> "How and in what measure are the communities of your Province open to the world?"<sup>93</sup>

On the other hand, there was less optimism than in 1966: "In the overall picture of fidelity to the Founder and to traditions of the Institute some shadows appear. In the context of the problems presented by modern ecclesiology, some people have the tendency of attributing only secondary importance to the Oblate identity and the Mazenodian ideal".<sup>94</sup>

Already appearing charged with all their conflicting elements were the themes of our relationship with the world and with the laity, of justice, of insertion into the world of the poor".<sup>95</sup> The Chapter document was drawn up according to the "see-judge-act" method. On the South American situation, the following was said: "Our brother Oblates ask themselves how they can best contribute to the true and total liberation in Christ of the Latin American continent".<sup>96</sup>

The mission must be deeply committed to developing the local church.

"In other places, the mission seems to demand a presence more clearly responsive to injustices and to economic and social aspirations".<sup>97</sup> Questions were raised on the possibility of new ways of belonging to the Congregation".<sup>98</sup>

"We commit ourselves to the movement toward authentic liberation that so characterizes our times".<sup>99</sup> "We give our full approval to those Oblates who have the particular charism to identify themselves completely with the poor by taking on their social, cultural and economic conditions".<sup>100</sup> "We realize we may not always be able to preach the Gospel explicitly. Especially in areas where the great non-Christian

religions are a living reality, our evangelization should include a common search for Truth..."<sup>101</sup>

The Chapter encouraged experimentation in community living, in formation, in structures, in the missionary presence in the world, among others things, small Christian communities.

"Within these basic Christian communities, concrete images of the universal Church, we will help to form responsible lay leaders capable of serving the needs of the people".<sup>102</sup>

It also presented the possibility for Oblates to engage in a secular profession and even to take part in "the social and political struggles which influence their future, particularly in the working man's world".<sup>103</sup>

Finally, it exhorted the members to support and not to extinguish the prophetic voices. This manner of seeing things, lucid, very beautiful, but controverted, produced the same effect on the Congregation which the Council had on the Church; it lit up the dark areas. Moreover, this outlook was so broad that it ran the risk of obscuring the characteristics of the Oblate charism and of giving rise to interpretations and implementations that were extremely different.

The Chapter of 1974, convoked because of the sudden resignation of the Superior General, Richard Hanley made some changes in *The Missionary Outlook* by correcting the idea of liberation and by reaffirming certain characteristic values of the Oblate charism.

In his report to the Chapter, Father Fernand Jetté said the following: "The Congregation should be a leaven in the life of the Church, not a "fifth column". As Oblates we are nothing without the Church and our mission is given to us by the official hierarchy of the Church (i.e., by the Pope and the Bishops)".<sup>104</sup>

The 1974 Chapter did not disassociate itself from the ecclesiology of the 1972 Chapter, but rather modified it and incarnated it into the life and the structure of the Church and the Congregation. Father Jetté took up once again the themes of *The Missionary Outlook* and applied them very serenely and in a non-polemical manner.

The Chapters of 1980 and 1986 confirmed the direction taken in 1974: insertion into the universal and the local Churches and renewal of the same, and the rediscovery of the original characteristics of the Oblate charism.

"We believe in the God of Exodus, the God of yesterday and today, the liberating Savior of history, fully revealed in Jesus Christ. In the Gospel, Jesus identifies himself with the hungry, the sick and with prisoners. He wants us to find him in those who suffer, in those who are abandoned or are persecuted for their stand on behalf of justice.

"We Oblates are sent to evangelize the poor and the most abandoned, i.e. to proclaim Jesus Christ and his Kingdom (C. 5), to be witnesses of the Good News to the world, to motivate actions which might transform individuals and society, to denounce whatever is an obstacle to the coming of the kingdom".

"Eugene de Mazenod opened up the way for us by devoting himself to the service of the poor and the most neglected people of Provence in order to bring the Gospel to them".<sup>105</sup>

## VI THE SUPERIORS GENERAL

On reading through the circular letters of the Superiors General, one is struck with admiration at their coherent adhesion to the Founder and his message. They explored that message more

in depth and reinterpreted it with the greatest fidelity.

Father Joseph Fabre, he first successor of Eugene de Mazenod, studied with meticulous care the essential points of the charism and especially the aspect of fraternal charity: "Yes, my dear brothers, know this well, it is charity which will create one heart out of many hearts, out of many spirits, one single spirit. It is charity and charity alone which creates *community* such as our venerated Founder wanted to see it established. Without *charity* individual life reasserts all its demands and all its concerns; we give the impression of living in community, but there are as many viewpoints as there are individuals; their interests diverge, clash, and egoism settles within and without accompanied by all its frightening consequences. Are we really living the common life? Are we really working for the community? Do we really have genuine charity? To answer these questions, let us see if we undertake to regulate our thoughts, our words and our actions according to the maxim of the *Imitation of Christ: Ama nesciri et pro nihilo reputari* (Lib. I, cap. II, 3). Yes, the community, always the community... from then on devotion, abnegation and generosity; from then on no more envy, no more jealousy, no more individualistic existence, fraternal charity in full perfection. *Tanquam fratres habitantes in unum* (Const. art. 1)".<sup>106</sup>

At the time this characteristic and traditional element of the Congregation was a new thing for the Church which concentrated almost exclusively on the sacramental and the soteriological dimensions of the faith. It is in this context that one must view the problem of indulgences that the Pope would grant on particular occasions. Among those who benefited from these indulgences

were the missionaries if they went to confession once a month.

However, among some of them were the missionaries of the Mackenzie who, because of the distances involved, could go to confession only once a year "because of the total lack of roads in a country covered with mountains, forests, rivers and lakes, where the best roads were the ice on the rivers in winter. Finally, the nomad existence of the primitive tribes who have no fixed abode and with whom the missionary can come in contact only at certain times of the year and at certain predetermined places [...]"<sup>107</sup> The indulgence was granted all the same, thus modifying the Church's norms. Similar cases proved very frequent. Because of difficult living conditions, changes were brought in especially in the areas of liturgy, prayer and the common life.

Even the mission itself wanted to adapt to human and cultural conditions: "As for the missions, the General Chapter [...] wondered if these works were still being conducted just like they were from the beginnings of our Congregation [...] It is evident that some changes must have taken place due to the different customs in various countries".<sup>108</sup> Nevertheless, the Congregation remained a faithful expression of the Church: "In the bosom of the Catholic Church, our religious family is like a church in miniature, called to represent, in a limited but real way the rights and the duties of the Spouse of our Lord Jesus Christ".<sup>109</sup>

In Oblate spirituality, the Church is like a mother who guards her children well, who fosters their growth in "power and wisdom and grace", but who knows how to learn from them the new things of the Spirit. The Oblates feel like sons of this Mother, members of this Mystical Body of Christ: "Jesus

Christ [...] has two bodies on this earth: one which is real in the tabernacle and one which is mystical in the Church.

"*Vos estis corpus Christi* [You are the body of Christ], Saint Paul told the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 12:27) [...] Jesus Christ and the Church are united in some way in the unity of one single person: he the head, she the body [...] Only one man whose body walks the earth, but whose head is swallowed up in the highest heavens [...] One man alone whose body extends throughout the whole earth, where he speaks the language of every nation [...] Only one man whose body is extended throughout the centuries, who strides through the ages incorporating new members and fulfilling in them what is lacking in his passion".<sup>110</sup>

These, therefore, are the themes dear to Eugene de Mazenod which Father Soullier took up again: the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ and the union of Christ and of the Church.

## 1. RENEWAL ON LOOKING TOWARD THE FUTURE

In the eyes of the Congregation, Father Deschâtelets is the one who, by following up on the preconciliar and the conciliar inspirations, made a decisive contribution to the reformulation of the Oblate charism in response to the questions being asked by the modern world. It was a question of rediscovering the role of the Institute within the Church with a closer cooperation and sharing, accepting the laity as equals. In the following quote, the expressions are somewhat dated, but it is the content that counts.

"We would like to see a real army of the faithful gathered around us, forming a kind of rearguard on this vast battlefield where our valiant missionaries are

engaged in the holy battles of faith and charity. This throng will be made up of parents and young people authentically Christian who are sincerely interested in the youth of our juniorates, of our novices, of our scholastics, as if they were their own children and their brothers. And we would wish to see as the heraldic device of that great army of charity the motto which the great Pope of the Missions set forth as a challenge to all of Christianity: "All of the faithful, for all of the infidels". To which we would add the words from our, Holy Rules: "*Nihil linquendum inausum ut proferatur imperium Christi*" [We must spare no effort to extend the Saviour's empire (*Preface*)].<sup>111</sup>

The participation of the laity in the mission is a pressing priority. It will enable the Church to express fully its universal mission. Paul VI stated that "the whole Church is missionary" and the 1982 Rule in turn stated that "the whole Congregation is missionary".

The "springtime" of the Council to which Fr. Deschâtelets was personally invited made a profound impact on him; he radiated its enthusiasm. But the Spirit had prepared him for this enthusiasm: "*Missionaries of the poor*, more than ever today, let us think of the poor, "*praecipuam dent operam pauperibus evangelizandis*" [they will work especially to evangelise the poor] (CC and RR of 1928, art. 1). Let us become totally immersed in them; let us become one with them. Let us tear down all the barriers set up between the working class poor and the Church. Let us be afraid of adopting a middle class outlook since we are meant to work for the poor! Let there be only one preoccupation for us: their evangelization! [...] May Saint Joseph, the poor worker, help us to serve Jesus like he did in the person of the poor!"<sup>112</sup>

This attitude of openness enabled the Congregation to enter quickly into the movement for renewal and to deal successfully with the crises involved. At this period in time, the Oblates shared in every aspect in the mystery of the Church with the Spirit steadfastly guiding it on the road to renewal. The Congregation, like the Church, had seen Salvation being presented in new terms in these difficult times, times of profound transformation of the human race. It experienced the doubts of facing what is new and saw the defection of so many of its sons; like the Church, it had doubts about its future existence: it was wounded by betrayal and was compelled to start over again in all humility.

The Oblates are men who make common cause with the Church, not out of servile duty and inertia, but rather as sons who bring to their family all their energy, their youth and their imagination. "In virtue of a privilege which we can never fully appreciate and through the grace of our vocation, in many places we make up the only clergy of the Church under the jurisdiction of missionary bishops who represent her. Narrowness of spirit does not belong among us, the kind of narrowness that would consider the Congregation a parallel Church, a thing turned in on itself".<sup>113</sup>

In the wake of the Council, the Congregation underwent the humiliation of a purification by way of self-criticism, loyal recognition of its errors and submission to the Church which required acceptance of the "new trend".

"Since our Congregation is an individual society within the great assembly of the people of God, the General Chapter should also pursue its task in an atmosphere of the most complete submission to our Holy Mother the Church who has-welcomed us as her children

for the building up of the Body of Christ [...]”<sup>114</sup>

In the eyes of Father Deschâtelets, the Council represented a shift on the theological scene as well as in language. Less bombastic words and expressions express more effectively the conciliar realities: the Church, the People of God, “apostolate of the laity [...] ecumenical life, apostolate in the Third World, the presence of the Church in the world, openness to the world which one must love [...] catechesis [...]”<sup>115</sup>

The charism acquired other shades of expression and the very structures of the Congregation changed profoundly. “If Jesus really wanted to identify with the poor (Matthew 25:40), then our brotherhood in Christ can only aim at sharing in this mysterious identification. Missionaries to the poor, we are first of all at the service of our Mother, “Church of the Poor”.<sup>116</sup> [...] Along with our Provincials and Vicars, we foresee an ever closer cooperation in the government of the Congregation [...]”<sup>117</sup>

## 2. A NEW IDENTITY

The newness brought by the Council showed its impact even more strongly in the circular letters of Father Richard Hanley. He quoted from Abraham Lincoln, McLuhan, the musical comedy, *Hair*, Paulo Freire. The themes he treated were: renewal, inculturation, the Church in the world which presents itself as humbly asking pardon for past faults, the brothers’ right to vote on all issues that concern the Congregation, a new system of values, the service of the “new poor”, decentralization, the “grassroots”, the Kingdom of God, the new structures, communications, “a new name for government”, community as “contact with life”.<sup>118</sup>

In a circular letter written on the occasion of his visit to South America, the themes treated were: underdevelopment, liberation, social ministry, “consciousness raising”, base communities, the formation of “leaders”, the local community, the laity.<sup>119</sup>

The post-Conciliar wave of enthusiasm was followed by the search for Oblate identity: “Why be a priest, religious, Oblate? We forget that no one was closer to the poor, the oppressed, the sinners than Christ – to the point of taking upon himself their misery and identifying with them. And yet, it was by living his mission of the “consecrated one”, by remaining faithful to his “identity”, of the One Sent by the Father that he carried out his work of salvation for the liberation of his brothers [...]. It is by returning to the Founder, to his spirit and his Gospel ideals that one can rediscover the criteria capable of sustaining in full vigor, the life of each one of the members of the Congregation”.<sup>120</sup>

“Our attachment to the bishops is linked to the attachment we profess to have for the Sovereign Pontiff. Let us summarize the thought of the Founder: “The Oblates are men of the Pope and of the bishops”.<sup>121</sup>

“The missionary future of the Church is brighter than ever, and our future as well since the Institute, like all the other institutes, forms an integral part of the ecclesial institution. We have proven our worth. We will continue to evangelize in new ways, according to the concrete needs of the People of God. Since we are aware of these demands, we sense at work in us in a number of places a radical transformation and upheaval which puts us into close and daily contact with the poor, the oppressed, whom we must liberate by presenting the message of Christ. As we examine our methods and minis-

tries, old and new, more than ever we are seeking to define what in the Church gives us our special character, our missionary meaning. Let us recall the words of Christ: the poor you will always have with you. The Church expects that we will be at the service of the poor; we should do everything in our power to make this service a concrete reality".<sup>122</sup>

Concerning this issue, two things seemed clear: first that the opening of the Congregation toward the Church is genuine only to the extent that it incarnates this ecclesial spirit in the life and the activities of Oblates and then that the religious Oblate family is authentically a gift of the Spirit only on the condition that it continues to bring to the Church the creative power of its charism.

### 3. THE INCARNATION OF THE CHARISM IN THE MODERN WORLD

Father Fernand Jetté treated the relationship of the Church and the Congregation with a very penetrating discernment. The Spirit must become incarnated in the options, the structures, the choices, the discernments.

"A few months ago, [...] I heard this reflection from a Father: 'Religious life is simply ordinary human life, the life of men and women today looked at from a religious point of view. Every life is religious provided the religious aspect enters.' To think that is to reject the idea of a religious Institute, to reject religious life as an organized group, to reject even every specific element or value making up that type of life, for instance, the consecration by vows. On the other hand, other Oblates can see religious life only in communities with the traditional religious life-style, with the result that they have the feeling that

religious life has practically disappeared in the Congregation.

"I am inclined to think that the majority of Oblates are found between these two extremes. They hold on to apostolic religious values and seek a real updating of the Institute".<sup>123</sup>

In his Christmas message of 1975, he compared the Incarnation of Christ to the incarnation the Oblate is called to realize: "To make ourselves poor with the poor and to go to them and live with them in order to reveal Jesus Christ [...] Christ could just as well have lived his life as a man within the conjugal state. He did not want to do so. The transcendence of its mission, it would seem, prompted Him to witness by the free choice of celibacy that his kingdom was not of this world".<sup>124</sup>

The concerns of Father Jetté were: the mission of Oblates to the new poor, a community life which should lead to a common undertaking, our relationship to the laity, our commitment to justice, the Oblate identity and his belonging to the Congregation.

The relationship of the Oblates with the Church encompasses all these issues: the Oblate supports renewal in the Church, the Oblate responds to the urgent needs of the Church, he is in the front ranks among those implementing the most radical options such as insertion among the poor, and commitment to the defense of the rights of the human person. He is a unifier who knows how to maintain his distinctiveness within the People of God and the local Church.

Father Jetté's thinking concerning the Church is like a grand symphony with well defined tempos, variations and adaptations due to cultures, regions, different fields of action: formation, mission spiritual life. The instruments used to play this symphony are personal

maturity and the relationship to Christ, community life, a relationship of respect and affection for the Church and for Mary.

The missionary experience of Father Marcello Zago and his commitment to dialogue with other world religions confirmed the Congregation in its broad renewed conception of ministry: "The mission is not limited to the proclamation of the Gospel and to the building of Christian communities; it also includes recognition of others and the values they bear, it includes collaboration with everyone for the good of mankind".<sup>125</sup>

Another important aspect was that of ecumenism. In regard to the laity, he confirmed the guideline given by the Congregation: "Only through "mission with the laity" will the faith be deepened, spread, and enabled to pervade all aspects of personal and social living".<sup>126</sup>

## VII. THE OBLATE TRADITION

The Oblate tradition reflects this relationship between the Church and the Congregation that we have tried to describe. It would be rash to summarize everything in a few words. Consequently, we will confine ourselves to citing a few typical experiences.

The mission, unity and continuity: "A Church is not built in a matter of a few years. On the contrary, it is a work which requires time and consequently perseverance. The spiritual edifice will be all the more solid and its proportions more harmonious in the measure which the builders would have been guided by the same spirit".<sup>127</sup>

Evangelization and human development: "A mission, a Church without any developmental impact on the soci-

ety in which it lives will always be incomplete and lack stability".<sup>128</sup>

Insertion: "With the Indians, he will become one of them; he will mingle with them like the yeast in the dough to make it rise".<sup>129</sup>

When they came into contact with cultures that were new to them, the Oblates were compelled to adapt their proclamation of Christ and to find new ways of "founding" the Church.

Thus it was that we progressed from a mentality of conquest to a mentality of dialogue, from confrontation with the world to acceptance and exchange with the world, from separation to cooperation with the laity.

In this search for new ways to carry out our mission, the Oblates became used to living with the poor, to merging Evangelization and human development, to promoting small groups, to defending the native population to the point of taking stands for justice.

Renewal of the Congregation in the light of the Council has not yet reached completion, but after so much hard work, we can affirm that the Oblates are still the bishops' men, the Pope's men and men of the Church.

GIUSEPPE MAMMANA

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> "Mémoires de M<sup>gr</sup> Eugène de Mazenod", 1845, quoted in RAMBERT I. p. 47, *Selected Texts*, pp. 71-72.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Cardinal Thomas Gousset, July 21, 1852, quoted in REY II, p. 423.

<sup>3</sup> CC and RR of 1818, part 1, chapter 1, para. 3, art. 3, *Nota bene*, in *Missions*, 78 (1951), pp. 15-16.

<sup>4</sup> Letter to Fr. Mille, to the Fathers and Brothers of Billens, November 1, 1831, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 8, n. 406, p. 40.

<sup>5</sup> CC and RR of 1818, part 1, chapter 1, para. 2, art. 2, in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 14.

<sup>6</sup> Speech given on the occasion of the ordination of missionary bishops, May 21, 1961, in *Documentation catholique*, LVIII (1961), col. 756.

<sup>7</sup> D'ADDIO, Angelo, "Cristo Crocifisso et la Chiesa Abbandonata", Roma, 1978, p. 157.

<sup>8</sup> Lenten Pastoral Letter, February 16, 1860, in *Selected Texts*, p. 73.

<sup>9</sup> Lenten Pastoral Letter, February 8, 1846, quoted in MAMMANA, Giuseppe, "Eugène de Mazenod et l'Église", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 41 (1982), pp. 18-19.

<sup>10</sup> OLIER, Jean-Jacques, *Traité des Saints Ordres*, part III, "Du sacerdoce", chapter VII, in LEFLON I, p. 327.

<sup>11</sup> OLIER, Jean-Jacques, *Traité des Saints Ordres*, part III, "Du sacerdoce", chapter VI.

<sup>12</sup> MAZENOD, Eugène de, *Directoire des novices*, manuscript, A.G., DM-IX-6 a, p. 22, quoted in MAMMANA, Giuseppe, "Eugène de Mazenod et l'Église", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 41 (1982), p. 10. See also "Des dévotions propres aux membres de la société d'après l'ancien directoire des noviciats et scolasticats", in *Études oblates*, 16 (1957), p. 267; *Directoire des noviciats et des scolasticats*, (1876), p. 150.

<sup>13</sup> Lenten Pastoral Letter, February 8, 1846, quoted in MAMMANA, Giuseppe, "Eugène de Mazenod et l'Église", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 41 (1982), pp. 22-23.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 19.

<sup>15</sup> Lenten Pastoral Letter, February 2, 1850, in "Mandements", f. 356-357, A.G., quoted in SANTOLINI, Giovanni, "Les thèmes fondamentaux de la théologie de M<sup>gr</sup> de Mazenod", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 46 (1987), p. 117.

<sup>16</sup> Pastoral Letters, February 8, 1846, February 10 1852, January 19, 1845 and February 16, 1860.

<sup>17</sup> Letter to Fr. Mille and to the Fathers and Brothers in Billens, November 17, 1830, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 7, n. 371, p. 224.

<sup>18</sup> Conference given to novices in Marino.

<sup>19</sup> MAMMANA, Giuseppe, *La Chiesa nella vita et nel pensiero di Eugenio de Mazenod*, Frascati, 1979, pp. 31-41.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 32, 44-47.

<sup>21</sup> *Jansénisme*, apologetic booklet written in 1806.

<sup>22</sup> MAZENOD, Eugène de, *Miscellanées*, (1804), cités in REY I, chapter VI, footnote 1, p. 72.

<sup>23</sup> "Instruction pastorale et mandement de Monseigneur l'Évêque de Marseille à l'occasion du carême de 1845. Sur les attaques actuellement dirigées contre l'Église, le 19 janvier 1845", in RAMBERT II, p. 203.

<sup>24</sup> LAMIRANDE, Émilien, "Eugène de Mazenod, catéchiste", in *Études oblates*, 16 (1957), p. 28.

<sup>25</sup> *De la communion des saints*, f. 318, A.G., quoted in LAMIRANDE, Émilien, "Eugène de Mazenod, catéchiste"..., p. 31-32.

<sup>26</sup> "Circular Letter of His Lordship the Bishop of Marseilles ordaining a collection for the poor of Ireland, February 24, 1847, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 3, p. 178.

<sup>27</sup> DE LUBAC, Henri, S.J., *Corpus Mysticum. L'Eucharistie et l'Église au Moyen Âge*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Paris, Aubier, 1949, p. 134.

<sup>28</sup> Letter to Fathers Augustin Maison-neuve and Jean Tissot, November 24, 1858, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 2, n. 258, p. 199; *Selected Texts*, n. 350, pp. 400-401.

<sup>29</sup> Letter to Fr. Jean-Baptiste Honorat, October 9, 1841, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 1, n. 9, p. 16.

<sup>30</sup> Letter to Fr. Damase Dandurand, in February 1852, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 1, n. 15b, p. 36.

<sup>31</sup> Pastoral Letter, February 10, 1852.

<sup>32</sup> Lenten Pastoral Letter, February 16, 1860, A.G., f. 706.

<sup>33</sup> Pastoral Letter, February 16, 1860, quoted in MAMMANA, Giuseppe, "Eugène de Mazenod et l'Église", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 41 (1982), p. 155.

<sup>34</sup> See LAMIRANDE, Émilien, "Le Sang du Sauveur, un thème central de la doctrine spirituelle de M<sup>gr</sup> de Mazenod", in *Études oblates*, 18 (1959), pp. 363-381.

<sup>35</sup> MAMMANA, Giuseppe, *La Chiesa nella vita...*, p. 84.

<sup>36</sup> *De la communion des saints*, A.G., quoted in MAMMANA, Giuseppe, "Eugène de Mazenod et l'Église", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 41 (1982), pp. 153-154.

<sup>37</sup> Pastoral Letter, January 24, 1858, quoted in MAMMANA, Giuseppe, "Eugène

de Mazenod et l'Église", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 41 (1982), p. 155.

<sup>38</sup> Pastoral Letter, February 8, 1846, quoted in MAMMANA, Giuseppe, "Eugène de Mazenod et l'Église", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 41 (1982), p. 154.

<sup>39</sup> Pastoral Letter, February 24, 1847, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 3, p. 178.

<sup>40</sup> See REY I, pp. 76-77, quoted in MAMMANA, Giuseppe, "Eugène de Mazenod et l'Église", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 41 (1982), p. 163.

<sup>41</sup> Letter to Fr. Jean-Fleury Baudrand, January 11 and 25, 1850, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 1, n. 126, p. 234.

<sup>42</sup> Letter to Fr. Hippolyte Courtès, July 22, 1828, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 7, n. 307, pp. 163-164; in *Selected Texts*, n. 392, pp. 438-439.

<sup>43</sup> Letter to Fr. Albert Lacombe, March 6, 1857, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 2, n. 229, p. 140; in *Selected Texts*, n. 267, pp. 316-317.

<sup>44</sup> MAMMANA, Giuseppe, "La Chiesa..", pp. 129-135.

<sup>45</sup> Pastoral Letter on the occasion of Pope Gregory XVI's death, June 9, 1846.

<sup>46</sup> Pastoral Letter, October 22, 1854.

<sup>47</sup> Pastoral Letter, June 9, 1846, see MAMMANA, Giuseppe, "Eugène de Mazenod et l'Église", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 41 (1982), p. 264.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibidem*, quoted in MAMMANA, Giuseppe, "Eugène de Mazenod et l'Église", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 41 (1982), pp. 264-265.

<sup>49</sup> "Pastoral Letter of His Lordship the Bishop of Marseilles who publishes herein the encyclical letter of our Holy Father the Pope Pius IX, on behalf of Ireland, June 12, 1847", in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 3, p. 182.

<sup>50</sup> "Instruction pastorale et Mandement de Monseigneur l'Évêque de Marseille sur les Missions, à l'occasion du carême, 14 février 1844", quoted in MAMMANA, Giuseppe, "Eugène de Mazenod et l'Église", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 41 (1982), p. 151.

<sup>51</sup> Letter to Fr. Charles Baret, January 17, 1851, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 11, n. 1057, p. 30.

<sup>52</sup> Letter to Fr. Antoine Mouchette, *ibidem*, n. 1256, pp. 253-254.

<sup>53</sup> Pastoral Letter, February 14, 1844,

quoted in MAMMANA, Giuseppe, "Eugène de Mazenod et l'Église", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 41 (1982), p. 267.

<sup>54</sup> "Instruction familière faite le dimanche de la Passion 1813", A.G.; found in part in *Selected Texts*, pp. 61-62; MAMMANA, Giuseppe, "Eugène de Mazenod et l'Église", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 41 (1982), pp. 269-270.

<sup>55</sup> Pastoral Letter, February 8, 1846, quoted in MAMMANA, Giuseppe, "Eugène de Mazenod et l'Église", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 41 (1982), pp. 269-270.

<sup>56</sup> *Inauguration du chemin de fer*, January 8, 1848, quoted in MAMMANA, Giuseppe, "Eugène de Mazenod et l'Église", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 41 (1982), p. 271.

<sup>57</sup> *Discours de M<sup>gr</sup> de Mazenod lors de la bénédiction de la Chambre de commerce de Marseille, le 27 septembre 1860*, quoted in REY II, p. 815; MAMMANA, Giuseppe, "Eugène de Mazenod et l'Église", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 41 (1982), p. 272.

<sup>58</sup> Pastoral Letter, February 8, 1846, quoted in MAMMANA, Giuseppe, "Eugène de Mazenod et l'Église", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 41 (1982), p. 253.

<sup>59</sup> *Préface of the Constitutions and Rules.*

<sup>60</sup> Letter to Father Henry Tempier, October 9, 1815, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, n. 4, p. 6.

<sup>61</sup> CC and RR of 1818, part 1, chapter 1, para. 1, art. 1, in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 13.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibidem*, art. 2.

<sup>63</sup> CC and RR of 1826, art. 6.

<sup>64</sup> *Missionaries in Today's World*, n. 86.

<sup>65</sup> CC and RR of 1818, part 1, chapter 1, para. 2, in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 24.

<sup>66</sup> *Missionaries in Today's World*, n. 57.

<sup>67</sup> CC and RR of 1818, part 1, chapter 3, para. 3, in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 39.

<sup>68</sup> R 27 [R 41b in CRRR 2000].

<sup>69</sup> CC and RR of 1818, part 1, chapter 3, para. 2, in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 38.

<sup>70</sup> CC and RR of 1853, "Les missions", art. 8-9.

<sup>71</sup> CC and RR of 1966, RR 8-9.

<sup>72</sup> CC and RR of 1818, part 1, chapter 2, para. 1, art. 6, in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 20.

<sup>73</sup> CC and RR of 1853, The direction of seminaries, art. 10-13; the vow of obedience, art. 4; CC and RR of 1966, C 2, RR 10, 26.

- <sup>74</sup> CC and RR of 1982, C 3.
- <sup>75</sup> CC and RR of 1982, CC 37, 39, 40.
- <sup>76</sup> "Circulaire du Supérieur général relative aux décisions du Chapitre de 1856", A.G., in PIELORZ, Józef, *Les Chapitres généraux*, vol. II, Ottawa, éditions des Études oblates (1968), p. 92.
- <sup>77</sup> See "Chapitre général de 1893", in COSENTINO, Georges, *Nos Chapitres généraux*, Ottawa, éditions des Études oblates (1957), pp. 131-138.
- <sup>78</sup> General Chapter of 1904, in *Circ. adm.*, III (1901-1921), p. 93.
- <sup>79</sup> General Chapter of 1947, in COSENTINO, Georges, *Nos Chapitres généraux...*, p. 247. In the minutes of this same Chapter, we find an interesting remark: "Let us cease using the word 'sauvage' to designate the natives".
- <sup>80</sup> General Chapter of 1926, in COSENTINO, Georges, *Nos Chapitres généraux...*, p. 212.
- <sup>81</sup> General Chapter of 1947, in COSENTINO, Georges, *Nos Chapitres généraux...*, pp. 246-447.
- <sup>82</sup> General Chapter of 1953, in *Circ. adm.*, VI (1953-1960), p. 11.
- <sup>83</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 23.
- <sup>84</sup> Rapport du Supérieur général au XXV<sup>e</sup> Chapitre général, May 1-27, 1953, in *Circ. adm.*, VI (1953-1960), p. 36.
- <sup>85</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 68-69.
- <sup>86</sup> Circular Letter n. 222, January 25, 1966, in *Circ. adm.*, VII (1965-1966), pp. 225-264.
- <sup>87</sup> Circular Letter n. 227, avril 12, 1966, in *Circ. adm.*, VII (1965-1966), p. 354.
- <sup>88</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 357-358.
- <sup>89</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 362.
- <sup>90</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 377.
- <sup>91</sup> Circular Letter n. 246, February 17, 1971, Preparation for the General Chapter of 1972, documents in the appendices, in *Circ. adm.*, VIII (1967-1972), p. 350.
- <sup>92</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 351.
- <sup>93</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 357.
- <sup>94</sup> Circular Letter n. 247, State of the Congregation, A report to the XXVIII General Chapter of 1972, in *Circ. adm.*, VIII (1967-1972), p. 420.
- <sup>95</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 420-429.
- <sup>96</sup> General Chapter of 1972, *Missionary Outlook*, n. 5.
- <sup>97</sup> *Missionary Outlook*, n. 9.
- <sup>98</sup> *Ibidem*, n. 10.
- <sup>99</sup> *Ibidem*, n. 17 f.
- <sup>100</sup> *Ibidem*, n. 16 a.
- <sup>101</sup> *Ibidem*, n. 16 d.
- <sup>102</sup> *Ibidem*, n. 17 c.
- <sup>103</sup> *Ibidem*, n. 17 d.
- <sup>104</sup> A.A.G., II, Rome, 1974, p. 85.
- <sup>105</sup> General Chapter of 1986, *Missionaries in Today's World*, n. 13-15.
- <sup>106</sup> Circular Letter n. 13, November 21, 1863, in *Circ. adm.*, I (1830-1885), pp. 95-96.
- <sup>107</sup> FABRE, Joseph, Request for and in-dult, reproduced in Circular Letter n. 19, of 29 June 1867, in *Circ. adm.*, I (1830-1885), p. 178.
- <sup>108</sup> FABRE, Joseph, Circular Letter n. 22, August 1, 1871, in *Circ. adm.*, I (1830-1885), p. 202.
- <sup>109</sup> SOULLIER, Louis, Circular Letter n. 53, May 24, 1893, in *Circ. adm.*, II (1886-1900), p. 122.
- <sup>110</sup> SOULLIER, Louis, Circular Letter n. 61, December 8, 1893, "Des études", in *Circ. adm.*, II (1886-1900), p. 23 (283).
- <sup>111</sup> Circular Letter n. 182, *L'Association missionnaire de Marie Immaculée*, January 25, 1948, in *Circ. adm.*, V (1947-1952), p. 208.
- <sup>112</sup> Circular Letter n. 184, March 19, 1949, in *Circ. adm.*, V (1947-1952), p. 242.
- <sup>113</sup> DESCHÂTELETS, Léo, Report to XXVI General Chapter, October 1, 1959, in *Circ. adm.*, VI (1953-1960), p. 314.
- <sup>114</sup> DESCHÂTELETS, Léo, Circular Letter n. 215, February 17, 1965, in *Circ. adm.*, VII (1965-1972), p. 15.
- <sup>115</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 27.
- <sup>116</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 18.
- <sup>117</sup> DESCHÂTELETS, Léo, Circular Letter n. 221, August 22, 1965, in *Circ. adm.*, VII (1965-1966), p. 211.
- <sup>118</sup> HANLEY, Richard, Circular Letter n. 248, June 1, 1972, in A.A.G., I, pp. 20-29.
- <sup>119</sup> HANLEY, Richard, Circular Letter n. 252, February 10, 1973, in A.A.G., I, pp. 177-180.
- <sup>120</sup> DESCHÂTELETS, Léo, State of the Congregation: A report to the General Chapter of 1972, in *Circ. adm.*, VIII (1967-1972), p. 421.
- <sup>121</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 423-424.
- <sup>122</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 438-439.

<sup>123</sup> JETTÉ, Fernand, Circular Letter n. 261, A report to the General Chapter of 1974, n. 20, "The Religious Life of the Congregation", in A.A.G., II, p. 123.

<sup>124</sup> Circular Letter n. 267, "Christmas Message of the Superior General", in A.A.G., II, pp. 380-381.

<sup>125</sup> ZAGO, Marcello, Circular Letter n. 303, December 8, 1986, in A.A.G., IX, p. 201.

<sup>126</sup> ZAGO, Marcello, Circular Letter n. 34,

"Africa's Challenges", May 21, 1987, in A.A.G., X, p. 45.

<sup>127</sup> CHAMPAGNE, Joseph-Étienne, "Les méthodes missionnaires des Oblats dans l'Ouest canadien", in *Études oblates*, 5 (1946), p. 158.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 155.

<sup>129</sup> ROUTHIER, Henri, "Notre apostolat sur les réserves indiennes", in *Études oblates*, 3 (1944), p. 106.

## COMMUNITY

*Summary: I. The Founder and apostolic community: 1. The "founding vision" (1814-1818); 2. The vision becomes the rule of life (1818-1861); II. The century after the death of the Founder: "United in the memory of a father forever beloved". III. From 1966 onwards: Clarifying the relationship between mission and community: 1. 1982 Constitutions and Rules: The unifying presence of Christ, the Saviour; 2. General Chapter of 1986: "Mission through an apostolic community"; 3. General Chapter of 1992: "Witnessing as apostolic community".*

### I THE FOUNDER AND APOSTOLIC COMMUNITY

From the time of his ordination in 1811 Father de Mazenod did not want ecclesiastical honours or a parish, but wanted to give himself to the service of the poor and of the youth in Aix en Provence. For three years he performed an individual apostolate, concentrating on those who were not being touched by the conventional parish ministry: those who spoke Provençal, the domestic servants, the youth and prisoners. In addition he was a spiritual director at the seminary of Aix. This full program was brought to a stop when he contracted typhus in 1814 and was dangerously ill. On his recovery he became aware that the needs of the poor were so great that he could not cope alone in this manner any longer and that he needed to find a personal equilibrium.

Faced with two choices: either to enter a well-regulated community, or to bring into existence a missionary group<sup>1</sup>, he chose the latter option, while incorporating a strong element of the former<sup>2</sup>. From the beginning the plan to preach to the poor of Provence involved a community of priests who would live together in the same house, and would be held together by a rule and a regular lifestyle<sup>3</sup>.

### 1 THE "FOUNDING VISION" (1816-1818)

Father de Mazenod does not take the credit for being the founder of the missionary community: the founder is Jesus Christ himself<sup>4</sup>. It is Jesus who guided and led him in a certain direction. That direction is charted in his writings from 1814 to 1818, from the time that he first speaks about his ideal until it is "codified" in the Rule of 1818.

#### a. *What form does this community take?*

— *An apostolic missionary community which aims at the sanctification of its members*

A group of diocesan priests living together in the same house, and who strive to imitate the virtues and examples of Jesus Christ<sup>5</sup>. The form of the community is that of Jesus and his apostles, who were schooled in his teaching so that they could be sent forth to conquer the world<sup>6</sup>.

The community is centered on Jesus, in which all the members are like the apostles around Jesus: "It has already been said that the missionaries ought, as far as human nature allows, to imitate in everything the example of Christ our Lord, the chief Founder of our Congregation, and that of the holy Apostles, our first Fathers. Following in their footsteps, the missionaries will

give one portion of their life to prayer, recollection, and contemplation, while living together in the seclusion of God's house"<sup>7</sup>.

The Founder is clear that the first aspect of community is all about relationship with Jesus, about sanctification of the missionary: "we will become saints in our Congregation, free but united by bonds of the most tender charity"<sup>8</sup>. It is not an individual task, but "we will help each other mutually with advice and with all that the good God will inspire in each of us for our common sanctification"<sup>9</sup>.

Sanctification is not an end in itself, but is essential so that the missionary may sanctify others: "The missionaries will be grouped in such a way that while some of them will strive within the community to acquire the virtues and the knowledge suitable for good missionaries, others will travel through the country-sides preaching the Word of God"<sup>10</sup>. While not preaching and being in the community they will "prepare themselves through meditation and study to make their ministry even more fruitful when they are called to new missions"<sup>11</sup>. Sanctity is thus essential for the mission of the community.

— *Community comes into existence as the result of mission, and for the purpose of mission.*

In the Petition addressed to the Capitular Vicars-General of Aix on January 25, 1816 the ideal of community is present from the beginning. They are to live together in order to grow into perfection, and they want from this the same advantages that they would have had had they joined a religious order (of which community is an integral part). The aim of the community is personal sanctification as well as being more useful in the diocese.

The Rule of 1818 states: "The other portion of their life they will zealously devote to the works of the ministry, namely, to missions, preaching, the hearing of confessions, catechizing, directing the young, visiting the sick and prisoners, giving retreats, and other works of this kind"<sup>12</sup>.

The two-fold division of their labors in community: a part of the year being spent on each, are meant to be a tangible expression of community. In other words, the community does not exist for its own sake, but for the sake of the apostolate: personal sanctification and ministry are totally tied up, and there is no dichotomy here, only two expressions of the same reality. Fr. Beaudoin makes this relationship between community and mission clear when he speaks of the Rule of 1818: "If we examine these articles of the Rule in the light of the Founder's letters, the importance of community is beyond any shade of doubt. Oblates seek sanctity together, pray together, do the work of evangelization together. The whole second part of the Rule makes explicit the communitarian striving towards perfection so that the ministry, which also is carried out in community, should, by the blessing of God, become fruitful. In the sixth paragraph which treats of the various ministries, the Divine Office which all the Oblates must recite in common is even presented in this light: 'The Institute considers this exercise as the source of all blessings which are to be poured over the entire holy ministry in the length and breadth of the Society'."<sup>13</sup>

*b. Characteristics of community which are essential to its mission*

In order for the community to achieve its twofold function it has to have certain characteristics, which Fa-

ther de Mazenod spells out in the Rule: "Whether out on missions or at home, their chief concern will always be to make progress in the way of ecclesiastical and religious perfection. They will cultivate especially the virtues of humility, obedience, poverty, self-denial, the spirit of mortification, the spirit of faith, purity of intention and so forth. In a word, they will strive to become another Jesus Christ, spreading abroad everywhere the fragrance of his amiable virtues"<sup>14</sup>.

Here emerged the characteristics of community on which the Founder himself was going to lay constant emphasis for the rest of his life: united by the bonds of charity, and of one heart and one soul, living a life of regularity, in obedience to the Rule and the Superior, – all this so as to be apostolic missionaries to evangelise the poor.

Thirty two years later, in 1850, Bishop de Mazenod was still as definite in his vision when he wrote to the whole Congregation: "Mindful of these words, (which marvellously sum up our entire Rule), 'all united in the bonds of the most intimate charity under the direction of the superiors', may they form but one heart and one soul"<sup>15</sup>.

## 2 THE VISION BECOMES THE RULE OF LIFE (1818 – 1861)

Originally Father de Mazenod intended to have only one community, but the request to take on the apostolate of Notre Dame du Laus, effectively ended this idea. From now on it became essential to maintain one community spirit among all the communities, thus necessitating a Rule<sup>16</sup>. The first Rule of 1818 was rewritten and presented to the Pope, receiving his approbation in 1826<sup>17</sup>. Of the 1826 text, Father Santolini comments:

"Of the 798 articles, the community is explicitly or implicitly mentioned in more than 120. This is a sign of the Founder's and the Oblates' concern to put community as the basis for the apostolic life. If we were to sum up this thought, we could say that he wanted to create within the Congregation an acute sense of family life as well as a fierce determination to maintain it at all costs against any outside interference."<sup>18</sup>

### 2.1 *The characteristics of apostolic community*

#### *a. United in the bonds of charity.*

*i. We form a family.* "We form a family, of which all who compose it wish only to have one heart and one soul" – here is the kernel of community for the Founder<sup>19</sup>, a concept which he comes back to again and again<sup>20</sup>. He defines unity as "that cordiality, that fusion, [...] which ought to exist amongst all the members of our Society which ought to have but one heart and one soul"<sup>21</sup>. In one of his early letters to Father Tempier, he exclaims, "Between us missionaries [...] we are what we ought to be, that is to say, we have but one heart, one soul, one thought. It is admirable! Our consolations, like our hardships are unequalled"<sup>22</sup>. In an atmosphere of mutual support, all difficulties are surmountable, even if the members are dispersed<sup>23</sup>.

The community of the Congregation makes its members one family, even if they do not know each other, as Bishop de Mazenod says to a newly-professed Oblate: "I do not know you personally[...] we are united in the most intimate bonds of charity and that I am a bound to you forever as you are to me"<sup>24</sup>. The Novice Master is urged by the Founder to ensure that "they must

find with us a true family, brothers and a father"<sup>25</sup>.

*ii. Centered around the presence of Jesus.* Unity attunes the members of the community to the will of God<sup>26</sup>. It is the presence of Jesus who ensures unity. For Saint Eugene he is "our common love"<sup>27</sup>, "our common Master"<sup>28</sup>, and the Oblates are urged to "gather closely around this good Saviour who has made his home amongst you"<sup>29</sup>. At a moment of separation from the Oblates, he remembers them during the Mass and describes the role of Jesus in the community: "We should often come together like this in Jesus Christ, our common centre where all our hearts become as one and our affections are brought to fulfilment"<sup>30</sup>.

During oraison the Oblates are united with each other, despite the distance which separates them: "This is the only way of reducing distances, to be at the same moment in our Lord's presence, it is so to speak like being side by side. We do not see each other, but we sense each other's presence, hear each other, lose ourselves in one and the same central point"<sup>31</sup>.

Praying also leads to a unity in community: "Everyone must know by heart the prayers recited in the Congregation, and especially those recited after particular examen as I strongly insist that we never leave them out wherever it may be that we find ourselves, whether travelling or whatever. That form of prayer, including the litanies, is special to our Congregation, they are distinctive and like a bond, a unity between all the members of the family"<sup>32</sup>.

Writing to the community at Vico, Saint Eugene exclaims, "You have earned all the love I have for you; you form only one person among your-

selves, you form only one person with me. That is what the Lord demands of us since he is the principle and the bond of our union"<sup>33</sup>.

*iii. Aims to sanctify its members.* The community is a vehicle used by God for the sanctification of its members if they avail themselves of "the means of salvation that his mercy provided in our holy house, in the midst of such good brothers as yourselves"<sup>34</sup>. It is a communal task: "We are put on earth, particularly those of our house, to sanctify ourselves while helping each other by our example, our words and our prayers"<sup>35</sup>.

*iv. Charity is its pivot.* The community is to live by the spirit proper to the Oblates, based on charity as its pivot: "Just as we have in a Society a common dress, common Rules, so must there be a common spirit which vivifies this particular body [...] Charity is the pivot on which our whole existence turns. [...] Charity for our neighbour is again an essential part of our spirit. We practice it first amongst us by loving each other as brothers, by considering our Society only as the most united family which exists on the earth, by rejoicing over the virtues, the talents and other qualities that our brothers possess just as much as if we possessed them ourselves, in bearing with mildness the little faults that some have not yet overcome, covering them over with the mantle of the most sincere charity"<sup>36</sup>.

"The utmost in the way of fraternal charity are also necessary for the good order and the happiness of a Society"<sup>37</sup>. In a practical manner, charity is expressed as, "take care of each other and let each look after the health of all"<sup>38</sup>. When there are difficulties between members of the community, "let holy

charity consume all our squabbles in the melting-pot of religion".<sup>39</sup>

In the face of difficulties which threaten the whole Congregation, it is in charity that they can resist: "Let us be united in the love of Jesus Christ, in our common perfection, let us love each other as we have done up to now, let us, in a word, be at one while they die of vexation and rage".<sup>40</sup>

v. *The whole community is always missionary.* The letters which the Founder writes to the missionaries and from the missions are a tangible means of creating one heart and one soul in the community – sharing details of how things were going, and also praying for each other. "I have no need to tell you how much I bless the Lord for all he is doing through your ministry; we are all in transports of joy, as if this were new to us. I have read our fathers' letter to the community"<sup>41</sup>. This is a concrete sign of what it means that the community is apostolic and that all are missionaries, because those who stay at home are praying for the workers, and studying to prepare themselves in turn for their own preaching when their turn comes: "If you do not pray for us, we are in a bad fix".<sup>42</sup>

The community is missionary in the example it gives to outsiders. Speaking of the ministry of the community of Notre Dame de l'Osier to priests: "People vie with one another in their admiration for the regularity, good order, piety that reign in the house[...] They find edification in everything: the silence that reigns in the house, the punctuality at all the exercises, the office, the small refectory penances. So be always what you ought to be and never let the presence of strangers bring you to make changes in anything whether it be in the Rule or in our customs. If one can find

in your house no more than a group of priests living under the same roof, as pastors from the surrounding neighbourhood might do you will be guilty-before me before the Congregation and before God; and the people for whose sake you surrendered your Oblate way of life will go away but little edified and certainly deceived in their expectations. And so I recommend you to be quite rigid on all of this. I want none of your expediency or human respect. Everyone knows who you are so be worthy of your vocation and strive to accept its every least demand."<sup>43</sup>

The abilities of the individual are there for the good of the community and its mission: "The Good Lord did not give you your talents for your own use only; but in calling you to the Congregation, he wished you to use these talents for the good of the whole family".<sup>44</sup>

vi. *Community life is not to be sacrificed to the mission.* The Founder is practical when he observes that the greater portion of the life of an Oblate is spent in work outside of the community. He writes, "Let us rather feel sorry that the duties laid on us by charity remove us so frequently, and for such long periods, from the community in which regular discipline reigns, and for a great part of our life deprive us, to our regret, of its wholesome influence".<sup>45</sup>

The zeal of the missionaries, however, is to be seen in the context of the community: "But beware of driving yourself as if it were a challenge. In God's name, go back to the bosom of the community to renew yourselves in the spirit of your vocation. otherwise it is all up with our missionaries. they will soon be no more than sounding cymbals".<sup>46</sup>

It is interesting to note that the needs of the community have to be

taken into account when arranging the public prayers at N.D. du Laus: "The evening oraison ought always to take place at half past seven, during the half hour which precedes supper. In order not to deprive him who conducts the evening prayers from the entire oraison of the community, when the oraison coincides with the time of the other, see to it that this prayer does not last more than a quarter of an hour. In no instance must it go beyond twenty minutes, but let it not go over a quarter of an hour when the times of the two exercises coincide. As the community must make its oraison before the Blessed Sacrament and you do not have the holy Eucharist in your interior chapel, the one who takes the evening prayer for the faithful must do so in a very moderate voice so as not to disturb the community".<sup>47</sup>

In the works undertaken in France, Eugene always insisted on a minimum of two Oblates working together. When a work was undertaken which did not fulfil this condition, Bishop de Mazenod was determined that it not be continued, as is seen in Limoges: "I have written to his Lordship the Bishop of Limoges; it was a measured letter to make him understand that it is impossible to continue a service which takes our missionaries away from their vocation. Living in community is essential to their style of life. I explain the situation to him by quoting from the very text of our Rules".<sup>48</sup>

When the Oblates began to go to the foreign missions, it was not always so simple to have the men living together in community. Despite the difficulty he always insists: "It is essential that you should continue to demand that you be left in pairs. If there is only enough for one you must share what there is, but I can never agree that a subject be alone without at least one companion".<sup>49</sup>

In 1853, the thinking of the Founder and of the Congregation was set down in the *Instruction on the Foreign Missions*: "To whatsoever Missions in foreign countries they may have been sent, our Fathers will always bear in mind that they must be inflamed with a desire of perfection so much the more ardent the longer they are separated against their will, from the company of their brethren, and that they must be faithful to the duties of their religious state and to the exercises of christian piety with a will so much the more determined, the more frequently they are deprived of the benefits of community life".<sup>50</sup>

vii. *The Oblates must love their community and find happiness in it.* The Oblates must love their community: "One must moreover be greatly attached to the house. he who only looks on it as a hotel where he only passes through would do no good therein. One must be able to say like St. Thomas: *haec requies mea* for the whole of one's life. I see that communities where this spirit reigns the most are those which do the most good and where one lives the most happily. May God give us the grace to be imbued with this truth and let us neglect nothing to instil it in our young people".<sup>51</sup>

It is in the community that they are expected to find happiness "within the confines of our houses".<sup>52</sup> Community provides "all that is needed to live happily".<sup>53</sup> "Live happily my dear children in your precious community. You would not imagine the happiness I experience when I hear about the unity and cordiality that reigns among you".<sup>54</sup>

In his advice to Fr. Mille on formation, the Founder emphasizes that the young people in formation must love the family – hence the foundation of community is this: "It is a question of

giving them a formation, of passing on to them our spirit, of inspiring in them that love of the family without which they will not achieve anything of value".<sup>55</sup>

It is in the community itself that relaxation is to take place: "it is not fitting to go outside our own houses for distractions or for rest".<sup>56</sup>

*viii. Makes up for the weaknesses of its members.* Despite Saint Eugene's idealism and initial enthusiasm for the joys of community life, experience taught him "that even the holiest and most fervent of communities are not exempt from some kinds of affliction".<sup>57</sup> In this light, he says of the behaviour expected of the members: "the community needs from those who form it that they do not give her the distasteful spectacle of an acute disorder, of an insulting disdain, of a disedifying irregularity, or a scandalous desertion, all of which trouble her tranquillity, her peace, her happiness, and even compromise her existence".<sup>58</sup> Eugene is aware that the community reflects something of the weaknesses of its apostolic model when he says, "The Lord, our divine model had many griefs from his well-loved apostles who were so often intolerable and bothersome".<sup>59</sup>

It is mutual support which makes up for the weaknesses of its members, starting with Eugene himself: "I feel fortunate amongst my brothers, amongst my children, because in the absence of virtues which are proper and personal to me, I am proud of their works and their holiness"<sup>60</sup>. To two members who left the Congregation, he made the same point: "You would always find therein the help that was indispensable to the feebleness of your learning, to the nullity of your knowledge".<sup>61</sup>

Community provides the opportunity for fraternal correction "which ensures your progress and preserves you from the error of illusion"<sup>62</sup>, something which de Mazenod often practised in his own correspondence. In our fraternal correction "may the charity of Jesus Christ inspire us, without it we run the risk of becoming mere Pharisees, well able to see the speck of dust in our brothers' eyes but unable to see the beam which afflicts our own".<sup>63</sup>

Community enables its members to bear difficulties: "so that we may help each other mutually to bear a misfortune which is common to us, since it weighs on the Society".<sup>64</sup>

The members of the community are urged to pray for each other as Eugene himself does at oraison each day for each of them. During the many cholera epidemics in Marseilles, he writes asking the communities to pray for the safety of those who are exposed to infection in their work with the sick.<sup>65</sup>

*ix. Sickness and health.* On the question of the health of the members of the community, Eugene is insistent in many of his letters that the men look after their health. "I call attention to your health and to that of the whole dear family".<sup>66</sup> During their pastoral work rest is essential: "I absolutely insist that you rest and that you study; one must know when it is time to close one's door", he wrote to Father Jean-Baptiste Honorat.<sup>67</sup> The community must provide the atmosphere for this: "The missionaries need prolonged rest for the body and interior tranquillity in their holy house for the spirit and the soul. One must observe our Rules on that point as on all the others. Be of a common accord in establishing perfect regularity in your house".<sup>68</sup>

When it comes to sickness and pre-

paring the members for death, he is clear about the role and attitude of the community: "I need not tell you with what care and charity you must treat him. Even if we have to sell things down to our shoes, let nothing be spared to comfort him; if his relatives were to propose that they take him home, do not consent; it is amongst his brothers that he ought to find all the services his condition demands, day and night, spiritual as well as temporal."<sup>69</sup>

And again, writing to Father Cour-tès: "I am not in favour that we send away from our communities our sick when they are in danger of death. They have the right to a care of the best order and the consolation of dying in the arms of their brothers is certainly something for a good religious who knows the value of supernatural aids."<sup>70</sup>

*x. The heavenly Oblate community.*

Those who have died form the heavenly Oblate community: "Now we have four in Heaven; this is already a nice community. They are the first stones, the foundation stones of the edifice which must be built in the celestial Jerusalem; they are before God with the sign, the kind of character proper to our Society, the common vows of all her members, the practice of the same virtues. We are attached to them by the bonds of a particular charity, they are still our brothers, and we are theirs; they dwell in our mother-house, our headquarters; their prayers, the love which they keep for us, will draw us one day to them so as to dwell with them in the place of our rest."<sup>71</sup>

*xi. Sacredness of the bonds which link the members.* The reaction of Eugene de Mazenod to those who leave the community highlights the binding force of the commitment to the Oblate

community, while at the same time giving them the attitude they should have regarding those who leave: "These profanations and perjuries provoke horror; they scandalise the Church and outrage God, hence I cite all these profanators before the judgement of God who will punish them for having dealt so basely with him. I bless you, you and all who are faithful to their vows and their oaths. We will never be able to do enough to make reparation by unlimited devotedness on our part, even unto the sacrifice of our lives in order to make up for sacrileges springing, so to speak, from our midst, and committed by those whom we have called our brothers."<sup>72</sup>

To leave the Congregation is to cut oneself off "from the family which had adopted you."<sup>73</sup>

*b. United in Obedience*

In his Mémoires, the Founder recalls the circumstances which necessitated the Rule of 1818: "I wanted to convince them that if we were to answer the call to another diocese to establish a new foundation, we should have to broaden the Rule we were following, draw up more extensive Constitutions, tighten our bonds and establish a system that we should have but one mind and one code of action."<sup>74</sup>

The Founder is unyielding on the point of obedience, but not for the sake of obedience itself, but for the purpose of maintaining one heart and one soul. "Regard the Rule as our code, the superiors as God, our brothers like our other selves."<sup>75</sup>

*i. Regularity: fidelity in shaping one's life according to the Rule.*

A characteristic feature of the Oblate community is its adherence to the

Rule and its spirit of regularity. "We live in community under a mild Rule which fixes our duties and gives a very great value to the least of our actions. the spirit of charity and of the most perfect brotherhood reigns amongst us"<sup>76</sup>. In order to insure that the community was what it was meant to be, the Founder constantly insisted on regularity, especially in his letters to the local superiors. He defines regularity as, "fidelity in shaping one's life according to the spirit and the letter of the Rule"<sup>77</sup>.

To Fr. Tempier, the newly appointed Superior of Laus, the second community of the Congregation, he exhorts, "Maintain in everything a most exact discipline; you are beginning to form a community in regularity, do not let abuses creep in"<sup>78</sup>. To Father Courtès and the community of Aix he explains the spirit and purpose of regularity: "Love one another. Let all agree in maintaining good order and discipline by fidelity to the Rule, obedience, abnegation and humility. The Church expects you all to be a powerful aid in her distress; but be well persuaded that you will only be good enough to achieve something inasmuch as you advance in the practice of religious virtues"<sup>79</sup>.

The regularity of the community is reflected in its mission: "Let it be demonstrated that, when a religious has to devote himself to external ministry, the habitual regularity that he should have acquired in the bosom of the community is a source of abundant graces and help, so that he isn't found wanting and doesn't disappoint the faithful's expectations"<sup>80</sup>.

### 2.2 The Superior.

The role of the Superior in the community is paramount. It is his role to ensure that the Rule and its prescrip-

tions are lived, that the internal life of the community unfolds ("Charity, charity, charity"), and that the community fulfils its mission ("Zeal for the salvation of souls"). The Founder's exhortation to Father Guigues on becoming a superior is echoed throughout his life to all Oblate superiors: "Let the introduction of the least abuse be anathema to you. God would call you to account for it. For it is you who are to build the foundations of the new community. And it is vital that it diffuse abroad the good odour of Jesus Christ"<sup>81</sup>.

## II. THE CENTURY AFTER THE DEATH OF THE FOUNDER: "UNITED IN THE MEMORY OF A FATHER FOREVER BELOVED".

"Let us be united in spirit and in heart and we will be strong for doing what is good; let us be united in the memory of a Father forever beloved"<sup>82</sup> is the first charge given to the Congregation by the Founder's successor, Father Fabre. At the end of the letter he speaks of how this unity is to be achieved: "In conclusion, let me exhort you in the Lord to remember the final behest of our beloved Father as he lay dying so that we can draw down upon ourselves and our works the most abundant graces: *Among yourselves practice charity, charity, charity, and outside, zeal for the salvation of souls*"<sup>83</sup>.

Father Fabre knew Eugene de Mazenod well, and on the first anniversary of the death of the Founder he recalls the impression made on him by this death, showing the emphasis that would be running through his life and teachings as Superior General: "Here on earth the undying memory of this beloved Father, the memory of his entire life, will continually speak those words

that still seem to ring in our ears, the words that, when death was pressing upon him, with so much earnestness and confidence he used to exhort us to exercise *zeal* and practice *charity*”<sup>84</sup>.

Fr. Roy points out that the direction taken by Fabre will be continued by his successors, “This last message of our Founder will come back time and again in the writings of all the Superiors General. It is a leitmotif which from now on will characterize the Oblate community: charity among the members will create a true community, zeal outside will make of it an apostolic community”<sup>85</sup>.

While it is fraternal charity which characterizes the community, Fabre and his successors remain faithful to de Mazenod’s ideal of the link between the two parts of the Oblate’s life, being religious and missionaries: “Community makes of the Oblate a true religious so as to evangelize the poor”<sup>86</sup>. They stress that our works are never meant to be individual works, but the mission is fulfilled as religious in the name of the community and for the community.<sup>87</sup>

When Fabre speaks of community he does not limit himself to a house community, but emphasises the concept of the wider community of a province, and the whole Congregation, which must have the same *esprit de corps*.<sup>88</sup> It is thus that he and Augier faced the situation of the expulsion of the missionaries from France, calling to mind the basic unity which exists in the Oblate community as the binding force despite their having to be dispersed and living alone. “This dispersion will be able to affect our bodies only; nothing will be able to separate our hearts and spirits. They are too closely united by the holy vows, by the bonds of charity most fraternal”<sup>89</sup>. Father Augier echoes the same sentiment on the Oblate community: “Let us remain united and we

will be stronger, and the most violent attacks will avail nothing against us”<sup>90</sup>.

Father Roy, in his study of the theme of apostolic community in the circular letters of the Superiors General, gives the following overview of their teaching: “Each one of our Superiors General expressed himself according to his temperament and his perception of things. The one speaks of apostolic family; the other of a community of apostolic religious or of missionary contemplatives; another speaks of apostolic community; and still another of evangelizing community or of a missionary community. But [...] there is no clash among the varying kinds of emphasis. These are all complementary aspects of one and the same beautiful reality: the Oblate community, such as the Founder wanted it in the contemporary world of his day, in the time of Father Fabre in 1880, or in the time of Father Jetté one hundred years later.”

“Underlying these different aspects are differences in emphasis, however, it is easy to detect a continuity where this reality, in the course of the years, grows in richness or content through the contributions made by the different Superiors General [...]”

“The heritage he (the Founder) left us inspires in us an *esprit de corps*, a very strong family spirit; if it is not strong enough, one or the other Superior General will, upon occasion, bring it to the fore – and sometimes in a very forceful way. At the same time as there is an insistence on charity and the family spirit, the place and the value of the religious consecration, of the vows, of the Rule are vigorously presented as well, first of all as structures, as a foundation, then as a milieu for personal and community growth. It is only later that there will be a concentration on the developing of the relationship that should

exist between community and mission, in order to finally affirm very clearly that the community is itself a support and an expression of the mission".<sup>91</sup>

### III. FROM 1966 ONWARDS: CLARIFYING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MISSION AND COMMUNITY

In the century after the Founder's death there has been no doubt about the zeal of the Oblates, as is attested to by the number of countries in which there are Oblate missionaries. Rather the question has been of reaching a clarity in the role between community and Oblate mission. We have seen that for Saint Eugene there was a twofold purpose in community: personal sanctification and mission – i.e. the two portions of the Oblate's life. There was always a struggle to come to an equilibrium between his initial desire to spend half the year preaching missions and the other half in prayer and study, between the demands of community and mission.

Until 1966 the Rule was basically that of the Founder, where there was no specific section on community, but where the idea of community was at the heart of the whole missionary life and activity of the Oblate. The 1966 Constitutions and Rules broke away from the traditional pattern and included a section with the title, *Life in Apostolic Community*, consisting of seven Constitutions (42-48) and eleven Rules (87-97). The accent is on the mission taking place in the context of community, and on interpersonal relationships. The *Reading Guide for the Constitutions and Rules* comments: "This indicates that the community is far more than a juridical entity; it is a communion in charity, it is the Lord's family. From

another point of view, the three articles 42, 44, 45 accentuate the special character of an apostolic community, as the place where the missionaries foregather and where activities are planned (a. 42); interchange and dialogue have a primordial role in their spiritual development, intellectual pursuits and in the apostolate of one and all (a. 44); the mission to announce the kingdom is what establishes and binds together the unity of the members (a. 45)"<sup>92</sup>.

In aiming to achieve the synthesis between community and mission it brought to the fore the elements of fraternal sharing and mission, but the handling of community lacked some of the elements which were important for the Founder, elements which were to be added as a result of the reflection of the Congregation in preparation for the 1982 text.

#### 1. 1982 CONSTITUTIONS AND RULES: THE UNIFYING PRESENCE OF CHRIST THE SAVIOUR

*a. We fulfil our mission in and through the community to which we belong (C 37)*

The Constitutions of 1982 provided the synthesis by showing that there are not two separate parts in the life of the Oblate, but one reality. Part One of the 1982 Constitutions and Rules on *The Oblate Charism* is made up of two chapters, *Mission* and *Apostolic Religious Life*, thus showing this forging into a unity of life. Initially they had been the traditional two separate parts, but the capitulars of 1980 voted to unify them in order to express the unity of the Oblate's life and ministry.<sup>93</sup>

The synthesis between community and mission is brought about by focus-

ing on Christ the Saviour. Reading through each of the Constitutions and Rules one can see "community" and "mission" as two spotlights which focus on one reality: Jesus Christ the Saviour. They shine from different angles and can be differentiated, but once they have come together focused on the central point, they are no longer distinguished as they have forged and become one, illuminating the focal point and bringing out all its richness. The presence of Jesus Christ the Saviour is the only reality around which our Oblate life focuses.<sup>94</sup> Centred on Jesus the Saviour, the Oblate attains personal salvation and works for the salvation of others in and through the community to which God has called him. Thus for the Oblate there can be no community without mission, and no mission without community.

*b. The call and presence of the Lord as the constitutive factor of community*

The model on which the Oblate apostolic community is based is that of the apostles gathered around Jesus (C 3), and of the community of the first Christians (C 21 and C 37).

Because Christ the Saviour calls us to follow him, personal sanctification means becoming one with him (i.e. "the Apostles' unity with Jesus" C 3), and mission means bringing others to that same unity (i.e. "their common mission in his Spirit" C 3). It is the presence of Christ the Saviour in the community which makes mission possible, and it is the mission of the Oblate to make Christ present in the community as well as outside. No longer are there two separate parts in our lives, but with "charity and zeal" permeating all areas, community exists for mission, and community itself is also part of mission.

"By growing in unity of heart and mind, we bear witness before the world that Jesus lives in our midst and unites us in order to send us out to proclaim God's reign" (C 37)<sup>95</sup>.

*c. Qualities of apostolic community*

In his address to the Intercapitular meeting of October 1995, Father Zago gave this summary of the dimensions of community:

"According to the Constitutions and Rules, community has a human dimension of mutual understanding and friendship, a Christian dimension of sharing faith, a religious dimension of support from our vows, a missionary dimension in the planning and carrying out of our ministry, an economic dimension in openness in the administration and sharing of goods"<sup>96</sup>.

I will begin by using these headings to point out the various dimensions of apostolic community according to the Constitutions and Rules.

— *Human Dimension: "the affection that binds us together as members of the same family"*

The overriding human characteristic is the affection that binds us together as members of the same family (C 42). Our communities are not only there as residences for a group of men committed to doing the same work, but our community life embraces every aspect of our lives, showing interdependence in our lives and missionary activities (C 38). In a spirit of simplicity and joyfulness we share ourselves, our friendship, our talents and our possessions (C 39). Bound together in charity and obedience, we will be open to fraternal sharing, and express our responsibility for each other in fraternal correction and

forgiveness (C 39). We will help each other find joy and fulfilment in our community life and in our apostolate, supporting one another in our resolution to be faithful to the Congregation (C29). For example, in living out the demands and difficulties of our celibacy we will find our support in friendship and in fraternal life (C 18).

The human needs of the Oblate are to be considered, including opportunities for recreation, rest and relaxation (R 25) [R 39b in CCR 2000], respect for its members' needs and their right to privacy (R 26) [R 41a in CCR 2000], and care and concern for sick and aged members (C 42). A fraternal community radiates the warmth of the Gospel through hospitality (C 41).

As members of the same family we keep alive the memory of the deceased and pray for them (C 43). When members want to separate themselves from the Congregation we will try all means of correction and conciliation, and if these fail then charity must characterize our attitude towards them (C 44).

— *Christian Dimension: witness of the presence and mission of Jesus*

Our communities are a sign that, in Jesus, God is everything for us (C 11), and they give witness to and make real the presence and mission of Jesus (C 37). They should help us to become more prayerful and reflective and to live the Gospel to the full, thereby freeing us for ever greater fidelity to our calling (C 87) [C 91 in CCR 2000]. To this end, the time spent praying together is one of the more intense moments of life (C 40). In the Eucharist, the bonds of apostolic community are drawn closer, while at the same time opening the horizons of our zeal to all the world (C 33). Community prayer takes the form

of celebrating a part of the Hours in common, a period of mental prayer spent together in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament (C 33), and setting aside special moments for deeper personal and community prayer, for reflection and renewal in the monthly and annual retreats (C 35). There also needs to be an openness to new forms of personal and community prayer which can help us encounter the Lord (R 20) [R 33a in CCR 2000].

Our togetherness in seeking and proclaiming the Kingdom of God, and in awaiting and working for Christ's coming is not limited to moments of prayer, but flowing from prayer, we commit ourselves to be a leaven of the Beatitudes at the heart of the world (C 11). We are called to share our faith experiences (C 87) [C 91 and R 91a in CCR 2000] so as to be interdependent in our lives and missionary activity (C 38). It is our fraternal charity which sustains our zeal (C 37).

— *Religious Dimension: vows which bind us in love to the Lord and to his people*

The affirmation that "community is the life-giving reality fashioned by the vows" (C 12), introduces the section on the evangelical counsels. Father Jetté explains the role of community in our profession of the counsels: "Commitment by vows reminds us first of all that the bond which unites us passes through Jesus Christ. Because of him we live together, we love each other, mutually help each other and share a common missionary activity".<sup>97</sup>

Each of the vows fashions a dimension of community.

Our celibacy allows us to give witness as a group to the Father's love for us and to our enduring love for him (C

16). In living our consecration, we will endeavour to help each other to grow in maturity (R 11) [R 18a in CCRR 2000], and will find our support in friendship and in fraternal life (C 18).

Our members adopt a simple lifestyle, remembering that it is essential for our religious institute to give collective witness to evangelical detachment (C 21). We hold all things in common (C 21), with all we acquire either through our personal industry or through the work of the Institute belonging to the community (C 22). Each member in his own way contributes to the support of the community and its apostolate (C 21). Whatever is owned by the community may be considered the patrimony of the poor, and will be administered carefully (R 14) [R 22a in CCRR 2000]. The community, however, placing its trust in divine Providence, will not hesitate to make use of what it has, even of what is necessary for its sustenance, to benefit God's poor (R 14).

Our vow of obedience shapes our communities to stand as a sign of that new world wherein persons recognize their close interdependence, thus challenging the world's spirit of domination (C 25). In the Superior we see a sign of our unity in Christ Jesus (C 26). As individuals and as a community we have the responsibility to seek the will of God. Decisions which express this will are best reached after community discernment and prayer (C 26).

The vow of perseverance is also not limited to the individual dimension. Through living this vow we will help each other find joy and fulfilment in our community life and in our apostolate, supporting one another in our resolution to be faithful to the Congregation (C 30).

Constitution 48 also points out that our initial and ongoing formation as re-

ligious takes place within the context of an apostolic community. We are all involved in a process of mutual evangelization, supporting one another in a healing and empowering way. Together, we create an atmosphere of freedom and mutual trust in which we call each other to an ever deeper commitment.

— *Missionary Dimension: we fulfil our mission in and through the community to which we belong*

Father Zago speaks of three requirements:

1) The mission is entrusted to the community, it is a community task before being a personal one. All the members support it. The community is committed to its life and ministry – cf. C 38, and R 1 [R 7a in CCRR 2000].

2) Community structures are at the service of the mission. Therefore the community must adopt a program of life best suited to the apostolate, while always keeping in mind that community life and mission are not opposed to one another – cf. C 38; R 23 [R 39a in CCRR 2000].

3) The community is, of its nature, missionary. The quality of community life is expressed in mission in as much as the community is the expression and the bearer of the life-giving message. Our mission is accomplished not only by our words and our work, but also and above all by the quality of our lives (cf. CC 3, 11, 37).<sup>98</sup>

Rule 24 [R 38a in CCRR 2000] points out that new forms of community living can develop in response to special missionary needs.

— *Economic Dimension: collective witness to evangelical detachment*

Since we are a missionary Congregation, the temporal goods of our Insti-

tute are, above all, at the service of the mission (C 122). Each member in his own way contributes to the support of the community and its apostolate (C 21), and all possessions belong to the community. The houses and Provinces will be solicitous in sharing their resources with Oblates working in poorer areas and in missions with fewer material goods (R 15) [R 22c in CCRR 2000]. Commenting on this aspect of sharing of goods, Father Joergensen writes, "This sharing is a beautiful witness we give to the world. An international organisation that really practices financial solidarity. The proposal of the 1992 Chapter to share the financial assets in a way that every Province shall be self-supporting is a sign of this. It would mean the end of the dependence of 'the poor Oblates' on 'the rich Oblates'. It is an important question of power sharing. A move from charity to justice"<sup>99</sup>.

— *Dimension Of Clarity: expressing our missionary goals*

In recent years much has been spoken and written about apostolic community, and there is a danger of this concept being an emotive and nebulous one. What is necessary is to be clear about our terms and goals. As individuals and as a community, we have the responsibility to seek the will of God (C 26) and to be clear about our community goals. Because we are bound in charity and obedience (C 3), decisions which express this will are best reached after community discernment and prayer (C 26). All of us are coresponsible for the community's life and apostolate. As a body, therefore, we discern the Spirit's call and seek to achieve consensus in important matters, loyally supporting the decisions taken. Such shared decision making can

best take place in a collegial and trust-filled atmosphere (C 72).

By sharing our faith experiences with one another we are better able to express our missionary goals in the context of the Province's priorities (C 87). Once these goals have been set, then it is necessary to have a program of life and prayer to sustain community and mission (C 38), with regular meetings to regulate the life and purpose of the community (C 38).

The one who helps the community to focus on its life and purpose is the Superior in whom we will see a sign of our unity in Christ Jesus (C 26). He is a sign of the Lord's loving and guiding presence in our midst (C 80). He animates and directs the community to further the apostolate and the best interests of the members (C 89), and will act collegially, assisted by a Council which expresses in its own way the members' concern for their community and for promoting its common good (C 83). Superiors are accountable at each level of government to higher authorities, and to the review of their own community (C 74). The Superior General and Council are to identify basic issues and help us to discern our common objectives (C 111).

In striving for clarity of life and ideals, the Constitutions and Rules will be the norm according to which the community's life and missionary activities will be regulated, while being the object of the community's reflection in prayer and fraternal sharing (C 28).

— *Dimension of the various expressions of community:*

The Congregation as a whole is one apostolic community (C71), with all its members being coresponsible for the community's life and apostolate, and all being expected to participate appropri-

ately in its government through responsible collaboration (C 72).

— *The Congregation as a Community*. The General Chapter has a very specific purpose in the life of the Oblate apostolic community as it meets to strengthen the bonds of our unity and to express our members' participation in the life and mission of the Congregation (C 105). It is a privileged time of community reflection and conversion (C 105) [C 125 in CCRR 2000].

From the Chapter the Congregation receives its Superior General – the man who is to be the Congregation's living bond of unity. His ministry is to stir the faith and charity of our communities to ever greater efforts in response to the Church's needs (C 112) [C 133 in CCRR 2000]. With his Council, the Superior General animates and unites the Congregation, so that, as one apostolic community, it remains faithful to the demands of the religious life and its mission (C 76).

On the Congregation as a community, Father Zago writes, "The Congregation is a community with its own structures and features, its particular charism and its superior, its missionary task and its own spirituality. By losing a sense of the Congregation as community, one is cut off from the reality approved by the Church. It is important, therefore, to maintain links not only with the authorities (superiors) but also with the whole organization through exchange and information".<sup>100</sup>

— *The Province as Community*. The Provinces and Vice Provinces are in their own way true apostolic communities (C 92) [C 96 in CCRR 2000], with the local communities and individuals being mutually responsible for each other and for the common mission (C 92). Just like the local Superior, the Provincial Superior is responsible for the specific

mission of the Congregation within the Province and the religious apostolic life of its communities and members (C 94) [CC 99-101 in CCRR 2000]. Of the Provincial's ministry, Fr. Jetté says, "His Province is first and foremost a family, an apostolic family. The members of this family want to devote themselves heart and soul to their mission, while remaining rooted in a community and supported by it"<sup>101</sup>.

The Provinces and Vice Provinces are grouped into Regions to ensure co-operation and exchange (C 104) [C 119 in CCRR 2000], and aim to increase the unity of the Congregation as an apostolic community.

— *The Local Community*. The Congregation's vitality and effectiveness depend largely on the levels of local community which lives the Gospel and proclaims and reveals it to the world (C 76). The Constitutions stress that the local communities are the living cells of the Congregation (C 87) [C 92 in CCRR 2000], whose aim it is to help their members to live the Gospel to the full, so as to have greater fidelity to our calling.

The term local community refers to a house, residence or district (C 88). Each local community has a Superior whose twofold task it is to animate and direct the community to further the apostolate and the best interests of the members (C 89) [C 93 in CCRR 2000]. It is also his duty to ensure that the local community is not turned in on itself, but that there be fraternal contact with other communities of the Province (C 89). The Superior has a local council, appointed in consultation with the members of the local community (C 91) [C 95 in CCRR 2000].

— *District Communities*. C 88 places house, residence and district on the same level as local communities.

This is an important statement in that it highlights that Oblates who are dispersed for the sake of the Gospel, and can benefit only occasionally from life in common (C 38), are still living in community, even though the contacts they have with their brothers are limited. These contacts need to be regular enough to be able to build up and maintain the constitutive human relationships necessary for community. In recognising that the district is not merely a unit of government, but community in a real way, it brings to life the concept of district community. It is not a second-class type of community, but is given as one of the ways in which our vocation to apostolic community is lived out on a local level. Therefore everything which applies to a house community applies equally to a district community insofar as the Constitutions are concerned (C 77). The Rules make practical distinctions, none of which change the nature of the community (R 86, 142) [R 92c, 151a in CCR 2000].<sup>102</sup> Oblates, whatever form their local community takes, are interdependent in their lives and missionary activity, being bound together in charity and obedience (C38).

— *Formation Community.* Formation of the new members of the apostolic community clearly has to take place in the context of an apostolic community (C 48). Following the model of Jesus forming his disciples (C 50), as disciples of the same Lord, the formation personnel along with those in formation make up one community (C 51).

Within the formation community, the formators form a nucleus at its heart (C 51). This heart is to live among themselves, as mature Oblates, all that is true of an apostolic community. It is the task of the nucleus to live in such a way as to make Jesus live in their midst (C 37), so that it is Jesus,

present among them, who is the Formator who ensures that those in formation are “schooled in his teaching” (Preface). Rule 35 [R 51a in CCR 2000] reminds us that no one can be a formator unless his life is characterized by a community spirit and apostolic zeal. Father Jetté writes, “Communitarian and apostolic spirit. The educator shares in an intense community life. He thrives in community and helps others thrive as well”.<sup>103</sup>

The need for community is pointed out for each stage of formation. For novices:

Life in community, with its joys and tensions, its spirit of charity and mutual support, will help novices identify with the Oblate family and will initiate them into the self-denial which is part of apostolic religious life (R 41) [R 56a in CCR 2000].

For scholastics:

Wherever these studies are pursued, it is important that scholastics live in an Oblate community and develop a missionary outlook (C 66).

For those who have completed their initial formation:

During the first years after their initial formation, Oblates will receive guidance and supervision from other Oblates more experienced. This is the time when they need the support of a community which, in turn, they enrich (R 58) [R 65h in CCR 2000].

For ongoing formation:

One of the foremost responsibilities of Superiors at all levels is to develop in the community a spirit that fosters ongoing formation (C 70).

— *Lay Involvement.* Rule 27 says that “in various places lay people feel called to participate directly in the Oblate mission, ministry and community”. The 1985 Administrative Directory comments:

"Membership in the Oblate Congregation is restricted to Catholic men who make vows according to the Oblate Constitutions and Rules and accept an obedience for a mission which involves them in the ministry of the Church, often as ordained priests or deacons. By contrast, Rule 27 opens up the possibility of new ways of associating lay people to Oblate mission, ministry and community. If the Oblates are considered not just as a religious Congregation but as a movement of people dedicated to de Mazenod's goals and inspired by his ideals, then *association with this movement* is possible to the extent that a man or woman is available for mission, shares in Oblate community and is engaged in some form of Oblate ministry".<sup>104</sup>

This possibility continues to be explored<sup>105</sup>.

## 2. GENERAL CHAPTER OF 1986: "MISSION THROUGH AN APOSTOLIC COMMUNITY"

The Oblates gathered together in the General Chapter of 1986 responded to the demands of society and our mission by outlining six areas which call the Oblates to respond urgently. The sixth of these calls is to "a mission through apostolic community"<sup>106</sup>. Section VI is dedicated to apostolic community (paragraphs 109-137). The capitulars say: "Oblate community is an essential dimension of our vocation [...] Community life is not only necessary for the mission, it is itself mission and at the same time it is a qualitative sign of the mission of the whole Church."<sup>107</sup>

Pointing out that when the link between community and mission is less evident, "the community is in danger of losing its vigor and the mission its support"<sup>108</sup>, the Chapter re-affirms the thrust of the Constitutions and Rules on

the relationship between mission and apostolic community. In a paragraph which echoes the thought of the Founder and of Father Fabre on the unifying role of the Rule in community and mission, they say, "We have just begun to discover our Constitutions and Rules. We must study and meditate on them tirelessly, so that they might be an even greater source of life and bond of unity".<sup>109</sup>

## 3. GENERAL CHAPTER OF 1992: "WITNESSING AS APOSTOLIC COMMUNITY"

The message which the 1992 capitulars gave to the Congregation can be seen as a call to implement the concept of apostolic community given in the Constitutions and Rules and in "Missionaries in Today's World". Their document "is an invitation to re-read our main Oblate sources from the vantage point of the quality of our life with a view to improving our testimony at the core of today's world"<sup>110</sup>.

"Like the Founder we see so many ills that beset the world and the Church [...] The weariness, indeed the resignation of those voices who have given up all hope of ever having their voices heard, has touched us deeply"<sup>111</sup>. After examining the demands and challenges of the present day world, the document poses the question of how Oblates can respond to these demands. The answer is clearly given: "we seek to gather around the person of Jesus Christ so as to achieve solidarity of compassion, to become a single heart that can be food for the life of the world".<sup>112</sup>

It is through our apostolic communities that we can respond to the present day missionary challenges. It states, "We can be effective evangelizers only to the extent that our compas-

sion is collective, that we give ourselves to the world not as a coalition of free lance ministers, but as a united missionary corps".<sup>113</sup> The accent of the document is on the witness which the quality of relationships on the human and faith level within the apostolic community build, so that "it is flesh for the life of the world. The community we create together around Jesus Christ is the banquet table to which we invite mankind".<sup>114</sup>

Oblates are invited to re-assess their commitment to apostolic community, and to widen their understanding of the implications of their vocation to mission in apostolic community in the areas of animation, accountability, formation, and association with the laity.

The document concludes on a Marian note: "Mary Immaculate is the Mother of our apostolic community [...] Mary is our model in her commitment to the values of the Kingdom and in her unique witnessing in the midst of her Son's first community".<sup>115</sup>

FRANCIS SANTUCCI

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See the October 28, 1814 letter to Abbé Charles de Forbin-Janson in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 2 p. 2-4.

<sup>2</sup> In his article, "Communauté et mission d'après Mgr de Mazenod et chez les premières générations d'Oblats en Europe", Father Yvon Beaudoin makes an analysis of the Founder's writings that deal with the foundation of the Missionaries of Provence in *Vie Oblate Life*, 49 (1990), p. E. 179-181.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>4</sup> Constitutions and Rules of the Missionaries of Provence, Part One, Chapter One,

par. 3, *Nota bene*, in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 15.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, par. 1, art. 1, p. 13.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, *Nota bene*, p. 17.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, Part Two, Chapter One, *Of the other principal observances*, p. 54-55.

<sup>8</sup> Letter of 1815 to Abbé Hilaire Aubert in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 3, p. 5.

<sup>9</sup> December 13, 1815 letter to Abbé Henry Tempier in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 7, p. 14.

<sup>10</sup> Petition addressed to the Vicars General of Aix, January 25, 1816 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 13, no. 2, p. 3

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>12</sup> CC and RR of 1818, Part Two, Chapter One, *Of the other principal observances* in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 55.

<sup>13</sup> In "Communauté et mission d'après Mgr de Mazenod et chez les premières générations d'Oblates en Europe", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 49 (1990), p. F 184.

<sup>14</sup> CC and RR of 1818, Part Two, Chapter One, *Of the other principal observances* in *Missions*, 78 (1951) p. 55.

<sup>15</sup> Letter of convocation of the 1850 General Chapter, March 19, 1850, quoted in the 1982 CC and RR, p. 141, Latin text in *Circ. adm.*, I (1850-1885) and PIELORZ, Józef, *Les chapitres généraux au temps du Fondateur*, I, Ottawa, Oblate Studies Edition, 1968, p. 251.

<sup>16</sup> CC and RR of 1818 in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 9-97.

<sup>17</sup> *Idem, ibidem* for the first official Latin text.

<sup>18</sup> "La mission en communauté apostolique selon nos Constitutions et Règles", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 49 (1990), p. E 201-300.

<sup>19</sup> January 20, 1823 letter from Eugene de Mazenod to Hippolyte Guibert in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 91, p. 101.

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, the letters to Father Tempier, February 24, 1816 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 10, p. 18; to Father Courtès, January 7, 1832 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 8, no. 413, p. 51; to Father Faraud, May 10, 1848 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 1, no. 95, p. 193.

<sup>21</sup> Letter to Father Hippolyte Courtès, November 8, 1821 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 74, p. 86.

<sup>22</sup> February 24, 1816 letter in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, no. 10, p. 18.

<sup>23</sup> October 29, 1823 letter to Father Courtès in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, no. 117, p. 125.

<sup>24</sup> August 18, 1843 letter to scholastic brother Charles Baret in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 10, no. 811, p. 27.

<sup>25</sup> July-August, 1848 letter to Father Louis – Toussaint Dassy in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 10, no. 983, p. 230.

<sup>26</sup> See May 2, 1823 letter from the Founder to Father Andre Sumien in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, no. 103, p. 113.

<sup>27</sup> July 1816 letter to the missionaries at Aix in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, no. 12, p. 20.

<sup>28</sup> August 18, 1843 letter to scholastic brother Charles Baret in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 10, no. 811, p. 27.

<sup>29</sup> March 19, 1831 letter to Father Mille in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 8, no. 387, p. 16.

<sup>30</sup> November 1, 1831 letter to Father Mille and the Fathers and Brothers of Bilens in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 8, no. 406, p. 39.

<sup>31</sup> January 10, 1852 letter in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 11, no. 1096, p. 71.

<sup>32</sup> July 9, 1853 letter to Father Anthony Mouchette in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 11, no. 1160, p. 146-147.

<sup>33</sup> December 15, 1843 letter to Father Etienne Semeria in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 10, no. 826, p. 47.

<sup>34</sup> August 12, 1817 letter to Father Tempier in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, no. 20, p. 32.

<sup>35</sup> August 22, 1817 letter to the same person in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, no. 21, p. 35.

<sup>36</sup> July 29, 1830 letter to Father Hippolyte Guibert in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 7, no. 350, p. 202-203.

<sup>37</sup> October 9, 1816 letter to Abbé de Forbin-Janson in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, no. 14, p. 23.

<sup>38</sup> June 19, 1825 letter from the Founder to Father Pierre Nolasque Mye in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, no. 183, p. 175.

<sup>39</sup> January 10, 1845 letter to Joseph Alphonse Martin in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 10, no. 865, p. 95.

<sup>40</sup> March 3, 1822 letter to Father Courtès in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, no. 80, p. 89.

<sup>41</sup> March 20, 1827 letter in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 7, no. 267, p. 131.

<sup>42</sup> March 11, 1816 letter to Father Tempier in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, no. 11, p. 19.

<sup>43</sup> October 8, 1835 letter to Father Eugene Bruno Guigues in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 8, no. 547, p. 178.

<sup>44</sup> November 5, 1844 letter in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 10, no. 861, p. 90.

<sup>45</sup> Constitutions et Règles de la Congrégation des Missionnaires de Provence (1825), Part Two, Chapter Two, par. *On recollection and silence*, art. 8, no. 3.

<sup>46</sup> May 27, 1835 letter in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 8, no. 516, p. 160.

<sup>47</sup> August 26, 1826 letter to Father John Baptist Honorat in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 7, no. 252, p. 117.

<sup>48</sup> February 26, 1848 letter to Father Courtès in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 10, no. 968, p. 213.

<sup>49</sup> January 25, 1848 letter to Father Etienne Semeria in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 4, no. 2, p. 7. See also March 1, 1844 letter to Father Honorat in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 1, no. 32, p. 81 and letters of July 6, 1845 to Father Guigues in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 1, no. 57, p. 121 and July 30, 1846 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 1, no. 67, p. 135.

<sup>50</sup> In *Selected Texts*, no. 313, p. 367.

<sup>51</sup> August 12, 1817 letter in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, no. 20, p. 33 & 34.

<sup>52</sup> March 8, 1827 letter to Father Courtès in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 7, no. 265, p. 129.

<sup>53</sup> November 19, 1840 letter to Father Semeria in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 9, no. 718, p. 156.

<sup>54</sup> December 27, 1841 letter to the same person in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 9, no. 755, p. 202.

<sup>55</sup> June 6, 1831 letter in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 8, no. 393, p. 27.

<sup>56</sup> August 20, 1847 letter to a priest in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 10, no. 940, p. 175.

<sup>57</sup> June 12, 1832 letter to Father Courtès in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 8, no. 424, p. 62.

<sup>58</sup> February 17, 1826 letter to Scholastic Brother Nicolas Riccardi in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 7, no. 225, p. 36.

<sup>59</sup> August 18, 1843 letter to Father Guigues in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 10, no. 812, p. 29.

<sup>60</sup> March 3, 1822 letter to Father Courtès in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 80, p. 89.

<sup>61</sup> August 27, 1821 letter to Father Bourrier in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 71, p. 82.

<sup>62</sup> February 28, 1825 letter to Father Bernard Vachon in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 172, p. 164.

<sup>63</sup> October 14, 1836 letter from the Founder to Father Adrian Telmon in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 8, no. 594, p. 260.

<sup>64</sup> October 9, 1823 letter to Father Courtès in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 114, p. 123.

<sup>65</sup> July 19, 1835 letter to Father Tempier in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 8, no. 523, p. 167 & 168.

<sup>66</sup> July 25, 1817 letter to in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 18, p. 28.

<sup>67</sup> March 13, 1827 letter in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 7, no. 266, p. 130.

<sup>68</sup> March 18, 1828 letter to Father Guibert in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 7, no. 297, p. 153.

<sup>69</sup> May 24, 1826 letter in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 7, no. 242, p. 100.

<sup>70</sup> June 26, 1826 letter in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 7, no. 249, p. 114-115.

<sup>71</sup> July 22, 1828 letter to Father Courtès in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 7, no. 307, p. 163.

<sup>72</sup> July 1829 letter to Dominic Albini in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 7, no. 332, p. 184.

<sup>73</sup> July 22, 1844 letter from the Founder to Father Ferdinand Carles in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 10, no. 848, p. 77.

<sup>74</sup> *Mémoires*, quoted in LEFLON II, p. 158.

<sup>75</sup> July 29, 1830 letter to Father Guibert in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 7, no. 350, p. 203.

<sup>76</sup> January 6, 1819 letter from the Founder to M. Joseph Augustine Viguier in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 38, p. 55.

<sup>77</sup> January 10, 1831 letter to Father Courtès in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 8, no. 378, p. 2.

<sup>78</sup> February 22, 1819 letter in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 40, p. 59. See also May 22, 1841 letter to Father Guigues in

*Oblate Writings* I, vol. 9, no. 729, p. 170; February 15, 1843 letter to Father Noël Francis Moreau in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 10, no. 788, p. 4 and April 24, 1848 letter to Father Courtès in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 10, no. 973 p. 220.

<sup>79</sup> February 22, 1823 letter in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 93, p. 103.

<sup>80</sup> May 18, 1836 letter to Father Mille in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 8, no. 571, p. 231.

<sup>81</sup> September 3, 1834 letter in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 8, no. 485, p. 124.

<sup>82</sup> Circular letter no. 10, December 10, 1861 in *Circ. adm.*, I, (1850-1885), p. 2.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 3.

<sup>84</sup> Circular letter no. 12, April 29, 1862 in *Circ. adm.*, I, (1850-1885), p. 3-4.

<sup>85</sup> ROY, Laurent, "La communauté apostolique selon les Supérieurs généraux", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 49 (1990), p. E 273.

<sup>86</sup> See circular letter no. 13, November 21, 1863 in *Circ. adm.*, I, (1850-1885), p. 14.

<sup>87</sup> Circular letter no. 22, August 1, 1871, p. 7.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 14.

<sup>89</sup> Circular letter no. 31, June 4, 1880, p. 3.

<sup>90</sup> Circular letter no. 76, May 3, 1903, p. 13.

<sup>91</sup> ROY, Laurent, "La communauté apostolique [...]", p. E. 298.

<sup>92</sup> NOGARET, Marius, O'REILLY, Michael, LAUDIN, Georges et alii, *The Congregation Renewed. A reading guide for the Constitutions and Rules*, Rome, 1968, p. 155.

<sup>93</sup> See RUCH, Ernest, "Apostolic Religious Life: a Slow Evolution in the Congregation", in *Vie Oblate Life* 46 (1987), p. 71-85. In this article, Fr. Ruch traces the development of the concept of apostolic religious life and looks at how this unity is manifested in the 1982 *Constitutions*. See also R. MOTTE, "Spiritualité oblate selon les nouvelles Constitutions et Règles", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 1984, p. 50-51.

<sup>94</sup> The idea of the inseparable link between community and mission focussing on Christ or his Gospel is seen in the following

Constitutions which deal with all aspects of our life. Sometimes without using the actual words, the concept of the link is clear:

SECTION	CC	RR 1982	RR 2000
Mission	1, 3	1	7a
Apostolic Religious Life	11		
Evangelical Counsels	12		
Chastity	15, 16, 18	11	18a
Poverty	21, 22	14	22a
Obedience	25, 26	18	26a
Perseverance	29		
Living in Faith	32, 33, 34, 35		
Apostolic Community	37, 38, 40, 41, 42	23, 24, 26, 27, 28	39a, 38a, 39b, 41a, 41b, 41c
Formation	45, 48, 50, 51, 53, 56, 66, 67	41, 65	56a, 67a
Ongoing Formation	69, 70		
Spirit of Government	71, [72] 72, [73]		
Structures of the Congregation	76, [76] 77, [77] 87, [91] 89, [93] 105, [106] 112, [133]		

<sup>95</sup> See ZAGO, Marcello, "Community", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 47 (1988), p. 3-10. Also G. SANTOLINI, "Mission through Apostolic Community according to our Constitutions and Rules", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 1990, p. E 201-230, for a thorough treatment of this topic as well as a bibliography. Also B. BRAMWELL, "Among Yourselves, Charity, Charity, Charity [...] The Theology of Oblate Community", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 1994, p. 67-81.

<sup>96</sup> "To become witnesses in apostolic community", in *Documentation OMI*, 208, (1996), p. 8.

<sup>97</sup> JETTÉ, F., *O.M.I., The Apostolic Man. A commentary on the 1982 edition of the Oblate Constitutions and Rules*, Rome, 1992, p. 134.

<sup>98</sup> ZAGO, Marcello, "Community" in *Vie Oblate Life*, 47 (1988), p. 8.

<sup>99</sup> JOERGENSON, J., "The Poor and the Oblate Charism. A personal commentary based on the first two chapters of the Constitutions and Rules", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 52, 1993, p. 131.

<sup>100</sup> ZAGO, M., *Community[...]*, p. 4-5

<sup>101</sup> JETTÉ, F., *O.M.I. The Apostolic Man [...]*, p. 450.

<sup>102</sup> See SANTUCCI, F., "Districts as Expressions of Apostolic Community in the Oblates of Mary Immaculate", in *Vie Oblate Life*, p. 103-119; also R. SCHWEITZ, "Oblate District Life: Reflections and Questions", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 50, 1991, p. 157-162.

<sup>103</sup> JETTÉ, F., *O.M.I. The Apostolic Man [...]*, p. 281.

<sup>104</sup> *Administrative Directory*, Rome, 1985, p. 31. See also, A. LALONDE, "New Associations and the General Government of the

Congregation", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 1993, 52, p. 163-176.

<sup>105</sup> See *Ibidem*.

<sup>106</sup> *Missionaries in Today's World*, Rome, 1986, no. 5.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibidem*, no. 109.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibidem*, no. 110.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibidem*, no. 125.

<sup>110</sup> *Witnessing as Apostolic Community*, General Chapter 1992, Presentation, p. 17.

<sup>111</sup> *Idem*, no. 2.

<sup>112</sup> *Idem*, no. 6.

<sup>113</sup> *Idem*, no. 7.

<sup>114</sup> *Idem*, no. 8.

<sup>115</sup> *Idem*, no. 45.

## CONSTITUTIONS AND RULES

*Summary: I. Constitutions and Rules in general: Nature and approbation by the Church. II. The Constitutions and Rules of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate: Their development. 1. At the time of the Founder: a. First outline: 1816; b. First complete edition: 1818; c. First text approved by Rome: 1826-1827; d. The changes of 1843; e. First revisions: 1850-1853. 2. After the Founder: a. The second revision: 1867-1894; b. Third revision: 1908-1910; c. Fourth revision: 1920-1928; d. The fifth revision: 1959-1982. III. The Constitutions and Rules of 1982. IV. The Founder and the Constitutions and Rules. V. The Superiors General and the Constitutions.*

### I. CONSTITUTIONS AND RULES IN GENERAL: NATURE AND APPROBATION BY THE CHURCH

In the religious literature of the first centuries, the word "rule" (*regula*) means a way of life according to a pre-determined model: the lifestyle of monks or of a master of the spiritual life, but above all the life of Christ and his Apostles. Gradually, the "rule" took on a more conventional meaning and applied to a whole set of texts, both spiritual and organizational, designed to structure and sustain the life of a community: the Rules of St. Basil, of St. Benedict, of St. Augustine.

In a more recent era (the 16th century), the clerics of the regular life (Jesuits, Theatines) were approved – no longer in virtue of a rule which enjoyed the prestige of the holiness of its author and its many centuries of existence – but rather of a "rule of life" (*formula vitæ, forma vivendi*), which was an expression of the original inspiration and of the spiritual and pastoral experience of a founding core group. Soon, however, these founders moved on to the writing of "constitutions" (*constitutiones*) which developed their charism and its living out in a more systematic and complete way. Then, alongside the constitutions there ap-

peared "rules" (*regulæ*) which explained those basic texts and adapted them to concrete circumstances. That is how, from the 17th century on, the new congregations with simple vows, (Lazarists, Passionists, and later the Oblates of Mary Immaculate) produced "Constitutions and Rules" which were subsequently approved by the Holy See.

The Code of Canon Law of 1983 presents the constitutions as "the basic code" which must contain the essential norms concerning the "nature, purpose, spirit and character of the institute" (Canon 578), and "the governance of the institute, the discipline of the members, the admission and formation of members, and the proper object of their sacred bonds" (Canon 587, § 1). The other elements more subject to change, or "rules", are to be found in other compilations (Canon 587, § 4).

If the formulation of a rule or of constitutions is based upon the spiritual experience of a founder and of an original group of disciples, it generally happens that an authoritative intervention on the part of the Church soon comes to give its stamp of approval, thus authenticating the original divine inspiration. "Again, in docile response to the promptings of the Holy Spirit the hierarchy accepts rules of religious life which are presented for its ap-

proval by outstanding men and women, improves them further and then officially authorizes them. It uses its supervisory and protective authority too to ensure that religious institutes established all over the world for building up the Body of Christ may develop and flourish in accordance with the spirit of their founders."<sup>1</sup>

The approbation of the Church in the initial stages of monasticism and other forms of consecrated life was given through the authority of the bishop. Sometimes the two authorities functioned as one, since the bishop added the weight of his authority to that of founder and author of the rule. Subsequently, we see the councils and, in the East, the civil authority, intervene to establish norms to be observed by all those men and women who bound themselves by vow to follow Christ. Already in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, and more frequently from the 12<sup>th</sup> century on, "pontifical protection" began to be established. Direct dependence on the Holy See was granted to monasteries to withdraw them from subjection to secular princes and to certain bishops, thus freeing them to better pursue their goals. From this time on, the official legislation for religious was issued either by the popes or by the great councils and it was by pontifical approbation that the authenticity of the charism of the founder was recognized. It also guaranteed the legitimacy of foundations and the fact that the rules were in conformity with the laws of the Church.

In the past, approbation by the Holy See has taken various forms, some more solemn than others: bulls, briefs, decrees. In this way, by extending its "protection" to religious congregations, the Holy See emphasized their dependence on it and the necessity for these institutes to periodically revise their con-

stitutions according to the progressive development of the common law of the Church. That was the case especially after the promulgation of the Code of 1917, then after the Second Vatican Council and after the Code of 1983. Through the constitution *Lumen Gentium* the Council brought into sharp relief the theological significance and the ecclesial dimension of the religious life.<sup>2</sup> In its wake, the decree *Perfectæ caritatis* invited religious to implement an appropriate renewal which would deal with "a constant return to the source of the whole of the Christian life and to the primitive inspiration of the institutes, and their adaptation to the changed conditions of our time".<sup>3</sup>

In 1966, the motu proprio *Ecclesiæ sanctæ* gave concrete directives on how to successfully carry out this reform. These directives were designed to lead to the elimination of outdated elements contained in the constitutions and the kind of adaptation which would bring the manner of life, of prayer and of work "in harmony with the present-day physical and psychological condition of the members. It should also be in harmony with the needs of the apostolate, in the measure that the nature of each institute requires, with the requirements of culture and with social and economic circumstances. This should be the case everywhere, but especially in mission territories."<sup>4</sup>

Above all, these orientations in postconciliar legislation aim to underline the profound reality of the "following of Christ" (*sequela Christi*) and show how the concrete norms which direct the religious life flow from theological and spiritual considerations. As for the ecclesiastical authority, it declares unequivocally the duty it has of ensuring that the constitutions remain faithful to the charism of the founders,

since this charism is not a gift made to only one particular religious family but to the entire Church, of which it is one of the most precious fruits.

## II. THE CONSTITUTIONS AND RULES OF THE OBLATES OF MARY IMMACULATE: THEIR DEVELOPMENT

### 1. AT THE TIME OF THE FOUNDER

#### a. *First outline: 1816*

From the time of his very first letter to Father Tempier, on October 9, 1815, Eugene de Mazenod was already portraying the general outline of his apostolic project. He specified: "We will live together in one house, that which I have bought, under a Rule we shall adopt with common accord and for which we will draw the elements from the statutes of St. Ignatius, of St. Charles for his Oblates, of St. Philip Neri, of St. Vincent de Paul and of the Blessed Liguori".<sup>5</sup>

The young Founder, who was above all a man of action and not of theories, did not establish a definite and unchangeable program at the outset. While keeping the essentials in view, he knew how to remain flexible and open to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit through the appeals, the needs, the various circumstances of the life of his "little Society" – "little" as he liked to call it, not only in number, but also in his original intention.

The first official text of the Society is dated January 25, 1816, the very day of the gathering of the first companions in the old Carmelite convent of Aix. It is a *Request for authorization addressed to the Vicars General of Aix*.<sup>6</sup> We can already discern in it the main themes of

the future Rules: the *Preface*, (the lamentable state of affairs in Provence); the first part on the ends of the Society (parish missions and sanctification of the Society's members); the second part or rule of life (ministry and community life); the third part, on the direction and administration of the society. No mention is made of religious life, but it is discreetly suggested as the ideal. Finally, we should also take note of the commitment "to persevere all one's life" in the society. In addition, some statutes and rules were developed during the years 1816 and 1817, as several documents of this era bear witness: letters of the Founder, various collections of local practices and the *Request for legal status* from the Minister of the Interior on behalf of the "Society of the Missionaries for the southern regions of France."<sup>7</sup>

#### b. *First complete edition: 1818*

The request of August 16, 1818 from the Bishop of Digne asking them to take on responsibility for the pastoral care of Notre-Dame du Laus was a turning-point in the life of the Society. A new foundation in another diocese brought with it a readjustment of the original project which foresaw only one house. The issue was so important that the Founder resolved to call a meeting of all those who were then part of his little Society, even the youngest who had not yet received Sacred Orders. "It was in order to make them understand that since they had been called to another diocese to make a new foundation, it became necessary to broaden the rule which governed us and to set about drawing up more comprehensive constitutions, to bind us more closely together, to establish a line of authority, in a word, to coordinate everything in

such a way that there existed only one will and that all were animated by the same spirit in their conduct. Everyone was of this opinion and they asked me to set about seriously and without delay to draw up the constitution and the rule which we would need.”<sup>8</sup>

Eugene de Mazenod withdrew to the family manor at Saint-Laurent-du-Verdon in order to find the solitude required to write this Rule<sup>9</sup>. Then, upon his return to Aix, he presented the text to the members of the Society during the annual retreat which took place from October 23 to November 1 of 1818. He preached this retreat himself by commenting each day on the proposed Rule.

The introduction of the vows into this rule gave rise to serious difficulties on the part of several of his confreres. The majority of the priests wanted the Society to remain a simple association of diocesan missionaries and to retain their full freedom of remaining with the Society or leaving it. After having called together the three scholastics, Eugene de Mazenod read them the Rule, especially the paragraph which dealt with the vows, and he asked them what they thought of it. He then granted them a deliberative vote in the general assembly of the community and submitted his project to all the members. It was the first General Chapter of the Congregation and it was on that occasion, by a vote of six to four that the vows were accepted into the Congregation<sup>10</sup>. On November 1, 1818, everyone except two members made their religious profession through the vows of chastity, obedience, and perseverance before the Founder, duly authorized to receive these vows. On November 13, 1818, the Founder obtained from the diocesan authority a new and definitive approbation of the Institute and of the Rule which had been adopted. This text of 1818 bears the title,

“Constitutions and Rules of the Society of the Missionaries of Provence.” It is made up of a foreword and of three parts: I. The end of the Institute and its ministries; II. The personal obligations of the missionaries (spirit of poverty, vows of chastity, obedience and perseverance) and the practices they were bound to as a community; III. The government of the Society and the training of its members in formation.

Already in his letter of October 9, 1815, to Father Tempier, Eugene de Mazenod indicated the sources from which he intended to draw the elements which would be the driving force for the life and the ministry of the future missionaries. In fact, the Rule of the Redemptorists is the main source of our Rule of 1818. To that, we can add the other rules mentioned in the letter to Father Tempier, the practices of the Company of Priests of Saint-Sulpice, *The Practice of Christian Perfection* by Alfonso Rodriguez and a few other authors.

Eugene de Mazenod’s Rule also has a biblical flavor – and in particular, it takes on a very evident Pauline coloring. Numerous borrowed texts notwithstanding, the first Rule is remarkable for the passages which flow directly from the pen and the heart of the Founder. A few central themes such as love of the Church, recognition of the need for salvation, zeal for souls, the spirit of reparation, the striving for perfection would find their culmination a few years later in that characteristically Mazenodian monument, the *Preface* of 1826, a feature which remains even today the clearest expression of the Oblate charism.

*c. The first text approved by Rome: 1826-1827*

The text of 1818 already contained the substance which would be retained

in subsequent versions. Several manuscripts of the following years have been conserved in the archives, and they bear witness to an ongoing work of correction and adaptation of the first text.<sup>11</sup> Thus, with the entry of the first brother in 1820, a paragraph on "coadjutor brothers" was added. The vow of poverty was introduced in October of 1821 by the second General Chapter. The *Preface* appeared in its almost definitive form in 1824 or in 1825. Finally, in 1825, the Congregation went beyond the boundaries of Provence with a fourth foundation, a house at Nîmes. The Congregation changed its name and adopted the title, "Oblates of St. Charles".

In view of the internal and external dangers which threatened the future of the young Institute, the decision was taken to seek pontifical approbation. With this goal in mind, the text of the Constitutions and Rules was revised, corrected and completed by the Founder. It was then entrusted to some Latinists, notably, to Fathers Albini and Courtès. The Founder went to Rome himself to solicit the desired approbation.<sup>12</sup> The text underwent only some minor changes on the part of the Cardinals' commission entrusted with the task of examining it. The main change was the name of the Society which from that time on took the title "Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of the Most Holy and Immaculate Virgin Mary". On February 17, 1826, Pope Leo XII approved the Congregation and its Constitutions. The Founder rejoiced: "Somewhat puny as we are, being weak and few in number, we nonetheless have an existence in the Church no less than that of the most celebrated bodies... It is thus we are constituted."<sup>13</sup>

By the following year, the Consti-

tutions and Rules approved by Leo XII were printed and distributed to all the Oblates. It is fitting that we should point out an important modification of the previous French texts. The previous texts read: "They will not take on the direction of seminaries". The text of 1826-1827 deliberately omits these words because there was already a question of accepting the major seminary of Marseilles. This detail is indicative of the Founder's readiness to respond to new needs and of his obedience to the Pope who had deliberately seen to it that this ministry should be listed in the pontifical brief. Nevertheless, the paragraph on the direction of seminaries would only come later on after a period of lived experience.

#### *d. The changes of 1843*

The General Chapter of 1843 (July 10-13) introduced only one change to the Constitutions of 1826-1827; it had to do with the frequency of General Chapters which, up to that time, were scheduled to be held every three years. Faced with the difficulties of getting together for meetings at such short intervals, and with the developments which led the Congregation to establish itself in the British Isles and in Canada, the Founder himself proposed having chapters every six years and to have corresponding terms of six years for the elected officers. The change was unanimously approved and confirmed by a decree of the Sacred Congregation for Bishops and Regulars of March 14, 1846 and an Apostolic Brief of March 20, 1846.

#### *e. First revisions: 1850-1853*

The first real revision of the Constitutions and Rules took place during

the General Chapter held in Marseilles from August 26 to August 31 of 1850. It was prompted by the desire to gear the text to the burgeoning expansion of the Congregation and the new works that had been accepted. The revision was prepared by a special commission made up of Fathers Henry Tempier, Hippolyte Courtès, Casimir Aubert, Ambroise Vincent and Charles Bellon.

The changes made fall into two categories: 1. The addition of new paragraphs on the direction of major seminaries and on the division of the Congregation into provinces; included as well is an appendix on the foreign missions. 2. More than two hundred modifications, additions and changes of articles in the existing text.

In January of 1851, it was the Founder himself, accompanied by Father Tempier, who went to Rome to request the approbation of the revised Constitutions and Rules. This was granted by a decree of the Sacred Congregation for Bishops and Regulars on March 20, 1851. A short time later (March 28), an Apostolic Brief was issued giving renewed approbation of the Congregation and its Constitutions. For a variety of reasons, the promulgation of this document did not take place until February 17, 1853, in Marseilles. Subsequently, it was issued to the whole Congregation by a circular letter dated August 2, which accompanied each copy of the newly printed Constitutions.<sup>14</sup>

The Chapter of 1850 seemed to be of such extraordinary importance that that Father Achille Rey called it "a founding General Chapter". In fact, Bishop de Mazenod could look upon it as his crowning achievement. This was the last revision of the Constitutions carried out in his lifetime.

## 2. AFTER THE FOUNDER

### *a. The second revision: 1867-1894*

Shortly after Bishop de Mazenod's death, his immediate successor, Father Joseph Fabre, learned from Rome that the Congregation did not enjoy the privilege of exemption as the Founder always thought it did. Consequently, a certain number of points in the Constitutions and Rules were brought up by the pro-secretary of the Sacred Congregation for Bishops and Regulars and discussed in an audience with Pius IX on August 14, 1863. These were communicated to the Superior General through the Procurator General, Father Ambroise Tamburini, and were the object of a decree dated January 5, 1866. There followed a revision of the text by a General Chapter held in Autun from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> of August 1867.

This work bore special fruit in the form of two new paragraphs: the first on taking charge of parishes, the other on the Procurator to the Holy See. In addition, about thirty additions and minor changes were made here and there.

The acts of the General Chapter of 1867 containing the modified Constitutions were presented in Rome in 1868. The Sacred Congregation judged them rather severely as to their conformity to their observations of 1866. Consequently, the General Administration had to revise the Capitular Acts before resubmitting them to the Holy See. On January 10, 1870, one month after the opening of the first Vatican Council, the decree of approbation was finally signed.<sup>15</sup>

The Chapters of 1873, 1879 and 1887 did nothing more than refine the revision of 1867. For various reasons, it

was not until after the Chapter of 1893 that a new edition of the Constitutions and Rules was printed. It was issued by Mame printers in Tours in 1894 with a letter from the new Superior General, Father Louis Soullier, as an introduction. The letter was dated February 17, and it explained that these new Rules were a revision of those of 1853 modified by the General Chapter of 1867 and approved by the Holy See in 1870. It contained nine hundred and three articles and a certain number of documents, either in the introduction or in the appendix. Finally, by Circular number 70, dated March 19, 1899, Father Cassien Augier, Superior General, promulgated the acts of that Chapter as revised by the Chapter of 1898 – arranged according to the order of the articles in the rule book, which rules it rendered more precise and complete.

*b. The third revision: 1908-1910*

The life span of the 1894 text was not of long duration. New norms dealing with institutes in simple vows grew more numerous toward the end of the pontificate of Leo XIII and at the beginning of the reign of Pius X. At the same time, the jurisprudence of the Sacred Congregation for Bishops and Regulars was developing. As for the General Chapter of 1906, after having made a few changes in the text of our Constitutions, it petitioned the Holy See for an approbation of this text.<sup>16</sup> The response was not what they expected. It called into question the accurate correspondence of the revision of 1867 with the observations made by the Sacred Congregation in 1866. Moreover, the Holy See required that in order to conform to recent legislation, the Oblates should undertake a complete revision of the Constitutions.

Thus it was that the Chapter of 1908, called to elect a new Superior General, became, like the Chapter of 1850, one of the important Chapters in terms of revising the Constitutions and Rules.

The Chapter's task had been prepared by a consultation of the whole Congregation and by the work of Fathers Joseph Lemius and Simon Scharsch who were the main authors of the revision. This work was motivated by the desire to conform to the canonical norms of the Church and to be faithful to the Founder's original project.

The results distinguished themselves by the addition of two important paragraphs: the one treating of foreign missions and the other dealing with scholasticates. Other important paragraphs were suppressed: one concerning a directory for the missions and another which dealt with the moderator of scholastics. There were an additional hundred amendments in other articles.

The approbation of the Holy See first took the form of a decree of the Sacred Congregation for Bishops and Regulars on the 21 of December 1909; and subsequently by an Apostolic Brief dated September 7, 1910. As a result, the new text could be printed in 1910, published under the name of the General House in Rome. It contained eight hundred and thirty nine articles divided into three sections and, for the first time, numbered in a continuous fashion. The volume also contained a number of appendices – namely, the previous briefs of approbation and two letters of the Founder. This was the third revision of the Constitutions.<sup>17</sup>

*c. The fourth revision: 1920-1928*

At the time of the appearance of the text of 1910, the drafting of the Code of

Canon Law, begun under Pius X and finished under Benedict XV in 1917 was already in progress. The Code dealt at length with religious. In virtue of Canon 489, the Code abrogated all prescriptions of the Constitutions and Rules of religious that might be contrary to the common law of the Church. Shortly after the Code came into force, the Sacred Congregation for Religious ordered Religious Institutes to revise their Constitutions within five years and bring them into conformity with the Code. This constituted a call to send our Constitutions back to the worktable scarcely ten years after the previous revision. Two General Chapters, that of 1920 and that of 1926, dedicated most of their time to this task.

In fact, the revision undertaken by the Chapter of 1920 proved to be so extensive that the Oblates became aware of the impossibility of carrying it to completion within the allotted time span and with the care required. Consequently, this led to the establishment of a postcapitular commission made up of members of the General Administration<sup>18</sup>. In July of 1925, the fruit of their work was submitted to the scrutiny of the members of the Congregation. This enabled them to prepare a definitive project for the Chapter of 1926. As a result, this twenty-first chapter, the "Centenary Chapter", became the chapter of the fourth revision of the Rule. It took place from September 20 to October 18. Certain changes were required in virtue of the new Code of Canon Law; others were demanded by the spirit of the Code and already-existing articles. A third category of minor alterations dealt with adaptation to the requirements of contemporary times or were simply editorial changes to improve the text.

A postcapitular commission made up of Fathers Euloge Blanc, Auguste

Estève and Albert Perbal put the finishing touches on the text in preparation for its presentation to the Holy See at the end of April 1927. The Sacred Congregation of Religious asked for only three changes and issued the decree of approbation on July 2, 1927. The General Council found, however, that this decree was too plain and colorless in view of the importance of this revision. They, therefore, asked the Holy Father for a more solemn approbation. This was granted to them by Apostolic Letters from Pius XI and under the form of a Brief dated May 21, 1928.<sup>19</sup>

#### *d. The fifth revision: 1959-1982*

— *The interim edition of 1966.* Of all the texts, the one of 1928 has enjoyed the longest life. However, at the Chapter of 1953, the new political, social and religious conditions created by the Second World War and the extraordinary development of the Congregation raised the question of another revision.<sup>20</sup> As a result, a postcapitular commission presided by Father Joseph Rousseau was given the task of preparing it.<sup>21</sup>

The General Chapter of 1959 began the examination of the text presented to it<sup>22</sup> and assumed the task of reworking it. But, in the face of the amount of work required and, perhaps, intuiting the profound changes which the recently convoked Council would bring, it suspended its work and confided to a new postcapitular commission the task of drawing up another text for the following Chapter. At the same time, it enjoined the commission to especially maintain the distinction between the Constitutions and the Rules, a distinction which was later required by the conciliar documents on religious life.<sup>23</sup> This commission, under the presidency

of Father Gerard Fortin, invited the Congregation to work with them by submitting their suggestions and desired changes. A first project was born. Radically reshaped in accord with the observations submitted by the Congregation, it was replaced in 1965 by a second draft called the *Textus Revisus*.<sup>24</sup>

It happened, however, that the Chapter opened on January 25, 1966, less than two months after the closure of the Council. A new view of the Church and its relationship with the world called for a new look at religious life and missionary activity. Consequently, the Chapter itself preferred to undertake the drawing up of a text. Within the space of two months, the capitulars accomplished a tremendous task<sup>25</sup>. Never before had a Chapter dared to carry out such a radical revision of the Constitutions and Rules. In fact, the new edition looked more like a total recasting rather than a simple revision of a long-established text. Some people even felt justified in speaking of "new" Constitutions. As for the text of the Founder, only the *Preface* was conserved in its original form as a family heirloom and an essential expression of the Oblate ideal. For the rest, the capitulars strove to translate the Founder's thinking into modern language. Moreover, the text emphasized those values to which today's world is particularly sensitive and which found an echo in the Council documents: dialogue, participation, co-responsibility, authority as service.<sup>26</sup>

The Constitutions and Rules, accepted by an almost unanimous vote, were promulgated on August 2, 1966 by the Superior General, Father Léo Deschâtelets.<sup>27</sup> The Holy See approved them as an interim rule. Just like all the other religious Institutes, our subsequent General Chapter was to review

them in the light of our lived experience in view of a revision and a definitive approbation.

— *Towards the definitive text: 1966-1980*. However, the 1972 capitulars judged that the experimentation permitted by *Ecclesiae sanctae* (1966) had not been long enough and decided to prolong it until the next chapter. Nevertheless, as a logical follow-up to the Chapter of 1966, the 1972 Chapter produced four documents which witnessed to the development of the life of the Congregation and of the Church during the first years after the Council and the period of experimentation with the interim Constitutions.<sup>28</sup> These booklets were favorably received in the Congregation and became a new source for the pending definitive text.

The extraordinary Chapter of 1974, brought on by the resignation of the Superior General, came too soon. Consequently, the Sacred Congregation for Religious granted us permission to prolong experimentation under the Constitutions of 1966 as amended in 1972 and 1974, until the following Chapter, the Chapter of 1980. As a result, the Chapter of 1974 decided to create a postcapitular commission entrusted with the task of preparing a revised text based on the 1966 text. This text would be submitted to the 1980 Chapter and ultimately to the Holy See.<sup>29</sup>

The commission came into existence the following year in February of 1975.<sup>30</sup> The commission, ultimately comprising eight members, was made up of: Fathers Alexandre Taché, as president, Paul Sion, as secretary, Marius Bobichon, Jean Drouart, Ruben Elizondo, Theobald Kneifel, Michael O'Reilly and Frederick Sackett. In 1979, it benefited from the help of two experts: Louis-Philippe Normand and

Alfred Hubenig, in drawing up the final text. Over a period of five years, it held seven plenary sessions. The revision took place in three stages: first, a preliminary survey (1975-1976)<sup>31</sup>; then, the drawing up of a first draft (1977-1978)<sup>32</sup>; and finally, the drawing up of the precapitular draft (1979)<sup>33</sup>, followed by a final consultation of the Congregation (1979-1980). The commission received many comments, critical observations and suggestions from fellow Oblates. It was also able to benefit from the results of the congress on the charism of the Founder held in May of 1976<sup>34</sup> and of the intercapitular meeting of the Provincials in April 1978. Finally, it also took into consideration recommendations made by the standing committee on formation, the finance committee and the General Council with which it maintained regular contact during the entire course of its work.

— *The definitive text of 1982.* A review of the draft of the new Constitutions absorbed the time of the 1980 Chapter from November 6 to December 3, the day when the final text was unanimously approved. A postcapitular commission made up of Fathers Alexander Taché, as president, Paul Sion, as secretary, Francis George, Francis Morrisey and René Motte set to work to polish the English and French texts. They were passed on to the General Council to be submitted to the Holy See at the end of January 1981. The Holy See presented its observations in March of 1982. A few months of dialogue resulted in the approbation from the Holy See on July 3 of 1982<sup>35</sup> and in the “decree promulgating the Constitutions and Rules” issued by the Superior General, Father Fernand Jetté on October 28, 1982.<sup>36</sup> Finally, it became possible to print the text of the Constitutions in French, English and Spanish at the No-

tre-Dame Printing House in Richelieu, Quebec, Canada. The printed text appeared in January of 1983. Translations in other languages followed shortly after.

### III. THE CONSTITUTIONS AND RULES OF 1982

The text of the Constitutions of 1982, in large part, was drawn from the Constitutions of 1966, revised mainly in the light of the capitular documents of 1972 and 1974, the post-conciliar documents of the Holy See, the writings of the Founder — especially the original Constitutions and Rules — and finally, the input from Oblates obtained through the questionnaire issued by the revision commission of 1975.<sup>37</sup> It made a particular effort to adapt itself to the international character and the new living conditions of the Congregation. In a style particular to constitutions, which are neither simple exhortation, nor a spiritual, pastoral or legal treatise, the text contained elements that were both inspiring and juridical and expressed this in a sober concise language, with a vocabulary sufficiently perennial to avoid becoming soon outdated.

In response to a unanimously expressed request from the Congregation, the *Preface* of the Founder was kept in its entirety. These pages of our genuine Oblate heritage were considered by all members of the Congregation as “the very heart of the Constitutions”, “our Golden Rule”, “our founding charter”. But in order better to place ourselves in a contemporary context, the *Preface* were preceded by a *Foreword* which highlighted for us its contemporary significance.

However, in the Constitutions of 1982 use of material drawn from the

Founder's writings was not limited to the reprinting the *Preface*. While resisting the temptation to slip in various extracts from the first set of Constitutions recognized as being those composed by Father de Mazenod. The 1982 revision preferred to present these texts separately in relation to the modern text, upon which they cast a light which shows their fidelity to the original Mazenodian inspiration.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, some of the expressions of the Founder have found their way into the various articles of the Constitutions and have given them a particularly Oblate flavor.<sup>39</sup>

The Constitutions are divided into three parts: the Oblate charism, formation, the organization of the Congregation. But this did not follow the pre-capitular draft, which had four parts. One of the major insights of the Chapter of 1980 was to unite under the single heading of "Oblate charism", the first two parts proposed as the *Mission* of the Congregation and the *Apostolic Religious Life*. These then became the two chapters making up the first part of the approved Constitutions. The intention was to show how the call to the apostolic mission and to the religious life should be considered as two constituent components of the same life entirely dedicated to Jesus Christ in order to collaborate with him in the work of evangelization (C 2).

The chapter on mission has as its aim to bring to the fore the apostolic and missionary character of the Congregation (CC 1, 5, 7, 8). The model of our relation to Christ is that of the Apostles with Jesus the Saviour (C 3). Our mission is carried out in community and through the community of which the living Christ is the centre (CC 3, 37) and under the aegis of the Immaculate Virgin Mary (C 10). In

contrast to the previous Constitutions, the text of 1982 does not describe our various ministries, but rather leaves the task of determining their apostolic priorities to the provinces – guided by a few general principles (RR 1, 2, 4, 5) [RR 7 a, b, d, e in CCRR 2000]. One can notice as well the important place allotted to the ministry for justice (CC 8, 9; R 9), a reflection of one of the major concerns of the Church in our times.

The second chapter develops the "rule of life" which draws its inspiration from the life of Jesus and the Apostles and which constitutes "the apostolic religious life". Those who are called to follow Jesus and to share in his mission feel the need to identify with him in order to be credible witnesses of the Word they proclaim (C 11). They feel the need of a life which is true to the Gospel, of a radical conversion from the very depth of their being. Here again Christ is at the source of our commitment through the vows (C 12). He is the one who is at the centre of our life of faith (C 31) and of our community life (C 37).

The *vows* (section I) are presented according to the order established by Vatican II. For each one, the text evokes its *Gospel origins* (CC 14, 18, 24, 29). It affirms its *sign value* which is simultaneously a challenge to the "world" and its values, and a proclamation of the Kingdom (CC 15, 20, 25, 29). It emphasizes its *communitarian dimension* (CC 12, 13, 21, 26, 29). Finally, it specifies its very *object* and its juridical implications for the individual religious and the community (CC 17, 22, 27, 30). The *life of faith* (section II) needs to be nourished by a constant seeking after God, by an intense relationship with Christ. The union with God is developed as much through the

ministry as through prayer and the celebration of the sacraments (C 31). As for *community* (section III), the text sees in it "the living cell" of the Church and of the Congregation (CC 12, 91). Our community life is at the same time a witness of the presence of Christ among us, a support of our evangelical life and the necessary condition for missionary effectiveness (CC 37, 38, 39, 76, 91).

The two other parts of the Constitutions take their meaning from the first: *formation*, first of all (2<sup>nd</sup> part), which has as its goal the formation of "an apostolic man, capable of living the Oblate charism" (C 46), and the *organization* of the Congregation (3<sup>rd</sup> part), whose structures "are set up in function of that mission", that is, to implement the Oblate charism, structures that must remain "flexible enough to evolve with our lived experience" (C 72). It is the same case for our temporal goods which are "above all at the service of the mission" (C 150).

As for *formation*, the text emphasizes its continuous nature; it is presented as an ongoing process which is never finished (CC 46, 47, 48, 68). It outlines the personal responsibility of each person, a responsibility which is fundamental and essential for an effective formation (CC 47, 49, 70), along with the function of the community which will foster this progress (C 48), especially in its first stages, and with the responsibility specific to major superiors and educators (CC 49, 51). While describing the different stages of formation, this text of 1982 pays particular attention to the preparation of candidates for the novitiate (C 53, 54), as well as continued formation after entering active ministry (CC 68, 70). It seeks to make concrete application of the most recent developments in pedagogy and religious psychology.

The third part on *organization of the*

*Congregation* begins with an introductory statement describing the "spirit of government" (CC 71-74). It brings to the fore the service dimension which characterizes authority (C 71) and the spirit of collegiality which should be the motivating force in the government of the Institute (C 73). The text emphasizes as well that, in the Congregation, the structures of government are at the service of the mission and of individual persons (CC 72, 76, 81, 91, 96, 125). It insists on the participation of everyone in the projects of the Institute and in the decisions taken through discernment, cooperative effort, elections, the councils and chapters (CC 72, 73, 74, 86, 90, 91, 93, 96, 108, 119, 125). It evokes once again the importance of monitoring and of periodic assessment of administrations and the tasks entrusted to them (C 74). This could be done either through reports, or by congresses and visits, or finally by the General Chapter.

Breaking away from the traditional order, the organization of the Congregation is structured as starting from the local communities, then moving to the provincial and the general level and, by so doing, affirming the importance of the local communities to ensure the vigorous life and apostolic effectiveness of both the individual members of the Congregation and the Congregation as a whole (CC 76, 77, 91, 96, 125, 126).

It should be noted that the directories developed after the 1980 Chapter<sup>40</sup> effectively supplemented the Constitutions and Rules. The fact that these directories had already been foreseen in the overall planning made possible a text much less encumbered by detail. Such was not the case with the previous versions of the Constitutions; they contained many elements which were dated and found their application limited to only a few areas in the Congregation.

#### IV. THE FOUNDER AND THE CONSTITUTIONS AND RULES

The person who wishes to know how the Founder understood the place of the Rule in the Society and the life of each of its members need only read the conclusion of the *Preface* of 1826 as it appears in its entirety in all the subsequent editions of the Constitutions: "...The success of such a holy undertaking as well as the maintenance of discipline in any society make certain rules of life absolutely necessary for unity of thought and action among the members. Such unity is a body's strength, keeping up its fervour and insuring that it lasts."

What conviction, what enthusiasm one finds in the letters of Eugene de Mazenod as he was writing to his small religious family when he was conducting the negotiations which would lead to the February 1826 approbation. His unbounded faith in the Church, in the ministry of the successor of Peter, enabled him to see in the approbation of Leo XII a seal of approval of the newly-formed project and the Rules which guided it, an approval which could never be called into question. "They are not a nonentity, they are no longer simple regulations, merely pious directions; they are Rules approved by the Church after most minute examination. They have been judged holy and eminently suited to lead those who have embraced them to their goal. They have become the property of the Church that has adopted them. The Pope, by approving them has become their guarantor. He whom God has used to draw them up disappears; it is certain today that he was merely the mechanical instrument which the Spirit of God put into play in order to show the path he wanted to

be followed by those whom he had predestined and preordained for the work of his mercy, in calling them to form and maintain our poor, little and modest Society."<sup>41</sup> This approbation gave him the greatest joy because it now placed the Society on the same level as the other Religious Orders, even the most famous ones, some of which had disappeared during the Revolution. From its very inception, Eugene de Mazenod wanted his small group of missionaries to supply for the absence of these Orders.

During his 1831 retreat, the Founder drew up a selection of articles of the Rules "that explicitly express why we have been established and what we should be"<sup>42</sup>. For the one who joins the Society, the Constitutions and Rules present, as it were, "the prototype of the true Oblate of Mary"<sup>43</sup>. They teach him how, according to the spirit of his vocation, he should "walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ and his Apostles"<sup>44</sup>. They are for him a faithful and sure counselor which leads to doing what is most pleasing to God and most useful to himself and others... They truly lend authenticity to his works and his actions<sup>45</sup>. At the end of his life, they will be the norm Christ will use to judge him.<sup>46</sup>

The Founder grieves over the fact that a number of Oblates are wandering away from the Constitutions and that, for several, it is a closed book<sup>47</sup>. He insists, therefore, on more fidelity in the observance of the Rules in order to get to know them thoroughly by the concrete living of them and "draw down upon us and upon our holy ministry new blessings"<sup>48</sup>.

The 1853 and 1857 Circular Letters<sup>49</sup> on the Holy Rules show clearly to what extent, to the very end of his life, Bishop de Mazenod considered this text sacred

and the norm of all Oblate life. As a result, he told his sons again and again: "Let us, therefore, value these Rules as precious, let us ever keep them before our eyes, still more in our hearts".<sup>50</sup>

## V. THE SUPERIORS GENERAL AND THE CONSTITUTIONS

Upon the death of Bishop de Mazenod, the concern of his successor, Father Joseph Fabre, was to maintain the Congregation faithful to the spirit of its Founder. This spirit manifested itself especially in the Holy Rules which the new Superior General in his very first circular letter exhorted his sons to observe most attentively. The soul of our Father and Founder, he wrote "lives among us in these blessed Rules which he left us as a pledge of his love, as an imperishable testimony of his great faith and of his ardent charity. These Holy Rules... I promise you most solemnly that in my hands this holy trust will not be allowed to fritter away, nor will the smallest part of this so precious gift be lost; total obedience to all their directives will be our joy and our strength."<sup>51</sup>

This call to the observance of the Rules was to be the object of several subsequent circulars as well. "The Congregation will be strong within, and esteemed by others only to the extent that our Holy Rules will be faithfully observed"<sup>52</sup>. "It is our Holy Rules that produces unity of mind and spirit from all the minds and all the hearts; beyond the pale of these sacred ordinances, there is only the individualist spirit, the separate, individual will, the work of the individual, the individual life, and consequently, the complete destruction of the common life, the religious life."<sup>53</sup>

In Circular Letter number 13, Father Fabre took up again the theme of the Holy Rules as the indispensable source of inspiration for the Oblate to renew himself unceasingly in the spirit of his vocation. He especially evoked the importance of remaining with the first ministry of the Congregation: evangelization of the most abandoned souls, especially, by the preaching of the Word of God and by the administration of the sacrament of penance, a ministry which calls for a careful preparation based on the Sacred Scriptures and theology. Moreover, according to the Rules, this ministry must be confirmed by the example of the missionary who should always look to "the example of the One in whose footsteps our vocation makes it our obligation to walk".<sup>54</sup> Father Fabre, basing himself on the *Preface* and on the text of the Rules, extended the invitation to maintain oneself in the spirit of oblation and to arrive at this state by being faithful to the concrete practice of the vows and of the community customs.<sup>55</sup>

In 1874, Father Fabre returned to the same theme. In his report to the General Chapter of 1873<sup>56</sup>, he had given vent to his alarm that "our Holy Rules do not always exercise a serious and practical enough influence neither on the internal dispositions of the members, nor on their external actions... The spirit of solidarity and sense of the Congregation suffer the lamentable consequences"<sup>57</sup>. On the occasion of the promulgation of the acts of the General Chapter of 1873, he judged it an opportune moment to repeat the advice given at the beginning of his term as Superior General and he issued a circular letter dedicated entirely to the Rules<sup>58</sup>. "What do our Holy Rules mean to us...? They are at the very heart of our family's existence. It is through our

Holy Rules that we exist, through them that we live, through them that we make up one religious family..."<sup>59</sup>. But, continued Father Fabre, the Rule is not being read; it is not being meditated. And so, parish missions are neither being conducted, nor preached according to the Oblate tradition. The practice of poverty and obedience is weakening; complaints and criticisms are growing apace. Without the Rule, each one becomes his own rule. People soon become discouraged and the community breaks up. Father Fabre urges, therefore, a profound love and a faithful obedience to the Rule as the basic requirement for a fruitful ministry and to call down upon us God's blessings. The Rule is the bulwark of one's vocation; without it, the religious does not exist. "Our Rule is a rule of life for our souls, for our works, for the Congregation. Let us retain this character for it through our fidelity day by day and throughout our religious life."<sup>60</sup>

It is especially in the circular letters which promulgated the acts of the various General Chapters, that the successors of Father Fabre in turn often reminded the Oblates of the sovereign importance of the Rule to ensure their apostolic effectiveness and the progress of their interior life. On several occasions, they made reference to the circulars of Father Fabre, which letters stood as veritable monuments of the Oblate tradition. For his part, Bishop Augustin Döntenwill, on the occasion of the centenary of the approbation of the Rule in 1926, wrote Circular Letter no. 133 addressed to the whole Congregation. "Let it be our firm conviction that, in order to walk in the footsteps of so many valiant apostles who, before our time, campaigned under the banner of Mary Immaculate, it is essential that we imitate their religious virtues. And how

is it possible to realize this ideal without fidelity to the Rule, which Rule, on that blessed day of our profession, we promised to observe most faithfully until our last breath."<sup>61</sup>

In this first circular letter of June 13, 1947, Father Léo Deschâtelets, the newly elected Superior General, called upon all Oblates to make a determined effort to make the Rule the centre of their lives so that the Rule could become for them "a source of apostolic enthusiasm and the basis for a strong zeal"<sup>62</sup>. Father Deschâtelets' term as General was distinguished by his extraordinary knowledge of the text of the Constitutions and of Oblate tradition. All the more so because, for thirteen years (before and after the Council), he lived through three attempts to revise the Constitutions.

On the eve of the 1966 Chapter, Father Deschâtelets reminded us of the importance of the revision which the next general assembly was to undertake<sup>63</sup>. Once the Chapter was over and the new Constitutions were approved and printed, Father Deschâtelets presented these Rules as "the source of the spirit of renewal in the Congregation" as asked for by the Council. And on the theme, "spirit of renewal," he wrote a whole circular letter in 1968<sup>64</sup>, a renewal in which the new Constitutions would be the driving force and the guide. Like all those who preceded him in office, he reemphasized the *Preface* as the "most vivid, most essential experience, and most unchanging thought of the Founder"<sup>65</sup>. At a time when the Council had just called for a renewal in the Church, for the Oblate this upturn meant "to put the Gospel and the Rule at the centre of their apostolic life"<sup>66</sup>. The Rule expressed the charism of the Congregation; it was the link of unity among its members. "Our power as

those dedicated to proclaim the Gospel is multiplied tenfold in virtue of the spiritual strength which it imparts to us and which we draw from the Church, united by the deepest bonds of charity and obedience – all together, Fathers and Brothers, working united in heart to promote the Kingdom of God, of which Kingdom, our apostolic religious life is the sign.”<sup>67</sup>

Father Jetté’s term as Superior General was the one which witnessed the conclusion of the revision of the Rules asked for by the Council. At the moment when one could say that the whole Congregation set to work to take part in this task, the Superior General, in a letter dated February 1, 1976, reminded us that “as an Oblate apostolic corps, we need some kind of structure or rule of life – workable, not too burdensome, yet effective nevertheless – which we accept and become truly imbued with so that we may be transformed in Jesus Christ, and our existence be given genuine consistency.”<sup>68</sup>

Later on, when he was announcing the completion of the 1980 Chapter’s task, Father Jetté presented the new text as a challenge to the Congregation, “the challenge of the future”.<sup>69</sup>

In order to achieve this, “the Constitutions need to be assimilated, interiorized. Only then will they be a source and a way of life”<sup>70</sup>. And the following February 17, he asked the Congregation, “We are now in possession of this gift the new Constitutions. What are we going to do with it? For it is a gift which challenges and puts us to the test... The Constitutions and Rules are already – and will be even more clearly so, once they have been approved by the Church – the concrete road of the Gospel, the Oblate way of living the Gospel today. It is in them and through them that we will discover Jesus Christ and learn to love

people, especially the poor, as our Founder has asked us to. There is a challenge here that no Oblate can escape if he wants ‘to save his life’.”<sup>71</sup> “A long period of time is beginning which, in a sense, is even more important than the Chapter. It has been called ‘the period of interiorization’, a space of time during which the *Constitutions and Rules* are progressively to become an integral part of our lives”<sup>72</sup>. In order to achieve this one has to get to know the *Constitutions*, read and reread them while meditating on the content. “This reading of the *Constitutions* must be done with love, with the intent of allowing ourselves to be imbued and nourished by them. The objective of the *Constitutions* as a book of life is to create a new life in us, a new being, an evangelical and Oblate being, the apostolic man of whom the Founder speaks and who spontaneously acts and reacts in an Oblate way according to the Founder’s spirit.”<sup>73</sup>

Finally, when presenting the text approved by the Church, Father Jetté reminded the Oblates of the importance of this approbation: “The Constitutions commit the Church; that is why they must be approved by the Church”.<sup>74</sup> Radiating the same faith and joy that the Founder felt the day after the original approbation, Father Jetté added: “It is the Church therefore that ‘constitutes’ us what we are. She vouches to the faithful for the Gospel authenticity of the life-project we offer them”<sup>75</sup>. And he invited the Oblates to look toward the future with confidence: “Let us head into the future filled with great desires, with unshakable hope and courage, eyes fixed on the vastness of the apostolic field opening up before us. May Blessed Eugene de Mazenod, our Founder and Father, obtain this grace for us!”<sup>76</sup>

ALEXANDRE TACHÉ

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<sup>2</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, VI, nos. 43-47.

<sup>3</sup> *Perfectæ caritatis*, 2a.

<sup>4</sup> *Perfectæ caritatis*, 3a.

<sup>5</sup> RAMBERT, Toussaint, *Vie de Monseigneur Charles-Joseph-Eugène de Mazenod*, Rome, 1883, I, p. 166; *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, no. 4, p. 6.

<sup>6</sup> *Missions* 52 (1914), p. 61-63; REY, Achille, *Histoire de M<sup>sr</sup> Charles-Joseph Eugène de Mazenod*, Rome, 1928, I, pp. 190-192.

<sup>7</sup> See REY I, p. 207.

<sup>8</sup> RAMBERT I, p. 282.

<sup>9</sup> See JEANCARD, Jacques, *Mélanges historiques sur la Congrégation des Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, Tours, 1872, pp. 95-99; PIELORZ, Józef, "Le séjour du Fondateur à St-Laurent et la rédaction de nos Règles (août-septembre 1818)", in *Missions*, 84 (1957), pp. 297-322.

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<sup>13</sup> A letter of February 18, 1826, from Father de Mazenod to the Oblates, in *Missions* 79 (1952), p. 142; *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 7, no. 226, p. 40.

<sup>14</sup> This circular letter was published as an appendix to Father Fabre's Circular Letter no. 14 of May 20, 1864. See *Circ. adm.*, I, pp. 108-113.

<sup>15</sup> See *Circular Letters* no. 17, in *Circ. adm.*, I, pp. 153-167; no. 19, I, pp. 177-191; no. 20, I, pp. 193-196, no. 22, I, pp. 199-225.

<sup>16</sup> *Circular Letter* no. 92, April 21, 1907, in *Circ. adm.*, III, pp. 140-206.

<sup>17</sup> *Circular Letter* no. 108, December 8, 1910, in *Circ. adm.*, III, pp. 249-252.

<sup>18</sup> Circular Letter no. 128, April 13, 1921, in *Circ. adm.*, III, p. 369.

<sup>19</sup> Circular Letters no. 137, March 19, 1927, in *Circ. adm.*, IV, pp. 61-66; no. 139, August 24, 1927, IV, pp. 101-106; no. 140, July 16, 1928, IV, pp. 107-147.

<sup>20</sup> Circular Letter no. 200, August 15, 1953, in *Circ. adm.*, V, pp. 24-26.

<sup>21</sup> Circular Letter no. 203, December 8, 1953, in *Circ. adm.*, V, pp. 110-111.

<sup>22</sup> *Textus Constitutionum et Regularum... revisus ac emendatus Capituli generalis proxime venturi approbationi subijcendus*, Rome, 1958, 122, 10 p.

<sup>23</sup> Circular Letter no. 210, November 22, 1959, in *Circ. adm.*, VI pp. 1-19.

<sup>24</sup> Circular Letters no. 215, February 17, 1965, in *Circ. adm.*, VII, pp. 5-32; no. 220, August 15, 1965, VI, pp. 169-190. The *Textus revisus* was published in *Missions*, 92 (1965), nos. 317 and 317 bis.

<sup>25</sup> Circular Letters no. 226, March 25, 1966, in *Circ. adm.*, VI, pp. 344-351; no. 229, April 25, 1966, VII, pp. 394-397.

<sup>26</sup> Circular Letters no. 227, April 12, 1966, in *Circ. adm.*, VII, pp. 353-380; no. 228, April 20, 1966, in *Circ. adm.*, VII pp. 381-386.

<sup>27</sup> Circular Letter no. 233, September 8, 1966, in *Circ. adm.*, VII, pp. 1-16 (alternate pagination 424-436).

<sup>28</sup> *Missionary Outlook*, 28 p.; *Community*, 27 p.; *Administrative Structures*, 42 p.; *Formation* (the text is published as an appendix to Acts of the General Chapter of 1974, pp. 71-82).

<sup>29</sup> See Documentation O.M.I., no. 55/75 (January 15, 1975), pp. 1-2.

<sup>30</sup> Circular Letter no. 263, March 10, 1975, in *Acta administrationis generalis* O.M.I., vol. II, 2a pars, 1975, p. 342.

<sup>31</sup> Circular Letter no. 265, October 13, 1975, in *Acta administrationis generalis* O.M.I., vol. II, 2a pars, 1975, pp. 360-368.

<sup>32</sup> This first draft was sent to the Congregation in three segments in the course of 1977 and 1978.

<sup>33</sup> *Constitutions and Rules... Proposed text prepared by the Revision Commission for the General Chapter of 1980*, Rome, 1979, 125 p.

<sup>34</sup> "Congress on the Charism of the

Founder today, Rome, April 26-May 14, 1976", in Documentation O.M.I., no. 70/76 (October 1, 1976), pp. 1-8. The acts of the congress were published in *Vie Oblate Life*, 36 (1977), pp. 1-296.

<sup>35</sup> See O'REILLY, Michael, "The Approval of the 1980 Rules by the Holy See", in Documentation O.M.I., 124/84 (March 1984), pp. 1-12. The text of 1982 underwent a few amendments at the General Chapter of 1986; in most cases, it had to do with adapting the Constitutions and Rules to the norms of the new Code of Canon Law of 1983 (See Documentation O.M.I., 154/88 (January 1988) pp. 1-3.

<sup>36</sup> *Acta adm. gen. O.M.I.*, vol. VI (1982/1983), pp. 42-43. See also, JETTÉ, Fernand, Letter of June 27, 1982, in *Letters to Oblates of Mary Immaculate*, Rome, 1984, pp. 112-121.

<sup>37</sup> See TACHÉ, Alexandre, "Rapport de la Commission pour la révision des Constitutions." in *Vie Oblate Life*, 37 (1978), pp. 199-212; "1980 Constitutions and Rules project: Principles underlying the drafting of the revised text", in Documentation O.M.I., no. 97/80 (September 1, 1980) pp. 1-8.

<sup>38</sup> See DROUART, Jean, "The place given to the Founder's thought and texts in drafting the Constitutions and Rules", in Documentation O.M.I., no. 94/80 (May 1, 1980), pp. 1-7.

<sup>39</sup> See, for example, Constitutions 4., 7, 8, 10, 37, 38, etc

<sup>40</sup> *General Chapter Directory*, Rome, 1980, 58 p.; *General Norms of Oblate Formation*, Rome, Casa Generalizia O.M.I., 1984, 134 p.; *Administrative Directory*, Rome, General House, 1985, 106 p.; *Directory for the Administration of Temporal Goods*, Rome, October 20, 1989, 44 p. To this list, one can add *Oblate Prayer*, (Rome, 1986, 236 p.), "It is a kind of spiritual directory. Every effort was made to link together our life of prayer, our Constitutions, the mind of the Founder and our Oblate practice." (Introduction).

<sup>41</sup> *Letter to the Oblates*, Rome, February 18, 1826, in *Missions*, 79 (1952), pp. 141-142; *Oblate Writings I*, vol 7, p. 40.

<sup>42</sup> Retreat notes of October 8, 1831, in

Selected texts related to the O.M.I. Constitutions and Rules, Rome, 1984, no. 209, p. 236.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Letter to Father Courtès, November 4, 1831, *Ibid.*, . no. 210, p. 237.

<sup>45</sup> Letter to Father Perron, August 25, 1845, *Ibid.*, no. 212, p. 240.

<sup>46</sup> Circular letter of August 2, 1853, in *Circ. adm.*, I, pp. 108, 110.

<sup>47</sup> Retreat notes of October 8, 1831, in Selected texts no. 209, p. 235. Circular letter of August 2, 1853, in *Circ. adm.*, I, p. 110.

<sup>48</sup> Letter to Father Tempier, December 22, 1825, in Selected texts..., no. 207., p. 233; Letter to the Oblates, February 18, 1826, *ibid.*, no. 208, p. 233; Circular letter of August 2, 1853, in *Circ. adm.*, I, p. 110.

<sup>49</sup> See in *Circ. adm.*, I, pp. 108-121.

<sup>50</sup> Retreat notes of October 8, 1831, in Selected texts..., no. 209, p. 235. See BEAUDOIN, Yvon, "Le Fondateur et l'observance des Constitutions et Règles, d'après ses écrits" in *Vie Oblate Life*, 43 (1984), p. 81-112.

<sup>51</sup> Circular Letter no. 10, December 10, 1861, in *Circ. adm.*, I, p. 2.

<sup>52</sup> *Circular Letter* no. 11, March 21, 1862, in *Circ. adm.*, I, p. 5.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>55</sup> Father Fabre considered this twenty-three page circular letter important enough to order that it should be read each year at the annual retreat along with the 1853 and 1857 circular letters of the Founder and a small

work by Father de Mazenod on "Nos Saintes Règles" which dates back to October 8, 1831, published as an appendix to circular letter no. 14.

<sup>56</sup> Circular Letter no. 25, December 8, 1873, in *Circ. adm.*, I, pp. 269 ff.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 278.

<sup>58</sup> Circular Letter no. 26, April 2, 1874, in *Circ. adm.*, I, pp. 285ff.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 288.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 299.

<sup>61</sup> Circular Letter no. 133, in *Circ. adm.*, IV, p. 20.

<sup>62</sup> Circular Letter no. 175, June 13, 1947, in *Circ. adm.*, V, p. 6.

<sup>63</sup> Circular Letter no. 215, February 17, 1965, in *Circ. adm.*, VII, pp. 22-25

<sup>64</sup> Circular Letter, no. 240, March 19, 1968, in *Circ. adm.*, VIII, pp. 151-175 (alternate pagination 1-27).

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152 (alternate pagination 4).

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159 (alternate pagination 11).

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 175 (alternate pagination 27).

<sup>68</sup> Letters to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Rome, 1984, p. 36.

<sup>69</sup> Letter of December 8, 1980, in *Letters...*, p. 86.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>71</sup> Letter of February 17, 1981, in *Letters...*, pp. 90 and 91.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 94, 95 and 96.

<sup>74</sup> Letter of June 27, 1982, in *Letters...*, p. 119.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

## DARING

*Summary: Introduction. I. The Founder and his era (1816-1861):* 1. The Preface of the Constitutions: a. *Nil linquendum inausum*; b. In the Constitutions and Rules of the Missionaries of Provence; c. The Constitutions and Rules of 1825; d. Latin translations of 1825 and 1826. 2. Other writings up to 1826: a. Before his priestly ordination; b. Related to the foundation of the Missionaries of Provence; c. From 1816 to 1826. 3. A series of daring initiatives. 4. First conclusions. *II. Missionary daring, but without using the term (1861-1947):* 1. Brief overview of the documents: a. The theme of daring is almost totally non-existent in official documents; b. Father Soullier, an exception; c. Father Reslé's commentary. 2. Missionary daring, present more than ever. *III. Daring, its missionary value expressed (from 1947 to our day):* 1. Father Deschâtelets; 2. The Constitutions and Rules of 1966 and 1982; 3. In the writings of the Superiors General; 4. Missionary daring. *IV. Daring, a missionary virtue:* 1. Daring as a virtue; 2. Mission; 3. Daring, a missionary virtue; 4. The folly of the cross, hunger and thirst for justice.

### INTRODUCTION

"*Nil linquendum est inausum ut proferatur imperium Christi...*", states the text of the Preface of our Constitutions and Rules of 1826. As a literal translation, I suggest: "We must overlook nothing, leaving nothing undared to advance, to extend the reign of Christ". This apothegm has sustained and presently sustains the missionary thrust of the Congregation; it is the key aphorism around which to build a reflection on daring, a daring more often lived than expressed in words.

Paradoxically, research in Oblate writings yields a meager disappointing harvest. The apothegm does not seem to have been used again by Eugene de Mazenod and the word "daring" is absent from the theme index of his writings. We had to wait until Father Léo Deschâtelets became Superior General in 1947 for this formulation to be singled out as a constituent element of the Oblate missionary existence. In addition to that, daring was not chosen as a sub-

ject for an article either in the *Dictionnaire de Théologie catholique*, or in the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*. As for New Testament references, in nineteen occurrences of the root word *tolmaô*, only two or three reflect a possible interest for us – and those in the writings of Saint Paul<sup>1</sup>. This raises the question of how to delimit this theme.

But it is praxis, history, and therefore life, more than verbal formulations that reveal daring. Written tradition is mostly inadequate to express lived experience. Eugene de Mazenod and his Oblates did not spend their time theorizing; they were missionaries brimming with daring to *extend the reign of Christ*. These daring practices can only be alluded to; it would take volumes to adequately describe them. And yet, it is those very practices that lie at the heart of a study of daring. For the proclamation of the Gospel is "a demonstration of the Spirit and of power" entrusted to creatures in "weakness and even fear and in great trembling..". as Saint Paul experienced it.<sup>2</sup>

## I. THE FOUNDER AND HIS ERA (1816-1861)

### 1. THE PREFACE OF THE CONSTITUTIONS

#### a. *Nil linquendum inausum.*

"*Nil linquendum inausum*" found its definitive formulation in the 1826 edition of the Constitutions. We know that the Preface is an original work of Eugene de Mazenod, the text in which he invested the greatest part of himself, of his charism, of what he wanted to share with others who like him became Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. We now take a look at the successive forms it took, searching out the sources and the harmonic convergences of this verbal formulation.

#### b. *In the Constitutions and Rules of the Missionaries of Provence*

In the Constitutions and Rules of 1818, chapter one entitled, *The end of the Institute*, was divided into three sections: 1. Preaching the Word of God to the people; 2. Make up for the absence of religious bodies; 3. Reform of the clergy. Immediately after article 3 of this section, we find a *Nota bene* of one hundred and thirty lines of whose next to last paragraph states: "How vast the field that lies before them! How worthy an undertaking! The people are wallowing in crass ignorance of all that pertains to their salvation. The consequence of this ignorance has been a weakening, if not an extinction of the faith and the corruption of morals. It is therefore urgent to bring back the multitude of those sheep who have strayed from the fold, to teach these degenerate Christians who Jesus Christ is, to snatch them from the slavery of the demon and to show them the way to heaven, to ex-

tend the Savior's empire, to destroy that of hell, to prevent millions of mortal sins, to promote virtues and to see to it that they are practiced in all their varied forms, to lead men to act as creatures of reason, then as Christians, and finally to help them become saints".<sup>3</sup> In the expression "it is urgent", we find almost an echo of "the love of Christ urges us on" (2 Corinthians 5:14). This call bases itself upon the observation and judgment of the sad state the people were in, and the loss of faith that is put in opposition to the "salvation" promised in Jesus Christ, the Savior, as well as with the "millions of mortal sins" to "prevent", with a final universal call to holiness.

#### c. *The Constitutions and Rules of 1825*<sup>4</sup>

"How vast the field that lies before them! How worthy and holy the undertaking! The people are caught up in crass ignorance of all that pertains to their salvation. The consequence of their ignorance has been a weakening of the faith and a corruption of morals with all the license which that inevitably entails. Thus, it is supremely important, it is urgently imperative, that we lead the multitude of lost sheep back to the fold, that we teach these degenerate Christians who Jesus Christ is, that we rescue them from Satan's power and show them the way to heaven. We must spare no effort to extend the Savior's empire, to destroy that of hell, to prevent thousands of crimes, to promote virtues and to see to it that they are practiced in all their varied forms, to lead men to act as creatures of reason, then as Christians, and finally to help them become saints".

The *Nota bene* of 1818 became the *Preface* with a few modifications to this paragraph. It is no longer a case of the "extinction of the faith", "weakening of

the faith" is what has been retained. "Millions of mortal sins to prevent" has become "thousands of crimes". "It is urgently imperative" enhances the value and weight given to the note of urgency expressed in "it is urgent". Above all, we see appear for the first time the expression, "We must spare no effort to extend the Savior's empire".

#### *d. Latin translations of 1825 and 1826*

It was the Latin translation of 1825, reused and modified in 1826 during the approbation, that transformed the "We must spare no effort" into a new formulation charged with daring: "*nihil linquendum inausum*" in 1825, then "*nil linquendum est inausum*" in 1826. This "*nil linquendum est inausum*" opened the way for a new development of the meaning. It was the first time that daring made its appearance. Reinforced here by a double negation it is based upon a *nihil* which became a *nil* in 1826. *Nil* is more incisive and gives the formula added force.

Who is at the origins of this change? Was it the Founder himself? Or was it rather Father Domenico Albini or Father Hippolyte Courtès, the translators? The fact that Eugene de Mazenod never uses this expression again raises some doubt, but the same thing could be said with regard to a number of other expressions in the Preface. Therefore there is no certitude, but a change of this kind could only have been ratified by the Founder himself.

## 2. OTHER WRITINGS UP TO 1826

### *a. Before his priestly ordination*

In the many letters he wrote to his mother, letters in which he strove to

justify the choice he made of his vocation because his mother was finding it very difficult to agree to it, there appear two ideas that are rather closely related. First of all, there is the idea of total dedication: "[...] I make myself available to carry out any orders he may wish to give me for his glory and the salvation of souls he has redeemed by his precious blood".<sup>5</sup> Then, there is that of urgency: "One would have to be slothful indeed not to burn with the desire to come to the aid of this good Mother [the Church] in her well-nigh desperate plight".<sup>6</sup> The idea of daring, however, is absent.

And yet we should take note of the August 16, 1805 letter to his father. The subject under discussion is Fortuné de Mazenod's refusal to accept the possible offer of an episcopal see: "When one wears the livery of Jesus Christ, ought one to fear anything, and should one not place one's hope in him who strengthens us? Let us thoroughly go over the duties that our character as Christian and priest impose on us. After that, let us consult our conscience to find out whether it reproaches us for our excessive modesty, which degenerates into spinelessness".<sup>7</sup> In all of Eugene's writings, this is the passage that echoes most strongly the theme of daring. It is the future of the Church that is at stake, the responsibility of the priest and simply that of being a Christian. Eugene was still a lay person, and even at that moment in his life, quite far removed from the prospect of a vocation to the priesthood. Nonetheless, the way he uses the expression "imposes upon us" leads us to see here a strange identification with his uncle, the Canon... Why should we be surprised to see this rejection of spinelessness resurface later on in the form of daring via a renewed awareness of the needs of the Church

and because at that time he would feel more strongly than ever what it meant “to wear the livery of Christ”. This same word, “spinelessness”, reappears in another letter to his father, on September 6, 1817, where it is again a question of the same offer of a bishopric and the same probable refusal on the part of Fortuné.

*b. Related to the foundation of the Missionaries of Provence*

Eugene’s exchange of letters with Charles de Forbin-Janson keeps us rather well apprised of his state of mind at this time. These letters are all the more revealing since Eugene’s friend was involved in a similar work of founding a society of missionaries. Of the two friends, Charles de Forbin-Janson showed himself to be by far the bolder, to the point that Eugene had to urge him to practice more moderation.

In 1813, Charles de Forbin-Janson was a little over twenty-seven years old. He had been a priest for fourteen months and was vicar general of Chambéry. This is what Eugene de Mazenod wrote to him on February 19: “I experience [...] a special consolation for the success of the various outlets of your zeal. [...] But, dear friend, will you please listen to me for once in your life? You have to put limits on that zeal of yours, if you want it to be both more productive and more enduring”. Bits of advice follow in the same vein; we draw your attention to only this one: “Oil is needed to lubricate these wheels that turn continually with a frightening rapidity”. And as a conclusion, he adds<sup>8</sup>: “There will perhaps come a time when I will indeed say to you: ‘Come, let us die now, we are no longer good for anything else. Let us go forward even to death!’.”

The same comments appear in a letter of April 9, 1813. The subject of discussion is “a zeal that does not seem to me to be ruled by wisdom” to which one must set limits. In a letter of July 19, 1814, Eugene rebukes his friend for “inconceivable instability in forming plans”. And finally, this significant passage from an October 28, 1814 letter while Charles de Forbin-Janson is involved in founding the Missionaries of France: “Not that I think I will probably come to join you. I still do not know what God wants of me but am so resolved to do his will that as soon as it is known to me I would leave tomorrow for the moon, if I had to”.<sup>9</sup>

Then comes the stroke of daring to set the wheels in motion to found his congregation. The first letter to Father Henry Tempier is dated October 9, 1815. The one to Charles de Forbin-Janson is from the 23 and 24 of the same month. “Now I ask you and I ask myself how I, hitherto unable to make up my mind in this matter, suddenly find myself setting wheels in motion, renouncing my comfort and risking my fortune by launching an enterprise of which I know the worth but for which I only have liking negated by other and diametrically opposed views! This is a riddle to me and it is the second time in my life that I see myself moved to resolve something of the utmost seriousness as if by a strong impulse from without. When I reflect on it, I am convinced that it so pleases God to put an end to my irresolution. And in such a way that I am engaged to the hilt! I assure you that in such circumstances I am quite another man. You would no longer say that I have lead in my pants if you were to see how I fly around. I am nearly up to your standard in acting with so much authority. [...] It is nearly two months now that I fight on at my

own expense, sometimes openly, sometimes discreetly. With trowel in one hand and sword in the other, I am like the good Israelites rebuilding the city of Jerusalem. [...] If I had foreseen all the nuisance, worry and disarray this establishment would throw me into, I believe I never would have had sufficient zeal to undertake it. [...]"<sup>10</sup>

The letter of December 19, runs along the same lines: "I [...] wage war against my own wishes, supported in the midst of this bother only by the supernatural outlook which inspires me, but which does not prevent me feeling the whole weight of my situation and all the more woefully in that I am helped neither by my taste nor inclination which indeed are quite contrary to the kind of life which I am leading".<sup>11</sup>

The words of Father Pedro Arrupe help us to interpret this experience: "Although the origins of each institute are different, their overall dynamic could be reduced, it seems, to three primary thrusts. The first is that of rendering a specific service to the Church and to mankind in a given period of history. The second thrust is the conflictual aspect that gave rise to certain institutes: conflicts not only with their contemporary lay civil state, but also with religious society, even in the person of its hierarchical authorities, who are not always open to the prophetic and charismatic spirit of the founders. The third thrust is characterized by the presence of a man or a group who, under the guidance of the Spirit and fully responsive to his action, bring their endeavor to completion according to the charism received".<sup>12</sup>

### c. From 1816 to 1826

The writings preserved from this period are not numerous, but all the more

valuable because of that. A few of them cast some light on our subject.

In 1817, Eugene spent a long time in Paris "in the hope of obtaining official recognition from the Government for his Society which was quite opposed at Aix. He also sought to obtain favors for his father and his uncles".<sup>13</sup> In a letter to Father Tempier, on August 22, he stresses "this spirit of being wholly devoted to the glory of God, the service of the Church and the salvation of souls" which "is the spirit that is proper to our Congregation", specifying that it is incumbent upon us to "have spent our whole life and given all our blood" to succeed in carrying out "the great work of redemption of mankind" that "our Lord Jesus Christ has left to us the task of continuing". Then, he continues: "Each society in the Church has a spirit which is its own; which is inspired by God according to the circumstances and needs of the times wherein it pleases God to raise these supporting bodies or rather it would be better to say these choice troops which precede the main army on the march, which excel in bravery and which thus obtain the more brilliant victories".<sup>14</sup> He uses the same image in an August 28 letter to his father and his uncles: "I am preparing choice troops for the Bishop of Marseilles".<sup>15</sup>

The steps Eugene took cast some light on the *nil linquendum inausum* – it brings to mind Father Albini's intervention – when in the autumn of 1825 he travels to Rome to obtain the approbation of the Congregation. The request he makes serves to broaden horizons considerably. Two of his letters attest to this. The first is addressed to Cardinal Pedicini, the ponent of the cause, and probably dated January 2, 1826: "[...] One of the main reasons prompting us to seek the approbation of the Holy See

was precisely our ardent desire to spread abroad in all parts of the Catholic world, the benefits of the ministries to which the members of our Society are dedicated, and this, on the invitation of the common Father of all the faithful as well as at the request of the bishops of various dioceses. [...] Several members of the Congregation would willingly go and preach the gospel to non-believers; when they will be more numerous it is possible that the superiors will send them to America, either to be of assistance to poor Catholics who are bereft of every spiritual benefit, or to win new members to the faith".<sup>16</sup>

In his March 20, 1826 letter to Father Tempier, he wrote: "They first thought we were only asking for France and the Cardinal Ponent said to me: 'Take that now, the rest will come after'. I was not of his opinion and the matter was resolved as we desired. I ought to say that it sufficed for me to make the observation that our Congregation would not limit her charity to a small corner of the earth and that all abandoned souls, wherever they were, would always be the object of her zeal and would have the right to her services, for them to accede to my views".<sup>17</sup> At this time, the Congregation had twenty-two professed members.

### 3. A SERIES OF DARING INITIATIVES

Eugene de Mazenod was an apostle, therefore, a man of action. If we want to discover his personality, his charism, his manner of responding to the Lord's call, we must pay attention to his actions, his choices, his commitments – mainly in times of crisis, by definition decisive times, times of making decisions. It was in this context that his apostolic daring manifested itself in fidelity to the ever-present command; "Go.." "I forget the

past and I strain ahead for what is to come; I am racing for the finish, for the prize to which God calls us upward to receive in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:13-14). Paul's way of saying it casts light on what Eugene de Mazenod wanted and practiced.

In the beginning, the daring choices made by the Founder affected primarily his own life; later on, they would more and more deeply involve his companions and "disciples". The limitations of this article do not allow for the kind of analysis that these different decisions would deserve. Here we can only point out and refer to other more detailed studies. But the growing number of daring initiatives bears its own witness.

In 1808, Eugene de Mazenod chose to leave his family so as to dedicate himself to the service of the poor. At Saint Sulpice, to help the cardinals and to assert the liberty of the Church, he showed a great deal of courage in the face of the claims made by the Emperor's police force. He then chose to return to Aix, not to integrate into the diocesan structures, to remain free in order to take care of the youth, the servants of the rich, the prisoners afflicted with typhus... He chose to preach in the Provençal language and to make his confreres share this choice. Then followed the stage of the foundation, the call to rally companions around him as his letter to Father Tempier testifies. Faced with the vulnerable situation of the tiny group of Missionaries of Provence, he made a trip to Paris in 1817; his acceptance of Notre-Dame du Laus and choice of religious life, (ignoring all convention by calling upon the three scholastics); his acceptance for himself and for Father Tempier of the position of Vicar General; his trip to Rome to ask for pontifical approbation of his rules. Significant was his phrase, "one

must not hesitate" from his July 14, 1824 letter to Father Tempier concerning the plan of making a foundation at Nice – that is, in an area which at that time was outside of France.

This attitude is even more evident in the choices of foreign missions for his Congregation. After the abortive attempt of making a foundation in Algeria, it would be some twelve years before another attempt was made. Each one of the subsequent foundations would deserve to be analyzed from the point of view of apostolic daring – whether it was a question of Canada, or the Red River, or his choice of Alexandre Taché for bishop at the age of twenty-seven years, or the choice of Ceylon, Oregon, Natal or Texas. His letters to Fathers Jean-Baptiste Honorat, Eugène-Bruno Guigues, Étienne Semeria and Jean-François Allard urge them to always go forward, ever further.

This overview, hardly a sketch, seems to me to be revealing. A reflection on the charisma of the Founder must be centered on his deeds, his apostolic choices. His letters usually are classical in his choice of words – even more so his formal texts. And even his retreat notes of October 1831 which give us the most extensive commentary Eugene de Mazenod made on the Rule. He highlights various phrases found in the Preface, but not the *nil linquendum inausum* that is not quoted here nor anywhere else. The writings of the Founder are an essential source, but one that is incomplete, and sometimes even unidimensional.

Can we set forth hypotheses to explain this? We must keep in view the limitations of the theological teachings of this first half of the XIX century, especially in ecclesiology or in pastoral theology. Neither the theology, nor preaching, any more than the catechetics

were equal to the challenges that the culture and the society of that time and therefore the mission presented to the Church. No one gave thought to – or even refused – creating the necessary conceptual tools. As for formulations or even images of the Church, people were stuck in the repetitive mode. A phrase such as is found in the Constitutions of 1982, "they should have the daring to blaze new paths" was unthinkable in the Founder's time.

The General Chapter of 1850 introduced into the Rule a paragraph on major seminaries. One of these articles is especially significant: "The Directors will shun such opinions as are not favoured by the larger and wiser part of the School; and, in order that they may proceed in all safety, let them beware of innovation, even in the received form of words".<sup>18</sup> The phrasing of Pope Stephen I (254-257) "Let there be no innovations beyond what has been handed down"<sup>19</sup> referred to the practice of not rebaptizing heretics. This became a law for the teaching of theology, reinforced by the phrase "not even through one word" (*ne quidem verbo*) whose origin needs to be researched. The next article stresses: "Not only the Superior General, but the Provincial and the Superiors of Seminaries are all bound to watch very strictly over the observance of the two preceding articles, for they concern the highest interests of the whole Congregation".<sup>20</sup>

Most astonishing of all is the fact that in the midst of the confined limits of this formulation, through the missionary work of the Founder and the Oblates, the Spirit was launching the mission to advance, to ever go further, despite these too-confining formulations.

Another analysis needs to be added here. With the exception of Bishop Al-

lard and perhaps one or other, the missionaries had no need of the Founder's urgings to go ever forward. For them this was a normal thing. The Founder was obliged rather to remind them of the importance of the basics such as regularity and obedience... so unilaterally stressed. Since this practice was in itself daring, these calls to return to the Rule were designed to refocus and build a more solid foundation. Consequently, our contemporary interpretation runs the risk of being incomplete and biased.

We have to point out in Eugene de Mazenod's case a doctrinal daring with strong pastoral repercussions, unique no doubt, but one whose importance we could never over-emphasize. It is a question of the choice of the moral theology of Alphonsus de Liguori. His stay in Naples and Palermo had little impact on him in this regard. The reasons are especially pastoral: the option for mercy, for Jesus the Redeemer, Savior, who must be proclaimed and revealed in preaching and in the celebration of the sacrament of penance. This daring on his part occasioned for him, as well as for the Oblates, some major difficulties from parish priests and even from bishops. The taking of theological stands is what often stirs up the most opposition in the Church.<sup>21</sup>

#### 4. FIRST CONCLUSIONS

Eugene de Mazenod's charism is the reference point for the Congregation. This charism manifested itself in his personality and in his choices more than in his writings. The formula *nil linquendum inausum* is an isolated text, but his deeds brim with apostolic daring.

It is difficult to say that this daring stems from Eugene's temperament. On several occasions he affirms the opposite, admitting that he feels more in-

clined to a life of tranquillity. We have only to think of his letter of October 23 and 24, 1815 to Charles de Forbin-Janson where he attributes to "a strong impulse from without" the decision which "put an end to my irresolution".

Let us consider as well his retreat notes of May 1818: "God knows that if I give myself up to exterior works, there is more of duty than of liking in it, it is obeying what I believe the Master demands of me; that is so true that I always do it with an extreme repugnance from my lower nature. If I follow my taste, I would attest solely to myself and content myself with praying for others. I would spend my life in study and prayer. But who am I to have a will of my own in this respect? It belongs to the Father of the family to fix the kind of work it pleases him to have his workers do. They are always too honoured and too happy to be chosen to cultivate his vineyard".<sup>22</sup>

Here is what Jean Leflon has to say about this: "In fact, in spite of his outward appearance of poise, his self-assured demeanor, the image of being a firebrand, Father de Mazenod admitted to being irresolute by nature, filled with aversion for business affairs, and so difficult to move to action that his friend Janson, ever eager to pursue anything that promised adventure, bluntly characterized him as having lead in his pants. But when he acted in the role of superior, as for example later on when he would act as bishop, his self-assurance became imperturbable; his irresistible energy and daring overcame and defied the worst obstacles. This seeming contradiction can be explained by the entirely supernatural sense of his apostolic mission; when his mission demanded it, nothing could stop him because he relied on Divine Providence to guide him, make up for his lack of

means and attain the goal the will of God has set for his zeal. More than once, without having at his disposal the necessary men and resources, he knew how to opportunely take far-reaching decisions and take on extremely daring endeavors. One has to conclude that this method brought him success and that, in an improbable way, success rewarded him by favoring him because of the harsh constraints he imposed upon himself".<sup>23</sup>

The source of Eugene de Mazenod's daring was not found in his temperament, but rather in others' need for salvation, a need to which his faith in Jesus Christ called him to respond, personally at first, then with his Congregation, "ready to leave for the moon, if I have to". He expressed himself in strong terms in an October 1817 letter to Fathers Henry Tempier and Emmanuel Maunier. Speaking of the difficulties encountered with Bishop Ferdinand de Bausset-Roquefort – the archbishop appointed to the see of Aix, who supported the opponents of the Missionaries of Provence – he wrote: "I needed a very special grace not to quarrel openly with the Prelate for letting himself be influenced to the point of being drawn into the maelstrom of the passions of men who for a long time now have impeded and persecuted us. [...] This is perhaps the greatest sacrifice of my self-love I have made. Twenty times in my discussion with the Prelate, I was tempted to jump up. [...] But the Mission, the Congregation, and all those souls who have yet to be saved through our ministry held me back, nailed me to the hard cross which my nature could scarcely put up with. [...] Put aside all that is human, consider only God, the Church and the souls to be saved".<sup>24</sup>

A final observation. The comparison with Charles de Forbin-Janson is

charged with interest. He is a man who, pushing lack of reflection to the limits, plunges headlong into things. We already alluded to this. The conflicts between the Missionaries of Provence and the Missionaries of France would show this. Of his twenty years in the episcopacy, Bishop de Forbin-Janson would end up actually spending only six years in his diocese of Nancy; the other years were spent in quasi-exile. Jean Leflon speaks of "the excesses, blunders, mistakes" of Bishop de Forbin-Janson and further on of "the whimsical, autocratic administration of this mixed-up spirit". Daring without doubt, but daring uncontrolled by reason. The only work of his that endured was that of the Holy Childhood. We should note that Bishop de Mazenod refused to support this project started by his friend because he deemed it to be in competition with the Propagation of the Faith. Compared with Charles de Forbin-Janson, Eugene de Mazenod, a Provençal like himself, was a wise and self-controlled individual. He was not lacking in daring, but this daring is regulated by a reason enlightened by faith and subject to the will of the Master. And these works have stood the test of time.

## II. MISSIONARY DARING, BUT WITHOUT USING THE TERM (1861-1947)

If the works dealing with the Founder and his era are numerous, the same cannot be said for this second period in the history of the Congregation. Insufficient research lends an air of hypothesis to any attempt at interpretation. This must be kept in mind.

A second period of Oblate history can be delineated by the dates 1861 to

1947. 1861 marks the year of the Founder's death and the election of Father Joseph Fabre as Superior General and 1947 was the year when Father Léo Deschâtelets was elected to the same post. An overview of the documents gives disappointing results. The theme of daring is practically absent from the circular letters of the administration and the acts of general chapters. Father Joseph Reslé's commentary on the Constitutions and Rules was done in the same spirit. But strangely enough, for the Congregation this period is marked by a missionary daring in total contrast to the limits outlined in the written texts. The Oblates are daring, but they do not know how to express it, or else they do not risk giving it clear expression.

## 1. BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE DOCUMENTS

### *a. The theme of "daring" is almost totally non-existent in official documents.*

The circular letters of the Superiors General take on a wide variety of literary forms. Only the exhortations fall within the scope of our present project. With the exception of Father Soullier, whom we will treat later, no one quotes or even alludes to *nil linquendum inausum*.

Father Fabre refers to the Constitutions and Rules constantly. "It is by means of the holy Rules that we find life". On occasion, he quotes the Preface, but never the phrase on daring. Noteworthy, however, is his circular letter no. 14 of June 29, 1867. Among the indulgences requested and obtained from the Holy See, indulgences which deal with indulgences, privileged altars, Requiem Masses, we find no. IX, "permission to read books forbidden by the Index", "a privilege which is very useful in the

contemporary intellectual climate, either in France or in heretical countries".

Bishop Augustin Dontenwill stressed that the 1920 Chapter allowed itself to create "a major breach" in a traditional principle by setting up the province of Saint John the Baptist at Lowell on the basis of language. He wrote", [...] for us and among us, the concern for souls overrides all other considerations [...]".<sup>25</sup>

In his report on his visit to South Africa, he wrote: "At present, our fathers have patiently formed fervent Christians; works, [...] schools [...] in short, a body of initiatives where daring and perseverance have been crowned with success [...]".<sup>26</sup> After Father Soullier, Bishop Dontenwill was, the second Superior General to use the term daring in an official document. We should stress here that it was used to acknowledge the work of Oblates carried out in a mission territory.

In the circular letter following his election, Father Théodore Labouré asserted again the tradition that Oblates are "specialists of difficult missions". After having reminded his readers that "love of the poor is our one and only reason for existing", he explained: "If we are ever presented with the opportunity of making a choice between a work that is a fine work, rich and dazzling in the heart of our urban centres and a poor work, cast aside, discouraging, difficult, either in our Red suburbs or in the foreign missions, let us not hesitate: Let us choose that which is humble, obscure, arduous"<sup>27</sup>. Daring is not absent, but it is rather the humbleness and obscurity of the work that are stressed.

### *b. Father Soullier, an exception*

Father Louis Soullier, Superior General from 1892 to 1897, was a

noteworthy exception. From his writings, we still have two major circular letters. The first one bears the title, *The Oblate Missionary's preaching according to His Holiness Léo XIII and the Rules of the Institute*<sup>28</sup>. There we find quoted the text of the Preface concerning daring as an essential element. This was the first time in seventy years. We would then have to wait until 1947 to have it appear again. Even more worthy of note is the way this quotation was emphasized. After having reminded his readers that "the first law that must be followed is that preaching should above all be imbued with the spirit and teaching of Jesus Christ", he added: "Become imbued with this idea [...] from our Rules and the apostolic spirit of our dear family. It is supremely important; it is urgent to lead back to the fold so many erring sheep, teach degenerate Christians who Christ is [...]. Nothing must be left undared to bring to fulfillment the empire of Jesus Christ, to destroy the kingdom of the devil [...]"<sup>29</sup>. The Latin text is cited in the footnote, emphasizing the phrase *docere christianos quis sit Christus* by writing it in italics. The French text used by Father Soullier – "nothing must be left undared" – is not that of the Constitutions and Rules of 1825, probably little known at the time, but a translation he did himself for this occasion. Can one assume that if one quotes a text from memory that one is familiar with that text? For less familiar texts, we go to the books themselves and recopy the text verbatim. Father Soullier's manner of using the *Preface* is according to the entire spirit of the whole circular from which one of its strong statements remains: "In a word, let us be missionaries. That is our characteristic quality [...]"<sup>30</sup>, an affirmation that he

bases directly on the example of the Founder.

In Father Soullier's other great circular letter, *On Studies for the Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate*<sup>31</sup>, one of the major areas of emphasis is on the necessity for the missionary to adapt his preaching to his audience. "It is not the hearers who adjust to the preacher, but the preacher who should adapt himself to his audience. What, then, will the missionary do? Will he give a series of trite sermons, unchanging in content and form, encased in a rigid frame?"<sup>32</sup> There is the obligation, therefore, to be concerned to get to know this audience, to make some "surveys" and also to have self-knowledge.

Further on, Father Soullier specified: "Let us now get down to something practical: Our holy Rules tell us: *Studebunt novas ad proximas missiones comparare dicendorum materias*. [They will engage in intellectual toil to gather new material for sermons for future missions.] It is worthy of note that our holy Rules ask us to always come up with something new. This directive is all-encompassing, making no distinction between the young and the old, novices and old campaigners. Our Rules take for granted the continuing development and progress of the mind in the field of theological knowledge [... that our Rules] do not lose sight of the great diversity in the range of audiences that hear our words and the concomitant adaptations that must take place in our sermons. That is why it requires of us to always come up with something new".<sup>33</sup> The rule quoted, article 297, deals with life in the religious houses; it was already present verbatim in the 1818 Constitutions of the Missionaries of Provence and comes to us, therefore, from the hand of the Founder. The use

Father Soullier made of it needs to be emphasized. That leads us to think that the same thing would apply even more to foreign missions.

### c. Father Reslé's commentary

Although published in 1958, Father Joseph Reslé's commentary on the Constitutions and Rules must be seen as part and parcel of the preceding period. He devoted only six pages to the *Preface* and made no mention of the *nihil linquendum inausum*.

## 2. MISSIONARY DARING, PRESENT MORE THAN EVER

In 1859, Father Henry Grollier established the mission of Good Hope near the Arctic Circle. In 1872, following in the footsteps of Father Louis Babel, Father Charles Arnaud came into contact with the Inuit of Labrador. In 1917, Father Arsène Turquetil baptized the first Inuit of Hudson's Bay.

In October 1865, Father Joseph Gérard performed his first baptisms at the Village of the Mother of God in Basutoland (Lesotho). In Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Bishop Bonjean dedicated himself to the development of Catholic schools. In 1876, he launched a newspaper published in English and Tamil. That same year, he ordained the first native priest trained in the seminary he had founded.

This was the era of the Cavalry of Christ in Texas along the Rio Grande. Father Yves Kéralum and several others lost their lives there. At the beginning of our century, in what is today Namibia, after three or four abortive attempts, the mission of Okavango was founded under the direction of Father Josef Gotthardt.

To this we must add the apostolic work done in Christian countries from

the chaplaincies at Sacré-Coeur in Montmartre in Paris – in whose history the role played by Cardinal Hippolyte Guibert is well known – right up to the University of Ottawa. In 1868, the Oblates made a foundation in Lowell. From 1932 on, the first United States province addressed itself to pastoral care of the Blacks.

We need only bring to mind foundations in Pilcomayo in 1925, the Belgian Congo in 1931, Laos in 1935, the Philippines in 1939, Haiti in 1943, Brazil in 1945.

This marshalling of past events can only be brief. Each one of these decisions showed that the missionaries, fathers and brothers, and their superiors made the choice to move forward, even to the ends of the earth to leave nothing undared. Two expressions capture the life and missionary work of the Oblates of this period. The expression "specialists of difficult missions" has been attributed to Pope Pius XI. *Apôtres inconnus* authored by Father Pierre Duchaussois indicates the place held by the brothers in this missionary expansion<sup>34</sup>. The Oblates brim with daring; their life declares it, but they do not know how to express it, or they do not dare.

## III. DARING, ITS MISSIONARY VALUE EXPRESSED (FROM 1947 TO OUR DAY).

### 1. FATHER DESCHÂTELETS

Father Léo Deschâtelets was elected Superior General on May 2, 1947. Already on June 13, he addressed the entire Congregation: "Dear fathers and brothers, at this time are you awaiting from me a motto? In accordance with the spirit of our last Chapter, I will tell you: rethink your holy Rules. Bring

them into the twentieth century, right up to 1947, but do it according to the spirit of our Founder and our first fathers [...] to be men of an authentic interior life [...] true religious [...] model priests [...] true missionaries [...] conquerors of unbelieving peoples [...]". Then he specifies: "To be true missionaries, men of the Pope and of the bishops, preachers to the souls who are still faithful, but who know how to dare everything – *nihil linquendum inausum* – to lead the masses back to God, people that modern errors have wrested from the bosom of the Holy Church"<sup>35</sup>. Here is where we find the first formal mention of daring as an essential value for the Oblate missionary.

In his circular letter *Our Vocation and Our Life of Intimate Union with Mary Immaculate*, we are invited to "take an honest look at the riches of our vocation in order to make a detailed and serious inventory of it. The purpose would be to develop a better appreciation of the full impact of the *nihil linquendum inausum*, such a source of inspiration in our holy Rules"<sup>36</sup>. This text is quoted again when the matter being dealt with is being a missionary.

In the report to the General Chapter of 1959, we read this: "The concern for perfection which should guide us from the spiritual point of view should also be a source of inspiration for us from the apostolic point of view. The *nihil linquendum inausum* retains its energizing power and it is painful for us not to make more use of it"<sup>37</sup>.

The major emphasis in Father Deschâtelets' opening address to the General Chapter, on January 25, 1966, right after the Second Vatican Council is on renewal. He specifies: "The Founder [...] would brook no hesitation; he would not want us to cling to the past as such or to situations that would hin-

der renewal. In his own time, he never hesitated to daringly create a new Congregation, one that was distinct from the old Orders, so that it could effectively serve the Church of his country and of his time. [...] He would blast out of his path anything he perceived as an obstacle. He would do it while keeping before him the points of reference of the Church, his own charisma as Founder and the prophetic sense of this charisma"<sup>38</sup>.

Further on he said: "Our Chapter must be a chapter of renewal according to the very title of the conciliar decree *De renovatione vitae religiosae* [...]. The Congregation awaits with expectation this entire radical review of our life; it places its hope in us. Great would be its disappointment if we should fail to respond to that sacred yearning. We are well aware of this responsibility which does not crush us but which energizes and encourages us: *Nihil linquendum inausum*".<sup>39</sup>

## 2. THE CONSTITUTIONS AND RULES OF 1966 AND 1982

The Constitutions and Rules of 1966 state that "according to its living tradition, [the Congregation] stands ready to the full extent of its possibilities to respond to the urgent needs of the world and the Church [...]" C 3). Even more significant is Constitution 12: "Driven by the same Spirit, [the Oblate] will daringly seek to blaze new paths to go to meet this world, humbly but confidently offering it the Word of Salvation. In the face of every obstacle and difficulty, he will remain unshaken [...]".

Three references are set down in the margin, two of which are taken from the decrees of Vatican II. The first reference, taken from Acts of the

Apostles 4:13, 29-31, recalls the total boldness the apostles had in proclaiming the Word. In the decree on the missionary activity of the Church, the issue of the qualities of a missionary are dealt with.<sup>40</sup> Finally, in the decree on the life and ministry of priests we read: "[...] Once again it is the Holy Spirit which impels the Church to blaze new trails to go to meet today's world".<sup>41</sup> In order to draw up constitution 12, the Chapter added "daringly" to this conciliar text, most certainly making reference to the Preface and to the, at least oblique, invitations of Father Léo Deschâtelets as well.

The Constitutions and Rules of 1982 have a very similar formulation: "To seek out new ways for the Word of God to reach their hearts often calls for daring; to present Gospel demands in all clarity should never intimidate us" (C 8). We have to stress "to reach their [of the people with whom we work] hearts": the outlook should be universal and efficacious. It was already present in the Founder's letter to Father Tempier, March 20, 1826 and strengthens the requirement to show daring.<sup>42</sup>

### 3. IN THE WRITINGS OF THE SUPERIORS GENERAL

The theme of daring thus becomes a part of the official vocabulary. Among many possible examples, we limit ourselves to three.

"We should "leave no daring, no audacity aside" (*nihil linquendum in-ausum*, Preface), working "fiercely" (*acriter*, Preface) for others, ready "if need be to sacrifice life itself, even to a violent death" (*usque ad internecionem*, Preface) to promote the values of God's kingdom" (R. Hanley).<sup>43</sup>

"During the present visit we heard a

triple call: a call for more daring, a call for greater sharing and, finally, a call to deeper hope. A call for more daring, for greater willingness to leave the beaten path in order to answer the new needs of the poor. Today the Christian conscience has become much more sensitive to our collective sins – sins such as exploitation, social injustice, contempt for the rights of man. It is a sign of the times, and for us Oblates it becomes a call from God to new forms of evangelization" (F. Jétte).<sup>44</sup>

"As we face this situation our vocation invites us not to close in upon ourselves, not to lose faith in ourselves. We must know how to launch out into the deep, that is, to allow ourselves to be soundly shaken up by the missionary needs of today's world, to search for suitable ways of responding thereto, according to available forces and possible assets. Like in the Founder's time we need to be daring, in Canada as elsewhere" (M. Zago).<sup>45</sup>

### 4. MISSIONARY DARING

The vocabulary of daring is now frequent, used by Oblates in many publications, official and non-official. One example among many. The provinces of France published two works in 1985 and 1986. The first was on the Founder and bore the title: *Oser grand comme le monde [A Daring as Large as the World]*.<sup>46</sup> The second presented the Congregation, and its editors chose as its title: *Audacieux pour l'Évangile [Being Daring for the Gospel]*.<sup>47</sup> The reception enjoyed by these two titles gives witness to the fact that these formulations express well one of the characteristic values that define the Oblates.

It would be outside the limits of this article to say whether missionary daring

continues to be a characteristic of the life and praxis of today's Oblates. Let us merely make allusion to several of them who died violent deaths: Maurice Lefebvre in La Paz, Bolivia, in 1971; Jean Franche in Inuvik, Canada, in 1974; Michael Rodrigo in Buttala, Sri Lanka, in 1987; Bishop Yves Plumey in Ngaoundéré, Cameroon, in 1991; three Belgian missionaries in Zaire in 1964, seven French and Italian missionaries in Laos from 1960 to 1969. Everything points to them being murdered because of their missionary commitment and the risks they took. There need be no hesitation in qualifying them as "Oblate martyrs".

#### IV. DARING, A MISSIONARY VIRTUE

##### 1. DARING AS A VIRTUE?<sup>48</sup>

Psychology recognizes specific human behaviors occurring when, in the course of life, the individual finds himself confronted with difficulties, threats and dangers. At those times, the simple wish – "I really would like" – proves inadequate. What is required is an effort that strains every fiber of one's being, an effort which leads one to assume a whole different range of attitudes and actions in an interplay of anxieties and daring, fears and ill-temper, withdrawal and aggression. These are perhaps transitory movements, what Saint Thomas Aquinas called *passions* and we today would call emotions, spontaneous reactions. We could also be dealing with more enduring temperamental attributes: some people are fearful and timid, others relish risk, adventure and lofty endeavors.

These passions, these traits of temperament can operate on the level of

spontaneous reactions of elementary psychology. They can also be integrated into the overall dynamism of the person, and that in a number of ways. One of these ways is virtue through which passions and temperamental attributes are not rejected, but rather assumed into the service of what is good, the plan of God – something which, in the last analysis, can take place only with the grace of God.

It is in this context that we can deal with daring. The outlook is that of a project to be carried out. But dangers and threats are perceived. Risks have to be run. How will the individual react?

Some people will imprison themselves in fear; others will flee, seeking a protected area or familiar ground where they believe they are safe; in the case of others, we can speak of resignation. In any case, there is no question of these latter sustaining the drive of a project, or of an ambition to be realized. Others, on the other hand, relish risk and adventure. There is a James Dean film which bears the title: *A Rage to Live*. Does this conjure up explorers, lone sailors or the mountain climber, the drivers of racing cars or motorcycles or the soldier? Or, one can also think of entrepreneurs, artists setting off on new roads, prophets decrying pernicious stagnation, political leaders. It is a case of exerting all one's energy, of not allowing oneself to be discomfited by risk or threats, to have the courage to be creative and to confront.

##### 2. MISSION

Etymologically, apostles and missionaries, are people who are sent. It also stresses the source of this sending: God, the Holy Spirit, the Church, superiors. Perhaps not sufficient attention

has been paid to the destination. It is always different from one's home, from the familiar; it is always somewhere else, some place beyond a frontier. Peter is called upon to go to the home of an uncircumcised person. Paul is called to move over into Europe, whereas Mark feared to follow him into the mountains of Pisidia. It was the same for Francis Xavier, Alexandre Taché or Joseph Gérard.

To the Eleven, the resurrected Christ first said: "Go". That is, set out on the road. And according to Saint John: "You did not choose me, no, I chose you; and I commissioned you to go out and to bear fruit" (John 15:16). In the renowned formula as found in Luke (10:2) and Matthew (9:38): "Ask the Lord of the harvest to send laborers to his harvest", the Greek verb used for "to send" is neither the frequently used *apostellein*, nor even John's *pempein*, but rather *ekballein*, used in the case of throwing out or casting out demons, an expression that has a connotation of *violence*. The "Go" demands that the *missionary* inflict upon himself a certain violence to leave his home and travel to another place.

The first meaning attributed to "another place" is geographic. Mission history outlines its stages from Caesarea and Antioch to Corinth and then Rome; then, with Augustine it was England; with Francis Xavier, Japan; then, the Americas and Africa. That is the most visible aspect. But another relocation happens especially on the cultural plane. From the Gentiles, the pagan nations of the New Testament, to the Inuit, the Basotho or the Hmong. This other cultural dislocation also exists where there is geographic proximity and the same language. The encyclical *The Mission of Christ, the Redeemer* uses the expression "areopagi of mod-

ern times"<sup>49</sup> for those other locations removed from ecclesial communities.

Can one really say that there is any mission without leaving one's home, without going beyond frontiers, without crossing boundaries, and consequently without striving to live some place else, something that implies being in a different way?

In centuries past, the geographic voyage was fraught with difficulties. Saint Paul was well acquainted with dangers, "dangers from rivers, dangers from bandits [...] dangers in the desert, dangers on the sea" (2 Corinthians 11:26). The difficult living conditions of the missionaries have often been stressed: arctic cold and snow, tropical heat, disease, uncertain housing. The greatest difficulty is cultural dislocation, beginning with learning the language. By definition, one never reaches the goal. The going beyond frontiers, the leaps that never quite attain their goal, are essential elements of the missionary task.

As a result, to be faithful to the Word of God, missionary existence demands courage and even daring:

— the courage to leave for another place and to try to live there physically and culturally;

— the courage, in the name of the Gospel, to confront the society to which one is sent and to challenge it — "Do you suppose that I am here to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division" — and to sustain the backlash, often the rejection, sometimes exile and death.

— the courage to try new things and be creative because the Spirit does not allow itself to be confined in preconceived models of missionary methods, of communities to be built, of ministries to be set up. Bishop de Mazenod wrote: "Charity embraces everything; and for

new needs, it invents new means when they are called for”.

— We can add the courage to endure criticism, sometimes severe criticism leveled at the ecclesial communities that sent the missionaries. The Acts of the Apostles gives us several examples of this.

### 3. DARING, A MISSIONARY VIRTUE

The *Dictionnaire Robert* defines daring as “an inclination or movement which leads to extraordinary actions in spite of obstacles and dangers”. Personal fidelity to the Gospel and the building up of the Church are never accomplished without struggle, without risk-taking, without daring. Saint Paul speaks of the “foolishness of God, more wise than the wisdom of men”. The wisdom of this world, i.e. to be reasonable, is not the wisdom of the Gospel. “To shame the wise, God chose what is weak by human reckoning” (I Corinthians 1:27).

To dare is “to undertake, to strive with assurance, daring to accomplish something deemed difficult, unusual or dangerous” (*Dictionnaire Robert*). “The Gospel is the power of God for salvation for whoever believes”. It would be impossible for the Gospel to reach people, all people, without having it proclaimed everywhere in all of those other locations, with assurance and daring. It is said and lived in every page which narrates the history of the missions.

It is true that abuses and excesses may occur. In those cases, daring has slipped into foolhardiness, rashness, unnecessary risk-taking. Such cases are not rare, but who can stand as judge over them since discernment is a sensitive matter and requires humility. On the other hand as far as the Gospel is concerned, lack of daring, cowardliness,

spinelessness, turning in on oneself, entrenching oneself in old habits and personal security are faults of quite a different seriousness. *Parrhesia*: that is assurance, full freedom of speech in God’s name are missionary qualities. We need to reread the Second Letter to the Corinthians, chapters 2 to 6. We need to hear once again the “woe unto me if I do not preach the Gospel”.

Some parallels have been drawn between the missionary and the adventurer. Deviations are never precluded and history shows that some have let themselves be carried away. Adventurers were to be found in the ranks of missionaries. But more often than not, faith, fidelity to the Holy Spirit, apostolic zeal succeeded in guiding and integrating the inclination for adventure, the relish of risk, the courage to go beyond frontiers. What was a temperamental attribute became a virtue. In the face of difficulties, virtue manifested itself in continuity and constancy: there was no giving up. It channeled the spontaneous reaction toward good; it stood without fear; it did not give in to discouragement or allow itself to be overwhelmed. Finally, it showed forth joyful and serene assurance. We must also remember the basic role played by that practical wisdom Saint Thomas called prudence, a wisdom which knows how to weigh the risks and address them in reasonable fashion, that is, sometimes with the folly of God!

But the Christian virtue of fortitude is not dependent on temperament. It can also be found in people less inclined to it by nature. Through this virtue, the missionary overcomes his fears, his diffidence to carry out the work of the Gospel. He develops the capability to move forward, confront problems, find new ways of doing things, “leave noth-

ing undared". Saint Thomas reminds us that fortitude is not only a virtue, it is a gift of the Holy Spirit. He points out the correlation between this virtue and the beatitude: "Happy those who hunger and thirst for justice" (Matthew 5:6). Quite a program of action!

Virtues are first and foremost personal attributes. But communities in the Church as such are also capable of virtues. There are some communities that are diffident or closed in on themselves and some courageous and even daring communities. Daring is a constitutive virtue of missionary institutes.

#### 4. THE FOLLY OF THE CROSS, HUNGER AND THIRST FOR JUSTICE

"Read this letter at the foot of your crucifix" such was the first call Eugene de Mazenod issued to Father Tempier<sup>50</sup>. From there was born the Congregation of the Oblates. The crucifix is the reminder of "the folly of the cross", the source of the Gospel, the power of salvation for all. The apostolic worker is gnawed by the hunger and thirst for justice. His model here is Paul, and ultimately Jesus. In their wake, the Oblates are called to be men who have the will and the courage to walk in the footsteps of the Apostles. To accomplish this they must "leave nothing undared".

MICHEL COURVOISIER

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> 2 Corinthians 10:2; Philippians 1:14; Romans 5:7

<sup>2</sup> See 1 Corinthians 2:3-5

<sup>3</sup> "Constitutions et Règles de la Société des Missionnaires de Provence", first French manuscript in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 15-19.

<sup>4</sup> The text of the Preface is that which

was published at the beginning of the Constitutions of 1966 and 1982.

<sup>5</sup> Letter of June 29, 1808 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, no. 27, p. 56.

<sup>6</sup> Letter of February 28, 1809 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, no. 46, p. 103.

<sup>7</sup> In *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, no. 10, p. 20.

<sup>8</sup> In this passage, there is a shift from the "you" to the "we" which indicates Eugene included himself in this. *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 15, no. 113, p. 33 & 34.

<sup>9</sup> In *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, no. 2, p. 2 & 3.

<sup>10</sup> In *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, no. 5, p. 8, 9, 11.

<sup>11</sup> In *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, no. 8, p. 15.

<sup>12</sup> ARRUIPE, Pedro, S.J., Speech of May 30, 1974 to the Union of Superiors General.

<sup>13</sup> BEAUDOIN, Yvon, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, no. 17, footnote 3, p. 27.

<sup>14</sup> In *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, no. 21, p. 35.

<sup>15</sup> In *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 13, no. 11, p. 16.

<sup>16</sup> In *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 13, no. 51, p. 72.

<sup>17</sup> In *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 7, no. 231, p. 64.

<sup>18</sup> Constitutions and Rules of 1928, article 75.

<sup>19</sup> "Nihil innovetur nisi quod traditum est", in DENZINGER, Henricus, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, Herder, Barcelone, Fribourg, Rome, 1957, no. 46.

<sup>20</sup> Constitutions and Rules of 1928, article 76.

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, the problems experienced by Father Hippolyte Guibert at Notre-Dame du Laus and his difficulties in obtaining jurisdiction for confessions as a missionary.

<sup>22</sup> In *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 15, no. 145, p. 146.

<sup>23</sup> LEFLON, II, p. 170 ff.

<sup>24</sup> In *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, no. 25, p. 39 & 40.

<sup>25</sup> Circular letter no. 128, April 13, 1921 in *Circ. adm.* III (1901-1921), p. 9 (366).

<sup>26</sup> Circular letter no. 130, January 6, 1923 in *Circ. adm.* IV (1922-1946), p. 3 (9).

<sup>27</sup> Circular letter no. 152, December 3, 1932 in *Circ. adm.* IV (1922-1946) p. 4, 10 (238, 244-245).

<sup>28</sup> Circular letter no. 59, February 17, 1895 in *Circ. adm.* II (1886-1900), p. 1-44 (203-246)

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 34.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 41.

<sup>31</sup> Circular letter no. 61, December 8, 1896, in *Circ. adm.* II, (1886-1900), p. 261-389.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 35.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, 89-90.

<sup>34</sup> DUCHAUSSOIS, Pierre, *Apôtres inconnus*, Paris, Spes, 1928, 277 p.

<sup>35</sup> Circular letter no. 175, June 13, 1947 in *Circ. adm.* V (1947-1952), p. 6.

<sup>36</sup> Circular letter no. 191, August 15, 1951 in *Circ. adm.* V (1947-1952), p. 2 (299).

<sup>37</sup> Circular letter no. 208, September 1, 1959 in *Circ. adm.* VI (1953-1960), p. 88 (307).

<sup>38</sup> January 25, 1966 in *Circ. adm.* VII (1965-1966), p. 16-17 (240-241).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 31 (255).

<sup>40</sup> *Ad Gentes*, 25.

<sup>41</sup> *Presbyterorum ordinis*, 22.

<sup>42</sup> In *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 7, no. 231, p. 64.

<sup>43</sup> HANLEY, Richard, Circular letter no.

248, June 1, 1972 in *Act. adm.* I (1972-1973), p. 22.

<sup>44</sup> JETTÉ, Fernand, "To the Oblates of South Africa", January 31, 1976 in *Letters to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate*, Rome, General House, 1984, no. 30. p. 221; also in *Act. adm.* III (1976-1977), p. 91 & 92.

<sup>45</sup> ZAGO, Marcello, "Letter to the Congregation (Christmas 1991) 150 years of Oblate presence in Canada", circular letter no. 323, December 2, 1991 in *Act. adm.* XIV (1991), p. 45.

<sup>46</sup> LECA, Noël, GÉREY, Jean, JACQUEMIN, François, BODY, Maurice, *Oser grand comme le monde*, Paris, C2L-Sadifa editions 1985, 31 p.

<sup>47</sup> *Audacieux pour l'Évangile*, Fayard, le Sarment, 1986, 94 p.

<sup>48</sup> The theme of daring does not seem to have been the object of much research, much like the entire theology of the virtues, i.e., with reference to apostolic sanctity. We will have to be satisfied with a few initial reflections with the hope that they will open up avenues for further research.

<sup>49</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *The mission of Christ, the Redeemer*, December 7, 1990, no. 37 c.

<sup>50</sup> Letter of October 9, 1815 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 4, p. 6.

## DECEASED OBLATES

*Summary: I. Eugene de Mazenod's Writings. II. Constitutions and Rules. III. General Chapters. IV. Superiors General. V. The Church's Tradition. VI. Relevance of the Founder's teaching.*

From its origin, the Oblate Congregation has been mindful of its departed members. Its concern for the dead, most evident in the writings of our Founder, also appears lucidly in our Constitutions and Rules, in the Acts of General Chapters, and in the Circular Letters of our Superiors General. Keeping the memory of our deceased alive, and remembering them fondly in prayer, is an integral part of our Oblate heritage. It is a legacy Eugene de Mazenod transmits to us from the Church's own tradition, a message which is still relevant today. This article focuses briefly on each of the above elements.

### I. EUGENE DE MAZENOD'S WRITINGS

In the pages of his correspondence, our Founder repeatedly refers to the grief that he experiences at the death of an Oblate. "What shall I say to you, my dear child", he wrote to Father André Sumien at Aix, "about the misfortune which has brought consternation to us all? I am dumbfounded and can scarcely believe it"<sup>1</sup>. On another occasion, hearing of the accidental death of one of his younger priests, he wrote to Father Hippolyte Guibert, at Ajaccio: "I have just offered the Holy Sacrifice for this good priest whose death you announced in your last letter. I will weep for him all my life, as for those who have preceded him into eternity; their loss leaves me inconsolable [...] I share

your grief [...] A blow of this kind flattens me; my soul is sunk in sorrow"<sup>2</sup>. Even towards the end of his own life, death still afflicted the Founder keenly, as he revealed to Bishop Étienne Séméria in Jaffna: "How bitter death is when it takes away from us those whom we have so many reasons to regret. Do you imagine I have accustomed myself to the thought that I have, for example, lost our Father Aubert who was so good, so kind, so admirable? I groan several times a day over this irreparable loss. The void he leaves around me is an abyss nothing can bridge. He is a loss to my heart, he is a daily loss to the service of the Congregation, he is a loss to all those whom he edified, whom he helped, whom he encouraged and whom he carried with him by his advice and most of all by his example. It is something one cannot console oneself about, however subject one is to the impenetrable will of God"<sup>3</sup>.

Bishop de Mazenod, nonetheless, did not reproach himself for being downcast at the death of Oblates. On the contrary – in 1831, for instance, he wrote to Father Henry Tempier: "Jesus Christ, our only model, does not give us this example. I adore his trembling and tears before the tomb of Lazarus just as much as I disdain and abhor the stoicism, the insensibility and the egotism of all those who would wish, so it seems, to surpass this prototype of all perfection"<sup>4</sup>.

It is thus not surprising that the death of his Oblate companions tested the Founder's faith vigorously<sup>5</sup>. Man-

power in the Congregation was habitually in short supply, and urgent needs could seldom be met. At times the way the Congregation was being tested seemed mysterious to him. "The better a subject is, the more uneasy I am, for death is choosing its victims among the elite", he exclaimed to Father Hippolyte Courtès<sup>6</sup>. Often, all the Founder could do was submit to God's designs: "There is nothing to do but prostrate oneself and, as always, adore the holy will of God".<sup>7</sup>

But Bishop de Mazenod knew how to console himself. The deceased, he reflected, were no longer exiles. Having died in the bosom of the Congregation was a veritable mark of predestination. The departed, therefore, were now in possession of God, the final end of all their hopes. They were our community up above, linked with the one on earth by the bonds of charity. Their petitions and love would draw the rest of their family to heaven with them.<sup>8</sup> "Their holy death is a great ratification of the Rule, a new seal of its approval by God".<sup>9</sup> In consequence, the Founder concluded that their memory must be preserved in writing for the edification of the whole Congregation.<sup>10</sup> The following passage, from a letter to Father Courtès, captures many of the foregoing sentiments: "Now four of them in heaven; this is already a nice community. They are the first stones, the foundation stones of the edifice that is to be built in the celestial Jerusalem; they are before God with the sign, the kind of character proper to our Society, the vows common to all her members, the practice of the same virtues. We are attached to them by the bonds of a particular charity, they are still our brothers, and we are theirs; they dwell in our motherhouse, our headquarters; their prayers, the love they keep for us will

draw us one day to them so as to dwell with them in the place of our rest. [...] I see them at the side of Mary Immaculate and, consequently, close to our Lord Jesus Christ [...]; we will receive our part of this fullness if we render ourselves worthy of them by our fidelity in practising constantly this Rule which has helped them to arrive where they are".<sup>11</sup>

On the other hand, the Founder urged the Oblates never to cease praying for their deceased brothers because of the bonds that unite them. On December 22, 1860, he wrote the following in his *Diary*: "This is how our little militant family on earth nourishes the already numerous community in heaven. May these dear Brothers whom God calls to himself one after the other, not lose sight of us once they have reached the summit of happiness; we greatly need help and increase so as to be adequate to the work that is waiting everywhere. We, on our part, do not forget them when they depart from us. Lest there be some obstacle to their immediate entry into heaven, we certainly accompany them with our sorrow, but especially with our suffrages. The entire Congregation engages itself with prayer and indulgences, good deeds and the holy Sacrifice of the Mass offered several times by each of us, which will open to them the gate of heaven if perchance their holy death in the bosom of the Congregation and the renewal of their profession before leaving this world were not sufficient to dissolve their debts toward God".<sup>12</sup> Bishop de Mazenod's thinking, moreover, was that the prayers of the living would help those already glorified in heaven to be lifted "higher in glory".<sup>13</sup> This unique way of seeing things says much about our Founder's hope in God.

## II. CONSTITUTIONS AND RULES

In drafting the Constitutions and Rules of the Congregation, the Founder incorporated some articles on the departed from the Redemptorists' *Statuti Capitolari*, and others from unknown sources<sup>14</sup>. The first approved edition in 1827 contained numerous provisions on behalf of deceased members. By and large these prescriptions remained intact in the Constitutions and Rules until after the Second Vatican Council. Thereafter, the obsequies contained in earlier editions were gradually dispensed with, and in our most recent edition of the Constitutions and Rules in 1982, it was judged fitting to place the list of suffrages in an appendix to the text. A summary of stipulations contained in various editions may be of interest here for comparative purposes. Only the major pre-Vatican versions are noted as they may be less familiar to many. Noteworthy additions and changes to the 1827 edition are indicated according to the edition in which they first appeared.

1. "Whenever a member of the Institute dies, all houses are to be notified so that the suffrages of all might deliver his soul quickly from Purgatory" (Part I, Chapter 4, §4, Suffrages, art. 1).

The next six articles were entitled *obsequies* up till the 1928 edition when it was changed to *exsequies*.

2. "The Society's deceased members are not to be buried within less than twenty-four hours, unless because of the smell or for some other reason, the Superior judges fit to anticipate the burial slightly" (1827).

Note: The 1928 edition simplified the text, merely indicating that burial could be advanced "for grave reasons".

3. "The prefect of the sacristy according to the Superior's directions,

will deliver to the infirmarian the suitable garments for the deceased. They are not to be put on till several hours after death, when every doubt as to the fact of death has been removed" (1827).

4. "The deceased's grave clothes will be such as belong to the ecclesiastical order of the deceased Oblate. The lay brothers will be vested in their usual dress" (1827).

5. "The deceased will have a cross placed in his hands, which will be left with him in the grave" (1827).

6. "This will not be the cross given to him on the day of his oblation; this will remain in the Society as a memorial of the virtues of him who bore it, and as a means of perpetuating his memory and good example he gave to his brothers" (1827).

7. "In every house of the Society, as a reminder of death, a cross will be placed in a conspicuous place. It will be put into the hands of the first to die and then buried with him" (1827).

The 1853 edition of the Constitutions and Rules added that this cross was to be a black wooden one. From 1827 onwards, the remaining articles on the deceased are entitled *Des suffrages*.

8. The Society, whose charity provides for all the needs, spiritual or temporal, of its members, will take care not to forget those who die in her bosom. Not only will they always share largely in all the merits of the Society, but their departed souls will be solaced immediately after their death by the offering of the holy Sacrifice of the Altar and by abundant suffrages" (1825).

9. "If the deceased was an oblate priest, each priest will celebrate five Masses for him; if the deceased was a simple oblate [i.e. a scholastic], each priest will celebrate three Masses for him. If he was a novice or lay brother, each priest will celebrate one Mass. If

he was the Superior General, each priest will celebrate nine Masses" (1825).

The 1853 edition stipulated that the five Masses for a deceased priest, three for oblates, and one for novices would now be offered only by the priests of their own Province or Vicariate. It stated too that all other priests of the Congregation, would offer one Mass for a deceased oblate who was professed, and it reduced the number to be said for a deceased Superior General to five.

In 1894, the original article was divided into two: one article treated the suffrages for the Superior General (five Masses), the Assistants General and the Procurator to the Holy See (three Masses); the second treated of the other deceased members of the Congregation. These provisions remained in force right up until 1966.<sup>15</sup>

The 1894 edition also added three Masses for a deceased Assistant General and the Procurator. Their counterparts in office, as well as the Superior General, were in turn to say three Masses for every deceased member of the Society in perpetual vows (this latter obligation was dropped in the 1910 edition). This edition of 1894 likewise stated that the one Mass offered by all priests in the Congregation for non-dignitaries was to be for every deceased Oblate in vows, whether priest or not. Oblates in temporary vows, and novices who had taken vows in danger of death but whose vows had not elapsed, were to receive one Mass from each priest in their Province or Vicariate. Conversely those novices who had taken vows under ordinary circumstances were to have one Mass offered for the repose of their soul only by the priests of their own house. The 1910 edition of the Constitutions and Rules included the Bursar General in the three Masses to be offered for deceased dignitaries, and

specified that the Procurator mentioned in the 1894 edition was the Procurator to the Holy See. It likewise simplified the previous edition by indicating that the one Mass every priest in the Congregation was to offer for a deceased Oblate pertained to those in perpetual vows. Then, in 1928, in conformity with the new Code of Canon Law, the new edition of the Constitutions and Rules simply laid down the following provisions: 1° For each deceased in the Congregation, the Superior General, his Assistants, the Bursar General and the Procurator to the Holy See will celebrate one Mass. 2° In every Province, each priest will likewise offer one Mass for each deceased member of the Province. 3° Finally, each of our deceased will be remembered for a full year after his death in the two Masses a month that all priests will say for our deceased (Rule of 1828, art. 363).

10. "Oblates and novices will offer as many holy communions for the deceased as the priests are to celebrate Masses". "Lay brothers will offer five decades of the rosary for the deceased for a week, as well as offering as many holy communions as the oblates and novices" (1827).

The 1894 edition restricted the communions to be offered by oblates and novices (lay brothers were no longer required to offer their communions) to the number of Masses that the priests of their own house were required to offer. Lay brothers were to offer five decades of the rosary over a week only for the deceased of their own house. The 1928 edition specified that Oblates and novices who were not priests were to offer as many holy communions for the deceased as the priests of their own house had to offer Masses.

11. "Besides the Mass to be said by each priest, there will be a service in

each house after the Office of the Dead, which will be recited in its entirety in the house where the deceased resided; in other houses only one nocturn and lauds will be recited" (1827).

The 1853 edition restricted the service and office to each house of the Province or Vicariate in which the deceased lived, and made clear that the service in other houses should be held after the one nocturn and lauds. Subsequently, the 1928 version inserted a sung Mass and the absolution in place of the service, and brought out more sharply that all the provisions applied only to the house or houses of the Province or Vicariate to which the dead person had belonged.

12. "In all houses of the Society, all prayers, Communions, penances and good works will be offered for each deceased member for eight days. He will also be mentioned in the evening prayer (1827).

The 1853 edition limited the above suffrages to each house of the Province or Vicariate to which the deceased belonged. The same applied to the mention of the person at evening prayers. The 1928 version dropped any reference to houses of a Vicariate.

13. "In the case of a deceased Superior General, the above-mentioned suffrages, funeral service and complete Office of the Dead will take place in all houses of the Congregation. The same applies throughout the Congregation for Assistants General and the Procurator, except that for the latter the funeral service will only be held in the General House and in the residence of a Provincial or Vicar of Missions (1894).

This new article was first introduced in the 1894 edition. The 1910 version added the General Bursar to the list, and the 1928 edition changed the funeral service to a solemn Mass with the Ab-

solution. It also stated that neither the solemn Mass nor the Office of the Dead had to be said for the Assistants, etc., except in the General House and in their own Provincial or Vicarial house.

14. "Those who are not attached to a particular Province but live under the direct authority of the Superior General, have the same obligations and the same rights in the matter of suffrages as the members of that Province in whose territory they reside" (1928).

This article was introduced for the first time into the 1928 edition of the Constitutions and Rules.

15. "On the death of the Sovereign Pontiff, a solemn Mass of the Dead will be recited for him in all houses of the Congregation. For the Cardinal Protector a solemn Mass will be offered in the General House, and in the Provincial houses. We will do likewise for the diocesan Bishop in our churches (1928, n° 369).

This article is also a new one, first introduced in the 1928 Constitutions and Rules.

16. "When the father or mother of one of our members dies, the same suffrages will be observed as in the preceding article (which was number 12 above). "The son of a deceased parent may offer five Masses for either parent, and three for a deceased brother or sister" (1827).

The 1928 edition combined the above two-part article into one and added "or a notable benefactor". It also observed that the superior should see that the same suffrages be applied for members of the Society who were not priests.

17. "On the anniversary of the death of a member of the Society a service will be held in the house in which he died or to which he belonged, which the whole community will attend" (1827).

The 1853 edition of the Constitutions and Rules specified that this service should be a sung Mass. The 1928 version simply dropped the reference to the house in which the deceased had died.<sup>16</sup>

What is most striking about the preceding articles, and the rulings of the General Chapters which follow, is the great amount of time and concern that were expended on them by the Founder and so many other Oblates. These detailed provisions testify to the importance attributed to the deceased in our Oblate history and spirituality.

### III. GENERAL CHAPTERS

A number of the Congregation's General Chapters addressed the topic of the deceased, and spoke of the suffrages that were to be offered on their behalf. Some comments by General Chapters are given here under the same numbers adopted in the preceding section, as a cross-reference to that particular article or articles of the Constitutions and Rules.

1. The 1867 Chapter prescribed that the deceased's Provincial, Vicar of Mission, or local Superior should notify the Superior General immediately, and send him whatever edifying information he could as soon as possible. Information was requested on the dead person's illness, virtues and life. The Superior General would then notify all the houses, asking them to perform the designated suffrages. Later he would publish whatever information he had received at greater length. On this same point the 1887 Chapter required that the Superior of every house in which the deceased had lived forward any documents he had or could collect to the Secretary General. These were to be sent in within three months so that a death notice could af-

terwards be sent out for the edification of all. Other members of the Congregation who knew the deceased well were strongly urged to do likewise. In 1898 the Chapter ruled that Provincials should keep a register containing all the information the individual had given on himself, as well as the person's changes of residence. Each year the Provincial send a copy of same to the General House. These measures were designed to facilitate the composition of the death notices.<sup>17</sup>

2. to 5. With regard to obsequies, the Chapter of 1893 directed that they should be observed according to regional customs, yet always in a modest, humble and poor manner.<sup>18</sup>

6. Besides the Oblate cross, the Chapter of 1837 recommended that another memorial of the deceased be kept, i.e. a simple necrology which would give a few details on the deceased person's life and virtues, and be read in the refectory on the vigil of the anniversary of the person's death.<sup>19</sup>

9. The 1926 Chapter at first wanted to retain the principle of a Mass by each priest in the Province. It became a special obligation on the General Administration, and it prescribed two monthly Masses to be said by each one for all of the deceased.<sup>20</sup>

11. Funerals should be conducted according to the usage of the country, the 1893 Chapter ordered, but further charged that everything should be carried out after the manner of the poor. It also conceded that the recitation of the Office of the Dead might be more easily neglected than other suffrages.<sup>21</sup>

13. Each year on May 21, the anniversary of the death of our Founder, the Chapter of 1867 asserted that a Mass was to be celebrated for him in perpetuity at the General House. This Chapter also stipulated that a Mass would

also be celebrated at the General House, annually and in perpetuity, for his Holiness Pope Leo XII for all that he had done for the Congregation.<sup>22</sup> In 1873 the capitulants decided that a sung funeral service for Father Tempier should be held at that Chapter as a sign of its affection and gratitude to him for the important role he had played in the founding of the Congregation. It was further indicated by the General Chapter of 1898 that whenever a General Chapter convened to elect a new Superior General, a funeral service would be sung before its closure for the repose of the soul of the last deceased Superior General.<sup>23</sup>

16. The 1893 Chapter affirmed that permission would be readily granted to attend the funerals of one's parents, but it would not be easily given for other relatives, unless the funerals were held in the vicinity.<sup>24</sup> Much earlier, the 1867 Chapter had observed that anyone entitled to suffrages for a relative ought to request them himself from the Superiors of his Province. It also had stated that as a sign of appreciation for our benefactors, a sixth decade of the rosary should be recited for them with an accompanying *De Profundis*. This was in addition to the mention of their names at night prayer. To this the 1887 Chapter added that in addition to the prayers normally said in each house or Province for particular benefactors, a Mass should be said for all of them once a month at the General House. The 1893 Chapter contented itself with urging that Oblates exactly observe everything our holy Rules prescribed in the way of suffrages for the deceased.<sup>25</sup>

17. The 1898 Chapter elaborated that the anniversary celebration should be announced on the vigil in the refectory, and that the suffrages should be performed at night prayer. The *De*

*Profundis* was to be recited with several accompanying prayers.<sup>26</sup>

#### IV. SUPERIORS GENERAL

In 1873 Father Joseph Fabre wrote as follows: "In this period (since the last Chapter) we have had the misfortune of losing fifty-two Fathers or Brothers. The Lord has called them to himself. I cannot tell you the names of all these dear deceased. But there is one whose name is already on your lips: that of Father Tempier. This is the first Chapter that this venerable companion of the best of Fathers does not attend; we had lovingly hoped to keep this faithful witness of the first days of our Family among us, (but) the Lord has decided otherwise. We had the consolation of being at his side when he drew his last breath; the Lord wanted to recompense his good servant and spare his [...] heart the poignant anguish he would have felt seeing the Holy Father held prisoner at Rome and our enemies entering Paris victorious! Alongside this ever venerable name permit me to also mention that of Bishop Semeria, of such gentle and holy memory, so quickly and unexpectedly snatched from our warm-hearted fellowship. Fifty other names follow these two cherished ones; the funeral list is very long! All our Fathers died in the peace of the Lord, they leave us a rich heritage of virtues to imitate and examples to follow; they are now before God with our beloved Father. They loved their religious family on earth; they love it in heaven where they pray for us who remain in exile. May their prayers draw down the most abundant blessings on this Chapter and on all the Family".<sup>27</sup>

Archbishop Augustin Dontenwill dealt with the question of suffrages in

his 1908 Circular. "Our General Chapters have dealt with the question of suffrages for our deceased at several sessions. Should we maintain those of the Chapter of 1850, presided over by our Venerated Founder, or, seeing how the Congregation has expanded, should they be revised so as to ease the burden of less-endowed Provinces and Vicariates, yet without prejudice to the deceased?" He went on to point out that the Chapter of 1908 had consented to modify three of the articles, and that this decision had been ratified by the Sacred Congregation of Religious Institutes in December of 1908. He concluded his address by saying: "The spirit which animated this revision always remains the spirit of charity which our Venerable Founder had for the deceased. And I hasten to take this opportunity, not only to remind you that it is a duty of justice for all of us to acquit punctually the prescribed suffrages for our dead, but also to urge you still further to pray much for our deceased – a fruitful apostolate which mitigates the intensity of the flames of Purgatory and draws down on ourselves the most abundant graces from the Heart of Jesus".<sup>28</sup>

Again, in 1927, the Superior General brought up the topic of suffrages in light of the revisions of the Constitutions and Rules at the 1926 Chapter. These had been undertaken to conform them to the new Code of Canon Law, issued in 1926. In closing, the Archbishop observed: "[The Founder's] image presided over all our sessions, and his spirit guided all our thoughts [...] We have reason to believe that he approved our work and that he is happy with us. Shouldn't we see his special intervention, moreover, in the following incident. On July 2, the very day that the Decree approving the changes to

our Holy Rules was signed at Rome, the Diocesan inquiry into a striking miracle at the intercession of Bishop de Mazenod took place at Notre-Dame de Lumières. The miracle is said to have taken place last June not far from the Sanctuary he loved so much."<sup>29</sup>

## V. THE CHURCH'S TRADITION

For the most part, Eugene De Mazenod's outlook on death and the afterlife were rooted solidly in the Church's teachings. Without question death troubled him deeply, and he had to struggle hard to accept it. He was able to overcome its sting, however, by his belief in the life to come, an uncomplicated and deep-seated faith in Christ's victory over the grave. Eternal life and Purgatory, as well as the Communion of Saints, were vivid realities for him. He accepted them wholeheartedly on the testimony of Scripture and Tradition. One can hardly doubt, moreover, that his views on predestination fell well within the range of orthodoxy, though further study of them would be helpful both to clarify his position and to contextualize them historically. The Founder likewise believed, in keeping with the Church's practice and teaching, that prayers for the dead were wholesome and holy, helping to free their souls from Purgatory. Yet he was also of the opinion that prayers and good works by the living could obtain a higher place for the deceased in heaven. How the Founder came to this conclusion, and the reasons he had for holding it, are unclear. For some, it goes beyond accepted teaching: that with death merit is no longer possible. Certainly, his stance is surprising and warrants further investigation.

## VI. RELEVANCE OF THE FOUNDER'S TEACHING

Preoccupation with community is a characteristic of our age. Nowadays people are increasingly conscious of their political and economic interdependence. Technology, travel and the media are drawing countries into a global community. They are raising expectations of a world harmony, one of well-being and togetherness.

Yet improvements in communication have exposed us to the breadth and depth of human miseries. We learn of countless social ills everywhere, varying only in kind or degree. There is tragedy and despair, oppression and hunger and alienation. People search for meaning and value whereby they can make sense of it all.

As Oblates we are called to address peoples' aspirations and anxieties, guided by Eugene de Mazenod's spirit. That spirit still sheds light on the hopes and fears of our time. It is Christ's spirit of compassion and trust, a spirit of faith and equity, and a spirit of family solidarity. Our Founder was sustained strongly by his Oblate community, living and dead, and by the wider Communion of Saints. His vision included the here and hereafter; it encompassed both miseries and mercy. It took account of human longing as well as the loving plan of God. It continues to offer our world meaning and value, a foretaste of the life to come.

Bishop de Mazenod's convictions, regarding the truths that death evokes, are relevant for his followers, and for the peoples we serve. They show compassion for human suffering, hopefulness in the face of tragedy, cooperation in attaining lasting values, and awareness of belonging to a community which transcends the limits of space

and time. They situate Christ squarely at the center of history. They challenge us to live in mystery while becoming our definitive selves. They teach that by dying we come to life, that our best yearnings are not in vain. They give us the certainty that justice will one day be done, and that tears will cease forever. They stress that each of us has dignity and importance, and that our destinies are interlocked, horizontally and vertically.

THOMAS A. LASCELLES

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> May 2, 1823 letter in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, no. 103, p. 112.

<sup>2</sup> January 11, 1837 letter to Father Guibert at Ajaccio in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 9, no. 601, p. 6-7.

<sup>3</sup> July 8, 1860 letter in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 4, no. 51, p. 153.

<sup>4</sup> January 11, 1831 letter quoted in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 7, Introduction, p. XXXVIII.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. XXXVI-XXXVII.

<sup>6</sup> March 14, 1837 letter in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 9, p. XXI.

<sup>7</sup> Letter to Fr. Étienne Semeria, September 19, 1851, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 4, p. 79.

<sup>8</sup> See DE MAZENOD, Eugène, *Selected Texts Related to the OMI Constitutions and Rules*, nos. 391 - 392, p. 436 - 439.

<sup>9</sup> See letter to Fr. Courtès in Aix, July 22, 1828, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 7, no. 307, p. 164.

<sup>10</sup> See in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 9, p. XXXIII, p. 124, 127-128, 131, 135.

<sup>11</sup> July 22, 1828, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 7, no. 307, pp. 163-164.

<sup>12</sup> *Selected Texts*, pp. 444-445.

<sup>13</sup> Diary, July 6, 1844 in *Selected Texts*, no. 395, p. 443.

<sup>14</sup> COSENTINO, Georges, *Histoire de nos Règles*, Archives d'histoire oblate, Ottawa, Éditions des Études oblates (1955), I, pp. 99-100.

<sup>15</sup> See articles 362 and 363 in the 1928 edition.

<sup>16</sup> LESAGE, Germain, *Évolution du texte de nos Saintes Règles*, Ottawa, Séminaire universitaire, 1948, pp. 196-206.

<sup>17</sup> VILLENEUVE, Jean-Marie Rodrigue, *Étude analytico-synthétique des Saintes Règles des Missionnaires O.M.I.*, Ottawa, scolasticat Saint-Joseph, 1929, pp. 257-258. In a similar vein see prescriptions of the 1867 and 1893 Chapters in *Acta Capitularia ab anno 1867 ad annum 1893*, manuscript, Deschâtelets Archives, 1893, pp. 17-18.

<sup>18</sup> *Acta capitularia*, p. 17.

<sup>19</sup> VILLENEUVE, Jean-Marie Rodrigue, *op. cit.* p. 263.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 268-269.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 273. See also *Acta capitularia*, p. 17.

<sup>22</sup> VILLENEUVE, Jean-Marie Rodrigue, *op. cit.* p. 275; *Acta capitularia*, p. 18.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>24</sup> *Acta capitularia*, p. 17.

<sup>25</sup> Villeneuve, Jean-Marie Rodrigue, *op. cit.* p. 277.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 278.

<sup>27</sup> Circular letter no. 25, September 8, 1873, containing the Superior General's report to the members of the Chapter in *Circ. adm.* I (1850-1885), p. 282-283.

<sup>28</sup> Circular no. 105, December 22, 1908, in *Circ. adm.* III (1886-1900), pp. 232-234.

<sup>29</sup> Circular no. 139, August 24, 1927, in *Circ. adm.* IV (1922-1946), pp. 101-106.

## DEVOTIONS

*Summary: I. Theology of devotions. II. The Founder's devotions; 1. Importance of signs for the Founder; 2. Events which revealed the face of God; 3. Devotion to the angels as envoys of God; 4. Devotion to certain particular signs; 5. Devotion to the mystery of the Communion of the Saints; 6. Conclusion. III. Devotions in the Oblate tradition: 1. In the Constitutions and Rules; 2. In the General Chapters; 3. In the circular letters of the Superiors General. Conclusion.*

### I. THEOLOGY OF DEVOTIONS

Devotions that do not deal with the major mysteries of our faith (such as the Father, Christ, the Spirit, the Eucharist, the Virgin Mary) have not been the object of very extensive research on the part of theologians or scripture scholars. The major dictionaries of liturgy, theology or spirituality are very brief in this regard.

On the other hand, it has always been the Church's concern to suppress devotions which border on idolatry or illusion, giving full freedom to the Spirit to breathe life into genuine popular piety. Nonetheless, it has encouraged some special forms of devotions, the fruit of which has become evident through the centuries, for example, the way of the cross, the rosary, and devotion to one's guardian angel.

For the requirements of this article, we can say this: the essential element in devotions is the use of some created reality to lead the human heart to a living relationship with God. The reality used can be a material object which has become sacred, such as the cross, relics, sacramental signs, etc., or else it can be a social reality directly related to God, such as the Church as an institution, the Mystical Body of Christ, the Pope; or furthermore it could be a particular human reality, such as the souls in purgatory, and the men and women saints.

In the New Testament, all creatures become parables that speak of the Kingdom of God. For Jesus, in a very special way, persons are often the means used to go to the Father, especially those who inspired admiration in him because of the faith they shared, for example, the little ones and the humble (Matthew 11:26), or the Centurion (Matthew 8:10), or the Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:28).

In the Church, throughout its history, devotions have developed in regard to realities related to the life of Jesus (Mary, Joseph, the Archangel Gabriel, the manger, the house of Nazareth...); and also in regard to *persons throughout the ages* who are considered intimate friends of Jesus because of their holiness; and also in regard to *places or objects* known to be special mediators of God's presence, such as relics or pilgrimage sites.

The popularity of all these devotions has varied throughout the centuries according to countries and temperaments, according to the place allotted to palpable signs in the daily lives of peoples or individuals. People did not always avoid concentrating on the signs as if they were the main reality, and as a result, produce a superstitious piety. But it would also happen that the signs would safeguard the heart which was engaged in a relationship with the true God and would provide a protection

against a vague, abstract and disembodied piety.

## II. THE FOUNDER'S DEVOTIONS

Saint Eugene de Mazenod lived at the end of a century in which the human heart was given more importance than the Cartesian spirit, "classicism", and the gardens of Versailles. It was the revolution of people who were more dominated by emotion than by reason.

In addition to this, Eugene bore in his personality the vibrant breath of Southern France, swollen to great gusts by the warm Mediterranean winds.

Some of the more ardent devotions which he developed had the same roots as the foundations of his interior life: for example, his devotion to the Trinity, to Christ the Savior, to the Immaculate Virgin, to Saint Joseph, to the Apostles, to the Church, etc. This dictionary devotes an article to each one of these themes. In addition, however, we find certain special devotions in which his heart manifests an incredible spiritual vitality: it is only about these that we will speak.

### 1. THE IMPORTANCE OF SIGNS FOR THE FOUNDER

It will not come as a surprise to see the importance of signs to nourish his intimate and profound relationship with the Lord – but without ever allowing them to lapse into sensationalism or sentimentality. Father Toussaint Rambert has this to say on the subject: "Such, then, was Bishop de Mazenod's piety: imbued with a lively faith, it embraced everything; it was great and lofty like his spirit; generous, broad and strong like his will, ardent and affectionate like his heart; simple, upright

and sensible just like his fine soul [...] He was endowed with an almost instinctive avoidance of the eccentric and of novelties in devotions. Initially, he did not dare to condemn these novelties, because he was well aware that the Holy Spirit could be found in them, that he is unceasingly manifest in the Church, that the forms of his manifestations are limitless, that he blows where he wills, and that God's gifts are almost as varied as there are just souls on earth. But for him, he felt no inclination, no attraction in this regard. He was only inclined to the lofty, ancient and perpetual devotions of the Holy Church, our Mother."<sup>1</sup>

### 2. EVENTS WHICH REVEALED THE FACE OF GOD

For the Founder, the most important signs that bound him to God were everyday occurrences, happy or sad; and the more mysterious they were, the more they enabled him to plumb the depths of the Trinity, of Providence, of the Holy Spirit, of the divine Will, of the glory of God.<sup>2</sup>

### 3. DEVOTION TO THE ANGELS AS ENVOYS OF GOD

In speaking of special devotions of the Founder, one must take particular note of the angels, especially the guardian angels.

He calls upon their intercession before undertaking important projects<sup>3</sup>; he always thanks them when a difficult endeavor succeeds<sup>4</sup>; every morning, he entrusts his day to his guardian angel<sup>5</sup>; he loves to remain in contact with his friends through their individual guardian angels<sup>6</sup>. He also likes to pray and have others pray the Office of the Guardian Angels on Tuesdays<sup>7</sup>. To

complete these all too brief observations, we could read the summary given by Father Eugene Baffie with regard to the Founder's devotion to the holy angels.<sup>8</sup>

#### 4. DEVOTION TO CERTAIN PARTICULAR SIGNS

In other places in this dictionary, we will find the paramount importance the Founder gave to signs such as the Eucharist, the Cross, the Passion and the Divine Office. But there are other important signs to point out: the Word of God, the liturgy, relics, and scapulars – these supplied the nourishment for which Eugene de Mazenod yearned in order to draw him close to God.

— *The Word of God.* For Eugene de Mazenod, the book of the Word, especially the New Testament, was the only authentic source of all apostolic actions which were truly evangelical. His attitude of veneration is evident in a letter he wrote in 1805 to a friend he met during a trip to Paris: “[...] I have gathered together below some words of consolation that I have been careful to draw from the pure wellspring, in the book of life, that admirable code where all needs are foreseen, and the remedies are prepared. So it is by no means Eugene, it is Jesus Christ, it is Peter, Paul, John, etc., who send you this wholesome food which, when received with that spirit of faith of which you are capable, will certainly not be without effect.”<sup>9</sup>

While meditating on the Word of God in the seminary, he expressed his veneration: “Let us adore Jesus Christ as he taught his Apostles his admirable doctrine that they were enjoined to pass on to us for our sanctification [...] We owe the same respect to the Word of God [...] as if we heard it from the very mouth of Jesus Christ [...]”<sup>10</sup>

The importance of the Word of God had already been planted in his heart as a child in Venice when his great uncle made him read chapters from the New Testament to him. The book he used was one he kept all his life.<sup>11</sup>

His attachment to the Word of God as the source of every evangelizing word is clearly evidenced in an article by Émilien Lamirande<sup>12</sup>. The Founder's instinctive reference to this Word is illustrated in two articles by Father Georges Consentino<sup>13</sup> and Father Sylvio Ducharme<sup>14</sup>, where they indicate the scriptural sources of our Constitutions and Rules.

— *The liturgy.* For the Founder, the liturgy was a privileged place to put his heart in contact with his Creator and Savior, and to gather the believers in living and splendid gestures of faith. “I hunger and thirst for these beautiful religious ceremonies”, he wrote in his diary, on March 8, 1859. In 1856, at the end of the ceremonies of Holy Week, he noted in his diary: “[...] these are beautiful days; a foretaste of Paradise”. Father Rambert makes the following observation: “[...] the simple, upright and exuberant piety of Bishop de Mazenod inclined him to have a great love of the pomp of religious ceremonies [...] Nothing gave him more joy than the public ceremonies and especially the general processions [...] where the whole city seemed to come together in a unanimous sentiment of faith and love to provide a procession for our Lord Jesus Christ”<sup>15</sup>. Nothing could give his Marseillan heart more consolation, nor make his love throb more fervently than to see the faithful assembled around our Savior. That is why he refused to allow the pontifical celebration of Pentecost to be canceled on the grounds that he was dying.<sup>16</sup>

— *Scapulars*. The Founder does not seem to have attributed much personal importance to scapulars as objects of veneration or devotion. It was rather as part of the habit of a family consecrated to Mary that he asked Rome to grant the Oblates two scapulars proper to them: the white scapular of the Immaculate Conception decreed at the Chapter of 1837 as a sign of consecration to Mary<sup>17</sup> and the blue scapular of the Immaculate Conception decreed at the Chapter of 1856, as emblems proper to those who preach the Virgin Mary.<sup>18</sup>

#### 5. DEVOTION TO THE MYSTERY OF THE COMMUNION OF THE SAINTS

The importance the Founder gave in his daily life to the mystery of the Communion of the Saints is a rather exceptional phenomenon. We can say that he habitually lived in the presence of the saints as his brothers and sisters who revealed to him various aspects of the heart of God. They found a place in his spirit where a theology was developing which was dear to his heart and which he himself acknowledged as being rather daring.<sup>19</sup>

Yet, his gaze on this mystery permeated his heart. After a ceremony celebrating the solemn jubilee of the Church in Spain, Bishop de Mazenod wrote this in his diary: "This joy was due to the great concourse of saints whose palpable presence it was impossible not to sense and to the happiness one experienced at being a part of this Catholic Church which held God as its Father and all redeemed men as brothers"<sup>20</sup>. This gives us a better understanding of his taste for liturgical prayer.<sup>21</sup>

Among the saints, the souls in purgatory held a very special place in the heart of the Founder.<sup>22</sup>

But perhaps the most moving aspect

of his devotion to the saints was manifested in the veneration he showed for their relics. This was not a case of sentimentality, but a genuine encounter with persons who were the friends of God, with brothers and sisters united with him in Christ<sup>23</sup>. This point of view enables us to understand better his being deeply moved when he found himself in the presence of the relics of Exuperius<sup>24</sup>, of Saint Serenus<sup>25</sup>, the former Bishop of Marseilles, of Bishop Gault<sup>26</sup>, who was a former Bishop of Marseilles as well, of Saint Lazarus, the alleged founder of Marseilles<sup>27</sup>. He was also very attached to the memory of deceased Oblates who showed signs of holiness.<sup>28</sup>

Another characteristic of his devotion to the saints was the attention he paid to their patronage. For him, patrons were very important, either as models, or as intercessors, or as protectors, always as friends cooperating with him in the service of the Kingdom, in his personal life as well as in his apostolic endeavors.

Firstly, there were his personal patrons: Saint Charles<sup>29</sup>, Saint Joseph<sup>30</sup>, and Saint Eugene<sup>31</sup>. All along his ascent to the priesthood, he called upon the saints of the Martyrology who specially represented each step to the priesthood<sup>32</sup>. For his Youth Congregation, he chose Saint Aloysius Gonzaga<sup>33</sup>. From the very inception of his Congregation of Missionaries, he entrusted it to Saint Vincent de Paul<sup>34</sup> and later on to Saint Alphonsus Liguori<sup>35</sup>, then to Saint Charles<sup>36</sup>, and to Saint Francis de Sales<sup>37</sup>. Moreover, he would call upon the assistance of Saint Leonard of Port Maurice to watch over the apostolic zeal of his Oblates<sup>38</sup>. Later on, in the daily litanies, he would introduce the saints whose lives were an inspiration for apostolic zeal: Saint Fidelis, Saint

Dominic, Saint Francis Xavier, Saint Philip Neri, Saint Joseph Calasanctius. In his very first letter, he had told Father Henry Tempier that their rule of life would be drawn from Saint Ignatius, Saint Charles, Saint Vincent de Paul and the Blessed Liguori.<sup>39</sup>

He was always attentive to the patrons of the Diocese of Marseilles: "Once he became the Bishop of Marseilles, Bishop de Mazenod considered himself as the official administrator of the interests and the glory of all the saints whose virtues and relics made up the century-old patrimony of his Church".<sup>40</sup>

As a missionary preacher, he always insisted on establishing a deep interior relationship with the patron of the parish where he was going to preach<sup>41</sup> and he asked the Oblates to do the same.

Finally, any occasion was a good occasion to call upon some saint – man or woman. Consequently, he felt particularly close to Saint Teresa because of the Carmelite convent the Oblates owned in Aix and because of the Carmelites who had died in this convent<sup>42</sup>. The dates of the signing of contracts and of setting up of a house were deemed important with reference to the saints whose feast was celebrated on those days<sup>43</sup>. The mere passing through Marseilles of the relics of St. Exuperius led him to spend hours in prayer in fraternal union with this saint.<sup>44</sup>

In all the foregoing, the most important reality and the most significant element to be retained was the Founder's extremely deep awareness of his family relationship with all the saints of heaven, the souls in purgatory, as well as with those persons whom he wished to lead to the Lord. He made very little distinction between the members of the Church Triumphant, Suffering or Militant which made up the Body of Christ,

if not in regard to the power of their intercession and protection. All of them were for him dear friends with whom he loved to communicate – whether it was with the maid servants gathered at the church of the Madeleine or with Saint Exuperius. The Communion of the Saints was not, first and foremost, a point of doctrine, but an everyday very living reality. That is why he called upon the saints of the Church Militant as well as the others for support in difficult situations; he spoke of all of them with the same feeling and affection.

## 6. CONCLUSION

At the end of this too brief look at the Founder's devotions, one is struck by the rather unusual balance between a lively sensitivity and a lucid faith, with no deviation toward superstition or toward a disembodied intellectuality. He appears as a light for an age where fear of popular religious emotion often tends to push people toward a misguided deprivation of all that is visible.

## III. DEVOTIONS IN THE OBLATE TRADITION

In general, we can say that drawn along by the current trend in the life of the Church the devotions lived by the Oblates in the Founder's lifetime have gradually lost their importance with the passing of time.

### 1. IN THE CONSTITUTIONS AND RULES

The Founder inserted into the text of the Constitutions and Rules only the three major devotions: to Christ the Savior, the Cross and to Mary Immaculate; the others stem only from customs in daily life and from the di-

rectories. After the Founder's passing, the Oblates held to this orientation each time they reworked our book of life.

## 2. IN THE GENERAL CHAPTERS

For their part, the General Chapters have allotted very little space to Oblate devotions in their official decrees. They limited themselves to promoting the editing and approving of various directories in which certain devotions were mentioned.

We could perhaps point out a few scattered cases. In 1873, the Chapter insisted on giving saints' names to our houses and to the places they were located, in accordance with a custom which harked back to the time of the Founder<sup>45</sup>. The same requirement would be repeated by several Chapters that followed: 1898, 1920, 1947.

The Chapter of 1887 made the decision to ask the Congregation of Rites to elevate the feast of Saint George to the rank of double major as a favor to the Oblates, but the report does not give the reason behind this devotion.

In 1893, the Chapter decided to relinquish the feast of Saint Lazarus because it was a local devotion specific to the diocese of Marseilles.

The 1879 Chapter expressed the desire to petition the Holy See to elevate the feast of Saint Marguerite Mary Alacoque to the solemnity of a double rank.

— *The Directory for Juniorates*. For a considerable length of time, the General Chapters stressed the drawing up of directories of formation for the juniorates, novitiates and scholasticates.<sup>46</sup>

In the directory prepared for the students in the juniorate, as drawn up by Father Alexander Soulerin and published in 1891, chapter VI lists the devotions which are especially recommended. After having made mention of

the major devotions toward Our Lord, the Blessed Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph, he added devotion to the guardian angels, the Archangels Michael, Gabriel and Raphael, as well as the patrons of youth: Saint Stanislas Kostka, Saint John Berchmans, with a preference for Saint Aloysius Gonzaga. These choices were not ordained by long-standing tradition, but because these were the devotions recommended by Rome.<sup>47</sup>

— *The Directory for Noviciates and Scholasticates*. From the years 1831-1835 onwards, there was a directory drawn up for noviciates and scholasticates in manuscript form; it remained in use until 1876 when Father Rambert touched up the text and published it through Mame.<sup>48</sup>

In the chapter on devotions in the manuscripts, great importance was attributed to the angels, just as had been done for the juniorates. The following devotions were added: devotion to "the Apostles, especially Saint Peter, Saint Paul and Saint John the Evangelist, all the founders of orders, the saints who distinguished themselves by their love for Jesus Christ: Saint Augustine, Saint Bernard, Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Francis de Sales, Saint Peter Alcantara, Saint Aloysius Gonzaga, Saint Stanislas Kostka, and among the holy women: Saint Mary Magdalene, Saint Teresa, Saint Catherine of Genoa, Saint Catherine of Siena, Saint Magdalene de Pazzi, etc."<sup>49</sup>. This directory asked the novices to consecrate each day of the week to a particular devotion by directing "their prayers, good works and ejaculatory prayers" to this end.<sup>50</sup>

But in Father Rambert's text, he limited himself to speaking about devotion to Our Lord (Holy Childhood, Passion, Eucharist, Sacred Heart), to Mary and to Joseph. He concluded his text with these words: "Such are the main

devotions that we feel limited to recommend as being more proper to the Oblates and more in conformity with the spirit of their vocation. We could list others of high quality and capable of producing much good for souls, but they would not have such a general application to our common needs [...] In this matter, it is better to leave each one free to follow his own special inclination after having consulted his spiritual director. The only things to be avoided are: 1) To take on too many devotions, for in that case, far from contributing to our spiritual growth, these devotions would set up obstacles by taking away freedom of spirit and peace of soul; 2) Never to despise any of those devotions approved by the Church. Since they find their source in the Holy Spirit, they are all worthy of our respect."<sup>51</sup>

Since the manuscripts of 1831-1835 were rarely cited until 1876 – especially by the Founder – and since in addition to that Father Rambert had a deep love of the Founder, would it be mistaken to assume that his interpretation of the recommended devotions was more in touch with Oblate tradition than what one finds in the manuscripts and even in the directories for juniorates published fifteen years later?

— *Oblate prayer books*. There were eight different Oblate prayer manuals: 1865, 1881, 1897, 1913, 1929, 1932, 1958 and 1986. Except for the very last one, all the editions retained the traditional devotions mentioned in this article. The most recent edition greatly modified this orientation by eliminating almost all the prayers other than those addressed to God, the Virgin Mary, Saint Joseph and the Holy Apostles. The only litanies retained were particular examen to keep in touch with the saints dearest to the heart of the Founder. In other instances, much more em-

phasis was placed on prayers, either from the Founder or from the present Missal.

### 3. IN THE CIRCULAR LETTERS OF THE SUPERIORS GENERAL.

The various Superiors General hardly spoke about the traditional Oblate devotions except for those dealing with the Sacred Heart and Mary Immaculate.

However, from the first anniversary of the Founder's death, they began to exhort the Oblates to build an ever stronger relationship, first of all with the Founder, and soon after with the Oblates who had left their mark in the Congregation because of their holiness. Naturally, there is no official mention of "devotion", but what it really consists in is this: to rely upon their intercession, to allow oneself to be influenced by their example, to draw inspiration from them for life and fidelity.<sup>52</sup> We can say that Father Leo Deschâtelets was the first great promoter of devotion to the Founder by various initiatives which cultivated an awareness in the whole Congregation in such a way that the beatification of the Founder appeared as the normal blossoming forth of Oblate piety rather than the beginning of a whole new devotion.

### CONCLUSION

How do we see ourselves today in regard to this tradition of Oblate devotions, without losing anything of the values it carries, but also without regressing to behavior that would not be authentic for contemporary spirituality?

It seems that the Founder gave us the key to this in his extremely powerful attachment to the Communion of the

Saints. Above and beyond this or that special devotion, he bore in his heart a deeply social faith which led him to live in total solidarity with all those the Father loved and Christ saved. Suffice it to bring to mind the text from his diary quoted above and written in the wake of the ceremony celebrating the jubilee of the church of Spain. "This joy was due to the great concourse of saints whose palpable presence it was impossible not to sense and to the happiness one experienced at being a part of this Catholic Church which held God as its Father and all redeemed men as brothers."<sup>53</sup>

It really seems that the spiritual orientations presently being raised up by the Spirit in the ecclesial community tend to draw us out of our too individualistic faith perspective to lead us to live in fraternal communion with humanity as a whole in our various encounters with God.

We find these orientations already very vigorous and alive in our Founder to a degree a little out of the ordinary for his times. For us, in turn, to assume these orientations in our lives is to plumb the depths of our Oblate tradition. And we can say that our most recent prayer manual supports this orientation by replacing several prayers addressed to individual saints by prayers which put us in touch with various categories of people seeking God or who have found him: such as ecclesial communities, the laity, priests, missionaries, Oblates living and death.

ROGER GAUTHIER

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> RAMBERT II, p. 650.

<sup>2</sup> To obtain an overall idea see RAMBERT I, p. 728-732, 749.

<sup>3</sup> See RAMBERT I, p. 63, 140, 349.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 428.

<sup>5</sup> See BAFFIE, Eugene, *Esprit et vertus du missionnaire des pauvres C.J. Eugène de Mazenod, évêque de Marseille fondateur de la Congrégation des missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, Delhomme et Briguet, Paris-Lyon, 1895, p. 219.

<sup>6</sup> See RAMBERT II, p. 345.

<sup>7</sup> See CHARBONNEAU, Herménégilde, "Aux origines de l'ordo oblat", in *Etudes oblates*, 20 (1961), p. 304.

<sup>8</sup> BAFFIE, Eugene, *op. cit.*, p. 217-221.

<sup>9</sup> Letter to Emmanuel Gaultier de Claubry, November 1805, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 14, no. 13, p. 25; REY I, p. 70, also in LAMIRANDE, Émilien, "L'annonce de la parole de Dieu selon Mgr de Mazenod", in *Etudes oblates*, 18 (1959), p. 113.

<sup>10</sup> "Sujets de méditations et instructions, no. 16", in LAMIRANDE, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

<sup>11</sup> RAMBERT I, p. 16.

<sup>12</sup> "L'annonce de la parole de Dieu selon Mgr de Mazenod", in *Etudes oblates*, 18 (1959), p. 105-126.

<sup>13</sup> COSENTINO, Georges, "La rédaction de nos Règles (1818-1825)", in *Etudes oblates*, 8 (1949), p. 286-287.

<sup>14</sup> "Essai sur les sources scripturaires de nos saintes Règles", in *Etudes oblates*, 4 (1945), p. 137-148.

<sup>15</sup> RAMBERT II, p. 447.

<sup>16</sup> See RAMBERT II, p. 704. The above indications could be supplemented by reading RAMBERT I, p. 362, 674; II, p. 417-419, 445-449, 630-634; LAMIRANDE, Émilien, "La mort et la résurrection du Christ et leur célébration liturgique", in *Etudes oblates*, 19 (1960), p. 4 ff.

<sup>17</sup> See DESCHÂTELETS, Leo, "Le scapulaire oblat", in *Etudes oblates*, 2 (1943), p. 79-82; *Missions*, 31 1904, p. 371.

<sup>18</sup> See COSENTINO, Georges, "Les directoires de la Congrégation", in *Etudes oblates*, 20 (1961), p. 275 ff.

<sup>19</sup> See *Diary*, July 6, 1846; RAMBERT II, p. 638-643.

<sup>20</sup> *Diary*, April 19, 1842, in RAMBERT II, p. 114. The same sentiments can be found in *ibidem*, p. 335-336; BAFFIE, Eugene, *op. cit.*, p. 214.

<sup>21</sup> See LAMIRANDE, Émilien, "La mort et la résurrection du Christ et leur célébration

liturgique”, in *Etudes oblates*, 19 (1960), p. 42 ff.

<sup>22</sup> See RAMBERT II, p. 432, 637-642.

<sup>23</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 439-440.

<sup>24</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 24.

<sup>25</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 53-56.

<sup>26</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 439-444.

<sup>27</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 527.

<sup>28</sup> BAFFIE, Eugene, *op. cit.*, p. 231-232.

<sup>29</sup> See RAMBERT I, p. 63, 150.

<sup>30</sup> See RAMBERT p. 576-578.

<sup>31</sup> See *Missions*, 12 (1874), p. 436; 17 (1879), p. 137.

<sup>32</sup> See BAFFIE, Eugène, *op. cit.*, p. 221.

<sup>33</sup> See RAMBERT I, p. 185, 763.

<sup>34</sup> See RAMBERT I, p. 323; MEUNIER, Ovila A., “Aux sources de notre spiritualité”, in *Etudes oblates*, I, (1942), p. 33.

<sup>35</sup> See RAMBERT I, p. 232, 498.

<sup>36</sup> See RAMBERT I, p. 241.

<sup>37</sup> See BAFFIE, Eugene, *op. cit.*, p. 221.

<sup>38</sup> See RAMBERT I, p. 272, 396; MEUNIER, Ovila A., *op. cit.*, p. 35.

<sup>39</sup> See RAMBERT I, p. 166.

<sup>40</sup> See BAFFIE, Eugene, *op. cit.*, p. 224 ff. On this topic, one could also read RAMBERT I, p. 554; II, p. 228-229, 335.

<sup>41</sup> See BAFFIE, Eugene, *op. cit.*, p. 223; RAMBERT I, p. 349.

<sup>42</sup> See RAMBERT I, p. 175, 184.

<sup>43</sup> See RAMBERT I, p. 554.

<sup>44</sup> See BAFFIE, Eugene, *op. cit.*, p. 228.

<sup>45</sup> See COSENTINO, Georges, *Nos Chapi*

*tres généraux*, éditions des Etudes oblates, Ottawa, 1957, p. 104, par. VIII.

<sup>46</sup> See COSENTINO, Georges, “Les directoires de la Congrégation”, in *Etudes oblates*, 20 (1961), p. 270-298.

<sup>47</sup> See *Directoire des juniorats, pour les élèves*, s. I, 1891, p. 81.

<sup>48</sup> See “Des dévotions propres aux membres de la Société” d’après l’ancien directoire des noviciats et scolasticats”, in *Etudes oblates*, 16 (1957), p. 263-279.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 277.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 278.

<sup>51</sup> *Directoire des noviciats et scolasticats de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, Tours, Mame et fils, 1876, p. 156.

<sup>52</sup> Circular letter no. 2, April 29, 1862 and no. 13 of November 21, 1863 of Father Joseph Fabre in *Circ. adm.*, I (1850-1885); no. 54 of October 5, 1893 of Father Louis Soullier in *Circ. adm.*, II (1886-1900); no. 69, of September 28, 1898 of Father Cassien Augier in *Circ. adm.*, II (1886-1900); no. 136 of May 3, 1926 of Bishop Augustine Donatenwill in *Circ. adm.*, IV (1922-1946); no. 167 of March 19, 1940 of Father Theodore Labouré in *Circ. adm.*, IV (1922-1946); no. 176 of August 15, 1947 and no. 191 of February 17, 1957 of Father Leo Deschâtelets in *Circ. adm.*, V (1947-1952).

<sup>53</sup> *Diary*, April 19, 1842, quoted in RAMBERT II, p. 114.

## DISCERNMENT

*Summary: I. The Founder's discernment with regard to himself: 1. A clear uncompromising view of himself; 2. His experience of the mercy of God; 3. Mission. II. The Founder's discernment in formation. III. The Founder's discernment with regard to human conduct: 1. The principle of realism; 2. A search for objective criteria; 3. The necessity of consulting. IV. The Founder's discernment in the affairs of his time. V. Discernment in the Constitutions and Rules of 1982: 1. Discernment, a school of apostolic life; 2. Discernment, a key for formation; 3. Discernment as wisdom in government.*

Because human existence is lived in an atmosphere of ambiguity, we are compelled to deal with discernment. The principle of action, the making of choices or what we call liberty is confused and tangled within us. It follows that, in its spontaneous expressions, human activity is generally disrupted by passions, envy, fear, the grasping for power, security and other inclinations which have an impact on the authenticity and the quality of one's ethics.

We must note here that the atmosphere of ambiguity in which human activity takes place only becomes understandable in the critical light of one's conscience judging itself. Daily conduct is often the victim of disguised activity in which the true, less glorious motives are dressed in motives of respectability, moral principles, indeed, noble ideals. The spectators are generally less dupes than the actors who present themselves thus, but that is another story.

The Pharisees are a good example of what has been said above. They clean the exterior of the cup, are careful about external conduct, follow the rules, but their lives are false and do not bear fruit because they operate in an atmosphere of ambiguity which is tolerated and which develops into a lie.

Jesus gave a good definition of discernment when he said: "The truth shall set you free"<sup>1</sup>. His relationship to the Pharisees, he who "could tell what a man had in him"<sup>2</sup>, consisted in offering them the truth; it was an unsurpassable pedagogy of discernment.

All spiritual authors have dealt with discernment of spirits. Saint Ignatius in his *Exercises* has presented the lion's share on this. "It can be said that discernment is the real goal of the *Spiritual Exercises* and the great contribution Ignatius made to Christian spirituality: It is a question of coming to a choice of an authentic response to the Word of God in every individual concrete life situation".<sup>3</sup>

Father de Mazenod never developed a theory of discernment, but he was always conscious of the ambiguity of human actions. He attempted to navigate these troubled waters while always keeping his course fixed on truth with regard to himself and the various situations in which he was involved. We will now attempt to follow him.

### I. THE FOUNDER'S DISCERNMENT WITH REGARD TO HIMSELF.

Discernment is the road which threads a path through the multiplicity

of internal divisions to lead to reconciliation with oneself and to inner peace.

Like everyone else, the Founder experienced in his relationship within himself certain tensions, dissatisfactions and inner disorders. The Founder's retreat notes especially take into account the enormous gap he felt between the spiritual ideal that he set for himself and the wretched interior condition in which he found himself as a result of the constant agitation imposed upon him by his missionary life. In this regard, it seems to me that the retreat he made at Bonneveine in the summer of 1816 represents an authentic experience of discernment in which the elements that were previously in tension found their resolution in harmony. In my opinion, it could provide us with a basic scheme through which we can get a reading of his discernment and interior reconciliation. It is worth our while to quote extensively from these notes: "I notice first that in the midst of my extreme distress – for I am seeing myself as I really am, namely, absolutely deprived of any virtue [...] I note, not without surprise, that I am not bothered by all that. I have a great trust in God's goodness [...] and I have a kind of hopeful assurance, that he will grant me the grace to improve, for one thing is sure, I am not worth much right now. [...] But I cannot cast off the mental attitude [...] that, as my desire is to win the glory of God and the salvation of souls he ransomed with his blood [...] that this good Master will not grant me some consideration [...] Is all this an illusion? Rashness? I have no idea. I am writing what comes to my mind [...]."<sup>74</sup>

This seems to have been a new experience for Father de Mazenod, hence the final remark. The novelty is "that in the midst of my extreme distress [...] I

am not bothered by all that". Previous to this, the awareness of his sins aroused remorse in him and drove him away from God. Now, the uncompromising clarity of who he is propels him towards the goodness of God. Moreover, if his missionary activity is a source of internal distraction, it does not separate him from God because it is a question of "the salvation of souls he ransomed with his blood".

It seems to me that the experience is made up of three elements: a clear, uncompromising view of himself, faith in the mercy of God, and mission. Indeed, this is not a case of three parallel elements juxtaposed, but of three points in the same movement. The discovery of his "wretchedness" (clear, uncompromising view of himself, self-knowledge) propels him towards the mercy of God, wherein lies the experience of reconciliation; mission expresses its fruitfulness and gratitude. Let us examine the three elements.

#### 1. A CLEAR, UNCOMPROMISING VIEW OF HIMSELF

Father de Mazenod really sees himself as he is. In 1813, he wrote: "There is always some self-seeking in everything I do"<sup>75</sup>. "[...] It is because I am wholly carnal, human, imperfect"<sup>76</sup>. Such expressions are not lacking. More interesting still is how the Founder goes about getting to know himself. Obviously, he uses the examination of conscience. He makes extensive use of it during his retreats – and he does it in writing – but on a daily basis as well: "twice a day; but three times would be better [...]."<sup>77</sup> He prepares himself for confession. In this same quote, he rebukes himself for not having examined himself with enough care: "The fault I am pinpointing here is that of not ex-

aming myself with enough care". He wants to go beyond appearances in his in-depth examination of his attitudes to discover what is not immediately obvious. In his retreat of May 1837, he twice comes back on the necessity "to probe myself and descend into my interior"<sup>8</sup>. "So it means descending into one's interior to purify it of every imperfection and remove all that could constitute an obstacle to the working of the Holy Spirit"<sup>9</sup>. The way he establishes a relationship between descent to his interior world, purification and the Holy Spirit is very interesting. As long as one remains on the level of conduct, ambiguity remains. Action must, therefore, leave behind the realm of the purely moral in order to submit oneself to the Holy Spirit.

In a somewhat enigmatic letter<sup>10</sup> (because we do not know its context), he acknowledges that one always sees things more clearly in regard to others. Then, he speaks of thoughts that one is reluctant to acknowledge and that tend to organize themselves to the point of forming a judgment upon which one acts. He seems to be alluding to spontaneous thoughts which are only a reflection of our self-centredness and which bring disaster in their wake if, without discernment, we permit them to be transformed into action. The Founder speaks of thoughts "which I would permit to become manifest"<sup>11</sup>. These spontaneous expressions give a strong impression of revealing a conscience acutely aware of the vagaries of our subjectivity.

## 2. THE EXPERIENCE OF GOD'S MERCY

During his retreat at Bonneveine, the Founder went to preach in Mazagues where he told the people "that one must approach God by the contempla-

tion of his kindnesses". This is a message he wished to apply to himself, allowing himself to be touched by "all the things God in his goodness has done for us..."<sup>12</sup>. In his retreat in preparation for his episcopal ordination, he tied in admirably well the contemplation of his wretchedness (clear, uncompromising view of himself) with God's mercy: "My good God! If you had not accustomed me to the traits of your infinite mercy, if already you had not inspired in my heart a gentle trust, there would be every reason to draw back with horror. But no, you are my Father [...] Everything you have done for me in the course of my life is too present to my memory [...] not to count on your infinite goodness[...]"<sup>13</sup>. It is fitting to emphasize the phrase "to count on". To count on God, to count on his Word, to find one's security in him. To count on God means to no longer rely upon oneself.

At the conclusion of his meditation on the ritual of ordination, he wrote: "How can I have got to the end of these lines [...] The Lord will have pity on me [...] I turn to him with the utmost confidence, for his is my help [...] I hope of his infinite goodness that having sown by an impulse of his mercy this seed in my soul, having thus begun the work he will deign to see it through to the end"<sup>14</sup>.

## 3. MISSION

During his retreat at Bonneveine, Eugene wrote: "God in his goodness knows that I need this trust to act; this it would seem is why he gives it to me"<sup>15</sup>. He quotes as well from his retreat at Amiens, before his ordination to the priesthood, in which he ties his awareness of personal sin in with his missionary response. His ministry is seen as a

means of redeeming himself, “the means of discounting a little my great sins”<sup>16</sup>. On a deeper level, he discovers that if until the present he could consider himself “a private person, bound to yearn for his own salvation”, from now on, “If I am not fervent and holy, the works the Lord has confided to me will feel the effect.”<sup>17</sup> The link between mission and holiness is established. In his retreat in preparation for episcopal ordination, the Founder brings to a close in this manner the consideration of his own poverty and God’s goodness toward him: “[...] to throw myself with total abandon into your paternal bosom, fully resolved to do [...] everything you demand of me [...] Too happy to devote the few days left me to spend on earth to do your holy will [...]”<sup>18</sup>. In this way, mission becomes a manifestation of his love, a response to the Father who loves us.

The retreat of 1837, at the moment when he was actually to take charge of the See of Marseilles, is focused on the link between holiness and mission. Nonetheless, we rediscover our three elements: clear uncompromising view of himself, mercy and mission all caught up in the same movement. “To you alone it belongs to give strength to my soul; you alone can renew in my depths the sacred fire of your love which must first enkindle fire in my heart, and then pour itself out by my ministry in the souls whom you want to confide to me”<sup>19</sup>. “I expect no less of your usual goodness, that mercy that my infidelities have never wearied and which inspires me even in this moment with so much trust. I shall without delay put out my hand to the work, for time is pressing”<sup>20</sup>.

From this radical experience, which unites the elements of truth with regard to himself, the mercy of God and mission, there came reconciliation and inte-

rior peace. It was in this way that the Founder experienced the road to freedom.

In the Letter to the Philippians, Saint Paul wrote: “may [your love for each other] increase more and more and never stop improving your knowledge and deepening your perception so that you can always recognize what is best”<sup>21</sup>. A reconciled heart is capable of true knowledge and a feel for discerning what is best. What superb expressions in our context! Now, let us see how that applied in the case of the Founder, in the rich diversity of everyday situations.

## II. THE FOUNDER’S DISCERNMENT IN FORMATION

The formation process begins with admission to novitiate. The importance of this event was evidently not lost on the Founder. Not satisfied with merely citing principles<sup>22</sup>, he showed his shrewd judgment with regard to the candidates. On October 2 and 3 of 1834, he wrote to Casimir Aubert concerning some postulants he had met at Calvaire: “I see no possibility of admitting the one who is sub-standard in intelligence. He did very badly in school. [...] It is some teacher in the town who pushed him through his studies in double quick time”. As for the other, “[he] has a crooked smile, a fastidiousness about his [personal appearance] [...] I don’t think he has the least idea about the religious virtues and it could well be has come for some ulterior motive”<sup>23</sup>. The letter shows that the Founder has capably questioned and checked out these two men and formed an opinion about them.

With regard to a priest novice, he wrote to Father Florent Vandenberghe, Master of Novices at Notre-Dame de

l'Osier: "I have difficulty believing in the sincerity of his effusions; it seems to me that there is a kind of affectation in everything he says. In a word, I did not fall victim to the kind of spell which he cast here [...]"<sup>24</sup> that is, in the Marseilles community.

On March 23, 1832, he wrote to Father Hippolyte Courtès: "Sound judgment is an indispensable quality, so much so that we have no right to overlook its absence in presenting candidates"<sup>25</sup>.

In a letter to Father Prosper Boissramé, Master of Novices in England, on June 25, 1858, he showed surprise that the intellectual level of the novices was mediocre. Even if virtue is preferable to innate ability, "this is most unfortunate"<sup>26</sup>. But more often than not, he recognized and showed enthusiasm about the candidates Providence sent us: "They are excellent candidates who both edify and delight us"<sup>27</sup>. He would even tell Father Richard: "Are you aware that in Brother Logegaray you have sent me another Saint Louis de Gonzaga?"<sup>28</sup>

His letters to the various Novice Masters are peppered with shrewd remarks, whether it was a case of administration of the novitiate or the personal growth of the candidates. For example, he gives a lengthy response about the admission of formerly married men, making appropriate distinctions for the different situations<sup>29</sup>. In the same vein, in 1834, he recommends that Father Casimir Aubert extend the novitiate of the "people who have experienced sexual weakness": "This is not a vice that dies by being put to sleep"<sup>30</sup>. One could make a whole collection of his pithy remarks which reveal solid good sense and a deep knowledge of the human heart. Shrewd insight, a healthy spiritual life, regard for the demands of the ministry, these were

the attitudes the Founder showed with regard to formation. It traced out a "virile, religious, but paternal formation", as he himself summed it up for Father Anthony Mouchette.<sup>31</sup>

### III. THE FOUNDER'S DISCERNMENT WITH REGARD TO HUMAN CONDUCT

Daily life is made up of a variety of unrecorded situations which call for decision making and choices. Differences in opinion create tensions which call for arbitration. The Founder's companions were young and untested, which meant that he was constantly being consulted – and it was something he valued – for all sorts of direction and advice. From this overall picture, there emerged a kind of existential wisdom whose characteristics could be described as follows:

1. An insistence on purity of intentions and unambiguous motivation.
2. A principle of realism: to give preference to concrete results, the logic of life experience, over all other considerations having to do with the ways or approaches in doing something.
3. A seeking of objective criteria.
4. Consultation, knowing how to seek advice.

An emphasis on purity of intentions and unambiguous motivation is certainly the key to the Founder's conduct.

On January 9, 1837, he wrote to Father Joseph Martin at Billens a long memorandum on Oblates who leave. He analyzed the cause of such defections. The first cause of these "criminal thoughts" is *individualism*: "It is because a person thinks he is someone great, that he imagines he has the means to success; it is because he has allowed himself to be enticed by exaggerated praise that he relies on himself and

wants to be more free to act in his way, to assert his talents, always under the pretext of working for God's glory"<sup>32</sup>. What a shrewd analysis! It has everything: an inflated idea of one's ego and one's abilities, a seeking of external approval, the birth of a plan of action and the will to be free to work out one's own agenda – and all of this under the guise of seeking the glory of God!

The text continues: "Someone who finds himself restricted, vexed by obedience, does everything possible to find a situation where he can develop himself and does not realize that this is a trap of self-love". And disorder sets in: "[...] that person will no longer abide by the superior's decision [...] [he] will want to consult outsiders [...] until he finds someone who agrees with him, and that is the one who is right; selfishness and the passionate desire to do one's own will drive a person to this extreme".

Two examples further illustrate this observation. In 1850, Father Nicolas wanted to found a second Oblate house at Limoges because he could no longer get along with his superior whom he "does not find to [his] liking" and he wished to choose his confreres "to go and live with a friend who seems to be the object of [his] affections as if one were a dyed-in-the-wool worldling". He says outright: "[...] there is no shadow of virtue in that, and there will be no blessing from God on projects conceived in similar vein"<sup>33</sup>.

His response to Father Suzanne who wanted to write books was based on the same argument: "My fear is lest self-love, self-esteem, scorn for others, and all that follows, insinuate themselves amongst you"<sup>34</sup>. The most terrible letter I have so far read is addressed to the very same person when he was still a scholastic, July 16, 1820.

In a letter to the Founder, he was putting on airs, but he wrote in this vein to a M. Coulin. M. Coulin showed the Founder this letter which became the object of this terrible letter: "[...] its style was ridiculous..."; and then, "in each line [...] one saw a pretentiousness of mind, a studied expression, an affected way of being picturesque so badly or so little dissimulated that reading it was disgusting. [...] but as for myself who looked further, who went to the principle and who plainly saw love of self, judge for yourself if I was pleased". In the meantime, a third letter arrived from the unfortunate Marius Suzanne: "your famous description of your journey to Saint-Cerf [...] It was as bad as it could possibly be in any literary style whatever; but what is really insufferable is this pretension of not wanting to let anyone believe that you are unaware of a term, an expression more suitable for the thing you wish to say. The result of this pitiful pettiness is that your letters are overloaded with erasures". And, height of stupidity, he used expressions of affection toward M. Coulin that "it is at the most what you could have said to Courtès or to me". As a result, the poor wretch has made himself appear completely ridiculous by showing his total lack of judgment, and especially is being deluded by "a detestable vice which hides all its forms but which must be unmasked and pursued" that is, self-love<sup>35</sup>. The Founder administered in a rough and ready way this dose of truth while his own heart was breaking to have to teach him such a lesson. Fortunately, Marius Suzanne accepted his treatment well. Here we have, I believe, an excellent example of discernment; because of this, I allowed myself to quote it at length.

The antidote to such a situation is purity of intention, that is, seeking the glory of God, the salvation of souls and the good of the Church. Quotes in this vein abound.

The practice of purity of intention leads to being “totally detached as to whatever obedience may call for”, he explained to Father John Baptist Honorat who had just been named novice master<sup>36</sup>. To Father Bellon who accepted his obedience as superior of Romans he wrote: “I like such abandonment to the will of God, such renouncement of any particular taste [...]”<sup>37</sup> Three years before when he was calling him back from England he warned him: “[...] I shall call in consequence upon the devotedness that we all owe to God and which hence precludes considerations of taste, inclination, health or life itself”<sup>38</sup>. Purity of intention brings forth zeal which creates the genuine missionary, the one who does not seek his own comfort, or his own interests<sup>39</sup>.

What he enjoined on his followers, the Founder practiced himself: “[...] I would rather see my hand wither than to write even a single syllable contrary to that end [the glory of God]”<sup>40</sup>. What better quotation could one find to bring this section to a conclusion.

### 1. THE PRINCIPLE OF REALISM

The Founder’s desire was to see things move forward, that missions be preached, Christians converted, that the Gospel spread ever more in the world. What was called for, then, was the use of effective means, even if they were simple, not to be finding out who was right and who was wrong, not to get entangled in rules of procedure, etc. That was his rule of thumb in knowing if writing books was called for or not; he wrote to Father Suzanne: “[...] a

good catechism, if it converts many souls, ought to be preferred to the most beautiful tome”<sup>41</sup>. There was no question of wanting to punish the young people who had been rowdy at the mission of Theys, but to “win their hearts” in such a way of drawing “towards you those who were more guilty than they”<sup>42</sup>. Zeal, yes, but well advised zeal. Consequently, in would not be suitable in Cévennes, dealing with a mixed population, to wish to convert the Protestants: “It would not take much to unleash a persecution whose consequences would be incalculable”<sup>43</sup>.

In Canada, in 1848, the Oblates had a disagreement with the Bishop of Bytown, Bishop Bruno Guigues, over a matter of money. The Founder urged them to seek an agreement. Since “you wish on both sides only the glory of God and the sanctification of souls. [...] Go forth together then and seek to attain this unique goal [...]”<sup>44</sup>. In 1826, during the mission at Digne, the question arose of taking up a collection to support some good work. The same principle of realism guided the Founder in this case. The Founder was not in favor of the collection because it would demand a lot of work, require a lot of time and, if the results were bad, “they are tempted to think [...] that we are collecting for our convent”<sup>45</sup>. Ground would thus be lost on all fronts.

It was this same realism that led him to choose preaching missions rather than the “worldly” preaching of the Lenten season and Advent. These preachers played at being stars, drew the glory down on themselves, whereas missions were addressed to the simple folk. It was easier to forget oneself and, as a result, to be an instrument of the grace of Jesus. In this way, the humble missionaries showed fruitfulness as “compared with the barren results of

most Lenten preachers". And here was the conclusion he drew: "Let us look always to what is useful, let us seek nothing but God's glory and the salvation of souls [...]"<sup>46</sup>. We find the same point of view in regard to a project for the jubilee at Aix preached during Lent of 1826: "All I desire is that they preach in a profitable manner, putting aside all self-love"<sup>47</sup>. He also wanted to see them give the catechism classes with "an hour glass on the table" and not "a sort of little sermon" because the people need to be taught<sup>48</sup>. Let them take advantage of this opportunity to reaffirm the Sodality for young people and assure its survival<sup>49</sup>. The end result did not seem to meet his expectations. "If, in the place of this parade, they had evangelized the poor abandoned souls, [...]"<sup>50</sup> he wrote with regret.

## 2. A SEARCH FOR OBJECTIVE CRITERIA

Upon the death of Father Victor Arnoux in 1828, the question arose as to whether, instead of giving his cross to someone else, it should rather be kept in the community as a memento of his virtues. But who "will be judge of the degree of heroism to which one must attain in order to be preferred [...] I for one will not make any such *discernment*. I see miracles only as a reason for an exception"<sup>51</sup>. Miracles! Now, there is an objective criteria, indisputable as a norm.

The word of the Pope is also an objective criterion. That becomes evident in the case of Lammenais: "[...] to renounce one's own opinions when they do not conform, I do not say to the decisions of the Holy See, but even to its viewpoint"<sup>52</sup>. There was debate as to whether or not one should officially pray for King Louis Philippe. Since the Pope was inclined to appeasement, the

Founder concluded that "it is no dishonour to modify one's opinion when the head of the Church gives his instructions"<sup>53</sup>.

The Oblate Rule is an objective criterion as well. In his correspondence with people from the outside, bishops for example, the Founder freely referred to the Rule in accepting or refusing this or that work, to ensure the honoring of a certain way of doing things, whether it was an annual retreat, the style of preaching: for example, the necessity of community, the character of Oblate preaching, the non-acceptance of Lenten preaching, of parishes or of minor seminaries.<sup>54</sup>

## 3. THE NECESSITY OF CONSULTING

Relying solely on one's own efforts, it is difficult to find one's way. Differing points of view abound, the information and the knowledge of the documentation that some have can complement that of others. Of necessity, then, one must seek advice.

The Founder knew how to seek advice. Whether it had to deal with the functioning of the Congregation, obediences, or the running of a diocese, he consulted other people. "I have been racking my brains to work out the appointments that have to be made. I discussed this a lot with Fathers Vincens and Santoni"<sup>55</sup>. He consulted Father Vincens "[...] to find out if I can risk giving an obedience to Father Piot. I gave up the idea when I heard what you had to say"<sup>56</sup>. There were some Oblates with whom he consulted freely, for example, Father Courtès. On May 17, 1831, he expressed regret that he did not have him present: "At this very moment I find myself in a real perplexity with regard to two individuals, and in things of this kind I do not like to act solely on my own judgment [...]"<sup>57</sup>.

The following quotation, taken from a letter to Father Casimir Aubert in the wake of abandoning the house at Penzance in England, could serve as an intermediary conclusion for us. After undergoing such a trial, he reflected with great serenity: "This calmness is the result first of my resignation to the will of God [...] then the serious and prolonged reflections which I have made myself and which likewise have occurred to the good sense of the two men whom I have called to my side to give me their advice. [...]" and who "it is really remarkable", reached the same conclusions<sup>58</sup>. There you have the three levels upon which discernment works: acceptance of the will of God which quenches our passions and bestows on us his Spirit; personal reflection which can, then, lead to a calm judgment, a judgment which is confirmed, deepened and clarified as a result of the advice of others.

The Founder required that people seek advice. The classical text in this area is most certainly his letter of January 10, 1843 to Father Honorat in Canada. Father Honorat "was ruling in independent fashion" and was building without rhyme or reason, caught up in his "monomania of the trowel"<sup>59</sup>, throwing money out the window. The Founder ordered him to hold "regular meetings" and to "deal with matters in a consultative manner". Very astutely he pointed out to him the benefits of this way of operating: "It is thus by giving others marks of confidence, by showing them deference, by knowing how to modify one's own ideas and to adopt those of others that one gains their sympathy"<sup>60</sup>. Moreover, each person has specific qualities others do not have; collaborative effort, where consultation has a part, make possible the enrichment of the whole: "Put everything then in common for the advantage of all"<sup>61</sup>.

This text gives the spirit of the practice of counsel. It is conducive to making a better judgment of the situation, creates relationships built on confidence, and allows the talents of all to become manifest. For example, that is why the Founder recommended it to Father Santoni, Novice Master. He told him to exercise caution in admitting novices; in this role, "Do not overlook the little warnings that are sometimes under one's nose"<sup>62</sup>. Even the worthy Father Tempier who had fallen into "a habitual independence" had his nose tweaked on occasion. Father de Mazenod wrote him, "[...] I [...] share with you so willingly all my thoughts, while being surprised [...] that [...] you have so much trouble sharing yours with me"<sup>63</sup>.

To take counsel is a necessary thing; and yet again, one must be discerning in choosing one's counselors. We have seen how Oblates in difficulties were seeking counselors who would tell them what they expected. The Founder wrote: "What do most men know of the duties of the religious soul and the value of the bonds contracted [...] with God?"<sup>64</sup>

During the cholera epidemic in Marseilles, an Oblate left his post on the advice of a doctor. The Founder knew how to make the distinctions called for: "Doctors are to be consulted only in order to ask them for the assistance of their skill in regard to the indispositions a person may have; but let us beware of listening to them when they advise something that is low, cowardice [...]"<sup>65</sup>

These texts teach us that one must not confuse counselors with accomplices, such as were the court prophets of the Old Testament. The practice of counsel is a function of discernment, driven by a search for truth. It is the fruit of a genuine friendship, as this last quotation admirably well affirms: "You know that a true friend can be

compared to a faithful mirror in which one can see oneself as one is; if it reflects some imperfection, [...] one is not annoyed with the mirror; on the contrary, one is thankful and relieved at having perceived it".<sup>66</sup>

#### IV. THE FOUNDER'S DISCERNMENT IN THE AFFAIRS OF HIS TIME

Jesus was approached on the question as to whether one should take sides with the occupying Roman power or the national independent army of his time. The first Christians showed themselves to be compliant citizens<sup>67</sup>, but they also considered themselves as foreigners and sojourners among the nations<sup>68</sup>. Society is a reality and each one must take his own stance. A theoretical neutrality is possible, but in practice we are always categorized. This is where *discernment* comes into play to run this course of hurdles made up of ideologies, compromises, partisan loyalties, resistance, party politics or personal choices.

The Founder lived in an age of radical upheaval. Consequently, one cannot avoid considering his discernment even in the social realm. I will, therefore, say a few words about the Lammenais affair, a suitable example for our purposes.

Jean Leflon treats the Lammenais affair at length<sup>69</sup>. We will limit ourselves to examining two letters to Father Tempier on this question.

Dated May 30, 1826, the first letter gives the reasons for which Father de Mazenod is not in favor of signing a petition bearing the signatures of 68 bishops condemning Lammenais' ultramontaniam. That is not surprising since he was in basic agreement with Lammenais<sup>70</sup>. What is interesting, however, is the line of argument he fol-

lowed. He judged such a show of force to be uncalled for on the part of the bishops. Such a noisy maneuver could lead people to believe that "they were justified in being suspicious of their [the bishops'] intentions".

More subtle still, he felt that "this declaration is a concession made to the liberal party that they fear and which will not cease to plot our downfall in spite of all such declarations which it mocks"<sup>71</sup>. He foresaw the opportunism of the liberal spirit and its profound antagonism for the Church. Today, we understand that the correct attitude to have in a liberal society is not the spirit of compromise, but of authentic identity: to be what one really is in a society which legitimately permits it and this is to its credit. Now, the Church was being tempted to make such a compromise. A letter of September 13, 1830 made reference to the mission crosses that were removed – probably to less visible locations – with the consent of the ecclesiastical authorities. Writing to Father Tempier, he said: "In my opinion, there is a greater scandal in the benevolent compromise [...] than in the profanation perpetrated by a horde of illdoers [...]" The conclusion showed an astuteness worthy of a second look. For the Founder, "it is possible that by dint of such illogic they may succeed in changing the accepted meaning of words [...] in that eventuality, I would wish that they leave God aside and not implicate him disrespectfully in all these human vagaries and vicissitudes"<sup>72</sup>. To refashion "God" according to the current fad is indeed one of the criticisms leveled against liberal theologians; had he seen this already in his time?

The October 26, 1830 letter indicated a break with the "school of M. de Lammenais". Monsignor Leflon summarized Lammenais' teachings in this

way: "In a world where liberalism was triumphing, Catholics had to speak out in favor of freedom [...] instead of demanding privileges [...] they would now have to stand on freedom alone if they were to regenerate the world and religion while bringing the work of Christ to fulfillment"<sup>73</sup>. Such theses seem rather appealing to us today. The Founder's criticism does not go to the essentials, but stopped at accidentals. Lammenais' thesis assumed that "Catholics are a power in France while not even having a party". Was, then, the power of the Church really on the agenda? And if it was the independence of the clergy that one was out to protect, was the best way of doing this to give up state support? Would they really be independent when they have no bread and no one would give them any? What especially distressed the Founder was "to see a man of his genius waste time writing newspaper articles" when he should have been completing "the works which Europe awaits with rightful impatience"<sup>74</sup>. We rediscover here the Founder's realism in top form, even if he had not grasped all the ramifications of the questions. That is what Leflon seems to say in the end: "It must be recognized in all justice that during the whole crisis, this man who was so opposed to liberalism, so touchy where doctrine was concerned [...] stayed clear of all party spirit and proved to be understanding, fraternal and conciliatory. [...] [He] so beautifully safeguarded charity as well as truth in difficult conditions [...]"<sup>75</sup>

## V. DISCERNMENT IN THE CONSTITUTIONS AND RULES OF 1982

The 1980 text contains eighteen references to discernment, nine in the Constitutions and nine in the Rules. When

the choice between temporary vows and promises was done away with, Rule 46 was eliminated as well. There remain, then, in the 1982 text, seventeen references to discernment. Six touch on formation, C51, 53, 55 and R 64, 67 [R 66f, 67c in CCRR 2000]; five deal with the exercise of government, C72, 81, 105, 111 and R 18; [C 73, 82, 125, 131 and R 26a in CCRR 2000] four deal with spiritual growth, C 26, 68 and R 20, 21 [R 33a, b in CCRR 2000]; three treat explicitly of the mission, R 6, 9, and 10 [R 7f, 9a, and 9b in CCRR 2000].

What is the object of discernment in the Constitutions and Rules? What is at stake in discerning? In the paragraphs that speak of formation, it is obviously a question of discerning the Oblate vocation (C 51), "what the Lord expects of them [the novices] (C 53), "the Lord's call" (C 55); the spiritual director helps "to discern God's action" (R 21) [R 33b in CCRR 2000]; in the face of new needs, they will be "discerning all the while the movement of the Spirit" (C 68). With regard to the laity, discernment bears on "their own talents and charisms" (R 6) [R 7f in CCRR 2000]. When it comes to obedience, it is also a question of discerning "the will of God" (C 26). In participation in the government of the Congregation, it is "as a body, therefore, we discern the Spirit's call" (C 72). In the General Chapters, "we discern God's will in the urgent needs of our times" (C 105) [C 125 in CCRR 2000]. The General Administration's task is to "help us discern our common objectives" (C 111) [C 131 in CCRR 2000].

In speaking of the ministry for justice, Rule 9 recommends "in each case, a serious discernment". "When they [prophetic voices] arise, they will be heard, tested, and supported" (R 10) [R 9b in CCRR 2000].

The Constitutions and Rules have few things to say on the manner of practicing discernment. One point, however, is clear: its link with community. Constitution 26 says it very explicitly: "Decisions which express this will are best reached *after community discernment* and prayer". Constitution 72 speaks to us about the spirit of government and says: "*As a body*, therefore, we discern the Spirit's call [...]" And Constitution 105 states: "*Together, in union with the Church*, [...] we discern God's will [...]"

In another context, community is the place which permits individuals to make a full scale exercise of discernment: Constitution 53 invites communities to welcome "those who wish to "come and see" [...] we will help them discern what the Lord expects of them". The Master of Novices enables the candidates to "discern the Lord's call" (C 55).

In addition to this major reference to community, the text gives a few other methodological directives for discernment. As we have seen, Constitution 26 mentions prayer. Constitution 105 speaks of the General Chapter which discerns "in union with the Church"; the same constitution asks us to "discern God's will in the urgent needs of our times"; Rule 9 asks for a discernment "in the light of ecclesiastical directives"; and Rule 21 speaks of the assistance of a spiritual director.

This first reading of the Constitutions and Rules is already very enlightening and reveals the richness of its content. We can now study their content more in depth in the following three brief paragraphs.

#### 1. DISCERNMENT, A SCHOOL OF APOSTOLIC LIFE

Constitution 1 tells us that "the call of Jesus Christ, heard within the Church

through people's need for salvation, draws us together". The need for salvation expresses itself differently according to time and cultures. We must, therefore, learn to grasp, interpret them and pray in order for them to produce missionary responses in us. "There is no ministry, however, which is foreign to us, provided we never lose sight of the Congregation's primary purpose: to evangelize the most abandoned" (R 2) [R 7b in CCRR 2000].

The nature of our charism as expressed in these texts naturally demands an exercise of discernment.

Constitution 68 paints a picture on a grand scale which embraces the work of God in the world, of his Word which transforms humanity to make of it the People of God. The Oblates are audaciously characterized as "instruments of the Word". There you have an unsurpassed theological and all-encompassing statement which could not be any broader. God's work is right now; it is not repeated; it is carried out. That is why Oblates must be "flexible and open, learning how to respond better to new needs". The means recommended by this same constitution is "discerning all the while the movement of the Spirit who renews the face of the earth".

This text obviously draws its inspiration from the theology of "signs of the times", that was so dear to the heart of the Second Vatican Council. The mission is not simply a repetition of tried formulae; it embraces inculturation, incarnation, creativity, in order to bestow on the unchanging deposit of faith a new relevance making it become nourishment and good news to contemporary humanity.

In this work of discernment, which is above all a work of purification and detachment from self in order to better

reflect the will of God, the role of community and prayer is basic (C 26). Rule 9 makes the astute observation concerning missionary initiatives linked with ministry for justice – and this is true of all initiatives – that following discernment, they “will receive their mission for this ministry from their Superiors”. The community takes ownership of the mission, authenticates it and guarantees its continuance.

The attitude which fosters the practice of discernment is described in Constitution 81 [C 82 in CCR 2000] which speaks of the qualities of superiors: “In humility and true obedience they will seek enlightenment from God and from their brothers’ counsel”. At the heart of discernment, there lies a poverty of spirit as it is expressed in the first of the Beatitudes. One must, then, avoid hardness of heart and the espousal of rigid ideologies. Among those brothers whose counsels bless us with God’s grace, the spiritual director (R 21) [R 33b in CCR 2000] has his specific role to play. The “exercises” listed in Constitution 33 provide a living context conducive to the practice of discernment. In the context of discernment, examination of conscience holds a very special place.

## 2. DISCERNMENT, A KEY FOR FORMATION

Formation works hand in hand with life. The world of chemistry is a world of repetition, governed by unchanging, static laws. Chemical reactions can be predicted and reproduced. Nothing like this exists in formation. Each person is unique and in the process of development. The educator works with this changing and unrecorded phenomenon. The contemporary mentality is more aware of this. That is why Constitution

51 speaks of journeying with people in their integral development, in their spiritual journey and the progressive discernment of their vocation.

Formation is definitely an art. Rule 35 requires of educators “sound judgment, an understanding of persons, a community spirit and apostolic zeal”. That is certainly a cluster of qualities that would enable them to be good spiritual directors. At the heart of direction of the conscience lies the practice of discernment. Discernment should enable each one to acquire genuine and accurate self-knowledge. The formation community is called to be the milieu in which this surfaces. Constitution 48 says: We are “[...] supporting one another in a healing and empowering way. Together, we create an atmosphere of freedom and mutual trust in which we call each other to an ever deeper commitment”.

## 3. DISCERNMENT AS WISDOM IN GOVERNMENT

Oddly, the question of discernment emerges frequently in the context of government. Constitution 72 mentions it in relation to the spirit of government. It is found among the qualities required for being a superior (C 81). It lies at the heart of the work of the General Chapter (C 105) and of the General Administration (C 111).

For my part, I will stress the link established by Constitution 72 and Rule 18 between discernment and consensus. I see here an interesting political philosophy.

Indeed, democracy barely escapes being arbitrary when its decisions are enforced on the basis of a slim majority. Among ourselves, we try to achieve something better. “As a body, therefore, we discern the Spirit’s call and seek to

achieve consensus in important matters [...]” At the basis of this linking of the words discernment and consensus, there is the certitude that the call of the Spirit is one and unique. The principle of consensus is rooted in the fact that there is *one single* call of the Spirit. From this point on, any problem rests in perception, acceptance and the uncovering of this unique call. This is where discernment comes into play. If acceptance leaves something to be desired, it is because its vital energies are being siphoned off by elements of passion or fear which cloud the vision. The work of communitarian discernment has, then, as its goal to purify the senses so that they provide access to the greatest possible fidelity to the call of the Spirit, the perception of reality, to the analysis of the present reality. This is a process conducted in community. The community as such must also accept to undergo this work of purification and conversion in order to reflect, as in a polished mirror, the call of the Spirit, perceived in the challenges and the concrete needs of a given moment in the life of the community.

So it happens that consensus is possible and that it arrives as a ripe fruit, the product of the process of discernment.

Rule 18 states this same philosophy as being valid on the level of the local community. Such a process seeking consensus is reserved for “major decisions and in matters concerning the life and mission of the whole community”. It is important, then, to know how to distinguish the essential from the accidental. More and more, communities are taking on community projects. That is an area which is worthy of being approached in this fashion, that is, through a process of discernment which has consensus as its goal.

We are probably only at the begin-

ning in the area of discernment. In the years to come, it would be important to collect the lived experiences in the Congregation to define more sharply through them the stimulating insights we find in the Constitutions and Rules.

JEAN-PIERRE CALOZ

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> John 8:32.

<sup>2</sup> John 2:25.

<sup>3</sup> FUTRELL, J.C., “Le discernement spirituel”, in *Foi vivante*, no. 341, p. 16

<sup>4</sup> In *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 15, no. 139, p. 130.

<sup>5</sup> Retreat notes, December 1813, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 15, no. 121, p. 58.

<sup>6</sup> Annual retreat at Bonneveine, July-August 1816, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 15, no. 139, p. 132.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 135.

<sup>8</sup> In *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 15, no. 185, p. 237.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 238.

<sup>10</sup> Letter to Father Marius Suzanne, May 9, 1827, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 7, no. 270, p. 133.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>12</sup> In *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 15, no. 139, p. 132.

<sup>13</sup> In *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 15, no. 166, p. 201.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 207.

<sup>15</sup> In *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 15, no. 139, p. 130.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 132.

<sup>18</sup> In *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 15, no. 166, p. 201.

<sup>19</sup> In *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 15, no. 185, p. 237.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 238.

<sup>21</sup> Philippians 1:9-10.

<sup>22</sup> See letter to Father Hippolyte Courtès, October 2 and 3, 1843, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 8, no. 486, p. 126.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, no. 487, p. 128.

<sup>24</sup> Letter of March 10, 1853, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 11, no. 1140, p. 125.

<sup>25</sup> Letter of March 23, 1832, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 8, no. 418, p. 55.

<sup>26</sup> Letter of June 25, 1858, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 3, no. 86, p. 142.

<sup>27</sup> Letter to Father Gustave Richard, August 3, 1851, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 11, no. 1072, p. 46.

<sup>28</sup> Letter of September 15, 1851, *ibidem*, no. 1083, p. 56.

<sup>29</sup> Letter of June 25, 1858, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 3, no. 86, p. 142-143.

<sup>30</sup> Letter of October 2 and 3, 1834, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 8, no. 487, p. 129.

<sup>31</sup> Letter of July 9, 1853, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 11, no. 1160, p. 147.

<sup>32</sup> In *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 9, no. 600, p. 6.

<sup>33</sup> Letter of March 3, 1850, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 11, no. 1037, p. 5-6.

<sup>34</sup> Letter of October 5, 1827, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 7, no. 285, p. 144.

<sup>35</sup> Letter of July 16, 1820, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 51, p. 67-68.

<sup>36</sup> Letter of May 4, 1828, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 7, no. 299, p. 155.

<sup>37</sup> Letter of August 20, 1853, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 3, no. 65, p. 102.

<sup>38</sup> Letter of April 21, 1850, *ibidem*, no. 38, p. 53.

<sup>39</sup> Letter to the Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, December 3, 1858, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 5, no. 62, p. 126.

<sup>40</sup> Letter to Bishop Barnabo, October 8, 1849, *ibidem*, no. 11, p. 33.

<sup>41</sup> Letter of October 5, 1827, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 7, no. 285, p. 144.

<sup>42</sup> Letter to Father Guigues, February 8, 1837, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 9, no. 605, p. 14.

<sup>43</sup> Letter to Father Mille, January 15, 1835, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 8, no. 501, p. 142.

<sup>44</sup> Letter to the members of the provincial council of Canada, November 1, 1848, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 1, no. 104, p. 205.

<sup>45</sup> Letter to Fathers Pierre-Nolasque Mye, James Jeancard and Hippolytus Guibert, November 21, 1826, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 7, no. 259, p. 123.

<sup>46</sup> Letter to Father Marc de L'Hermitte, January 10, 1852, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol.

11, no. 1096, p. 71; see also letter to Father Charles Baret, August 16, 1853, *ibidem*, no. 1170, p. 161.

<sup>47</sup> Letter to Father Tempier, March 30, 1826, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 7, no. 233, p. 73.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 74.

<sup>49</sup> Letter to Father Tempier, April 9, 1826, *ibidem*, no. 235, p. 80.

<sup>50</sup> Letter to Father Courtès, July 22, 1826, *ibidem*, no. 250, p. 115.

<sup>51</sup> Letter to Father Courtès, March 8, 1830, *ibidem*, no. 343, p. 196.

<sup>52</sup> Letter to Father Mille, February 18, 1832, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 8, no. 416, p. 54; see also letter to the Fathers and Brothers of Billens, September 11, 1832, *ibidem*, no. 429, p. 67-68.

<sup>53</sup> Letter to Father Tempier, October 28, 1830, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 7, no. 369, p. 222.

<sup>54</sup> Letter to Bishop Buissas, Bishop of Limoges, October 7, 1847, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 13, no. 115, p. 141; Letter to M. Merguet, vicar general of Nancy, October 21, 1847, *ibidem*, no. 117, p. 142; letters to Bishop Buissas, October 24, 1847, *ibidem*, no. 118, p. 143 and February 20, 1848, no. 119, p. 144; letter to Cardinal Dupont, Archbishop of Bourges, May 3, 1854, *ibidem*, no. 134, p. 156.

<sup>55</sup> Letter to Father Tempier, May 31, 1850, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 11, no. 1045, p. 14.

<sup>56</sup> Letter of April 12, 1850, *ibidem*, no. 1040, p. 9.

<sup>57</sup> In *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 8, no. 391, p. 25.

<sup>58</sup> Letter of December 6, 1850, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 3, no. 45, p. 65.

<sup>59</sup> Letter of November 26, 1843, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 1, no. 28, p. 66.

<sup>60</sup> Letter of January 10, 1843, *ibidem*, no. 14, p. 29-32.

<sup>61</sup> Letter of January 17, 1843, *ibidem*, no. 15a, p. 34.

<sup>62</sup> Letter of March 27, 1850, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 11, no. 1038, p. 7.

<sup>63</sup> Letter of October 6, 1829, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 7, no. 338, p. 191-192.

<sup>64</sup> Letter to Father Alexandre Chainé, July 13, 1852, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 11, no. 1109, p. 90-91.

<sup>65</sup> Letter to Father Courtès, July 30, 1854, *ibidem*, no. 1228, p. 222.

<sup>66</sup> Letter to Father Honorat, January 10, 1843, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 1, no. 14, p. 32.

<sup>67</sup> See Romans 13:1.

<sup>68</sup> See 1 Peter 2:11; also Hebrews 13:14.

<sup>69</sup> LEFLON, II, chapter 10, p. 397-428.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 399.

<sup>71</sup> Letter to Father Tempier, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 7, no. 246, p. 108.

<sup>72</sup> In *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 7, no. 363, p. 215.

<sup>73</sup> LEFLON, II, p. 403.

<sup>74</sup> In *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 7, no. 368, p. 219.

<sup>75</sup> LEFLON, II, p. 427-428.

## ENDS OF THE CONGREGATION

*Summary: I. The ends of the Congregation as expressed by the Founder. 1. General end; 2. The main specific end; 3. Secondary ends specific to the Congregation: a. Making up for the Religious Orders that have disappeared; b. Recitation of the Divine Office in common; c. Reform of the clergy; d. Mary Immaculate. II. The ends of the Congregation in the 1982 Constitutions and Rules. III. The ends of the Congregation and Oblate spirituality.*

In the present-day organization of religious Congregations, one inevitably finds the presence of a twofold end: one that is general or common to all Congregations and the other specific or peculiar to each institute. After a long process in treating of this issue, the Holy See gave a clear formulation to this requirement, especially in the *Norms of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars* of June 28, 1901.

The general or common end consists in a striving for Christian perfection through the practice of the evangelical counsels. The ascetics of the first Christian centuries, and then the monks, had no other goal in view other than to follow Christ in a radical way. Very early on, however, the monks, the Benedictines in particular, carried out ministry both inside and outside the monastery. But this same ministry, even if it became an ordinary element of life, still remained something accidental and secondary with regard to monastic life.

The Canons Regular of the 10th to the 12th centuries displayed a tendency toward what we today call a specific end. As their name indicated, they were ecclesiastics bound to the service of a specific church, but they became "regulars" because they decided to live according to a rule of monastic life. For Saint Norbert, for example, personal sanctification was to manifest itself externally in preaching and parish minis-

try. This always remained a secondary consideration, while liturgical prayer and the Divine Office remained their principal duty. The Mendicant Orders continued on in the same direction with a more specific determination of their own particular end.

In the 16th century the Clerics Regular appeared. Together with the religious life they set for themselves an eminently active goal to the point that one could say that they launched a new kind of religious life. It is in the Rule of Saint Ignatius that we see the appearance of a clear formulation of the two ends: personal sanctification and the apostolate. This Rule exercised a great influence on the organization of religious Congregations founded from that time on, especially during the 19th and 20th centuries. The latter came into existence with the specific goal of putting themselves at the service of the Church. They often started with a simple coming together of people who were leading a kind of evangelical life, but not bound by solemn vows. They followed a way of life of milder discipline, or at least very different from the life of the monks – a lifestyle which was much more directed toward the apostolate in all its forms or towards works of mercy.

According to a 1964 study conducted on a broad spectrum of constitutions, most of the respondents considered that the apostolate was all that

much more fruitful to the extent that the members led holy lives, that is, that the general end is directed toward the specific end. For others, the works were presented as a means of attaining perfection.<sup>1</sup>

## I. THE ENDS OF THE CONGREGATION AS EXPRESSED BY THE FOUNDER

From the inception of the 1818 Rule and those of 1825-1826 (1827 edition), Father de Mazenod specified the general end of the Institute he had just founded: "The end of the Institute known as the Missionaries of Provence is first of all to form an association of secular priests who live together and who strive to imitate the virtues and the example of our Savior Jesus Christ, mainly working at preaching the Divine Word to the poor" (Article 1). Article 2 gave an initial explanation with regard to this main specific end.

A number of commentaries have been written on these articles (cf. the bibliography). Here is a summary of the main ones.

### 1. THE GENERAL END

a) The first two articles of the 1818 Rule were drawn almost verbatim from the Redemptorist Rule (1791 edition). In the Redemptorist Rule, these articles were part of the preamble. Father de Mazenod brought them into the main part of the Rule to clearly stress that it is a question of constituent conditions.

b) Even if the Missionaries of Provence were secular priests, the first article proposes to them the general end of Religious Congregations, without however speaking of the evangelical counsels. Saint Alphonsus, followed by the

Founder, stresses in this general end of perfection two special points: a group of secular priests who *live together* and who strive to *imitate the virtues and the example of our Savior Jesus Christ*. Saint Alphonsus had written *Redeemer*, Father de Mazenod used the word *Savior*. According to his explanations, we are dealing here with the same reality: "We must say *Christe Salvator*. That is the aspect under which we ought to contemplate our divine Master. Our particular vocation is such that we are associated in a special manner with the redemption of men".<sup>2</sup> In both cases, Jesus Christ is seen especially through the aspect of his love which became mercy and zeal for the salvation of men.

If the Founder copied Saint Alphonsus in this way, it was because he had found in this text, approved by the Church, an adequate expression of his past experience and of his plans. Eugene knew and loved Jesus Christ from the time of his childhood and in a special way in Venice, but he had, so to speak, a personal experience of Jesus on Good Friday, an almost palpable and intense experience of the goodness and mercy of Christ the Savior for him personally. As a result, he decided to change his life and to become a priest. His life would remain marked: to love Christ, to imitate, to make him known, "to employ all the means to extend the empire of the Savior", such was his ideal.

As a young priest in Aix he saw an immense amount of good that needed doing. But how could he succeed single-handedly? Consequently, he sought some co-workers. He understood that an effective apostolic activity had to flow from a community which was indeed united and indeed fervent. Christ the Savior and the community appear simultaneously from the very first article

of the Rule like two pillars of Oblate life as willed by the Founder; his sons would always see these as two important elements of the charism of the Congregation.

c) The Latin text of the 1825-1826 Rule made two changes of some importance in the first article. The expression "secular priests who live together" became "secular priests gathered in community and living together as brothers". Father de Mazenod wanted to see a community where fraternal charity reigned. He would often write that it was a case of one of the distinguishing features of the Congregation he had founded. The second change was perhaps not wittingly done and could have been made by the translators. In the 1818 text, the general end of religious life precedes the specific end. Priests strive to imitate Jesus Christ mainly by working at preaching the Word of God to the poor. The apostolate was presented as a means, a way of imitating Jesus Christ. In 1825-1826 when it was accepted that they should live according to the evangelical counsels, strangely enough the emphasis was not placed on religious life, but rather on the specific end: they would "devote themselves, above all things, to the evangelization of the poor, while diligently imitating the virtues and example of our Saviour Jesus Christ". Religious life became a way of living more perfectly in order to more successfully evangelize. In this way, as we have seen, our Congregation took its place among the ranks of the majority of the Religious Congregations whose general end is directed toward the specific end, that is, as a confirmation of the striving for perfection to achieve a more effective apostolate.

d) The Latin text of 1825-1826 has two other seemingly apparent surprises

in store for us. When the Congregation was approved by Rome as a Religious Institute and the Rule contained a chapter on the vows, the Founder still spoke in the first article of secular priests and did not mention the evangelical counsels. The addition "bound by the vows of religion" had been forgotten and was only added in 1850 at the time of the first revision of the Rule. However, the expression "secular priests" remained unchanged – and that for a whole century. At the time of the 1926 revision, the word "secular" was suppressed because the Code of Canon Law of 1917 had finally officially recognized the genuine religious character of Congregations with simple vows, putting them on the same level as the Orders with solemn vows as far as the essence of the religious life was concerned. So it was that the members of Religious Congregations were no longer "secular priests bound by the vows of religion", but authentic religious. Nevertheless, the expression "priests bound by vows" still remained an unfortunate formulation since the Congregation had a large number of brothers. We had to wait until the 1928 edition of the Rule to find the brothers mentioned in the chapter on the ends of the Congregation, in article 9.

## 2. THE MAIN SPECIFIC END

In the 1818 Rule, the main end specific to the Congregation was set forth in a concise and clear manner: "mainly working at preaching the Word of God to the poor". The Latin text of 1825-1826 used rather the expression "to evangelize the poor". In 1818, it was followed in article 2 by this explanation: "Hence the members of this Congregation, under the authority of the Ordinaries to whom they will always

remain subject, will devote themselves to providing spiritual assistance for the poor people scattered over the rural districts, and for the inhabitants of the small rural villages deprived of spiritual help. They will provide for these needs by means of missions, catechetical instructions, retreats or other spiritual exercises”.

The Latin text of the 1825-1826 Rule embellished the last phrase of the article and put retreats ahead of catechetical instructions: “They will break the heavenly bread of the Word by missions, retreats, catechetical instructions or other spiritual exercises”. Missions, catechetical instructions, etc., are the means, the works to attain the end. The first part of the Rule then goes on to clarify these means. It is divided into two chapters, chapters two and three. The longer chapter, chapter two, is made up of four hundred and ten lines of printed text (Duval edition) and gives a brief treatment of parish missions, characterized as “one of the main ends”. The third chapter consisting of two hundred and sixty lines suggests other means or “exercises”: preaching, confession, direction of youth, prisons, ministry to the dying, Divine Office, public ceremonies in the church.

Here again many considerations could be offered. Here are the main ones:

a) Saint Francis de Sales wrote to Madame Brulart on July 20, 1607: “Do not try to do everything, but a few things only, and no doubt you will do a lot”. Father de Mazenod manifested a realism and a rather extraordinary instinct for what was appropriate by giving his Institute only one very well defined main goal: to proclaim the Word of God to the poor of Provence, and he proposed the missions to the people as the best means of achieving this.

This is not a case of narrow-mindedness. Eugene was well aware of the evils afflicting the Church and especially in the Preface was able to express in words of fire all the charity and zeal that burned in his heart. “All the means in our power are to be employed to extend the empire of Christ [...]”, “the above-mentioned priests while devoting themselves to all the holy works which priestly charity can devise [...]”; “having laid this foundation [of virtues], all the subjects of the Institute will without holding anything back dedicate themselves to doing the good that obedience may prescribe”, (paragraph on preaching); “they are called to be the cooperators of the Savior, the co-redeemers of the human race; and notwithstanding the fact that in view of their small numbers at present and the most pressing needs of the people who surround them, they are compelled for the moment to limit their zeal to the poor people of our rural areas and so on, in their holy desires, their ambition should encompass the immense expanse of the whole wide world” (*Nota bene* of 1818).

The Founder’s realism and instinct for what was appropriate stands out all the more clearly since after the Revolution everything in the Church of France had to be rebuilt from scratch. Carried by their zeal, some churchmen founded a number of Congregations for priests, brothers and sisters and set out to respond to all the needs with a wide variety of ends. Examples of this were the Abbés de La Mennais in Brittany, Chaminade and Noailles in Bordeaux, Colin in Lyon, Moreau in Mans, etc. Father de Mazenod began exclusively with priests to evangelize the poor of Provence especially by means of missions. Consequently, it was a case of a community of priests dedicated to one single endeavor in order to work more

effectively and in depth in one single region of France.

b) It has often been written as the Founder did in chapter two of the Rule, for example, that missions were “one of the main ends of the Institute”. End is taken here in a broad, undefined sense. Missions were only the specially favored means of achieving the end specific to the Congregation, that is the evangelization of the poor. Father de Mazenod bore in mind the importance of parish missions throughout his life. He himself and his sons had, however, well understood that it was the question of a means. At the time when the government of the July Revolution forbade the preaching of missions in 1830, no Oblate thought that the Congregation had lost its reason to exist. It was on this occasion that the Founder spoke of parishes, and the General Chapter of 1831, especially at the urging of Father Hippolyte Guibert, made the decision to send some members of the Society to foreign missions as soon as a favorable occasion would present itself. As we know, the occasion presented itself in 1841. However, this did not make its way into the first chapter of the Rules until the 1910 edition.

c) In the third chapter of the 1818 Rule, Father de Mazenod suggests several other means for evangelization, means he calls “exercises”. He lists seven, most of them related to missions. One has the impression that he wanted to venture out only on ground that was very familiar and solid because the seven exercises he set forth were precisely those he lived from the time of his return to Aix in 1812. He *preached*, *heard confessions* in various places, including the major seminary, successfully *directed youth*, cared for *prisoners* and often of the *dying*; he *recited the Divine Office* with Brother Maur and

conducted *public ceremonies* in the church of the Mission.

d) With efficiency in mind so that his subjects might not be distracted from their main objective, the Founder, following Saint Alphonsus, copied articles 15 and 17 of the second chapter in which he forbade the kind of work that would distract them from the main objective of the Society. As a result, he stated that the missionaries “would not take on the direction of seminaries”, “they will not be directors for religious women”, “they will not accept any pastoral charges, nor will they preach Lenten series”. According to our Founder’s way of thinking, this was valid especially for the beginning, “in view of the fact that they were few in number”. Very early on exceptions had to be made and they were required to go beyond the confines of Provence. In addition, they had to expand the list of means of evangelization to enable the fathers to work for the salvation of souls even if they were not gifted with the strength to preach, or yet again to respond to the urgent needs of the bishops who allowed them to found a centre for preaching provided that they would accept some other work, etc. So it was, for example, that already in 1819, Father Tempier was appointed to help out in the parish of Notre-Dame du Laus; that in 1823, Fathers de Mazenod and Tempier accepted the posts of Vicars General of Marseilles, that in 1827 the Congregation took on the direction of the major seminary of Marseilles. During his lifetime, the Founder also accepted a number of other works in spite of the Constitutions.<sup>3</sup>

### 3. SECONDARY ENDS SPECIFIC TO THE CONGREGATION

In the first chapter of the 1818 Rule, two articles (sixteen lines) deal with the

main end, taken almost verbatim from the Rule of the Redemptorists. Two paragraphs of three articles each follow to illustrate two other ends: making up for the Orders which disappeared during the Revolution (twenty-five lines) and the reform of the clergy (twenty-two lines).

In this first chapter, we see no apparent hierarchical arrangement of these three ends. The first article does indeed begin with these words: "The end of the Institute [...] is first of all", but this "first of all" is balanced off only by the word "also": "The end of this association is also to make up for [...]", and at the beginning of the paragraph on the reform of the clergy the expression: "a no less important end of their Institute which they will strive to attain with as much zeal as they address to the principal end is that of reforming the clergy [...]". The words "main end" which appear in the third paragraph also clearly apply to the preaching of the Word of God especially in the missions. However, the second chapter begins with these words: "Since the missions are one of the main ends", and this leads one to assume that making up for Religious Orders was viewed by the Founder as a main end. Whatever the case may be, these two ends considered traditionally as secondary present many problems. The fact that the two articles on preaching the Word of God come from the Rule of the Redemptorists and that, on the other hand, the two other ends had not been taken from other Rules, one could believe that they enjoy a particular importance in that we are dealing with more personal apostolic projects and problems and these would therefore all the more make up part of the charism of the Founder. On the other hand, when one is well acquainted with the correspondence of the Foun-

der, we know that he spoke much less of these two ends rather than the first and that he, himself, together with the Oblates of his time and after him, had much less of an influence in this area than in that of the missions.

*a) Making up for the Religious Orders that have disappeared*

First of all, let us reread the text of the 1818 Rule as translated literally in the 1827 edition and make some brief reflections on them.

"Article 1. The end of this association is also, as much as possible, to make up for the absence and loss of fine institutions which have disappeared since the Revolution and which have left a terrible gap of which religion is becoming daily more aware".

"Article 2. That is why they will strive to reproduce in their persons the piety and fervor of the Religious Orders destroyed in France by the Revolution. Let them strive to become their successors in virtue just as they succeed to their ministry and to the most holy practices of their regular life such as the living of the evangelical counsels, love of solitude, a disregard for the honors of the world, remaining aloof from dissipation, the abhorrence of riches, the practice of mortification, public recitation of the Divine Office in common, ministry to the sick and so on".

"Article 3. Once again, that is why the members of this Society engage as well in instructing youth about their religious duties in order to turn them away from vice and dissipation and to render them fit to fulfill fittingly the obligations that religion and society can legitimately expect of them in the various social positions they are destined to fill".

Father de Mazenod did not assign the Oblates the duty of re-establishing

the Religious Orders. He asked them to “reproduce in themselves” the piety, fervor and virtues of these Orders and to be their successors in some of their works.

It has been pointed out that this secondary end is not all that distinct from the common, main end<sup>4</sup>. Indeed, in the first part of article 2, the verbs are in the future tense and emphasize the demands of the common end to strive toward perfection, exercising as effectively as possible the discipline, “the piety and fervor of the Religious Orders which had been destroyed...”. Article 3 speaks of evangelization of the dying and youth.

However, it really seems that one can speak of a secondary, very characteristic specific end. The Founder desired to see religious life resurrect in all its splendor just like he set himself the goal of reforming the clergy. The means of attaining this were the vows, common life, a strict regularity borrowed in part from the Orders that had been suppressed as well as their ministry.

No satisfactory explanation has ever been found for this preoccupation of the Founder. When he spoke of this end on a number of occasions he hardly gave the reason for it. It really seems that his life in common from 1812 to 1815 with Brother Maur, the ex-Camaldulense, stirred up in him this interest in the Orders which had disappeared.

In his commentary on the Rule, Father Alfred Yenveux offered another explanation. Father de Mazenod always had a certain sense of the history as well as a great love for the Church. Just as there is much talk in our day of returning to the sources, it was already the Founder’s desire that his religious family should draw its inspiration from the early Church. He concluded the first chapter on the ends with the following words of the *Nota bene*: “What more

sublime purpose than that of their Institute? Their founder is Jesus Christ, the very Son of God, their first fathers are the Apostles. They are called to be the Savior’s co-workers [...]” Now, according to the explanation offered by Father Yenveux, the Founder understood that the living tradition of the life of the Apostles and of the first Christian community was to be found in Religious Orders. The monks were the ones who followed Christ in a radical way and passed on to others the riches of the Gospel tradition in their fulness. That is why he wanted the Oblates to walk in their footsteps.

The Apostles had reserved for themselves the ministry of prayer and the Word (see Acts 6:4). The Oblates, too, are called to proclaim the Word of God and to pray, especially by reciting the Divine Office in common (*Opus Dei*).

As far as making up for the lost Orders goes, only on one occasion did the Founder take someone into his confidence on this matter during his lifetime, and it had to do precisely with reciting the Divine Office in common. At the 1843 Chapter, he was asked if scholastics were obliged to recite the Divine Office in common. He replied that he had been especially struck by the absence of the Divine Office since the disappearance of the Religious Orders and that as a result he had wanted to lay upon all the Oblates the obligation imposed upon all the members of Religious Orders.

In the last century, the Religious Orders were reconstituted in France little by little. Bishop de Mazenod spoke less and less of making up for them, but suggested rather that the Oblates emulate the old, but newly-restored, Orders as to their fervor and to rival the young religious Congregations as well. Nonetheless, the fact remains that this end

had a rather profound influence on the second part of the Rule which dealt with the special obligations of missionaries as well as the spirituality of the Founder and of the first generations of Oblates whose life was often enough compartmentalized either in two distinct periods of time or in two spiritual tendencies: almost monastic within the Oblate houses and very active outside. From this end we have especially kept the obligation of the Divine Office in common, and from it we are bound to retain a teaching, one of the Founder's dreams: his unbounded desire for personal perfection and for the holiness of the members of the Congregation called to reproduce in themselves the fervor and zeal of the lives of the Apostles, the first Christians, the monks, and the religious in the centuries that preceded the Revolution. In the 1837 Chapter, he declared: "What other fanciful idea of perfection might one conjure up if this idea did not consist in walking in the way that Jesus Christ, the Apostles and the first disciples traveled before us? That is our end. Other Orders may have more exacting ends than this one, but there is none more perfect".

This explains why he so often pruned away lukewarm members from the Congregation. The reason he gave for this was: "Our birth is of very recent date, we should be in the full fervour of the youth of our institute, and already we risk falling into the decrepitude of those old Orders which are in need of reform [...]"<sup>5</sup> All Oblates work at becoming saints.<sup>6</sup>

Father Leo Deschâtelets in the circular letter of August 15, 1951, *Our Vocation and Life of Intimate Union with Mary*, clearly emphasized the meaning of this secondary end of the Congregation: "We are religious as well: *coadunati sacerdotes, religionis*

*votis obligati* (art. 1). Need one stress this point too much? To do so, we would have to quote almost the entire Rule, not in order to prove something that is self-evident, but rather to emphasize the distinguishing features of our religious character. Nevertheless, let us examine closely the strongest trait of these features, the one which the Founder most vigorously supported *ab initio*. In his opinion, in order to realize the end of the Institute, it was necessary that we be up to par in the Church".

"We also rediscover in the writings of Father de Mazenod, as in the words of the Rule, this idea of reform or of resurrecting the religious life, just like when he spoke to us of the priesthood a while back".

"Let us take up again the first manuscript of the Rule".

"In the first chapter, it states unambiguously: Of the end of the Congregation, paragraph II: *To make up for the void left by the disappearance of religious institutes [...]*".

"Just as he vigorously sought to put to flight lukewarmness in our priestly lives, in the same manner he excluded it from our religious life, whether it was a matter of the living out of our holy vows or it was the case of all the practices of the religious life which always lead to perfection. Was there ever a more holy Founder of some Order who wrote more vigorously than ours when he – we dare to say it – harangued us like a General exhorting his troops before a battle. He called upon us to achieve our aim: "By untiring efforts to become saints; by courageously advancing on the same path as that followed by the many Apostles and evangelical labourers ... by the entire renunciation of self, with a single view to the glory of God, the edification of the Church, and the salvation of souls; by

continually renewing themselves in the spirit of their vocation; by pursuing the path of habitual self-denial and of incessant longing after perfection; by never relaxing in their efforts to become humble, meek, obedient, lovers of poverty and penance, mortified, detached from the world, from family [...]”.

“Could anyone have ever summed up in a few more incisive and demanding terms an entire program of life based on the holy Gospel? In view of this, could anyone doubt that our Oblate religious life, in spite of so many associations with the life of other religious institutes, should already be characterized in relation to these latter by this fervently enflamed exhortation on the part of Father de Mazenod to commit ourselves heart and soul to the pursuit of religious perfection? Does this not urge us on to become better religious than all the others since, according to the daring thought of the Founder, we are a kind of quintessence of the perfection of all those Orders and institutes he wished us to replace?”<sup>7</sup>

*b) Recitation of the Divine Office in common*

In the Rules of 1818 and 1827, the obligation of reciting the Divine Office in common was included, not among the exercises of piety of the second part, but among the ends and works of the first part. Fathers Joseph Reslé and Nicholas Schaff claimed that this was truly the case of an end or of an important means to attain the secondary end of making up for the Orders which had disappeared. Father Gerard Fortin, on the other hand, maintained that the recitation of the Divine Office in common was neither an end nor even a means to attain a specific end<sup>8</sup>. According to him, the recitation of the

Divine Office in common was an exercise of piety, a means of attaining the general end of personal sanctification. From its very nature, it belonged to the second part of the Rule. He refers to the Constitutions of the Dominicans as an example of this, as it was true for the Mendicant Orders and the Clerics Regular. However in general, the Canons Regular and the monks had the divine liturgy as a principal end specific to them, that is the conventual Mass and the Divine Office recited in choir.

Whatever place choral recitation of the Divine Office might have occupied in the constitutions of Religious Orders, the intentions of the Founder were clear and unequivocal. He considered the recitation in common of the Divine Office a work of first rank through which was exercised in an outstanding way the secondary end of making up for the Religious Orders that have disappeared. That is why all Oblates, novices included, were obliged in one way or another to recite the Divine Office in common. There lies one of the characteristics proper to the Institute which distinguishes it from the Redemptorists and other religious Congregations because it is seen as an end and not only as an exercise of piety.

Nevertheless, Father de Mazenod was mistaken with regard to the liturgical-canonical character of our recitation of the Divine Office. Once he had obtained pontifical approbation in Rome, on February 17, 1826, and a sharing of the privileges granted the Redemptorists, on April 23, 1826, he believed that his Congregation enjoyed the privilege of exemption and that our recitation of the Divine Office was the equivalent of choral recitation of the Religious Orders, obliging in virtue of ecclesiastical law and not only in virtue of our own constitutions. This point was clarified

after his death, but it would have in no way changed the demands he made.

Certainly, it was only a case of a secondary end and its relationship to the main work which was an apostolic work. That is why he sometimes spoke of it as a means of apostolic effectiveness: "The Institute considers this exercise as the source of all the blessings that should pour down on the entire holy ministry of the entire Society"<sup>9</sup>. This prayer, the prayer of apostolic men, was to be made on behalf of poor sinners and with their intentions in mind, presenting their needs to God, but in the Founder's eyes, much more was at stake here; it was a case of adoring and praising God.

In the *Directoire des novices*, which devotes twenty of its pages to the Divine Office, one reads: "The Divine Office recited in choir is one of our obligations, at one and the same time being the most serious, the most holy and the most fruitful. It is of supreme importance that our novices, brothers and scholastics, should be able to fulfill it in suitable fashion".<sup>10</sup>

"Before beginning the Divine Office, we should arouse within ourselves a keen faith perception of the presence and sovereign majesty of the God whose praises we will have the honor of singing ... The recitation of the divine psalmody here on earth is only an echo and an extension of the perfect praise that Jesus Christ offers to God his Father in heaven [...]. During the praying of the divine psalmody God is present, and we are speaking to God himself. We are only the instruments that should be animated by his divine Spirit to worthily praise his holy name. It is as if we were transported to heaven to stand in the midst of the angelic choirs. We join in unison with the praises and blessings which they unceasingly offer

to the sovereign Master of everything. On earth, we sing unceasingly the hymn that we will have the happiness of singing one day in heaven with the saints for all eternity. We share in the prayers that the Church Militant raises constantly to God, a communion which causes us to unite our voices with those of the most pure, most holy souls there might be on earth. What sentiments of veneration and respect we should have! How deeply must we prostrate ourselves before the supreme majesty of God!"<sup>11</sup>

From the depths of his personal Christological spiritual experience flowed the two demands from the heart of Eugene de Mazenod: the *opus Dei* or *laus divina* and the proclamation of the Word which is linked to the twofold preoccupation of Christ – the glory of the Father, and the salvation of the brothers – as well as the two activities of the Apostles – "We will [...] continue to devote ourselves to prayer and the service of the Word". (Acts 6:4)

In this regard, Father Nicholas Schaff wrote: "In the light of the apostolic element of our life, the other, the contemplative element of meditation and of the praying of the breviary, should not take on the appearance of being a useless luxury, even less that of being an obstacle, but rather as being the source and the touchstone of *pure* zeal. In praying the divine office in common, I would readily see the great *testimony* of the purity of our zeal. I say purity, not intensity. Intensity does not necessarily need the psalmody. Alongside these external manifestations of the apostolate, we should maintain as well this testimony among ourselves, a testimony which is *in-house*, communitarian and spontaneous, an authentic witnessing offered to God by individuals and by others, by individuals *in the*

presence of the others. If the apostolate is directly the proof and fruit of our charity for our neighbor, praying the Divine Office is the proof and fruit of "our sense of God", the love of God. As with Christ, so should it be with the sons of Bishop de Mazenod: the consuming concern for the salvation of souls flows from a consuming concern for the glory of God through praise to God the Father – "*in unione illius divinae intentionis qua Ipse in terris laudes Deo persolvisti*".<sup>12</sup>

The immediate and direct subject of this obligation is the community with a sufficient number of Oblates present, members not legitimately and temporarily absent for various reasons, especially those connected with the main end. This is not the case with the obligations which the Founder characterized as "special for the missionaries", and set forth in the second part of the Rule, such as observance of the vows, etc. These latter apply to each individual personally and oblige everywhere and always, taking into account the importance of the regulation.

But, even if from this very fact praying the Divine Office in common was only realized by a few communities and by a small number of Oblates, we can say that this end has been observed and that the Congregation has been faithful to it.

### c) Reform of the Clergy

This other secondary specific end poses still more problems than that of making up for the Orders that had disappeared.

Few priests have expressed as harsh a judgment of the state of the clergy as that expressed by Father de Mazenod in the three articles of the 1818 Rule concerning the reform of the clergy and in

the *Nota bene* which followed, a passage which later became the Preface to the Rule. What unfortunate experience led him to such a radical stance? In Sicily and Aix, he may have met some priest lacking in zeal, but nothing in his writings allows us to say that he met priests who were depraved and sources of scandal. He did, however, know that during the Revolution many priests had married and had sworn the oath of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. In Paris the Sulpicians certainly put a great deal of emphasis on forming holy priests and must, no doubt, have evoked the weaknesses of a portion of the clergy of the previous century as well as some harsh judgments of Saint Vincent de Paul concerning the clergy of his day<sup>13</sup>. Eugene must have reacted vigorously to this since M. Emery told him one day that he had the temperament of a reformer and on November 22, 1812, M. Duclaux wrote to him that, in Aix, he should not carry on like a reformer.<sup>14</sup>

There can be no doubt that, in this part of the Rule, the Founder drew his inspiration from Félicité de La Mennais' work: *Réflexions sur l'état de l'Eglise en France pendant le XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle et sur sa situation actuelle*. This book had been written in 1808 and submitted for criticism to M. Emery, who at that time put his whole confidence in Eugene, the seminarian. La Mennais' judgment of the clergy was more nuanced, but he used expressions which are found almost verbatim in the writings of the Founder: "the sacred deposit of faith", "in the hearts of the faithful a dying faith, in the hearts of the pastors a zeal grown cold and almost extinguished", "from the time of the overthrow of paganism, history offers no example of degeneracy so widespread and thorough", etc.

La Mennais was already suggesting

the remedy adopted by the Founder: "If something could reawaken this faith [...] in hearts, it would no doubt be parish missions. [...] One has had to see with one's own eyes the fruit of sanctification that a few genuinely apostolic men can produce in order to understand how powerful this means is"<sup>15</sup>. Félicité's influence on Eugene can come as no surprise since for a number of years this priest was considered a genuine prophet who enjoyed a great influence on the young clergymen of the first decades of the XIX century. Let us now reread the first article of paragraph three on clergy reform:

"A no less important end of our Institute, an end they will as zealously strive to achieve as they do the main end, is that of clergy reform and of repairing to the full extent possible to them the evils caused in the past and still being caused by unworthy priests who lay waste the Church by their heedlessness, their avarice, their impurity, their sacrileges, their felonies and heinous crimes of every description".

Even though the judgments made concerning the gravity of the evils involved might be excessive and very much in character with Eugene's style and temperament, the suggested remedies seem very restrained. In this instance again, Father de Mazenod exhibited his equilibrium and realism; he knew his limits and those of his colleagues. Articles 2 and 3 make this evident:

"Article 2. In the beginning, the missionaries because of their youth, will only be able to undertake indirectly the healing of this deep wound by their gentle suggestions, their prayers and good examples, but in a few years, please God, they will make a frontal attack on all these horrible vices. They will apply the probe, iron and fire to

this shameful festering sore which is consuming everything in the Church of Jesus Christ".

"Article 3. Consequently, they will preach retreats to priests and the Mission House will always be a welcoming refuge for them, like a health-giving pool where those afflicted with foul and festering illnesses will come to cleanse themselves and begin a new life of penance and reparation".

The 1825-1826 Rule tones down these judgments considerably and modifies the three articles. Cardinal Pallotta, in particular, had found that they were overdrawn, at least as far as the expressions used was concerned.<sup>16</sup> Articles 2 and 3 lose the initial part "in the beginning [...]" and the end "in a few years [...]" to retain only the more modest means "especially prayer, counseling and example" as well as welcoming priests into our houses for retreats, etc. These articles remained still unchanged in the 1928 Rule.

The accomplishments in this area certainly did not meet up with the Founder's expectations. When he was named Vicar General of Marseilles in 1823, he found there a clergy without much discipline since they had been over twenty-five years without a resident bishop. He attempted, undoubtedly too vigorously and too rapidly, to reform the less edifying portion of the clergy and soon became aware of the difficulty of such an endeavor. He got into the bad books of many, was criticized, calumniated and had to endure much suffering from being little loved by the clergy. Understandably, in 1825 and 1826 in Rome, he willingly consented to temper his expressions and weigh more carefully the scope of his projects.

Practically, he was aware that it was easier to train the clergy of the future

well than to reform the older clergy. That is why he accepted the direction of the seminary of Marseilles in 1827, those of Ajaccio in 1834, Fréjus in 1851, Romans in 1853 and Quimper in 1856.

The 1850 Chapter recognized the direction of seminaries as an important secondary end of the Congregation and prepared a text which became article 3 of the first part of the Rule of 1853. However, it was with difficulty that the Oblates followed the Founder on this point. Few of the Fathers liked to teach. The seminaries of Romans and Quimper were abandoned in 1857. As for the welcoming of priests into our houses, this was done especially in Notre-Dame du Laus and Notre-Dame de Lumières until 1840-1841. But the Founder had to intervene since he noticed that the young priests in these communities let themselves be drawn along to follow the irregular not very edifying habits of the priests who came for retreats. Moreover, we lost the shrine of Notre-Dame du Laus, while Notre-Dame de Lumières became a minor seminary and Notre-Dame de l'Osier, a novitiate. On the other hand, Bishop de Mazenod instinctively spoke less and less of clergy reform. In fact, the French clergy of the last century became better and better trained and more and more generous and zealous with the examples of several parish priests who have today achieved the title of blessed and saints.

The questions associated with this secondary end, that of clergy reform, have never been fundamentally explored in the Congregation and remain an open field of research on the origin of this apostolic concern of the Founder's with regard the interpretation it should be given and its concrete application in practice. The fact always remains, however, that Bishop de Maze-

nod possessed an unusual interest in the holiness of priests and wanted to pass on this concern to his sons.

In his biography of the Founder, Father Achilles Rey wrote a long commentary on the Rule. Concerning the apostolate of Oblates to the clergy he wrote: "But the missions, the first, and properly speaking, only end of the Oblate Congregation necessarily evoked another end, that of the sanctification of the clergy".

"In fact, to prepare the people for the missions and even to make the missions possible, to support the work of the missionaries, to assure their success, to gather, maintain and carry on its fruits, it was necessary to have worthy priests, and holy priests at the head of their parishes. The ministry of Gospel workers is not permanent. In the Church, they are established as auxiliary aides offering assistance to the diocesan hierarchically established clergy: they only come when summoned by the ordinary pastors and withdraw after having fulfilled their always limited task, leaving it to the one who called them the concern to draw as much fruit as possible from their labor and their care. What would happen if the priest was lacking the holiness necessary to be capable of responding to the lofty mission of being pastor of his flock? In addition, we would say that the sanctification of the clergy, next to the missions, and with the missions, is the main end of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. The holy Founder formally declared this to them: 'Assuredly, the most excellent end of our Congregation next to the holy missions is the direction of major seminaries. For the missionaries would expend the sweat of their labors in vain in their attempts to snatch sinners from spiritual death if they did not have in the parishes priests

imbued with the Spirit of God, faithfully following the example of the Divine Shepherd and pasturing with vigilant and constant care the sheep which had been brought back to the fold. That is why, to the extent that we are able, we will devote ourselves generously heart and soul to such a noble and important ministry”.

He continued: “The missionaries will strive to help priests to maintain themselves in the purity and fervor of their holy state by assistance of all kinds, but especially by spiritual retreats either within their communities or outside”.

“The Oblate of Mary is not only an apostle to the people, he is also an apostle to the clergy. He is even above all the priest’s priest; he is the Oblate of the priesthood, offered, dedicated to his own sanctification”.<sup>17</sup>

On this point just as in the case of the religious life, Father Leo Deschâtelets has written a most enlightening passage: “We are first and foremost priests: *‘Finis hujus parvae Congregationis... est ut coadunati sacerdotes...’*” (art. 1). Priests among so many others. Priests with a special inspiration, however, an inspiration which adds a particular dimension to the Oblate priesthood. We have been created to restore to the priesthood all its glory and prestige and to draw along with us by our exemplary life all those who bear, like us, the sacred character of ordination. When he was laying the foundations of his Institute, our Founder had in mind the reform and sanctification of the clergy in the same way as he envisioned the conversion of the masses. That is why from that time on he demanded such a high degree of priestly perfection from his first disciples. It is possible that this motivating factor for our founding has become blurred with time, but it is more useful to evoke it once

again in order to avoid losing contact with one of the ideas that formerly enkindled zeal in the heart of our Founder and which could serve as an incentive for our sacerdotal life as priests”.<sup>18</sup>

“Has it not [...] been established with obvious clarity that the Founder wanted perfect priests in order to work at renewing the priesthood? Can we doubt that, already at the beginnings of the Institute, a distinguishing feature of the Oblate priesthood was to stand out because of their zeal for the conversion of all souls, but especially priestly souls? In our opinion, this is an incontrovertible element in our origins”.

“Has this spirit changed among us? If there is less emphasis placed upon it because many circumstances have modified the state of the priesthood, it remains no less true that, in order to remain faithful to the grace of his origins, the Oblate should never lose sight of the fact that he should work ceaselessly for the renewal of the priesthood. The spirit of the Rule is that we should all be of a keener, stronger and tougher calibre in order to be in the Church and to be a support and an example for all our colleagues in the priesthood. The Oblate cannot be like other priests; he must be the model for others. The graces of his vocation propel him to the heights and make of him a trainer and formator with regard to the priesthood”.<sup>19</sup>

#### d) *Mary Immaculate*

The 1818 Rule does not mention the name of Mary in the chapter on the ends of the Congregation. The 1827 Rule only gives the new title of the Congregation: “The end of this small Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of the Most Holy and Immaculate Virgin Mary [...]”.

Father de Mazenod had the idea of giving this name to his religious family during a novena to the Immaculate Conception in Rome in 1825 while the Rule was being edited and the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars was about to begin studying it. Consequently, he changed nothing in the text which was presented. Nonetheless, other articles of the second and third part from the 1824-1825 manuscript mentioned Mary, saying among other things: "They will always look upon her as their mother".

It was not until the 1926 General Chapter that article 10 of the first chapter was added: "Our Congregation has been instituted under the title and patronage of the Most Holy and Immaculate Virgin Mary. Our members, therefore, must ever foster in their own hearts, and promote amongst the faithful, a tender devotion to this Heavenly Patroness and Mother".

The Apostolic Letter of Leo XII of March 21, 1826, granting approval of the Congregation had already assigned a different task. He wrote: "Finally, it is our hope that the members of this holy family who, under the protection of certain laws so suited to forming hearts to piety, have dedicated themselves to the ministry of preaching and taking as their patroness the Immaculate Virgin, the Mother of God, will make it their objective to the extent of their ability to bring back to Mary's bosom of mercy the men that Jesus Christ wanted to give her as her children, from his place on the cross".

It would be legitimate, therefore, to add the following to the three specific ends expressly listed by the Founder at the beginning of the 1818 and 1827 Rules to: "promote amongst the faithful a tender devotion" to Mary and to set as one's objective "to bring back to

Mary's bosom of mercy the men that Jesus Christ wanted to give her as her children, from his place on the cross".<sup>20</sup>

According to Father Maurice Gilbert, however, it is a case rather of a mission which encompasses all the ends and lends a Marian character to all the apostolic activities of the Congregation.<sup>21</sup>

## II. THE END OF THE CONGREGATION IN THE 1982 CONSTITUTIONS AND RULES

Until the time of the Second Vatican Council, there had been four revisions of the 1827 Rule and four editions: 1853, 1894, 1910 and 1928. While making some additions, an effort was made to maintain as much as possible a literal fidelity to the editions written during the Founder's lifetime.

The Second Vatican Council breathed a spirit of renewal everywhere in the Church. The decree *Perfectae caritatis* on religious life called for a return to the sources, especially to the spirit and charism of the founders. The 1966 capitulants believed that the moment had come to definitively abandon the letter of previous rules and to make radical modifications to the preceding texts. The 1966 Chapter perhaps drew more of its inspiration from the Council than from the charism of Bishop de Mazenod, even if it did remain faithful to it.<sup>22</sup> But this abandonment of the text of the 1928 Rule and many articles which had remain unchanged since the beginning of the Congregation was found to be too radical by many Oblates.

The final revision adopted by the 1980 General Chapter took these criticisms into consideration and approved a text that did indeed draw its inspiration from the Council, but in equal measure

from the charism of the Founder: a charism known today better than ever as a result of many historical works written since the 1939-1945 war for the cause of beatification of Eugene, and since the Council, in view of accurately determining his spirit and charism.

Nonetheless, Oblates who knew the first editions of the Rule well and lived that of 1928 were surprised when they read the present articles that treat of the end of the Institute. Indeed, the first chapter, no longer entitled the *end*, but the *mission* of the Congregation, still contains ten articles like the 1928 edition – but only the first and the last take up once again the previous text in modified form. The first article lays out the general end of religious life which consists in a radical following of Christ through the vows of religion and the specific main end, that of evangelizing the poor. Article 10 reminds us that Mary is patroness of the Congregation and that Oblates seek to promote a genuine devotion to the Immaculate Virgin.

Once the element of surprise passes, one still cannot deny that study and meditation reveals in this first chapter the apostolic inspiration of the Founder and several elements specific to his charism.

It is Jesus Christ first and foremost who stands at the very beginning of the Constitutions; He it is who calls, gathers, invites Oblates to follow him and to share in his mission through word and action. Jesus Christ truly lies at the heart of this chapter, especially in articles 1 – 4.

Oblates follow Christ radically (art. 2) and live in community in an atmosphere of charity and obedience, taking as the model for their lifestyle the community of the Apostles with Jesus Christ (art. 3); here again we find ideas

and realities dear to the heart of the Founder.

Through love of the Church, the Oblates carry out their mission in communion with the Pope and the Bishops (art. 6). Bishop de Mazenod lived this and reminded people of this requirement throughout his life.

Oblates devote themselves to the evangelization of the most abandoned (art. 5), especially by the proclamation of the Word (art. 7) with boldness, humility and confidence (art. 8) as prophets of the new world (art. 9) with Mary Immaculate (art. 10). For the most part, these aspects are found in the first editions of the Rule.

After having explained in a masterly fashion the mission of the Congregation or its main specific end, a few of the key ideas of the Founder, ideas which served adequately to enlighten superiors and guide them in the choice of the most important works were simply evoked. Oblates make an option for the poor; they carry out their mission in communion with the Pope and the Bishops; they make themselves available to respond to the most urgent needs of the Church through various forms of witnessing and ministry, but especially by the proclamation of the Word, etc.

The attention focused here on Christ, the Church and the needs of the people, are attitudes that are very Mazenodian.

However, there is no longer any talk of making up for the Religious Orders which have disappeared, of reciting Divine Office in common or reform of the clergy. These were cases rather of secondary ends and consequently of the things which were more important than a simple listing of ministries or particular works which it was the desire to leave out in 1980.

Certainly, in the mind of the Founder, by making up for the Religious Or-

ders which had disappeared he intended to emphasize, in a manner one could call challenging, the very lofty ideal of sanctity and the religious life which he set forth for his sons: fearless missionaries, but first and foremost religious in the full sense of the word. The second chapter of the first part of the Constitutions and Rules of 1982 set forth the same radical demands that make the Oblates "radical disciples, like Mary". However, we may possibly not have talked about the Divine Office sufficiently. In Constitution 33, we read: "Each community will ordinarily celebrate part of the Hours in common". This wording does not seem to amount to an obligation; more especially, it does not say that we are dealing with an end which is specifically our own. In the same vein, we may not have sufficiently brought forth the demands of the Founder in what concerns our apostolate to priests. Formation of the clergy is hardly alluded to in Rule 5 [R 7e in CCR 2000] without mentioning the fact that we are dealing with an end and an important traditional work. Rule 26 [R 41a in CCR 2000], however, reminds us that "priests are always welcome [...]" to "share the bread of friendship, faith reflection and prayer".

If the new Constitutions and Rules bring some interesting developments in the brief chapter on the mission of the Congregation and maintain in very lively form the fervor of zeal that inspired the Founder, they still have lost something, it seems, of the effervescence with which he set forth the projects in 1818 and 1825-1826. In particular, should a means not have been found to evoke in some way this preoccupation on the part of Bishop de Mazenod to make of his sons extraordinary apostolic men called through a demanding religious life and a daring

zeal to evangelize the poor, to renew religious life and sanctify the clergy as well?

Certainly, the apostolate to the clergy through the formation of seminarians, the preaching of priestly retreats, welcoming ecclesiastics into our houses was not held in much regard by the Oblates of the Founder's day and in the period that followed. We have maintained the direction of a few major seminaries, some priests have preached priests' retreats, but it was hardly by this way that the Congregation gained its reputation in the Church. Nevertheless, can we allow ourselves to forget this mission that Father de Mazenod had wanted to entrust to his sons? Does it not remain like a challenge thrown at the feet of future generations of Oblates?

### III. THE ENDS OF THE CONGREGATION AND OBLATE SPIRITUALITY

In 1950, those responsible for the review *Etudes oblates* conducted a survey among Oblates on the spirituality of the Congregation. The majority of those who answered presented a synthesis of the essential elements of this spirituality almost always starting from the first chapter of the Rule on the ends of the Congregation. Suffice it here to refer the reader to this report, especially to answer no. VIII, whose concluding words are as follows: "Our spirituality has a salvationist character, a merciful love at the service of the Savior and Mary Immaculate in the Church, in collaborative obedience to the Pope and the Bishops in the exercise of our apostolate to souls, especially the most abandoned. Nevertheless, if, from the theological point of view, this character

has at its centre the mystery of salvation, from the psychological and historical point of view it focuses on the mystery of the Immaculate Conception, whose title we bear "as a name we share with the Most Holy and Immaculate Virgin Mary" and which by mandate of the Pope we have the honor and the duty of making known and loved: We are the missionaries and the apostles of the Immaculate".<sup>24</sup>

Another study of Oblate spirituality was conducted in 1976 in course of a congress on *The Charism of the Founder Today*. The congress participants were seeking to find the basic spiritual values that characterize the Congregation. They went about it by starting from the lived experience of Oblates and a historical study of the Founder and the Congregation. Once again, the first chapter of the Rule provided them with the nine elements that the congress participants recognized as essential to the charism, and therefore, to Oblate spirituality: Christ, evangelization, the poor, the Church, community, religious life, Mary, priests, urgent needs and daring.

In the "call" of the "final declaration of the congress" a very concrete Oblate spirituality emerged<sup>25</sup>. If one attempted to extract the hard core as well as the dynamic at the heart of Oblate spirituality, it seems that one would find this synthesis in the preface of the Rule or yet again at the beginning of the paragraph entitled *Of the Other Principal Observances* (1818 Rule, Part Two, Chapter One, par. 4): "It has already been stated that the missionaries should, to the extent that human weakness allows, imitate in every respect the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, main founder of the Institute and of his Apostles, our first fathers. In imitation of such noble models, one part of their

lives will be spent in prayer, interior recollection and contemplation in the privacy of the house of God in which they will lead a common life. The other will be entirely devoted to exterior works of the most active zeal such as missions and preaching [...]"

Christ is as the centre of the life of the Oblates. That is why they "will strive to become other Jesus Christs" who had a two-fold love: the glory of the Father and the salvation of souls. That says it all. They will reincarnate his love of the Father in the liturgy of the Mass and of the Divine Office recited in common, through the vows of religion and their life of prayer, study and asceticism which will allow them to achieve a more intimate knowledge of Jesus and to be come ever more closely united to him in the manner of the Apostles who spent three years with their Master – with Mary always discretely present. Then, like Christ, the Oblates devote their lives "to the point of death" for the evangelization of the poor.

The love of God and of Christ flows back to earth and becomes the primary focus for brotherly love and then love of neighbor. Father Robert Becker wrote: "The fraternal sentiments that bond our communities internally find their source in the love of God. Where this love exists in its greatest fullness is also where brotherly love will be unbounded and our houses and the entire Congregation will in truth become one single great family. There you find the Oblate's source of joy and happiness, a source of strength as well in carrying out his serious duties".

"The same love of God flows back and pours its waves over the world in the form of zeal for the salvation of souls, an ardent zeal which knows no bounds, neither in extension nor in in-

tensity, an apostolic zeal that embraces the whole world. That is the love of one's neighbor which rushes to the assistance of souls in distress whenever they call. That is why the poor enjoy preferential attention in Oblate ministry"<sup>26</sup>

We know that a certain unease has always existed in the Congregation with regard to the equilibrium to be achieved between these two obligations that the Rule seems, if not to oppose, at least to juxtapose or set at different periods of time: one within our communities and the other outside. A certain unity of these two obligations seems to be put forward in the Preface of the Rule embodied in the expression "apostolic men", but this is accomplished only gradually in the daily life of each one, a life always very taken up with apostolic activity. The unease might have been greater during Father Joseph Fabre's time. Father Achilles Rey, his faithful secretary, captured his thought very well toward the end of the last century in a passage in Bishop de Mazenod's biography:

"How could this life of outstanding holiness, interior recollection and monastic observance, in a word, this life of a religious, be reconciled with a missionary life dedicated to the whole array of apostolic works? [...]"

"This is where the truly inspired wisdom of the legislator of the Oblates becomes manifest. The missionary Oblate was bound to live two lives: he was bound to be a missionary as the external end of his vocation; he was bound to be a religious as the internal end of his vocation: simultaneously an interior man and a community man, an external man and an internal man. Well, then, he would be one and the other, but successively in turn. His time would be divided into two parts: He would be a

Mary at one time and a Martha in another. The Oblate would unite in himself these two evangelical lives, these two vocations of the saints: the contemplative life and vocation, the active life and vocation. One would complement the other. Contemplative life would enable him to purify, sublimate and multiply the other one hundred fold. He would renew his natural and supernatural resources; he would renew his strength like the eagle; he would shake from his feet the dust of the road. Active life would enable him to make his finest dreams and his most holy desires of contemplation a reality. He would dedicate himself body and soul to his God; to his interior fire enkindled by prayer and meditation, he would add the merit of his struggles, the glory of his triumphs, the riches of his spoils. He would work himself to death if necessary in order to win souls for the Savior, souls that taught him the meaning of a love which endured to the very end. It is by means of this alternating rest and labor, of contemplation and action that he effected a high ideal of perfection which the Founder caused to be handed on to his religious".<sup>27</sup>

This life with its two movements and two time periods, continued to be a source of suffering in the spiritual life of each Oblate. The capitulants of the 1980 chapter put forth a solution to do away with this ambiguity once and for all. They drew together in one single part of the Constitutions and Rules the chapter on mission and that on religious apostolic life. Drawing their inspiration from the Second Vatican Council, they integrated these two dimensions of our life in several articles of the 1982 Constitutions, especially numbers 31 and 32 which express this unity of the religious and the apostolic life: "We achieve unity in our life only in and through Jesus

Christ. Our ministry involves us in a variety of tasks, yet each act in life is an occasion for personal encounter with the Lord, who through us gives himself to others and through others gives himself to us. While maintaining within ourselves an atmosphere of silence and inner peace, we seek his presence in the hearts of the people and in the events of daily life as well as in the Word of God, in the sacraments and in prayer. We are pilgrims, walking with Jesus in faith, hope and love" (C 31).

"It is as missionaries that we worship, in the various ways the Spirit suggests to us. We come before him bearing with us the daily pressures of our anxiety for those to whom he sends us (cf. 2 Cor 11:28). Our life in all its dimensions is a prayer that, in us and through us, God's Kingdom come" (C 32).<sup>28</sup>

Father Leo Deschâtelets, with his profound understanding of Bishop de Mazenod, is the one who has spoken and written the most at length, and undoubtedly with the most fire and conviction about Oblate spirituality based on the mind of the Founder and the Rules. He often spoke on this theme, but more especially in his circular letter of August 15, 1951: *Our Vocation and our Life of Intimate Union with Mary*.

In the course of the 1948 congress on Oblate formation in Washington, Father Deschâtelets had delivered a message on Oblate spirituality to the congress participants, a message he was able to sum up in a few brief paragraphs. He began with these words: "Dear Fathers, what, then, is Oblate spirituality? Charity! Charity! Love! Love! The pages of the Founder's life and the Rule he left us to guide our lives and apostolate are filled with charity and love. We could make a host of distinctions, but our Oblate spirituality means love!"

He ended his address with the following reflections: "Dear Fathers [...] our spirituality makes optimists of us. Can we harbor any pessimism with such a love of God in us? Are not joy and happiness the fruit of charity? Let us take a look at our history. We find nothing sad there. Read the life of the Founder; read his letters [...] Everywhere you will find an important note of optimism. Bishop de Mazenod was always sure beforehand of the success of his undertakings [...] This optimism has made us bold. Joyfully, we tread paths others were afraid to tread. We immediately accepted what other people considered too humble. We have always been attentive and faithful to these words of our holy Rule: *nihil linquendum inausum ut proferatur imperium Christi*, we have to use every available means to extend the empire of the Savior".<sup>29</sup>

The calling to mind of some of these avenues of research are enough to demonstrate the entire riches of the first chapter of the Constitutions and Rules on the ends or the mission of the Oblate Congregation, making evident the characteristic traits of Oblate identity and the major trends of our spirituality.

YVON BEAUDOIN

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<sup>4</sup> FORTIN, Gerard, "Réflexion sur la fin spéciale de la Congrégation", in *Etudes oblates*, 21 (1962), p. 197.

<sup>5</sup> Eugene de Mazenod to Father Cyr Chauvet, February 8, 1853, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 11, no. 1136, p. 120.

<sup>6</sup> See Eugene de Mazenod's March 13, 1830 letter to Father Hippolyte Courtès in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 7, no. 344, p. 196-197.

<sup>7</sup> Circular letter no. 191, August 15, 1951 in *Circ. adm.*, V (1947-1951), p. 17-18.

<sup>8</sup> FORTIN, op. cit., p. 205-206.

<sup>9</sup> 1818 Rule, Chapter III, par. 6. article 2.

<sup>10</sup> *Directoire des novices* (1876 edition), p. 29.

<sup>11</sup> *Directoire des novices* (1876 edition), p. 41-42.

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<sup>13</sup> DEVILLE, *L'école française de spiritualité*, p. 18.

<sup>14</sup> REY I, p. 143.

<sup>15</sup> p. 55, 79, 86, 110.

<sup>16</sup> Eugene de Mazenod to Father Henry Tempier, February 26, 1826.

<sup>17</sup> REY I, p. 298.

<sup>18</sup> *Notre vocation et notre vie d'union intime avec Marie Immaculée*, circular letter no. 191, August 15, 1951 in *Circ. adm.*, V (1947-1951) p. 6-7.

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 104-106.

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## EUCHARIST

*Summary: I. The Founder:* 1. Eugene de Mazenod's liturgical sense seen in the context of his era; 2. His personal experience; 3. Pastoral praxis and teaching; *II. Eucharist in the Constitutions and Rules:* 1. Constitutions and Rules of 1826; 2. Constitutions and Rules of 1966; 3. Constitutions and Rules of 1982. *III. Eucharist in the Oblates' life experience:* 1. Eucharist and oblation; 2. Eucharist and mission; *IV. The Eucharist in Oblate ministry.* *V. Eucharist in the context of Oblate identity:* 1. Identification with Christ the Savior; 2. Apostolic community; 3. Evangelization.

The Eucharist lies at the heart of the Oblate's life just like it lies at the heart of every Christian's life. As source and summit of the Church's life, it cannot be reduced to the status of a devotional practice. We must, then, grasp the meaning it has in the overall vision of the Oblate charism.

### I. THE FOUNDER

#### 1. EUGENE DE MAZENOD'S LITURGICAL SENSE SEEN IN THE CONTEXT OF HIS ERA

Eugene de Mazenod was favored with an experience and a view of the Eucharist which constituted the foundation of his teaching to the Oblates as well as to Christians to whom he ministered as missionary and then as bishop. Put back into the context of the particular era in which he lived, they showed themselves to be rather profound and original.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, during the first half of the nineteenth century, Eucharistic devotion was heavily encumbered with hypothesis. In the history of this devotion, this period is generally considered as a period of decline. It is almost the case of being a parenthetical phase inserted between the simplicity and depth of Alphonsus de Liguori's popular devotion, which illuminated the second half of the

eighteenth century, and the movement of fervor that one saw revive toward the end of the nineteenth century. From the doctrinal point of view, Jansenism had already been overcome. But in practice, in the everyday lives of the faithful, it continued to exercise considerable influence, culminating in the divorce between devotion and Eucharistic celebration, between the spiritual and the liturgical life.

Throughout his life, Eugene de Mazenod would go against this tendency. First as a missionary and then as bishop, he would exhort people to approach the Eucharist with confidence. In addition, he knew how to set Eucharistic devotion in a broader and richer perspective.<sup>2</sup> One cannot lose sight of the fact that the basic spiritual experience that changed his life – his encounter with Christ, the Crucified Savior – took place in the context of a liturgical event, the celebration of the Liturgy of the Cross on Good Friday. It would be in the liturgy, especially in relation to its main mystery, the Paschal mystery, that Bishop de Mazenod would gather the faithful of Marseilles.<sup>3</sup> His teaching, as found in his writings, was born of a personal experience which harked back to his seminary days and which matured with the passing of years. It would be especially during the celebration of the Eucharist that he

would experience his most intense moments of Communion with Christ.

Even if adoration holds a place of great importance in his prayer life, it was never separated from the Eucharistic celebration itself, a celebration of which it was the natural continuation. He would teach those very same Marseilles faithful how the Eucharistic celebration was a prime occasion for identification with Christ. True devotion cannot be private or individualistic; on the contrary, it is communal and liturgical. It is, in fact, in this celebration that the common priesthood of the faithful is expressed: "The sacrifice at our altars is offered by the ministry of the priest on behalf of the Church. The people offer the sacrifice with the priest. It is through this lofty cooperation in the mystical immolation of the Man-God that the royal priesthood is exercised (1 Peter 2:9), a priesthood in which all Christian souls share through their union with Jesus Christ, the Sovereign Priest".<sup>4</sup>

## 2. HIS PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

An attentive reading of Eugene de Mazenod's life enables us to grasp the countless moments of encounter with Christ and to reconstruct the various stages of the spiritual journey that led him to the mystical heights of Communion with the Lord and to this identification with the One who is the end itself of the sacrament of the Eucharist.<sup>5</sup>

We find a first indication of this interior journey in his innate attraction for God, "a kind of instinct to love him", he would say himself, which, from childhood, would enable him to savor the Eucharistic presence.<sup>6</sup>

We have to go back to his seminary days to uncover his explicit relationship with Jesus in the Eucharist, even if this

relationship existed already during the years he spent in Turin and Venice.<sup>7</sup> By reading these personal writings and his notes as a seminarian, we can see being born in him the intense desire to enter more deeply into the mystery of the Eucharist, whose depths he is beginning to discover. He diligently records the list of his Communion, which, according to the custom of the time, he was allowed to receive. He writes down the dispositions necessary to be worthy of receiving Communion. He studies the example of the saints with a view to being enkindled with their love of the Eucharist. He seeks to receive Communion at least one time more than it was generally done in the seminary. By doing this, he was preparing himself for the day when he would be able to celebrate the Eucharist every day.<sup>8</sup> His relationship with his "good Master" continues in adoration, and "what an effort" it cost him every time he had to tear himself away from his "tender friend".<sup>9</sup>

During this period, his frequent internal experiences in this area are reflected in his correspondence with his family. He constantly exhorts his mother, his sister and grandmother to receive Communion. While fighting Jansenist prejudices, he explains how, even in the context of the kind of social life led by his sister, one can and should live one's Christianity. It is precisely because she lives immersed in the world that she needs to "draw the Lord's graces more frequently from the inexhaustible source of these adorable sacraments". He teaches her that one need not wait to become perfect before approaching the Eucharist. On the contrary, it is receiving Holy Communion often that makes one perfect. "You will never learn to love Jesus Christ worthily except in the sacrament of his love".<sup>10</sup>

"By frequenting the sacraments, it is then that you will become more perfect. This means is infallible".<sup>11</sup>

Eugene's union with Jesus in the Eucharist, a union which developed during his seminary days and which appears in correspondence with his family, culminated at the moment of his ordination to the priesthood. This is how he summarizes his feelings: "There is only love in my heart".<sup>12</sup>

The years which followed immediately after ordination show us Eugene living a real interior dilemma. The spiritual formation he received in the seminary set in stark contrast the demands of the apostolate as opposed to those of the life of perfection.<sup>13</sup> It is a period of darkness, even with regard to the Eucharist. He wrote in his retreat notes: "It is rarely now that I experience, during the Holy Sacrifice, certain spiritual consolations that constituted my happiness in a time when I was more recollected; instead, I have ceaselessly to combat distractions, worries, etc".<sup>14</sup> As a number of passages in his diary and the letters he wrote to Father Henry Tempier testify, his fidelity in time of trial led him to a new, more mature, relationship with the Eucharistic Jesus. One of these letters gives us a glimpse of this personal intimacy: "This morning, before Communion, I dared to speak to this good Master with the same freedom that I would have had if I had had the happiness to live when he walked on earth, and if I had found myself in the same predicament. [...] I exposed to him our needs, asked his light and his assistance, and then I surrendered myself entirely to him, wishing absolutely nothing else than his holy will. I took Communion in this disposition. As soon as I had taken the precious blood, it was impossible for me to withstand such an abundance of interior

consolations that it was necessary... to utter sighs and shed such a quantity of tears that the corporal and the altar cloth were saturated. No painful thought provoked this explosion, on the contrary, I was well, I was happy and if I was not so miserable, I would believe I was loving, that I was grateful".<sup>15</sup>

When, in his diary, he speaks of "the great flashes of understanding and inspirations that God in his goodness deigned to grant me in the course of many years on the wonderful sacrament of our altars [...]", we are not dealing here with an exceptional event, even if he speaks of "extraordinary experiences the person of the divine Savior has often granted him".<sup>16</sup>

His Communion continued on beyond the Eucharistic celebration into silent and lengthy oraison on a daily basis. There the personal intimacy is such that he is able to request graces for himself and for all the people entrusted to his care; he can ask for forgiveness of sins, the gift of to always live and die in his grace... He continues: "And what all more does one not ask for when one is before the throne of mercy, that one adores, loves, sees Jesus our Master, our Father, the Savior of our souls, that one speaks to him and that he give answer to our hearts through the abundance of his consolations and his graces? Oh, how quickly that half-hour slips by, how delightfully is it spent!"<sup>17</sup> This already gives us some idea of what the typical oraison spoke of by the Constitutions and Rules should be for the Oblate.

### 3. PASTORAL PRAXIS AND TEACHING

Both Eugene de Mazenod's pastoral practice and his teaching as bishop are colored by his personal experience of the Eucharist.

From the catechetics he taught to the young people of the Christian Youth Association of Aix to the institution of perpetual adoration in the diocese of Marseilles, the Eucharist found a large place in his ministry and in that of the Oblates.<sup>18</sup> Eugene de Mazenod took it upon himself to prepare the youth for First Holy Communion, to carry Viaticum to the sick and to preside at Eucharistic devotions. Once he became bishop, he would continue to war against the deeply rooted prejudices stemming from Jansenism by giving Holy Communion to those condemned to death. He would invite his missionaries to act with the same openness in mission countries. He considered the Eucharist as the means par excellence to strengthen the faith of neophytes. When he learned that people had reservations about admitting Canadian Amerindians to Communion under the pretext that they were not sufficiently educated, he intervened, declaring: "Don't you know that it is the very means of forming, of Christianizing them? Advance cautiously, granted; but to exclude them in general is too extreme".<sup>19</sup>

This pastoral attitude took on a particular kind of expression in the teachings spread especially through his pastoral letters.<sup>20</sup> We see three major themes emerging:

— The Eucharist is at the center of the entire Christian mystery because it is Christ, himself. About this topic, he wrote: "In religion, everything culminates in the Eucharist as to the goal where God's glory is realized and souls achieve their salvation. All the sacraments of the Church, all the supernatural gifts of God, all works of genuine piety move toward this goal where Jesus Christ himself is, the origin and culmination of our sanctification, like the crowning of our glorification, at the

same time as the perfection of the external glory of God among men".<sup>21</sup>

— To speak of the Eucharist is to speak of Christ at the culminating moment of his life, the moment he gives himself to us. He is, then, "in that state which is the highest expression of love";<sup>22</sup> it is the synthesis of Redemption, "the Lamb of God immolated from the beginning of the world (Apocalypse 13:4) for the salvation of men. He is not only the victim, but the priest as well who offers himself and immolates himself constantly for us".<sup>23</sup>

— Presence of Christ. The Eucharist exercises an effective action on the Christian by carrying out in him the fruit of Redemption, by radically transforming him to identify him with Christ himself in a "union whose value is infinite".<sup>24</sup> "[Christ] willed to become our nourishment in this divine sacrament; he willed to become flesh among us to make his union with us more personal and in some way to identify ourselves with him".<sup>25</sup> "In this way, the union between Creator and his creatures is, in Communion, the most perfect that could be conceived. Never, on his own, would man have thought of something like this [...] it is the marvel and the masterpiece of divine love".<sup>26</sup>

— Finally, by allowing every Christian to become united with Christ, the Eucharist leads all the faithful to be united among themselves. In the breaking of the bread, the Lord is the "only and genuine bond of spirits and hearts".<sup>27</sup>

For Eugene de Mazenod, the unity brought about by the Eucharist is an experience which harks back to the time of his youth when, upon entering a church, he was seized by the feeling of "catholicity", by the idea of being "a member of that great family of which God himself is Head".<sup>28</sup> From that time

on, the idea grew to maturity of finding all his friends, his relatives, the members of his Oblate family in "a common centre where we meet every day".<sup>29</sup> The Eucharist becomes for all Oblates the "living centre which serves as our means of communication".<sup>30</sup> From then on, for the Founder, this became a habit during oraison, to call to mind his sons, person by person,<sup>31</sup> and in this way to pray for each one in particular.<sup>32</sup> Then, too, he invites all Oblates to be faithful to the meeting place of oraison before Jesus in the Eucharist in order to meet each other.<sup>33</sup> To his mother, he wrote: "Let us often look for one another in the heart of our adorable Master [...] it is the best way to bring us together, for, as we each of us find our common identity in Jesus Christ, we become but one thing with him, and through him and in him we become one thing with one another".<sup>34</sup>

## II. THE EUCHARIST IN THE CONSTITUTIONS AND RULES

### 1. THE CONSTITUTIONS AND RULES OF 1826

Eugene de Mazenod passed on his Eucharistic experience in the Constitutions and Rules. Three articles defined Oblate Eucharistic devotion in a special way: 299 dealing with the celebration of Mass; 254 dealing with evening oraison, and 257 treating of visits to the Blessed Sacrament.

From this point of view, the text which has been most sustaining for Oblate life is certainly article 299: "Priests shall live in such a way that they can worthily offer the Holy Sacrifice every day".<sup>35</sup> As Father Reslé wrote in his commentary on the Rule,

it is a text which sets forth "briefly, clearly and vigorously" for the Oblates his law of life and his priestly mission.<sup>36</sup> Commentators have insisted on two points: daily celebration of Mass and the necessity of leading a life which allows one to worthily celebrate the Eucharistic mystery.

The first point – daily celebration of Mass – was not something taken for granted in the Founder's day. A number of priests were not in the habit of celebrating every day. The code of Canon Law of 1917 was still reminding priests of their obligation of celebrating the Eucharist several times a year (*pluries per annum*, Canon 805). The biographies of Eugene de Mazenod and he himself in his diary and letters relate the sacrifices and privations he was compelled to impose upon himself, especially when he was traveling, to respect the obligatory Eucharistic fast.

In his acts of visitation of the province of England, he wrote about this topic: "Never abstain from saying your Mass, whatever pretext may present itself: the wrong which you would do to yourself and to the Church, the glory which you would withhold from God, and all the other reasons which you know, and which it is useless for me to adduce here, oblige me to make this a duty of conscience for you. To act otherwise, would be to depart entirely from the spirit of our Institute, and from what has been constantly practised in it. [...] Let us not forget, my beloved Friends, that you are called to engage with the "strong one who is armed", in one of his formidable strongholds, and that you need nothing less than the strength of God Himself, to triumph over this powerful enemy. And whence will you draw the strength, but from the Holy Altar, and from Jesus Christ your Head?"<sup>37</sup>

The second point to have been a

source of inspiration for the Oblates is the quality of life demanded to celebrate the Eucharist: "[They] shall live in such a way that they can *worthily* offer the Holy Sacrifice every day". This is the source of the requirement of weekly confession (article 300), the exact observance of the rubrics, a celebration of the Eucharist in which one allots all the time necessary (article 301-302), preparation for Mass and thanksgiving (articles 303-304). But the Oblates have especially seen in these texts the depth of the interior life demanded of them to conform their lives to Christ, priest and victim.

The second instance of characteristic Oblate Eucharistic spirituality during the day is that of evening oraison: "Mental prayer will be made in common twice a day - in the morning, [...] and in the evening, in the church, before the Blessed Sacrament [...]" (article 254). There is no reason to speak here of the method of oraison. Nevertheless, we can highlight two aspects that relate to our theme: Oraison should be made before the Blessed Sacrament and in common.

The third instance is that of the daily visit to the Blessed Sacrament (article 257) to which one can add the customary visit to the Blessed Sacrament before leaving the house and upon returning home (article 81, 336).

At the outset, evening oraison was considered as a continuation of the visit to the Blessed Sacrament. Indeed, in the manuscript of the 1818 Rule, we read: "[...] and in the evening, gathered around the altar, by way of a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, for half an hour".<sup>38</sup> Based on his own experience, the Founder always considered it essential to spend this period of prayer in the presence of the Eucharist. In a letter to Father Delpuech in 1856, he wrote: "I consider it absolutely necessary to set up a chapel inside the house where the

Blessed Sacrament can be kept. It is essential that our evening oraison be made in the presence of our Lord, and we must have the facility to visit Him often during the day. All of this is not possible if we are obliged to betake ourselves to a public church".<sup>39</sup>

Oraison takes place, not only before the Blessed Sacrament (and not in one's room as in the case of Ignatian meditation), but also in common, as an act of the entire community. This points to a clear perception of the ecclesial dimension of the Eucharistic mystery. As we have seen in Eugene de Mazenod's experience, the Eucharist is the gathering place where all Oblates dispersed throughout the world meet. It creates community. Father Joseph Fabre gives this aspect considerable prominence when, in his commentary on this article, he writes that prayer in common constitutes "a priceless benefit; the Savior told us: *Ubi sunt duo vel tres congregati in nomine meo, ibi sum in medio eorum*. [For where two or three meet in my name, I shall be there with them] Matthew 18:20)."<sup>40</sup>

As we have seen, Eugene de Mazenod taught us how to pray before the Blessed Sacrament: adoration, gestures of love, praise and thanksgiving; contemplation of the mysteries of Christ who transforms himself into a source of inspiration for our own life; petitions for favors for the Congregation, the Church, persons to whom we are sent; discernment in our own spiritual journey and our ministry.

There are no lack of allusions to the Eucharist in the Constitutions and Rules. In particular, it leaves its stamp on the mission. Before taking their departure, missionaries will receive the benediction of the Blessed Sacrament along with the rest of the community.<sup>41</sup> While they are traveling and they pass

through a town or village, they should go to the church to offer adoration, and when they are unable to stop, "they will make up for it by addressing from afar their prayers to Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament".<sup>42</sup> They open the mission with the exposition and benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.<sup>43</sup> The visiting of families is preceded by a visit to the Blessed Sacrament "to commend to this important action to Our Lord Jesus who can greatly influence the success of this mission".<sup>44</sup> Finally, it is on one's knees before Him that the Office is recited all during the mission.<sup>45</sup>

## 2. THE CONSTITUTIONS AND RULES OF 1966

The articles of the Constitutions and Rules on the Eucharist remained practically unchanged until the 1966 edition in which some important changes occurred in this respect as well as in many others. The Council had hardly released the new wind of liturgical life in the Church by setting the Eucharistic solidly back in the heart of the liturgy. Following almost literally the Council's text, article 49 of the Constitutions and Rules of 1966, in strict dogmatic form, gives prominence to the eminent role the Eucharist should play in the task of personal sanctification of the individual Oblate, in his apostolic action and in his fraternal relations with the people to whom he is sent. We have to deal with a text where the most secure and most orthodox theological data must serve as basis and sustenance for Oblate life in its personal, communitarian and apostolic dimensions.<sup>46</sup>

In the 1966 text, there is still mention of the visit (R 115) and of oraison before the Blessed Sacrament, even if the communitarian dimension is overlooked (R 110). Nevertheless, there is a substantial

change with regard to the previous Rule which reveals itself in a new style of spiritual life centered on prayer life in the liturgy. As has been very accurately noted: "The Founder's spirituality is that of his times, troubled times, but less frenzied than ours. The exercises of piety that the Constitutions and Rules suggest for the purpose of developing a deep personal relationship with Christ and to nourish apostolic fervor are less easily able to be observed in their qualitative integrity – with the exception of those Oblates who are retired or who are in formation. The majority of Oblates involved in the active life are unable to carry out all these prescriptions. On the other hand, their priesthood is exercised in eminent fashion daily in the liturgy: the Eucharist and recitation of the Divine Office. To develop among the Oblates of our age an enlightened liturgical piety seemed the way to go to avoid nourishment of the spiritual life brought on by an almost unavoidable overwhelming workload".

"Ascetical practices and spiritual effort need to be maintained: meditation, oraison, particular examen, fasting, retreats; indeed, the spiritual life is not limited to participation in the liturgy (SC 12). Nevertheless, that same Council recommends that piety and non-liturgical observances 'be brought into harmony with the liturgy [in such a way] as to flow from it in some way and to return to it [...] because, by its very nature, liturgy is far superior to them' (SC 13). In this way, one can assure unity of the Oblate spiritual life and its greatest possible fruitfulness".<sup>47</sup>

## 3. THE CONSTITUTIONS AND RULES OF 1982

The Constitutions and Rules of 1982 take up once again the new perspective

of the 1966 text, while integrating into it some traditional elements. For example, article 299 of the first rule, abolished in 1966, is entirely restored. Article 33 of the present Constitutions and Rules provides us with a synthesis that is marvelous in its richness: "The Eucharist, source and summit of the Church's life, is at the heart of our life and action. We will live such lives as to be able worthily to celebrate it every day. As we participate in its celebration with all our being, we offer ourselves with Jesus the Saviour; we are renewed in the mystery of our cooperation with him, drawing the bonds of our apostolic community ever closer and opening the horizons of our zeal to all the world. In gratitude for this great Eucharistic gift, we will seek the Lord often in his sacramental presence".

This article brings out various elements.

— The central place held by the Eucharist in the life of the Church of which it is the source and summit. Suffice it to recall the teaching of the Second Vatican Council from which the Rule draws its inspiration: "[...] The Eucharist appears as the source and the summit of preaching of the Gospel: [...] For in the most blessed Eucharist is contained the entire spiritual wealth of the church, namely Christ himself our Passover and our living bread, who gives life to people through his flesh — that flesh which is given life and gives life by the holy Spirit. Thus people are invited and led to offer themselves, their works and all creation in union with Christ" (PO 5).

— The place that the Eucharist holds *at the heart* of the life and action of the Oblate. It was observed that "the word "heart" was not placed at the very head of the article only for the good composition or structure of this passage

[...]" It "brings out the affective element which the Eucharist commands and which, issuing from the heart, should imbue and influence all our daily activity. Indeed, we do not celebrate the Eucharist or participate in it only by those few minutes of fervor consecrated to the liturgical act. We celebrate and participate in the Eucharist so that it can be an intense moment in our union with God. All the successive instances of the day would only be echoes and the continuation of this rich and intense encounter with the Lord".<sup>48</sup>

— Referring once again to article 299 of the Founder's Rule, we recall the demand to lead a life which allows for a worthy celebration of the Eucharist every day.

— A classic element of Oblate spirituality, the bond which exists between the Eucharist and oblation, is once again emphasized. While acknowledging the Eucharist as a sacrifice, the Oblate celebrates the offering of himself, his own Mass, in union with the offering that Christ makes of himself.

— The Eucharist unites the Oblate to Christ in such an intimacy that he becomes one with him and thus can become his cooperator: "[...] they are renewed in the mystery of their cooperation with him". The Rule suggests it is a mystery of Communion which in the dynamics of continued growth is never finished. Later on, the Constitutions come back on this point stating that the novices become accustomed "to meet him in the Eucharist" (C 56).

— The Eucharist is still the mystery of communion between all the members of the community. In uniting each individual one to the other and transforming him into Jesus Christ, the Eucharist makes all become one. Once again, as in the old Rule, there is an insistence on

the communitarian dimension of oraison: "In accordance with their tradition, they consecrate one hour a day to oraison and spend part of this time in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament". In this way, they "secure the bonds of their apostolic community".

Finally, the apostolic dimension of devotion to the Eucharist appears. It is, in fact, "at the heart of their life and activity", in such a way that the Oblates are "opening the horizons of our zeal to all the world". Constitution 40 reaffirms the importance of daily oraison before the Blessed Sacrament and also indicates the content of that oraison. "Whatever the demands of our ministry, one of the more intense moments of the life of an apostolic community is the time spent praying together. One in spirit with those who are absent, we turn to the Lord to praise him, seek his will, beg forgiveness and ask for the strength to serve him better".

### III. EUCCHARIST IN THE OBLATES' LIFE EXPERIENCE

Contrary to what has been the case with the other dimensions of the Oblate life, the theme of Eucharist has seldom been the object of an explicit and detailed reflection. Generally, it was overshadowed by the greater reality of the mystery of Christ. In Oblate thought, the Eucharist has always been perceived as the obligatory way to identification with Christ, an identity which enables us to cooperate with his plan of salvation.

But before being for the Oblates an object of reflection, the Eucharist was a life experience. Concerning this subject, research becomes very far-ranging and difficult because it is obliged to embrace the entire Oblate life experience,

an experience which covers several generations and has not always been recorded. Coming back on the life experience of Oblates, two characteristics seem to me to be more important: the close link between oblation and Eucharist and the link between mission and Eucharist. This latter must be understood in the rather restricted sense of support that the sacrament can provide in the course of apostolic work, especially in the context of solitude.

#### 1. EUCCHARIST AND OBLATION

Life experience and doctrinal reflection have especially pondered on the association between the Eucharist and oblation. In his study on oblation, Emilien Lamirande presents a wide selection of texts in which the Eucharistic sacrifice makes its appearance like a golden thread woven through the consecration typical of the Oblate. Oblation takes on a meaning and value because it is done in union with the oblation or sacrifice of the Savior.<sup>49</sup>

Taking into account its historic value, we can find a passage charged with significance in the writings of scholastic brother Francis Mary Camper. His biography was published in 1859, that is, while Eugene de Mazenod was still living: "I harbor a great desire [...] to conform my life in all its dimensions, all its circumstances, to the life of Jesus, victim on Calvary and in the Blessed Sacrament. Oblate means victim; I would like to be the victim of Jesus, as he is daily my victim. Taking this point of view, I like to think of his hidden life, his humility, his gentleness, his patience, his sacrifice, his state of continued humiliation, of annihilation, of sacrifice in the sacrament of the altar because of me. And for love of him, I would like [...] to practice all the virtues

he practiced, suffer like him, offer myself like him".<sup>50</sup> His vision of the priesthood conforms with this: "The Eucharist as sacrifice: it is a continuation of the sacrifice of the cross; same victim, same person offering the sacrifice, same fruits, same effects, same value. [...] In one or the other, the priest must see in Jesus a model which he must faithfully replicate [...]"<sup>51</sup>

This is a mind set that has been woven into the history of the Congregation right to the present time. Father Joseph Ladié who died in 1990 showed himself to be a faithful heir of this tradition when, at the end of his life, he wrote: "I am living and discovering the Eucharist in a special way. I usually say Mass seated in the community chapel [...] Well, then, at the consecration when I say: "This is my body, that is, my life given for you", I say to myself: But I am part of the Mystical Body of Christ; I can, then, truly offer myself, offer my life for the Church, the world, the Congregation, the Province, people who are dear to me, etc. Similarly, "This is my blood..": I can offer the gift of my illness, my frailties, my sufferings... Never have I felt I have lived my priesthood as fully as I am living it now, never have I felt myself more "oblate", "offered", than at the present time [...]"<sup>52</sup>

The Eucharist is simultaneously the model of consecrated and priestly life that is set before the Oblate and the means of identifying himself to Christ in his mystery of the Redemption. In the 1876 directory for novices and scholastics, we already see this association between the Eucharist and union in Christ.<sup>53</sup>

Joseph Mary Simon is the one who has perhaps done the most work on this theme. In his important study on Oblate spirituality, he wrote: "[...] For us Ob-

lates, the Mass [...] is the *centre* towards which all the other [religious practices] should converge. Why? Christ is the first "Oblate of Mary Immaculate". [...] If we accept that, the conclusion follows: If we want to walk in the footsteps of the first Oblate, all our spiritual and apostolic activity should be centered on the sacrifice of Calvary made present on our altars. It is not, then, a question of establishing a water-tight compartment, an absolute break, between our Mass and the rest of our lives. [...] In other words, the Mass must become a part of my life, just like my life must become a part of the Mass [...]"

"But the Mass was not only our Lord Jesus Christ's sacrifice; it is also the sacrifice of the Church, our sacrifice. [...] Consequently, each morning, one would need to bring to the sacrifice a rich personal oblation. Even better, our whole day should be a continuous oblation culminating in the Eucharistic sacrifice of the following day. All our actions should be accomplished with an internal perfection such that it is transformed into a precious gift, a spotless offering worthy of being placed upon the altar alongside the oblation of Jesus. Then, the Mass will become our sacrifice because it will be the sign of our own oblation [...]"

"Because of transubstantiation, Jesus becomes our victim and produces in us this interior oblation of which he is not only the sign, but the cause as well. Let us abandon ourselves, then, to the transforming action of our victim who will fashion us according to his image and likeness. [...] He sets our thoughts in harmony with his own, our heart in harmony with his".<sup>54</sup>

Oraison before the Eucharist and the visit to the Blessed Sacrament have always been considered as the two other

ways of prolonging the Eucharistic celebration, and of identifying oneself gradually with Christ so as to become fully transformed into him.<sup>55</sup>

## 2. EUCHARIST AND MISSION

The second aspect which appears on a regular basis in Oblate tradition is that of the importance of the Eucharist for missionaries who, in order to carry out their ministry, must live in isolation. It is in their daily contacts with Jesus in the Eucharist that they find the necessary strength to move forward. Here, too, a few testimonies will suffice.

The first one comes to us from those who witnessed the holiness of Father Joseph Gerard. They were struck by his relationship with the Eucharist, the secret of his perseverance in the apostolate: "He never left the church when the Blessed Sacrament was exposed. Even when there was no exposition, he was very often at the church. He said Mass slowly and very fervently". "People judged his great love for the Blessed Sacrament by his long prayers in church. He said Mass slowly without hurrying. When he carried the Blessed Sacrament to the sick he invited Christians and the school children to go with him in procession".<sup>56</sup>

Another testimony comes to us from Canada. From Fort MacLeod, November 11, 1883, Father Leonard Van Tighen wrote: "Here I am more than three hundred miles from Saint Albert [...] among people who, for all intents and purposes, are pagans [...] It is eight years now since I left the Catholic people of Flanders, my family, [...] and here I am cast to a far off horizon. No more community, no more confreres, no more cheerful relaxation, not even a little garden plot or a tree to offer shade and shelter. Yes, let me repeat: What a

change for me! One thing, however, is left to me – and that is the main thing: I have the Blessed Sacrament with me. That says it all".<sup>57</sup>

When the time came for him to withdraw from active duty in the apostolate, Bishop Jules Cénez acknowledged that it is in the Eucharist that he found the courage to soldier on. Upon leaving Basutoland where he had worked as a missionary for forty years, he told his confreres: "Each day, even amidst the most absorbing activity, never forget to set aside a few minutes before the Blessed Sacrament. There, in the presence of Jesus, you will draw courage, strength and consolation in your sufferings. In his presence, you will learn to become and remain ever good and holy Oblates, missionaries filled with a consuming zeal".<sup>58</sup>

## IV. THE EUCHARIST IN OBLATE MINISTRY

The Oblates are called not only to live the Eucharistic ministry, but to make it a living reality as "the source and summit of all evangelization" (PO 5).

An exhaustive study should inform us about such things as the active participation of Oblates in international and regional Eucharistic congresses in which they often played the roles of prime instigators and animators. This kind of research could also focus on studies and material published by Oblates on the Mass and the Eucharist. It would be interesting as well to see how, in imitation of Bishop de Mazenod, some Oblate bishops have established perpetual adoration in their diocese, or other special Eucharistic projects such as those of Montmartre.<sup>59</sup>

Suffice it here to give, in the form of a brief summary, some observations on

the catechesis and every day pastoral service of the Oblates, especially in mission territories. Indeed, the missionaries felt it was their obligation to instill in the people a sense of the Eucharist, an understanding which embraced participation in this sacrament and the in-depth study of its mysteries right down to concrete exercises such as adoration, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, processions... One need only page rapidly through Missions to find on a regular basis the description of solemn Eucharistic celebrations in which thousands of the faithful took part; or yet again the simple catechesis of every day. To lead people to the reception of the Eucharist was one of the basic objectives of parish missions, just as it was ordinary pastoral practice in parishes confided to the care of the Oblates. Indeed, participation in the Eucharist has been considered a sign of conversion and an essential condition of an authentic commitment to the Christian journey.

Who knows to how many other parishes could be applied what the Archbishop of Quebec City said some time in the past to Father Hormidas Legault: "Your fine parish of Saint Sauveur stands out among all the others because of its devotion to the Blessed Sacrament [...] The adoration offered by your thousands of workers every month on their way home from work is a most edifying display: Everywhere people are talking about it with enthusiastic admiration".<sup>60</sup>

A talk by Father Charles Baret, bearing the title, *The Eucharistic Sacrifice*, enables us to see the content of the catechesis that was given during parish missions. In the text, we read: "Now direct your gaze to the Eucharist; summon to this place all the mothers of this earth; let them put into opera-

tion all the ingenuity and tactics of their lofty love. Between them and God on the altar, there will always exist a deep chasm. No human love would be capable of descending from high up, and thousands of obstacles stop it from falling. The God of the Eucharist descends from the highest heights and his humiliations descend to infinity [...] Here I no longer perceive either God or man. The Man-God entirely disappears and fades away. The infinite one is no more than an atom; he seems to be on the edge of annihilation. Yes, the Eucharist is the last step in the Word's humiliation and, by that very fact, the Eucharist is his culminating point in his ascension in love [...] The love of God obliterates, calls for and stirs up our love. It will never be said that infinite love had marshaled around you in vain so many attractive things and so many prodigies! [...] Our adorable Master with his personal form cloaked beneath such a humble disguise wanted to teach us that genuine love is solely the fruit of sacrifice, and that, to love divinely and be loved divinely, the infallible means is by voluntary immolation".<sup>61</sup>

The exhortation to frequent Communion is another element that appears regularly in the catechesis. For example, in a letter sent to a magazine called *L'Eucharistie*, Brother Eugene Groussault wrote: "All of our missionaries in Ceylon naturally assume it is their duty wherever possible to establish frequent Communion among their Christians". And he narrates how he himself prepares children for first Holy Communion and what efforts people make to attend Mass, sometimes even walking several kilometers to do it.<sup>62</sup>

Another witness, coming from the missions with the Amerindians in Canada, helps us to grasp the importance

the missionaries placed on worship of the Eucharist. "The catechism classes of the morning and the evening taught them in what way Jesus Christ would come and reside in the church, that is, in the sacrament of the Eucharist. We speak to them of the real presence, of the host, the chalice, the ciborium, the lamp burning before the Blessed Sacrament, genuflections, the way of coming in, of behaving, and of leaving the church when the Blessed Sacrament is on the altar, of how to decorate the altar, of visits to our Lord present in the tabernacle".<sup>63</sup> This is not a case of mere external ritualism. Teachings on the Eucharist have as their objective a greater depth of understanding: "If you believe that Jesus Christ is now present body and soul, cloaked by the species of bread and wine in this tabernacle, you will come to visit him during the day, because you are the only reason for which he came to take up residence in this church. Go to him, then, you who have caused him sorrow by your sins; go mourn for your failings in his presence, asking his forgiveness and promising to never more offend him. You also who are frail and sad, go to him; to ask his assistance, his enlightenment and his strength".<sup>64</sup>

In Oblate catechesis, there is no lack of emphasis on catholicity and unity, traits Eugene de Mazenod perceived as being intrinsically dependent on the mystery of the Eucharist. For example, the Archbishop of Durban, Bishop Denis E. Hurley, explains what he describes as "the Eucharistic peace that we should bring to racial and social divisions in the world". In a talk entitled, *The Eucharist and Unity of the Family*, presented at the XXXVIII international Eucharistic Congress, the Oblate bishop who led a constant struggle against ra-

cial segregation said: "So it is that we could and still can take part in the sacrifice and share the banquet with our brothers and sisters in faith, and then walk out of our Father's house aware not of our oneness in Christ, not of the overpowering experience we have just enjoyed together, but of what divides us, the barriers of disregard and non-communication of class, of colour, race and language. I wonder if the sufferings of Jesus that night were not in some way associated with the crimes of discrimination by which men have contrived to inflict isolation and humiliation and indignity on their fellow men, and to shrink and impoverish them in body, mind and heart".<sup>65</sup> Once again, the Eucharist emerges as the most basic bond among Christians since it is capable of breaking down every wall and of leading to unity.

## V. THE EUCHARIST IN THE CONTEXT OF OBLATE IDENTITY

We will now try to synthesize the elements that have emerged to this point in a way that will also situate the mystery of the Eucharist in the central perspective of the Oblate charism.

The Eucharist as it was lived by the Founder and in the Oblate tradition helps us in achieving a fuller understanding of our union with Christ, the Savior, whose cooperators we are called to be, the communitarian dimension of our vocation and, finally, evangelization. We could even attempt an interpretation of all the aspects of the Oblate charism described at the 1975 congress in Rome (Christ, evangelization, the poor, the Church, community, religious life, Mary, priesthood, urgent needs<sup>66</sup>) in the light of the Eucharist and vice versa.

## 1. IDENTIFICATION WITH CHRIST THE SAVIOR

The Eucharist is understood above all in the light of our vocation as cooperators of Christ the Savior. Indeed, we know that “the desire to cooperate with him draws us to know him more deeply, to identify with him, to let him live in us” (C 2). The Eucharist is the mandatory road that must be taken to arrive at this goal.

In the Eucharist, Christ has left us his redemptive love which led him to the cross. If “the Oblate cross received at the time of perpetual profession” is an exterior sign, “a constant reminder of the love of the Savior who wishes to draw all hearts to himself and sends us out as his co-workers” (C 63), the Eucharist is our daily reminder of that. That is why we acquire the ability to see “through the eyes of our crucified Savior”, to see “the world which he redeemed with his blood, desiring that those in whom he continues to suffer will know also the power of his resurrection” (C 4).

In the Eucharist, we learn the very essence of our religious life, our consecration, our oblation which consists in replicating Christ in our lives “even unto death” (C 2). The Eucharist is Christ’s supreme gift, the manifestation of the greatest love, because “there is no greater love than to give one’s life”. Our oblation, then, takes the Eucharist as its pattern; like Christ’s gift, it is the complete gift of self in the manifestation of the greatest love. We are *Oblates*, that is people totally offered up, unconditionally and irrevocably, a holocaust, an immolation of our entire being to the one who gave himself entirely to us. Thus we can be a response of love to the love with which Jesus Christ loved us and gave himself up for us (See Galatians 2:20).

Paul VI reminded all religious: “On the occasion of your religious profession, you were offered to God through the Church in intimate union with the Eucharistic sacrifice. This offering of yourselves should, day after day, become a concrete reality and be continually renewed”.<sup>67</sup>

Oblation enables us to become simply one with Christ. It is a case of dying with him to be in him, to lose one’s life to save it in him (See Mark 8:35). We live in the mystery of which Paul spoke: “I have been crucified with Christ, and I live now not with my own life, but with the life of Christ who lives in me” (Galatians 2:19-20). Constantly grafted into the fruitful death of Christ by our sharing in the Eucharist, we can hope to become his authentic cooperators in the Pascal Mystery. In the same way that the offering that Jesus makes of himself to the Father is the road to salvation for the human race, so our oblation, grafted into his own offering and validated by it, could also be the secret of our apostolic fruitfulness.

Mary who “consecrated herself totally as lowly handmaid to the person and work of the Savior” (C 10) remains the peerless model of oblation.

Finally, it is in our daily relationship with the Eucharist that this “priestly charity” of which the *Preface* speaks can mature. Even the scholastics will achieve “appreciation of the gift of the priesthood” and will arrive at a sharing “in a unique way in Christ’s own ministry of priest, prophet and shepherd” (C 66) and the brothers will share “in the common priesthood of Christ” (R 3) [R 7c in CCRR 2000].

## 2. THE APOSTOLIC COMMUNITY

Another dimension of the Eucharist preserved in the Oblate tradition is that

of the hearth of communion. It is, in fact, a bond and model of unity "which this most holy sacrament aptly signifies and admirably realizes" (LG 11). Indeed, "though there are many of us, we form a single body because we all have a share in this one loaf" (1 Corinthians 10:17).

The religious community, which finds its place within the great ecclesial community, also draws life from the Eucharist. In *Evangelica testificatio*, we read: "United in the name of Christ, our communities naturally have the Eucharist at their centre, 'a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity'."<sup>68</sup>

If "the community of the Apostles with Jesus is the model of our life" (C 3), it is gathered around the Eucharist that the Oblates will learn to live the relationship of Communion because it was at the Last Supper that the Lord put his definitive stamp on the community of the Twelve. It was there that he gave them the commandment to love each other, the element at the very heart of community life. He demonstrated for them the quality of these relationships based on service (the washing of the feet). He offered them the same possibility of loving as he loved and to serve as he served in the measure that he himself identified himself with each one of them.

The Eucharistic celebration constitutes the most clearly defined moment of ecclesial Communion. Ultimately, it is a school where the Oblates learn to carry out their "mission in Communion with the pastors whom the Lord has given to his people" (C 6).

### 3. EVANGELIZATION

The third element of the Oblate tradition is the link which exists between the Eucharist and evangelization. This

is the least developed of the three. From our own experience, we know the kind of spiritual support the Eucharist provides for us to progress in the missionary life, especially if this life is lived in solitude. But we do not have an adequate understanding of the Eucharistic dynamic of evangelization and the apostolic charity that flows from it. There is a close association between the imitation of Christ the Savior and evangelization of the poor (see C 1), between the following of Christ and announcing the Gospel, between identification with Christ and the service of "God's people in unselfish love" (C 2). If the Eucharist is the privileged place of conformity to Christ, it also becomes the place of missionary sending off; it is the place which gives rise to a daily practice of charity, not only within the community, but also with regard to *every individual* for whom Christ offered his body and shed his blood. So it is that "the bread of God's word and the bread of charity, just like the Eucharistic bread, are one and the same bread: It is, in fact, the person of Jesus who gives himself to humans and involves his disciples in his act of love for his Father and his brothers".<sup>69</sup>

So it is that the Eucharist can no longer be considered a fringe element in the overall life project of the Oblates. It serves to nourish and to shape our charism. Indeed, in it, Christ himself is really present, "the living Only Begotten Son of God, splendor of eternal light, Word made flesh and Redeemer of men",<sup>70</sup> to bring to fulfillment the new and eternal alliance. It is by taking it as his starting point that he gets us involved as his cooperators in his own work of salvation.

FABIO CIARDI

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> For a more in-depth study of the place the Eucharist holds in the life and teachings of Eugene de Mazenod, I refer you to my previous writings: "La relation personnelle avec Jésus Eucharistique selon le bienheureux de Mazenod", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 37 (1978), p. 237-250; "L'Eucharistie dans l'action pastorale du Bx de Mazenod," in *Vie Oblate Life*, 38 (1979), p. 39-50; "L'Eucaristia nelle vita e nel pensiero di Eugenio de Mazenod", in *Claretianum*, 19 (1979), p. 259-289. Translated into English under the title: "The Eucharist in the Life and Thoughts of Eugene de Mazenod", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 38 (1979), p. 201-231.

<sup>2</sup> An adequate study of this topic is lacking while the rich and abundant documentation available promises a fruitful return for the research time invested. See "Le saint Fondateur des Oblats et la liturgie", in *Semaine religieuse de Quebec*, 57 (1945), p. 718-720. For the relationship with Dom Guéranger and the liturgical renewal, see MITRI, Angelo, *Le bienheureux Eugène de Mazenod*, Rome, 1975, p. 99-102.

<sup>3</sup> See LAMIRANDE, Emilien, "La mort et la résurrection du Christ et leur célébration liturgique. Textes de Mgr de Mazenod", in *Etudes oblates*, 19 (1960), p. 3-22.

<sup>4</sup> Pastoral letter of February 8, 1846.

<sup>5</sup> See "The Eucharist's Place in Blessed Eugene's Life", in "The Eucharist in the Life and Thoughts of Eugene de Mazenod", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 38 (1979), p. 207.

<sup>6</sup> "Retreat notes, Amiens, 1-21 December, 1811", in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, no. 95, p. 215.

<sup>7</sup> For the relationship with the Eucharist in the period before his entry into the seminary, see MORABITO, Joseph. "Je serai prêtre", in *Etudes oblates*, 13 (1954), p. 9-60; PIELORZ, Józef, *La vie spirituelle de Mgr de Mazenod, 1782-1812*, Ottawa, Oblate Studies Edition, p. 59-210.

<sup>8</sup> "Fast days, Communion days and 'of perpetual memorial'," in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, no. 31, p. 71.

<sup>9</sup> Letter to Mrs. de Mazenod at Aix, February 13, 1809, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, no. 45, p. 99.

<sup>10</sup> Letter to Mrs. Boisgelin at Aix, nee de Mazenod..., December 4, 1808, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, no. 35, p. 79.

<sup>11</sup> Letter to Mrs. Boisgelin at Aix, nee de Mazenod..., August 12, 1811, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, no. 90, p. 199.

<sup>12</sup> Feelings after priestly ordination. Letter to Mr. Duclaux, December 21, 1811, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, no. 98, p. 229.

<sup>13</sup> See TACHÉ, Alexander, *La vie spirituelle d'Eugène de Mazenod, 1812-1818*, Rome, 1963, p. 31-56.

<sup>14</sup> Annual retreat made at Bonneveine, July-August 1816, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 15, no. 139, p. 133-134.

<sup>15</sup> Letter to Father Tempier, August 23, 1830, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 7, no. 359, p. 212.

<sup>16</sup> Diary, March 17, 1839.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, February 7, 1839.

<sup>18</sup> See "L'Eucharistie dans l'action pastorale", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 38 (1979); "L'Eucaristia nelle vita e nel pensiero di Eugenio de Mazenod", in *Claretianum*, 19 (1979), p. 278-283. Translated into English under the title: "The Eucharist in the Life and Thoughts of Eugene de Mazenod", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 38 (1979), p. 220-226.

<sup>19</sup> GRANDIN, Bishop Vital, Notes on the Church of the Northwest, quoted in Paul Emile Breton, "Le Fondateur des Oblats d'après les écrits de Monseigneur Grandin", in *Etudes oblates*, 18 (1959), p. 358.

<sup>20</sup> Especially those of February 8, 1846, February 20, 1859 and December 21, 1859. See *L'Eucaristia*, op. cit., p. 284-287.

<sup>21</sup> Pastoral letter of December 21, 1859, p. 9.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 7.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 6.

<sup>24</sup> Pastoral letter of February 22, 1859, p. 36.

<sup>25</sup> Pastoral letter of December 21, 1859, p. 7.

<sup>26</sup> Pastoral letter of February 22, 1859, p. 36.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>28</sup> "Extract from a 'Miscellaneous' notebook, May 1804", in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, no. 7, p. 10; see also no. 38, p. 86.

<sup>29</sup> Letter to Father Valentine Végréville, March 25, 1857, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 2, no. 231, p. 142.

<sup>30</sup> Letter to Father Albert Lacombe, March 6, 1857, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 2, no. 229, p. 140.

<sup>31</sup> Letter to Father Peter Aubert, April 9, 1859, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 2, no. 264, p. 211.

<sup>32</sup> Letter to Father Valentine Végréville, March 25, 1857, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 2, no. 231, p. 142.

<sup>33</sup> Letter to Father Mark de l'Hermite, January 10, 1852, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 11, no. 1096, p. 71.

<sup>34</sup> Letter to Mrs. de Mazonod at Aix, December 25, 1808, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 14, no. 45, p. 85.

<sup>35</sup> This passage was taken verbatim from Saint Alphonsus' Rule: "The priests will be assiduous in giving every possible kind of edification and will live so as to be able to celebrate worthily every day. In addition, they must go to confession at least once a week". See COSENTINO, Georges, *Histoire de nos Règles* I, Ottawa, Oblate Studies Edition, 1955, p. 97.

<sup>36</sup> "Brevissime, clare et nerveuse", in RESLE, Joseph, *Commentarium privatum Constitutionum et Regularum*, Part Two, Ottawa, Oblate Studies Edition, 1956, p. 177.

<sup>37</sup> Act of Visitation of the Province of England, July 22, 1850, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 3, Appendix no. 4, p. 189 & 190.

<sup>38</sup> "Constitutions et Règles de la Société des Missionnaires de Provence, premier manuscrit français", Second Part, Chapter One, par. 5, in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 61.

<sup>39</sup> Letter to Father Leon Delpeuch, December 10, 1856, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 12, no. 1334, p. 34.

<sup>40</sup> "For where two or three meet in my name, I shall be there with them". (Matthew 18:20) Circular letter no. 15, November 21, 1863, in *Circ. adm.* I (1850-1885), p. 97. In this circular letter we find a commentary on the three forms of Eucharistic piety. p. 97-100.

<sup>41</sup> "Constitutions et Règles de la Société des Missionnaires de Provence, premier manuscrit français", Part One, Chapter Two, par. 2, Special rule for parish missions", in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 25, lines 128-135.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 26, lines 182-188.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 28-29, lines 248-263.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 29, lines 217-220.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 31, lines 334-335.

<sup>46</sup> See the commentary on the 1966 Rule: *The Congregation Renewed. A Reading Guide for the Constitutions and Rules: Introduction and Commentary*, Rome, 1968, p. 164-166. GILBERT, Maurice, "Réflexions sur la vie oblate à la lumière des nouvelles Constitutions", in *Etudes oblates*, 25 (1966), p. 332-337.

<sup>47</sup> HUDON, Germain, "Vie oblate et liturgie", *Etudes oblates*, 25 (1966), p. 37-48.

<sup>48</sup> NORMANDIN, Rodrigue, *L'Eucharistie et l'Oblat*, typewritten manuscript, A.D., Ottawa.

<sup>49</sup> LAMIRANDE, Emilien, "Esprit oblat. Approche historique", in *Etudes oblates*, 15 (1956), p. 322-355. See *Idem*, "La vocation oblate d'après le frère scolastique F.-M. Camper (1835-1856)", in *Etudes oblates*, 17 (1958), p. 270-279.

<sup>50</sup> *Vie de François-Marie Camper, scolastique minoré de la congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée, par un prêtre de la même congrégation*, Paris, E. Repos, 1859, p. 207-208.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 220.

<sup>52</sup> *Missioni OMI*, March 1991, p. 50.

<sup>53</sup> "Des dévotions propres aux membres de la Société d'après l'ancien directoire des noviciats et scolasticats", in *Etudes oblates*, 16 (1957), p. 270-274.

<sup>54</sup> SIMON, Joseph Mary, "Essai d'une spiritualité oblate", in *Etudes oblates*, 15 (1956), p. 247-249.

<sup>55</sup> See COOPER, Austin, "Prayer before the Blessed Sacrament", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 37 (1978), p. 251-259.

<sup>56</sup> BEAUDOIN, Yvon, *Le bx Joseph Gérard, O.M.I.*, biography, testimonies, *Oblate Writings* II, vol. 3, Rome, 1988, p. 164 & 165.

<sup>57</sup> Letter to Father Leduc, in *Missions*, 22 (1884) p. 199.

<sup>58</sup> "Vicariat du Basutoland. Départ de Mgr Cénez, évêque de Nicopolis et premier Vicaire apostolique du Basutoland", in *Missions*, 65 (1931), p. 114.

<sup>59</sup> "Les principales oeuvres Eucharistiques, réparatrice et nationales établies dans le sanctuaire du Sacré-Coeur", in *Missions*, 26 (1888), p. 576-588.

<sup>60</sup> "Lettre de S. G. Mgr l'Archevêque de Québec au R. P. Legault, o.m.i., curé de Saint-Sauveur", in *Missions*, 49 (1911), p. 55.

<sup>61</sup> "Le sacrifice Eucharistique", in *Missions*, 15 (1877), p. 244-246.

<sup>62</sup> Letter from Brother Eugene Groussault to the publication "L'Eucharistie", in *Missions*, 51 (1913), p. 71-73.

<sup>63</sup> Letter from Bishop Paul Durieu to Father Aime Martinet, September 10, 1884, in *Missions*, 23, (1885), p. 54.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 56.

<sup>65</sup> "The Eucharist and Unity of the

Human Family", in *Missions*, 92 (1965), p. 191-192.

<sup>66</sup> See "Déclaration finale du congrès sur le charisme du Fondateur aujourd'hui", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 36 (1977), p. 299-307.

<sup>67</sup> *Evangelica Testificatio*, no. 47.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibidem*, no. 48.

<sup>69</sup> C.E.I. (Conferenza Episcopale d'Italia [Italian Conference of Bishops]) *Evangelizzazione e testimonianza della carità* [Evangelization and the witness of charity] I.

<sup>70</sup> MAZENOD, Eugene de, Pastoral letter of December 21, 1859.

## EVANGELIZATION AND MISSION

*Summary: I. At the time of the Founder:* 1. Origins of the charism of evangelization; 2. Parish missions, the primary end of the Congregation: a. Involvement in parish missions; b. Purpose and format of these missions; 3. Foreign missions, a happy turn of events for the Institute: a. Foreign missions, a more radical understanding of the charism; b. The fervor of first evangelization; c. Missions; a radical imitation of the Apostles; 4. Daring in the face of new challenges; 5. The Founder's vision; a. To respond to the needs of the Church; b. Like Christ, the Evangelizer, whose co-workers we are; c. Especially through the ministry of the Word; d. Through the witnessing of a consecrated life; 6. The response of the Oblates to the vision of the Founder. *II. Evangelization after the death of the Founder:* 1. Evangelization during the first century following the death of the Founder: a. General Chapters; b. Superiors General; 2. The outcome of the Council and the Rule of 1966; 3. The survey and study on evangelization in the Oblate charism; 4. A view from above; 5. Direction taken by the Chapters which followed the Council; 6. The Constitutions and Rules of 1982. *Conclusion.*

"He has sent me to bring the Good News to the poor [...]. The Good News is proclaimed to the poor" (Luke 4:18; Matthew 11:5). This double Gospel expression makes up the motto inscribed on the coat of arms of the Congregation of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate and of its founder, Eugene de Mazenod. It highlights the missionary character of the Oblate charism and its primary activity. The Oblates find themselves reflected in it no matter how diverse their ministries might be.

The word mission has perhaps attained an even more common usage in the Institute. Indeed, it reflects the very name and the double ministry set forth by the Constitutions: parish missions and foreign missions.

The present study is divided into two parts: the first deals with the period of the Founder (nos. 1-6), the second with the period which followed his death.

### I. AT THE TIME OF THE FOUNDER

#### 1. ORIGINS OF THE CHARISM OF EVANGELIZATION

It was Eugene de Mazenod's personal experience that led him to discern the salvation needs of people. His years in Italy and his return to France after the Revolution helped him become aware of these needs, especially as they applied to poor people. Nothing could make him back off and as a young lay person he was committed. He worked among prisoners, taught catechism to the rural youth, took a stand against Jansenism, etc. His "conversion", one Good Friday, committed him to a new relationship with Christ and a new vision of the Church purchased at the cost of his blood. He was ready to leave everything behind to dedicate himself unconditionally to their service.

Subsequent to his formation at the seminary of Saint Sulpice in Paris dur-

ing which he personally got to know the difficulties imposed upon the Pope and the Church, he returned to his native city of Aix-en-Provence and dedicated himself to an apostolate which was out of the ordinary. He preached to the poor, the workers, the domestic servants in a simple, solid and consistent way. He gathered together youth of all ages, offering them entertainment and Christian formation through the Association, of the Christian Youth of Aix which he established.

The feverish apostolate of these three years made Father de Mazenod aware of the vastness of the needs he faced and the inadequacy of his personal response. Under the influence of an "impulse from the outside", he made the decision to establish a community together with a few priests to evangelize the forsaken rural population through the means of missions.

From the first documents dealing with the foundation, Eugene's intentions are clear. His letters to Father Henry Tempier and to the Vicars General of the diocese, the 1818 Rule, his personal recollections and those of his first companions give witness to this. He takes his starting point from the circumstances of his own need for salvation. To Father Tempier he wrote: "Dwell deeply on the plight of our country people, their religious situation, the apostasy that daily spreads wider with dreadfully ravaging effects. Look at the feebleness of the means employed to date to oppose this flood of evil."<sup>1</sup> The request addressed to the Vicars General of Aix for authorization to set up a community in that city is in the same vein: "The undersigned priests: deeply moved by the deplorable situation of the small towns and villages of Provence that have almost completely lost the faith; knowing from ex-

perience that the callousness or indifference of these people renders the ordinary help supplied by your concern for their salvation insufficient and even useless [...]"<sup>2</sup>.

As a solution, he proposes the preaching of parish missions. In doing this, he is following the recommendations of the Pope and the example of other dioceses in France, in particular, that of his seminary confrere, Charles de Forbin-Janson. To Father Tempier, he wrote: "Well, dear man, what I say to you, without going fully into details, is that you are necessary for the work which the Lord inspires us to undertake. Since the head of the Church is persuaded that, given the wretched state in which France finds herself, only missions can bring people back to the Faith which they have practically abandoned, good men of the Church from different dioceses are banding together in response to the views of our supreme Pastor. We likewise feel that it is utterly necessary to employ the same remedy in our regions and, full of confidence in the goodness of Providence, have laid down the foundations of an establishment which will steadily furnish our countryside with fervent missionaries."<sup>3</sup> To the Vicars he wrote: "Convinced that missions are the only means by which these people who have gone astray can be brought out of their degradation [...] the Missionaries will [tour] the rural areas proclaiming the word of God"<sup>4</sup>.

The analysis of the situation of the need for salvation and the desire to respond to this need by means of missions emerges even more strongly in the *Preface* of the Constitutions and Rules, considered as the charter for the missionary ideal of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. From the outset, Eugene de Mazenod proposed, not only a con-

crete missionary endeavor, but also a well defined and demanding community life style – an ideal of the missionary constantly devoted, not only to equip himself for his important ministry, but also to become a saint.

## 2. PARISH MISSIONS, THE PRIMARY END OF THE CONGREGATION

At the time of the founding of the Congregation, Eugene de Mazenod held the view that the preaching of parish missions was the most effective means to Christianize the rural areas of southern France in order to “rekindle the flame of faith that has all but died in the hearts of so many of her children... We must lead men to act like human beings, first of all, and then like Christians, and, finally, we must help them to become saints.”<sup>5</sup>

In the note that he addressed to Mgr. Adinolfi, Under-Secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, Eugene de Mazenod wrote: “Our Society works in towns, as you could notice from our Rules, and is engaged there in all sorts of good works, but its preference is to evangelize with all the zeal it can the poor who are abandoned... to spread the knowledge of Jesus Christ and to extend his spiritual kingdom in souls”<sup>6</sup>.

In the Letter of Approbation of the Rules signed by Pope Leo XII, we read: “About eleven years have already passed since our predecessor, Pius VII [...] expressed the desire to see, in the wake of the storm of the Revolution, missionaries to bring the scattered sheep back to the right road of salvation. Meanwhile, to respond to this desire, a small group of priests was being formed in the diocese of Aix in the heart of the southern provinces of France with the purpose of devoting themselves to this ministry [...]”

“Now, this Congregation has set for itself a variety of goals, the first and most essential of which is that its members, bound by vows [...] should dedicate themselves especially to the holy exercise of missions, taking as their priority for the focus of their zeal the countryside devoid of spiritual assistance, and in their preaching, using the local dialect. In addition, this Society sets as its goal to be of assistance to the clergy, either by taking on the running of seminaries [...] or in making themselves always available to parish priests and other pastors to work for the reforming of morals by means of preaching and other spiritual exercises. Also, it devotes all its care and solicitude to the youth, this chosen portion of the Christian people, which it gathers in pious groups in order to hold at bay the seductions of the world. Finally, it administers the sacraments and distributes the Word of God to prisoners [...]”<sup>7</sup>

The pontifical Letter of Approbation, certainly written with the suggestions of the Founder<sup>8</sup>, mentions the various ends of the Institute: parish missions, assistance to the clergy, youth ministry, care of prisoners. Parish missions are presented as the primary reason for the founding of the Congregation and its main purpose.

### *a. Involvement in parish missions*

This giving of priority to parish missions was included in the first Rule of 1818 and in the approved edition in 1826 without it being understood as an exclusive ministry<sup>9</sup>. From 1816 to 1861, the Oblates preached some 3,000 parish missions and retreats<sup>10</sup>. At the time of the Founder, they constituted the main ministry of the Oblates in Eastern Canada. The first year, at least fourteen parishes had the benefit of being min-

istered to by the first group. From 1842 on, the Oblates preached parish missions in the United States, traveling from their Canadian base in Longueuil. From 1856 to 1862, under the leadership of Father Édouard Chevalier, the Oblates from Buffalo preached 108 parish missions or retreats, speaking to the immigrants of Irish or French-Canadian extraction.

Preaching as it was conducted in parish missions served as a model for all the other forms of ministry. Thus it was that the evangelization of the Amerindians of Canada was carried out according to this method. These were still a nomadic people. Consequently, the Oblates evangelized them in the places and the times of their general gatherings, giving them continuous instruction. The ministry to the lumber men in the bush camps also drew its inspiration from this method. In Texas, the parishes they accepted to take care of the Mexican people were considered as permanent missions and centers for the spread of evangelization. In a special way, the presence of Oblates at Marian shrines offered the possibility of going out to preach missions in the local area. At the same time, while receiving pilgrims they could prepare them for the preaching of missions, or deepen the results of missions already preached.

Throughout his life, the Founder insisted on the importance and effectiveness of parish missions. Father Alfred Yenveux dedicated 144 pages of his commentary on the Rule to recording the many things the Founder said on this matter<sup>11</sup>.

*b. The purpose and format of these missions*

Eugene de Mazenod chose parish missions as the primary means to evangelize

the most abandoned souls, those with whom ordinary ministry would have the least contact. His goal was to lead them to a knowledge of Jesus Christ and to extend his kingdom in them, to lead them back to the Church and to Christian living by instructing them on the fundamental truths of the faith and its concrete demands. The missions entailed a rather long and intense period of preaching which led to a Christian transformation of morals<sup>12</sup>. Their object was not only to instruct, but to convert<sup>13</sup>. The sacrament of confession or reconciliation played a prominent role in this process<sup>14</sup>.

The missions were duly prepared by the missionaries who, in order to do this, were obliged to devote a part of the time spent in community to study, to prayer and to the preparation of themes on which to preach.

The mission was announced beforehand in the parish to be evangelized. After a day of fasting and praying, the missionaries would generally walk to the designated place where the clergy and the people would welcome them in the context of a special ceremony. The mission was carried out by several missionaries – two at least – but generally four or five. It lasted from three to six weeks. The first days were spent in getting in touch with the local people through visiting families and inviting them to the exercises.

During the day, there were two intense periods for everyone in general. Early in the morning before people went to work in the fields, there was Mass with a catechetical teaching on the duties of Christians, the truths contained in the Creed, the commandments and the sacraments. In the evening, in a context of prayer, the major mission preaching was held; this is how it took place: recitation of the rosary, invoca-

tion of the Holy Spirit, sermon, penitential prayer, benediction of the Blessed Sacrament and the notices regarding the mission. The sermon lasted about forty-five minutes and dealt with the love and fear of God, with salvation and grace, with sin and conversion, with the four last things (death, judgment, heaven and hell) and with Mary.

During the day, there were other instructions addressed to various groups. There were two or three days of retreat for children who promoted the mission in their own families. Special sermons were addressed to young people and women, especially on Sunday when they were free from their tasks. Even the men had some instructions adapted particularly to them.

In the course of the missions, special ceremonies offered people the opportunity to pray, to learn and to reflect. In addition to the opening of the mission and its conclusion when a cross was erected in a central location in the parish, there was a ceremony for the renewal of baptismal vows or the promulgation of the law of God, a ceremony dedicated to the dead with a procession to the graveyard, and the penitential procession.

Confession was the culminating event of the conversion process. It could entail several encounters with the priest. The missionaries prepared for confession with care and made themselves available to receive penitents. They were constantly invited to pray for the conversion of sinners. In the evening, the bells were rung for ten or fifteen minutes. At that moment, the whole village was invited to kneel and pray for the conversion of sinners.

The mission also had as its objective conversion of the community and the resolution of certain social moral problems. It is thus that, in the first years

following the Revolution, tribunals were established to settle the problems of goods acquired illegally. Groups and gathering places were organized to overcome common vices such as men going to bars and young people going to dances. In the months that followed, one or two missionaries would return to the place to rekindle and reaffirm the renewal brought about by the mission.

In these parish missions, we can point out certain characteristics:

— Above all, they were characterized by the fact that the Word of God was given center stage and was proclaimed in a way adapted to the people so that they could grasp it; the local dialect was used for solid sermons which could have a lasting effect.

— The mission took place in a context of faith where people called upon the grace of God through prayer; personal and community conversion was stressed. The entire parish community was involved: from priests through to the laity, from children to various categories of people. There were a number of ways of getting close to the people; they ranged from family visitation to making themselves available for hearing confessions, to preaching every day and at special ceremonies.

— The witness of the missionaries was just as important as the words they spoke. Their lifestyle, their prayer, their availability were all an integral part of the mission. Their preaching about Christ and their witness was based on their own experience of Christ.

### 3. FOREIGN MISSIONS, A HAPPY TURN OF EVENTS FOR THE INSTITUTE

In 1840, twenty-five years after its foundation, the Congregation was characterized by its apostolic zeal, but it was experiencing difficulty in its

growth. Among its members, it counted fifty-five professed, forty of whom were priests. The members lived in six missionary communities with the addition of two other communities responsible for the major seminaries of Marseilles and Ajaccio. The accepting of foreign missions in 1841 constituted a decisive turn of events for the Congregation. It was responsible for its geographic expansion, its increase in numbers and a deepening of its evangelizing charism. Twenty years later, at the death of the Founder in 1861, the Oblates would have over four hundred members; they would be found on various continents and their average age would be 35.7 years.

The option for foreign missions was not a decision made on impulse. It was grounded in the logic of the Founder's vision and the aspirations of the Oblates. In the 1818 Rule, the first Rule, Eugene de Mazenod wrote: "They are called to be cooperators of the Savior, co-redeemers of the human race. And even though, because of their present small number and the more urgent needs of the people around them, they have to limit the scope of their zeal, for the time being, to the poor of our countryside and others, their ambition should, in its holy aspirations, embrace the vast expanse of the whole earth."<sup>15</sup>

From the time of the original approbation from Rome in 1826, some of Eugene de Mazenod's companions declared themselves ready to leave for the foreign missions – among whom were Fathers Domenico Albini, Hippolyte Guibert, Pascal Ricard and Jean-Joseph Touche. That is what allowed the Founder to write to Cardinal Pedicini, *ponent* of the cause for the approbation of the Rule: "Several members of the Congregation would willingly go and preach the Gospel to non-believers; when they

will be more numerous it is possible that the superiors will send them to America, either to be of assistance to poor Catholics who are bereft of every spiritual benefit, or to win new members to the faith."<sup>16</sup> In 1831, the Chapter presented a motion, adopted unanimously, in which a request was made of the Superior General "that some of our members should be sent to the foreign missions when a favorable opportunity presents itself"<sup>17</sup>. The following year, he made an unsuccessful attempt to establish a mission in Algeria. The favorable opportunity was to emerge ten years later when the new Bishop of Montreal came to Europe to find priests, and discouraged by the failure of his endeavors, passed through Marseilles on his way to Rome. That is when he met Bishop de Mazenod. When the Congregation was consulted, a favorable response was received and action was taken.

Four priests and two brothers set sail for Montreal on October 16, 1841. That same year a foundation in England would be undertaken by the sending of Father William Daly. Four years later, the Oblates left for Western Canada and the diocese of Saint Boniface and immediately launched into their ministry to the Amerindians. In a few years they spread out over the entire expanse of the prairies and the polar region in search of tribes which were still nomadic. In 1847, two new foundations were undertaken: one in the United States on the Pacific Coast and the other in Jaffna in Ceylon, now known as Sri Lanka. In 1848, a mission was established in Algeria, a mission for which the Founder had been offering his services since 1832. In 1851, the failure of the mission in Algeria made it possible to accept a mission in Natal, a mission suggested by the Congregation of

the Propaganda. In the meantime, from 1849 on, the Oblates had forged on to the Mexican border and three years later established themselves in Texas. A simple listing of the foundations is totally inadequate to reflect the daring that was called for here when we take into consideration the difficulties presented in travel and cultural integration as well as the tasks rapidly assumed in ever more extensive territories.

*a. Foreign missions, a more radical understanding of the charism*

In his letter missioning the first Oblates leaving for Montreal, the Founder revealed his fatherly concern and his intuition that they would be opening up a new field of apostolate and a door leading to the conquest to souls in other countries. He stressed the witness they were to give and their charity to each other.

He would soon become aware that the foreign missions were a further development of his original vision of evangelization, of the gift of self, of following the example of the Apostles, and of seeking out of the most abandoned souls<sup>18</sup>.

In the foreign missions, evangelization was not only a question of reawakening a lapsed faith, but of communicating the faith in its most basic form. On January 8, 1847, he wrote to Father Pascal Ricard, sent to the diocese of Walla Walla in the United States: "I say nothing of how magnificent in the eyes of faith is the ministry you are going to fulfill. One must go back to the birth of Christianity to find anything comparable. It is an apostle with whom you are associated and the same marvels that were wrought by the first disciples of Jesus Christ will be renewed in our days by you, my dear children, whom Provi-

dence has chosen amongst so many others to announce the Good News to so many slaves of the demon who huddle in the darkness of idolatry and who know not God. This is truly the real apostolate which is renewed in our times. Let us thank the Lord for having been deemed worthy to be participants therein in so active a manner [...]"<sup>19</sup>

Four years later, he would write to the same Father Ricard: "Foreign missions compared to our missions in Europe have a special character of a higher kind, because this is the true apostolate of announcing the Good News to nations which have not yet been called to knowledge of the true God and of his Son Jesus Christ [...] This is the mission of the apostles: *Euntes, docete omnes gentes!* (Matthew 28:19); this teaching of the truth must penetrate to the most backward nations so that they may be regenerated in the waters of baptism. You are among those to whom Jesus Christ has addressed these words, giving you your mission as he gave their mission to the apostles who were sent to convert our fathers. From this point of view, which is a true one, there is nothing higher than your ministry [...]"<sup>20</sup>.

The foreign missions were not a carbon copy of those being preached in France to the people overlooked by ordinary pastoral ministry. The primary focus of the foreign missions was on non-Christians to make the initial proclamation of Christ to them and to convert them to Christ.

*b. The fervor of first evangelization*

Ever since he met Bishop Bettachini, the Founder cherished great hopes for the mission of Jaffna. He wrote to the superior of the Jaffna mission, in a letter tinged with some impa-

tience: "You do not give me enough details on your way of life, where you live, and your ministry. When will you begin to win over the unbelievers? Are you only on your island as parish priests of old Christians? I had always thought the idea was to convert the pagans. That is what we are made for rather than anything else. There are enough bad Christians in Europe without our having to go and look for them so far away. Give me plenty of information on this, even if all there is to report so far is hopes."<sup>21</sup> Two and one half years later, he would bring up the same topic again: "Be patient, and when you are able to launch an attack on idolatry, you will see that you will find less difficulty and more consolations in that work than in battling with those degenerate Christians who discourage you so much."<sup>22</sup>

To Bishop Jean François Allard, Vicar Apostolic of Natal, he wrote: "There is a matter for extreme concern in the lack of success of your mission to the Africans. There are few examples of such sterility. What! not a single one of those poor infidels to whom you have been sent has opened his eyes to the truth you were bringing them! I have difficulty in consoling myself over it since you were not sent to the few heretics who inhabit your towns. It is to the Africans that you have been sent, it is their conversion that the Church expects from the holy ministry she has entrusted to you. It is, therefore, to the African that you must direct all your thoughts and efforts. All our missionaries must know this and take it to heart."<sup>23</sup>

A few months later, he further developed the same theme in a letter to the same bishop: "I must admit, my dear Lord Bishop, that your letters still trouble me greatly. Up till now your mission is a failed mission. Frankly,

one does not send a Vicar Apostolic and a fairly large number of missionaries for them to look after a few scattered settlements of old Catholics. A single missionary would have been enough to visit these Christians. It is clear that the Vicariate has been established in this area simply for the evangelization of the Africans. Now, we have already been there for several years and you are involved in something quite different. I think, to speak truthfully, that you are not fulfilling your mission and at the same time are doing all in your power to help the English colonists. [...] Elsewhere I see the Vicars Apostolic putting their hands to the plough like any other missionary, in some territories taking charge of one mission station on their own and in others exploring the country themselves and founding mission stations here and there among the pagans to whom they are sent, to which they then send missionaries to continue their work. They learn the local languages in order to carry out the ministry which is their responsibility, however difficult this study may be. In short, they are at the head of everything that zeal for the salvation of the pagans can inspire. It seems to me that you are not acting in this way and perhaps one ought to attribute the failure of your mission so far to the methods you are using."<sup>24</sup>

To Father Joseph Gérard who was seeking by every means possible to evangelize non-Christians, he lent his encouragement and his hope: "I take great interest in reading about what you are doing in your work for the conversion of those poor Africans who resist with a diabolic stubbornness all that your zeal prompts you to do to bring them to a knowledge of the true God and to their own sanctification. Their obstinacy is truly deplorable and must be the source of great sorrow for you.

After so many years not a single conversion; it is awful! You must not lose heart because of it. The time will come when the merciful grace of God will produce a sort of explosion and your African Church will be formed. You ought perhaps to penetrate deeper among these savage tribes in order to bring this about. If you were to meet some who had not already been indoctrinated by heretics and who had had no contact with white men you would be likely to do better. *Do not forget that you have been sent for the conquest of souls* and remind Father Bompard of this also. *You must not be unwilling to make an assault and you must pursue the enemy* to his furthest hideouts. Victory is promised only to perseverance. Fortunately the reward is not measured solely by success and you need only to have worked to that end in order to achieve it."<sup>25</sup> These texts all show that, as far as the Founder was concerned, the object of the foreign missions was above all the evangelization of non-Christians and that the proclamation of the Word lies at the heart of the Oblate charism.

*c. Missions, a radical imitation of the Apostles*

Furthermore, it is through the foreign missions themselves that one can reach the most abandoned souls. To the Fathers of the Red River, the Founder wrote: "You go out from my embrace to fly to the conquest of souls and, one can truly say, *of the most abandoned souls, for is it possible to find souls that are more lost than those of these poor Indians whom God has called us to evangelize, a priceless privilege?* I am well aware of the sacrifices, the privations, the torments that you have to pass through to obtain the results that you

seek, and it is this that weighs so heavily on my heart, but what will your merit be before God if, faithful to your vocation, you become the instruments of his mercies towards these poor infidels whom you are rescuing from the grasp of the devil who had made them his prey, and if in this way you extend the Kingdom of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth!"<sup>26</sup>

It was in the context of the missions of first evangelization that the ideal of total gift of oneself as described in the *Preface* of the Rule found its highest expression. Bishop de Mazenod wrote to Father Augustin Maisonneuve: "The tiniest detail of what concerns you interests and touches me. How could I be insensitive to the sufferings that you are enduring to extend the Kingdom of Jesus Christ and to respond to your beautiful vocation, which has called you to the most meritorious mission that I know. There is no doubt that you are buying souls at the price of your own blood, you, the first apostles of those souls whom God wishes to save by means of your ministry."<sup>27</sup>

On January 26, 1854, the Founder wrote the following to Father Joseph-Alexandre Ciemin, seriously ill in Jaffna: "If the good Lord calls you to himself, what does it matter whether it is through the arrows of the infidel, death inflicted by a torturer, or the little fire of sickness contracted in the exercise of the great ministry of preaching the gospel and calling souls to sanctity? The martyr who dies for charity will be rewarded no less than he who dies for the faith."<sup>28</sup>

The Founder sees the Oblates as imitators of the Apostles through their option of choosing to follow Christ and through the ministry of the word to which they consecrated themselves. In the work of first evangelization, con-

formity to the Apostles seems even more radical to him because it is rooted in faith.<sup>29</sup> Expressing his admiration for what Father Henry Faraud had endured so as to conquer souls for Christ, he replies: "One has to go back to the first preaching of Saint Peter to find anything similar. An apostle like him, sent to *proclaim the Good News* to those savage nations, the first man to speak to them of God, to bring them to knowledge of Jesus the Savior, to show them the way that leads to salvation, to give them rebirth in the holy waters of baptism – one can only prostrate oneself before you, so privileged are you among your brothers in the Church of God by reason of the choice that he has made of you to work these miracles."<sup>30</sup>

Two years later, he wrote again to Father Faraud: "I know that you are offering all your sufferings to God for the salvation of those poor lost souls whom you are leading by grace to the knowledge of the truth, to the love of Jesus Christ, and to eternal salvation. It is this that consoles me most of all when I consider that you have been chosen as the first apostles to proclaim the good news to nations which without you would have never known God... It is wonderful, it is magnificent to be able to apply in so real a way the beautiful words of the Master *Elegi vos ut eatis*(Jn 15,16). What a vocation!"<sup>31</sup>

On the same topic, he wrote to the missionaries of Ile-à-la-Crosse: "My dear children, I think of you as true apostles. *You have been chosen by our divine Savior to be the first to go and announce the good news of salvation to the poor Indian people* who, before you arrived among them, were wallowing under the power of the devil in the thickest darkness. You are doing among them what the first apostles of the Gospel did among the nations that were

known in earlier times. This is a privilege that has been reserved for you, and it makes your merit, if you are well aware of the sublime character of your mission, like that of the first apostles, propagators of the teachings of Jesus Christ. For the love of God, be sure that you do not lose even the tiniest jewel in your crown!"<sup>32</sup>

#### 4. DARING IN THE FACE OF NEW CHALLENGES

Eugene de Mazenod did not allow himself to be restricted by preconceived plans. A man of grand desires and of healthy realism, he sought the will of God for his personal life and for the direction of his Congregation. He was not lacking in prudence, but it was his daring which characterized him even more. Within the clearly defined limits of proclaiming the Word of God in order to make Christ known through parish and foreign missions he knew how to face new challenges, which became an opportunity for him to broaden his field of apostolic action. He was receptive to new suggestions from bishops and fellow Oblates, and after an appropriate period of discernment, was able to give them his support.

When he founded the Aix community, his intention was to dedicate himself to missions in the Archdiocese of his origins. Two years later, when the Bishop of Digne offered him the shrine of Notre Dame du Laus, he prayed to God and consulted his fellow Oblates. His memoirs record: "Everyone was of this opinion and they asked me to take matters in hand seriously and swiftly to prepare the constitutions and rules that they would require"<sup>33</sup>. With the acceptance of this shrine, the Congregation experienced its first move to expand; it adopted a rule, a kind of religious life

and it became open to ministry in Marian shrines. In the latter "we carry on a perpetual mission and in addition to that we spread devotion to the Virgin"<sup>34</sup>, as the Founder wrote in his acts of visitation to the shrine of Notre-Dame de l'Osier, on July 16, 1835. The shrines provided ideal locations from which the Oblates were able to circulate throughout the region to preach parish missions from November to Easter. In the summer season, they received pilgrims there.

From the beginning, the forlorn state of the clergy both moved and irritated the Founder. In order to respond to this need in a positive way, he chose the priesthood and then founded a community of missionaries, who, according to the first Rule, was to collaborate in reforming the clergy by welcoming priests and preaching retreats for them. The staffing of seminaries was excluded from their purposes. But as a consequence of a positive opinion expressed by the 1824 Chapter and especially in the light of encouragement received from Rome in 1825-1826, he looked favorably upon the staffing of seminaries. He saw it as something closely related to the main end of the Congregation: the evangelization of the poor. The Founder would accept to take on the direction of five seminaries in France, one in the United States and would offer to take over two others. In the year following his death, however, there would remain only two seminaries under the direction of Oblates.

In their apostolate, the missionaries gave preference to the rural poor. That is how the Oblates began their apostolate in England, by ministering to small Catholic communities under the protection of some nobility, and from there they reached out to the Anglicans. But when in the aftermath of the potato

famine of 1848-1849, hordes of Irish Catholics flocked to the industrial centers, the Founder encouraged the Oblates to take care of them in the cities. In this way, the focus shifted from ministry to the farming people in the rural areas to the immigrant workers concentrated in the urban areas. He then wrote to Father Casimir Aubert: "I had thought it was understood that you were to establish yourselves in the big city of Manchester, just as you were proposing to do at Liverpool. I am most concerned that you be able to establish yourselves in big cities where there is much good to do though you must be in a place of your own."<sup>35</sup> In Canada, he encouraged the Oblates to establish themselves in Montreal, Quebec City and Bytown (the future city of Ottawa). What was of particular interest to him was not the place, but the people, especially those who were in need of evangelization.

Similarly, new challenges were offered through the assistance offered to the seasonal workers in the lumber camps of Canada and, later on, the care given to settler families who set off to colonize the land. It was the Founder's wish to evangelize those most in need. All the more so, he encouraged the evangelization of the Amerindians in spite of the sacrifices, the travel and the loneliness this entailed. He did not want them to let any opportunity pass them by. When Father Jean-Baptiste Honorat was hesitating about accepting the foundation of Bytown he received this letter: "You certainly need to be enterprising if you are called to the conquest of souls. I was fuming at finding myself 2000 leagues from you and unable to make my voice reach you in less than two months... This was not something tentative to be tried. You had to go there with the firm resolve to stay, to take root there! How could you hesi-

tate? What more beautiful mission than this! Ministry in the lumber camps, missions to the Indians, an establishment in a city which is wholly of the future. But it is the beautiful dream coming true and you would have let it escape! The thought makes me shiver! Take all your courage in your hands once more and establish yourself there properly. Urge each one to do his duty. It is only thus you will bring upon yourselves the blessing of God."<sup>36</sup>

The Texas mission accepted in 1852 presented still other challenges. The Catholic population, deprived of priests and scattered over an immense territory, needed pastors. Consequently, the Oblates accepted parishes that would become centers of evangelization and bases from which to travel throughout the area, that is, permanent missions – as Father Augustin Gaudet called them on August 28, 1858. An historian described the situation in this way: "At that time, we had residences with parishes in Brownsville and Roma and, for a time, at Matamoros and Ciudad Victoria in Mexico. But one was more certain of finding an Oblate from Texas on horseback traveling the sandy plains, wearing a large *sombrero* and carrying with him a portable altar."<sup>37</sup>

##### 5. THE FOUNDER'S VISION

Eugene de Mazenod made definite apostolic choices to which he remained faithful in his leadership of the Congregation. His choices were not based on abstract considerations, but rather on a deep faith which took into account the contemporary needs of the Church, through the vision of Christ as his point of departure. It was his desire to collaborate in the salvation of the most abandoned souls by proclaiming the

Word of God and through the witness of a consecrated life.

##### *a. To respond to the needs of the Church*

Experiencing exile, repatriation, then being a seminarian in the context of persecution and, finally, being a zealous priest working outside parish structures, Eugene was refined in his way of looking at society and the Church. As he wrote to his mother in 1809, he became a priest in order "to help this good Mother who is almost in desperation"<sup>38</sup>, "this poor Church, so horribly abandoned, despised, trampled underfoot and which, nevertheless, has begotten all of us in Jesus Christ [...] the Spouse of Jesus Christ, whom this Divine Master brought into existence by the shedding of his blood"<sup>39</sup>. It was in view of the needs of the Church that he would make the particular choice of his ministry and that he would found his Institute. But his view of the Church is a vision of the mystery of his own relationship with Christ, as well as the vision of the Church's abandoned state caused by the ignorance of the masses and by the clergy's lack of concern, a Church often subjected to persecution. It is of this Church that he has perceived the urgent needs.<sup>40</sup>

##### *b. Like Christ, the Evangelizer, whose co-workers we are*

To respond to the needs of the Church, he looks to the conduct of Christ. "How, indeed, did our Lord Jesus Christ proceed when he undertook to convert the world? He chose a number of apostles and disciples whom he himself trained in piety, and he filled them with his Spirit. These men he sent forth [...] to conquer the world [...]."<sup>41</sup>

The Founder grasped the role of the evangelizer from Christ. That is the specific nature of his charism as expressed in his motto: "He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor [...] The Good News is proclaimed to the poor" (Luke 4:18; Matthew 11:5). It is in this particular manner that he wants to follow the route traced out by Christ.<sup>42</sup> Surveying the Congregation's history in the light of the Rule, he wrote in his retreat notes of 1831: "Will we ever have an adequate notion of this sublime vocation? For this, we must understand the excellence of our Institute's end. The latter is beyond doubt the most perfect that could be proposed here below, since the end of our Institute is the very same as that which the Son of God had in view when he came on this earth, namely, the glory of his heavenly Father and the salvation of souls. *Venit enim filius hominis quaerere et salvum facere quod perierat* (Luke 19:10). He was especially sent to preach the Gospel to the poor, *Evangelizare pauperibus misit me*, and we have been founded precisely to work for the conversion of souls, and particularly to preach the Gospel to the poor. [...] The means we use to achieve this end share its excellence. They are unquestionably the most perfect, since they are the very same ones used by our divine Savior, his Apostles, and Disciples, namely, the strict practice of the evangelical counsels, preaching and prayer, a happy blend of the active and contemplative life, of which Jesus Christ and the Apostles have given us the example. By this very fact, this is beyond any doubt the culminating point of the perfection which God has given us the grace to accept, and of which our Rules are only the development [...]."<sup>43</sup>

Eugene de Mazenod was a man "passionately dedicated to Jesus Christ",

as Pope Paul VI characterized him on the occasion of his beatification. His Good Friday experience, probably in 1807, was the culmination of a conversion process and the beginning of a life totally dedicated to Him in a continuous progression toward Him.

It is through evangelization of the poor and the commitment to become saints that we become cooperators with Jesus Christ. In a difficult time of trial, he wrote to his community from Paris: "Our Lord Jesus Christ has left us the task of continuing the great work of the redemption of mankind. It is towards this unique end that all our efforts must tend; as long as we will not have spent our whole life and given all our blood to achieve this, we can say nothing; especially when as yet we have given only a few drops of sweat and a few spells of fatigue. This spirit of being wholly devoted to the glory of God, the service of the Church and the salvation of souls, is the spirit that is proper to our Congregation, a small one, to be sure, but which will always be powerful as long as she is holy."<sup>44</sup> In the first Rule, he had written: "They are called to be cooperators of the Savior, the co-redeemers of the human race".<sup>45</sup>

### *c. Especially through the ministry of the Word*

From Christ's response to the needs of the Church was born the Founder's vision and undertaking: the evangelization of the poor. It was through missions within the country for Christian groups of the most abandoned, and even more through the foreign missions for the non-Christians, that this evangelization was realized. Both forms communicate to people who Christ is and lead them to him. Proclamation of the Word

of God is the preferred means for leading people to conversion.<sup>46</sup>

It is from meditation on the Scripture and from its assimilation in prayer and from the relationship with Christ that the proclamation of the Word has to flow. It is done in the name of the Church. “[The missions] are nothing other than the exercise of the power to teach bestowed by Jesus Christ on his Church; when one realizes that the priests who conduct these missions [...] are sent by the bishops, who in turn are sent by Jesus Christ [...] [these missions] are the legitimate preaching of the Word of God to instruct and convert souls [...] they are the very preaching that Jesus Christ had prescribed for his apostles and which they brought about all over the universe.”<sup>47</sup>

Experience shows the effectiveness of the action of the Spirit in the direct proclamation of the Word: “You have realized, as we have, that the entire success of our endeavors is due to his grace and to his grace alone. Grace penetrates hearts while our words reach the ears. Herein lies the vast difference between our preaching and the sermons, from other aspects infinitely superior, of the great-occasion preachers. Miracles multiply at the sound of the missionary’s voice and the prodigious number of conversions is so striking that the poor instrument of these marvels is the first to be amazed: as he blesses God and rejoices, he humbles himself because of his own insignificance and nothingness. What an approval these miracles are! Have there ever been greater miracles than those which occur during missions, than those you have worked yourself?”<sup>48</sup>

That is why preaching should go hand in hand with confidence in the grace of God and prayer. The Founder wrote to Father Jean-Joseph Magnan

conducting a mission at Brignoles: “Come on! When you are sent in the name of the Lord, leave aside, once and for all, all these human considerations, the result of a poorly disguised pride and of a lack of trust in the grace of Jesus Christ, whose instruments you have indeed been for so many years. Should you deserve to have this divine grace withdrawn from your ministry, then you would have reason to dread the people’s judgment; as long as it abides with you, however, you will convert the people by your simple sermons which are unpretentious but inspired by the spirit of God, who does not operate by way of circuitous phrases and the flowery language of orators [...]”<sup>49</sup>

Along with this confidence in God and prayer, proper preparation is still required. In his Acts of Visitation of England, the Founder wrote: “It is by preaching, accompanied with prayer, that you will introduce the light into men’s minds. The world is disposed to hear you, you need only speak in the proper manner and in this you cannot succeed but by study.”<sup>50</sup> He wrote to Father Marc de L’Hermitte in accordance with the Rule: “I also urge everyone of you: do not neglect study. [...] Do not pursue what is brilliant but what is solid, what can be understood by everyone in your audience, what is instructive and conducive to lasting conversions. This advice is meant not only for you but for everyone, for the greater good.”<sup>51</sup>

#### *d. Through the witnessing of a consecrated life*

The ministry of preaching should go hand in hand with the witness of an exemplary life. That is what he wrote in his memoirs: “I have said that my intention in dedicating myself to the

ministry of the missions to work especially for the instruction and conversion of the most abandoned souls, was to follow the example of the Apostles in their life of devotedness and self-denial. I became convinced that, in order to obtain the same results from our preaching, we had to walk in their footsteps and as far as we could, practise the same virtues. Hence I considered choosing the evangelical counsels, to which they had been so faithful, as indispensable, lest our words be no more than what I have often noticed about the words of those who proclaim the same truths, namely sounding brass and tinkling cymbals. My consistent thought has always been that our little family should consecrate itself to God and to the service of the Church through the vows of religion [...]."<sup>52</sup>

Only apostolic men can evangelize with success. The practice of the evangelical counsels, faithfulness to the Rule, community life in obedience and charity, the life of faith and prayer are essential for the one who wants to be a genuine missionary.

#### 6. RESPONSE OF THE OBLATES TO THE VISION OF THE FOUNDER

A Congregation receives its charism from the Holy Spirit; this charism is mediated to it through its founder. All those who share in this charism have their own impact on it, especially those persons who played important roles in the early days of the Institute. Because they lived close to the Founder and because of their influence on the Institute as a whole, Oblates like Fathers Henry Tempier, Casimir Aubert, Hippolyte Guibert, Domenico Albini and Joseph Gérard have made a contribution in shaping the charism.

An historian wrote: "In this evolu-

tion, we can distinguish four driving forces: practical living at the grassroots level, the leadership and direction of the Founder who was also Superior General, decisions of the General Chapter, and the codification of these main decisions in the Rule".<sup>53</sup> During his lifetime, Eugene de Mazenod knew how to keep his hand on the helm of the Congregation, while being conscious that he was interpreting its spirit and purpose.

The Oblates would soldier on in the wake of the Founder, sometimes in a more inflexible manner than his. They shared his outlook and his involvement in parish missions and foreign missions, all of these efforts directed toward evangelization of the most poor and insignificant. This is well illustrated by the studies made in preparation for the congress on evangelization.<sup>54</sup> The spread of the Oblates to the various continents, the diversity of contexts, and an increase in personnel were at the basis of the accepting of new ministries and other responsibilities to answer new challenges. However, the orientation towards the evangelization of the poor has remained unchanged and the new initiatives drew their inspiration from the experience of parish missions. It can be said that it was evangelization of the poor through the means of the proclamation of the word that was the common priority of the Oblates who were contemporaries of the Founder.

In this regard, the response of the Oblates of France was characteristic.<sup>55</sup> Among them there was a "common inclination" in favor of home and foreign missions. Even if he was not a skillful preacher, Father Tempier was an ardent defender of the missions and when he was in charge, he almost exaggerated in the demands he made on the priests. The twenty-four houses founded in France under the direction of the Foun-

der were dedicated to mission work. Marian shrines accepted at this time were also involved in this kind of preaching. The common sentiment among the Oblates in this regard ran so deep that it was only with hesitation that secondary ministries were accepted. That is how it happened that when Father Toussaint Dassy was asked by the Founder to do some Lenten preaching in order to make the Congregation known in new dioceses, he replied by expressing his preference for parish missions. Parish ministry was not easily accepted. Father Melchior Burfin obtained Father Tempier's support in his request to the Founder to release his community from parish obligations in the diocese of Limoges. Although formation ministry gradually became one of the ends of the Congregation, it was not sought after by men as holy as Fathers Albin and Guibert. In 1840, when he was superior of the seminary in Ajaccio, Father Albin wrote to the Founder: "I was happy to be able to leave aside my usual duties to take up once again a ministry which is only a memory for me. I felt real joy in being able to return to our apostolate, and even if my delicate health prevented me from plunging into the work with all the ardor I wished, I would ask you a thousand times to send me back to the poor that Jesus Christ has given us to evangelize."<sup>56</sup> Twenty years later, Father Antoine Andric, a professor in the same seminary of Ajaccio wrote to Father Tempier: "The missions had always been the object of my desires [...]"<sup>57</sup> It was because of the general preference for the preaching of missions that youth apostolate, even if it was undertaken in view of evangelizing the poor, fell into disuse among the Oblates, while the Founder encouraged other institutes to take charge of this work.<sup>58</sup>

It was in the same spirit that new challenges were faced in England as they arose in different situations.<sup>59</sup> Initially it was the support received from some Catholic nobles which enabled the Oblates to take care of small rural Catholic communities and to turn their attention to the conversion of the Anglicans. With the arrival of large numbers of Irish, the Oblates settled down in the cities of Liverpool, Manchester and Leeds. Their apostolate targeted poor needy immigrants who were open to their pastoral care. The Founder's preference was for centers from which the Oblates could reach out to an entire city rather than parishes, but concrete needs led him to accept the second, less desirable solution. This shows us his adaptability in realizing his vision – as long as Christ was proclaimed to the poor.

In Sri Lanka, the work of evangelization did not develop according to the expectations of Eugene de Mazenod in spite of the quality of the men he had sent.<sup>60</sup> It was the Founder's wish to evangelize and bring the Hindus and the Buddhists to conversion, and he expressed his impatience when he raised this point again with Father Étienne Semeria and other Oblates working on the island.<sup>61</sup> He did not let the opportunity escape to express his joy when Father Constant Chouvanel obtained some results with the Buddhists.<sup>62</sup> Perhaps he was aware of the difficulty of conversions in an Asian context. There, through parish missions, the Oblates obtained more success in reorganizing the Christian communities.

The Founder showed his satisfaction with the response of the Oblates in Canada in the evangelization of the poor.<sup>63</sup> Parish missions were organized with success among French speaking Catholics, and the same approach was

adopted in the lumber camp ministry. Evangelization of the still-nomadic Amerindians moved forward rapidly with success and heroism, to the extent that it drew the deep and lasting admiration of the Bishop of Marseilles: "A heavenly mission it is and we can hardly thank the Lord enough for having confided it to us."<sup>64</sup> A few years later, he wrote to this same priest: "It must be admitted that this mission to the Indians of Hudson Bay is more than purely natural strength can endure. Ceaseless miraculous aid is necessary if a man is not to succumb in it."<sup>65</sup>

In the Canadian West the mission experienced perhaps even greater difficulties from the beginning, but its development was even more typical. The missions of the Canadian North rapidly became the symbol of missionary heroism. Father Henry Grollier, who died from exhaustion at thirty-eight years of age while seeking out a group of Amerindians and Inuit, exclaimed: "The glory of God has been the only motivating factor for my actions during my life, if it is for the greater glory of God that I should depart from this earth, I do so gladly." His companion, Father Jean Séguin added: "The glory of God and the salvation of souls was the exclusive goal of his life and it was also the subject of his ravings when he was delirious."<sup>66</sup> Bishop Alexandre Taché wrote to his mother: "What a consolation it is, dear Mother, to see God loved and served in these places where ten years ago his supreme existence was, so to speak, unknown... How can you ever suppose that I would not be happy to be a missionary."<sup>67</sup> The missionaries did not only seek to evangelize by making the Lord known, they built schools, and facilitated contacts between the Amerindians and the European colonists. But the salvation of souls through evangeli-

zation was the goal for which they would risk anything. Bishop Taché wrote to one of his confreres: "This mission is not very imposing as far as the number of Indians involved, but even if there was only one, was not his soul bought at the price of all the blood of our Savior, and can the missionary, then, hesitate to come to their aid."<sup>68</sup>

It was through the preaching of parish missions, using Canada as a base, that the Oblates established contacts in the United States. The first permanent foundation in Oregon in 1848 was with the Amerindians. The founding of the Texas mission followed shortly after. Special attention was paid to the Spanish speaking population, by carrying out an itinerant ministry which reached right to the Mexican border. In a very typical decision, the Oblates withdrew from the two dioceses in Oregon because the bishops did not acknowledge that the missionaries were religious. In the same manner, they withdrew from Saint Mary's College when it ceased to be a seminary.<sup>69</sup>

## II. EVANGELIZATION AFTER THE DEATH OF THE FOUNDER

### 1. EVANGELIZATION IN THE FIRST CENTURY FOLLOWING THE DEATH OF THE FOUNDER

In the course of the century which followed the Founder's death, the Congregation experienced a numerical increase, going out to many countries and taking on a variety of ministries. Evangelization of the poor remained the apostolic ideal in all its various commitments. The study of this topic under the aspects of General Chapters, Superiors General and the Constitutions and Rules has been started, but

its concrete development has not yet been studied even though documentation is not lacking on this theme. It is enough to think of the reports from the provinces presented for each General Chapter and to the reports published in *Missions*, the official publication of the General Administration.

#### *a. General Chapters*

The main preoccupation of the Chapters that were held during this century was to evaluate the observance of the Constitutions and Rules, making their contribution to evangelization in this way.<sup>70</sup> The preaching of missions as a primary end of the Congregation emerged on a regular basis to such an extent that the Chapter of 1947 asked that houses of mission preachers be established even in mission countries. The priority given to parish missions was at the basis and sometimes the cause of controversy regarding parishes and institutions of learning. The foreign missions were always held in high esteem and encouraged. As far as defining who the poor were, several Chapters (1904, 1920, 1926, 1932) limited themselves to the working class. The Chapter of 1947 expressed itself in a very significant way: "The only genuine Oblate is the one who is truly striving to win for Christ the masses who are withdrawing from him. The Chapter also requested that our apostolate should increasingly seek the support of the laity in the form of Catholic Action."<sup>71</sup>

#### *b. The Superiors General*

The Superiors General have supported parish missions in Christian countries, insisting on holiness of life as the source of apostolic fruitfulness, and on the competence of the missionary.<sup>72</sup>

Father Joseph Fabre sought to lead the Congregation by remaining as faithful as possible to the Rule: "a family treasure, its precious wealth". From the very beginning of his mandate in 1862, he reminded his Oblate confreres: "To what are we called, dear Brothers? To become saints, in order to more effectively work for the sanctification of the most abandoned souls. That is our vocation, let us not lose sight of it and from the very outset apply ourselves to achieving a thorough understanding of it."<sup>73</sup> Commenting on the first article of the Rule, he wrote: "There you have the objective our venerated Father gave us. We are to evangelize the poor, the most abandoned souls, and to succeed in this lofty calling we must imitate the virtues of which our Divine Master has offered us such a wonderful example. To be missionaries of the poor and to live the religious life, such is the vocation of the genuine Oblate of Mary Immaculate, such is your vocation, such is ours."<sup>74</sup>

Father Louis Soullier wrote a long circular letter entitled: "The Preaching of the Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate according to Leo XIII and the Rules of the Institute". In fifty-one pages, he dealt with the regard in which preaching was held, the need for it, its dignity and fruitfulness, the learning and preparation it demanded, and its distinguishing features. In an appendix, we find the circular letter on preaching, published by the Congregation of Bishops and Religious at the command of Pope Leo XIII.

Father Soullier wrote: "If the aspect that characterizes our apostolate [...] is mission, our special vocation is that of being missionary; but what especially constitutes being a missionary is preaching." He continued in the style of his day: "When God created an apostle, he put a cross in his hand and told him

to show forth this cross and preach it. But beforehand, he planted that cross in his heart and according to how firmly planted this cross remains in the heart of the apostle, the cross he holds in his hand will win many or few victories." The themes developed are the basic themes of Christian life centered on Christ so as to convert souls by the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ. He wrote: "To make known and loved Jesus Christ, so little known by our decadent Christians, to extend his kingdom by the observance of his law, to stamp out sin and thus overturn the devil's rule, to put to flight every kind of crime, to cause to be held in high regard and to practice all virtues, there, o Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, lies your lofty endeavor."<sup>75</sup>

Bolstered by the decisions taken by the Chapter at which he was elected, Father Cassian Augier referred Oblates back to the letter of his predecessor on preaching and added this: "Our priests should draw their inspiration from these teachings."<sup>76</sup> A few years later, after the 1904 Chapter, he stated: "Even though the missions are the primary and principal end of the Institution, nevertheless, the apostolate to the workers in all the forms approved by the Holy See and the Episcopate [...] is not only in harmony with the end of the Institute, but must also be vigorously encouraged in our times."<sup>77</sup>

Father Theodore Labouré affirmed that the mission is "the work, or rather ministry par excellence of our beloved Congregation", and Father Leo Deschâtelets declared: "First and foremost among us, this is what constitutes being a missionary". The development experienced in western countries led Father Hilaire Balmès to accept dechristianized or quasi-pagan parishes. Father Deschâtelets invited the capitulants of the 1953

Chapter to foster an apostolate which would oppose Communism; he invited the capitulants of the 1959 Chapter to promote the apostolate which targeted the working class. He reminded the capitulants of the 1972 Chapter that "the problem of justice in the world forms the backdrop for our entire apostolate of evangelization. As missionaries to the poor we are among those most involved in the struggle for peace in the world by achieving justice in every area."<sup>78</sup>

In the 1966 Chapter, Father Deschâtelets raised the question of the ends and the means of our mission. "The question is asked and comes from several quarters and one would be led to believe that it received some favorable responses. That could be one of the most basic causes of the weakness of our present recruiting policy. Since we do not have a clear idea of who we are and why we exist in the Church, the Congregation is unable to project a clear image of who she is to those who might be considering joining us."<sup>79</sup> The response to this can be found in the new Constitutions and Rules of 1966.

The Superiors General played a role with regard to the foreign missions by accepting new fields of endeavor and by the conferring of first obediences. Father Fabre, the immediate successor to the Founder, strove to develop the missions we already had. He accepted two new missions: the mission of Colombo, something the Founder already wished to accept, and that of Windhoek, in the present Namibia, in order to help develop the implantation of the Congregation in Germany. Father Soullier was the first to visit the mission territories and Father Auguste Lavillardière made religious authority distinct from ecclesiastical authority. Bishop Augustin Döntenwill, a former British Columbia

missionary, accepted the missions of Pilcomayo and the Belgian Congo. On the subject of missionary work, he wrote that his role was to "sustain the faith among people converted to the faith, to create and support works of every kind to ensure their continued existence and the fervor of their supernatural life and always continue to move forward in the evangelization of peoples still caught in unbelief".<sup>80</sup> Father Théodore Labouré reorganized the structure of the missions to the Amerindians and did the groundwork for the transfer of certain areas to the diocesan clergy of Sri Lanka.

General administrations were generally reticent about accepting new territories so as to be able to develop the missions already confided to us, and thus respond to the continued demand for additional personnel coming from our Vicars Apostolic. They perhaps did not become aware of the significant needs which existed in territories entrusted to others. Father Deschâtelets was bolder. In spite of the 1947 Chapter's admonition to strengthen only the missions we already had, he knew how to respond to the needs of the Church. Due to the growth in vocations, he was able to accept at least twenty-eight new foundations.

In the process of development of the missionary commitments during the century which followed the death of the Founder, I think I can find the following major tendencies:<sup>81</sup>

— The ministry of parish missions was maintained in several provinces especially in Europe and in Canada. Other provinces, like that of Argentina, were founded with this in mind.<sup>82</sup>

— New missionary territories such as Namibia, Zaïre, Laos, Cameroon, Pilcomayo, etc., were accepted as areas of first evangelization.

— Provinces were founded to serve the spiritual needs of immigrant Christians: Saint Mary's in Canada and the Central Province of the United States for immigrants of German extraction; Assumption Province in Canada and the vice-province of France-Benelux for Polish immigrants, Saint John the Baptist Province in the United States for Franco-Americans.

— Some provinces were established to assist the working class people of Chile and Bolivia.

— In the old established missions, a stronger Oblate presence assured greater stability and enabled them to organize parishes and schools.

— Practically everywhere, but especially in English-speaking provinces, parishes were accepted which then became their main ministry. However, the parishes varied widely in nature.

## 2. THE OUTCOME OF THE COUNCIL AND THE 1966 RULE

During the first half of the decade of the 60's, the Second Vatican Council was held (1962-1965). It was an event which generated great hope, active communion, reflection and theological discernment. Sign of a turning point in the Church, it allowed her to better understand her nature and her mission. For some it seemed that everything in the Church was starting again from the beginning. The conciliar decisions, communicated in the respective documents, established the points of reference for the action and for the teaching of the hierarchy, and for the entire movement of renewal which followed, including renewal of religious life.

The Council occurred at the time of the emergence of an increasingly radical socio-cultural turning point: the end of the colonial era and the emergence of

new nations, the explosion in the means of mass communication, technological development and growing economic division among peoples, a growing pluralism in cultures, religions, opinions, and immigration from the southern hemisphere to the north. It is not easy to distinguish the impact of the Council from that of these other changes.

Religious life itself was profoundly influenced by this conciliar thrust and by the socio-cultural changes. After the postwar rise in vocations, we witnessed a decline in vocations and a rise in the number of those leaving. The challenge of the Council and the renewal it unleashed was received at varying levels and paces.

It was in this climate of effervescence, less than three months after the close of the Council, that the General Chapter took place (January 25-March 23). Using the language and outlook of the Council, it gave the Congregation a completely new text of the Constitutions. In the perspective of our topic here, it seems to me that the most significant elements in the text of the 1966 Constitutions are the following:

a) A clear distinction is made between the end and the means, between the evangelization of the poor (C 1, 3) and the means to carry it out (R 20-36). Parish missions are presented as a means of evangelizing (R 21-23).<sup>83</sup>

b) Among the various means available, they recall the need for discernment regarding present commitments and regarding the priorities to be adopted so as to achieve the goal. It was a precondition for renewal in the area of pastoral activity. This aspect would be put forward by the succeeding General Administrations, the first of which was that of Father Deschâtelets.<sup>84</sup>

c) Activities related to evangelizing are seen in the light of the charism as a

gift from the Holy Spirit, as a sharing in the mystery of Christ and as service of the Church. The Founder's *Preface* is the privileged expression of this. In this light, religious life and the apostolic life are complementary elements. The Oblate is presented as the apostolic man. The charism, as a living reality, needs the institution which, at the same time, it goes beyond; it must, then, adjust to its evolution.

d) The Rule reveals the missionary character of the Congregation while drawing its inspiration from the missionary decree *Ad Gentes*, especially paragraph 6 which also interprets our experience. Article 3 of the Constitutions is very characteristic: "The entire Congregation is missionary in character and its principal aim is to help those souls who are most in need. It will proclaim to all "who Christ is" by the witness of its life as well as by the ministry of the Word. This it will do to awaken or to re-awaken the faith, and to establish on that faith a living Church radiating charity throughout the world. Thus it advances toward its ultimate fulfillment. That is why the Congregation brings the message of the Gospel to those who have not yet received it, and where the Church is already established, to those regions and human groups further removed from its influence [...]" The words which most often recur in this text are *mission* and *missionary*.<sup>86</sup>

e) The option for the poor is confirmed and stressed. It recurs frequently in the text.<sup>87</sup> It is through a faith perspective that we can focus on the socio-economic situation of the poor.<sup>88</sup>

f) The text makes adequate reference to the ministry of the word,<sup>89</sup> but at the same time the commentaries put it in context. It is seen in relation to human words and their credibility rather

than in its relationship to the Word of God. The insistence is on the necessity of a word which is lived rather than proclaimed. The link between evangelization and the word communicated is rather eclipsed.<sup>90</sup>

### 3. THE SURVEY AND STUDY ON EVANGELIZATION IN THE OBLATE CHARISM

The new 1966 Constitutions and Rules *ad experimentum*, traced the path for the Congregation to follow, especially on the points indicated above. The sociological survey prepared for the 1972 Chapter permitted a review on how these Constitutions and Rules had been perceived and lived by Oblates.<sup>91</sup> The survey revealed the following:

— 90% of the Oblates indicate that to be a genuine missionary the Oblate must occupy himself, above all, with the proclamation of the Good News (Q 145).

— 97% think that to preach the Gospel to the poor is an element which reveals the missionary action of the Congregation (Q 150).

— 61% consider that to work for the conversion of non-Christians is an element which shows forth the missionary action of the Congregation (Q 153).

— 69% think that bringing back those who are the furthest removed from Christ manifests the missionary action of the Congregation (Q 156).

— 45% maintained that the prophetic decrying of flagrant injustices is an integral part of evangelization (Q 147).

The evangelization of the poor thus remains a value clearly present in the consciousness of the Oblates even during a period of overall revision. The

only value the Oblates considered more important was fraternal charity.

It was this which was confirmed once again by the congress on the Oblate charism in 1976.<sup>92</sup> Evangelization is one of the characteristic elements and recognized by all as essential. Consequently, what one is dealing with here is one of the four basic elements to be considered in the evaluation and the renewal of the life and works of the Congregation. These elements are: Christ, evangelization, the poor and community. Among other things, what is being affirmed is this: "Evangelization is our basic mission [...] Evangelization is done by means of our speech, our actions, and our life [...]. For us Oblates, to proclaim clearly who Christ is has been and remains a priority."<sup>93</sup>

Next in line to the congress on the charism, we have to consider the 1982 congress on evangelization to which we have often referred in this article.<sup>94</sup> The studies presented were discussed in general assembly. A committee made a synthesis of the discussions<sup>95</sup> according to the five approaches that had been established: the vision and practice of the Founder, the response of the Oblates to the vision and practice of the Founder, evangelization according to the General Chapters and the Superiors General, evangelization according to our Constitutions and Rules and Oblate evangelization today.

The judgment on the evangelization of today is positive: "1. Our best Oblate tradition of evangelization is very much alive and we must continue it. The goal to be attained is the credible proclamation of Christ, Savior and Liberator, and that as proclaimed to the poor, that is, to those who are far removed from Him and also against the idols of the western world [...] 2. We, the Oblates, also need to be evangelized [...] 3. Our mission is

not determined by ideology or by partisan politics, but rather by the will and the mission of the Lord [...] 6. We must carefully listen to Christ and become familiar with his life and his charity like the Founder did. We must preach the same message as Christ preached and communicate the same assurance. We must listen carefully to the world as well [...] 7. We cannot ignore the negative side of our world; but it is the positive side in our world which offers us the challenge: God loves the world as it is, He wants to save it, and that is why he calls us and sends us."<sup>96</sup>

That same year, another congress took place in Ottawa from August 9 – 20. Its theme was Oblates and evangelization in secularized societies.<sup>97</sup> It was meant to be complementary to the congress held in Rome and to posit some answers to contemporary problems. The congress participants were three times as numerous as those at the congress in Rome and the conference speakers were chosen from the great specialists in today's world, but the conclusions were rather meager. In the final synthesis which dealt with the points of view involved, the elements brought to the fore were the positive aspects of secularization, the global injustice of the world economic system, the unity that exists between human history and the history of salvation, and finally the need for inculturation. From the practical point of view, "the first endeavor of evangelization is for we, ourselves, to listen to the Good News. In this way, we preserve a missionary outlook and a perspective of evangelization through conversion to Christ, a renewed and personal conversion, in a life of service and dialogue, forged together by prayer and action. Evangelization takes place in and by a community of believers open to the Spirit and celebrating the living God.

Each member of the Christian community is called to evangelize [...]. We promote the full responsibility of the laity and we develop small ecclesial communities [...]. We should explore new avenues in catechetics, especially for youth and the family. As an absolute priority we go to the poor, to those who seek liberation and who are struggling against oppressive social structures."<sup>98</sup>

Three months earlier at the shrine of Notre-Dame du Cap, Father Fernand Jetté had delivered a speech on evangelization of the secularized world – a conference that is his finest reflection on the proclamation of Jesus Christ by the Oblates.<sup>99</sup>

#### 4. A VIEW FROM ABOVE

The Superior General and the members of his council regularly have contact with all the members of the Congregation and are in a privileged position to be able to observe of what is being done in the field of evangelization and the thinking surrounding it. *Communiqué*, their only official publication, deals with this on a regular basis.<sup>100</sup>

Similarly, the reports of the Superiors General to the various General Chapters present a studied and pertinent review of the missionary trends in the Congregation. In 1980, Father Jetté pointed out four basic trends:

- option for the poor;
- the search for commitments that were more specifically Oblate;
- a consistent interest in missions *ad Gentes*;
- fostering the role of Christian laity.<sup>101</sup>

With regard to missionary action, Father Jetté brought to the attention of the 1986 Chapter a few particular points concerning the activities, the new foundations and the criteria upon which ac-

tion was taken. With reference to activities, he noted among other things:

“1. In some Provinces, a serious effort is being made to take up again the ministry of preaching. The response of the people has surpassed all expectations.

2. The dimension of ‘social justice’ is slowly but nevertheless really becoming an integral part of our missionary commitment [...]

3. There is a greater openness to interprovincial cooperation in view of maintaining or developing certain important Oblate works [...]

4. Meetings, studies and research on an interprovincial level that are specialized and most useful for specific ministries [...]

5. [...] gradually withdrawing from parishes that are rather bourgeois [...]

6. the effort [...] to give the laity a greater part in the Church’s life and to associate them still more with our ministry.”<sup>102</sup>

As for new foundations, he admitted that “in the years that lie ahead, [the Congregation], after serious evaluation, will have to reduce the number of its works and to keep, strengthen and develop those which are more in line with its missionary charism and, at the same time, take care to reserve some forces for new commitments in response to new challenges [...]”<sup>103</sup>

With regard to our action, he highlighted two criteria regarding the nature of Oblate ministries: “To proclaim the Gospel of God by our behavior, our work and our word – this we find in articles 2 and 7 of our Constitutions; and secondly, to be very flexible, free and daring in the choice of other ministries, doing so ‘according to the need for salvation’ of the world of the poor, wherever we find ourselves called to serve. This is illustrated by articles 8 and 9.”<sup>104</sup>

In his report to the Chapter of 1992, Father Marcello Zago, who from 1966 on had closely followed the missionary evolution of the Congregation, dedicated a considerable amount of time to the Oblate mission, measuring up the reality of our life with the ideal of the new Constitutions and Rules.

After having recalled the unity between life and action, he took up once more the theme of the sensitivity of missionaries to people’s need for salvation as the driving force for zeal and renewal, and as the necessary condition for a valid choice of priorities. The option of the poor is growing. “Teaching who Christ is has been the major scope of our commitment throughout our history since our foundation. [...] The proclamation of the Gospel, however, still remains the principal aim of our mission and therefore needs to be highlighted.”<sup>105</sup> After taking a look at parochial ministry, the work in which most Oblates are engaged, but in a great variety of contexts, he examines some ministries related to the explicit proclamation of the Word of God: parish missions that are being rediscovered in new contexts, retreat houses, shrines and social communications. He evaluates how the three demands of all missionary activity are being carried out, that is, promotion of justice, dialogue and inculturation.

The fostering of lay involvement in all its forms is understood in the light of its relationship to the Church and in its sharing in the Oblate charism. He concludes by stressing five criteria for evaluation and for effectiveness:

“a) The mission characterizes us as Oblates. The new foundations both internal and external are a sign thereof. This missionary mentality and openness must be characteristic of all members, especially of growing Provinces with an abundance of vocations.

b) Problems caused by a shortage of personnel will increase in the coming years, especially in the northern hemisphere. Increasingly, choices will have to be made based on a healthy realism which takes account of available personnel and favors collaboration.

c) We must not, however, become closed in on ourselves. We must maintain and increase our daring in choosing new challenges which respond to the missionary needs both where we are already present and in other countries.

d) Evangelizing the poor must increasingly become characteristic of our apostolate. Proclamation of the Word must not weaken dialogue as a method and as a specific activity, nor can we overlook the integrality of its dimensions, like commitment to justice.

e) An ever greater number of laity are showing interest in the Oblate charism. I believe the time has come to coordinate and animate the lay movement inspired by the Oblate charism, not merely by gathering information but by facilitating a common Oblate formation for lay people."<sup>106</sup>

##### 5. THE DIRECTION TAKEN BY THE CHAPTERS AFTER THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

Decisions taken by Chapters express the perception the capitulants, at a specific moment of the Congregation's history, and of the challenges to be faced, together with the appropriate responses. They have had an impact on the life of the Institute in virtue of the representative quality and authority of the Chapter. The Chapters of 1972 and 1992 showed their creativity in the position they took with regard to the question of missions.<sup>107</sup> Those of 1966 and 1980 concentrated on the text of the

Constitutions and Rules and deserve separate treatment.

The 1972 Chapter produced the document *Missionary Outlook*, a text which stirred up debate and enthusiasm as well as opposition. Following the example of the Founder who set himself "to serve the most abandoned",<sup>108</sup> the capitulants turned their gaze upon the world to uncover the needs of salvation of humanity (nos. 1-8). They recalled some characteristics of Oblate identity: consecrated for mission, in apostolic communities with missionary priorities (nos. 9-13). Three lines of action are proposed: option for the poor, solidarity with the people of our time and the will to be creative (nos. 14-17).

The issue in question is evangelization in the context of option for the poor. "We will never forget that the worst form of poverty, as our Asian brothers have reminded us, is not to know Christ. And that today two-thirds of the world's population still awaits first proclamation of the Good News of Salvation. We will attempt to proclaim the Gospel to those who have yet to hear it for the first time, as well as to those who once lived by the Gospel but no longer feel the need for Christ's presence in their lives (no. 15b)." Basing themselves on Constitution 3 of 1966, the commitment of explicit proclamation of the Gospel in the context of the overall mission of the Congregation is evoked. The other aspects of missionary activity such as those of development and liberation are treated in a more general way without arranging them in an order of importance or of priority in practice.

The 1974 Chapter addressed a letter to the Oblates in which they affirmed their own faith in the living Christ, the apostolic religious life and in community life. By doing this, they put the ac-

cent on being rather than doing, in the knowledge that the latter depends on the former. It was a response to the crisis caused by the resignation of the Superior General.

The 1986 Chapter concentrated on the missionary challenges in today's world. In the introduction of the document it issued, it recalls the priority of our missionary life: "Like our Founder, we are convinced that the first need of all people is 'to know who Jesus Christ is'. Primarily, our mission is to proclaim Jesus Christ and his kingdom both to those who do not know him and those who have lost sight of the hope which he brings us; in this way to lead them to the fullness of life."<sup>109</sup> In today's world, our work of evangelization should call attention to six challenges: the poor and justice, secularization, inculturation, collaboration with the laity, our relationship to the Church, and community life. All of that calls for adequate formation. The 1986 Chapter raises, several times in different contexts, the explicit proclamation of Jesus Christ.<sup>110</sup> This proclamation is seen as a characteristic aspect of our charism: "In the Church we have a special service to render: 'to make Christ and his kingdom known to the most abandoned'."<sup>111</sup> That is one of the things that motivates the recruiting of Oblate vocations.<sup>112</sup> It determines Oblate formation itself.<sup>113</sup> Insertion among the poor, inculturation, collaboration with the laity, and community life are seen in function of a more credible and effective proclamation. It is "by emphasizing the re-evangelization of Christians who are indifferent or separated from the Church"<sup>114</sup> that these same ministries such as parish ministries should be characterized.

We can say that evangelization, in as much as it is a proclamation which

exercises a transforming influence over people and society, is considered as having a central role in the overall mission of the Oblates.

Through its document *Witnessing as Apostolic Community*, the 1992 Chapter invites everyone to "re-read our main Oblate sources from the vantage point of the quality of our life in view of improving our testimony at the core of today's world".<sup>115</sup> After having described humanity's need of salvation, it stresses the link between community and evangelization: "Therefore, we choose community as a way whereby we are continuously evangelized and can be witnesses of the Good News in this graced moment of today's world. [...] We can be effective evangelizers only to the extent that our compassion is collective, that we give ourselves to the world not as a coalition of free-lance ministers, but as a united missionary corps. To seek to achieve quality in our community life and in our being, with each other as Oblates, first of all, as well as with all persons of good will: that is the first task of our evangelizing activity."<sup>116</sup> By becoming authentic communities animated by the Spirit, "we can issue an invitation to communion, a sign of the new world born of the Resurrection".<sup>117</sup> "As we become 'one heart and soul' (Acts 4:32), our communities will become more and more apostolic; by the quality of the witness they give, they will "bear fruit that lasts" (John 15:16)."<sup>118</sup> The theme of preaching is linked to vocation,<sup>119</sup> and to Mary who invites us "to love the people to whom we are sent to proclaim the Good News".<sup>120</sup>

It can be said that the Chapters from 1966 to 1992 broadened the concept of mission by acknowledging the central role played by the proclamation of Jesus Christ to the poor. Mission is not

concerned solely with apostolic activity, but with the entire personal and communitarian life of the Oblate, his being and not merely his activity. It exercises an influence over all aspects of the charism such as spirituality, community and structures. It should transform the lives of the people and the societies to which they are sent. That is why the commitment to justice, dialogue and inculturation constitute essential elements of the mission to evangelize. Even when they stress the aspect of being prophetic in denouncing negative elements, they still gaze with sympathy on the people and cultures they are addressing. Christ lies at the heart of the message which is transmitted and, even more, he is the foundation of personal and community life.

#### 6. THE 1982 CONSTITUTIONS AND RULES

The 1982 Constitutions and Rules present the Oblate charism such as it is perceived and set forth by today's Oblates. Starting with the 1966 Rule and a comprehensive vision which goes beyond that of the Founder's Rule, their mode of expression takes into consideration the Church's contemporary theological awareness as well as that which the Oblates perceive. Following the many consultations conducted with all the members of the Congregation, the 1980 Chapter revised, debated and approved every portion of the Constitutions and Rules. The competent authority of the Church approved the whole text in 1982, after requesting a few modifications. The first ten articles present the various aspects of the mission of the Congregation.<sup>121</sup> In the Oblate mission, the announcement-proclamation is constantly present. Certain articles are more explicit and successfully reveal the

continuity with the Founder and the centrality of evangelization.<sup>122</sup> The additional insights of the 1966 Rule such as the distinction between the objective and the ministries are taken up again. The text stresses the role of Christ, not only as the center of evangelization, but in addition to this as its protagonist. That is how our cooperation with Christ, so dear to the heart of the Founder, is shown under a new light. To cooperate with Him, one must share his view of humanity and his love for it. New attitudes toward persons, cultures and the world, new approaches to things like respect, dialogue, prophetism as well as the new aspects of evangelization such as the commitment to justice, inculturation, collaboration with others, especially with the laity find their origins in this kind of a vision of Christ and his Kingdom. The implementation of all of this is rooted and in some way flows from our association and identification with Him.

Option for the poor is linked to the proclamation of Christ, both to stir up or to awaken people to a new world born of the resurrection. Numbers 5 and 7 of the Constitutions deserve to be quoted in full because of their precision of expression. Rule 2 [R 7b in CCRR 2000] draws these practical conclusions: "Preaching missions at home and sending missionaries abroad have been traditionally central to our apostolate. There is no ministry, however, which is foreign to us, provided we never lose sight of the Congregation's primary purpose: to evangelize the most abandoned." Consequently, each province must establish its priorities and regularly evaluate its apostolic commitments.<sup>123</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

In the entire history of the Congregation, the ideal of evangelization of the

poor as the goal of its mission has remained much alive in the spirit and the Rule of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. It was implemented in different situations and diverse ministries. Evangelization of the poor was contained in the body of the charism as flowing directly from the ongoing experience of Christ. It is linked to the quality of the apostolic community and of the apostolic man and therefore to witnessing.

In considering the evolution which evangelization has undergone in the way in which it has been perceived and put into practice from the Founder's time until today, some significant trends are noticeable. There has been a transition from:

— an evangelization focused, even in a quantitative manner, on the explicit proclamation of the Word through parish and foreign missions, to a mission to evangelize through a wide variety of activities and ministries;

— from an evangelization centered above all on religion and morality to a comprehensive evangelization which should enlighten and transform all aspects of personal, collective and cultural life;<sup>124</sup>

— from an objective teaching-style evangelization to an evangelization adapted to the personal journey of the listeners to respond to their expectations. The Founder asked us to "teach who Christ is", the main article in the new Constitutions speaks of "making Christ known";

— from an explicit preaching to sinners deprived of salvation to an evangelization which speaks to people who, while they are in need of salvation, are loved by God, among whom God is already at work and through contact with whom the missionary can be enriched;

— from an announcement made by a group of priests to an evangelization which is the work of the whole Church;

— from a presentation concentrating on the conversion of souls to an evangelization with a three-fold objective: personal and community conversion, the building of an inculturated and responsible ecclesial community, and the promotion of the Kingdom of God.<sup>125</sup> From this perspective, certain activities such as human development, inculturation, dialogue and commitment for justice and peace are truly missionary in character.<sup>126</sup>

It would, perhaps, be rash to simply state that in the Congregation evangelization of the poor has become ever more radical. The Church's thinking as well as her experience has certainly enabled us to achieve a better grasp of all that this implies. In pastoral praxis, explicit preaching may not only have lost some of its quantitative importance but also the high regard in which it was held. The Word of God proclaimed appropriately has a unique power and missionary effectiveness. One would have to study in depth its value based on the Scriptures, Tradition, Vatican Council II, especially the constitution *Dei Verbum*, Pope Paul VI's exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and John Paul II's encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio*. One would also have to rediscover the need of such a proclamation for the Church and even more for the people of our contemporary world. The human race is often disoriented and lives perpetually in a pluralism which, even more so than in the past, demands a clear statement of issues in order to make an adequate religious and human choice. Then, for today's Church, one would have to find avenues, new and old, which would amount to what the Founder sought in parish and foreign

missions giving priority to the proclamation of the Word. The three-fold distinction made in *Redemptoris Missio*<sup>127</sup> namely, pastoral evangelization, new evangelization, missionary evangelization, could be used as a point of departure.<sup>128</sup>

What John Paul II stated concerning the Church corresponds with the insight, the will and the action of Eugene de Mazenod and the charism he passed on. "Proclamation holds a permanent position of priority in mission. The Church cannot escape the explicit junction of Christ; She cannot deprive men of the Good News that they are loved of God and saved by Him [...] Every form of missionary activity leads to this proclamation which reveals and initiates one into the mystery hidden for centuries and revealed in Christ, the mystery which is at the heart of the mission and life of the Church and which is the source of all evangelization. [...] Faith is born from hearing and every ecclesial community takes its origin and life from the personal response of each one of the faithful to this proclamation. Just as the economy of salvation is centered on Christ, in the same manner missionary activity leads to a proclamation of its mystery."<sup>129</sup> In this regard, the Congregation has a significant challenge to face and address to be truly missionary in our world and faithful to its charism.

MARCELLO ZAGO

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> First letter of the Founder to Father Tempier, October 9, 1815, in *Selected Texts*, no. 2, p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> A request addressed to the Vicars General of Aix for authorization to set up a community in that city, January 25, 1816, *ibidem*, no. 5, p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> Letter to Father Tempier, October 9, 1815, *ibidem*, no. 2, p. 17 & 8.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, no. 5, p. 23 & 25.

<sup>5</sup> Preface of the 126 Constitutions and Rules, *ibidem*, no. 1, p. 15 & 16.

<sup>6</sup> Letter to Mgr. Adinolfi, December 23, 1825, *ibidem*, no. 39, p. 63 & 64.

<sup>7</sup> "Lettre apostolique approuvant notre famille religieuse", in *Missions*, 60 (1926), p. 318-319.

<sup>8</sup> See "Petition to Pope Leo XII, December 8, 1825", in *Selected Texts*, no. 110, p. 132-133.

<sup>9</sup> TOURIGNY, Irénée, *Synopsis Constitutionum et Regularum Oblatorum Sanctissimae et Immaculatae Virginis Mariae*, edition, 1826, 1853, 1928, 1966, Rome, 1970

<sup>10</sup> See PIELORZ, Józef, *Les Chaptires généraux au temps du Fondateur*, Ottawa, Oblate Studies Edition, 1968, p. 116.

<sup>11</sup> YENVEUX, Alfred, *Les saintes Règles de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, Paris, 1903; see a few of these texts in *Selected Texts*, nos. 119-132, p. 142-156.

<sup>12</sup> See FITZPATRICK, James, *Oblate Traditions in the Parish Missions*, Rome, 1992, p. 8. The original 1818 Rule contains a detailed description of the manner of conducting missions. In Chapter 2, contains 82 articles; see: "Un ancien manuscrit des saintes Règles" [Honorat manuscript], Part One, Chapter two in *Etudes oblates*, 2 (1943), p. [6-15]. In the Constitutions and Rules of 1928, these regulations were kept. See POUPARD, P., "Le Père de Mazenod et les premières missions des Missionnaires de Provence (1816-1823)", in *XIXe siècle, siècle de grâce*, Paris, 1982, p. 65-98. AUDRUGER, Alexander, *Directoire pour les Missions à l'usage des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, Tours, Mame, 1881, 286 p. Bishop de Mazenod's pastoral letter on this subject is noteworthy, *Instruction pastorale et Mandement de Monseigneur l'évêque de Marseille sur les Missions à l'occasion du Carême*, February 14, 1844, 26 p.

<sup>13</sup> See *Selected Texts*, nos. 120, 122-124, 127, 129, 132, 321, 453.

<sup>14</sup> See *Selected Texts*, nos. 134-137, 140, 175.

<sup>15</sup> Constitutions and Rules of 1818: Part

One, Chapter One, par. 3, *Nota bene*, in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 15; also, *Selected Texts*, no. 143, p. 170 & 171.

<sup>16</sup> Letter to Cardinal Pedicini, January 2, 1826 in *Selected Texts*, no. 144, p. 172.

<sup>17</sup> 1831 Chapter in PIELORZ, Józef, *Les Chapitres généraux au temps du Fondateur*, Ottawa, Oblate Studies Edition, 1968, vol. I, p. 104.

<sup>18</sup> In *Selected Texts*, can be found a few of the many testimonials written by Eugene de Mazenod, see nos. 145-164. Also, SANTOLINI, Giovanni, *Evangelizzazione e Missione*, Bologna, 1984; HENKEL, Wilhelm, "L'esprit et le coeur du Bienheureux Eugène de Mazenod à la lumière de l'instruction sur les missions étrangères", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 36 (1977), p. 173-185.

<sup>19</sup> In *Selected Texts*, no. 145, p. 173.

<sup>20</sup> December 6, 1851, letter in *Selected Texts*, no. 151, p. 177-178.

<sup>21</sup> Letter to Father Étienne Semeria, February 21, 1849 in *Selected Texts*, no. 148, p. 175.

<sup>22</sup> Letter to Father Semeria, September 19, 1851, *ibidem*, no. 150, p. 177.

<sup>23</sup> Letter to Bishop Jean François Allard, May 30, 1857, *ibidem*, no. 158, p. 184.

<sup>24</sup> November 10, 1857 letter in *Selected Texts*, no. 159, p. 185 & 186.

<sup>25</sup> September 4, 1860 letter, *ibidem*, no. 164, p. 192-193.

<sup>26</sup> June 28, 1855 letter, in *Selected Texts*, no. 154, p. 179-180.

<sup>27</sup> March 13, 1857 letter, in *Selected Texts*, no. 155, p. 181.

<sup>28</sup> In *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 4, p. 118.

<sup>29</sup> Santolini, Giovanni, *Evangelizzazione e Missione*, p. 99-104.

<sup>30</sup> May 28, 1857 letter in *Selected Texts*, no. 157, p. 183-184.

<sup>31</sup> December 9, 1859 letter to Fathers Henry Faraud and Isidore Clut in *Selected Texts*, no. 161, p. 188-189.

<sup>32</sup> April 17, 1860 letter to Fathers Valentine Végreville and Julian Moulin in *Selected Texts*, no. 163, p. 191.

<sup>33</sup> In RAMBERT, I, p. 282.

<sup>34</sup> Quoted in BEAUDOIN, Yvon, "Les réponses des Oblats de France à la vision et à la pratique de l'évangélisation du Fondateur", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 42 (1983), p. 148.

<sup>35</sup> January 19, 1850 letter in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 3, no. 35, p. 49-50.

<sup>36</sup> March 1, 1844 letter in *Selected Texts*, no. 71, p. 93.

<sup>37</sup> DOYON, Bernard, "L'évangélisation: la réponse des Oblats à l'appel du Fondateur", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 42 (1983), p. 246.

<sup>38</sup> February 28, 1809 letter in *Selected Texts*, no. 44, p. 67.

<sup>39</sup> October 11, 1809 letter, *ibidem*, no. 46, p. 69; see "The Service of the Church", *ibidem*, nos. 44-51, p. 67-75.

<sup>40</sup> See "Urgent Needs of the Church", in *Selected Texts*, nos. 193-195, p. 217-219.

<sup>41</sup> Preface of the Constitutions and Rules, p. 11.

<sup>42</sup> See *Lumen Gentium*, no. 46.

<sup>43</sup> Retreat notes of October 8, 1831 in *Selected Texts*, no. 9, p. 31-32.

<sup>44</sup> Letter to Father Tempier, August 22, 1817 in *Selected Texts*, no. 7, p. 29-30.

<sup>45</sup> 1818 Constitutions and Rules: Part One, Chapter One, par. 3, *Nota bene*, in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 15.

<sup>46</sup> LAMIRANDE, Emilien, "L'annonce de la parole de Dieu selon Mgr de Mazenod", in *Etudes oblates*, 18 (1959), p. 105-126; ZAGO, Marcello, "Connection between Popular Missions and the Charism of the Institute", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 39 (1981), p. 155-185.

<sup>47</sup> Lenten pastoral letter, February 2, 1839, quoted in LAMIRANDE, Emilien, "L'annonce de la parole de Dieu selon Mgr de Mazenod", in *Etudes oblates*, 18 (1959), p. 118.

<sup>48</sup> Letter to Father Vincens, January 17, 1835 in *Selected Texts*, no. 124, p. 147.

<sup>49</sup> March 8, 1844 letter in *Selected Texts*, no. 127, p. 150.

<sup>50</sup> Act of Visitation of the Province of England, Maryvale, July 22, 1850 in *Selected Texts*, no. 128, p. 152.

<sup>51</sup> August 17, 1852 letter in *Selected Texts*, no. 129, p. 153.

<sup>52</sup> The Founder's Memoirs about 1845, in *Selected Texts*, no. 16, p. 39.

<sup>53</sup> PIELORZ, Józef, "Les chapitres généraux de 1818 à 1861 et l'évangélisation", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 42 (1983), p. 282.

<sup>54</sup> "Actes du congrès sur les Oblats et l'évangélisation" in *Vie Oblate Life*, 42 (1983), p. 99-394.

<sup>55</sup> See BEAUDOIN, Yvon, "Les réponses des Oblats de France à la vision et à la pratique de l'évangélisation du Fondateur", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 42 (1983), p. 141-161.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 156.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 158.

<sup>58</sup> See BEAUDOIN, Yvon, "Le Fondateur et les jeunes", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 36 (1977), p. 135-149.

<sup>59</sup> See Cooper, Austin, "La réponse de la province anglaise à la vision et à la pratique de Mgr de Mazenod", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 42 (1983), p. 163-182; Beaudoin, Yvon, *Le père Casimir Aubert, 1810-1860*, Rome, Oblate General Postulation, 1993.

<sup>60</sup> See BOUDENS, Robrecht, "Le travail d'évangélisation des Oblats à Ceylan au 19<sup>e</sup> siècle", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 42 (1983), p. 183-192.

<sup>61</sup> See *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 4, nos. 11, 14, 23, 30.

<sup>62</sup> Letter to Bishop Semeria, October 10, 1857, *ibidem*, no. 44, p. 139.

<sup>63</sup> See CARRIERE, Gaston, "La réponse des Oblats de l'Ouest canadien à la perception de la 'mission' chez Mgr de Mazenod", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 42 (1983), p. 193-213; BOUCHER, Romuald, "L'évangélisation et les Oblats de l'Est du Canada", *ibidem*, p. 215-229.

<sup>64</sup> Letter to Father Guigues, September 25, 1844 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. I, no. 47, p. 106.

<sup>65</sup> January 10, 1851 letter in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 2, no. 137, p. 3.

<sup>66</sup> Quoted in CARRIERE, Gaston, "La réponse des Oblats de l'Ouest canadien à la perception de la 'mission' chez Mgr de Mazenod", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 42 (1983), p. 207.

<sup>67</sup> January 4, 1856 letter, *ibidem*, p. 207.

<sup>68</sup> April 16, 1848 letter, *ibidem*, p. 208.

<sup>69</sup> See LEVASSEUR, Donat, *Histoire des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, Montreal, 1983, vol. I, p. 138-147; DOYON, Bernard, "L'évangélisation: la réponse des Oblats à l'appel du Fondateur, (la région des Etats-Unis - la Province du sud)", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 42 (1983), p. 241 s; MENARD, Clarence C., "Les Oblats et l'évangélisation aux Etats-Unis, la période des débuts (1842-1883)", *ibidem*, p. 159-271.

<sup>70</sup> See KEDL, Aloysius, "Les chapitres généraux de 1867 à 1966", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 42 (1983), p. 285-288.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 287.

<sup>72</sup> See LEVASSEUR, Donat, "L'évangélisation et les supérieurs généraux de la Congrégation", *ibidem*, p. 307-308.

<sup>73</sup> Circular letter no. 11, March 21, 1862 in *Circ. adm.*, I (1850-1885), p. 2 [70].

<sup>74</sup> Circular letter no. 13, November 21, 1863, *ibidem*, p. 2 [84].

<sup>75</sup> Circular letter no. 59, December 28, 1892 in *Circ. adm.*, II (1886-1900), especially p. 13, 20, 21 and 34.

<sup>76</sup> Acts of the 1898 Chapter in circular letter no. 70, March 19, 1899, *Circ. adm.*, II (1886-1900), p. 29 [373].

<sup>77</sup> 1904 Chapter Statement in circular letter no. 84, July 2, 1905, *Circ. adm.*, III (1901-1921), p. 93.

<sup>78</sup> In LEVASSEUR, Donat, "L'évangélisation et les supérieurs généraux de la Congrégation", p. 315-316.

<sup>79</sup> Circular letter no. 222, January 25, 1966 in *Circ. adm.*, VII (1965-1966), p. 259.

<sup>80</sup> Circular letter no. 141, quoted in LEVASSEUR, Donat, "L'évangélisation et les Supérieurs généraux de la Congrégation", p. 317-318.

<sup>81</sup> See LEVASSEUR, Donat, *Histoire des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, Montreal, Provincial House, vol. I (1983), 308 p., vol. 2, (1986), 465 p.

<sup>82</sup> *La mission de l'intérieur: Synthèse du congrès international des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée, Rome, avril-juin 1957*. The 516 pages are divided into three parts: the nature of parish mission, the mission in action, the missionary.

<sup>83</sup> See in *The Congregation Renewed. A Reading Guide for the Constitutions and Rules*, General House, Rome, 1968, p. 1-80.

<sup>84</sup> *Le renouveau dans la Congrégation*, circular letter 238, February 17, 1968 in *Circ. adm.*, VIII (1967-1972), p. 137-144.

<sup>85</sup> *The Congregation Renewed*. .... 74-80.

<sup>86</sup> ZAGO, Marcello, "Oblats, quel type de missionnaires sommes-nous?" in *Vie Oblate Life*, 29 (1970), p. 16-46.

<sup>87</sup> See 1966 Constitutions and Rules, C1, 4, 25, 30 and 108.

<sup>88</sup> See *The Congregation Renewed*, p. 48-58.

<sup>89</sup> See 1966 Constitutions and Rules, C 1, 3, 12, 57; R 5-6, 21-23.

<sup>90</sup> See *The Congregation Renewed*, p. 54-58.

<sup>91</sup> 1972 precapitular commission: *Sociological Survey*; TREMBLAY, Yvan, *Sociological Survey, a working document*, General House, Rome, 1972.

<sup>92</sup> "Acts of the Congress on the Charism of the Founder today", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 36 (1977), p. 3-293; especially, ZAGO, Marcello, "Some insights on the fundamental values of the Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate", *ibidem*, p. 253-283

<sup>93</sup> "Final Statement", *ibidem*, p. 285-293.

<sup>94</sup> "Acts of the Congress on the Oblates and evangelization", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 42 (1983), p. 99-377

<sup>95</sup> "Plenary sessions - summary of the discussions", *ibidem*, p. 359-368

<sup>96</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 366-368

<sup>97</sup> *Congrès sur les Oblats et l'évangélisation dans des sociétés sécularisées*. Acts of the Congress, manuscript prepared by Henry GOUDREAU, 1984, Ottawa, Saint Paul University, 317 p.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 299-300, passim.

<sup>99</sup> See *The Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate. Addresses and Written Texts, 1975-1985*, General House, Rome, 1985, p. 184-212.

<sup>100</sup> ZAGO, Marcello, "Oblate Evangelization Today", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 43 (1983), p. 335-346; *idem*, "Report of the Assistant General for Mission to the 1980 Chapter", in A.A.G., 1980, p. 99-122.

<sup>101</sup> "The State of the Congregation. Report of the Superior General to the 1980 Chapter", in A.A.G., V (1980) p. 5-9.

<sup>102</sup> "The State of the Congregation. Report of the Superior General to the 1986 Chapter", in A.A.G., IX (1986), p. 148-149.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 150-151, par. 19.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 152, par. 22.

<sup>105</sup> "The State of the Congregation. Report of the Superior General to the 1992 Chapter", in A.A.G., XV (1992), no. 14, p. 173.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibidem*, no. 22, p. 181-182.

<sup>107</sup> See GEORGE, Francis, "L'évangélisation et les Chapitres généraux de 1972 à 1980", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 42 (1983), p. 289-305.

<sup>108</sup> *Missionary Outlook*, no. 1.

<sup>109</sup> "Missionaries in Today's World" in A.A.G., IX (1986), no. 2, p. 58.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibidem*, nos. 14, 22, 25, 40, 43, 53, 60, 77, 92, 103, 146 and 159.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibidem*, no. 92, also see no. 14.

<sup>112</sup> See *ibidem*, no. 146.

<sup>113</sup> See *ibidem*, no. 159.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibidem*, no. 103.

<sup>115</sup> "Presentation", in A.A.G., XV (1992), p. 52.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibidem*, no. 7, p. 54.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibidem*, no. 9, p. 55

<sup>118</sup> *Ibidem*, no. 13, p. 56.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibidem*, no. 28, p. 60.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibidem*, no. 45, p. 65.

<sup>121</sup> See JETTÉ, Fernand, O.M.I. *The Apostolic Man. A Commentary on the 1982 edition of the Oblate Constitutions and Rules*, General House, Rome, 1992, especially pages 17-119.

<sup>122</sup> C 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11, 13, 66, 76; R 2, 3, 7, 8, 29, 60, 61 [R 7b, 7c, 7g, 8a, 47a, 66b, 66c in CCRR 2000].

<sup>123</sup> See R 4 [R 7d in CCRR 2000].

<sup>124</sup> See *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, nos. 18-20.

<sup>125</sup> See *Redemptoris Missio*, nos. 19-20.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibidem*, nos. 52-60.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibidem*, nos. 33-34.

<sup>128</sup> See ZAGO, Marcello, "La nouvelle évangélisation selon Jean-Paul II et les défis pour les Oblats", in *Kerygma*, 25 (1991), p. 165-187.

<sup>129</sup> *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 44.

## FORMATION

*Summary: I. Formation according to the Founder:* 1. Aware of his responsibility; 2. Fundamental values: a. Attachment to Jesus Christ; b. Detachment; c. The gift of self through the vows; d. The gift of self for life; e. Serious preparation for the gift of self; f. The gift of self lived in generosity; g. The gift of self lived in charity; 3. The Founder's affection for the Oblates in first formation; 4. The responsibility of educators; 5. Qualities of the educators; 6. Studies; 7. Formation of the brothers; 8. Vocations apostolate; 9. Ongoing formation; 10. Conclusion; *II. Formation in the History of the Congregation:* 1. Decisions of the General Chapters; 2. Documents from the General Administration; 3. Responsibility of the General Council; 4. Preparation of educators; 5. Ongoing formation; 6. Formation of the brothers; 7. Working tools at the service of formation; 8. Conclusion.

Throughout its history, formation has always been a major concern for those in charge of the Congregation. We will seek out the principles that our Founder wanted to inculcate in the educators and in those in their care, then we will look at how faithful his followers were to his directives.

### I. FORMATION ACCORDING TO THE FOUNDER

It is especially in his letters to the Oblates of France that Saint Eugene expresses his views on formation, since in his day the majority of the formation houses were in France.

The Founder's texts are clear and forceful. They hardly need any commentary. Rather than give an exposé of his thought, it seemed preferable to quote him textually, arranging the selections from his letters according to the subjects treated.

#### 1. AWARE OF HIS RESPONSIBILITY

Because he is convinced that the only way of guaranteeing the future of the mission is by assuring that we have

Oblates who are well formed, Oblates progressively more steeped in the spirit which brought about the foundation of the Institute, Father De Mazenod takes a serious interest in formation. Throughout this article, we will see this in the letters he wrote to educators and to the candidates in formation, as well as in the reports he demands.

Moreover, he wants to participate as much as possible personally in the preparation of candidates in formation: "As long as I am in Marseilles, I will endeavour to have the novitiate moved to that city because I will be able to give the Novice Master a hand and keep my eye on the students".<sup>1</sup> This letter is of the 10th of January 1826.

The same concern is still present several years later as regards Montolivet: "I will have my days of visiting this interesting youth, and by the grace of God all will go well".<sup>2</sup>

He even intervenes in the organization of the novitiate, for example, by deciding on the role of the brothers who are admonitors.<sup>3</sup>

His visits are an opportunity for him to meet the scholastics personally: "I am very pleased with our Oblates. I have already seen sixteen of them in in-

dividual interviews, and I was delighted with the experience".<sup>4</sup>

In spite of a very heavy schedule, he goes to Montolivet to receive the vows of two scholastics.<sup>5</sup> In the same letter where he asks news of Montolivet, he makes the following suggestion to Father Mouchette: "Why don't you take one day a week to come to see me, especially when you notice that I have been unable to come and call on you myself".<sup>6</sup>

He plans to hold a meeting of the superiors of the seminaries run by the Oblates: "I would very much like to hold a meeting of our superiors of major seminaries in order to work out something which is the same for everyone, as regards the teaching as well as the exercises in their communities"<sup>7</sup>. In this regard, even if he allows participants to express their point of view, he also intends to express his own personal opinion: "I want to remain neutral in this discussion which should especially be based on experience. I speak when it is a matter of choosing authors. As for the rest, that is different".<sup>8</sup>

It is because he keeps close watch over the formation of candidates that he goes to the trouble of writing to them personally on the occasion of their oblation or their ordination to the priesthood. Examples of this are numerous and easy to find in his published letters.<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, it is with a good grasp of the situation that he describes the houses of formation in his circular of February 2, 1857: "Since my last circular, a large number of vocations have materialized and we have had the consolation of seeing our novitiate of Notre Dame de l'Osier with a constant supply of edifying subjects. Since the numbers have increased these last years, we have had to establish a sec-

ond novitiate in Nancy. The novitiate in England as well is beginning to be have some good novices. These different novitiates supply good subjects to the scholasticate at Montolivet near Marseilles, that model community where I often come to receive edification, and from which I am sending you the present circular".<sup>10</sup>

## 2. FUNDAMENTAL VALUES

Our Founder never wrote a treatise on formation, but like the Apostle Paul he reacted to concrete situations. What is meaningful for us is to rediscover his most profound convictions expressed spontaneously here and there in the corpus of his letters. We can present his thought in the following fashion:

The foundation stone of all formation is the love of Jesus Christ. Rooted in this solid base, young Oblates are able to:

- detach themselves from all that which is not Jesus Christ;
- give themselves totally to God through the vows;
- give themselves for life;
- and therefore to prepare themselves seriously for this;
- live their gift of self with generosity;
- love their brothers in community, love the Congregation and value their vocation, love the Church and the Virgin Mary.

### *a. Attachment to Jesus Christ*

"Passionately devoted to Jesus Christ", he wants to share this passion with all Oblates so that they can be true apostles: "We should often come together like this, in Jesus Christ, our common centre where all our hearts

become as one and our affections are brought to fulfillment".<sup>11</sup>

It is especially in the Eucharist that one encounters Christ: "You must inspire a great love for our divine Saviour Jesus Christ, which is manifested especially in the Sacrament of the Eucharist of which we must try to become the perfect adorers".<sup>12</sup> That is why he does not find it acceptable that there is no chapel with the Blessed Sacrament in the novitiate: "I see a great disadvantage in not having the Blessed Sacrament within easy access of the novices. It is to Jesus Christ that they should go to be filled with fervour. Each should be able to go often according to his inspiration and present himself before the Saviour and converse with him for a few moments in silent meditation".<sup>13</sup>

It is in loving Jesus Christ and in becoming permeated with his spirit that the young Oblates prepare themselves to be missionaries: "It is a question of forming men who are to be imbued with the spirit of Jesus Christ capable of fighting the terrific power of the devil [...] of edifying the world so as to bring it to the truth, and of serving the Church".<sup>14</sup>

What is worth noting is that, in recommending the love of Christ and the imitation of Christ, he insists on the missionary vocation in the footsteps of the Apostles. For example, on February 17, 1859, he goes in spirit to Montolivet among the scholastics: "I seem to see in each one of them an apostle called by a remarkable favour of the mercy of God, like those whom Our Lord chose for himself during his sojourn on earth, to proclaim everywhere the good news of salvation".<sup>15</sup>

Writing to the scholasticate after his retreat in 1831, he takes up again, in substance, his reflections on the Oblate vocation. As published by Father Fabre in circular No. 14, May 20, 1864, the

Founder's text reads: "Our principal end, I would almost say our only end, is the selfsame end that Jesus Christ set for himself on coming into the world, the same end that he gave to the Apostles, to whom, without any doubt, he taught the most perfect way. And so our humble society knows no other founder than Jesus Christ [...] and no other Fathers than the Apostles".<sup>16</sup>

### *b. Detachment*

It is by following Jesus Christ that one achieves detachment from all the rest: "One is not good for very much when one cannot imitate the detachment recommended by Jesus Christ and practised by the saints. Oh! How lax we are! We arrive only by much reasoning, when we should soar as though by supernatural instinct".<sup>17</sup> Detachment enables Jesus Christ to take over all the room in our interior life: "One must begin with self-renunciation; room must be made for the Lord to work in [...] Abnegation, humility and finally holy indifference to all that God can ask of us, and which he makes known to us only through the voice of superiors".<sup>18</sup>

Detachment in regard to their parents and their country give Oblates the freedom to do good wherever God calls them: "You will emphasize holy indifference in everything demanded by obedience. It is the cornerstone of religious life. Detachment from one's parents is a very meritorious virtue which one must absolutely possess if one wants to become good for something, all the more so when it is a case of one's country. The whole earth belongs to the Lord and we are called to serve it without regard to individual preference according to the need, the choice and the will of the superiors".<sup>19</sup>

*c. Gift of self through the vows*

In several letters, the Founder presents the vows as the road by which one gives oneself totally to Christ for the service of the Church. Here is a particularly clear example: "Keep repeating to the novices that by their consecration they give themselves to the Church without reservation, that they completely die to the world, to their families and to themselves; that they vow a perfect obedience by which they sacrifice unreservedly their own will so as to wish only what is prescribed by obedience; it is not only a question of obeying, but also of acquiescing in heart and spirit with obedience, of being indifferent to places, things, even persons whom they should all love with the same charity; that they vow also voluntary poverty which obliges them to demand nothing, to be content with everything, to consider themselves blessed if something is wanting to them and if they suffer, as a result of holy poverty, privations and even destitution. Without this disposition, poverty is only a word void of meaning. Chastity obliges then not only to avoid everything that is forbidden in this matter, but also to preserve themselves from the least harm that could befall this beautiful virtue. It is in accord with this principle that we hold in such horror the sensual tendencies that bear the stigma of particular friendships, to call them what they are, for they really wound this most delicate virtue that the slightest breeze can harm. Be inflexible on this topic".<sup>20</sup>

In his warning against particular friendships, he describes attitudes we now recognize as tendencies toward homosexuality: "It is a very dangerous passion which becomes as violent as what we call love, or rather let us say it is really love that is no less to be feared

when it has as its object a person of the same sex".<sup>21</sup>

As one can see, the Founder is clear and definite in the positions he takes. At the same time, he is understanding in helping the person involved to conquer this tendency: "My first thought had been to immediately send away the brother who had demeaned himself to the point of scandalizing the young novice whose name you do not tell me. However, I still retain the hope that this poor child may have checked himself at the edge of the pit and that he can still be reached by the advice that I have in store for him. I have decided to call him here to finish his novitiate if he gives me grounds to believe in a sincere return to virtue on his part, or to be sent away if his disorder seems to me to be incurable".<sup>22</sup>

Let us finish our consideration of these directives on the vows by quoting a few words in praise of obedience: "Who can tell the strength, the light, the power that obedience gives. God himself acts through this means, we become the instruments of his action in the exercise of the functions that he requires of us".<sup>23</sup>

*d. Gift of self for life*

For a man of faith such as Saint Eugene was, it is inconceivable to renege on a commitment made to God, made in the presence of Christ, who makes the gift of himself at the moment of oblation: "Stress very much the importance of the obligation undertaken by oblation. They are free not to advance that far, but this consecration cannot be revoked. It is perpetual. It is not without reason that this sacred commitment is made in the presence of Jesus Christ, the divine Master, who approves it by his holy Body and his

precious Blood. Woe to him, a thousand times woe to him who might break ties that should never be broken by the will of him who has taken them upon himself".<sup>24</sup> "Apostasy is such a horror to me that I cannot recommend enough that you be quite cautious with Brother Pianelli".<sup>25</sup>

*e. Serious preparation for the gift of self*

Immediate preparation necessarily entails a retreat: "If you plan on coming to me, come eight days before the date set for your profession so that, through a good retreat, you can prepare yourself for it".<sup>26</sup>

Preparation takes place as well throughout the novitiate. The beginning of missionary religious formation has a great influence on all the rest of one's life. On the novitiate rests the hope of the Congregation: "The hope of the Society rests on the good use of the time of the novitiate, that is a conclusion I cannot avoid".<sup>27</sup> The novitiate, therefore, must be a place of regular observance: "I intend the novitiate to be a place of extreme regularity.... When good habits have been acquired during the novitiate, one will not likely be sent away during the oblateship".<sup>28</sup> Since the novitiate is short, it is fitting that it be used in the best fashion possible: "Far from finding long the short period of time devoted to preparation, it must be confessed that it is not ample enough for the purpose of divesting oneself of what remains of the old man, of adorning one's soul with the many virtues we lack and thus disposing ourselves to make to God an offering as little unworthy of him as possible".<sup>29</sup> "One whole year is such a short time to prepare oneself for an act as important as oblation that, if we use part of that time badly, we will find ourselves deficient

in virtue and preparation when the day of fulfilment comes. *Ideo dormiunt multi*. That's the reason we become such poor religious".<sup>30</sup> The Superior General does not have the right to shorten it: "It is not in my power to shorten the canonical time, I will not call it a trial but a preparation".<sup>31</sup>

In spite of its monastic traits, the novitiate is an ideal period to prepare oneself for the mission: "This temporary rest should be looked upon as a great act of kindness from the mercy of God. It is in this all too short space of time that one works for himself, for his own sanctification [...] Please note that you did not join the Carthusians [...] On the contrary, you were admitted among those who, in imitation of the Apostles in whose footsteps they are called to walk, spend only a few months apart in order to make themselves more fit for the very active life of the missionary in the most varied and fruitful kind of ministries as witnessed by the truly miraculous blessings which flow from them. And yet again these few months consecrated to living apart and to the holy exercises of fervour are often mitigated for the priest by his participation in a few missions which initiate him to the marvels of such a great ministry".<sup>32</sup> This comment was directed to an Oblate novice who was already a priest, but who could not understand why he had to remain for such a long period of time without being involved in the active ministry.

*f. Gift of self lived in generosity*

For Saint Eugene, the call to generosity should naturally evoke a corresponding echo in the hearts of the young: "I do not accept bargaining with the good Lord [...] they are to put themselves heart and soul into acquiring the

virtues that are proper to the state of perfection they have vowed [...] Is it possible to achieve these results with people who are not generous, who have no courage, are devoid of love and have fallen into a rut? When does a person entertain such sentiments if he does not have them during the period of fervour?"<sup>33</sup>

Generosity prepares one for the apostolate: "It is a question of forming men of God, and you well know whether men like that are tempted to spare themselves. [...] Let the Oblates assimilate well what the Church's expectations of them are. It is not mediocrity in virtue which is required to respond to the exigencies of our holy vocation. [...] They must understand that their ministry is the continuation of the ministry of the Apostles, and that it is nothing less than a question of performing miracles. The reports that reach us from the foreign missions give us proof that this is so".<sup>34</sup>

It is by its generosity that the Congregation will be capable of accomplishing these marvels: "This spirit of being wholly devoted to the glory of God, the service of the Church and the salvation of souls, is the spirit that is proper to our Congregation, a small one, to be sure, but which will always be powerful as long as she is holy. Our novices must steep themselves in these thoughts".<sup>35</sup>

When Father Vincens asks him to be lenient in regards to a young man whose conduct left much to be desired, his reaction was vehement and he noted in his journal: "I do not want any smoldering wicks in the Society. Let them burn; let them shed heat; let them give light - or let them leave".<sup>36</sup> He invites the young Oblates to set very high ideals for themselves: "Keep always before your eyes the very peak of the mountain where the burning bush awaits you. By

your holy desires and by a sustained fervour hasten your transformation".<sup>37</sup>

In all these appeals, he is speaking to future apostles who should be equipped for the mission to which they are destined: "[...] that all their actions ought to be done with the dispositions in which the apostles were when they were in the Cenacle waiting for the Holy Spirit to come and inflame them with his love and give them the signal to go forth swiftly and conquer the world. Ours must make provision thereof doubly, both for themselves and for those whom they will have to lead to the knowledge of the true God and to the practice of virtue".<sup>38</sup>

#### *g. Gift of self lived in charity*

Fraternal charity is a characteristic of Oblate life according to the testament which the Founder left to his sons: "Love one another. Let all agree in maintaining good order [...] The Church expects you all to be a powerful aid in her distress; but be well persuaded that you will only be good enough to achieve something inasmuch as you advance in the practice of religious virtues".<sup>39</sup>

Therefore, failings in charity are to be avoided at all costs: "How these petty quarrels amongst the Brothers distress me! I know that they do their best to quickly heal these wounds to charity, but they should not fall into these faults which inevitably damage a virtue they ought to have in the highest degree. I strongly exhort them to take pains to uproot this kind of petty antipathy that does them injury in their hearts".<sup>40</sup> "Let charity reign among us to such an extent that it isn't possible for anyone to fall in it in the slightest manner".<sup>41</sup> He tells the master of novices: "Insist much on mutual love, on

helping one's neighbour, and especially one's brethren.<sup>42</sup>

It is in loving the Congregation that the young Oblates will grow in their vocation: "It is a question of forming them, of passing on to them our spirit, of inspiring in them that love of the family without which they will not achieve anything of value".<sup>43</sup> "Those who do not attach themselves wholeheartedly to the Congregation are not made for it. We must show them the Congregation as it is in the Church. It is the youngest of the religious families, but it enjoys the same dignity as all its older sisters [...]. Thanks be to God it is still faithful to its vocation, and no one can question that it works more in the common Father's field than can be expected of it".<sup>44</sup>

So that this love can be concrete, the young Oblates should take an interest in the missions of the Oblates and knowledge about these missions must be communicated to them: "Moreover, you know that our young Oblates are very much interested in the success of your ministry. Again yesterday, they asked me to tell them something about your work"<sup>45</sup>. He writes to Father Bellon who is resting at Notre-Dame de Lumières: "Rest then a few days in the presence of Mary, our good Mother, and console our dear youth by your pleasant company. They will be much encouraged by everything you tell them about the victories wrought by grace in our missions in England - especially in Leeds where it seems that we are called to do a great deal of good".<sup>46</sup>

It is by loving the Congregation that candidates deepen their appreciation of their Oblate vocation: "It is most essential among other things to solidly confirm the novices in the appreciation of their vocation and their attachment to the Congregation".<sup>47</sup> He himself gives

the example of his faith in the grace of the priesthood. He goes to say Mass in the chapel of the Capuchin sisters to celebrate in quiet meditation the anniversary of his priestly ordination and he adds: "I will remain on retreat the rest of the day in order to prepare myself for the ordination which I must perform tomorrow".<sup>48</sup> More than twenty years after his episcopal consecration he prescribes for himself a day of retreat in order to prepare himself to ordain some young Oblates. This is a very clear manifestation of the fact that the celebration of one's ordination has not become a habit with him. Rather he retains a very lively faith in the priesthood.

In one and the same filial love, the Founder includes the affection Oblates have for the Virgin Mary and their devotion for the Church: "[...] a filial devotion to the most holy Mother of God, who is also our Mother in a special manner; a devotedness to the Church that can stand any test".<sup>49</sup> Other quotes have shown us how many times he invites the young Oblates to be ready to respond to the expectations of the Church.

These directives, suggested by the circumstances of life, make up a whole which deserves to be presented as a program of formation. Now we must look at the example that the Founder gives in his contacts with the young Oblates and what he expects of the educators.

### 3. THE FOUNDER'S AFFECTION FOR THE OBLATES IN FIRST FORMATION

His directives are categorical and he intervenes with authority to correct abuses. But if he is exacting, it is because he loves the young Oblates and he wants what is good for them. Thus it

is that he could speak to the novices and the scholastics as follows: "How much I love you. I feel it when I am with you. I feel it when I am far from you, you are always present to my thoughts and you live in my heart".<sup>50</sup> It is always a joy for him to be with the scholastics: "I am so happy when I find myself in their midst. I enjoy their own happiness. In a manner of speaking, I savor with my eyes the virtues that I see in them. I thank God for it".<sup>51</sup> As in many other letters to Oblates, he recognizes in his affection for the Oblates in training a gift from God: "I have always thanked God for this gift as a special gift which he deigned to grant me. For that is the nature of the heart that he has given me, this effusive love which is proper to me and which pours forth for each one of them without depriving any of the others. Such as is the case, if I dare say so, of the love of God for men".<sup>52</sup>

This affection compels him to take into account the particular situation of certain candidates. The novices who are priests have a right to expect some consideration, even if it is necessary to be exacting with them. Here is the principle that he establishes for priests during the novitiate: "In general, while demanding a strict observance of the rule of the novitiate, we must have a lot of regard for the priests. But see to it that they are not required to work more than one mission during the course of their novitiate. Priests, even more than young people, need the strict observance and the direction that is given in the novitiate".<sup>53</sup> The sick have a right to expect certain mitigations: "I do not hesitate to say that if Léon de Saboulin's health permits him to recite the Divine Office, we should not discourage him from becoming a priest. But we should allow him a great deal of latitude in his studies to prevent him from exhausting

himself. He would even do a lot of good in only celebrating Holy Mass and in giving an example of a holy priestly life".<sup>54</sup> It is necessary to take age as well into consideration as in the case of Father Tudès a 40 year old novice.<sup>55</sup> He recommends special concessions in the case of George Crawley, a Protestant minister of Leeds, who converted to Catholicism and entered the Oblates: "I think that you will have recommended that at l'Osier they should take the greatest care of Mr. Crawley. In the beginning, it will be necessary to be very careful. Above all, it is essential that we give him tea when he thinks fit, even every day. Let us be kind and considerate in his regard. In coming to us he is making such a big step".<sup>56</sup>

The affection the Founder had for the young Oblates explains, no doubt, a leniency which we sometimes find astonishing. In response to a group of scholastics who had sent him a collective letter attacking their superior he wrote: "Even while praising your good intentions, my dear Brothers, I cannot help but blame the course you took in manifesting collectively a wish, a desire, if you will, for a demand which is not within your prerogatives to express". He shows them that it is against obedience and he concludes his letter in the following fashion: "I will say no more about this bit of a lapse in propriety; only, I am surprised that there was not a single one among you who, through better counsel, did not turn the rest away from such false proceedings. Besides, do not be uneasy, I do not hold it against you, since I take into consideration your good intentions. I only had to remind you of the principles involved, and I embrace and bless all of you from my heart".<sup>57</sup>

Even in the case of certain ones whose conduct is reprehensible, he

stretches leniency to the limit. In order to help Brother Saluzzo to reflect on his difficulties, he suggests that he go to Notre-Dame du Laus "to place himself until further orders under the mantle of our Good Mother". At the same time, he addresses him firmly: "Go there with an upright heart, call fervently upon this powerful protector, ask her to enlighten the director I appoint for you in this holy place and to give you the simplicity and docility you need in this situation, decisive as it is for your life".<sup>58</sup>

In a letter to Father Tempier, he discusses the case of a scholastic who had rebelled. In spite of that he calls him to the subdiaconate and he adds: "What is to be done? To confide oneself to the mercy of God who we have to hope will bless our decision more charitable than prudent [...] Make him feel profoundly the new obligation which he will undertake to become a holy religious".<sup>59</sup> It really seems that, in these two cases, the Founder does everything possible to save men who already have taken on the commitment of perpetual vows. He is so convinced of the importance of vows made to God that he uses every means to see that this commitment is maintained and succeeds.

Since he is persuaded that gentleness is much more effective than severity with youth, he does not accept judgments that are too harsh with regard to the young: "I see them [the Oblate scholastics] from time to time and I assure you that my judgment on them isn't as harsh as yours and especially not as harsh as Lagier's. Certainly these children aren't perfect, but they are good, full of goodwill; they listen readily to the minor strictures that they receive; they talk good sense when one enters into conversation with them".<sup>60</sup>

One must test them, it is true, but one must not be unduly exacting: "We

cannot test our candidates enough. [...] All the same we must not tempt God by asking too much from human weakness. What I want to say is that not all are fit to be put through extraordinary tests. However, all must pass those tests designed to ground them in the virtues which they must practise".<sup>61</sup>

The youth are the hope of the Congregation. He looks with confidence on their efforts to be faithful: "As you know, you are the hope of our Society; so you can gauge my happiness when I contemplate you going forward in the ways of the Lord [...]"<sup>62</sup> It is certain that the youth will make their contribution to the development of the Oblate endeavour: "Since this is so, our work will go forward. You are destined [...] to perfect it".<sup>63</sup> Through them he foresees the marvels that will be accomplished in their mission: "I already savour in anticipation the blessings that the Lord will pour forth on them as a reward for their fidelity. God will be glorified by them and our dear Congregation will be shown honour in the Church because of them".<sup>64</sup>

#### 4. THE RESPONSIBILITY OF EDUCATORS

Many letters are sent to those in charge of formation to encourage men who would prefer to dedicate themselves to the pastoral ministry rather than to spend long years in the same house teaching and giving direction to their younger brothers.

Their task is a genuine ministry which they should value: "Moreover, it was my intention that you should in some way familiarize yourself with your sublime dignity and that you should reap abundant graces from your sacred ministry".<sup>65</sup> The object of their mission is "to neglect nothing in training religious who will be fit to serve the

Church and Society".<sup>66</sup> In this same letter, the Founder points out to Father Courtès that his dedication corresponds to the generosity of God who is sending an abundance of vocations. In a letter to Father Dorey, he restates in other terms his faith in the greatness of this mission: "What more beautiful ministry than that of forming in virtue, especially in the religious virtues, the chosen souls called by God to walk in the footsteps of the Apostles to spread the knowledge and the love of Jesus Christ!"<sup>67</sup>

The educator should be totally dedicated to his task and should accept the renunciation that this implies: "So if you renounce yourself entirely, together with your tastes and even the reasonings your mind may entertain, you will give a good account of yourself in the delicate task imposed on you. I am not trying to minimize your own estimate of the burden that weighs you down. On the contrary, I agree that it could not weigh more heavily on your shoulders, but by living in close union with God, pondering frequently on the importance of your tasks and studying how men who have achieved success in this field have acted, you will achieve the same results. But you must apply yourself to your task and tell yourself again and again that God, the Church and the religious family will be demanding an account *villicationis tuae*".<sup>68</sup> He gives the same kind of advice to Father Mouchette.<sup>69</sup>

Several times the Founder protests against the frequent absences of a superior of a scholasticate or a master of novices. He writes to Father Mille, superior of the scholasticate of Billens: "Once and for all impress this upon yourself: I have not sent you to Switzerland to do outside ministry but to direct, instruct and look after the community that is entrusted to you".<sup>70</sup> And to

Father Bellon for Father Richard, master of novices: "I have only one thing left to tell you: It is that before leaving you specify clearly the responsibilities of each one, especially for the novitiate which should be entirely separated from the rest of the community and governed by the Master of Novices who must have no other work or ministry to carry out. He will never have enough time to care for such a large family upon which the future of the Congregation depends".<sup>71</sup>

This, however, does not rule out the fact that ministry can be beneficial for educators, especially during the vacations: "In the case where I will have found it acceptable that it is proper for this one or that one to absent himself briefly, I would not have allowed him to absent himself more than twice in a row, unless it was in order to fulfill some duty of the sacred ministry such as giving a spiritual retreat to some religious communities or to some parishes, which would fall within the particular competencies of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. I would even like for them to obtain this kind of work, in a moderate measure, no doubt, but in a manner useful for the preacher and for those he is evangelizing".<sup>72</sup>

The educator allows others to benefit from the gifts that he has received from God: "But since the aptitude you received for the sciences is a gift from God, I judge it important that you don't neglect it. Assign it a subordinate role, yes; shun and leave it in disuse, no. [...] Be generous with your riches, share them with others".<sup>73</sup> One must care for each individual: "Concentrate particularly, my dear Father, on your novitiate. That is your most important work. [...] It is not enough to teach in a general way during the lessons in common, it is necessary to work with each one in par-

ticular as if he was the only person you had to form".<sup>74</sup> Spiritual direction is especially necessary: "Give all your attention to the novitiate. I know that they have enough lessons, but direction has always been defective for one reason or another, and thus the novices generally do not change, do not improve, which is a great misfortune".<sup>75</sup>

One element of particular concern for the Founder in regard to young men in formation, as well as for all Oblates, was the question of health: "Watch out for the lungs of our young men. [...] Let them get lots of rest; be willing to let them remain an extra hour in bed".<sup>76</sup> In several letters the Founder betrays the same concern for the health of the young Oblates. He does not see this as being in opposition to the spirit of mortification: "I consider it very important that we care for the health of our Oblates; but I also consider it very important that the spirit of mortification not be lost among us. We have to be careful not to make sissies and sensual men out of those whom God will perhaps call to all the privations of the apostolic life".<sup>77</sup>

The Founder demands precise reports on each one of the candidates, reports which oblige the educators to be attentive to each person: "Again you will point out to the moderator of the scholastics that he must, just like the Master of Novices does, correspond directly, not through an intermediary, with the Superior General to whom is reserved the overall direction of this so important sector of our great family".<sup>78</sup> "You must get into the habit of each one writing me separately [superior and Novice Master] and without influencing each other. It is only thus that I shall possess the conscientious opinion of two people who must provide the material for my judgement and the properly motivated vote of the Council".<sup>79</sup> Often

enough the Founder thanks the Master of Novices and the moderator of the scholastics for the reports that they have sent.<sup>80</sup>

## 5. QUALITIES OF THE EDUCATORS

The Founder tells us what kind of a man he counts on to carry out this kind of ministry.

The educator is a model for those confided to his care: "[...] So at this time the heart of our novitiate must be very sound and for this we need a Master of Novices. This Master of Novices is you, my dear Father Honorat, who combine an unshakeable loyalty to the Society with a love of order and regularity".<sup>81</sup> Father de Mazenod considered Father Tempier the ideal educator. It is to him that he confided Notre-Dame du Laus, the second house of the Congregation, and it is to him that he gave the responsibility of forming the young Oblates in this community. He tells him why: "First companion of mine, you have from the first day we came together grasped the spirit which must animate us and which we must communicate to others". That is why he must stay at Notre-Dame du Laus as the one in charge of formation: "Is it surprising, after that, that having a house somewhat remote, very essential for us because of the circumstances and the locality, you should be in charge of its management?"<sup>82</sup> The true educator is therefore the one who has grasped the spirit of the Congregation and who is capable of communicating it to others. It is because he believes in the importance of the mission of educator that the Founder chooses the best for this responsibility. He sends Father Mounier to the novitiate to help Father Vincens "because of his good attitude and his fine qualities. A community like yours

is too important in our Congregation for me not to consider it as my principal duty to provide it with all that can contribute to maintain the good spirit that prevails there. The same motive that prompted me to put you in charge at the novitiate obliges me to get you all the help you have a right to claim for carrying out that task".<sup>83</sup>

The educator is a man who lives through faith in the presence of God, a man for whom oraison is indispensable: "Oraison will be your rich mine and the daily examens will serve you as beacon, mirror, compass and as a spur too, if necessary. Proceed, therefore, with confidence and like Saint Ignatius tell yourself: Alone, Vincens can do nothing. Vincens and God can do everything".<sup>84</sup> Moreover, the ministry of formation faithfully carried out is a source of sanctification: "How much a person profits for oneself in leading others to perfection! This has turned out to be your lot. Rejoice over it [...] and count on God's help in this valuable ministry".<sup>85</sup>

In order to be capable of forming men of God, the director must apply himself to his own spiritual formation: "I request Father Vincens to pay special attention in training the good Brother Nicolas in the religious life. When he will be in charge of the dogma class, there won't be time any more. It would certainly be a pity that such a good member were not equal to his duties because he had not applied himself sufficiently to working on himself according to the spirit of our Institute".<sup>86</sup>

The educator is a well balanced man of sure judgement: "Father Dorey redeems his youth in the priesthood with a great spiritual maturity, very good judgement and an exemplary piety".<sup>87</sup> "When one has the intellectual training that you have, the wisdom, modesty and reserve that no one will deny you pos-

sess, plus kindness and the other qualities that I know you have, one need not be uneasy about the decisions one takes, nor about assuming responsibility".<sup>88</sup>

The educator is a competent individual who continues to study: "Arrange everything well in advance with him [Father Courtès] and Father Guigues [new Master of Novices] whom I have advised to nourish himself with reading suitable to his new employment, such as Father Lallemand, Rigoleuc, Judde, etc".<sup>89</sup>

Study goes hand in hand with spiritual reading which maintains one in an attitude of faith: "Spiritual reading is a necessary nourishment for the piety of the man of study who is conducted by it to the practice of the virtues which one is liable too easily to neglect when absorbed in the pursuit of learning. [...] This duty must never be neglected".<sup>90</sup>

The educator is a community man. Several times the Founder repeats that the directors must meet regularly: "I strongly recommend to you to maintain the community on the basis of one of our religious houses, and don't lose sight of the fact that you are not to be like isolated priests who are together because they are directing a seminary. The Rule cannot be put aside".<sup>91</sup> It is especially those who are directors in diocesan seminaries whom he reminds of the necessity of living in community: "We are community men and not vagabonds of the main highways. Once the seminarians have left, the religious community does not cease any less to exist".<sup>92</sup> Seminary directors should pray together: "Father Nicolas has not asked me for a dispensation from saying the Office in common. He did well because I would not have granted it, at least not *semel pro semper*. I would have referred him back to you to judge when it would be opportune to dispense him on a temporary basis".<sup>93</sup>

The true educator gains the confidence of the youth: "I believe in your piety, regularity, zeal, but I fear your severity, your demands. [...] In a word, you would have much and perhaps too much of introspection to win the confidence of young men; the latter is of primary necessity in the functions of a Master of Novices who must be considered a saint in his own novitiate, but also a good father".<sup>94</sup> He brings this subject up again when he names Father Dassy Master of Novices: "They must find with us a true family, brothers and a father; we have the obligation to represent Divine Providence to them".<sup>95</sup> And he tells another Master of Novices: "Therefore, make wider your doors and the compassion of your charity".<sup>96</sup>

After having quoted many extracts from the letters of Saint Eugene, we can affirm that they represent the man himself as a model for the educators of young Oblates:

- convinced of the fundamental values, he believes in them deeply and he says this clearly;
- firm in the matter of principles;
- overflowing with affection and understanding for the young;
- he shows a healthy balance between a clear vision of principles and the understanding of people.

## 6. STUDIES

Here, as in the case of his other directives, Saint Eugene has in mind the mission to which Oblates in formation should be preparing themselves developing to the full all the talents that God has given them: "It is impossible to insist too much on the importance of study: and not just theology and philosophy, but the humanities too. We must oppose modern errors with up-to-date weapons. I never cease to be as-

tonished at seeing so many able young writers amongst our enemies, using such art and skill on the side of lies and deceptions of every kind. We must prepare ourselves for this kind of combat too. We must have a good understanding of our own language and practice to use it well. It will be time well-spent. Get some fire out of that flint-stone. You must strike it to start a fire, the spark is only produced by the blow. But never forget that it is for God you are working, that the glory of his holy name is at stake, that the Church expects this service from you. It means you must supernaturalize your studies, sanctify them by the integrity of your intention, leaving all self-love aside, not seeking yourself in anything; in this way profane authors have the same capacity to lift your thoughts to God as do the Fathers of the Church".<sup>97</sup>

Three points in this text deserve to be highlighted:

*a.* We have to fight using up-to-date weapons. This could be translated as follows: We must speak the language of our contemporaries and use the modern means of communications. In another letter, he states that holiness of life alone is not sufficient: "We live in an age when it is absolutely vital to be able to confront evil doctrines with means other than good example alone".<sup>98</sup>

*b.* He urges the study of profane authors because they reveal the world which the missionaries will address. In a letter to Father Tempier, he states several times that it is necessary to study the humanities "if we do not want to have a bunch of half-wits incapable of writing a few lines".<sup>99</sup>

*c.* All this effort is at the service of the apostolate. The young Oblates do not study to become brilliant, but to answer the call of the Church and thus to expend themselves for the glory of God.

It is, therefore, important to fully develop the talents that have been given by God and to take the time to train oneself well: "I am hardly concerned about the period of formation being extended. The essential is that nothing remain buried, that each one make the most of the measure of talents the Lord has given him".<sup>100</sup>

The program of studies necessarily includes English, an indispensable tool in the countries where the Oblates are carrying out their ministry. "Knowing English is essential for us in most of our foreign missions".<sup>101</sup>

Books are work tools that must be chosen with care. For the young priests who are following a special course: "As for the Summa of St. Thomas, Father Vincens and the other two Fathers are agreed that a copy should be provided for each student".<sup>102</sup> Father Tempier is the one who set up the library for the scholasticate of Montolivet. On this topic, Mgr. de Mazenod writes to Father Rey: "You will tear out your beard when you see all the books over which you had the exclusive right of leisurely enjoyment fly off without you to the holy mountain [Montolivet, while Father Rey is at the major seminary], where others than you will leaf through them, will read them or fall asleep on them".<sup>103</sup> When the wanderings of the first scholasticate came to an end, the library of Montolivet ended up at Solignac, where, in great part, it still remains. We have to acknowledge that the choice of books was of a high standard.

## 7. FORMATION OF THE BROTHERS

Everything that has been said up until now concerns the Brothers as much as it concerns the future priests. Since most of those who presented

themselves to become Brothers were manual workers, they needed special attention, not having had the benefit of the kind of education enjoyed by the other candidates. On the other hand, the Founder reacted to the temptation to see the Brothers as mere labourers and to give them too much manual work: "The novices, irrespective of who they are, must live under the care of the master of novices up to their oblation. It isn't a question of knowing if one can use them sufficiently in the novitiate house during the year of their testing, they have to learn what it is to be a religious and a year is not too much for that, but it is vital to take pains with them, the more uncouth they are the more unremitting the care they need".<sup>104</sup>

It is an injustice to make them work all day: "I reply that I have always considered it an injustice to make men, who have come to us to become religious, work from morning till evening. Surely they have to work, but they must also pray and be instructed in the duties of the religious life. They are not common labourers, they cannot be treated as hired domestics who are paid so that they work the whole day. [...] All of them will do their spiritual reading daily and when a Father has been appointed to be in charge of them, he will give them in common the instructions prescribed by the Rule. If there is no such priest, at least once a week the Master of Novices must attend to their instruction, even if he has to cancel that day what he would normally give to others".<sup>105</sup> "During the year of novitiate, manual work must give way to a lavish spiritual concern".<sup>106</sup>

Brothers are necessary for the mission: "We will need a skillful Brother to accompany the Fathers who are destined to the conversion of the gentiles on the island of Ceylon. I propose to call him

for that mission. Even though he does not have much time at hand, have him begin to learn English, that will be so much gained. Do not delay a single day and have him study it all day long".<sup>107</sup>

When they have received their obedience for a house, their formation is not at an end. Even if there is only one Brother in the community, he has the right to be helped and sustained in the pursuit of his religious formation: "You mentioned good Brother Picard in passing. Please look after him well. Instruct him at least once a week in the duties and the advantages of the religious life. Let's not lose sight of the fact that our lay brothers are not domestic servants, but rather our brothers who need to be maintained in the fervour of their holy vocation. I lay this on you as a special responsibility."<sup>108</sup> The insistence on the religious formation of the Brothers recurs in several letters in more or less the same terms: "I charge you with the care of the lay Brothers. Teach them well what it is to be a religious, that it is not sufficient to be a religious in name only".<sup>109</sup>

Formation must also adapt itself to the Brothers, taking into consideration their talents: "I have only the time to charge you with the responsibility of the postulant whom I am sending to you. He is a man of good will, capable of the greatest sacrifices for the good God on whose behalf he abandoned all the benefits that he could have come upon in the world. I warn you that he is not made for manual labour of too crude a sort [...] He possesses another kind of talent that we will have to apply ourselves to use in the Congregation, perhaps in some house where we are engaged in education. Make a good religious of him, and only require of him that of which he is capable and that for which he is suited".<sup>110</sup>

In 1859, an edition of the "Rules and Constitutions for the use of lay Brothers" followed a circular letter in which the Founder expressed his esteem for the Brothers.

## 8. VOCATIONS APOSTOLATE

A constant supply of new recruits is a necessity in order for the Congregation to accomplish its mission: "We have an immense need to maintain our army. The reserve forces melt away, so to speak, in our hands. Forty Oblates seemed to me to be more than enough to face every need. A lot remains lacking".<sup>111</sup> The Founder feels this need deeply: "My praises to the Lord would be doubled if, as well as the conversions effected, you had succeeded in attracting some candidates to the house. It pains me to be able to reply only with refusals to the requests that come to me from all our houses, it is to wither on the vine".<sup>112</sup>

Father de Mazenod hoped to find a few vocations among the young people that he used to gather together at Aix. From the six that he chose at the beginning, not one persevered. In fact, it was the witness of his zeal which attracted the first recruits: Marius Suzanne at the mission of Fuveau and, at the mission of Mouriès, Hippolyte Courtès who had been a member of the Youth Association at Aix.<sup>113</sup> In the years which followed, vocations were slow in coming.

In order to respond to this problem, in 1840, Mgr. de Mazenod decided unenthusiastically to open a juniorate at Notre-Dame de Lumières. "I give my consent that we try to take in a few students since the novitiate is not maintaining itself, but I do not hide from them how little confidence I have in a means which takes so much time and is so doubtful in terms of recruiting re-

sults".<sup>114</sup> After a few years, in view of the good results obtained by this work, Mgr. de Mazenod shows himself more favorable to the juniorate formula and even recommends it for Canada: "I am obliged to adopt for Canada, where the flow of vocations has so soon dried up, our system at Lumières. We have only this means left to supply our novitiate. It is a long road but one eventually reaches the end".<sup>115</sup> In 1848 the juniorate of Lumières was closed down<sup>116</sup> because the Congregation was going to benefit from another much more effective source of vocations, the recruiting tour of Father Leonard.

This recruiting tour inspired by the Oblate missions in Canada, was a grace for the Congregation. Father Léonard Baveux, French Sulpician who became an Oblate in Canada in 1843, offered himself to visit the seminaries of France in order to make the Oblate missions known and thus to recruit young people who would reinforce the missionary group and ensure its supply of fresh recruits. Mgr. de Mazenod is hardly enthusiastic in the beginning. He writes to Mgr. Bourget November 7, 1846: "I am counting little on the success of his mission. However we will overlook nothing in order to support him in the confidence with which God has inspired him".<sup>117</sup> The tour lasted from December 29, 1846, to March 8, 1848 and was a success. Numerous recruits arrived at the novitiate of Notre-Dame de l'Osier and it was necessary to open a second novitiate in Nancy. It is with joy that Mgr. de Mazenod welcomes this gift of Providence - even if he does ask Father Leonard to suspend for a short time his undertaking due to the lack of money to feed the novices.<sup>118</sup> The example of Father Leonard encouraged Mgr. de Mazenod to renew this experiment with others. Two scholastics were stopping

off at Viviers: "I very willingly agree that our two future Oblates should stop off at Viviers, either to present their respects to the holy Bishop, or to visit the seminary and reawaken by their presence there the vocations that tend to develop. The fact is that we have an immense need to supply our army".<sup>119</sup> In May of 1855, he asks Father Vincens to make a recruiting tour: "Go, therefore. Even if you delay a little, you will find all the seminaries closed, and we will then fail in our purpose. However, you understand how important it is to try to use this means to bring in fresh recruits. You have no time to lose. I believe that I have given you a few reports on the Congregation which it would be good for you to distribute as you travel along".<sup>120</sup> Let us also note in this letter another means of making known the Congregation and the Oblate missions: "the reports on the Congregation". This refers perhaps to a report written by Father Leonard.<sup>121</sup>

The Oblates will not attract any vocations if they do not give witness by the generosity of their lives: "Let our Fathers no longer fear, therefore, to appear to be what they actually are, namely, men who are truly religious, separated from the world by their profession, men devoted to the Church, engaged only in working for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, without expecting any other reward here below than that promised by our Divine Saviour to those who leave everything to follow him. [...] And let us not fear that by this strict regularity we will turn away from our Society those whom we would be well pleased to see join it. We are confident that it will be quite a different story. [...] Therefore, let's truly be what we should be and we will see that they will come to us".<sup>122</sup>

An effective means of obtaining vocations is that which the Lord himself recommended, prayer: "Let us pray to good effect so that the Father of the family send us workers to cultivate the vineyard he has confided to us. This grace is one which is for our good Mother to obtain for us for the glory of her divine Son; let us ask for it from her with fervour and perseverance".<sup>123</sup> Even if the workload is heavy, our Founder welcomes vocations because they are a gift from God: "The enormous responsibilities weighing upon us are certainly enough to scare us. But who can dare to decide the measure of the Lord's merciful plans? [...] It is at this moment when the Lord calls our Congregation to extend its zeal to a great many countries, that he at the same time inspires a great number of men to offer themselves to accomplish his desires, so how could we refuse to accept their dedication which enables us to obey the will of our Master!"<sup>124</sup>

Before admitting young men to the novitiate, it is necessary to discern carefully if their vocation comes from God: "Be careful to discern well the motives which bring them to us, to weigh their virtue and to judge if their talents are sufficient".<sup>125</sup> "We must during the novitiate examine men about their talent. I do not claim that we should admit only geniuses, but there is a degree of ignorance and incapacity that is not admissible".<sup>126</sup> Therefore, one must not allow oneself to be unduly impressed by human talents: "Talent is a good thing, but we must put it in second place after the virtues which are indispensable for a Missionary Oblate of Mary".<sup>127</sup> Nor must one allow oneself to be unduly impressed by family connections.<sup>128</sup> Past difficulties are not necessarily an obstacle for a vocation: "I do not recall having deterred you from receiving

those who may have given way to reprehensible conduct before coming to the novitiate. I am not at all inclined to seeing them excluded. It would be another thing if they did not correct themselves in spite of the abundant help that the goodness of God provides for them in this holy place".<sup>129</sup> In his biography of Mgr. de Mazenod, Father Rambert quotes a long letter our Founder wrote to a parish priest of his diocese who wanted to enter the Oblates. The Bishop acknowledges all the qualities of this priest; he admits that there is perhaps an authentic vocation here, but he asks him to reflect and to pray before making a decision. This letter shows clearly that the Founder was not just trying to draw people into the ranks of the Oblates, but that he wanted, above all, to be faithful to the will of the Lord for each one.<sup>130</sup>

## 9. ONGOING FORMATION

A generous and competent response to the call of the Church was the motive which prompted Father de Mazenod to involve himself in the mission and to found the Congregation. So that the Oblates can become involved along with him and so that they should measure up to what was expected of them, among other things, they were required to maintain and to renew their intellectual knowledge.

The first appeal Eugene de Mazenod makes to the Oblates is that they continue to study: "You should rather thank God for having obtained for you this solitude in order to set you once again upon the paths of the interior life and to use your time for study. How could you possibly convince yourself that at your age you could be dispensed from study? What did you know when you came out of the seminary? You have everything

to learn".<sup>131</sup> The Founder reminds superiors that one of their duties is to make the young priests study: "So do not tire of giving good formation to the men I send you [...] but if you are continually on the go, I am mistaken in my expectations. So program some time for yourself and attend to this duty which is meant to produce happy results for the Church and the Congregation".<sup>132</sup> He makes the same appeal to Father Moreau in regards to Father Nicolas: "Warn him so that during this year he will always have something prepared".<sup>133</sup>

It is necessary to work methodically and, first of all, to impose upon oneself a discipline of silence and constant application in study. In the acts of visitation of Notre-Dame du Laus of June 26, 1828, he directs that they should observe the silence, stay in their rooms and study. And he adds: "We have stated that by observing these Rules, more studying could be accomplished. [...] Who, then, could ever dispense priests from this duty, priests who are religious who should not only be the salt of the earth, but also the light of the world? What we call not studying is to be satisfied with reading a book now and again, out of sheer curiosity and without any lasting fruit. In order to study, one must have a plan, do reading which is related to that plan, take notes on what one has read, add to these notes one's own reflections, consult different other works which confirm, corroborate or give a deeper understanding of the matter or the subject upon which one is working. We study when we become better and better informed in theology, when we acquire a deeper knowledge of the Scriptures, when we compose speeches, when we prepare instructions for the missions and for retreats. It would be a terrible mistake to believe

oneself dispensed from writing because one has already preached several missions".<sup>134</sup>

Ongoing formation also involves prolonged study sessions: "My Council decided that our young priests would meet at N.-D. de Lumières to prepare themselves by study for the holy ministry, which is being compromised daily by the ineptitude of those who exercise ministry without experience, possessing little doctrine and less written material".<sup>135</sup> The Founder remains firm in this decision even if the mission is for a while deprived of workers: "The necessary step I have taken this year does not allow me to assign any young members. They are at work getting ready for the holy ministry".<sup>136</sup> After having made the experiment, the Founder expresses his satisfaction: "I foresee good things under every aspect in regard to the action that I decided to take. Regularity is being admirably observed among our young people assembled at Calvaire".<sup>137</sup> And he directs Father Tempier who is visiting in Canada to organize a similar course: "It is not only today that we have had cause to bemoan the too great facility of using our subjects before they have been sufficiently trained. One should not fear taking some strong measures to remedy this evil in Canada. [...] I have withdrawn from their work, already crowned with many blessings, several of our missionaries who may have been offended by this action. [...] If we could set up something similar in Canada, I would not shrink from the suspension of all missions for one year for each individual".<sup>138</sup>

## 10. CONCLUSION

We have not quoted from all the letters sent to the educators and Oblates in formation. Those which we have

used are always related to the topic being treated. They make known to us the convictions of our Founder. Consequently, they can give those who are responsible for formation something to think about and can sometimes challenge them.

## II. FORMATION IN THE HISTORY OF THE CONGREGATION

### 1. DECISIONS OF THE GENERAL CHAPTERS

When we read the circulars of the Superiors General, especially those who report on the deliberations of the Chapters, we notice that, almost every time the question of formation was broached, the same directives on the necessity of preparing well the Oblates for their future mission in all areas are repeated. It would be tedious to report the norms that are repeated almost word for word; let it suffice to note a few specific decisions.

The Chapter of 1906 decided that the scholastics would be placed under the direct jurisdiction of the Provincials and not under that of the Superior General so that they can be more closely supervised. The communication of this decision provided the Superior General, Father Auguste Lavillardière with the opportunity to restate the prime importance of formation in the scholasticates".<sup>139</sup>

The Chapter of 1920 presents a complementary plan for the formation of future missionaries:

- History of the Congregation, to be given especially at the juniorate and at the novitiate;

- The study of English at the juniorate and at the scholasticate. On this topic, the Superior General says: "For those houses of formation which might

be behind in this regard, we would willingly grant them permission to send a professor to spend his vacations once or twice in the British Province".

- Courses in eloquence and also "practical advice on the way of teaching catechism to children".

- A course in accounting given by an expert during the vacations.

- A course on ascetic and mystical theology.

After this, Mgr. Augustin Dentenwill writes a long paragraph on the apostolic spirit in the formation of subjects.<sup>140</sup>

The Chapter of 1953 reviews all the stages of formation giving directives for each one as well as for the preparation of educators.<sup>141</sup>

The many repetitions from one Chapter to the other are a sign of vitality. They show that at every important meeting, the Oblates in positions of authority wanted to stress this point and to carry out their responsibilities in a domain vital for fidelity to the mission. Other decisions of Chapters and Superiors General will be studied in the following paragraphs.

### 2. DOCUMENTS FROM THE GENERAL ADMINISTRATION

The oldest official document promulgated by the Superior General is the *Directory of novitiates and scholasticates* which Father Joseph Fabre had charged Father Rambert to draft. The latter had used existing manuscripts already available to the Masters of Novices.<sup>142</sup>

After several Chapters, the Superiors General wanted to see published a *Ratio Studiorum ac Vitae* to be used by the scholasticates. Father Louis Soullier wrote in circular no. 57 of March 26, 1894: "This is the kind of work that

cannot be improvised and, even though it has been pending for a very long, we believe that nothing has as yet been done". In fact, we had to wait until 1960 to see appear, by mandate of Father Léo Deschâtelets, the *Ratio Studiorum* applying to the Congregation the norms promulgated in the Apostolic Constitution *Sedes Sapientiae* of Pope Pius XII and in the *Statuta Generalia* appended to this Constitution. In presenting this Oblate document, Father Georges Cosentino passes in review all the projects of this kind since the Chapter of 1879.<sup>143</sup>

In applying Rule 33 [R 49a in CCRR 2000] of the present Constitutions: "The Superior General in Council establishes the general norms for Oblate formation", a document was developed after an extensive consultation throughout the Congregation and thanks to the joint effort of many educators. It was officially promulgated by Father Fernand Jetté, March 24, 1984, under the title *General Norms of Oblate Formation*. Translated into several languages it is very useful for Oblate educators.

In their circulars, the Superiors General often broach the question of formation. Among these circulars, the letter of Father Soullier entitled: *Concerning the Studies of the Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate* deserves special mention.<sup>144</sup> It is a long document of 127 pages. In the first part of this document, the Superior General presents the need for study: for the religious who must "acquire fully the science of the supernatural life"; for the priest who "evidently can only dispense Jesus Christ to souls under the concrete form of the human word after having previously experienced himself a sort of intellectual communion"; for the missionary, for the Oblate who, in the footsteps of the Founder, must remedy the

people's ignorance; for the Oblate in the foreign missions. In the second part, Father Soullier lists the subjects that the Oblates should study. In first place are the ecclesiastical sciences. First of all Sacred Scripture, which "taken as a whole is the great power of the apostolate and the most effective instrument of personal sanctification". He also recommends the study of secular sciences and of foreign languages, which are necessary for the missions and for fraternal exchange in the Congregation. The third part speaks of the supernatural character which should be given to studies: "No study or knowledge but that which becomes transformed into the love of God". Apart from the style, which is no longer current, the directives of this letter still remain valid.

Father Deschâtelets' letter, *Our Vocation and our Life of Intimate Union with Mary Immaculate*<sup>145</sup>, a letter meant for all Oblates, is not directly addressed to houses of formation. I mention it here only because it was analyzed at meetings of educators and they found it helpful in their work.<sup>146</sup>

During his term as superior, Father Jetté showed a particular concern for the works of formation. In addition, he took every opportunity to express his thinking on formation in his letters and on those occasions when he met with educators and with young Oblates.<sup>147</sup> These documents as well as the extracts from the letters of Superiors General quoted in other paragraphs show that, following the lead of Saint Eugene, they are conscious of their responsibility and want to supervise formation carefully.

### 3. RESPONSIBILITY OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL

In reporting on the work done by the Chapter of May 1893 where he was

elected Superior General, Father Soullier stated this in circular no. 57 of March 26, 1894: "It is expedient and fitting that one of the assistants of the Superior General have the particular responsibility for the things related to studies in the Congregation and more especially for the Catholic University of Ottawa". In fact, Father Soullier named two assistants, "one more particularly charged with fostering studies inside the Congregation; the other to supervise the development of the teaching at the University of Ottawa".<sup>148</sup>

The desire to see one of the members of the General Administration put in charge of formation in order to assist the Superior General in this field was taken up again by the Chapter of 1947 which recommended that there a Director General of studies be named. The Chapter of 1953 confirmed this decision and gave the Director of Studies an official position in the General Administration.<sup>149</sup>

The Chapter of 1966 further enhanced the institution by establishing a General Secretariate of Formation, directed by a specialized secretary who worked under the control of an Assistant General.<sup>150</sup> This organization was not retained by the Chapter of 1972. But from the Chapter of 1974 on, it was decided that the Assistant General responsible for formation would be assisted by a general committee composed of at least one Oblate from each Region. This institution was confirmed by the Chapter of 1980 (R 34) [R 49b in CCR 2000]. It permits the Assistant General to have continuous contact with the works of formation in the entire Congregation.

It was in an effort to carry out in a collegial manner their responsibility that, in 1978, the members of the General Council organized a systematic

visit of all the houses of formation in order to evaluate the situation and to encourage all of those who devoted themselves to formation.<sup>151</sup>

All this enables us to see how the Superiors General and their council ranked formation among the very first of their concerns.

#### 4. PREPARATION OF EDUCATORS

Superiors General and Chapters have often complained that educators were too few in number and lacked adequate preparation. To remedy this lack, Father Deschâtelets decided to establish a community called *Studium generale superius* which would have as its primary goal the preparation of individuals for the task of being educators. The Chapter of 1953 had a very broad vision of the role of this new institution:

a. "all of our Oblate houses of formation should be represented at the *Studium* one year or the other by Fathers characterized as 'in training';"

b. the Fathers should be grouped alternately according to the nature of the work to which they are assigned or to which they are destined: the juniorate, the novitiate, the scholasticate;

c. in addition to the courses, the program of studies in this house consist in personal work and even exams [...]

d. for a brief period there can be received from time to time in the *Studium* some Fathers involved in ministries other than the formation of young Oblates, as long as the Institute does not have other means available for providing these Fathers the supplementary formation their respective needs require;

e. the *Studium* should receive as well those Fathers who will have been sent to Rome to obtain academic degrees at the Roman universities.<sup>152</sup>

In fact, the *Studium* received mostly Fathers who were following courses at the Roman universities. In addition to the academic courses, for a few years the program consisted of special sessions on the problems of formation. From the outset it was never possible to carry out the ambitious program of the Chapter of 1953. "We do not want to fail to mention that, whatever the current success of the *Studium* may be, the final formula has not yet been found. It can describe two distinct organizations: first of all, a centre for meetings, where at set times the Oblates trained in one or the other purpose of the Institute can meet [...] We can also envisage a permanent *studium* where missionaries, professors, sociologists could meet to study the major problems of our apostolate, of our works, of our teaching. But that cannot be carried out at the present time because, for the moment, because of circumstances the *Studium* is nothing more than a residence for our student-priests".<sup>153</sup> During the preparation of the 1966 Chapter, it was clear that Father Deschâtelets had not given up hope of making of the *studium* a nerve centre for various activities.<sup>154</sup> This project was never launched. After the Chapter of 1972, the *Studium* no longer existed as a separate community. The student fathers stayed at the General House and tried to fit in as best they could into the life of the local community.

This in no way means that the preparation of educators did not continue to be a matter of major concern. During Father Jetté's term of office as Superior, six congresses were organized for educators. For one month, several of them met in Rome (once in Washington) to pool their experience and to study the best means of being faithful to their task. Congresses of the same kind,

but of shorter duration, were also organized by several Regions. These international meetings are a more modest project than the *Studium Generale Superius*, but they are easier to carry out. They serve a real need and they are considered valuable by the participants.

## 5. ONGOING FORMATION

There was in the former Constitutions a rather rigid structure which upheld the pursuit of study and mutual support in the community to assure that it took place. It was the theological conference which was to be held once a month.<sup>155</sup> And even other conferences were foreseen in order to exchange points of view on the missionary method.<sup>156</sup> According to the first Rule, the theological conference was to take place once a week. Father Fabre reminds his subjects of the need for this.<sup>157</sup> Moreover, he had planned to have an Assistant General write up a conference plan adapted to our ministry and which could provide for each one through serious work the means of keeping or obtaining the indispensable knowledge for its perfect exercise.<sup>158</sup> In fact, this plan never saw the light of day.

The first years of ministry were considered as a privileged time in which to provide for the young fathers the additional formation they needed. In his circular on preaching, Father Soullier says: "We are making every sacrifice in order to obtain for our scholastics the most solid and the most complete studies. [...] But once these subjects pass under the jurisdiction of the provincial superiors and the local superiors, we desire that they should strictly observe the directives of our Holy Rules and of our General Chapters: the annual exams, the three years without regular ministry, years used for the immediate

preparation for the missions, the theological conferences, etc. Once the basic fund of knowledge is acquired, it is our duty to augment it by constant work and to apply it in our apostolic works through serious preparation".<sup>159</sup> The foundation principles of these decisions are upheld in the new text of the Constitutions<sup>160</sup>, but what has not been kept is the rigid structure which ensured the actual application of these principles.

In the face of the intellectual upheaval of the post-war period, the need was felt to give the Oblates a time of reflection so that they could take stock of their lives and renew themselves. It is again due to an initiative taken by Fr. Deschâtelets that the "De Mazenod Retreat" is set up. Speaking about the suggestions made at the Chapter of 1953, he presents the project in the following manner: "[these suggestions] express all the advantages there would be, after a few years of active life, to give our Fathers the chance to reflect for a certain length of time on their spiritual and apostolic life".<sup>161</sup> Father Deschâtelets sends out a special circular to announce that the Sacred Congregation of Religious approves the setting up of the De Mazenod Retreat.<sup>162</sup> The first part of the circular describes the history of this institution beginning from the Chapter of 1837 which already suggested: "A six month retreat in the novitiate after ten years of oblation". Next, Father Deschâtelets makes reference to the proposal of the 1953 Chapter and he explains the spirit animating this new institution: "A period essentially dedicated to a basic review of the whole of Oblate religious life with an adult awareness and with all the experience of several years of religious life and of Oblate ministry, permitting each one either a deepening of that life, or perhaps a true returning to basics to make a

fresh start".<sup>163</sup> A few years later, he shows how this institution had operated.<sup>164</sup> After the Chapter of 1972, it was entrusted to the Regions and had varying degrees of success. In considering its eventual revival, it would be advisable to remember the suggestions made by Father Armand Reuter, Director General of Studies: "It would seem to be worthwhile to try to make of it a combination of spiritual and pastoral renewal, something which seems to us to be a psychological necessity to ensure a fruitful experience at this level".<sup>165</sup>

In order to ensure that the action of the Superior General and of his council should be effective in this field, the Vicar General was named the person in charge of ongoing formation in the first session which followed the Chapter of 1974.<sup>166</sup> And he [the Vicar General] established a "network of persons" apt to help the Provinces for the ongoing formation of Oblates. This network is meant to respond to the need for exchange and of mutual support in the Congregation as a whole, without it being necessary to set up a new official structure. It is also an invitation to call upon all the competence available to work together in ongoing formation<sup>167</sup>. A newsletter served as a communications link among the members of this network.

In addition to this work which involved all the Provinces, Father Jetté saw to the organization of different international meetings. Starting from the principle stated in Rule 70 [R 69b in CCRR 2000] "an adequate formation should be assured when an Oblate receives an assignment for which he has not been trained", he offered several sessions to educators; this was treated above. He also offered sessions to newly appointed Provincials to help

them take on their responsibilities in the best possible conditions.<sup>168</sup> It was also due to Father Jetté's initiative that two important congresses were organized: one on the charism of the Founder<sup>169</sup> and the other on the Oblates and Evangelization.<sup>170</sup> Another congress sponsored by the General Administration was held in Ottawa in August 1982 to study evangelization in secularized societies.

## 6. FORMATION OF THE BROTHERS

Throughout the history of the Congregation we find a concern for the religious and technical training of the Brothers. In his report to the Chapter of 1904, Father Cassien Augier makes the acute observation that: "If technical training produces little when it is not accompanied with good will, good will without technical training remains practically sterile".<sup>171</sup> A little further on he states: "The lay brothers will fulfill only very imperfectly their task if they are not enlightened from the supernatural point of view".<sup>172</sup> This concern was given a concrete form in the former Constitutions<sup>173</sup>, entrusting the ongoing formation of the Brothers to a Spiritual Prefect who was to gather them once a week and accompany each one personally. The Provinces with many lay brother vocations organized with special care the spiritual and technical formation of their Brothers. Father Deschâtelets, reporting on the second Extraordinary General Council, could say: "At the present time, we find schools or houses specialized in the ongoing formation of Brothers in twelve Provinces".<sup>174</sup>

With the advent of a change of mentality, the need was felt to reduce as much as possible the differences which existed between fathers and brothers. That is why, in his report to the Chapter

of 1959, Father Deschâtelets begins the paragraph on the Brothers this way: "Up to now we have said little about our dear coadjutor brothers. We did this deliberately. They are so identified with, incorporated into our Oblate life that we should not treat them separately when we are treating of the Congregation in general as it is our purpose here".<sup>175</sup> But it still remains true that the Brothers, like all Oblates, have the right to a solid formation in every domain. That is what Father Deschâtelets develops in the rest of his report. He stresses this same topic in his opening speech at the Chapter of 1966<sup>176</sup>. He even wrote a special circular on this subject in which he comments on the articles of the Constitutions which treat of the Brothers.<sup>177</sup>

It is because he wanted to acknowledge and show consideration for the change in mentality and because he felt it was important to maintain a solid formation for the Brothers that Father Jetté convoked a special congress for them. This congress was held in Rome in August-September of 1985 and was organized by the Brothers themselves.<sup>178</sup>

In conclusion, we do well to remember the directives Father Jetté gave to the Chapter of 1986: "To respect and to promote the vocation of the Oblate Brother according to its own proper specificity – To abolish all the unnecessary distinctions between Fathers and Brothers in the life shared in common, on the religious and human level – To guarantee a serious doctrinal and spiritual formation as well as an adequate technical formation".<sup>179</sup>

## 7. WORKING TOOLS AT THE SERVICE OF FORMATION

We have already spoken of the documents published by the Superiors

General in council. Other initiatives are worthy of being mentioned here.

Sometimes the Oblates write with more good will than competence about the Founder and his spirituality or about the Congregation. Faced with the abundance of this literature, the Chapter of 1947 feeling the need to guarantee the soundness of Oblate historical studies and spirituality, wanted to create an "Institute for Historical Studies", to be established in Rome and to be made up of Oblates who would have been scientifically prepared for this task at various universities.<sup>180</sup> This Institute never saw the light of day, but the Chapter's wish did not remain a dead letter. A certain number of Oblates specialized themselves in spiritual theology and in the history of the Church. Thanks to their work, we now possess a considerable number of valuable theses and studies which are a rich source of information on formation which is specifically Oblate. Among others, we can cite the *Archives d'histoire oblate* under the direction of Fathers Maurice Gilbert and Gaston Carrière (published by *Études oblates*, Ottawa), the periodical *Études oblates*, which became *Vie Oblate Life* in 1974 (same publisher), the *Quaderni di Vermicino* published by the scholasticate of the Province of Italy.

In view of the theological controversies and the climate of uncertainty which arose after the Council, the Superior General felt the need to surround himself with theologians to shed light on the problems which touch on Oblate life<sup>181</sup>. He called two priests to the General House and centres for research were established in six Regions. This group experienced some difficulty in establishing a working method and was discontinued after the Chapter of 1972.

Another project of the same kind made its appearance at the intercapitular

meeting of May 1978. "Father Gilles Cazabon, Provincial of the Province of St. Joseph in Canada, suggested setting up a freely constituted group of Oblates desirous of sharing their research and reflections on the history, the spirituality and the present life of the Congregation"<sup>182</sup>. This suggestion received the strong support of all the participants. On the occasion of the Congress on the Oblates and Evangelization, held September 14, 1982<sup>183</sup>, this organization was set up under the title of "Association for Oblate Studies and Research". The charter was officially approved at the plenary session of the General Council of November-December 1982.<sup>184</sup> The houses of formation will find its work useful.

The Chapter of 1947 also entrusted to the Superior General the responsibility of publishing writings which cast light on our history: "The time has come to especially collect and verify according to scientific method the sources of this history and to publish them in order to make them accessible to all researchers".<sup>185</sup> A first collection of texts was published in *Missions* and in a separate edition thanks to the work of Father Paul-Émile Duval. Reporting on this work to the Chapter of 1953 Father Deschâtelets observed: "Would it not be better to reserve *Missions* for more recent events and to organize another series in the form of a special publication".<sup>186</sup>

The task of carrying this out fell to Father Jetté. At his urging, Yvon Beaudoin has already published, in a first series of a sixteen volumes of *Oblate Writings*, the letters of the Founder to Oblates as well as to the Sacred Congregation and the Society for the Propagation of the Faith. The publication of other texts continues. This collection is a work tool of great value in the hands of Oblate educators.

## 8. CONCLUSION

In reviewing the history of Oblate formation, we have seen all sorts of projects arise and develop in response to the need for a sound education. Some continue, others have been abandoned. The spirit which animated these undertakings is the spirit of Saint Eugene when founding the Institute: to respond to the call of the Church and in order to do that to form "apostolic men deeply conscious of the need to reform themselves, who would labour with all the resources at their command to convert others" (*Preface*). The method, just as it was at the time of the Founder, is always the same: to imitate Christ in the formation of the Apostles (cf. C. 45).

RENÉ MOTTE

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<sup>76</sup> Letter to Father Tempier in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 18, p. 28 & 29.

<sup>77</sup> Letter to Father Martinet in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 11, no. 1234, p. 228.

<sup>78</sup> Letter to Father Marchal for Father Mouchette in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 11, no. 1168, p. 158.

<sup>79</sup> Letter to Father Guigues at l'Osier

while Father Vincens was Novice Master in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 9, no. 756, p. 204.

<sup>80</sup> Letter to Father Mouchette in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 11, no. 1179, p. 168; to Father Berne, vol. 11, no. 1196, p. 183; to Father Vandenberghe, vol. 11, no. 1248, p. 243.

<sup>81</sup> Letter to Father Honorat in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 7, no. 299, p. 154.

<sup>82</sup> Letter to Father Tempier in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, no. 86, p. 94.

<sup>83</sup> Letter to Father Vincens in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 10, no. 958, p. 185 & 186.

<sup>84</sup> Letter to Father Vincens in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 9, no. 734, p. 176.

<sup>85</sup> Letter to Father Dorey in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 10, no. 990, p. 237.

<sup>86</sup> Letter to Father Guigues in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 9, no. 770, p. 229.

<sup>87</sup> Letter to Father Dassy in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 10, no. 986, p. 232.

<sup>88</sup> Letter to Father Berne in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 10, no. 1027, p. 276.

<sup>89</sup> Letter to Father Tempier in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 7, no. 302, p. 156.

<sup>90</sup> Letter to Father Berne in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 11, no. 1119, p. 101.

<sup>91</sup> Letter to Father Moreau in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 9, no. 747, p. 191.

<sup>92</sup> Letter to Father Lagier in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 11, no. 1211, p. 198; same instructions to Father Bellon, vol. 11, no. 1214, p. 202 and vol. 11, no. 1216, p. 205.

<sup>93</sup> Letter to Father Moreau in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 10, no. 838, p. 62.

<sup>94</sup> Letter to Father Dassy in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 10, no. 980, p. 227.

<sup>95</sup> Letter to Father Dassy in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 10, no. 983, p. 230.

<sup>96</sup> Letter to Father Richard in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 11, no. 1072, p. 46.

<sup>97</sup> Letter to Father Mille in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 8, no. 377, p. 1 & 2.

<sup>98</sup> Letter to Father Mille in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 8, no. 389, p. 21.

<sup>99</sup> Letter to Father Tempier in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 8, no. 546, p. 196.

<sup>100</sup> Letter to Father Mille in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 8, no. 393, p. 27.

<sup>101</sup> Letters to Father Dassy in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 10, no. 987, p. 234; to Father Vandenberghe, vol. 11, no. 1127, p. 109.

<sup>102</sup> Letter to Father Fabre in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 11, no. 1080, p. 53.

<sup>103</sup> Letter to Father Rey in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 11, no. 1250, p. 247.

<sup>104</sup> Letter to Father Casimir Aubert in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 8, no. 564, p. 224.

<sup>105</sup> Letter to Father Vincens in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 9, no. 783, p. 239 & 240.

<sup>106</sup> Letter to Father Guigues in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 10, no. 793, p. 11.

<sup>107</sup> Letter to Father Vincens in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 10, no. 936, p. 169.

<sup>108</sup> Letter to Father l'Hermite in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 11, no. 1103, p. 81.

<sup>109</sup> Letter to Father Richard in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 11, no. 1102, p. 80.

<sup>110</sup> Letter to Father Vandenberghe in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 11, no. 1126, p. 108.

<sup>111</sup> Letter to Father Richard in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 11, no. 1097, p. 73.

<sup>112</sup> Letter to Father Mille in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 8, no. 565, p. 224.

<sup>113</sup> See RAMBERT I, p. 252-258.

<sup>114</sup> *Diary*, quoted by REY II, p. 89.

<sup>115</sup> Letter to Father Guigues, May 14 and 16 1846 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 1, no. 62, p. 130.

<sup>116</sup> An historical account of the first attempt at setting up a juniorate at Notre-Dame de Lumières is given by Father Fernand Lepage: "Aux origines de nos juniorats", in *Etudes oblates*, 12 (1953), p. 145-165.

<sup>117</sup> In *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 1, no. 69, p. 137.

<sup>118</sup> Letters to Father Leonard in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 10, no. 921, p. 152 & 153; no. 925, p. 155 & 156; no. 938, p. 171-173; no. 944, p. 178-179; no. 952, p. 189 & 190; no. 954, p. 191 & 192; no. 960, p. 198-200; no. 962, p. 203-204. See VERKIN, Henri, "La tournée de propagande du père Léonard" in *Etudes oblates*, 26 (1967), p. 55-88.

<sup>119</sup> Letter to Father Richard in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 11, no. 1097, p. 73.

<sup>120</sup> Letter to Father Vincens in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 11, no. 1271, p. 269.

<sup>121</sup> See VERKIN, Henri, *article quoted above*, no. 18.

<sup>122</sup> Acts of visitation of the house of Notre-Dame de l'Osier, August 2, 1836.

<sup>123</sup> Letter to Father Tempier in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 7, no. 236, p. 85.

<sup>124</sup> Letter to Father Vincens in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 10, no. 936, p. 167.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>126</sup> Letter to Father Vincens in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 10, no. 1006, p. 253.

<sup>127</sup> Letter to Father Vincens in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 11, no. 1145, p. 132.

<sup>128</sup> See letter to Father Vincens about Father Telmon's nephew in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 10, no. 825, p. 44; to Father Vandenberghe about Father Vincens' nephew, vol. 11, no. 1239, no. 236.

<sup>129</sup> Letter to Father Richard in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 11, no. 1104, p. 83.

<sup>130</sup> RAMBERT II, p. 669ff. On this topic see BLANCHETTE, Guy, "La pensée de Mgr de Mazenod sur les moyens de recrutement", in *Etudes oblates*, 19 (1960), p. 197-218.

<sup>131</sup> Letter to Father Fayette in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 11, no. 1238, p. 234.

<sup>132</sup> Letter to Father Dassy in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 10, no. 987, p. 233 & 234; on this topic see correspondance to the same priest, vol. 10, no. 989, p. 235-237; no. 994, p. 241 & 242.

<sup>133</sup> Letter to Father Moreau in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 10, no. 820, p. 38.

<sup>134</sup> Published as an appendix to Father Fabre's circular letter no. 26, April 2, 1874.

<sup>135</sup> Letter to Father Vincens, appointed to teach this course in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 10, no. 898, p. 131.

<sup>136</sup> Letter to Father Dassy in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 10, no. 899, p. 132.

<sup>137</sup> Letter to Father Santoni in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 11, no. 1076, p. 49.

<sup>138</sup> Letter to Father Tempier in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 11, no. 1077, p. 49 & 50.

<sup>139</sup> Circular letter no. 92 of April 21, 1907, p. 188ff.

<sup>140</sup> Circular letter no. 128 of March 13, 1921.

<sup>141</sup> Circular letter no. 203 of December 8, 1953, p. 24-33.

<sup>142</sup> These writings can be found in *Etudes oblates*, 16 (1957), p. 263-266.

<sup>143</sup> See COSENTINO, George, "La ratio stuiorum de la Congrégation", in *Etudes oblates*, 19 (1960), p. 172-179.

<sup>144</sup> Circular letter no. 61 of December 8, 1896.

<sup>145</sup> Circular letter no. 191 of August 15, 1951.

<sup>146</sup> For example, see GERVAIS, Jacques, "Un congrès d'éducateurs sur la circulaire du T.R. Père Général" in *Etudes oblates*, 11 (1952), p. 214-215.

<sup>147</sup> His teaching, very rich in content, has been published in *Letters to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate*, General House, Rome, 1984 (passim) and in *The Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate: Addresses and Written Texts, 1975-1985*, General House, Rome, 1985, p. 215-270.

<sup>148</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 29.

<sup>149</sup> Circular letter no. 203 of December 8, 1953, p. 32ff. Institution approved by the Sacred Congregation for Religious, August 17, 1953, (*ibidem*).

<sup>150</sup> C and R of 1966, C 160 and R 171, 10<sup>e</sup>.

<sup>151</sup> In A.A.G., IV, 1 (1978), p. 192-195. Later on, the report of these visits was presented to the Congregation in A.A.G., V, 1 (1980), p. 64, 95-97.

<sup>152</sup> Circular letter no. 203 of December 8, 1953, p. 31.

<sup>153</sup> Circular letter no. 208 of September 1, 1959, p. 33ff.

<sup>154</sup> Circular letter no. 220 of September 15, 1965, p. 17ff.

<sup>155</sup> C and R of 1926, art. 283.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibidem*, art. 282.

<sup>157</sup> Circular letter no. 13 of November 21, 1863.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>159</sup> Circular letter no. 59 of February 17, 1895, p. 26.

<sup>160</sup> C and R of 1966, C 113-115; C and R of 1982: C 68-70; R 58, 68-73 [R 65h, 68a, 69a,b, 70a,b,c in CRR 2000].

<sup>161</sup> Circular letter no. 203 of December 8, 1953, p. 17.

<sup>162</sup> Circular letter no. 206 of September 14, 1956.

<sup>163</sup> Circular letter no. 206, p. 15.

<sup>164</sup> Circular letter no. 220 of August 15, 1965, p. 19-21.

<sup>165</sup> Circular letter no. 224 of March 15, 1966, p. 20.

<sup>166</sup> A.A.G., II 2 (1975), p. 414 & 415.

<sup>167</sup> A.A.G., III, 1 (1976), p. 86.

<sup>168</sup> A.A.G., IV, 2 (1979), p. 340-342; VI, I (1982), p. 116.

<sup>169</sup> *Vie Oblate Life*, 36 (1977).

<sup>170</sup> *Vie Oblate Life*, 42 (1983).

<sup>171</sup> Circular letter no. 84 of July 2, 1905, p. 43.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 58.

<sup>173</sup> Art. 619-625.

<sup>174</sup> Circular letter no. 241 of April 1, 1969, p. 67.

<sup>175</sup> Circular letter no. 208 of September 1, 1959, p. 88.

<sup>176</sup> Circular letter no. 22 of January 25, 1966, p. 37.

<sup>177</sup> Circular letter no. 230 of May 1, 1966.

<sup>178</sup> *Vie Oblate Life*, 45 (1986).

<sup>179</sup> Superior General's report on the state of the Congregation, 1986, A.A.G., 9 (1986), p. 140.

<sup>180</sup> Circular letter no. 181 of November 1, 1947, p. 62.

<sup>181</sup> Circular letter no. 247 of April 1, 1972, p. 22ff.

<sup>182</sup> A.A.G., IV, 1 (1978), p. 167.

<sup>183</sup> In *Vie Oblate Life*, 42 (1983), p. 377-380.

<sup>184</sup> A.A.G., VI, 1 (1982), p. 149.

<sup>185</sup> Circular letter no. 181 of November 1, 1947, p. 63.

<sup>186</sup> Circular letter no. 201 of May 1953, p. 18.

## GLORY OF GOD

*Summary: I. Eugene de Mazenod: 1. The actuality; 2. Its meaning. II. The Oblates: 1. Explicit mention; 2. Equivalent expressions. Conclusion.*

To mention the glory of God spontaneously brings to mind the classic trilogy: "for the glory of God, the good of the Church and the salvation of souls", which in renewed terminology the Code of Canon Law addresses to all religious: "the honor of God, the building up of the Church and the salvation of the world" (Canon 573, par. 1). Even if seeking the glory of God is something which concerns all religious, it still takes on a different coloring according to the spirit proper to each institute. We will, therefore, study what seeking the glory of God meant for Eugene de Mazenod and see how the Oblates lived and understand living with the same outlook.

### I. EUGENE DE MAZENOD

#### 1. THE ACTUALITY

The search the glory of God is one of the basic motivating factors that determined Eugene de Mazenod's conduct - and this from his adolescence on. Under the direction of Don Bartolo Zinelli in Venice, he had drawn up a rule of life for himself. After having made mention of his morning prayer, he noted: "Having thus organized everything for the greater glory of God, I will leave my room to go about my business".<sup>1</sup>

In Eugene de Mazenod, the seminarian at Saint Sulpice, we find the same concern. He exhorts his mother to do everything, even the most insignifi-

cant things, in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ. In doing this, he was making allusion to Colossians 3:17 and he concludes with the quotation from 1 Corinthians 10:31: "Whatever you eat, whatever you drink, whatever you do at all, do it for the glory of God".<sup>2</sup> If he gives his sister advice, it is, of course, to help her to live the Christian life, but always with the same concern in mind: "I hope that God will be glorified by our correspondence".<sup>3</sup>

The notes he made during his retreat in preparation for the priesthood reveal the same preoccupation: "You gave me intelligence, will, memory, a heart, eyes, hands, in a word all my bodily senses, all my soul's faculties, you gave me all these things for yourself, to use them for your glory, for your exclusive and greater glory. [...] My God, henceforth, it is all settled and for my whole life. You, you alone will be the sole object to which will tend all my affections and my every action. To please you, act for your glory, will be my daily task, the task of every moment of my life. I wish to live only for you, I wish to love you alone and all else in you and through you".<sup>4</sup>

When he remains on at the seminary after the departure of the Sulpicians, it is always for the same reason: "I will stay, then, because everything obliges me to stay: the glory of God, the good of the Church, the building up of my neighbor, my own advantage".<sup>5</sup>

When it was a matter of gathering a group of priests to preach the Gospel to the insignificant poor, it was for the

glory of God and the salvation of souls that he undertook this endeavor. From that time on, he would almost always say: "the glory of God and the salvation of souls", and sometimes he would quote the entire trilogy, as for example in the Preface: "The sight of these evils has touched the hearts of certain priests, who are full of zeal for the glory of God, and of devotion to the interests of the Church, and who would willingly sacrifice themselves for the salvation of souls".<sup>6</sup>

We will return to this theme later, but we can already quote a few important passages. In his letter of invitation to Father Henry Tempier, the Founder wrote: "Read this letter at the foot of your crucifix with a mind to heed only God and what is demanded in the interests of his glory and of the salvation of souls for a priest like yourself. [...] It is not easy to come across men who are dedicated and wish to devote themselves to the glory of God and the salvation of souls".<sup>7</sup>

The same thought surfaces again on the occasion of the approbation of the Rules by Rome: "Do all the good that is incumbent upon you, but do it only for God".<sup>8</sup> In another letter to the same father, we find an echo of his retreat notes quoted above: "[...] I have done all I ought, God will do the rest. We live only for him; we seek only the glory of his holy name and the salvation of souls he has redeemed".<sup>9</sup> The conclusion he draws from the fact of the approval by Rome is much in the same vein, "The conclusion to be drawn from this [...] is: we must work, with renewed ardor and still more total devotedness, to bring to God all the glory that stems from our efforts and to the needy souls of our neighbors, salvation in all possible ways".<sup>10</sup> He would be able to tell Cardinal Frasoni that this was the goal of

the life of every Oblate: "Our Oblates of the Most Holy Mary Immaculate are, by the grace of God, all good and all ready to sacrifice their lives for the glory of God and to work for the conversion and sanctification of souls".<sup>11</sup>

## 2. ITS MEANING

To understand the significance for Eugene de Mazenod of seeking the glory of God, there is no better means than to contemplate Jesus Christ working for the glory of his Father. The Founder's spirituality is, indeed, Christocentric. Paul VI called him a person "passionately attached to Jesus Christ". Eugene himself said: "Since I have not imitated my model in his innocence, will I be denied the opportunity to imitate him in his devotion to the glory of his Father and the salvation of men?"<sup>12</sup> To commit himself to follow Jesus Christ is the central element of Eugene de Mazenod's spirituality. And it is from this point of departure that one can understand the richness of the other elements, like the one we are presently studying.

a) It was by seeking the glory of his Father that Jesus conducted himself as a genuine Son of God.

"The one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true" (John 7:18). This is the same experiential truth that Eugene de Mazenod lived out; the texts quoted in this article are sufficient proof of that.

b) To seek the glory of God is a source of freedom.

Jesus is free to speak to every class of society, rebuking them for their sins and summoning them to an authentic fidelity to God. He does not fear to proclaim the Beatitudes in the face of the world's rejection of them.

Eugene de Mazenod felt free enough

to speak out frankly. For example, to preach in Provençal in spite of the ridicule of Aix's high society, to defend the rights of the Church like the freedom to teach,<sup>13</sup> to display his independence with regard to all governments, to reprimand certain Oblates such as Bishop Jean-François Allard<sup>14</sup> or Father Calixte Kotterer,<sup>15</sup> or when he told Father Hippolyte Courtès: "See to it firmly that each performs his duty punctually. [...] The essential is to please God".<sup>16</sup>

c) Seeking the glory of God is a source of peace

Jesus experienced in his own human heart the terror of death: "Now my soul is troubled. What shall I say: Father, save me from this hour? But it was for this very reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name" (John 12:27-28). It is after having said "glorify your name" that with a peaceful heart Jesus proclaimed his certainty of victory: "And when I am lifted up from the earth, I shall draw all men to myself" (John 12:32).

Among the many trials Eugene de Mazenod had undergone, we can recall the long Calvary he suffered from 1832 to 1837. After his consecration as Bishop of Icosia, he was proscribed by the French government and ordered by Rome to remain silent. In spite of the deep suffering that this caused him, he wrote to Bishop Frezza: "It is a rich reward for my suffering to see God glorified in this way, so many souls converted; [...] as long as God is exalted what does it matter that I remain humiliated, neglected, abandoned by almost everyone? [...] From the day of my birth, God has led me by the hand; he has led me to do so many things for his glory that I would have feared being proud if men were aware of it and had granted me recognition. It is better for me that they should be unjust and un-

grateful; thus God would be my only reward as he is my only strength, my only hope."<sup>17</sup> Once the matter was settled by his appointment as Bishop of Marseilles, even if he did not want to accept the responsibility of a diocese, he wrote in his diary: "So be it! Just so long as God is glorified by it. I could not have lost my independence and liberty more completely; humanly speaking, it is an affliction for me, but things must be considered in another light".<sup>18</sup>

d) Seeking the glory of God means self-denial

"I tell you most solemnly, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees the Father doing; and whatever the Father does the Son does too" (John 5:19). Jesus personally lived the beatitude of poverty that he proclaimed.

It is the same attitude of self-denial that the Founder recommended to the Oblates. "Please God at Aix they will know how to profit from the gifts of God. For that the missionaries must be forgetful of themselves, and have nothing in view save the greater glory of God and the salvation of these poor souls who have not had any help since the mission."<sup>19</sup> He recommended the same attitude to the first missionaries sent to Canada: "[...] never seeking their own interest but only what pertains to the glory of God and the service of the Church".<sup>20</sup>

e) Seeking the glory of God is a source of apostolic zeal

"Because I have come from heaven, not to do my own will, but to do the will of the one who sent me. Now the will of him who sent me is that I should lose nothing of all that he has given to me, and that I should raise it up on the last day". (John 6:38 - 39) The one who acts only for the glory of God discovers ever more the infinite love of God for

people and shares his desire that "everyone [...] be saved and reach full knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4).

Committed to the following of Jesus Christ, from the first years of his ministry, Eugene de Mazenod linked together the glory of God and the salvation of men. We have already quoted enough texts which give proof of this. Moreover, in a letter to Father Christopher Bonjean, he explains the link between the glory of God and the salvation of men: "May you all be preserved also in order to continue to bring about the glory of God by working for the conversion of these poor souls which without you would not be saved".<sup>21</sup> God is glorified when men are saved. So it is as a missionary that Eugene de Mazenod seeks the glory of God following in the footsteps of Jesus. As Father Józef Pielorz pointed out in his thesis: "His apostolic mentality enables us to discover the true meaning of the phrase which appears so often in the writings of Bishop de Mazenod: 'to work for the greater glory of God'. This work is not to be accomplished mainly through the various acts of religion, i.e., adoration, sacrifice, prayer, etc., as the French School in general understood it, but rather through the apostolate. That is, less by increasing acts of adoration than by increasing the number of adorers."<sup>22</sup>

f) Love is the inspiration for seeking the glory of God

"He who sent me is with me, and has not left me to myself, for I always do what pleases him". (John 8:29)

It is noteworthy that, from time to time, the Founder transformed the classical trilogy into another formula: "The love of Christ, love for the Church and the salvation of souls". For example, in the well-known text: "The one who

would like to join our ranks should burn with the desire of his own perfection, be enflamed with love for Our Lord Jesus Christ and his Church, with an ardent zeal for the salvation of souls".<sup>23</sup> Consequently, for the Founder as for the Oblates, seeking the glory of God meant to respond to the love of Christ, to love the Church with him and to share his love for all. Seeking the glory of God was understood and lived as a commitment to follow in the footsteps of Christ, the Savior.

## II. THE OBLATES

In what way were the Oblates faithful to the call of their Founder: seeking above all the glory of God?

### 1. EXPLICIT MENTION

Since they heard the Founder speak of the "glory of God and the salvation of souls", the Oblates gladly drew their inspiration from this. So it was that Bishop Vital Grandin wrote to Bishop de Mazenod: "All our fathers are well; they are obtaining the glory of God and everything leads us to believe that the Lord will crown our efforts with more and more success".<sup>24</sup> In a letter to the Founder, Father John Séguin communicates the testimony of Father Julian Moulin in which he describes the difficulties of a missionary journey: "Now all of this is a thing of the past! May these few labors benefit the glory of God and the salvation of souls and I will have been richly rewarded for them".<sup>25</sup> It is always the same wording that reappears so there is no need to multiply quotations from writings.

In their circular letters, the Superiors General issued the same call, making explicit reference to the Founder. Here

is one example from Father Joseph Fabre: "Yes, for the glory of God, to save souls, let us leave no stone unturned and by doing so show ourselves to be worthy sons of our Father so filled with love for God and for souls".<sup>26</sup> In the conclusion to his circular letter on studies, Father Louis Soullier stated: "What is at stake is the glory of God in us and in souls".<sup>27</sup> In circular letter 133, Bishop Augustine Dontenwill presented the letter of congratulations from Pope Pius XI for the centenary of the approbation of our Rules: "In the wake of a century of suffering, struggles and labors for the glory of God, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate [...] are happy to hear the common Father of all the faithful [...] tell them that he is happy with the zeal, dedication and piety which reigned and continues to reign in your Congregation".<sup>28</sup> Faithful to the mind of the Founder, his fifth successor spontaneously linked the glory of God and missionary zeal.

## 2. EQUIVALENT EXPRESSIONS

Indeed, when one consults the General Analytical Table of Contents of the review *Missions* or in the Analytical Index of the Constitutions and Rules of 1982, we do not often find the expression "glory of God". Except for a few quotations of the Founder's wording, we hardly find anything more by going through all the Administrative Circulars of the Superiors General. This should not surprise us since, in contrast to other founders of orders, Father de Mazenod did not make it a primary command for the Oblates to seek the glory of God for its own sake. On the other hand, what we usually find is the primacy of consecration to God and the primacy of the commitment to follow in the footsteps of

Christ to be cooperators of the Savior in a missionary work.

To avoid piling up quotations, let us simply point out a few typical expressions in the circular letters of Father Leo Deschâtelets. "Our ideal is an absolute and enthusiastic commitment, a total availability to God and to souls for God, drawn from contemplation and in interior union with God".<sup>29</sup> In the same circular letter, our vocation is described as "a frantic gift of oneself to the service of God, his glory, his love and his infinite mercy; it is a drive, a special intensity of priestly charity, of zeal for the most difficult works".<sup>30</sup>

Insisting on the primacy of the love of God, Father Deschâtelets presented the General Chapter as an undertaking of charity towards God and men: "If we are gathered here, it is to practice charity. In some way, it is the solemn act through which the Congregation displays, in an official and collective manner, its charity toward God and souls. It is to love God more in the soul of our brothers and of poor sinners."<sup>31</sup> The same thought was expressed at the General Chapter of 1959 in different words: "We are bound in duty to Jesus, to the Church, to souls".<sup>32</sup> And a few lines further on: "To lend strength to this three-fold love, or better still, to this single love of God from which the others flow, we need a special asceticism which, among us, consists in imitating the virtues and examples of Our Lord in our personal life as well as in our apostolic life".<sup>33</sup>

We could go through all the reports to other Chapters and circular letters of the Superiors General; the same ideas will be found, namely, the fundamental reality for the Oblate is his consecration to God, with and through Jesus Christ, to cooperate with him for the salvation of men.

Consecrated to God, the Oblate bears "witness to God's holiness and justice" (C 9). In speaking of our sharing in the prophetic grace of the Church, the Constitutions and Rules of 1982 used an expression that was not well known to the Founder.<sup>34</sup> Are these expressions a faithful expression of his thinking? The answer is found by quoting the Magnificat which makes the link between the glorification of God and the ministry for justice. Mary gives glory to God: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord". In the course of her contemplation, she discovers the plan of God, a plan to restore justice among people and recognize the dignity of the poor: "He has [...] exalted the lowly. The hungry he has filled with good things." It is the same undertaking as the Oblate following the Lord to be of service to the poor. The concluding lines of Rule 9 bring to mind Psalm 8 which begins by giving glory to God: "O Lord our God, how great is your name", and leads us to discover the outstanding dignity of man: "What is man that you should spare a thought for him?" It is, therefore, by giving glory to the just and holy God that the missionary will be an authentic Gospel worker, avoiding the pitfall of developing a narrow partisan view in defense of the poor.

Even if more recent texts use a different wording, they still refer to the same reality: the absolute primacy of God. For Eugene de Mazenod, God holds first place. Eugene wanted to do everything "for the greater glory of God". For the Oblates who want to be witnesses for a just and holy God, God holds first place. God must hold first place for all the religious who, according to Paul VI, are called to "show forth to men the primacy of the love of God".<sup>35</sup>

## CONCLUSION

"To seek the glory of God" was lived in different ways by holy founders and by the religious who committed themselves to follow them. In the case of the Oblates, Eugene de Mazenod gave this search a distinctly apostolic orientation, following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, Savior, with whom they wish to cooperate for the salvation of men.

RENÉ MOTTE

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> REY I, p. 26.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to his mother, November 29, 1809 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, no. 64, p. 145.

<sup>3</sup> Letter to his sister, July 12, 1809, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, no. 57, p. 131.

<sup>4</sup> Retreat at Amiens, December 1-21, 1811 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, no. 95, p. 217.

<sup>5</sup> Bargemon (Var, France) Boisgelin Collection.

<sup>6</sup> Constitutions and Rules of 1982, *Preface*, p. 10.

<sup>7</sup> Letter to Abbé Henry Tempier, October 9, 1815 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, no. 4, p. 6 & 7.

<sup>8</sup> Letter to Father Tempier, December 18, 1825 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, no. 212, p. 123.

<sup>9</sup> Letter to Father Tempier, June 10, 1826 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 7, no. 248, p. 113.

<sup>10</sup> Letter to Father Tempier, February 18, 1826 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 7, no. 226, p. 40.

<sup>11</sup> Letter to Cardinal Fransoni, September 25, 1847 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 5, no. 6, p. 16.

<sup>12</sup> Spiritual conference, 1808, Oblate General Archives, quoted in MORABITO, Joseph, "Je serai prêtre", p. 78.

<sup>13</sup> See LEFLON III, Chapter V.

<sup>14</sup> See letters to Bishop Allard, May 30 and November 10, 1857 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 4, nos. 26-27, p. 87-95.

<sup>15</sup> See Letter to Father Callixtus Kotterer, April 23, 1837 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 9, no. 615, p. 28-30.

<sup>16</sup> Letter to Father Courtès, August 15, 1830 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 7, no. 356, p. 210.

<sup>17</sup> Letter to Bishop Frezza, April 27, 1835 in RAMBERT I, p. 698.

<sup>18</sup> Diary, April 15, 1837, quoted in LEFLON II, p. 515.

<sup>19</sup> Letter to Father Tempier, April 9, 1826 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 7, no. 235, p. 80.

<sup>20</sup> Letter to Father John Baptist Honorat, March 26, 1842 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 1, no. 10, p. 19.

<sup>21</sup> Letter to Father Christopher Bonjean, October 16, 1858 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 4, no. 47, p. 143.

<sup>22</sup> PIELORZ, Józef, *The Spiritual Life of Bishop de Mazenod, 1782-1812*, Ottawa

Oblate Studies Edition, 1956, p. 343 in the manuscript English translation.

<sup>23</sup> Quoted in the 1982 Constitutions and Rules, p. 54; see also, Preface, p. 11.

<sup>24</sup> June 1, 1860 letter in *Missions* I (1866) p. 53.

<sup>25</sup> December 20, 1860 letter, *ibidem*, p. 69 ff.

<sup>26</sup> Circular letter no. 40, December 8, 1886 in *Circ. adm.*, II (1886-1900), p. 7.

<sup>27</sup> Circular letter no. 61, December 8, 1896 in *Circ. adm.*, II (1886-1900), p. 126 from the separate printing.

<sup>28</sup> Circular letter no. 133, January 25, 1926 in *Circ. adm.*, IV (1922-1947), p. 24.

<sup>29</sup> Circular letter no. 191, August 15, 1951, "Our Vocation and our Life of Intimate Union with Mary Immaculate", in *Circ. adm.*, V (1947-1952), p. 39.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 28

<sup>31</sup> Circular letter no. 201, "Report to the 1953 General Chapter", in *Circ. adm.*, VI (1953-1960), p. 34.

<sup>32</sup> Circular letter no. 208, in *Circ. adm.*, VI (1953-1960), p. 5.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 5

<sup>34</sup> Constitution 9 and Rule 8.

<sup>35</sup> PAUL VI, Exhortation, *Evangelica testificatio*, June 29, 1971, no. 1.

## HOLINESS

*Summary:* I. *Eugene de Mazenod*: 1. The dynamics of holiness; 2. Holiness of the apostolic man; 3. The Christological dimension of holiness; 4. The communitarian dimension of holiness; 5. Practice of the virtues; 6. The Rule, a "manual" for holiness. II. *The Oblate tradition*: 1. The teaching of Superiors General and General Chapters; 2. Oblate literature; 3. Canonized holiness. III. *The Constitutions and Rules*: 1. Conformity with Christ through oblation; 2. Mission; 3. A "shared holiness"; 4. The way of holiness. 5. The present challenge.

The Second Vatican Council vigorously presented anew the fact of the universal call to holiness (LG 5). Oblates, like all Christians, are called to holiness. Foremost among them stood, Eugene de Mazenod who consistently cherished an ever-growing desire for holiness. He himself wanted to be holy and he wished the same for all those he would touch through his ministry. He wanted first of all to lead them to live as reasonable human beings, then as Christians, and finally, he wanted to help them become saints. This is the holiness he desired for his Oblates. He exhorted them with these words: "In God's name, let us be saints".<sup>1</sup> He considered the community as a place of sanctification; he embraced religious life as an effective means to achieve this and chose the preaching of parish missions as a ministry in which one achieved holiness and sanctified the people. He understood the intrinsic link that exists between holiness and mission; it was something he stressed often and on a regular basis. He lived his life in such a way as to focus constantly on the attainment of holiness. He was never one to compromise or settle for half measures. Moreover, he presented his confreres with the challenge of a radical life commitment: "I do not want any smoldering wicks in the Congregation; let them burn; let them give heat and light or let them leave".<sup>2</sup>

In this article we will not treat of that general holiness which is each Christian's goal. We will concentrate rather on the characteristic traits which distinguish the path of holiness which Oblates are called to follow.

### I. EUGENE DE MAZENOD

#### 1. THE DYNAMICS OF HOLINESS

One of the first features that catches the eye when we read the writings of Eugene de Mazenod is the terminology he uses when treating of this issue. As opposed to the abstract term "holiness", the Founder often preferred the more concrete term *saint* or the more dynamic term *sanctification*, *tending* toward holiness and perfection. Indeed, as far as he was concerned, holiness is a dynamic process of becoming – a constant journeying which lasts a lifetime. In the *Preface*, we read that Oblates "must strive to be saints. [...] seeking at all times to reach the very summit of perfection". "Let there be no limit set for our personal holiness," Father Leo Deschâtelets used to exclaim when he read this text.<sup>3</sup>

Such a dynamism must be sustained by the firm determination to attain sanctity. "When it comes to perfection, one must never say that it is sufficient."<sup>4</sup>

The reminder to desire and have the will to achieve holiness is constantly repeated and is consistent. In the Rule, the first criterion to discern an Oblate vocation is to "burn with great desire for one's own perfection" (C and R 1928, art. 697). "A firm resolve we have adopted is to rid ourselves of all those who do not want to strive for perfection".<sup>5</sup> This desire should not remain the prerogative of novices, but must grow ceaselessly as the *Preface* reminds us: "[...] seeking at all times to reach the very summit of perfection".

If, indeed, holiness is a gift of God which communicates his life, it is also a response which demands commitment, work, becoming. In virtue of our baptism, we are holy, but at the same time we should bring to maturity the seed of life implanted in us by baptism.

## 2. HOLINESS OF THE APOSTOLIC MAN

A characteristic trait of the holiness the Founder demands of his Oblates is the intrinsic link he sees between holiness and the apostolic man. *Holiness* and *apostolic man* are terms that are used almost synonymously. As a result, we now begin to see the kind of holiness to which the Founder felt God was calling him, the holiness he recommended to his Oblates. Letters written during the early years of the Congregation's life give us a good idea of how the Founder envisioned the Missionary of Provence: He had to be "an extraordinary man"<sup>6</sup>, a "truly apostolic man"<sup>7</sup>, capable of combining into one a life of holiness with a life of proclaiming the Gospel. By "extraordinary men" the Founder did not mean a person with outstanding gifts, a renowned preacher capable of capturing the hearts of his listeners: "Were it a question of going out to preach more or less well the word

of God mingled with much alloy of self, of going far and wide for the purpose, if you wish of winning souls for God without taking much trouble to be men of interior life, truly apostolic men I think it would not be difficult to replace you. But can you believe I want merchandise of that sort?"<sup>8</sup> he wrote to Father Henry Tempier when the founding of the Congregation was still a project on the drawing board. For his missionary project, more than good preachers, he needed men of the interior life, truly apostolic men, definitely saints: "We must be truly saints ourselves. In saying that, we include all that can possibly be said"<sup>9</sup>. Numbers are not the primary consideration here; rather it is quality. This is the way he explains it to Father Charles Forbin-Janson. In contrast with his friend who is working on a vast missionary project, recruiting many priests to evangelize the whole of France, Eugene de Mazenod is looking for men capable of living an authentic Christian and communitarian life. He wrote to Forbin-Janson, "If I were you, I would aim at somewhat less brilliance and I would insist more on soundness. Of what use are fine speeches if one is conceited? Humility, the spirit of abnegation obedience, etc., and the utmost in the way of fraternal charity are also necessary for the good order and the happiness of a Society. Not all your people have properly understood that [...] Here we agree on no such arrangements. We were six [...] Our community is very fervent. There are no better priests throughout the diocese."<sup>10</sup>

The expressions "to be saints" and "to be apostolic men" are equivalent in some way. He wrote to Father Tempier to exhort the missionaries "to conduct themselves like saints, like real apostles"<sup>11</sup>. And with regard to the scholastics in his charge, he wrote to Father

Mouchette, "They have to realize that their ministry is the continuation of the apostolic ministry [...] So let them lose no time in becoming saints, if they have not done so already [...]"<sup>12</sup>. Toward the end of his life as he was summing up his own particular ideal of life, he wrote to the missionaries in Canada: "I have such a high view of your vocation that I cannot bear the thought of the tiniest imperfection and it troubles me as if it were a serious infidelity. Every day I pray that his grace will keep you all in great holiness. I cannot think in other terms of the life of sublime devotion which is the life of our missionaries".<sup>13</sup>

We have to return to the sources so as to understand the relationship between mission and holiness. Indeed, it was a two-fold indivisible objective which was the inspiration for the founding of the Institute: mission and the desire for Gospel perfection. An interior crisis tormented the young Father de Mazenod for years: whether to dedicate himself to an apostolic career or to withdraw to a monastery. It was only when he had gained the assurance that in founding the Missionaries of Provence the rural poor would be evangelized while at the same time he could achieve the holiness to which he felt called that this crisis was resolved. In the book of *Formules d'admission au noviciat* [Formulas for Admission to the Novitiate], he wrote that the holy Institute "should help us to attain the virtues specific to the state of perfection to which we most willingly dedicate ourselves. That is why we are laying the foundations of the Society of the Missionaries of Provence in Aix on October 2, 1815".<sup>14</sup>

In the *Petition Addressed to the Vicars General of Aix*, he had written: "The end of this Society is only to work for the salvation of one's neighbour by

dedicating itself to the ministry of preaching; its chief aim also includes providing its members with the means necessary to practice the virtues of religion [...]"<sup>15</sup>. That is why in the budding community, the missionaries will work "at their own sanctification in conformity with their vocation".<sup>16</sup>

The *Preface* confirms that the end of the Institute, under the Lord's inspiration, is to "work more effectively for the salvation of souls and for their own sanctification". The original priests in the group wanted to submit themselves to a Rule because they resolved "to obey the following Constitutions and Rules; by living them they hope to obtain all the benefits they need for their own sanctification and for the salvation of souls". The end could only be achieved if the members of the Institute "carry out their duty worthily, faithfully fulfilling their splendid vocation". Introducing the vowed life into that original group, and their progressive transformation from a group of diocesan priests into a religious community must be understood in this light.

### 3. THE CHRISTOLOGICAL DIMENSION OF HOLINESS

When it is a case of describing in a concrete way the program of holiness to which the members of the Society are called, Eugene de Mazenod recommended a specific style of life where life was divided into a period spent in the ministry and another spent in community in order to be equipped to work "together for the glory of God and for our sanctification"<sup>17</sup>. The life of recollection, silence, study and prayer which the members of the Institute experience in community seems to be the most suitable way to keep them on the path of holiness. "One part [of the year,

spent in community will be used for] our individual sanctification".<sup>18</sup>

Later on, the Rule would give a more concrete expression to this original insight: "[...] one part of their life will be spent in prayer, internal recollection, contemplation in the privacy of the house of God in which they will lead the common life. The other will be entirely dedicated to the most active works of zeal in the world outside [...]"<sup>19</sup>

In the history of the Congregation, this distinction almost established a dichotomy and created a division in the ideal apostolic man: a division between missionary action and the life of withdrawing into community – associating the means of sanctification with the latter period.

On the other hand, to achieve a good understanding of the distinction set forth by the Founder, we must see it in context. This idea draws its inspiration from the imitation of Christ and the Apostles: the missionaries should: "imitate in all things the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, main founder of the Society and the Apostles, our first fathers. In imitation of these great models, one part of their life [...]"<sup>20</sup>. In the light of this text, the main task of the missionaries is neither preaching nor praying in the silence of their house, but rather the imitating of Christ. Consequently, the unifying element is found in reliving the tension inherent in the mystery of Christ by following the example of the Apostles<sup>21</sup>. The holiness recommended by Eugene de Mazenod is eminently Christological: it is a case of becoming other Christs, to become co-workers with him in his paschal mystery. Missionary action is intrinsically the work of Christ, that is, to relive Christ in his greatest mystery, the mystery of the Redemption.

It is in this perspective that we can reread the numberless references to Christ, especially to Christ the Savior, which continually flow from Eugene de Mazenod's pen in his writings. From the beginning of his spiritual life, Christ is the model and guide to follow on the path of holiness. He stands before the mystery of Christ like "a painter copying a model". What does the painter do? "He places his model in the best possible light, observes it very closely, stares at it, seeks to fix its image in his imagination, then he sketches on a sheet of paper or on a canvas a few lines which he compares to the original; he corrects them if they are not in exact correspondence with the original, then he continues"<sup>22</sup>. Eugene did the same with Christ – he wrote: "Beloved model to whom I must conform myself, as is my desire with his grace".<sup>23</sup>

This is not a question of imitating externals, but rather of an authentic identification with Christ to the point of becoming his other self. In 1811, while still a young priest, Eugene wrote: "[...] Saint Paul said that those whom God wished to save, whom he has predestined for his glory [...], he has decided and ordained would resemble his son Jesus Christ, [...] he has predestined for his glory. Whichever way you put it, it is still conformity with Jesus Christ that is the definitive sign of predestination as it is always infallibly either its effect or its cause. Do we resemble Jesus Christ? Do we imitate Jesus Christ with all our strength; do we live the life of Jesus Christ? Then we shall infallibly be saved".<sup>24</sup>

For Eugene, conformity with Christ is achieved through the cross. No road to holiness is without suffering. Annoyances, trials, difficulties... everything can serve as an occasion to relive Christ crucified. Reflecting on his own per-

sonal experience, he wrote: "Never allow yourself to be crushed by the difficulties and the sufferings that are inseparable from our life here below, whatever the position in which Providence has placed us, Wisdom consists in taking advantage of everything for our sanctification".<sup>25</sup>

Even if it seems to harbor an inherent dichotomy, the Oblate project enjoys profound unity. Mission calls to holiness and vice versa. While meditating on the Rule, the Founder wrote: "[...] For to what a high degree of holiness does the apostolic vocation bind, I mean to say, that vocation which dedicates me to work unstintingly at sanctifying souls with the means used by the Apostles?"<sup>26</sup>

#### 4. THE COMMUNITARIAN DIMENSION OF HOLINESS

Another characteristic trait of the idea of holiness in the thought of Eugene de Mazenod is the communitarian dimension. If it is not good enough to have mediocre preachers, it is not sufficient either to have apostolic men as isolated individuals. To be "truly apostolic men" it is necessary to *march together* in the footsteps of the Apostles. What is called for is to live as they lived, gathered around Jesus in conformity with the model they taught to the first Christians of Jerusalem. A "shared holiness" was called for. In a letter to Father Tempier suggesting a first meeting with all the future members of the community Eugene de Mazenod wrote: "We will help each other mutually with advice and with all that the good God will inspire in each of us for our *common sanctification*".<sup>27</sup>

Yet again he wrote to Father Tempier that the house in Aix "in my mind and my hopes must reproduce the

perfection of the first disciples of the apostles", that is, the first Christian community in Jerusalem because, as he went on to say, "I base my hopes on that much more than on eloquent discourses. Have they ever converted anyone?"<sup>28</sup> Here he is making an obvious reference to the witness given by the first Christian community with its life of holiness, the fruit of mutual love. Indeed, it was characterized by the union of hearts and minds and by the common sharing of material goods. As a result, what would be expected of the future members of the Society was to live in a perfect harmony of sentiments, with mutual good will and a spirit of detachment shared by everyone. Everything, even the work of personal sanctification, was to be a shared endeavor. Consequently, in community the members could experience together the same spiritual joy. Life in common would stand out as an essential element for the apostolic man, either with regard to efficacious missionary activity or for personal sanctification. Holiness was a project they worked at together; it became a shared holiness. "Oh! do not doubt that we will become saints in our Congregation, free but united by bonds of the most tender charity [...]"<sup>29</sup>

Once the group of the Missionaries of Provence was established, the demand for sanctification in view of the mission became greater. To someone requesting a description of this new vocation, the Founder wrote: "The missionary, being specifically called to the apostolic ministry should aim at perfection. [...] So he ought to do everything to arrive at this desirable holiness which is to produce such great effects"<sup>30</sup>. The novice, Jacques-Joseph Marcou, illustrated that he had learned this lesson well when he gave this explanation of his vocation to the seminarian, Hip-

polyte Guibert: "Shall I speak to you personally of our Institute? It would be enough for me to tell you that we strive for perfection; [...] we are one in heart and soul".<sup>31</sup>

The apostolic man is someone who commits himself with all earnestness to walking the path of holiness, along with his brothers in community. As we read in the *Preface*, this is because mission demands "apostolic men deeply conscious of the need to reform themselves, who would labour with all the resources at their command to convert others".

In the Rule, Eugene de Mazenod clarifies this idea of perfection that he initially spoke of. The path of holiness he wishes to follow is a communitarian path. The apostolic man does not achieve sanctity independently of others. We stand together as one unit, bound by the bonds of mutual love. Indeed, as we have already said, to become saints means to relive Christ in his fullness as persons transformed into him by the Spirit who grafts us on to him. It is the identification of each individual with Christ alone which makes it possible that the missionaries become one with him: "They will all be united by the bonds of the most all-pervading charity and in perfect submission to the superiors".<sup>32</sup> Commenting on this passage of the Rule, the Founder himself noted: "And always with Jesus Christ as our model. United to Jesus Christ in the most profound charity, they will stand as one man among themselves, his children, very closely united in the bonds of the most ardent charity, living under the rule of the most perfect obedience to obtain the humility they need".<sup>33</sup>

On another occasion, he wrote to Father Hippolyte Courtès: "Let us be united in the love of Jesus Christ, in our common perfection, let us love each other as we have done up to now, let us

[...] be at one [...]"<sup>34</sup>. Grafted into the one and only body of Christ we are called to become the one and only Christ.

Ultimately, the ideal of the Oblate as apostolic man contains, and has contained from the very beginning, a great richness. It embraces, bound together in an inseparable way, the concept of holiness of life, of holiness shared in fraternal living and of holiness shared in apostolic ministry. A synthesis of this ideal is found in the text: "Live for God and for the Church, for the sanctification of the poor heathen, for the Congregation [...] Be united, *cor unum et anima una*. Constantly re-read your holy Rules. By being faithful to them you will become holy [...] Remember that *Deus charitas est*"<sup>35</sup>. Father Joseph Morabito sums up in this manner what Eugene de Mazenod is recommending: "Oblation, personal holiness, apostolate; elements which harmonize perfectly, complete each other and of which the first, oblation, is like the heart from which flow the two others which are like the fruit and the goal"<sup>36</sup>. The distinctions must of necessity be confined to the realm of ideas. In reality, the Oblate undertaking is of the greatest simplicity and indivisible.

## 5. PRACTICE OF THE VIRTUES

In his journey toward sanctity, Eugene de Mazenod attached great importance to the ascetical practice of the virtues. Charity, the bond of perfection, stood in the first place. In the original plan for founding the Congregation, it was to be the exclusive bond uniting the missionaries. It was "the pivot on which our whole existence turns"<sup>37</sup>. But charity has all the other virtues as her servants. The Founder often lists them in

his writings, even if he does not do so in a systematic way. Writing to Father Tempier, he told him: "For the love of God never cease to inculcate and preach humility, abnegation, forgetfulness of self, disdain for worldly esteem. May these ever be the foundation of our little Society, which, combined with a truly disinterested zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, and the most tender, affectionate and sincere charity amongst ourselves, will make of our house an earthly paradise [...]"<sup>38</sup>. To Charles de Forbin-Janson, he wrote: "Humility, the spirit of abnegation, obedience etc., and the utmost in the way of fraternal charity are also necessary for the good order and the happiness of a Society"<sup>39</sup>. Among the ascetical attitudes, he pointed especially to "holy detachment which is the royal road to accomplish God's will"<sup>40</sup>, "the pivot of religious life"<sup>41</sup>. And yet again, "self-denial, [...] abnegation, [...] interior life, regularity, love of one's vocation"<sup>42</sup>; "reserve and exterior modesty which is very edifying"<sup>43</sup>; "the most ardent desire for perfection, [...] devotion for the Church, zeal for the salvation of souls and a great attachment to the family, [...] respect for superiors [...]"<sup>44</sup>

But it is especially in the *Preface* that the Founder sets forth a demanding ascetical program. The missionaries "must wholly renounce themselves, striving solely for the glory of God, the good of the Church and the growth and salvation of souls. They must constantly renew themselves in the spirit of their vocation, living in a state of habitual self-denial and seeking at all times to reach the very summit of perfection. They must work unremittingly to become humble, meek obedient, lovers of poverty and penance, mortified, free from inordinate attachment to the world

or to family, men filled with zeal, ready to sacrifice goods, talents, ease, self, even their life, for the love of Jesus Christ, the service of the Church, and the sanctification of their brethren."

## 6. THE RULE A "MANUAL" FOR HOLINESS

The Founder did not limit himself to asserting the demands of holiness, of pointing out the basic paths to be followed (apostolic, Christological, communitarian) or the concrete virtues to be lived. He also presented concrete means to achieve this. He did it especially by writing the Rule, the observance of which was, according to him, the ordinary path to holiness. We read in the Rule, "All the members of our Society including the Superiors, are bound to order their whole lives in strict agreement with our Rules and Constitutions, and in such manner to strive to reach the perfection of their state" (C and R of 1928, art. 228). With the sanction of papal approbation, it was obvious that "they are no longer simple regulations, merely pious directions; they are Rules approved by the Church after most minute examination".<sup>45</sup>

The Founder was "strongly convinced that the sanctification of our Society's members and the success of their work depend on their fidelity in observing exactly the holy Rules of our Institute [...]"<sup>46</sup>. In a letter to Father Marc de l'Hermite he wrote that the Rule serves "both for your own sanctification and for the salvation of souls which it is your mission to convert"<sup>47</sup>. And in one of his circular letters, he wrote: "There lies the secret of your sanctification: these Rules contain everything which should lead us to God. Adorn your souls with the finest virtues; heap up your merits; ensure your

own perseverance. Read, meditate and observe your Rules and you will become genuine saints; you will build up the Church [...]."<sup>48</sup>

Indeed, as Father Yvon Beaudoin has pointed out, the Rule written by the Founder contains more rules on holiness than on the end of the Institute, the ministry and means of saving souls. He was convinced that "the most effective means of evangelization is the example of a holy life".<sup>49</sup>

## II. THE OBLATE TRADITION

### 1. THE TEACHING OF THE SUPERIORS GENERAL AND GENERAL CHAPTERS

After the Founder's death, the Oblate tradition had a tendency to formulate the distinction between missionary activity and the life of perfection in an academic and abstract way. The basis for this distinction is found in the first two parts of the Rule: the end of the Institute and religious life. Certain Oblate values are grouped around the theme of mission and others around religious life. Issues of holiness are often placed in the context of religious life.

For example, we can read concise phrases such as the following: "As religious, it is our duty to strive for holiness; this was clearly established by our Founder. We are religious to become saints"<sup>50</sup>. Or yet again statements that are deliberately couched in very strong language: "In the name of God, of his Vicar on earth and of our venerated Founder, we declare that in our Congregation we are religious before being missionaries; we are religious in order to be supernatural missionaries, religious to persevere unto death in the labors of the apostolate".<sup>51</sup>

In this counter positioning, the link between holiness and mission remains stable with a clear subordination: to be an authentic missionary one has to be a saint and one is a saint in the measure that one lives in harmony with one's religious vocation. The sequence is quite clear: religious life – holiness – mission.

It was Father Joseph Fabre, Bishop de Mazenod's immediate successor, in particular who established this vision of things, a vision which predominated until the second half of this century. In his second circular letter, he wrote: "To what are we called, my dear brothers? To become saints, to be able to work effectively for the sanctification of the souls of the most abandoned. There lies our vocation. [...] We must work energetically, generously for our own sanctification, that is, we must meditate every day in the most serious, profound manner on our duties of state to acquire an ever deeper knowledge of the virtues that God expects of our souls in order that, through an ever more religious conduct it may attain to the practice of our holy obligations. [...] To work at sanctifying others through the exercise of the ministry in the world is a very fine mission, but it is only one part of our holy vocation. It presupposes the first part as its principle and the source of its fruitfulness. Indeed, can we collaborate effectively and in a supernatural manner with the grace of ministry to souls if we have not already achieved a clear understanding, a profound grasp of the need of our own sanctification?"<sup>52</sup> For the Oblate, any laxity in striving for sanctity causes his ministry to suffer: "Our negligence in cutting ourselves off from fervor and holiness would deny these souls the fruit and reward due this fervor and holiness".<sup>53</sup>

In his reflection, Father Fabre quoted here articles 288 and 289 which

divide the Oblate's life into two portions: one devoted to prayer and silence and spent within the community and the other dedicated to preaching and other activities of the apostolate. It is especially during this first phase, that of silence and interior recollection, that the individual works at this sanctification. In the second phase, the phase of evangelization, one makes use of the holiness one has acquired living in the religious house. "Tireless apostle during that period of time devoted to evangelical labors, the Oblate of Mary worthy of this name returns to his cell happy to live there as a perfect religious and to contribute according to his strengths and talents and continue to uphold in his community the life of perfection which is its distinctive character".<sup>54</sup>

He also quotes another text which is fundamental in the Oblate's journey to holiness, article 426 of the Rule: "The whole life of the members of our Society ought to be a life of continual recollection". He combines this with the following articles on the style of life to be maintained in a religious house. In this part of the Rule entitled: *Of silence, recollection, prayer and other religious exercises; also of penances and community conferences* there resurface all the means recommended as means of sanctification for the Oblate: silence, interior recollection, exercises of piety, the practice of mortification, penance... The judgment that Father Fabre makes of the Congregation based on these articles reveals the importance which he attributes to this part of the Rule: "[The Oblates] were fervent as long as they loved solitude, their cells and silence; laxity became evident the day they found solitude too demanding, their cell too boring and silence too hard to endure, [...] Let us have a love of silence and of our cells [...]".<sup>55</sup>

The Oblate tradition followed faithfully the teachings of Father Fabre. The means of sanctification indicated above are often referred to in the circular letters of the Superiors General as fundamental traits of the striving for perfection. In his report presented at the beginning of each General Chapter, one part was devoted to the state of the interior life of the Congregation and the way of measuring this is how effectively these means were used. In like manner, when a call is made for a more intense spiritual life, it is to these means that one appeals above all. Stress is also put upon exercise of the presence of God and ejaculatory prayers, Eucharistic worship, the rosary, examination of conscience, confession, the chapter of faults, retreats, Scripture reading, spiritual reading, solitude, silence, etc.<sup>56</sup>

Commenting on the *Preface*, Father Fabre stressed, in addition, the virtues characteristic of the Oblate life of holiness. Generosity, self-denial, mortification, humility, obedience, poverty, purity, zeal... All essential virtues for the missionary: "We are sent to convert and sanctify souls: above all, let us offer them a living example of the virtues we have preached to them. [...] Happy the missionary who leaves in his wake the perfume of his virtues, the moving memory of his holiness!"<sup>57</sup> Among the virtues, fraternal charity and love for souls hold pride of place. Charity is "the virtue which should be characteristic of the Oblate of Mary Immaculate [...]: that is our special virtue".<sup>58</sup>

To corroborate the close relationship which tradition sees between holiness and mission and, as a result, the absolute necessity of striving for holiness according to our specific vocation, one need only quote from an important General Chapter, that of 1926. One hundred years after the approbation of

the Rule, it deliberately chose to make its main focus the holiness of its members and their fidelity to the ministry of evangelization. In the chapter acts, the readers are reminded that the Founder put holiness in the very first place in the program laid out in the *Preface* of the Rule. He stressed "Zeal was something he favored without a doubt. He knows that he is training missionaries, apostles. And the apostle's virtue is zeal. But he also knows that there exist two kinds of zeal. First of all, the one which has nothing in common with zeal except the name, which is only a natural urge, a need for activity and movement. This zeal is not good. Genuine, effective zeal, zeal that reaches souls, touches them, converts them, that is the zeal that flows from holiness: it is a result; it is a consequence of holiness. As a foundation of our spiritual structure, our Founder laid the cornerstone of holiness [...] And as its crowning feature, as a consequence, as a fruit of holiness, zeal [...]"<sup>59</sup>

One of the Superiors General who, following the example of Father Fabre, has written the most on Oblate spirituality and indicated definite paths to follow in our journeying toward holiness, was Father Leo Deschâtelets. Among his many writings, his circular letter of August 15, 1951 on the subject remains one of the most developed texts in Oblate literature. The document's teaching contains nothing original, but it makes an excellent synthesis of the entire Oblate tradition. His presentation of "the Oblate style of the spiritual life" is based explicitly on his reading of the Rule where Father Deschâtelets finds everything required to lead one to holiness.<sup>60</sup>

He summarizes Oblate identity in four words: *priest, religious, missionary, Oblate*. To these, he adds four

characteristics.<sup>61</sup> What is noteworthy as well is the fact that he exploits in depth the content of these four Oblate characteristics. He shows how the Oblate is called to live "even more", we could say, each of these aspects. Concerning the priesthood for example, he says that "we cannot be satisfied with an ordinary priesthood"<sup>62</sup>. One characteristic of the Oblate priesthood is "his fervor, his zeal for the conversion of all souls". "The Oblate cannot be like other priests; he must be a model for others"<sup>63</sup>. We are likewise called "to be better religious than all others, since, according to the Founder's bold way of thinking, we are a kind of quintessential perfection of all the Orders and Institutes for whose absence he would like to compensate"<sup>64</sup>. As for our missionary life: "Let there be no limit to our zeal either"<sup>65</sup>. In the final analysis, our oblation consists in "a kind of superior degree of our commitment to the service of God and of souls, a reckless gift of ourselves to the service of God, to his glory to his love and his infinite mercy; [...] an unconditional oblation of ourselves which brings it about that we cannot define ourselves other than by stating: 'These men are Oblates par excellence'. Every religious Institute, no doubt, has the same desire to attain perfection in the gift of self. Nonetheless, in the measure that a sustained striving for perfection in all areas and with every fiber of our being, heart and soul, constitutes a special vocation, that is our vocation"<sup>66</sup>. He sees that bound up with the spirit of oblation there is intrinsically a whole series of elements which make up the ascetical aspect of our spiritual life: the life of oraison, recollection and silence, abnegation of self, mortification, perfect obedience, poverty, humility, simplicity, purity of intention, heartfelt charity"<sup>67</sup>.

Father Deschâtelets also returns to treat the Mazenodian theme of conformity to Christ by developing it in such a way as to highlight the contemplative dimension of our vocation – something that has happened only rarely in Oblate history. “Our ideal is a totally unreserved and enthusiastic commitment, a complete availability to God and to souls for God, derived from contemplation, in internal union with God [...]. The Oblate who lives his Rule [...] will experience all the graces and gifts of the mystical life [...]. Come on, fathers and brothers, “usque ad apicem perfectionis”, to the very summit of charity”.<sup>68</sup>

The main topic treated in this circular letter is the Marian aspect. Here, it returns to the traditional axiom which it takes to the limit. For the Oblate, the way to holiness passes through Mary. As the Immaculate One, she is the model of every virtue, the model of holiness. She was “redeemed in all perfection”<sup>69</sup>, and she is the “perfect model after which God intends to mold each one of us”<sup>70</sup>. However, she is not a model that one contemplates from the outside. The grace of our vocation leads us to re-create it in ourselves: “We are Oblates of Mary Immaculate. This is not merely a label. [...] It is a case of some kind of identification with Mary Immaculate; it is a case of a gift of ourselves to God through her and like her, a gift which plumbs the depths of our Christian, religious, missionary and priestly life”<sup>71</sup>. Once we have identified with her, we will be able to live her virginal holiness, her self-effacement as humble servant, her hidden life of poverty, the sacrificing of herself with her Son and her love that is as much like Christ’s as is possible”.<sup>72</sup>

In his teaching, Father Deschâtelets constantly reaffirmed this ideal of holiness. “How can we claim to be *dispen-*

*satores mysteriorum Dei*”, he wrote in 1959, “if we have not learned from personal experience who the Trinity is for us, how he dwells in souls, who Christ and the Blessed Virgin are?”<sup>73</sup> Again, at the end of his term as Superior General, in the wake of the Council, he said: “We must be more spiritual, more then ever men of the interior life! [...] To take on the work of the ministry, apostolate among the masses, especially among the poorest of the poor, among all those classes of people, we must first of all be filled with God; we must first and foremost live God [...]”<sup>74</sup>

## 2. OBLATE LITERATURE

With the advent of the review *Etudes oblates*, the study of spirituality took on more intensity and became more systematic. A perusal of the articles published from 1940 to 1960 gives the impression that a unifying element is becoming evident: the centrality of Christ in our spiritual life. The program outlined for holiness ends up being that set forth by the Founder. Less dominated by the preoccupation of stating concrete norms of life, of curbing abuses, of urging observance of the Rule than was the case for the Superiors General, these authors focused directly on the essence of the road of perfection followed by Eugene de Mazenod. One of the review’s first collaborators, Henri Gratton, put his finger on the essential trait of Oblate spirituality: “To live Christ crucified, Redeemer, Savior, in his oblation for the glory of God, for the salvation of the most abandoned souls and the benefit of the Church, there you have the characteristic ideal which makes our Founder stand out among many saints, his confreres”<sup>75</sup>. And shortly after that, Father Germain Lesage wrote: “The imitation of our di-

vine Savior, in my opinion, constitutes the essential quality of a life ostensibly oriented toward so many varied goals, so disposed as to illustrate the key idea of the works and the spirit of the missionary of the poor".<sup>76</sup>

The imitation of Christ always orients itself toward the mystery of Christ, the Savior; that is why the path of holiness as identification with Christ never stands separated from apostolic action. We are called to relive Christ in our work of evangelization. By following Christ, the Oblate finds himself, like Christ, immersed in humankind, ready to offer his life for those to whom he is sent. "[...] The modern Oblate sees himself officially enrolled in the school of the Incarnate Word, the Word seen in his specific role of Savior. [...] Friend of the poor, the outcasts, apostle of the masses, preceding the Oblate by a long way and by right of an infinitely superior claim, the Redeemer realized it in every fiber of his being. The missionary of the poor need only follow in his footsteps in order to realize it in turn".<sup>77</sup>

In this sense, oblation, the characteristic element of our vocation takes on a purely apostolic coloring. Through it, we offer ourselves to God in order to be offered entirely with Christ to humanity, dedicated unconditionally to the salvation of souls: "We are men of action. It follows that we must sanctify ourselves in and through action. We must have a spirituality that leads to action. Now, "the dominant feature of the spirituality of oblation is to be eminently dynamic, active, practical; it is a wonderful springboard for action"<sup>78</sup>. Consequently, the path to holiness leads through service to the Church, especially in the domain of evangelization of the poor and the most abandoned.

Throughout the years, a good deal of emphasis has been placed on another

element of Oblate spirituality, the Marian character of Oblate life. Literature in this area has abounded, especially during the 1950's. In the survey on Oblate spirituality conducted in 1950 by *Etudes oblates*, "the majority of responses were in consensus with regard to expressing the unity of our spiritual life through this motto: "To Christ Redeemer through Mary Immaculate, Co-Redemptrix", or more succinctly: "Ad Jesum per Mariam Immaculatam", or simply: "To lead souls to the Mother of Mercy", or finally: "To reproduce the image of Christ in his oblation to the Father and to souls through Mary Immaculate"<sup>79</sup>. Mary emerges as the model of holiness that the Oblate is called to follow through his total oblation to God the Son's work of redemption. With him and in him, the Oblate can achieve the full living of his own specific vocation.<sup>80</sup>

With the Second Vatican Council, a new breath of the Spirit was felt throughout the Congregation. The most obvious manifestation of this was the 1966 Constitutions and Rules. Not only does this text concentrate on the apostolic man and apostolic community, but more especially – and to me that seems to be a new phenomenon in our spirituality – it is acknowledged that "[...] the apostolate is not an obstacle to prayer but rather a nourishment for prayer and interior life [...]".<sup>81</sup> This would be an answer to a great need. Already in 1950, for example, Father Maurice Dugal was asking the question as to whether the Oblate's journey should not lead through the apostolate rather than through silence, recollection and the cell. He wrote: "The apostolic man must learn how his work can be for him a genuine source of sanctification and recollection". In his reading of article 246 of the Rule, he pointed out how the

emphasis is not on "continual recollection of spirit", but rather on "the whole life of the members". "Continual recollection" embraces both the times of solitude within the community as well as the time of working at preaching missions outside the community. Father Dugal's conclusion seems to be that the path to holiness leads through the life of prayer as well as through the apostolate. In fact, the case is that of one and the same life lived by the same person.<sup>82</sup>

From 1966 on, the review *Etudes Oblates* which in 1973 changed its title to *Vie Oblate Life*, would continue to reflect the thinking going on within the Congregation.<sup>83</sup>

### 3. CANONIZED HOLINESS

"Holy priests, this is our wealth!"<sup>84</sup> These words of Eugene de Mazenod give recognition to the fact that in the Oblate congregation holiness is not simply an ideal or a topic for spiritual writings. Thank God, holiness is a lived reality for many of its members. In the Founder's way of thinking, it was a normal thing to consider that in our society "all members work to become saints in the exercise of the same ministry and the exact practice of the same Rule"<sup>85</sup>. The holy death of Oblates was for him a confirmation that his life ideal could be truly lived. On the occasion of the death of Father Victor Arnoux in 1828, writing with reference to four of the original Oblates who had, in his words, left for "our mother house", he stated: "Their holy death is, in my opinion, a great sanctioning of our Rules; they have received thereby a new seal of divine approbation. The gate of Heaven is at the end of the path along which we walk"<sup>86</sup>. On other occasions, a reflective consideration of his Oblates led him to write: "I feel fortunate

amongst my brothers, amongst my children, because in the absence of virtues which are proper and personal to me, I am proud of their works and their holiness".<sup>87</sup>

The same observations surface in the writings of other Superiors General. For example, we read in one of Father Cassian Augier's circular letters: "It is a pleasure for us to become aware of the fact that among our ranks we find some model religious. They love and practice the Rule with a fidelity that is all-embracing and constant. Concerned above all for their personal sanctification, they delight in poverty, humility, mortification, obedience. Their life exudes the very perfume of the life of Our Lord and as they pass by, people hail their presence with one acclaim: "There goes a saint!"<sup>88</sup> The beatification of Father Joseph Gerard, the already large number of those acclaimed as venerable and servants of God, and the countless number of Oblates, some well known, some not, who "at the end of the path we tread" have found "the gate of Heaven" confirms us in this conviction. The example of these Oblates maintains throughout the Congregation the desire for holiness and the enthusiasm to attain it. On the occasion of the Congregation's first centenary, Bishop Augustine Dontenwill wrote: "Noblesse oblige, as sons and brothers of saints, we must work at becoming saints ourselves".<sup>89</sup>

As a result, we realize the importance of maintaining, keeping alive and developing the memory of the Congregation's history. From this point on, the study of the many Oblate biographies we have will be of enormous help in achieving an understanding of how to live the Oblate charism and how to become saints.<sup>90</sup>

Among this multitude of saints, Saint Eugene de Mazenod holds a most

special place. If “our spiritual life keeps his flame burning among us”, it is, as Father Deschâtelets wrote, because of the fact that “we lit our torch at the flaming heart of Bishop de Mazenod”<sup>91</sup>. Not only did the Spirit mediate a charisma through him to the Oblates and the Church, it also led him to live this charisma to the full, making of him a model of holiness. After having taken note of the fact that “the Founder left no stone unturned, tried every means to lead us to become saints and apostles in season and out of season”, we should make our own the words of Father Deschâtelets: “let us put our trust in him, believe in him, take him as our guide; let us be eager to garner the tiniest ones of his words, teachings and instructions distilled into our holy Rule”.<sup>92</sup>

In the letter which he wrote on the occasion of the canonization of the Founder, Father Marcello Zago stated the following: “Every Oblate derives from the Founder the spirit that gives him life, finds in him a model for life. [...] That is why I invite all of you to fix your gaze upon the Founder, considering him as a saint to be imitated, a founder to be followed, a master to be heeded, a father to be loved, an intercessor we can call upon. In his wake and under his guidance we will be able to renew ourselves in the charisma that the Spirit has mediated to the Church through him”.<sup>93</sup>

### III. THE CONSTITUTIONS AND RULES

Oblate tradition, like the Founder himself, has seen in the observance of the Rule the best road to holiness. A reading of circular letters 11, 14, 15, 20, 26 and 42 of the Superiors General would suffice to convince us of this.

Bishop Dontenwill declared: “These Rules [...] what a phalanx of Oblates have they not helped lead to holiness!”<sup>94</sup> And the 1926 General Chapter on the occasion of the Congregation’s centenary of the approbation of the Rules made this appeal to the members: “Let us observe them; they are holy and they will sanctify us”.<sup>95</sup>

It is the Rule as a whole which dictates the Oblate’s lifestyle. Nevertheless, as we have seen, the part of the Rule which has the most to say about holiness is the part entitled: *Of the other principal observances*. It has been dubbed “the heart of our spirituality”<sup>96</sup>. In his own comments on the Rule, Bishop de Mazenod pointed to it as the best description of his life project: “Everything is contained right there”, he exclaimed<sup>97</sup>. Indeed in this passage the Oblate vocation is presented as a life spent in following Christ, imitating him, being transformed into him: “In everything the missionaries must imitate the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, [...] they will make it their endeavor to become other Jesus Christs”. It is only at this juncture that they will be able to fulfill their role as missionaries, a role which consists in spreading “far and wide the good odor of his [Christ’s] gracious virtues”. Moreover, they are invited to be “all united by the closest bonds of charity and in perfect submission to superiors [...]”.<sup>98</sup>

Taking my starting point from this text of the 1818 Rule, I would like to focus on three specific aspects of the Oblate’s path to sanctity which we have already seen in the writings of the Founder: conformity to Christ, mission, life shared as brothers. I will then treat the same theme in the present Rule which wisely found a way of integrating the Founder’s thinking into the contemporary scene.

In the Constitutions and Rules of 1982, the word *holiness* is not used except for some places where it is referred to in passing: "We bear witness to God's holiness and justice" (C 9). But the reality underlying the words is obviously holiness, a holiness set forth for us especially where it is a case of leaving everything to follow Christ (see C 2), of achieving the unity of our lives in Jesus Christ (see C 31), of forming Christ in us through the work of the Spirit (see C 45). And again we read, in the measure that our communion of heart and spirit grows, Jesus dwells in our midst, Jesus who communicates to us his holiness and is the source of our unity as he sends us out to proclaim his Kingdom (see C 37).

### 1. CONFORMITY WITH CHRIST IN OBLATION

At the heart and centre of the path to holiness the relationship with Christ the Savior figures prominently. The centrality of Christ in Oblate life, a position strongly reaffirmed by the Constitutions and Rules of 1982 gives holiness its ontological substance in its fullness. Before being a desire, a task or an asceticism, holiness is a participation in the holiness of Christ himself. We are holy in the measure that, responding to the call of Christ the Savior, we follow him, live his life and he leads us into the life of the Trinity.

We read in the Constitutions and Rules that the Oblates are *set apart* (C 2), *called* to follow Christ (C 1, 2, 19, 24), to become fully his *disciples* (C 50). They follow him and participate in his mission (C 1), *cooperating* with him and *imitating* his example in a radical way (C 1, 12). In virtue of their calling, they should live in the strictest *communion* with him (C 20), develop the

habit of *listening* to him (C 56), in order to effectively get to know him (C 33), to let themselves be *molded* by him in such a way that they find in him the *inspiration* of their conduct (C 33), and that they grow in his *friendship* (C 56), to the point of *intimacy* (C 36, R 65) [R 67a in CCRR 2000]. This is how the Oblates will achieve "the unity of their life only in Jesus Christ and through him" (C 31).

The road to holiness to which the Oblates tend consists in this identification with Christ the Savior. The Oblate is no longer his own; he belongs totally to Christ and his work. Each day, he dies to himself to allow himself to be taken over by Christ to the point of thinking like Christ. He sees everything with the eyes of Christ. The poor appear to him as being "the poor of Jesus Christ" according to the expression used by Eugene de Mazenod in the Church of the Madeleine in 1813. The Church appears to him as "the beloved Spouse of the Son of God", "born from the blood of a God who died on a cross". Being missionary consists in being "cooperators with Christ the Savior". Eugene de Mazenod's progressive identification with Christ, Christ crucified remains a typical example of the Oblate's path to holiness. This path leads to transformation into a new being, to the point of being clothed in the apostolic personality of Jesus Christ.

Oblation is the act that expresses most profoundly our identification with Christ. Indeed, it is a response of total love born of the awareness of being loved in an absolute way.

Our name expresses what this holiness entails: Oblates, that is people who make the total gift of themselves unconditionally and irrevocably to this God to whom we already belong and the fruit of whose eternal love we rec-

ognize ourselves to be as his creatures. Oblates, transformed into holocausts, implying the immolation of our whole being to this God who gave himself entirely to us in his Son. Oblates, because we have understood the logic dictated by the fact that we have understood who God is and for having seen how he has made himself present and entirely ours and how he has intervened in the history of our salvation. Oblates, in a love-for-love response to the love of Jesus Christ who loved us and gave himself up for us (see Galatians 2:20).<sup>99</sup>

Through oblation, we are one with Christ in the gift of himself to his Father. This oblation associates itself to the priestly offering of Christ to the Father. Writing to religious, Pope Paul VI said: "At the moment of your religious profession, you were offered to God through the Church in an intimate union with the Eucharistic sacrifice. Day after day, this offering of yourselves must become a reality which is renewed continually and concretely" (*Evangelica Testificatio*, 47). We are immersed in the mystery proclaimed by Paul: "I have been crucified with Christ, and I live now not with my own life but with the life of Christ who lives in me" (Galatians 2:19-20). It is a case of dying with him so as to exist in him, to lose our life in order to find it in him (see Mark 8:35), renewed and in its fullness.

We generally stress the ascetical aspect of oblation in our awareness of having to die to ourselves to let Christ live in us. Nevertheless, we must point out its mystical dimension: a total following of Christ by submitting ourselves unreservedly to the guidance of the Spirit. Some unknown Oblate left us these words of wisdom: "The soul that is dead to itself, and firmly decided to die for ever, will allow itself to be doc-

ilely guided by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ. Its union with Christ the Savior will become passive. The Holy Spirit will enlighten it with an interior light, will kindle it with zeal, will guide it in the choices to be made of the most effective apostolic means and sometimes will even consume it as a victim for the salvation of souls. Its intellect will be habitually engaged in contemplating the mystery of Jesus Christ, Redeemer, and it will burn with an unquenchable apostolic fire".<sup>100</sup>

Immersed in the fruitful death of Christ, we can hope to become his genuine cooperators in the paschal mystery. Just as the offering that Jesus makes of himself to the Father is the road to salvation – the road to new life and the unity of the human race – so too our oblation fused to his and drawing from it its worth will in like manner become the secret of our apostolic fruitfulness. It is in this theological holiness that the mission of "proclaiming the Kingdom of God and to seek it before anything else" (see Matthew 6:3) (C 11) takes its meaning. Because our mission stands in the context of continuing the mission of Christ ("As the Father has sent me, so I send you"), the ideal of the apostolic man and of apostolic community as conceived by Eugene de Mazenod contains as an inherent element a calling to holiness – that is, to the transforming communion with Christ in his Spirit. In order to pursue the work of Christ, every Oblate must be another Christ and the community must be permeated by his presence and that of his Spirit. The evangelization project typical of the Oblate charism necessarily embraces that of holiness of life. As a result, the Oblates will be witnesses "to God's holiness and justice" (C 9).

## 2. MISSION

Another dimension of the Oblate path to holiness is mission. As we have pointed out, in the past reflection on holiness focused especially on religious life and considered mission rather as a result of personal holiness. The practice was to highlight the impact holiness of life had on the mission. Less attention was paid to the idea that mission itself contributes to the holiness of Oblates and not exclusively the reverse. In the 1982 Constitutions and Rules, if it is true that "our apostolic zeal is sustained by the unreserved gift we make of ourselves in our oblation", it is no less true that we, in turn, are "constantly renewed by the challenges of our mission" (C 2).

For the Oblate, holiness is constructed in the constant gift of self that the mission demands, in the love and concrete service to the people to whom he is sent. The gift of self to God, oblation, is mediated by the gift of self to the men and women of our times. Such was the oblation of the Son of Man who came to give his life to redeem his brothers. It is in giving his life for his friends that he gave the greatest proof of his love.

In the footsteps of Christ who came to serve, of Paul who defines himself as a servant of Jesus Christ, and of Peter who identified himself as a servant and apostle of Christ, Eugene de Mazenod could write: "Charity for our neighbour is again an essential part of our spirit. We practice it first amongst us by loving each other as brothers [...] as for the rest of mankind, in considering ourselves only as the servants of the Father of the family commanded to succour, to aid, to bring back his children by working to the utmost, in the midst of tribulations, of persecutions of every kind, without

claiming any reward other than that which the Lord has promised to faithful servants who have worthily fulfilled their mission".<sup>101</sup> In this regard, Father Fernand Jetté wrote: "This is not the spirituality of a spouse, but rather of the faithful servant, the faithful servant who gives his all without expecting any return in terms of wonderful experiences, consolations, mystical graces other than the privilege of pleasing Jesus Christ for whom he works".<sup>102</sup>

Oblation is not only a gift of self to God; it is also the gift of self to the Church and to humanity, an unconditional gift of self to the evangelization of the most poor. Christ has given us the measuring stick for true love: to give to the point of giving one's life. It follows that his mission led to the cross. He was to die "to gather together in unity the scattered children of God" (John 11:52). To draw all men to himself he was to be "lifted from the earth" (John 12:32-33). That is the logical dynamic of the grain of wheat that because it dies "bears much fruit" (John 12:24).

All those who, with him and like him, want to work for the building up of the Kingdom of God and to gather mankind into the family of the children of God are called to travel this same path. Also for us Oblates, "the cross of Jesus Christ is central to our mission" (C 4). If we wish to be genuine cooperators with Christ, we too, are called to the mystery of his crucified love. "The Oblate cross which we receive at perpetual profession is a constant reminder of the love of the Saviour who wishes to draw all hearts to himself and sends us out as his co-workers" (C 63). To participate in the process of Christ, who draws people to himself, we have to become a part of his own mystery.

Our death, our "oblation", just like that of Jesus takes place mainly in the

apostolate. The penance we do, the fasting we perform, the vigils we keep are not as characteristic of us as they would be of someone in the monastic life. It is especially in evangelization that we discover the path of asceticism in giving ourselves to others, following the example of Christ whose death flowed from the fact that he gave his life for those he loved. Evangelization means to place all our gifts, our time and talents at the service of the people God has put into our care – without ever holding back. Our oblation becomes real through this concrete practice of the gift of love and of self in the work of evangelization.

Even the Oblate's "night of the senses" and the "night of the spirit" will bear the imprint of the apostolate. His trials could have their origin in the sense of failure, the awareness of his ineffectiveness, the lack of self-assurance and weariness. Faced with the new challenges of evangelization, he can feel inadequate, helpless, ill-equipped. He can see his projects, built with such enthusiasm, crumble; he can see the people who used to follow him desert him, fail in their duty. An unexpected obedience could remove him from a field where he was working effectively and with love. He could feel discounted, be tempted to rebel because the good of the souls which had been confided to him seems to come in conflict with this new manifestation of the will of God... He reaches a certain age when he perceives that his strength is diminishing and he can no longer work as hard as he had done up until then.... He becomes aware that "we are only the earthenware jars that hold this treasure, to make it clear that such an overwhelming power comes from God and not from us" (2 Corinthians 4:7). "For it is when I am weak that I am strong",

says St. Paul (2 Corinthians 12:10). And yet again: "It is for this I struggle wearily on, helped only by his power driving me irresistibly" (Colossians 1:29). "There is nothing I cannot master with the help of the One who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13). Apostolic work purifies itself of all human influence and shows forth the work of God in full transparency.

All that can become the concrete way of cooperating in Christ's mission to the point of realizing in one's flesh "all that still has to be undergone by Christ for the sake of his body, the Church" (Colossians 1:24). Conformity with Christ, and consequently sanctification, find their fulfillment in our mission: to reach out to the people to whom we are sent and to love them to the point of giving our lives for them and by so doing to contribute to the building up of the body of Christ, the Church.

### 3. A "SHARED HOLINESS"

Returning to the thought of the Founder, the Constitutions and Rules of 1982 highlight another characteristic trait of Oblate holiness: its communitarian dimension. The key text for this is Constitution 37. Commenting upon this article, which presents the community of the Apostles gathered around Jesus as the model, Father Zago wrote: "In this case, the model is not exclusively exterior; it is also the realization of the model itself and even if this realization is only analogous, it is nevertheless very real. Christ calls us; he gathers us and is present among us. We follow him and become his co-workers in the community and through the community because he makes himself present to the community: "For where two or three meet in my name, I shall be there with them" (Matthew 18:20). If

holiness and mission are mediated by community, the reason is not because it is the instrument that effectively executes this process, but rather because Christ is present in and through the community. Certainly, this presence is not realized through a sacramental formula like it is in the Eucharist. It takes place through our living of the Christian life. Constitution 37 gives us the theological reason and indicates to us the way of going about forming a community in order to render Christ present and to create a missionary community".<sup>103</sup>

The community takes on the role of providing a context for mystical experiences. Jesus lives among his own and imbues them all with his presence. As a result, holiness is safeguarded from false pseudo-introspection, pseudo-intimacy or individualism. It becomes once again the road shared in common by the people of God.

After having considered the community as a context for sanctification (the mystical dimension of fraternal living), the Constitutions and Rules present it as a place of mutual support for the purpose of spiritual growth (the pedagogical dimension). If, as we read in Constitution 39, we share "what we are and what we have with one another", this sharing "enriches our spiritual life, our intellectual development and our apostolic activity". Moreover, community life renders us responsible for each other (C 39) through "a mutual evangelization" where "we call each other to an ever deeper commitment" (C 48) which leads us to "a deeply shared love of Christ" (C 73) [C 71 in CCRR 2000] and to "sharing of life, prayer, mission" (C 87) [C 91 in CCRR 2000]. The Rule also stresses means of growth in fraternal communion: a common project (C 38), common shar-

ing of goods, mutual aid, fraternal correction (C 39) prayer in common (C 40), etc.

Oblation is not only a gift of self to God or to those to whom we are sent; it is also a total gift of ourselves to our confreres in community.

The document entitled *The Contemplative Dimension of Religious Life*, issued by the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes offers us a synthesis which can help us to understand this two-fold orientation of the Constitutions and Rules. At the outset, it states that "the religious community is, in itself, a theological reality, an object of contemplation: as "a family gathered in Christ's name" (PC 15). It then draws the following conclusion: if it is a place where God is present "it is, by nature, the place where the experience of God must, in a special way, be capable of attaining its fullness and communicate itself to others. Mutual fraternal welcoming in charity helps 'to establish a milieu conducive to the spiritual progress of each one of its members' (ET 39)".<sup>104</sup>

In this light, community life appears to be an authentic road to holiness, a help "to become more prayerful and reflective and to live the Gospel to the full, thereby freeing us for ever greater fidelity to our calling" (C 87) [C 91 in CCRR 2000]. In the same way, the Oblates "strive together to bring the grace of our Baptism to its fullness" (C 12). Because Jesus himself is present among them the members of the community can, by living their mutual love, achieve sanctity.

In the final analysis, the community's striving for holiness reflects the life of the Trinity. To all intents and purposes, to be one in heart and soul means to share in the *koinonia* of the Trinity and to be a living icon of it. Fi-

nally, our holiness is Trinitarian: “[...] the one and undivided Trinity, which in Christ and through Christ is the source and origin of all holiness” (LG 47).

#### 4. THE WAY OF HOLINESS

In the last analysis, the present Constitutions and Rules present the dynamism of holiness. We read that the unconditional gift of our oblation must be ceaselessly *renewed* (see C 2); Oblates are called to *grow* “in faith, hope and love” (C 11); “we are pilgrims, walking with Jesus in faith, hope and love” (C 31).

Formation is seen in the light of this dynamic. Indeed, “the goal of the formation process is that each of us become [*de faire grandir*] an apostolic man” (C 46) in such a way as to attain “maturity in faith based on a personal decision for Christ” (R 52) [R 65a in CRR 2000]. “Jesus calls to total [*devenir pleinement*] discipleship” (C 50). Constitution 47 speaks in the same vein, expressing itself with equal clarity: “Formation is a process which aims at the integral *growth* of a person and lasts a lifetime. It enables us to accept ourselves as we are and *develop* into the persons we are called to be. Formation involves us in an *ever-renewed conversion* to the Gospel and a readiness *to learn and to change* in response to new demands”.

This dynamism, constantly demanded of the spiritual life, has serious consequences, even on the apostolic life since it is called to a sustained renewal. “Faithfulness to our Oblate vocation must guide us [...] in establishing [...] priorities and in determining which ministries to accept. [...] The same concern will also serve as a criterion in the periodic re-evaluation of our apostolic commitments” (R 4) [R 7d in CRR

2000]. The requirement is for a “creative and ongoing fidelity” (C 46). “We are instruments of that Word. We have thus to be open and flexible, learning how to find answers to new questions” (C 68). Interior renewal leads to an ever-renewed creativity and, in turn, apostolic challenges contribute to the sustained internal renewal and to sanctification.

The building up of the interior man in us is a never-ending task. Its goal is to reach the adult stature of Christ, a journeying which will continue “until the day of the Lord comes”. The Spirit alone is capable of bringing this work to completion. He alone can bring about that our being, our time, our work and our love can be interiorly molded by Christ and turned toward him. Eugene de Mazenod wrote: “It is that divine Spirit which must henceforth be absolute master of my soul, the only mover of my thoughts, desires, affections my whole entire will”.<sup>105</sup> Sanctification is the work of the Spirit who, by his nature, is always creative and always offers an open invitation to march resolutely forward on the road of life. Armed with this knowledge, every Oblate is “[...] throughout life’s various stages [...] called to respond generously to the promptings of the Spirit” (C 49).

On the journey of holiness, the Oblates look upon Mary Immaculate as their model. “Mary Immaculate, in her faith response and total openness to the call of the Spirit is the model and guardian of our consecrated life” (C 13). She was the first to consecrate herself totally to God to the point of being entirely at the service of the Son and his mission. “Open to the Spirit, she consecrated herself totally as lowly handmaid to the person and work of the Saviour” (C 10). Her virginity expresses in a wonderful way the meaning of oblation

when, having reached the culminating point of her total divesting of self at the foot of the cross, she shares the *kenosis* of her Son. Mary's oblation mirrors fully that of Jesus. And just as Jesus generated the new humanity by his oblation, in the same way Mary in total union with his offering became Mother of the Church.

Oblates of Mary Immaculate, we are, like her, in her image, offered by her, in her, united in the same will to the offering of Christ. She teaches us how to live the death of Jesus, how to unite ourselves to him in his paschal mystery, how to become his co-workers, how, through the mystery of the cross, to become fathers and mothers of souls to the point of generating the Church. "Inspired by the example of Mary", [...] we can place ourselves totally at the service of "the Church and God's Kingdom" (C 46).

##### 5. THE PRESENT CHALLENGE

The goal of sanctity remains a challenge for the Congregation today as well. In order to become aware of this, we have only to read what Fathers Jetté and Zago have written.

"The first prophetism of a religious family, no matter how missionary it might be, will always be *the quality of its being and the holiness of its members*. The Church needs our activity; she needs our holiness even more".<sup>106</sup>

In the letter he wrote in 1991 to the Oblates of Europe, Father Zago stated: "Today more than ever the Lord questions us about who we are and not only about what we are doing. People's need for salvation today not only addresses new missionary challenges to us but also requires of us holiness and a new personal and community lifestyle. An Oblate, dying from cancer, wrote me

that "the real challenge for Oblates today is not evangelization but holiness". In today's reality of the secularized world, it is the quality of our personal being that enables us to be authentic missionaries and makes us witnesses to the Transcendent, and spiritual guides".<sup>107</sup>

FABIO CIARDI

##### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Father Francis-de-Paul Henry Tempier, February 18, 1826 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 7, no. 226, p. 40.

<sup>2</sup> *Diary*, July 19, 1846.

<sup>3</sup> Circular letter no. 191, August 15, 1951 in *Circ. adm.*, V, p. (23) 320.

<sup>4</sup> Acts of visitation of the house at Billens, August 26, 1831 in *Selected Texts*, no. 290, p. 342.

<sup>5</sup> "Un devoir de famille", in *Missions*, 44 (1906), p. 225.

<sup>6</sup> Letter to Abbé Charles de Forbin-Janson, October 9, 1816 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, no. 14, p. 24.

<sup>7</sup> Letter to Abbé Henry Tempier, December 13, 1815 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, no. 7, p. 13.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 13.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 13.

<sup>10</sup> Letter to Abbé Forbin-Janson, October 9, 1816 in *Oblate Writings I*, no. 14, vol. 6, p. 23 & 24.

<sup>11</sup> March 30, 1826 letter in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 7, no. 233, p. 73.

<sup>12</sup> December 2, 1854 letter in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 11, no. 1256, p. 253.

<sup>13</sup> Letter to Father Valentine Végreville, April 17, 1860 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 2, no. 273, p. 229.

<sup>14</sup> August 12, 1820 in *Ecrits du Fondateur*, booklet no. 3, Rome, 1952, p. 7.

<sup>15</sup> Letter to the Vicar Capitulars of Aix in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 13, no. 2, p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> Letter to Abbé Tempier, December 13, 1815 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, no. 7, p. 12.

<sup>18</sup> Letter to Abbé Tempier, October 9, 1815 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 4, p. 7.

<sup>19</sup> C and R of 1818, Second Part, Chapter One, par. 4, "Of the other principal observances" in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 55.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 54-55. See also the beginning of the Rule: the Missionaries "strive to imitate the virtues and examples of our Savior Jesus Christ", *ibidem*, p. 13.

<sup>21</sup> See CIARDI, Fabio, "*Fisionomia e natura della comunità oblata nel periodo di fondazione (1815-1818)*" in *Claretianum*, 16 (1976), p. 252-258; GILBERT, Maurice, "Vie active ou vie mixte?", in *Etudes oblates*, 7 (1948), p. 287-290; LAMIRANDE, Emilien, "Les 'deux parts' dans la vie de l'homme apostolique d'après Mgr. de Mazenod", in *Etudes oblates*, 25 (1966), p. 177-204; RESLE, Joseph, "Concurrence ou convergence?", in *Etudes oblates*, 28 (1969), p. 22-44.

<sup>22</sup> DADDIO, Angelo, *Cristo Crocifisso e la Chiesa abbandonata. Eugenio de Mazenod: un appassionato di Christo e della Chiesa*, Frascati, 1978, p. 40.

<sup>23</sup> Retreat made in Amiens, December 1 to 21 1811, "On the Prodigal Son", in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 14, no. 95, p. 225.

<sup>24</sup> General resolution, end of December, 1811 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 14, no. 101, p. 232.

<sup>25</sup> Letter to Father Végreville, April 17, 1860 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 2, no. 273, p. 228-229. On the centrality of Christ crucified in the spirituality of the Founder see DADDIO, Angelo, *Cristo Crocifisso e la Chiesa abbandonata. Eugenio de Mazenod: un appassionato di Christo e della Chiesa*, Frascati, 1978.

<sup>26</sup> "Retreat notes", 1826 in *Selected Texts*, no. 198, p. 223.

<sup>27</sup> Letter of December 13, 1815 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 7, p. 14.

<sup>28</sup> Letter of November 15, 1815 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 6, p. 11.

<sup>29</sup> Letter to Mr. Hilary Aubert, 1815 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 3, p. 5.

<sup>30</sup> Letter to Mr. Joseph Augustine Vigier, January 6, 1819 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 38, p. 55.

<sup>31</sup> Letter written about 1821 and quoted by Yvon BEAUDOIN in "Le Fondateur et

l'observance de Constitutions et Règles, d'après ses écrits", *Vie Oblate Life*, 43 (1984), p. 103.

<sup>32</sup> C and R of 1818, Second Part, Chapter One, par. 4, "Of the other principal observances" in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 55.

<sup>33</sup> Circular letter of October 8, 1831, *Nos saintes Règles*, quoted in circular letter no. 14, by Father Fabre, May 20, 1864, *Circ. adm.*, I, p. 128.

<sup>34</sup> Letter to Father Hippolyte Courtès, March 3, 1822 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 80, p. 89.

<sup>35</sup> Letter to the Oblates of the diocese of Saint Boniface, May 26, 1854 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 2, no. 193, p. 75-76.

<sup>36</sup> MORABITO, Joseph, "L'Immaculée dans la spiritualité du Fondateur", in *Etudes oblates*, 14 (1955), p. 37-38.

<sup>37</sup> Letter to Father Hippolyte Guibert, July 29, 1830 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 7, no. 350, p. 202.

<sup>38</sup> Letter to Father Tempier, August 12, 1817 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 20, p. 31-32.

<sup>39</sup> Letter to Abbé Forbin-Janson, October 9, 1816 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 14, p. 23.

<sup>40</sup> Letter to Father Courtès, October 23, 1839 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 9, no. 702, p. 136.

<sup>41</sup> Letter to Father Vincent Mille, June 6, 1831 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 8, no. 393, p. 27.

<sup>42</sup> Letter to Father John Mary Verdet, August 24, 1854 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 2, no. 200, p. 81.

<sup>43</sup> Letter to Father Courtès, April 2, 1823 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 100, p. 110.

<sup>44</sup> Letter to Father Tempier, June 18, 1828 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 7, no. 302, p. 156-157.

<sup>45</sup> Letter to Father Tempier, February 18, 1826 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 7, no. 226, p. 40.

<sup>46</sup> Acts of visitation of the Notre-Dame du Laus community, June 28, 1828 in *Selected Texts*, no. 253, p. 301.

<sup>47</sup> Letter of August 17, 1852 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 11 no. 1112, p. 95.

<sup>48</sup> Circular letter of August 2, 1853, p. 4, quoted in circular letter no. 14 by

Father Fabre, May 20, 1864, *Circ. adm.*, I, p. 110.

<sup>49</sup> BEAUDOIN, Yvon, "Le Fondateur et l'observance des Constitutions et Règles, d'après ses écrits", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 43 (1984), p. 102-103.

<sup>50</sup> DESCHATELETS, Leo, circular letter no. 222, January 25, 1966 in *Circ. adm.*, VII, p. (33) 257.

<sup>51</sup> DONTENWILL, Augustine, circular letter no. 113, December 25, 1915 in *Circ. adm.*, III, p. 277.

<sup>52</sup> Circular letter no. 11, March 21, 1862 in *Circ. adm.*, I, p. 2-3 (70-71).

<sup>53</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 5 (73).

<sup>54</sup> Circular letter no. 15, March 19, 1865 in *Circ. adm.*, I, p. (11) 141.

<sup>55</sup> Circular letter no. 13, November 21, 1863 in *Circ. adm.*, I, p. 97.

<sup>56</sup> It would be sufficient to point to the eloquent example of circular letter no. 128, April 13, 1921 in *Circ. adm.*, III, p. 407.

<sup>57</sup> Circular letter no. 13, November 21, 1863 in *Circ. adm.*, I, p. 89.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 95.

<sup>59</sup> Circular letter no. 137, March 19, 1927 in *Circ. adm.*, IV, p. 90.

<sup>60</sup> Circular letter no. 191, August 15, 1951 in *Circ. adm.*, V, p. 302.

<sup>61</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 302-303.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 304.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 308.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 316.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 320.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 322.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 330-347.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 332.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 368.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 369.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 347-348.

<sup>72</sup> See *Ibidem*, p. 373.

<sup>73</sup> Circular letter no. 208, September 1, 1959 in *Circ. adm.*, VI, p. (64) 283.

<sup>74</sup> Circular letter no. 225, March 23, 1966 in *Circ. adm.*, VII, p. 334.

<sup>75</sup> "La dévotion salvatorienne du Fondateur aux premières années de son sacerdoce", in *Etudes oblates*, 1 (1942) p. 159.

<sup>76</sup> "Thèmes fondamentaux de notre spiritualité", in *Etudes oblates*, 4 (1945), p. 8.

<sup>77</sup> BELANGER, Marcel, "Vocation oblate", in *Etudes oblates*, 3 (1944), p. 95.

<sup>78</sup> XXX, "Pour une spiritualité oblate", in *Etudes oblates*, 10 (1951) p. 101. The various articles on the subject give a broad view of oblation. See GILBERT, Maurice, "Our oblation and the Oblation of Christ the Priest", in *Etudes oblates*, 14 (1955), p. 148-153; LAMIRANDE, Emilien, "Esprit d'oblation. Approche historique", in *Etude oblates*, 15 (1956), p. 323-355; SIMON, Joseph Mary, "Essai d'une spiritualité oblate", in *Etudes oblates*, 15 (1956), p. 221-259; LAMIRANDE, Emilien, "La vocation oblate, d'après le frère scolastique F. M. Camper (1835-1856)", in *Etudes oblates* 17 (1958), p. 270-279; FORTIN, Gerard, "Les Idées-Force de la deuxième partie des Constitutions", in *Etudes oblates*, 23 (1964), p. 92-93.

<sup>79</sup> "Pour une spiritualité oblate", in *Etudes oblates*, 10 (1951), p. 96.

<sup>80</sup> As I have already stated, studies on this subject are many. I will limit myself to treating the most important ones: GRATTON, Henry, "Marie dans la Règle", in *Etudes oblates*, 4, (1945), p. 229-242; JETTE, Fernand, "Essai sur le caractère marial de notre spiritualité", in *Etudes oblates*, 7 (1948), p. 13-45, 169-195; BELANGER, Marcel, "The Immaculate Conception and our Oblate Vocation", in *Etudes oblates*, 9 (1950), p. 166-174; TOURIGNY, Irenée, "Notre dévotion mariale oblate", in *Etudes oblates*, 10 (1951), p. 22-37; GILBERT, Maurice, "Notre consécration à Marie Immaculée", in *Etudes oblates*, 12 (1953), p. 183-205; MORABITO, Joseph, "L'Immaculée dans la spiritualité du Fondateur", in *Etudes oblates*, 14 (1955), p. 87-104; TOURIGNY, Irenée, "Marie Immaculée dans la vie apostolique de l'Oblat", in *Etudes oblates*, 14 (1955), p. 105-132; BELANGER, Marcel, "Regina Congregationis nostrae. Réflexions sur notre vocation et notre esprit marial", in *Etudes oblates*, 16 (1957), p. 97-135; 19 (1960) p. 219-241.

<sup>81</sup> *The Congregation Renewed: A Reading Guide for the Constitutions and Rules*, The General House, Rome, 1968, p. 92.

<sup>82</sup> "Our Oblate Life of Recollection", in *Etudes oblates*, 9 (1950), p. 99-114.

<sup>83</sup> For example, see DROUART, Jean, "Notre propre forme de consécration à Dieu pour le service de l'Eglise", in *Etudes ob-*

lates, 27 (1968), p. 3-40; JETTE, Fernand, "La sequela Christi dans la vie oblate", in *Etudes oblates*, 28 (1969), p. 3-13; JETTE, Fernand, "Ressourcement spirituel", in *Etudes oblates*, 31 (1972), p. 81-92; GILBERT, Maurice, "Vision de foi et visée missionnaire", in *Etudes oblates*, 31 (1972), p. 253-258; ZAGO, Marcello, "Notre identité religieuse et la mission", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 33 (1974), p. 241-251; COOPER, Austin, "Prayer before the Blessed Sacrament", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 37 (1978), p. 251-259; MOTTE, René, "Notre vie de prière, regard sur la situation actuelle", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 38 (1979), p. 233-248; DEEGAN, James, "Oblate Spirituality and Prayer", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 43 (1984), p. 159-170.

<sup>84</sup> Letter to Father Jean-Baptiste Honorat, August 18, 1925, *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, no. 194, p. 183.

<sup>85</sup> Letter to Father Courtès, March 13, 1830 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 7, no. 344, p. 196.

<sup>86</sup> Letter to Father Courtès, July 22, 1828 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 7, no. 307, p. 164.

<sup>87</sup> Letter to Father Courtès, March 3, 1822 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, no. 80, p. 89.

<sup>88</sup> Circular letter no. 84, July 2, 1905 in *Circ. adm.*, III, p. (27-28) 74-75.

<sup>89</sup> Circular letter no. 113, December 25, 1915 in *Circ. adm.*, III, p. 286.

<sup>90</sup> See GILBERT, Maurice, "La tradition oblate comme source de notre spiritualité", in *Etudes oblates*, 19 (1960), p. 97-107; MITRI, Angelo, "The Message of Our Blessed Founder and of the Other Oblates, Venerables and Servants of God", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 38 (1979), p. 121-128.

<sup>91</sup> Circular letter no. 222, January 25, 1966 in *Circ. adm.*, VII, p. 54.

<sup>92</sup> Circular letter no. 201, May 1, 1953 in *Circ. adm.*, VI, p. 45-46.

<sup>93</sup> "Renewing ourselves in the Oblate charism while keeping our eyes on Eugene de Mazenod, our Founder", in *Documentation OMI*, no. 202, February 1995, p. 3-4.

<sup>94</sup> Circular letter no. 132, December 25, 1925 in *Circ. adm.*, IV, p. 20.

<sup>95</sup> Circular letter no. 137 in *Circ. adm.*, IV, p. 91.

<sup>96</sup> See BLANCHARD, Gerard, "Au coeur de notre spiritualité. Les articles 287-298 de nos saintes Règles", in *Etudes oblates*, 17 (1958), p. 193-211.

<sup>97</sup> Circular letter of October 8, 1831, *Nos saintes Règles*, quoted in circular letter no. 14 of Father Fabre, May 20, 1864, *Circ. adm.*, I, p. 125..

<sup>98</sup> *Constitutions and Rules of 1818*, p. 54-55.

<sup>99</sup> See CIARDI, Fabio, *Eugenio de Mazenod, un carisma di missione e di comunione*, Città Nuova, Rome, 1995, p. 132-133.

<sup>100</sup> XXX, "Pour une spiritualité oblate", in *Etudes oblates*, 10 (1951), p. 115.

<sup>101</sup> Letter to Father Guibert, July 29, 1830 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 7, no. 350, p. 203.

<sup>102</sup> "Esprit oblat et Règles oblates", in *Etudes oblates*, 21 (1962), p. 19.

<sup>103</sup> "Community", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 47 (1988), p. 9-10.

<sup>104</sup> No. 15 in *Enchiridion Vaticanum*, 7, 522.

<sup>105</sup> Retreat preparatory to taking possession of the episcopal see of Marseilles in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 15, no. 185, p. 238.

<sup>106</sup> "The State of the Congregation. Report of the Superior General to the 1980 Chapter", September 8, 1980 in A.A.G., V (1980), supplement, p. 17.

<sup>107</sup> Circular letter no. 320, March 8, 1991 in A.A.G., XIV (1991), p. 20.

## HOLY SPIRIT

*Summary: I. The Holy Spirit in the writings of Eugene de Mazenod:* 1. The action of the Holy Spirit; 2. The gifts of the Spirit; 3. How the Spirit acts; 4. The Spirit and the Church; 5. The Spirit in the persons of the Pope and the Bishops; 6. The Spirit and the sacraments: a. Confirmation; b. Orders; c. The other sacraments. 7. The Spirit and mission; 8. The Spirit and the Virgin Mary; 9. The Spirit and the Oblate Congregation; 10. Praying to the Spirit; 11. Fidelity to the Spirit; 12. Sources of his teaching on the Spirit; 13. An overall view. *II. The Holy Spirit and the Constitutions and Rules of 1982:* 1. Foreword; 2. The mission of the Congregation; 3. Religious apostolic life; 4. Formation; 5. Organization of the Congregation; 6. A new "breath". *III. Renewal of the Oblate spirit and charism:* 1. Renewal in the Spirit; 2. The Spirit and the Oblate charism.

### I. THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE WRITINGS OF EUGENE DE MAZENOD

One should not expect to find a systematic presentation of the theology of the Holy Spirit in the writings of Eugene de Mazenod. The Founder of the Oblates is not a theoretician of the spiritual life; he is fundamentally a man of action, a person passionately committed to Jesus Christ, committed with all his being to the mission of spreading the Kingdom of God and to the evangelization of the world.

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that he had a profound living relationship with the Holy Spirit which he saw as being present and active in the heart of the Church, in the sacraments, in mission, in his own life and that of others. He occasionally speaks of this in his retreat notes, his correspondence, his personal diary and his pastoral letters. His expression is that of a man who prays, of a committed spiritual individual, and it reflects the theological teaching of his own century.

In a study published in *Vie Oblate Life* in 1982, Father Irénée Tourigny developed the theme of the Holy Spirit in Eugene's writings using the historical

approach – that is, according to the various stages of Bishop de Mazenod's life.<sup>1</sup> In the present work we will use the thematic approach to try to reconstruct Bishop de Mazenod's basic thinking on this subject, in as much as it is possible from the texts we have concerning the Holy Spirit. This endeavor entails certain risks – such as that of projecting certain associations on to the author being studied of which he himself was not aware – but it is worth trying. It will be important for us to remember that we do not possess everything Eugene could have possibly written on the Holy Spirit and that the texts handed down to us were all written for certain events or in very concrete, limited circumstances. It will also be necessary to read the texts on the Holy Spirit in constant relation to the body of his teaching and his way of speaking, for example, of God the Father, of Jesus Christ the Savior, of the Church, of the sacraments, of mission, and of the Virgin Mary.

#### 1. THE ACTION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

According to Eugene de Mazenod, the Holy Spirit, third Person of the Holy

Trinity, was sent from on high to each Christian by the Word who had promised to do so. Just as he descended on the Apostles and Mary on the day of Pentecost, so today he descends anew on his Church. He communicates his presence through the sacraments, prayer and other means such as the assistance and example of other Christians, spiritual reading, religious profession.

He seeks to establish his dwelling with power in the heart of the believer and he even finds his "delight [...] to rest in it".<sup>2</sup> "[...] The Holy Spirit ever fecund and infinitely multiplying his benefactions, comes down anew today as then, accompanied by all his gifts, into souls so fortunate as to be busy preparing him a dwelling."<sup>3</sup> In his fullness he inhabits the soul as well as the body. He fills the person with his power, covers him and sometimes enfolds him "as in a cloak".<sup>4</sup>

According to the expression of the prophet Isaiah, the Spirit of God "rests" on the believer to fill him with the love of the Savior and to send him to evangelize the poor.<sup>5</sup>

The Spirit is not satisfied with inhabiting hearts, he wants to reign there as "absolute master" and he acts by pouring forth his blessings and working marvels. His action in generous people takes on very rich and varied forms.

Here are a few examples of this action of the Holy Spirit, examples gleaned from here and there in the Founder's writings.

The Spirit renews the human person by creating a new world, a world of light, of truth and unity. At the time of the Apostles, he renewed the face of the earth and he "performs a type of new creation here below".<sup>6</sup> His transforming action infuses life into the person, regenerates and sanctifies him. "[...] When the Spirit of God blows, he en-

ables one to travel far in a short space of time [...]"<sup>7</sup>

Time and again, the Founder recalls the fact that the Spirit of the Lord inspires us. He inspires the Church as a whole and each of the faithful. He especially inspires the decisions of the Pope, whom he himself has chosen as the successor of Peter. All the impulses of the heart of the Virgin Mary are inspired by the Holy Spirit since he rests upon her and fills her with his graces. Sometimes the Founder wrote to his correspondents in the following terms: "[...] it is the Holy Spirit who has inspired you to say to me what you say, which is so true [...]"<sup>8</sup> "Follow God's inspiration and show that it really comes from him by living a truly edifying life".<sup>9</sup>

As for himself – as his retreat notes especially show – he is very conscious of being the recipient of inspirations from God and desires fervently to be faithful to them always.

The Holy Spirit inspires the impulses of the heart, the thoughts, the words, the decisions, the means to be taken to carry out certain projects, and the resolutions. One day, the Founder confided to Father Mouchette: "You can easily see that during retreats it is the Holy Spirit who inspires resolutions and he it is who brings about success in the projects he himself prompted".<sup>10</sup>

The missionaries' preaching should be inspired by the Spirit: "[...] You will convert them with sermons that are simple, not affected and inspired only by the Spirit of the Lord who does not work through the well-rounded phrases and the fine language of orators".<sup>11</sup>

We mention a few other signs of the Spirit's action. He is a spirit of truth; he constantly sheds his light and illumines those who ask for his help. He enkindles with the fire of his love those upon whom he descends and fills them with

the love of the Savior Jesus Christ. He comes into their hearts to pray “*in a way that can never be put into words*”, according to Saint Paul’s letter to the Romans.<sup>12</sup> At certain times he “lifts up” with power that which has fallen. And finally – we will return to this later on – the Spirit propels towards the mission of spreading the Kingdom of God in imitation of Jesus Christ.

## 2. THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

When the Holy Spirit comes upon a person – most especially in the sacraments of Confirmation and Holy Orders – he always comes with his gifts. Eugene was very knowledgeable in the theology of the gifts of the Holy Spirit as it was taught in his day. On a few occasions in his writings he manifests the concrete impact of these gifts in his own life and in the life of Christians and the Oblate missionaries.

Already in 1811, during his seminary studies at Saint Sulpice, he had given a conference in the Major Catechism course on the gift of fear of God. He did not speak of “servile fear” but “[...] of that filial fear, precious gift of the Holy Spirit, a gift you received from his liberal hand, and which leaves you with the task of cultivating it carefully in your souls”.<sup>13</sup> It is a constant disposition which allows a person to stand before the Majesty of God with respect, in submission to his will and remaining at a distance from anything that might displease him. Eugene continues by describing the effects of this gift, which he considers to be the foundation of all the others.

The gift of fortitude is bestowed at the moment of Confirmation, but it is given in an even more outstanding way in the various stages of Holy Orders: sub-diaconate, diaconate, priesthood,

episcopacy. The power that comes from the Spirit is indispensable in dealing with difficulties in the ministry.

In one of the Founder’s letters to Father François Le Bihan, a missionary in South Africa, we find another example of the gifts of the Spirit which become operative in missionary activity: “I admit that it must not be easy to learn the African language, but you know that missionaries always share a little in the miracle of Pentecost. Invoke the Holy Spirit, then, that he may bring to completion the gifts you did not fully receive on the day of your Confirmation. You received then the germ of knowledge which must now develop in you for the service of God and the salvation of souls.”<sup>14</sup>

The gift of piety is mentioned in a letter to Father J. B. Molinari at Ajaccio. He wrote: “[...] Ask God urgently for the gift of piety which is lacking in you. *Pietas ad omnis utilis est*; with piety you will acquire all the rest [...]”.<sup>15</sup> Finally, the gift of wisdom is mentioned along with fortitude in a pastoral letter dated March 20, 1848.<sup>16</sup>

## 3. HOW THE SPIRIT ACTS

Based on the various expressions used by the Founder, it is possible to deduce how he perceives the Spirit’s manner of acting.

The Spirit intervenes gently and smoothly; his inspirations and messages come with peace and gentleness. He is truly the Paraclete, the Consoler. For example, he knows how to speak gently to the heart of priests that he calls aside to the solitude of a retreat.<sup>17</sup> It sometimes happened that Eugene felt these communications in tangibly, such as during his ordination to the episcopacy<sup>18</sup> or, sometimes, while he was administering the Sacrament of Confirmation.<sup>19</sup>

The above in no way hinders the Spirit from acting with power and strength. His interventions are always effective and, at certain times, there is no way to escape his inspirations.

Abundance and fullness are characteristics of his action as well.<sup>20</sup> As an inexhaustible source, he pours out his blessings without limit.

The action of the Spirit is entirely free and without charge: “[...] *Spiritus ubi vult spirat*.”<sup>21</sup> He chooses to pour his gifts upon whomever he wishes and to make him a means of his grace.

#### 4. THE SPIRIT AND THE CHURCH

As we know, love and service of the Church played a primary role in the spiritual experience of Eugene de Mazenod. It was the vision of the evils inflicted on the Church, “that glorious inheritance purchased by Christ the Saviour at the cost of his own blood”<sup>22</sup> which impelled him to follow Christ and to gather companions to work to rebuild the Church, laid waste by the Revolution and its aftermath. One need not be surprised, then, to see him forge a fundamental and vital link between the Spirit and the Church.

In his wonderful pastoral letter on the Church, published in 1860, he states that the Holy Spirit promised by the Savior is the soul of the Church and it is he who unites the Church-Spouse to Jesus Christ. “Then, too, it was with her [the Church] that the Holy Spirit promised by our divine Savior came to bind in order never to separate from her in the future, to be, as it were, her soul, her inspiration, to enlighten, direct, sustain and work in her the great things of God. *Magnalia Dei* (Acts 2:11).”<sup>23</sup> “This holy and immaculate Spouse indissolubly linked to Jesus Christ by the price of his blood and by the Holy

Spirit bears in her womb a host of children [...]”<sup>24</sup>

Already when he was teaching catechism toward the end of his seminary studies in Paris, Eugene used to say that among the faithful in the Church there existed “[...] such a union that they form one single body of which the Holy Spirit is the soul”.<sup>25</sup> In the course of his trip to Algiers in 1842, he wrote in his diary: “It is during these occasions that one begins to appreciate the value of belonging to the same family inspired by the Holy Spirit, who communicates his divine action to all the members of the body of which Jesus Christ is the head”.<sup>26</sup>

Christians who have been baptized in the same Spirit become members of the Body of Christ and experience in their persons the action of the Spirit in order to live in a great unity of faith and charity.

The Spirit gives life to the whole Church: he inspires, enlightens, prays in her, directs and works the marvels of God in her. He is present in the sacraments of the Church, in its liturgy, its feasts and, of course, in her mission.

#### 5. THE SPIRIT IN THE PERSONS OF THE POPE AND THE BISHOPS

It has been said of Eugene de Mazenod that he was a man of the Pope and of the bishops. That is quite understandable in the light of his convictions concerning the action of the Spirit in the person of the Roman Pontiff and the bishops.

On the occasion of the election of Pius IX, Eugene made reference to the Consoler Spirit who came to “make his choice” of a new Pope, to the surprise of the “Catholic world”.<sup>27</sup> This same Spirit inspires the successor of Peter and guides him in his decisions, espe-

cially when it is the case of an infallible dogmatic declaration. Foreseeing the proclamation of the Immaculate Conception in 1854, the Bishop of Marseilles writes to the Holy Father, speaking to him of "the decision that the Holy Spirit will place upon your sacred lips".<sup>28</sup> Moved by the Holy Spirit, the Pope consulted the entire episcopacy and it is to him now that the same Holy Spirit will inspire the definitive judgment. In his description of the ceremony of the declaration of the dogma on December 8, 1854, Bishop de Mazenod records in his diary: "Then, the sovereign Pontiff, in reality, the *Summus Pontifex, afflante Spirito Sancto*, rose and proclaimed the infallible decree [...] at the very moment when he pronounced the infallible words which the Holy Spirit had put upon his lips".<sup>29</sup>

As for the bishops, they have received their authority from the Holy Spirit himself and have been installed in office by the same Spirit to govern the Church. This deep conviction was founded on a text of Saint Paul taken from the Acts of the Apostles 20:28: "Be on your guard for yourselves and for all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you the overseers, to feed the Church of God which he bought with his own blood".<sup>30</sup> He is referring to this passage from the Acts in a speech he gave at the closure of a provincial council on September 23, 1850.<sup>31</sup> He alludes to it again in the promulgation of the synodal decrees of 1854: "It will always be better understood by everyone that this authority is the very authority of the Holy Spirit who established the Bishops in their office to govern the Church of God [...]".<sup>32</sup>

Eugene firmly believes that the Holy Spirit has inspired the decisions of

the councils of the universal Church and that he is also present and active in the provincial councils.<sup>33</sup>

These reflections and these few quotes enable us to better understand the profound esteem and respect Eugene de Mazenod always felt for the Church, the spouse of Jesus Christ animated by the Spirit, and for the person of the Pope and his co-workers, the bishops, successors of the Apostles.

## 6. THE SPIRIT AND THE SACRAMENTS

The sacraments of the Church are an especially blessed point of access to the Holy Spirit, though not an exclusive one. It was with reference to the sacraments, especially the sacraments of Confirmation and Holy Orders, that Eugene spoke with the most profusion about the Holy Spirit. The most lengthy text in which he treats of the Holy Spirit is found in his retreat in preparation for his episcopal ordination,<sup>34</sup> while he was preparing himself to receive a new anointing from the Holy Spirit.

### a. Confirmation

The young Eugene received Confirmation when he was nine years old in Turin in 1792 at the hands of Cardinal Costa. His biographers report an event which took place in the period between his first Holy Communion and his Confirmation, that is, from Holy Thursday to Trinity Sunday. His parents had made the decision to have him undergo a surgical operation for the removal of a wen which had begun to grow in the corner of his left eye. When he saw all the surgical instruments for the operation laid out before him, Eugene's courage failed and he left. "In a state of conflicting emotions, Eugene regained his room and, under an impulse of fervor,

cast himself upon his knees to call upon our Lord Jesus Christ to whom he had, it seems, not prayed beforehand. We heard him tell how he turned to the Holy Spirit with great confidence. This fervent prayer was pleasing to the Lord, for the child immediately arose filled with new courage and went back to the room of the Father Rector. He asked that the doctor be recalled, so resolved was he to undergo the operation no matter how painful it might prove to be. [...] The supernatural strength that Eugene had obtained from the Holy Spirit through his prayer was manifested, not only in his decision to undergo the operation, but in the courage with which he sustained the whole operation. He made no outcry and voiced no expression of pain."<sup>35</sup>

We notice that from his youth, from the time just before his Confirmation, Eugene was aware of the Spirit's activities and prayed to him with confidence to obtain strength and courage in a very concrete situation.

Once he became a bishop, the Founder would take most seriously his mission of "conferring the Spirit" to the faithful through the Sacrament of Confirmation. In the wake of the Revolution, a large number of Christians of all ages had not received this sacrament. In his pastoral letter of 1844, he wrote: "[...] We made it a point of going on every occasion to confer the Spirit on those among them who, until that point, had neglected to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation [...]"<sup>36</sup> His diary tells us that on certain days he confirmed a great number of people, up to sixteen hundred on May 27, 1858, hardly three years before his death.<sup>37</sup> On Mondays, he provided time for Confirmations in his private chapel but, in fact, he was called upon to administer this sacrament practically every day.<sup>38</sup>

It even seems, however, that this was no burden for him, but rather a joy: "[...] What happiness I would feel to be able to give the Holy Spirit to so many poor souls who have the duty and the need to receive him".<sup>39</sup>

Sometimes, Bishop de Mazenod experienced in a tangible way the sweetness of the Holy Spirit's presence at the time of Confirmation. He notes in his diary of February 28, 1844: "What need has one of tongues of fire to see, in some way, the presence of the Holy Spirit? On these occasions, his presence for me is palpable and I am so imbued with the Spirit that I cannot hide my emotion. I have to do violence to myself not to shed tears of joy, and, in spite of my efforts, often tears I cannot withhold betray the sentiment which animates me and fills me to overflowing in the full sense of the word!"<sup>40</sup>

At 76 years of age, in 1858, he still lives intensely the celebrations of Confirmation: "It is, in fact, the grace that God grants me when I am called to confer the Holy Spirit. I consider myself some kind of a wonder worker who, in virtue of the omnipotence of God, works as many miracles as I confirm children. That is what sustains my attention and the fervor of my soul during the hours on end this delightful ceremony of general Confirmation lasts. The whole thing started anew the same day when I confirmed nine hundred girls in the afternoon. A thousand million acts of thanksgiving be rendered to the Father and his Son Jesus Christ, author of all these marvels, and to the Holy Spirit, who communicates himself in this way to souls for their greater sanctification."<sup>41</sup>

He never tires of teaching those who come to receive this sacrament the beauty and the efficacy of the gifts of the Holy Spirit that they are receiving.

It cannot be doubted that the frequent – often daily – administration of this sacrament which he considers an act of love of the Spirit, had its impact on the spiritual life of the Bishop of Marseilles.

### *b. Holy Orders*

In the writings of the Founder we find a very close link between the sacrament of Orders and the coming of the Holy Spirit with his gifts.

On the eve of his reception of Minor Orders, he wrote to his mother: “By the Order of Lector, one is empowered to read Holy Scripture and other ecclesiastical books in the Church, and receives the grace of the Holy Spirit to do it well”.<sup>42</sup>

In a conference given the day of his ordination to the sub-diaconate, he states that the newly ordained “[...] were flooded by the heavenly dew of the most abundant gifts of the sanctifying Spirit [...]”.<sup>43</sup>

Eugene often associates the diaconate and the Spirit of Fortitude. On March 2, 1811, he wrote his mother: “You know what St. Paul said about Christians and himself, that they have not received a spirit of fear, on the contrary, when we received the diaconate the Spirit was given us *ad robur*, namely, to armour-plate us against every kind of fear and weakness. It is a tonic liqueur that was poured at the time into our souls and, provided we raise no obstacles by our sins, it must produce its effect, for it is not in vain that the Holy Spirit came down upon us.”<sup>44</sup>

In April of 1824 he wrote congratulating the scholastic, Barthélemy Bernard on his ordination to the diaconate and he continued: “Zeal is the distinctive characteristic of the deacon, for he has received the spirit of strength,

firstly for himself and his own sanctification and perfection of soul, and then to combat the enemies of God and to repulse the demon with that supernatural strength that comes from on high”.<sup>45</sup>

Ordination to the priesthood confers a certain fullness of the Holy Spirit and demands a great fidelity to the least impulse of this Spirit. Here is how Eugene expresses himself at the beginning of his retreat in preparation for priestly ordination: “I pray that I may profit from the grace I am privileged to receive, and use it to purify my soul and rid my heart completely of creatures, so that the Holy Spirit when it no longer encounters obstacles to its divine operations, may come to rest on me in all its fullness, filling everything within me with the love of Jesus Christ, my Saviour, in such a way that I live and breathe no longer but in him, consume myself in his love, serving him and spreading the news of how lovable he is [...]”.<sup>46</sup>

Bishop de Mazenod ordained to the priesthood a large number of Oblates and diocesan priests. For him the imposition of hands created a bond of spiritual paternity with the newly ordained through the communication of the Holy Spirit. In his diary of March 25, 1837, he speaks of the first time he ordained someone to the priesthood: “How can I recall without deep feeling that the first fruits of my episcopal fecundity was this worthy Father Casimir Aubert, the first upon whom I imposed my hands [...] It seemed to me that my own spirit was communicated to him, that my soul expanded in an effusion of charity, a supernatural love which produced something beyond the human in turn. It seems to me that, like our divine Master, I could say that I felt power flow from me [...] This miracle takes place at every ordination I perform [...]”.<sup>47</sup>

There can be no doubt that his ordination to the episcopacy was the peak experience for the Founder of his relationship with the Holy Spirit. His retreat notes in preparation for receiving the episcopacy clearly demonstrate this. First of all, he meditates on his response to the way the Holy Spirit has led him since his ordination. Then, he expresses his unlimited confidence in God's mercy in his hope that the life-giving Spirit that he will receive will lead him to perfection, in order, as he says: "[...] for me to become truly his right-hand man, the Elijah of the Church, the anointed of the Lord, the priest according to Melchisedech who has nothing else in view but to please God by fulfilling all the duties of my ministry for the building up of the Church, the salvation of souls and my own sanctification."<sup>48</sup>

Then, he lingers for a considerable amount of time over the words of the Pontifical: *Accipe Spiritum Sanctum*. He writes: "[...] meditate on these words and try to understand as perfectly as you can what they mean. It is not like the first time in the diaconate simply *ad robur*, nor is it again simply as in the priesthood for the remission of sins or their retention [...] That was already a lot, too much. But this time it is to be raised to the order of bishops [...] to be anointed and consecrated *in ordine Pontificali*, to enter into participation in the solicitude for all the Churches, to pass on in my turn the Holy Spirit to work towards the perpetuation of the priesthood in the Church of Jesus Christ, to judge, interpret, conserve, ordain, offer, baptize, and confirm [...]"<sup>49</sup>

"That the sacred anointing spreads over all his person [...] That he be *filled* internally with the virtue of the Holy Spirit, that he be in some manner

as it were clothed again and enfolded in it as in a cloak".<sup>50</sup>

"*Sit sermo ejus, et praedicatio, non in persuasibilibus humanae sapientiae verbis, sed in ostensione Spiritus et virtutis*. An admirable lesson that I love to find again here after meditating on it in St. Paul and set down in another book dear to me under a variety of titles."<sup>51</sup> This is a very clear allusion to a familiar conviction that he had written into the first Rule of the Missionaries of Provence in 1818: to preach Jesus Christ and him crucified, not with human eloquence, but in the power of the Spirit at work in our weakness.<sup>52</sup>

The new bishop emerged from this retreat and his episcopal consecration with an acute consciousness "that, through God's mercy, I have completely changed. I have a clearer knowledge of my duties and I think I have obtained, with the Holy Spirit, the resolve to discharge them faithfully. To offer offense to God – but what am I saying, the very thought of consciously saddening the Holy Spirit seems to me a monstrosity henceforth impossible."<sup>53</sup> These unambiguous words express the importance of this experience for the Founder and the very personal link that he had forged with the Holy Spirit.

### c. *The other sacraments*

The texts on the presence of the Spirit in the other sacraments are understandably not as numerous.

Baptism is a renewal in water and the Spirit, an indispensable means to be able to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. "In the one Spirit we were all baptized. (1 Corinthians 12:13) We are all one with him only to the extent that we members of his body."<sup>54</sup> "The entire mystery of man's regeneration by water and the Spirit (John 3:5), this mystery

which is that of spiritual resurrection by baptism is gloriously represented in the prayers and rites of this ceremony."<sup>55</sup>

We find at least one reference to the role of the Holy Spirit in marriage<sup>56</sup> and one on his presence in the Sacrament of the Sick which Eugene calls "the anointing of the Holy Spirit".<sup>57</sup>

## 7. THE SPIRIT AND MISSION

The Spirit is also at the origin and heart of the mission of the Church. This was a conviction very dear to the heart of the Founder whose charism is essentially apostolic and missionary. Without working out a whole synthesis of this theme, he still made frequent references to it in his writings, either in speaking of himself or in describing the activities of the missionaries.

The process of gathering up all these short passages enables us to grasp the great importance for Eugene of the Spirit in mission. From this we could even deduce some very fruitful spiritual principles for a consistent teaching on a truly spiritual action in the life of a missionary Oblate.

On a number of occasions, the Founder referred to the miraculous descent of the Spirit on the Apostles at Pentecost to set them afire with his love and to propel them on to the conquest of the world. He does not hesitate to state that Pentecost with all its marvels sees its continuation in the work of today's missionaries. He entertained a sure conviction that this was so from his seminary days on and held to it until the end. In a conference presented in 1811, he referred to "[...] the miraculous descent of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles assembled with Mary and the other disciples in the Cenacle. You must have felt that it was not just a question of celebrating the memory of a glorious

moment of the past, for you certainly shared in the very same favours that were poured out on the assembled disciples [...]"<sup>58</sup>

In 1817, the Founder wrote to Father Henry Tempier about the new novices: "They ought not to forget [...] that all their actions ought to be done with the dispositions in which the apostles were when they were in the Cenacle waiting for the Holy Spirit to come and enflame them with his love and give them the signal to go forth swiftly and conquer the world, etc."<sup>59</sup>

Later on, as he became aware of the wonders worked by the missionaries in North America, Ceylon, Africa and elsewhere, he wrote to Father Le Bihan: "[...] you know that missionaries always share a little in the miracles of Pentecost".<sup>60</sup>

The Founder encouraged Father Pascal Ricard whom he had assigned to the missions of Oregon: "I say nothing of how magnificent in the eyes of Faith is the ministry you are going to fulfill. One must go back to the birth of Christianity to find anything comparable. It is an apostle with whom you are associated (Bishop Blanchet) and the same marvels that were wrought by the first disciples of Jesus Christ will be renewed in our days by you, my dear children, whom Providence has chosen amongst so many others to announce the Good News [...] This is verily the real apostolate which is renewed in our times."<sup>61</sup>

He stands in admiration before the apostolate of Father Henry Faraud of Red River: "But, also, what a reward you will have beyond this world, when one thinks of the wonders that have been brought about by the power of your ministry. One has to go back to the first preaching of Saint Peter to find anything similar. An apostle like him,

sent to proclaim the Good News to those savage nations, the first man to speak to them of God, to bring them to knowledge of Jesus the Savior, to show them the way that leads to salvation, to give them rebirth in the holy waters of baptism – one can only prostrate oneself before you, so privileged are you among your brothers in the Church of God by reason of the choice that he has made of you to work these miracles.”<sup>62</sup>

The Spirit who descended on Saint Peter and the Apostles, at the inception of the Church to propel them forth to the conquest of the world, continues to fill the hearts of Oblates with love and zeal to proclaim the Gospel and perform miracles today. Pentecost is continued every day in the ministry of the missionaries. They make their contribution to bring about the new creation of the Spirit who renews the face of the earth.

These reflections touch on one of the key ideas of the Founder, namely, that the Oblates are “apostolic men” who follow in the footsteps of the Apostles, their first fathers.<sup>63</sup> “In the footsteps of the Apostles”: that means to imitate them in their virtues, but also, like them, to receive the Spirit of Pentecost. “They have to realize that their ministry is the continuation of the apostolic ministry, and that it is a question of going to the length of performing miracles.”<sup>64</sup> In 1819, the Founder wrote to the young priest, Father Joseph Augustine Viguier, to invite him to join the Missionaries of Provence: “The missionary, being specifically called to the apostolic ministry, should aim at perfection. The Lord destines him to show forth anew, amongst those of his own time, the marvelous things that were done of old by the first preachers of the Gospel. He ought then to walk in their footsteps while being firmly per-

sueded that the miracles he must do are not the effect of his eloquence but of the grace of the Almighty who will communicate himself through him [...]”.<sup>65</sup>

He exhorted the missionaries of the Vicariate of Colombo who were faced with the difficulties of their ministry: “Your destiny is to be apostles, and so tend within your hearts the sacred fire that the Holy Spirit lights there”.<sup>66</sup>

Now let us examine more in detail the way the Spirit is active in the ministry of Eugene and the Oblates.

The call to the apostolic vocation is a free choice which has its origins in the mercy of God and nothing else. Sometimes Eugene makes the association between this call and the Holy Spirit. Writing from Saint Sulpice seminary, he explains to his mother that he is “strongly moved by God’s Spirit to imitate Jesus Christ in his active life of teaching his divine doctrine to peoples [...]”.<sup>67</sup> In the course of a retreat in May of 1824, he records the impact the reading of the life of Blessed Leonard of Port-Maurice had on him eight or nine years earlier. He wrote: “[...] the same reading [...] perhaps passed on to me without my perceiving it, the spirit that drew me on shortly afterwards, that is about three years, to follow the same career [...]”.<sup>68</sup>

When the Spirit calls a person to the apostolic life, he supplies him with everything he needs. The Founder reassures Father Stephen Semeria: “It is not you who have called yourself; God will give you all that you need to bring your ship safely to harbour. Trust in his goodness and his promises, pray to him unceasingly for the lights of his Holy Spirit and walk without fear in the name of the Lord”.<sup>69</sup>

The person becomes suffused by the Spirit who fills him with the gifts he

needs for ministry, clothes him in love and fortitude to enable him to surmount all obstacles. Bishop de Mazenod's episcopal consecration is a fine example of this being suffused by the Spirit. During his retreat in preparation for his episcopal consecration, the future bishop awaited the life-giving Spirit who would "bring him to perfection" and cause him to become truly prophet, king and pontiff.<sup>70</sup> As he wrote in his retreat notes, the Spirit opened his heart even more to the universal dimension, communicating to him the spirit of the Divine Pastor. "[...] anointed and consecrated [...] to enter into participation in the solicitude for all the Churches [...]"<sup>71</sup>

It is the Spirit who sends the person on his mission like the Apostles issuing from the Cenacle. We read in *Instruction pastorale sur les missions* of 1844 these words that suggest Bishop de Mazenod's motto and that of the Oblates: "[...] one senses that the Spirit of God has come to rest on them to bring them to evangelize the poor (Isaiah 61:1) [...]"<sup>72</sup> The Spirit that builds the Church sends forth the Apostles to proclaim the Good News and serve the People of God.

In the light of these considerations, it would be interesting to reread a key paragraph from the Preface of the *Constitutions*: "How, indeed, did our Lord Jesus Christ proceed when he undertook to convert the world? He chose a number of apostles and disciples whom he himself trained in piety, and *he filled them with his Spirit*. These men he sent forth, once they had been schooled in his teaching, to conquer the world [...]"<sup>73</sup> It is possible that when the Founder wrote these words he perceived the link that existed between "the spirit of Jesus Christ" – that is, his way of thinking, loving and acting- and

the Holy Spirit, sent by the Savior upon his disciples after his Resurrection.<sup>74</sup>

The power of the Spirit remains present throughout ministry and in its various activities. The Spirit urges priests to proclaim the Word with power, to break the spiritual bread in the very role of Jesus Christ, to make known how worthy of love is the Savior, to speak unceasingly the Word which is spirit and life and capable of bringing to life those who welcome it.<sup>75</sup>

The Spirit inspires and guides in all instances: in the administration of baptism and of the other sacraments, in the various battles of daily life, in all facets of the ministry.

It is to him we must attribute the fruitfulness of the missionary life. The power of the Spirit, the Sanctifier, "had obviously associated himself to the ministry of these men given the task of carrying out a great work of mercy"<sup>76</sup> and that is what explains the fruitfulness of their work and the marvels they work.

In his youth, Eugene de Mazenod was able to benefit from the spiritual ministry of a genuine apostle during his stay in Venice. In his memoirs about his family, he wrote: "Shall I ever be able to sufficiently thank the God of infinite goodness for having provided me with such help precisely at the most difficult period of life, a decisive time for me. when that man of God – with a skillful hand and the grace of the Holy Spirit whose instrument he was – laid in my soul the foundations of religion and piety upon which the mercy of God built the edifice of my spiritual life [...]"<sup>77</sup>

The presence of the Spirit in his life invites the apostolic man to act as much as possible under the guidance of the Spirit and to maintain by prayer and constant fidelity the sacred fire which burns in him.

## 8. THE SPIRIT AND THE VIRGIN MARY

In a conference presented in Paris in 1811, Eugene spoke of “[...] the memorial of the miraculous descent of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles assembled with Mary and the other disciples in the Cenacle”.<sup>78</sup> He then adds that the same Spirit descends anew today on those who are willing to receive him, and we can add: following the example of Mary and the Apostles.

When he became a bishop he described what he experienced during the first ordination he performed on the feast of the Annunciation, 1837. It was the ordination of Father Casimir Aubert: “It seemed to me that with the Holy Spirit that was descending upon him and with the power of the Most High which was about to clothe his whole being – for in describing this divine action which in some way transforms the soul of the new priest in making it fruitful, one can use the words of the angel to the Mother of God – it seemed to me that my own spirit was being communicated to him [...]”.<sup>79</sup>

On the occasion of the unveiling of the monument in honor of the Immaculate Conception at Marseilles in 1857, he spoke of “the glorious image of Mary Immaculate, holding in her hand the symbol of her original innocence, while the Holy Spirit rested on her heart to fill it with his graces and be the inspiration for its every movement”.<sup>80</sup> The Spirit of God rests on Mary’s heart, fills it with his graces and is the inspiration of its every movement.

Once again it was the Spirit that inspired the Church and the Pope to proclaim the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, a proclamation very dear to the heart of Bishop de Mazenod: “[...]when the Holy Spirit not only *prays in her* as he always does *with in-*

*describable groaning*, but even more inspiring her and making her act with an unparalleled solemnity, grants her the privilege of awarding the Holy Virgin a glorious and imperishable crown [...]”.<sup>81</sup> In the same pastoral letter, the Bishop of Marseilles states that the Spirit of God dwells in “those who have their hearts set on divine things [...] reveals to them the meaning of it, the understand the immense cost of everything that is dear to piety [namely, here, the Immaculate Conception][...]”.<sup>82</sup> He sees the Pope’s infallible words during this proclamation as “a spark [...] or rather a ray of the Holy Spirit, who, by shining down from heaven on the Holy See, would have instantly spread its light, reaching us to stir up all hearts”.<sup>83</sup>

## 9. THE SPIRIT AND THE OBLATE CONGREGATION

The Second Vatican Council highlighted the role of the Holy Spirit with relation to the charisms, and, among others, the charisms of founders and religious communities. One should not expect to find these expressions in Eugene de Mazenod’s nineteenth century vocabulary. But there can be no doubt whatever that he attributes the founding of his community to an action of the Holy Spirit.

We have seen how the Holy Spirit called him to the apostolic life and prepared him for his role as Founder. He attributes the founding of the community of the Missionaries of Provence to a “strong impulse from outside”.<sup>84</sup> The word “Spirit” as such does not appear in this expression, but it is clear that it is a case of a special inspiration of the Holy Spirit.<sup>85</sup>

He also attributes the writing of the Rules to the work of the Holy Spirit; seeing his own role in this as being that

of a simple instrument. That is what he was to say in his letter from Rome to Father Tempier the day after Pope Leo XII gave the Institute his approbation: "The Pope, by approving them [the Rules], has become their guarantor. He whom God has used to draw them up disappears; it is certain today that he was merely the mechanical instrument which the Spirit of God put into play in order to show the path he wanted to be followed by those whom he had predestined and preordained for the work of his mercy, in calling them to form and maintain our poor, little and modest Society."<sup>86</sup>

With reference to the pontifical approbation of this community, Eugene did not hesitate to say that it was the Spirit which inspired the Head of the Church. In this affair upon which hung the "[...] salvation of an infinity of souls",<sup>87</sup> the Holy Spirit took action: "[...] this resolution was put in his head by no one; I err, for the Holy Spirit who assisted him was alone able to cause it to spring up in his soul and direct his will so that he insisted on it to the end [...]"<sup>88</sup>

Subsequently, the Spirit continued to inspire the decisions of the Superior General for the good of the Congregation. The superiors are invited to "[...] act under the impulse of the Holy Spirit in God's presence [...]"<sup>89</sup> and to maintain among Oblates "unity in the Holy Spirit in the bonds of peace [...]"<sup>90</sup>

The taking of religious vows is a privileged moment for receiving the Spirit. In a letter to Bishop Ignatius Bourget of Montreal, the Founder alludes to Father Claude Leonard's oblation ceremony: "It seems that the Holy Spirit poured out copiously on the new Oblate the unction of his sweetest communications".<sup>91</sup> On another occasion, he wrote to Father Semeria: "[...] you are

filled with the religious spirit which was poured into your soul on the day of your profession and has been developed by the grace of God and the communication of the Holy Spirit throughout the course of your religious life".<sup>92</sup>

We can see that in the eyes of the Founder, the Spirit is everywhere present in the life of the Congregation, even if it is not something mentioned in explicit fashion.

Bishop de Mazenod rather regularly used expressions such as "the spirit that is proper to our Congregation",<sup>93</sup> "the spirit of our Rules",<sup>94</sup> "that interior spirit which is so necessary for evangelical workers",<sup>95</sup> or yet again, "the spirit of Jesus Christ".<sup>96</sup> It really seems that one should interpret the word "spirit" in these expressions in the sense of the totality of dispositions, the ideas, sentiments which characterize the way of being and acting of a person or group.<sup>97</sup> That does not mean that one should exclude all reference to the person of the Holy Spirit in these texts. The link between "spirit" and "Spirit", third person of the Blessed Trinity is present explicitly in the Bishop of Marseilles speech at the closing of the 1850 provincial council: "In no other place than in France were the reforms of the Council of Trent more perfectly realized. The *spirit*, in particular, of that holy assembly is fully alive in our clergy. It is the *spirit of God* himself who worked powerfully to sanctify the elect, for the work of the holy ministry and for the building up of the body of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 4:12)."<sup>98</sup>

Finally, what Bishop de Mazenod said of the action of the Spirit in all Christians and in every apostle applies to the Oblates as well, including the exhortations to call upon the Spirit and to remain faithful to him. We will now speak of this.

## 10. PRAYING TO THE SPIRIT

Eugene is profoundly convinced of the necessity of often calling upon the Holy Spirit. This is something he himself does faithfully and a practice he recommends to others.

We know that he often prayed to the Holy Spirit – more explicitly at the time of his Confirmation in Turin, before the reception of Holy Orders, when preaching missions and before he himself conferred the sacraments of Confirmation and Holy Orders. He loved the liturgical feast of Pentecost and sought to prepare himself for it by more fervent prayer. No doubt he put into practice what he advised others, namely, to unceasingly ask the Holy Spirit for his light.<sup>99</sup> His “devotion” to the Holy Spirit took concrete form and expressed itself in practices such as the recitation of the *Veni Creator Spiritus*, the *Veni Sancte Spiritus* and the celebration of the Votive Mass of the Holy Spirit. Through these prayer forms, he expressed the awareness of his weakness and his need of radical assistance from the Spirit. It is important to note that on the eve of his death, which occurred May 21, 1861, he asked Father Anthony Mouchette to recite the *Veni Creator* and the sequence from Pentecost whose octave they were celebrating.<sup>100</sup>

Time and again, Father de Mazenod encouraged others to call upon the Holy Spirit with confidence and perseverance.

He asked the members of the Association of Christian Youth of Aix to pray to the Holy Spirit at the opening of their meetings, before doing their spiritual reading and on the occasion of elections.

He often invited the Oblates to implore the Holy Spirit’s help in their own special needs, when launching a mis-

sion, during chapters and elections, in preparation for great liturgical feasts and throughout their lives. The *Directory for Novices*, probably drawn up between 1831 and 1835 – a work certainly approved and encouraged by the Founder – describes the “devotion to the Holy Spirit” that was presented to the novices: “Among the persons of the Trinity, worthy of all adoration, they will make it their special concern to develop a particular devotion to the Holy Spirit; that is one of the devotions dearest to interior souls and quite rightly so. For how can one take even one step in the ways of God, how can one understand anything of the secrets of the spiritual life, if one is not introduced to it by this divine spirit whose special quality is to sanctify souls and who is not only the source of all graces, but even grace itself. It is not by his own lights that the spirit of man can be enlightened concerning the truths of Faith, it is only by the pure flames of his love that he can extinguish the fire of concupiscence. But it is especially when one wants to enter into the interior life, which should be our only life, that one has need of special assistance from the Holy Spirit, for he alone can lead us there, since this life is only the perfect establishment of his reign over a soul. Purity of heart, the spirit of oraison, recollection, fidelity to grace, what are they, if not various actions of the Holy Spirit who has taken hold of our soul. The novices will, therefore, seek to quicken their spiritual life through a great devotion to this adorable person of the Most Holy Trinity. They will intensely desire that he come to establish his dwelling in their heart. They will call upon him with frequent yearning and will dedicate themselves faithfully to following all his inspirations, upbraiding themselves for the least failure

of this kind as a grave fault. They will love to be led in all matters by his various attractions and will always make their own inclinations and their natural dislikes give way to the movements of divine grace."

"As for external practices in his honor, they will take care to recite very devotedly the *Veni Sancte Spiritus*, etc., at the beginning of all their endeavors."

"It would be beneficial if they could memorize that beautiful and touching composition from the Pentecost liturgy: *Veni Sancte Spiritus, et emitte caelitus*, etc. They could say a few verses during the day in the form of ejaculatory prayers and according to their varied states of soul; in sadness, they will cry out with the author: *Consolator optime*, etc.; to obtain some light in a period of doubt and darkness: *O Lux beatissima*, etc.; and so on for all the verses."

"The novices will celebrate the feasts associated with Pentecost with special devotion. They will prepare for them by a special effort, and during the entire octave, a special exercise will take place in their oratory to give honor to the Holy Spirit, offer fervent prayers to him and ask him for the special graces according to their needs."<sup>101</sup>

Bishop de Mazenod and the first Oblates used to pray to the Holy Spirit every day in the liturgy and their exercises of piety. Trinitarian formulas abound in the celebration of the Eucharist, in the baptismal formulas, the sacrament of reconciliation and in blessings. The Founder wanted to leave as a heritage to his Oblates the morning prayer that he himself used during his seminary days in Paris. This prayer, composed by Mr. Olier, is essentially Trinitarian. It addresses itself

successively to the Eternal Father, the Word, Son of God and the Holy Spirit.

Finally, in his pastoral letters and letters for the Lenten season, the Bishop of Marseilles reminded the clergy and faithful of the need to call upon the light and assistance of the Holy Spirit through Votive Masses, prayers, the recitation of the *Veni Creator*, especially on the occasions of special celebrations, gatherings, synods, and celebrations of Confirmation.

## 11. FIDELITY TO THE SPIRIT

The richness of the gift of the Spirit he received stirred up in Eugene's heart the desire to be faithful to the inspirations of this same Spirit. On a number of occasions he invited other people to be faithful to the Spirit and to always act under his "impulse".<sup>102</sup> But it was especially his own desire to work in harmony with the Spirit which shows in his writings, especially on the occasion of his retreats.

The Spirit wants to be absolute master over everything. That is why one must not oppose him or impede his activity in any way. One must avoid "grieving the Holy Spirit",<sup>103</sup> and being unfaithful to him by refusing to respond to what he wants.

With his acute sense of personal sin, Eugene mourned over his own infidelities to the action of the Spirit in his life. On the other hand, he acknowledged that he had cooperated with the inspirations of the Spirit and expressed an ardent desire of continuing to do it even more. So as to leave the Spirit free to act in his life he wanted to be faithful to the least prompting of the Spirit and, in order to do that, he was ready to constantly purify his heart of all self-seeking outside of God's will. Here is what he wrote during his retreat of

1818: "Have I not saddened the Holy Spirit hitherto by not responding to what he wished of me? May it be so no longer: speak Lord, your servant listens: show me, I beg you, the way that I should go, enlighten me with your light, give me the understanding to know your will and walk in the ways of your commandments."<sup>104</sup>

During the course of his retreat in preparation for the episcopacy in 1832, he made a careful self-examination on his response to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit: "[...] It will be advantageous to examine attentively the Holy Spirit's way of acting towards me both at the time of my ordination and during the course of my priestly ministry, and my cooperation on the one hand and my infidelities on the other hand, with the abundant communications of his grace. Thus I will ascertain the loss attributable to my fault, shed bitter tears before God, and full of trust in his mercy, I will dare to hope that this living Spirit who is to come down into my soul will restore all I have let deteriorate, strengthen, consolidate, bring to perfection everything in me [...]"<sup>105</sup>

Tangibly inspired in the course of his retreat in preparation for the taking possession of the See of Marseilles, he expressed his generous abandonment to the action of the Holy Spirit in this way: "So it means descending into one's interior to purify it of every imperfection and remove all that could constitute an obstacle to the working of the Holy Spirit. It is that divine Spirit which must henceforth be absolute master of my soul, the only mover of my thoughts, desires, affections, my whole entire will. I must be attentive to all its inspirations, listen to them first in the silence of prayer, follow them then and obey them in the line of action they lay down. Avoid with care all that could

sadden it and weaken the influence of its power in me."<sup>106</sup>

## 12. SOURCES OF HIS TEACHING ON THE SPIRIT

Among the sources for Eugene de Mazenod's teaching on the Spirit, one must mention first of all the Sacred Scriptures. Eugene knew the Word of God well, a word he had studied and prayed over a great deal; he was profoundly convinced that it was the Spirit of God who was speaking to him through the Scriptures. He quoted several passages concerning the Holy Spirit, passages taken especially from the letters of Saint Paul (Romans, Corinthians, Ephesians), the Gospel of John and the Acts of the Apostles (mainly about the Pentecost event). In addition to explicit quotes, we can point to several implicit references to passages of Sacred Scripture.

The liturgy constitutes another important source, especially texts from the *Pontifical* for Confirmation and Sacred Orders, the Mass of Pentecost and hymns to the Spirit which sustained the Founder's prayer life to the very end.

It was inevitable that Father de Mazenod's thinking should be influenced by the theological and spiritual writers of his day. A cursory glance at the theology manual of Canon Louis Bailly, used as a textbook at Saint Sulpice seminary during Eugene's formation years there, reveals many similarities with the vocabulary and thought of the latter.<sup>107</sup> It is interesting as well to note the similarities between the teaching found in the *Catéchisme du diocèse de Marseille*, and that of the one who promulgated it in 1849.<sup>108</sup>

Let us also not forget the influence of the French School of Spirituality,

notably, the adoption of the Trinitarian prayers of M. Olier.

Finally, among the sources for Eugene de Mazenod's teaching on the Spirit, one must not forget to mention the experience of the Spirit in his own life and in the lives of others. His personal relationship with the Holy Spirit and what he observed in the lives of Oblates and other Christians<sup>109</sup> led him to attribute a more profound and deeper meaning to the formulas he inherited from his milieu. We can, no doubt, apply here what Jean Leflon said about Eugene's studies: "There was nothing of the speculative in Eugene de Mazenod and he remained a practical man throughout his entire life. [...] With Eugene, it was not a case of proceeding from the doctrinal to the practical; much to the contrary, it was through the practical that he came to know the doctrinal, and his only use of the doctrinal was to make it serve the practical."<sup>110</sup>

### 13. AN OVERALL VIEW

The Founder has relatively little to say about the Spirit, but there can be no doubt that his relationship with the Spirit is real and important, without, for all that, being "extraordinary" or unusual. The Holy Spirit gave life to his Christian life, his life as a priest, a missionary and bishop. The Spirit was often in his thoughts.

Eugene views the Spirit as the one who descends upon the Apostles on the feast of Pentecost and who continues to pour life into the Church and its members. It is the Spirit's pleasure to dwell in the hearts of Christians and he works powerfully in their lives. He transforms people and pours out his gifts abundantly through the sacraments – especially Confirmation and Orders – and many other ways as well. He is the love

and internal fire at the source of all missionary activity. He is the one at the origin of the founding of the Missionaries of Provence. Eugene encourages others to call upon the Spirit frequently and calls for a generous fidelity to his inspirations.

To describe his experience of the Spirit, the Bishop of Marseilles borrowed concepts and expressions bound to a particular period in religious history, but the reality beyond this terminology is an essential value which belongs to the very nature of the Christian and religious life.

## II. THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE CONSTITUTIONS AND RULES OF 1982

The *Constitutions and Rules* of 1982 are a good reflection of the new sensitivity to the action of the Spirit specific to our times. In the *Constitutions and Rules* we find fifteen explicit references to the Spirit in the life of the individual Oblate.<sup>111</sup> Moreover, several other texts can be read and studied in depth under the aspect of the Holy Spirit, as for example, the matter of discernment, availability, charism.

Previous editions of the *Constitutions* used to say very little about the Holy Spirit. In the Rule drawn up by the Founder in 1818, we find only the words: "whom he filled with his spirit" in the well known *Nota bene* of chapter one of the first part,<sup>112</sup> and the directives concerning the celebration of the Mass of the Holy Spirit and the recitation of the *Veni Creator* at the opening of General Chapters and missions.<sup>113</sup>

In the presentation of the *Constitutions* of 1928, Pope Pius XI wrote; "[...] while all the ages run, the loving kindness of God – in order to meet the spe-

cial needs of times and peoples – never fails to raise up, to invigorate, and to make fruitful, apostolic companies of men who, following in the footsteps of the first preachers of the Gospel and *kindled with a zeal [spirit] like unto theirs*, go forth into the most distant regions [...].<sup>114</sup> In the text of the *Constitutions* themselves, we hardly find anything more on the Spirit than what is contained in the first Rule written by the Founder.<sup>115</sup>

The *Constitutions* of 1966, profoundly influenced by the Second Vatican Council, marked an important turning point with regard to the present texts on the Holy Spirit. Ten very clear passages on the Spirit cast a whole new light on the text as a whole.<sup>116</sup> This change in the manner of presenting the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Oblate was pointed out by Father Maurice Gilbert in an article published in *Etudes oblates* in 1967<sup>117</sup> and by the authors of the commentary on the *Constitutions* entitled: *The Congregation Renewed*.<sup>118</sup>

## 1. THE FOREWORD

At the very outset, the foreword of the *Constitutions* of 1982 launches us into the heart of our Oblate charism: “Our Lord Jesus Christ, when the appointed time came, was sent by the Father and *filled with the Spirit* ‘to bring the good news to the poor [...]’ (Luke 4:18-19). [...] Blessed Eugene de Mazenod heard that call. Burning with love for Jesus and his Church, he suffered deeply on seeing how God’s people were abandoned.”<sup>119</sup> To carry out his mission to the poor, Jesus Christ was sent by the Father and *filled with the Spirit*. The disciples of Jesus Christ – starting with his Apostles and continuing with many other Christians, among whom we count Eugene de Mazenod and his Oblates –

were also called by the Father and clothed in the Spirit of Pentecost to be sent, in turn, to the mission to the poor.

## 2. THE MISSION OF THE CONGREGATION

Oblates set off following the Twelve, united around the Lord to “[...] create anew in our own lives the Apostles’ unity with him and *their common mission in his Spirit*.” (C 3) The mission of the Oblates is the work of the Spirit; it comes from him; it lives in and with him.

The first chapter, on the mission of the Congregation, concludes with an article on Mary Immaculate, patroness of the Congregation. (C 10) It is the first of three passages which show the link which exists between the Virgin Mary, the Holy Spirit and the Oblate. It is said here that she is “open to the Spirit” and that leads her to consecrate herself totally to the person and work of the Savior. In her, the Oblates “recognize the model of the Church’s faith and of our own”. Consequently, they are invited to follow Mary in her openness to the Holy Spirit and her consecration to the Savior.

Rule 9 presents a concrete example of mission lived in the Spirit: “Responding to the call of the Spirit, some Oblates identify themselves with the poor, sharing their life and commitment to justice; others are present where decisions affecting the future of the poor are being made. In each case, a serious discernment in the light of ecclesiastical directives will be made and the Oblates concerned will receive their mission for this ministry from their Superiors.” The Spirit guides the Oblates and inspires them in their mission, something which presupposes an ongoing discernment attentive to his calls.

### 3. RELIGIOUS APOSTOLIC LIFE

The second chapter of the *Constitutions* treats of the apostolic religious life. We are reminded that the Oblates “choose the way of the evangelical counsels”. (C 12) Immediately after, we are presented with “the model and guardian of our consecrated life”: Mary Immaculate. How is she a model? “[...] in her faith response and total openness to the call of the Spirit [...]”. The Oblates can thus benefit from contemplating Mary’s faithful response to the Spirit’s call, a response which is expressed in their way of living their commitment of chastity, poverty and obedience.

The link between the Spirit and the evangelical counsels becomes even more explicit in the articles on poverty, obedience and perseverance (Constitutions 21, 25, and 29).

Povcrty (C 21): “The Spirit prompted the first Christians to share everything. Under the influence of that same Spirit we hold all things in common”. The Spirit of the Resurrected Jesus received at Pentecost was the source of inspiration for the first Christians and urged them on to share their possessions. The same Spirit still moves the Oblates and invites them as well, to put everything in common in the context of a simple life style, offering in this way “collective witness to evangelical detachment”.

Obedience (C 25): “Our life is governed by the demands of our apostolic mission and by the calls of the Spirit already dwelling in those to whom we are sent”. This article reminds us that the Spirit is already present and active in the persons to whom the Oblates are sent. Consequently, it is not a case of bringing them the Spirit of Christ that they have not yet received, but rather to

reveal to them the fullness of this presence. The Oblates’ obedience which is a response to the Spirit implies an attentive listening to the calls of the Spirit through persons and events. This invitation calls to mind the attitude of the Founder who perceived the call of God through the needs of the Church of his time.

Perseverance (C 29): “Jesus ‘always loved those who were his own in the world’, and to the very end ‘he showed how perfect his love was’ (John 13:1). His Spirit inspires all Christians to constancy in their love. The same Spirit develops in us a close attachment to the Congregation. Our perseverance is thus a sign of Christ’s fidelity to the Father.” Inspired by the Spirit, Jesus loved his own to the end and gave his life for the salvation of the world. The same Spirit of love poured out into the hearts of Christians and the Oblates seeks to reproduce in them what he accomplished in Jesus. He gives them fortitude and constancy in love. He impels the Oblates to bind themselves in perpetuity to the Congregation by the vow of perseverance, so as to express the firmness of the love he put into their hearts.

The Spirit is present as well in the prayer of the Oblate. We take up once again here a basic theme of the theology of the Spirit, namely, that it is the Spirit who comes to create prayer in the hearts of the children of God.<sup>120</sup> In Constitution 32, we read: “It is as missionaries that we worship, in the various ways the Spirit suggests to us [...]”. The Spirit makes praise flow from the heart of the missionary Oblates just like he did for Jesus. In Saint Luke’s Gospel, in chapter 10, verse 21, we read: “It was then that, filled with the Holy Spirit, he said, ‘I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for hiding these things from the learned and clever and revealing them

to mere children'." The inspirations of the Spirit are manifold and various just like the missionary situations lived by the Oblates.

In Constitution 36 the intimate link between Mary, and the Spirit who guides us, and the Oblates, appears for the third time: "With Mary Immaculate, the faithful handmaid of the Lord, and under the guidance of the Spirit, we enter into closer union with Jesus Christ. We will contemplate with her the mysteries of the Incarnate Word, especially in praying the rosary." The Spirit inevitably leads one to the Lord Jesus Christ from whom he issued; he makes us penetrate the depth of the mystery of Christ and the intimacy of his friendship. Because the Virgin Mary is totally given over to the Spirit, who covered her with his shadow, she entered into the intimacy of a relationship with her son Jesus, more deeply than any other human being. In union with Mary, the Oblate is invited to allow himself to be taken over and guided by the Spirit in order to gain a more in-depth knowledge of this intimacy with the Savior. In particular, he is exhorted to contemplate with her the mysteries of the Word Incarnate.

#### 4. FORMATION

The second part of the *Constitutions* treats of formation and contains a number of very rich texts on the role of the Spirit in first and ongoing formation. Firstly, article one, Constitution 45: "Jesus personally formed the disciples he had chosen, initiating them into 'the mystery of the Kingdom of God' (Mark 4:11). As a preparation for their mission he had them share in his ministry; to confirm their zeal he sent them his Spirit. This same Spirit forms Christ in those who endeavour to follow in the

Apostles' footsteps. As they enter more deeply into the mystery of the Savior and his Church, he moves them to dedicate themselves to the evangelization of the poor."

First of all, we are reminded that Jesus personally formed his disciples, initiating them into the mysteries of the Kingdom of God, associating them to his ministry and, finally, he sent them his Spirit – the power from on high, to confirm their zeal. This passage sounds like an echo of the words of the Preface: "How, indeed, did our Lord Jesus Christ proceed [...]?"

The article then describes the action of the Spirit in those "who endeavour to follow in the Apostles' footsteps". He "forms Christ" in them, since it is a case of formation; he leads them to a deeper understanding of the mystery of Christ, the Savior as only he can do. He introduces them to the mystery of the Church, "the beloved spouse of God's only-begotten Son"<sup>121</sup> whose soul and principle of growth he is. And, to the extent that he introduces them to the mystery of the Savior and his Church, he encourages the Oblates to consecrate themselves to the evangelization of the poor. In this way, he brings to realization the motto of the Oblates and gives concrete life to the main elements of the charism: the relationship to Christ the Savior and the Church, mission, evangelization of the poor.

In order to achieve a full understanding of the impact of this article, it is important to see Oblate life and formation as a gift to be received, a response to a call. God calls by his Spirit and it is the Spirit who forms the candidate according to his will.<sup>122</sup>

It goes without saying that the Oblate should strive to achieve faithful collaboration with the Spirit, to allow himself to be led by the Spirit who

dwells in his heart. This truth is highlighted in Constitution 49: “[...] Each of us, however, is the principal agent of his own development; throughout life’s various stages, we are called to respond generously to the promptings of the Spirit”. The attitude of openness to welcome the inspirations of the Spirit must become evident more and more in each stage of the life of the Oblate, whether he is in first formation, in full missionary activity, or in the last years of his life.

Constitution 56 is a marvelous synthesis of the role of the Spirit in the life of the novice, and even, of every Oblate. The Spirit lives in the heart of the novice and guides him little by little in his spiritual and Oblate journey. He causes him to grow in friendship with Christ and to enter gradually into the mystery of salvation through prayer and the liturgy. He it is again who gives the ability to hear the Lord speaking in the Scriptures, to meet Jesus in the Eucharist, and, in this way, of discovering him in persons and events. Finally, the Spirit helps the novice to recognize his presence and his action in the charism lived by the Founder and transmitted, in turn, to his disciples in the course of the history of the Congregation.

Constitution 68 reminds us that the Spirit is ever at work in the world and that he renews the face of the earth: “God is ever at work in the world; his life-giving Word seeks to transform mankind to build his People. We are instruments of that Word. We must, therefore, be open and flexible, learning how to respond better to new needs, how to find answers to new questions, discerning all the while the movements of the Spirit who renews the face of the earth (cf. Psalm 104:30).”

The Spirit acts, not only in the persons to whom the Oblates are sent,<sup>123</sup>

but in the whole universe to foster the coming of the Kingdom of God, that new world born of the resurrection.<sup>124</sup> Oblates must learn to constantly discern this action of the Spirit, that is, to acknowledge the signs of his presence in the world. That presupposes much flexibility and openness on their part.

The discernment in question here is mentioned eighteen times in the *Constitutions* of 1982.<sup>125</sup> This is something new with regard to preceding editions, except for the 1966 edition where the word is found seven times.<sup>126</sup>

This frequent call to discern the promptings of the Spirit reminds Oblates that a continual conversion of the heart is called for because discernment is never automatic. It is an art that is learned little by little through experiencing the action of God; it is also, and especially, a gift one must ceaselessly beg from God. In his commentary on this constitution in *O.M.I. The Apostolic Man*, Father Fernand Jetté has given a good description of the spiritual attitude required to live discernment.<sup>127</sup>

## 5. ORGANIZATION OF THE CONGREGATION

The third part of the *Constitutions* concerns “organization of the Congregation”. From the very beginning the spirit that must reign in Oblate government is described. Among other things, in Constitution 72, we read: “All of us are co-responsible for the community’s life and apostolate. As a body, therefore, we discern the Spirit’s call and seek to achieve consensus in important matters, loyally supporting the decisions taken. Such shared decision making can best take place in a collegial and trust-filled atmosphere.”

This is a case of communitarian discernment: “As a body”, Oblates discern

the call of the Spirit. It is a whole way of being, of living, of governing that is set forth here. Discernment, personally lived by each Oblate, culminates in communitarian discernment or a common search for the directions which will bring the fruits of the Spirit.

The last sentence of this article stresses one of the essential attitudes for communitarian discernment: "a climate of mutual confidence".

The last explicit reference to the Spirit is found in the section dealing with the General Administration. Constitution 111 makes the following recommendation to the members of the General Administration: "Their first concern is our fidelity as a Congregation to the missionary thrust which is our Spirit-given heritage from the Founder". It is both a recognition of the essential apostolic charism of Eugene de Mazenod and an exhortation to remain faithful to the missionary thrust that the Founder left as "our Spirit-given heritage" to the Congregation.

#### 6. A NEW "BREATH"

The *Constitutions and Rules* of 1982 do not give us a systematic theology of the Spirit: that was not their purpose. They do remind us, however, that the Spirit is present in Jesus Christ, in Mary, in the Apostles, with Bishop de Mazenod and his disciples, in the persons to whom the Oblates are sent and in the whole universe. This Spirit of love is ever active, guiding the world toward its Fullness. He causes the Oblates to enter deeply into the intimate workings of the mystery of Christ the Savior and of his Church. It invites them to live the evangelical counsels in depth. It gives a new power to their missionary activity and leads them to praise God in their hearts as a result of

this activity. The Oblates are invited to discern the promptings and inspirations of the Spirit and to remain faithful to them, imitating the example of Mary, and in so doing, to live their missionary commitment in continual docility to this same Spirit.

It is clear that the brief, but relevant, references to the Holy Spirit in the *Constitutions* of 1982 are like yeast, or yet again, like a new "breath", capable of bringing life into the whole book of the *Constitutions*. When they are put into practice, these passages contain the dynamism necessary to renew not only the *Constitutions*, but also and especially the life and mission of all the Oblates who continue the missionary charism of Bishop de Mazenod in the contemporary context of today's world.

### III. RENEWAL OF THE OBLATE SPIRIT AND CHARISM

#### 1. RENEWAL IN THE SPIRIT

In an explicit way, our century has given more importance to the key role of the Holy Spirit in theology and Christian living. There has even been talk of the "reappearance of the Spirit" or "renewal of the Spirit." Launched at the end of the last century by Leo XIII's encyclical *Divinum illud munus*,<sup>128</sup> the renewal of the Spirit became enriched through the various renewal movements (biblical, liturgical, patristic, theological) in the Church and the influence of the theology of the Eastern Church. The Second Vatican Council acknowledged this movement by its profound renewal of theology of the Spirit. In the second half of the twentieth century, the books written about the Spirit and the studies published on the Spirit increased, and a large number of Christians rediscovered

and benefited from the activity of the Spirit in their prayer and in their daily life.

It seems to us that, for the contemporary Oblate, fidelity to the Founder's charism implies a desire to live a profound experience of the Spirit. While doing this according to his specific grace, in the footsteps of Eugene de Mazenod, he must know how to take advantage of the great richness that the present renewal of the Spirit offers.

Without wanting to present a complete theology of the Spirit here, we would like to briefly recall certain points of view that seem to us to be especially fruitful so as to better live the Oblate and Christian life according to the Spirit of God today.

Today, terminology regarding the Spirit has drawn closer to biblical language. The Spirit is seen as the breath of God through whom God creates the universe and human beings, like water that purifies, a fire that burns and gives warmth and light, like the life, power and love of God at work in the world. The New Testament, the culmination of God's revelation about the Spirit, shows us how the Spirit of the Father is present in Jesus Christ and in the heart of the life of Christians.

The conception of Jesus is the work of the Spirit who covers the Virgin Mary with his shadow and makes her fruitful. At the moment of his baptism in the Jordan, he receives the fullness of the Spirit from the Father. He is anointed, consecrated and sent on this mission to proclaim the good news to the poor. He allows himself to be guided by the Spirit into the desert, to the synagogue and in his ministry to the point of freely offering his life for the salvation of the world. Through his resurrection, the work par excellence of the Spirit of the Father, he himself be-

comes a living spirit and source of the Spirit for all who believe in him.

Pentecost heralded the dawn of the outpouring of the Spirit on the entire Church. It is the Spirit of God who builds up and gives life to the Church, who gives holiness and communion in love to the disciples of Jesus. He dwells in the heart of Christians, intercedes for them to the Father and grants each one the power of discovering that he is the beloved son of God, crying out: "Abba, Father!" He causes him to enter more deeply into the depth and richness of the mystery of Jesus, the Lord. Author of the new world, born of the resurrection, he becomes a source of new life for the children of God and a pledge of the future resurrection following the pattern of Jesus.

The missionary dynamism of the Church finds its origin in the Spirit of Pentecost.<sup>129</sup> Father F. X. Durrwell wrote: "The apostolic charism is not added as something extraneous to the Christian grace; it is immanent in it. The vocation of apostle finds itself contained in the call to communion with the Son, (1 Corinthians 1:9) a call which is specific to the Christian."<sup>130</sup>

The sacraments are the privileged place of activity for the Spirit. Through baptism, a person is called to be reborn "by water and the Spirit"; with Confirmation he receives a fullness of the Spirit; in the Eucharist, the celebrant calls down the transforming presence of the Spirit at the moment of the epiclesis; in the sacrament of Orders, a Christian is transformed by the power of the Spirit's love in view of ministerial service ordained in the Church; the anointing of the Spirit acts for the good of people who are ill.

The power of the Spirit is evident in the hierarchy of the Church, but in its whole charismatic dimension as well. It

raises up in abundance the most varied of charisms in view of the common good and gives assistance in living these charisms. Among these, the charism of founders of religious communities and those who follow them has a special place. Religious life is born from the wind of Pentecost; it springs up in the heart of certain people docile to the Holy Spirit. That is why the Spirit alone can bring life to religious life and constantly renew it in depth.

## 2. THE SPIRIT AND THE OBLATE CHARISM

It would be possible to review all the elements of the Oblate life and charism in order to highlight their strict relationship with the Spirit.

It is the Holy Spirit, author of the Oblate charism, who sows in the heart of a Christian a strong desire to be an Oblate and to follow the call to share community life. He watches over his formation and progressive growth in the charism inherited from Bishop de Mazenod. It keeps him centered on Jesus Christ, his sonship with the Father, the cross and resurrection. It brings about the desire to follow Christ like the Apostles followed him, consecrated by the Spirit to announce the good news to the poor. He enriches their missionary activity with the abundance of the fruits of the Spirit.

He opens the heart of the Oblate to the needs of the entire world, just like he did for the Founder. He grants him the power of wisely reading the "signs of the times", of discerning the most urgent needs of the present time and to recognize the action of the Spirit, not only in the heart of every human being, but also in human history, in cultures and religions.<sup>131</sup>

It is the Spirit again who creates the communion of persons and makes pos-

sible the witness of a united and dynamic apostolic community.

In communicating this charism to an Oblate, the Spirit takes possession of his person and of his innermost processes, setting him to follow resolutely in the footsteps of Christ and giving him the power to live the evangelical counsels joyfully – in this way making him more available for the service of the mission. It is once again the Spirit of Pentecost that inspires the Oblate's apostolic prayer and his liturgical celebrations and enables him to uncover the beauty and depth inherent in his life as an apostolic man.

Finally, the Spirit that plumbs the very depths of God opens the Oblate's eyes and heart to the mystery of the Virgin Mary. He enables him to see in her a model of docility to the actions and inspirations of the Spirit and of openness to receive the Savior and his works. It also enables him to consider the Virgin Mary as his Mother, always tenderly present in the Oblate's life with its missionary sufferings and joys.

The Spirit who laid hold of Eugene de Mazenod to raise up in the Church a new missionary charism continues today to set aflame the hearts of the heirs of his charism in an ever renewed Pentecost.

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NOTES

<sup>1</sup> TOURIGNY, Irénée, "Blessed de Mazenod and the Holy Spirit", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 41 (1982), p. 201-212. In the Deschâtelets Archives in Ottawa, there is a French translation of this article bearing the title, *L'Esprit Saint dans la vie du Bx Eugène de Mazenod*.

<sup>2</sup> [Conference on the fear of God], June 30, 1811, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, no. 87, p. 193.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 191.

<sup>4</sup> Retreat for the episcopate, 1832, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 15, no. 166, p. 204.

<sup>5</sup> Isaiah 61:1. See *Instruction pastorale sur les missions*, 1844.

<sup>6</sup> *Lettre pastorale*, March 20, 1848.

<sup>7</sup> Diary of the mission at Marignane, November 17-December 15, 1816.

<sup>8</sup> Letter to Father Joseph Alexander Ciamin in Jaffna, April 9, 1853, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 4, no. 33, p. 110.

<sup>9</sup> Letter to Father Charles Baret, July 17, 1854, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 11, no. 1220, p. 210.

<sup>10</sup> RAMBERT II, p. 598-599.

<sup>11</sup> Letter to Father John Joseph Magnan, March 8, 1844 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 10, no. 836, p. 59.

<sup>12</sup> Romans 8:26. See *Mandement à l'occasion du Saint Temps du Carême, des prières indiquées par N.S.P. le Pape, et d'une nouvelle Indulgence en forme de Jubilé, le 10 février 1852* and *Lettre pastorale sur la définition du dogme de l'Immaculée Conception et pour le saint temps du Carême*, le 8 février 1855.

<sup>13</sup> [Conference on the fear of God], June 30, 1811, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, no. 87, p. 192.

<sup>14</sup> Letter to Father Francis Le Bihan, Sep-

tember 3, 1860, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 4, no. 31, p. 220.

<sup>15</sup> Letter to Father J. B. Molinari, February 10, 1848, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 10, no. 965, p. 208.

<sup>16</sup> *Mandement à l'occasion des élections générales et de la prochaine ouverture de l'Assemblée nationale*, March 20, 1848.

<sup>17</sup> See *Act of Visitation of Notre-Dame du Laus*, October 18, 1835, in *Selected Texts*, no. 175, p. 201.

<sup>18</sup> See [Letter to Bishop Fortuné de Mazenod, Bishop of Marseilles], October 14, 1832, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 15, no. 168, p. 211.

<sup>19</sup> See RAMBERT II, p. 174 and 503.

<sup>20</sup> See Conference for ordination day [subdiaconate], December 23, 1809, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, no. 65, p. 148.

<sup>21</sup> John 3:8. Letter to Father Joseph Martin, May 10, 1837, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 9, no. 617, p. 32.

<sup>22</sup> *Constitutions and Rules*, Preface.

<sup>23</sup> *Mandement à l'occasion du saint temps du Carême*, February 16, 1860.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>25</sup> The lecture: "De la communion de saints." See LAMIRANDE, Émilien, "Eugène de Mazenod, catéchiste", in *Etudes oblates*, 16 (1957), p. 34.

<sup>26</sup> Diary, 1842, in *Missions*, 12 (1874), p. 451.

<sup>27</sup> *Mandement sur le carême de 1847 et pour le Jubilé indiqué par N.S. Père le Pape Pie IX à l'occasion de son exaltation*, February 7, 1847.

<sup>28</sup> Diary, November 24, 1854, in *Missions*, 11 (1873), p. 29.

<sup>29</sup> Diary, December 8, 1854, in *ibidem*, p. 47-48.

<sup>30</sup> T.O.B. translation, 1976 edition. See also the footnotes that explain the meaning of this verse.

<sup>31</sup> *Discours prononcé à la Session de clôture du concile provincial*, September 23, 1850.

<sup>32</sup> *Mandement pour la promulgation des Statuts synodaux*, October 14, 1857.

<sup>33</sup> Diary, October 28, 1838 and *Discours prononcé à la Session de clôture du concile provincial*, September 23, 1850. Marseilles, 1850. See also *Discours pour*

*l'ouverture du synode diocésain*, September 28, 1856.

<sup>34</sup> See, Retreat for the episcopate, 1832, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 15, no. 166, p. 199 ff.

<sup>35</sup> *Souvenirs de famille*, in *Missions*, 5 (1866), p. 118 and REY I, p. 18.

<sup>36</sup> *Instruction pastorale sur les missions, à l'occasion du Carême*, February 14, 1844.

<sup>37</sup> See RAMBERT II, p. 503.

<sup>38</sup> Diary, June 11, 1838 and Daily spiritual exercises [after 1837], in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 15, no. 189, p. 246.

<sup>39</sup> Letter to l'abbé Martin, January 11, 1844, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 10, no. 829, p. 51.

<sup>40</sup> Diary, February 28, 1844 and RAMBERT II, p. 174.

<sup>41</sup> RAMBERT II, p. 503.

<sup>42</sup> Letter to his mother, May 10, 1808 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, no. 54, p. 123. In this letter Eugene speaks of "that sacramental grace which is given only to those who exercise the ministry which has been conferred on them in the prescribed rite". It would seem, then, that he shared the opinion of certain theologians, his contemporaries, who held the opinion that minor orders and the sub-diaconate are an integral part of the Sacrament of Orders. The *Catéchisme de l'Eglise catholique* (Paris, Mame-Plon, 1992) distinguishes "three degrees of the sacrament of Orders": the episcopacy, priesthood and diaconate. (no. 1554) See also the Motu proprio *Ministeria quaedam* August 15, 1972 in *La documentation catholique*, no. 1617, 1972, p. 852-854.

<sup>43</sup> Conference for ordination day [sub-diaconate], December 23, 1809, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, no. 65, p. 148.

<sup>44</sup> Letter to his mother, March 2, 1811, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, no. 80, p. 179.

<sup>45</sup> To Barthélemy Bernard, scholastic, at Aix, April 8, 1824, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, no. 133, p. 136.

<sup>46</sup> Retreat made in Amiens, December 1811, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, no. 95, p. 213.

<sup>47</sup> Diary, March 25, 1837.

<sup>48</sup> Retreat for the episcopate, 7 to 14 October 1832, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 15, no. 166, p. 200.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 202-203.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 204.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 204.

<sup>52</sup> See *Constitutions and Rules of 1818*, First Part, Chapter Three, par. 1, Preaching, in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 36.

<sup>53</sup> Letter to Father Henry Tempier, October 20, 1832, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 8, no. 437, p. 76.

<sup>54</sup> *Mandement à l'occasion du saint temps du Carême*, February 8, 1846.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>56</sup> "Autre exhortation avant le Mariage", in *Ordonnances synodales du diocèse de Marseille* promulgated October 14, 1857.

<sup>57</sup> *Mandement pour le Carême*, February 28, 1848.

<sup>58</sup> [Conference on the fear of God], June 30, 1811, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, no. 87, p. 191.

<sup>59</sup> Letter to Father Tempier, November 4, 1817, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, no. 29, p. 45.

<sup>60</sup> Letter to Father Francis Le Bihan, September 3, 1860, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 4, no. 31, p. 220.

<sup>61</sup> Letter to Father Pascal Ricard, January 8, 1847, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 1, no. 74, p. 148.

<sup>62</sup> Letter to Father Henry Faraud, May 28, 1857, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 2, no. 234, p. 146.

<sup>63</sup> See *Selected Texts*, no. 11 and Maurice Gilbert, "Sur les traces des Apôtres", in *Etudes oblates*, 16 (1957), p. 293-301.

<sup>64</sup> Letter to Father Antoine Mouchette, December 2, 1854, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 11, no. 1256, p. 253.

<sup>65</sup> Letter to Mr. Viguier, January 6, 1819, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, no. 38, p. 55.

<sup>66</sup> Letter to the Oblate Fathers of the Vicariate of Colombo, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 4, no. 25, p. 85.

<sup>67</sup> Letter to Madame de Mazenod, April 6, 1809, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, no. 50, p. 117.

<sup>68</sup> Retreat made in May 1824, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 15, no. 156, p. 172.

<sup>69</sup> Letter to Father Stephen Semeria, May 9, 1848, *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 4, no. 3, p. 13.

<sup>70</sup> See Retreat for the episcopate, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 15, no. 166, p. 200.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 202-203.

<sup>72</sup> *Instruction pastorale sur les missions à l'occasion du Carême*, February 14, 1844.

<sup>73</sup> *Constitutions and Rules*, Preface.

<sup>74</sup> See footnote 98 on "the spirit of Jesus Christ."

<sup>75</sup> *Instruction pastorale sur les missions à l'occasion du Carême*, February 14, 1844.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>77</sup> *Souvenirs de famille*, in *Missions*, 5 (1866), p. 128.

<sup>78</sup> [Conference on the fear of God], June 30, 1811, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, no. 87, p. 191.

<sup>79</sup> *Diary*, March 25, 1837.

<sup>80</sup> *Mandement au sujet de l'érection et de la bénédiction d'un monument élevé en mémoire de la proclamation du dogme de l'Immaculée Conception de la Très Sainte Vierge*, November 18, 1857.

<sup>81</sup> *Lettre pastorale et mandement sur la définition du dogme de l'Immaculée Conception et pour le saint temps du Carême*, February 8, 1855.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>83</sup> *Lettre pastorale au sujet de l'érection du monument de l'Immaculée Conception de la Très Sainte Vierge*, December 21, 1855.

<sup>84</sup> Letter to l'Abbé Forbin-Janson, October 23, 1815, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, no. 5, p. 8.

<sup>85</sup> See CIARDI, Fabio, *I Fondatori uomini dello Spirito*, Pontificia Universitas Lateranensis, Institutum Theologiae Vitae religiosae "Claretianum", Romae, 1981, p. 66; letter to Father Tempier, October 9, 1815, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, no. 4, p. 6: "[...] you are necessary for the work which the Lord *inspires* us to undertake."

<sup>86</sup> Letter to Father Tempier, February 18, 1826, *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 7, no. 226, p. 40.

<sup>87</sup> Letter to Father Tempier, December 22, 1825, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, no. 213, p. 222.

<sup>88</sup> Letter to Father Tempier, March 20, 1826, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 7, no. 231, p. 65-66.

<sup>89</sup> See the letter to Father Louis Soullier, October 16, 1855, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 11, no. 1293, p. 286.

<sup>90</sup> Letter to Father Charles Bellon, October 18, 1848, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 3, no. 21, p. 31.

<sup>91</sup> Letter to Bishop Ignatius Bourget, October 1, 1843, *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 1, no. 26, p. 60.

<sup>92</sup> Letter to Father Semeria, August 5, 1851, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 4, no. 21, p. 76.

<sup>93</sup> Letter to Father Tempier, August 22, 1817, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, no. 21, p. 35. The Founder wrote: "Each Society in the Church has a spirit which is its own; which is *inspired* by God [...]" See also the letter to Father Vincent Mille, September 18, 1838, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 9, no. 673, p. 102 and *Selected Texts*, no. 448 ff.

<sup>94</sup> Act of Visitation of Notre-Dame du Laus, in *Selected Texts*, no. 253.

<sup>95</sup> "Constitutions and Rules of the Society of the Missionaries of Provence", 1818, First Part, par. 1, in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 86

<sup>96</sup> Letter to Father Bellon, August 30, 1844, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 10, no. 853, p. 84. See also *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, no. 100, p. 230 and vol. 15, no. 130, p. 107.

<sup>97</sup> *Dictionnaire général de la langue française du commencement du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle jusqu'à nos jours* (A. Hatfeld), Paris, Delagrave, 1964, gives, among others, the following meaning for the word "spirit": "matrix of ideas, sentiments, which govern the habitual way of acting of a person or group of people."

<sup>98</sup> *Discours prononcé à la session de clôture du concile provincial*, September 23, 1850. See the reflections of Louis Cognet in the *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, Beauchesne, vol. IV, Second Part, 1961, the word "spirit" (col. 1237-1246). The author shows how, in the French school of spirituality and M. Olier, the founder of Saint Sulpice, among others, there existed a very close association between the expression "the spirit of Jesus Christ" and the Holy Spirit, third person of the Trinity.

<sup>99</sup> See the letter to Father Semeria, May 9, 1848, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 4, no. 3, p. 13.

<sup>100</sup> See REY II, p. 853-854.

<sup>101</sup> Directorium des novices et des oblats de la Société, Lagier manuscript, archives of the Province of Manitoba, Winnipeg. See *Etudes oblates*, 16 (1957), p. 266-267. In this same directory, when there is question of the method of oraison, the recommendation is that the novices surrender themselves to the Spirit: "As soon as they feel some good sentiment being born, they surrender themselves without offering any hindrance to the Spirit of God."

<sup>102</sup> See the letter to Father Soullier, October 16, 1855, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 11, no. 1293, p. 286.

<sup>103</sup> See *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 8, no. 437, p. 76; vol. 14, no. 87, p. 193; vol. 15, no. 145, p. 145; no. 165, p. 198; no. 185, p. 238. This is an expression borrowed from St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians 4:30.

<sup>104</sup> Retreat in May of 1818, *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 15, no. 145, p. 145.

<sup>105</sup> Retreat for the episcopate, 7 to 14 October 1832, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 15, no. 166, p. 200. See also, retreat of 1818 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 15, no. 145, p. 145 and that of 1837 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 15, no. 185, p. 238.

<sup>106</sup> Retreat preparatory to taking possession of the episcopal see of Marseilles, May 1837, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 15, no. 185, p. 238.

<sup>107</sup> Louis Bailly, *Theologia dogmatica et moralis ad usum seminariorum*, Dijon, 1789, 8 vols. The only edition we were able to consult was the edition published at Besançon in 1823 by A Montarsolo. See in this edition of 1823, vol. 1, p. 18; vol. II, p. 38 ff; vol. III, p. 409 ff; vol. IV, p.1 ff; vol. V, p. 457 ff; See also, LEFLON I, p. 329, footnote 77.

<sup>108</sup> See *Catéchisme du diocèse Marseille*, New edition, Marseilles, Marseilles Printers, 1905.

<sup>109</sup> See for example, Diary, April 22, 1839 (religious sisters of the Visitation); *Souvenirs de famille*, in *Missions*, 5 (1866), p. 128 (Don Bartholomew Zinelli); *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 11, no. 1098, p. 75 (the Missionary Oblates).

<sup>110</sup> Jean Leflon, *Eugène de Mazenod*, Fordham University Press, 1957, vol. I, p. 300-301.

<sup>111</sup> C 3, 10, 13, 21, 25, 29, 32, 36, 45, 49, 56, 68, 72, 111 [C 73, 131 in CCRR 2000] and R 9 [R 9a in CCRR 2000]. There must be added here the reference to the Spirit in the Foreword, the text where the Founder quotes Saint Paul: "Preach [...] in the showing of the Spirit [...] (p. 16)", and the words of the *Preface*, which could be interpreted as a reference to the Holy Spirit sent by Jesus Christ: "How, indeed, did our Lord Jesus Christ proceed when he undertook to convert the world? He chose a number of apostles [...] and he filled them with his Spirit [...]"

<sup>112</sup> *Un ancien manuscrit des saintes Règles. Constitutions et Règles de la société des Missionnaires dits de Provence* (Honorat manuscript), Ottawa, Oblate Studies Edition, 1943, p. [5]. This *Nota bene* went on to become a part of the *Preface*.

<sup>113</sup> See *ibidem*, p. [47] and [18].

<sup>114</sup> *Constitutions et Règles de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de la Très Sainte et Immaculée Vierge Marie*, General House, Rome, 1930.

<sup>115</sup> See nos. 171, 382, 403, 502, 576.

<sup>116</sup> See C 7, 11, 12, 35, 47, 55, 81, 90 and R 6.

<sup>117</sup> "Charismes et institutions dans la vie oblate", in *Etudes oblates*, 26 (1967), p. 301-309.

<sup>118</sup> *The Congregation Renewed. A Reading Guide for the Constitutions and Rules. Introduction and Commentary*, General House, Rome, 1968.

<sup>119</sup> *Constitutions and Rules of the Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate*, Rome, 1982, Foreword, p. 7.

<sup>120</sup> See Romans 8:26-27; Galatians 4:6.

<sup>121</sup> *Preface*, p. 9.

<sup>122</sup> On this topic see *The Congregation Renewed. A Reading Guide for the Constitutions and Rules. Introduction and Commentary*, General House, Rome, 1968, p. 185-188.

<sup>123</sup> See Constitution 25.

<sup>124</sup> See C 9.

<sup>125</sup> C 26, 51, 53, 55, 68, 72, 81, 105, 111 [C 82, 125, 131 in CCRR 2000]; R 6, 9, 10, 18, 20, 21, 46, 64, 67 [R 7f, 9a, 9b, 26a, 33a, 33b, -, 66f, 67c in CCRR 2000].

<sup>126</sup> C 13, 56, 67, 146; R 10, 95, 143a.

<sup>127</sup> *O.M.I. The Apostolic Man: A Commemoration*

tary on the 1982 edition of the *Oblate Constitutions and Rules*, General House, Rome, 1992, p. 374-376.

<sup>128</sup> *Divinum illud munus*, May 9, 1897.

<sup>129</sup> The apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii nuntiandi*, of December 8, 1975, describes in concise terms the link between the Holy Spirit and evangelization. See *La documen-*

*tation catholique*, no.1689, January 4, 1976, p. 75.

<sup>130</sup> F.-X. DURRWELL, *L'Esprit Saint de Dieu*, Paris, Cerf Editions, 1983, p. 98.

<sup>131</sup> See the encyclical, *Redemptoris missio*, of John Paul II, December 1990, no. 28 in *La documentation catholique*, no. 2022, February 17, 1991, p. 162.

## INCULTURATION

*Summary: I. The theory of primitive Revelation. II The strategy of adaptation. III. Inculturation. IV. The Oblates and inculturation.*

"The richness of the native heritage of the peoples of Africa can teach the universal Church new ways of Christian living."<sup>1</sup>

"Being aware that the "seeds of the Word" are already present in other religions and cultures (EN, 53), our task is to enter into dialogue with them so as to discover in them those values which resonate with the Gospel."<sup>2</sup>

Inculturation is a recent manifestation of new insights and practices with regard to the mission of the Church. This mission has its roots in Christ's mission and involves a continuation of the mystery of the Incarnation in everything human, more specifically, each and every culture. Peter Charles, S.J., the great Belgian missiologist, introduced the term *inculturation* into the field of missiology, but he gave it the same anthropological meaning as *enculturation* which means the process by which one assimilates one's own culture.<sup>3</sup> J. Masson, S.J., was the one who, in 1964,<sup>4</sup> invented the expression "inculturated Catholicism". However, we had to wait almost fifteen years for the term *inculturation* to be used with its present theological meaning. It seems that the first use of the term should be attributed to the 32nd Congregation of the Society of Jesus, December 1974 to April 1975. Likewise, the term seems to have been first introduced to the 1977 Synod of Bishops on catechesis by Father Pedro Arrupe, the then Superior General of the Jesuits.<sup>5</sup> Pope John Paul II officially adopted it in his 1979 Apostolic Letter *Catechesi*

*Tradendae*, and by this very fact, gave it a universal value. Since then, it has been impossible to keep track of all the books and articles that have been written on this subject, even if the term is not always understood in the same way and remains a rather fluid concept in the thinking of many.

### I. THE THEORY OF PRIMITIVE REVELATION

To get a good grasp of the new light shed on the theology of mission by the idea of inculturation, it must be compared with the strategy of adaptation<sup>6</sup> which it was meant to replace, and with the concept of primitive revelation<sup>7</sup> developed in the nineteenth century, which was based on the theory of *semina Verbi* of the Fathers of the Church, especially Saint Justin the Martyr, though significantly different from it. The theory is that each nation or human group retained some traces or vestiges of a primitive Revelation, that of Genesis in particular, a revelation made by God at the dawn of the human history and passed on from generation to generation by oral tradition. For this reason, missionaries strove to uncover traces of this Revelation in the peoples they went to evangelize. A fine example of this attitude is an unpublished article by Francis Le Bihan, O.M.I., who from 1859 to 1916 was a missionary, first among the Zulu and then the Basotho. In the wake of an article by Father Frédéric Porte, O.M.I., a younger con-

frere, entitled, "Memoirs of a Missionary in Basutoland"<sup>8</sup>, an article he felt was too negative with regard to the religious culture of the Basotho, Father Le Bihan wrote his own "Reminiscences on the Kaffir Religion".<sup>9</sup> In his conclusion, he summarizes his thought in this way: "I have spoken of the idea of God among these pagans [...] From this, I deduced the issue of prayer, of future life and the immortality of the soul. I also noted the ideas surrounding the final end of man, then the enduring presence of moral truths, including the gloomy sentiment that this fall left in the spirit and in the heart. Then I ended with the dogma of Redemption".

"In view of such a testimony, how could it be that this universal and perpetual belief did not flow from one same and unique source? How is it that a people, whom it is said the Arabs called Kaffir because of their unbelief, and who were foreign to any other nation because of their migration to the South<sup>10</sup>, should be able by pure chance to agree on these principles of dogma and morals? Neither reason, nor emotion, nor imagination could have contributed to creations of this kind. The only way these traditions can be explained is by the fact of a revelation".

Father Le Bihan is stating here that the moral truths and teachings that he discovered among the Zulu and Basotho<sup>11</sup> illustrate without a doubt that, like the other nations they were heirs of the primitive revelation offered to the human race from its very inception. That is why, he says, it is easy to preach the Gospel to the Basotho. They immediately recognize it as a truth they always believed. Father had already written at the beginning of his article: "The proof that our words find an echo here is the fact that this word brought about the conversion of a large number. This pa-

ganism that seems to be nothing more than a heap of superstitious and immoral practices [according to his young confrere], conceals some basic elements that bear the genuine stamp of an enlightenment or a knowledge left in their souls by the One who created all of us and brought us into this world. That is why when the word of the one sent by God falls upon it, it is received not as something foreign, but as if it belonged, speaking a language which is understood [...] Every missionary welcomed in the midst of a people, no matter how Kaffir it might be in its beliefs and its customs [here again an allusion to his confrere's way of speaking], should not fear that his words fall into a void. On the contrary, it falls like the water of life-giving rain upon the soil in whose depths there is a hidden seed, planted there by the hand of the Divine Creator. The work consists in removing all the undergrowth and turning over the soil".

Father Le Bihan ends with this advice to young missionaries (he was 64 years old when he wrote this text): "In conclusion, I do dare, therefore, to offer encouragement to the young fathers. Let them have confidence in their mission. The seeds are there in the depth of souls. Their words, falling like the water of a life-giving rain, will cause the seeds to sprout, grow, bear fruit for eternal life, thus fulfilling this prophecy of Isaiah: "Lauda sterilis quae non parit; decanta laudem, et hinni, quae non pariebas: quoniam multi filii desertae magis quam ejus quae habet virum, dicit Dominus. Dilata lacum tentorii tui et pelles tabernaculorum tuorum extende, ne parcas; longos fac funiculos tuos, et clavos tuos consolida" (Isaiah 54:1-2).<sup>12</sup>

It would certainly be possible to find similar texts in the writings of a number of Oblate missionaries at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of

the twentieth. But the one we quoted here will suffice for our purposes.

Today, with the theory of inculturation, we no longer speak in the same way. First of all, we no longer understand Genesis as the historical narrative of a revelation given to the first human couple, a revelation transmitted by oral tradition from generation to generation to our day while becoming partially vitiated in the course of the ages.<sup>13</sup> We speak more of the divine presence among the nations in the course of their history and of the action of the Holy Spirit active among them from the beginning. For example, the 1986 General Chapter expressed its conviction that "we can recognize God's Spirit working within people of differing beliefs and cultures. In this dialogue with them we are certain that we shall encounter God."<sup>14</sup> That is why today we believe it is possible for the missionary to discover the traces of this presence and this action in the culture of the people to whom he is sent. In this sense, when he arrives among his adoptive people, the missionary does not come to bring Christ, but he comes to reveal Him as being already present and active from the very beginning. Consequently, the culture of a people is not lacking in kinship to the Gospel, even if it can appear to be very different at first blush because of the language and the symbols it uses, language and symbols that do not correspond to those of the Gospel as found in the Bible. The Scriptures trace their origins to languages and cultural milieus of another age, those of the Middle East of several thousand years ago. In spite of this disjuncture, Mateo Ricci was able to establish a link between the Gospel and the culture of the Confucian Chinese of the sixteenth century, as did Roberto de Nobili with that of the Brahman Indians. We be-

lieve we can do the same thing today with the contemporary cultures of our world.

But we have rushed things a bit. Because, before the theory of inculturation came to prominence, it was the theory of adaptation which ruled. What are the main characteristics of this theory and why was it not yet inculturation?

## II. THE STRATEGY OF ADAPTATION

It really seems that at the origins of Christianity, the Christian faith never existed without being assimilated into the culture of those who accepted it. In the churches of Paul, the Jews and the Greeks were able to feel completely at home. The Gospel of Jesus Christ as well was written according to four different cultural situations in the New Testament. These are the four Gospels we know. However, after Constantine, when what until that time was called *religio illicita* became the state religion, Christianity became the vehicle for a culture, the culture of Rome.<sup>15</sup> The missionary movement from the civilized world to that of the Barbarians, that is to say, from a superior culture to inferior cultures, was to bring them into subjection, if not suppress them.<sup>16</sup>

During the last few centuries, western colonialism with its attitude of cultural superiority had its impact on the missionary endeavor. We went to evangelize primitive peoples and, because of this language and this outlook, the concomitant objective was to civilize them. For example, in his instruction on foreign missions,<sup>17</sup> Bishop de Mazenod divided what were then known as foreign missions into two groups: civilized heretical countries and uncivilized pagan countries: "The Congregation ac-

cepts missions both in heretical countries and in pagan countries. In the former, we are dealing with an educated and already civilized population; in the latter, the milieu is generally rough, uncivilized, with little or no knowledge of the basic idea of religion" (p. 6).

Further on, in the second part of the instruction entitled, "Directory for Foreign Missions," he adds: "[...] Far from considering the work of educating savages<sup>18</sup> in the rudiments of social life as being foreign to their work, on the contrary, the members of the Society will look upon this as an excellent means of contributing to the good of the mission and of making their apostolate more fruitful. That is why they will leave nothing undone to bring the nomadic tribes to give up their life of wandering<sup>19</sup> and find places to settle where they will learn to build houses, cultivate the land and learn the basic arts of civilization. [...]"

"To the Christian and social education of savage tribes, the missionaries will unite their concern for progress, even material progress, of their flock. They will, therefore, be formed to maintain peaceful relationships with their neighboring tribes, to maintain harmony among themselves, protect unity in the homes, and finally, through work and wisdom, develop the habit of maintaining and even increasing the family savings" (p. 13).

Western Christians were not aware of the cultural limitations of their theology. They believed their theology to be above culture and universally valid. They thought that theirs was a Christian culture and identified with their faith. Consequently, it was fully exportable along with their Christian faith since the two were indistinguishably one. It must, however, be noted that Bishop de Mazenod, in the previously quoted

document, asked his missionaries "to apply themselves to the study of the sciences most suitable to their vocation,"<sup>20</sup> an approach which proved its worth in particular in Lesotho. This latter point refers to visiting the villages and families: "[...] The missionaries, since they are to be at the service of everyone, will travel from place to place to visit the families and tribes and to offer the benefits of religion to the most neglected souls".<sup>21</sup>

However, little by little, they grasped the fact that to foster and favor conversions they would have to make certain adjustments. This was called the strategy of adaptation. In the process of evangelization, it was necessary to accept certain elements that were not in contradiction with the Gospel.

After having stated that "never before have we talked so much about adaptation [...] as we have in the last ten years," Father Albert Perbal, O.M.I., described it this way in a 1936 article: "There lies the whole principle of adaptation. To offend the least possible, to treat with respectful tact everything which contains a legitimate value, to carefully keep that which is not in contradiction with the rules of supernatural life, that which will never jeopardize the solid make up of a society living the Gospel, to love that which is typical of a people, to accept that they have the right to remain as God has made them, that is what the pioneers easily understood; that is what the Propaganda, in its marvelous conception of the apostolate has never ceased to recommend to all the missionaries."

"We will limit ourselves to quoting this passage from a 1659 Instruction, almost at the time of the Propaganda's foundation. "Since it is in peoples' nature to prefer what they have long possessed, to hold in high regard and love

above all what makes up their nationality, nothing is more irritating, nothing raises their ire, nothing makes the foreigner hated and rejected more than to see him try to change their traditional customs, to overthrow what their ancestors have built up, especially when they notice that these destructive moves have as their goal the introduction of European customs to replace those they considered hallowed by time-honored memory."<sup>22</sup>

Moreover, most of the time, it was only a question of incidentals such as liturgical vestments, artistic expressions, music, etc. This missionary movement encompassed the following characteristics:

- There was absolutely no question of changing the western (Roman) theological idea which was considered universal and immutable.

- It was a question of a concession to Christians of other cultures such as those in the Third World. Adaptation was a problem for the young churches. In the Western world, adaptation was an accomplished fact, so they thought. Their culture was Christian.

- The young churches were therefore allowed to use certain elements of their culture in the expression and practice of their faith.

- But the only elements allowed were those that were indifferent or naturally good.

- Cultures were not considered as indivisible wholes, but rather as a collection of elements independent one from the other that could be isolated or brought together at will without doing them violence in any way.

- It was likewise a marginal activity. The core was distinguished from the bark. Adaptation dealt only with the external trappings, the outer surface of the deposit of faith and not the faith itself.

But a new awareness of the relativity of each culture, especially of western culture, began to develop little by little. The coming of age of the young churches which sometimes accompanied and sometimes lead the way (in Lesotho, for example), the independence movements in the Third World, made people aware that the Gospel can be lived in many ways. Benedict XV's Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud* (1919), even if it was far from speaking of inculturation, was strongly opposed to any kind of domination by the Catholic missionaries, and the Pope strongly requested that they avoid any manner of operating which would make them the instruments of the colonial policies of their countries of origin. He asked as well that the mission churches should no longer be considered as colonies under foreign dominance and strongly recommended the formation of a local clergy that was capable not only of working under the guidance of missionaries, but also of taking the responsibility for governing their own people.<sup>23</sup> *Rerum Ecclesiae* (1926) by Pius XI and *Evangelii Praecones* (1951) by Pius XII went even further in this direction and local hierarchies were set up little by little in Africa and Asia.<sup>24</sup> But it is really only in the time of Pius XII's letter that adaptation began to enjoy a general consensus even if the ultimate goal was still to set up a monolithic Catholic or Christian culture.<sup>25</sup>

After Vatican II and because of this Council, even if the churches of the Third World had played a rather secondary role at it, a change took place in missionary thinking and practice in spite of the fact that the term adaptation continued to be used.<sup>26</sup> People became more and more aware of the point of view and the development of the young churches, especially at the Roman syn-

ods of bishops where a growing number of participants from the Third World made their voices heard. This was especially evident in the 1974 Synod on evangelization where Africa made an important impact with its idea of "incarnation" which was already the harbinger of the term inculturation, though it did not explicitly use this term. But what do we really mean by inculturation and what is so novel in this new missionary approach?

### III. INCULTURATION

First of all, a brief definition: "Inculturation is the unwritten response of a given culture to the first proclamation of the Gospel and subsequently to ongoing evangelization".<sup>27</sup>

A second definition, which is the transposition of the anthropological definition of the term *transculturation*,<sup>28</sup> the normal evolutionary process of a living culture, reads as follows: "Inculturation is the internal evolutionary process of a culture in response to the proclamation of the Gospel, with the Gospel working upon the culture as an internal agent guiding the process".

These definitions indicate that inculturation does not necessarily imply a violent clash of the Gospel with a particular culture. Quite the contrary, it can be a peaceful process where Gospel and culture come into contact in a dynamic and fruitful way.<sup>29</sup> That is not to say that painful moments may not be experienced at one point or other of the process. For this reason, inculturation theologians label this as *kenosis* patterned after the *kenosis* of Christ. But culture must be understood as the product – at least in part – of the action of the Holy Spirit in a people to whom God has always been present from the

time of their coming into being. From this perspective, we cannot view culture as necessarily opposed to the Gospel. At the same time, to say this does not mean that culture and the Gospel are identical. The dynamics of a culture, its symbolism and its content can be very different. But even there, that is not saying that it is evil or false for all that and that it is in opposition to the Gospel. To be different does not necessarily mean opposition or contradiction. Trying to discover and perceive similarities to the Gospel in a culture can prove useful in an initial proclamation of the Gospel, in view of anchoring the Gospel to the values, symbols and profound expectations of the people being evangelized. But we cannot reduce a culture to the possible similarities it could have with the Gospel, and inculturation cannot be reduced to simply adopting those cultural elements which resemble Gospels elements. Such a process would do violence to the culture, and indeed, destroy it as an integral organic whole. This would not be inculturation, it would still be adaptation.

Pope John Paul II seems to imply that cultures can contribute something to the Gospel when he says that, thanks to inculturation, the Church recognizes and expresses in a better way the mystery of Christ.<sup>30</sup> In order for that to happen, it really seems that culture would have to contribute something authentic and new which is not or is not yet expressed by the Gospel. Should we, then, say that cultures complement what is lacking in the Gospel, somewhat like Saint Paul who completes in his flesh that which is lacking in the passion of Christ? What is certain is that we do not yet understand, that we are far from grasping all the consequences and implications of inculturation.

Consequently, when we speak of inculturation, we need to have an adequate anthropological definition of culture, a definition that is comprehensive and all-encompassing. For culture does not consist only in the accidental and superficial elements belonging to a given people, for example, their dress, their food, even though these too are part of culture. Culture is not even exclusively the artistic expression of a people, as the term is often commonly understood. Culture is the way a more or less homogeneous group of humans<sup>31</sup> have of perceiving, understanding, expressing, living the reality (which they are and which surrounds them) and experiencing it. This reality includes the world of nature and the universe, human beings and the world of the transcendent. Such a definition leaves nothing out. It includes language, thought, the entire symbolic system, social and political organization, economics and especially religion which, in the mission sciences, is one of the most important aspects or which is of major concern for these sciences. Culture embraces the whole human reality and it is only when it is understood in this way that we can truly speak of inculturation.

To understand well what new contribution the idea of inculturation makes in missionary thought and practice, we need to compare it to the theory of adaptation which preceded it. Here are their most outstanding characteristics:

1. First of all, they differ in the agent involved. In the case of adaptation, the missionary (most of the time a Westerner) was obliged to instigate or guide with a benevolent hand the encounter between Christian faith and local cultures. The process was unilateral in the sense that the local community was not the main mover. For incultura-

tion, the main mover is the group of people who is the recipient of the Gospel and is integrating it through the action of the Holy Spirit,<sup>32</sup> patterned on the Incarnation where the agent is the Holy Spirit with the collaboration of the Virgin Mary. It is not the missionary, nor the hierarchy, nor the magisterium which control the process. That does not mean that the missionary has no role to play. Quite the contrary is true; he is the essential condition for inculturation. He must proclaim the Gospel, otherwise it could not become incarnate in the new people who receive it. The missionary is the sower. His role is essential. Without him, nothing would happen. He must plant the seed. But it is not he who makes the seed sprout and grow; he is not the effective agent of inculturation.

2. Inculturation focuses on the local situation, on the birth of a local individual church. The Church, one and universal, exists only in the individual churches. So it is not a case of establishing the Church brought from some place else by the missionary, but to bring about the birth of the local church of each people, a localized and individualized church. The theory of adaptation spoke of implantation, with only some possibility of adopting certain local accidental characteristics. Inculturation embraces the whole cultural context in the broadest sense of the word: language, symbolism, the world of imagination, the religious dimension, education, social life, etc. We should refer to the definition of culture given above.

3. As was already implied, inculturation is not only based on the Incarnation as its model, it is its continuation. The incarnational dimension of the Gospel, which is identified with Jesus Christ, *incarnates, incorporates itself* in

the people and their culture. This is an ongoing incarnation, not so much of the Church which spreads and grows as of *a new church being born*.

4. Inculturation is a process with a two-fold movement: There is simultaneously inculturation of the Gospel and evangelization of the culture. The Gospel remains Good News while it becomes a cultural phenomenon adopting and integrating the system of meaning of the culture in question. At the same time, it gives this culture “the knowledge of the divine mystery” while allowing it to bring to Christian life from its own living traditions, some original expressions that the Gospel has not yet expressed. It is in this that we can see how inculturation goes far beyond the metaphor of the core and the bark used

in the theory of adaptation. A more adequate metaphor is that of the seed cast into the earth of a particular culture; it sprouts, grows, flowers and bears fruit.

5. Just as culture is a reality which encompasses everything and makes up an indivisible whole, so it is with inculturation. Paul VI’s *Evangelii Nuntiandi* still spoke of “certain elements of human culture” (art. 20). We now recognize that it is impossible to isolate cultural elements and customs and christianize them. When the encounter between the Gospel and a given culture remains at this level, the meaning of the encounter is diminished. It is only when the encounter is all encompassing that culture can renew itself from the inside.<sup>33</sup>

A comparative table <sup>34</sup>

	ADAPTATION	INCULTURATION
Prime mover of the process	The missionary or the Church who sends	Local Christian community under the inspiration and impulse of the Holy Spirit
Objective of the process	Establishment of the local Church as an extension of the universal Church	Birth of a local Church with distinct local characteristics
The way the process operates	Spread of the universal Church	Integration into the local culture
Level of application of the process	Accidental, limited to certain neutral and naturally good cultural elements	Assimilation of culture as an organic and indivisible whole
Justification of the process	A concession and privilege granted to a “mission” Church	A need and a right to express one’s faith in one’s own culture
Beneficiaries of the process	The young Churches	Every Christian cultural community
The focus	Unity with a certain tolerance of diversity	Unity in diversity
Preferred approach	Good will and practical sense of the missionary	Dialogue of the Gospel and local culture

#### IV. THE OBLATES AND INCULTURATION

1. As missionaries, inculturation does concern the Oblates, but not as agents, since the missionary as such is not able to act directly on the process of inculturation.<sup>35</sup> The fact of belonging to a culture different from that of the people we are called to evangelize deprives us of the ability to intervene directly in the process of inculturation. What concerns the missionary first and foremost on a personal level is acculturation, the process by which someone moves toward (*ac*-culturation, from *ad*, towards) another culture and strives to understand and assimilate it. That is precisely the situation of a missionary involved in the mission *ad extra*. Since he does not belong to the culture of the people he is called to evangelize, the missionary must meet this culture and assimilate it as much as is possible, but he never succeeds perfectly in doing this. Because he cannot live this culture, he cannot interiorize it as perfectly as he lives and has interiorized his own culture, by osmosis so to speak, by being born into a given family and group and by growing up in them. The culture of his adoptive people will always be something external to him, something he acquired as set in contrast with his own culture because the knowledge he has of it remains indirect and rational (achieved through reasoning) and not *experiential* like that of his own culture.

In this sense, even if in his time Bishop de Mazenod could not have conceived of inculturation, he did have a deep concern for acculturation, without knowing what to call it, and exhorted his missionaries to acquire a thorough knowledge of the people they were to evangelize. We know how he preached in Provençal to communicate

with the humble folk of his little corner of France and to enable them to better understand the Gospel. We also know how he demanded that his Oblate missionaries "make every effort [...] to learn as soon as possible the languages it is necessary to know in that country".<sup>36</sup> He wrote to Father Étienne Semeria in Ceylon: "Insist firmly that our missionaries learn the languages. This is an indispensable duty for them, and you yourself must apply yourself to it. See what advantages the Jesuit Fathers gain by doing this."<sup>37</sup> Bishop de Mazenod gives equal emphasis to visiting the people as we indicated above. He did so himself when he preached missions. Visiting families was the first task he took on in the first days [of a mission]. That is what he recommended to Bishop Jean-François Allard whom he found did not move around enough: "I would be pleased to see you going out and surveying your territory a little. Missionary bishops do not fix themselves in one residence never to leave it. You should build up relations with your Kaffirs to whom you have essentially been sent."<sup>38</sup> The 1986 Chapter also expressed itself in this way: To "establish Christian communities rooted in the local culture" (C. 7), Oblates have to be "very close to the people with whom they work" (C. 8). In communion with them and with an attitude of profound respect, we shall discover new aspects of the inexhaustible riches of God in the hearts of the people, in their history and religions. "We shall let our lives be enriched..." and thus we shall hear "in new ways the Gospel that we proclaim" (R 8) [R 8a in CCR 2000].<sup>39</sup>

2. The missionary's second task is one of translation, translation of the Gospel into the language and thought patterns of his adopted people. But this remains more or less accurate and im-

perfect until the people being evangelized assimilate the missionary's proclamation and express it in their own idiom and way of thinking. It is only at this stage that the missionary finally knows how he should have translated the Gospel. I can give personal testimony to this from my experience as a missionary in Africa. Since the end of the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s, the ecclesial Sesotho language that the French and Canadian missionaries had helped create developed very rapidly from the time when some Basotho took part in the task of translating the Bible and the liturgical texts. We were often faced with astonishing surprises which compelled our admiration in spite of all the efforts we had expended previously.

3. And this points to the missionary's third task, that of discerning whether inculturation has really taken place and been carried out as it ought. Obviously, this discernment cannot be done alone. It must be done in dialogue with those who have accepted the Gospel, assimilated it, let themselves be transformed by it. Because, ideally, the results of inculturation must be consistent, must be totally evangelical and totally of the culture of those who have accepted the Gospel.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Missionary Outlook*, p. 5 & 6. This document is one of the two official texts published by the 1972 General Chapter.

<sup>2</sup> *Missionaries in Today's World*, no. 53. Paragraph III in which this number is found is entitled: *Mission and Inculturation*.

<sup>3</sup> "Missiologie et acculturation", in *Nouvelle Revue Théologique*, 75 (1953), p. 19. Since the term *inculturation* did not exist at the time and he gives it the anthropological meaning *enculturation*, I think he used it inadvertently. The term he really wanted to use was *enculturation*, but he made the typographical error of writing *inculturation*. He certainly had no intention of breaking new ground (he was neither an anthropologist, nor an ethnologist); if he had had this intention, it seems to me he would have said so. In any case, after this article, he never used the word again.

<sup>4</sup> "L'Église ouverte sur le monde", in *Nouvelle Revue Théologique*, 84 (1962) p. 1038. The text reads as follows: "Today, when precisely the urgency of having a Catholicism inculturated in a multi-dimensional way has become more pressing. Without a doubt, never so much as today, have the major cultural groups of humanity felt, val-

ued and sought to defend their cultural originality, their land with its own character, their language, art, system of symbols, ceremonies, general outlook on life, their 'way of life' in the American style, their Indian *svadharma*, their *Weltanschauung* or their negroness, formerly a source of shame, but now unfurled as a proud banner."

In an earlier paragraph, the author had written: "As long as the Church was co-extensive with the Mediterranean basin, bound to the Greco-Latin culture, its openness to culture and its dialogue with it were relatively simple. And yet, already in ancient times, the Latin Church experienced difficulties in maintaining contact with Hellenic peoples or Germanic groups. We could no doubt find there the deep causes of the orthodox and protestant rifts from which we still suffer so much today."

<sup>5</sup> Speech published under the title "Catéchèse et inculturation", in *Lumen Vitae*, 37 (1977), p. 445-450 and also in Arrupe, Pedro, S.J., *L'espérance ne trompe pas*, Paris, Le Centurion, 1981, p. 161-173.

<sup>6</sup> We can place the beginning of the theory of adaptation in Benedict XV's encyclical letter *Maximum Illud* (1919) even if some missionaries of the past like Cyril and Methodius in the ninth century, Mateo Ricci and Roberto de Nobili in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and a few others had conceived a missionary approach which was a harbinger of what we call today inculturation. This is so in spite of the fact that, in their attempt to establish contact on a profound level with the culture of the people being evangelized, we can consider that they saw the missionary as the prime mover in the process. Nevertheless, the missiologists previous to 1975, as we can well understand, spoke of Cyril and Methodius, de Ricci and de Nobili rather as being the most outstanding representatives of adaptation. For example, André Seumois in his *Introduction à la Missiologie*, (Switzerland, Administration of the New Review of Missionary Sciences, 1952) wrote: "Adaptation is sometimes carried out with consummate mastery as for example in Moravia with Saints Cyril and Methodius, but in general adaptation is too often subject to failure be-

cause of imperialist interests." (p. 298) "We have to acknowledge [...], the fine efforts of adaptation, even in Spanish America under the Patronage [of the kings of Portugal and Spain]. [...] But it was especially in Asia that the Patronage saw splendid efforts of adaptation, especially with Ricci, de Nobili, Balignano, Verbiest, etc." (p. 301, footnote 917).

<sup>7</sup> A classical synthesis of this theory written in French can be found in Lemonnyer, A., o.p., *La Révélation primitive et les données actuelles de la science*, Paris, Victor Lecoffre Bookstore, J. Gabalda, Editor, 1914, 359 p. In spite of the way it is presented on the title-page, this book was not authored by A. Lemonnyer; it is his translation of a work by the great ethnologist and linguist, Wilhelm Schmidt (1868-1954) of the society of the Steyl missionaries (Divine Word). The preface clearly states: "Everything in this book is his work except for the footnotes under the signature T.; these were written by the translator [Father Lemonnyer], and submitted to Father Schmidt who gave them his approval. Moreover, he reviewed the translation itself." According to Father Schmidt's theory on primitive revelation, the biblical revelation contained in Genesis was communicated to all peoples due to the fact that we are all sons and daughters of Adam and Eve. Traces of this can be found in the cultures of all peoples.

This way of thinking is based on a historical interpretation of the Bible, especially the book of Genesis. We can no longer speak this way today even if we must maintain that God revealed himself to everyone and in different ways, especially in the context of their cultures, because He was always present to each and every human group from the time of their coming into being. Nevertheless, André Seumois, O.M.I. still defended this theory of primitive revelation in 1981 in his *Théologie missionnaire* (Rome, Urbaniana University Press, 1981, vol. III, p. 43-68; see also the Italian translation of this work: *Teologia Missionaria*, Bologna, EDB, 1993, p. 139-152) presenting it as a "theological problem" rather than an ethnological and historic one. (p. 52-53)

<sup>8</sup> In *Missions*, 34 (1986), p. 166-221, 269-357.

<sup>9</sup> The manuscript of this article can be found in the Oblate archives at Maseru.

<sup>10</sup> It is thought that the Basotho originally came from central Africa and emigrated to the South, to finally settle in what is called the Orange Free State (South Africa) and the present-day Lesotho.

<sup>11</sup> More than all the other Oblate missionaries who first came to South Africa, Father Le Bihan had lived among the people to whom he was sent. Bishop Allard had asked him to live for several months in a remote Zulu village in order to learn the language and customs of the people. For several years, he had hauled provisions from Pietermaritzburg (Natal) to Roma (Lesotho some hundreds of kilometres) with ox-drawn wagons. He was always accompanied by several Basotho with whom he lived very closely for weeks on end, sometimes for months. During the gun war in Lesotho (1879-1881), he lived with the Basotho army for two years. Great Chief Letsie was very grateful and as a reward offered to allow him to choose any place he wished in Lesotho to found a new mission. This gave rise to the present mission of Montolivet.

<sup>12</sup> The English translation of this text reads as follows: "Shout for joy, you barren woman who bore no children! Break into cries of joy and gladness, you who were never in labor! For the sons of the forsaken one are more in number than the sons of the wedded wife, says Yahweh. Widen the space of your tent, stretch out your hangings freely, lengthen your ropes, make your pegs firm; for you will burst out to right and to left. Your race will take possession of the nations, and people the abandoned cities" (Isaiah 54: 1 & 2).

<sup>13</sup> Especially given the fact that we now know the human race existed for hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of years instead of the few thousand (four or five) which were ascribed to it in the nineteenth century.

<sup>14</sup> *Missionaries in Today's World*, no. 56.

<sup>15</sup> See Masson, J., *op. cit.* See footnote 3 for a passage dealing with this subject.

<sup>16</sup> We have only to think of Cyril and

Methodius, eastern missionaries of the ninth century, who had an attitude diametrically opposed to this. After the death of Methodius – Cyril had died in Rome several years earlier – their work was condemned by the then-reigning Pope. Their work survived only in Bulgaria, a territory under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, because the followers of Methodius sought refuge there and carried on the work of these two great missionaries. But this failed to benefit the church of Rome in any way since in the 1054 schism the Slavic church of Bulgaria seceded to become part of the Orthodox Church along with the entire Patriarchate of Constantinople.

<sup>17</sup> Instruction of our Venerated Founder with regard to foreign missions, Rome, General House, 1936, p. 6.

<sup>18</sup> By “savages,” it really seems that Bishop de Mazenod meant those whom he called “unbelievers” in an earlier part of this document.

<sup>19</sup> Nomadic life was, therefore, considered as being an inferior, if not subhuman, way of living and it had to be replaced with a settled way of life. The difficulties the Church encountered to feel at home in the nomad cultures are well known. We cannot even say that it has succeeded in feeling at home with them. The nomadic peoples of North America, Australia and Africa, even if sometimes a number of their members have been Christians for many years, have not provided ordained ministers to take over the direction and leadership of their local churches. It seems that the Church, because of the way it views itself, cannot become nomadic with the nomads. Everything in it exudes a settled way of life, starting with its legislation which defines Christian communities in terms of well defined and clearly marked territories.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 9.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 12.

<sup>22</sup> “A propos de la formation des futurs missionnaires”, in *Etudes missionnaires*, Supplement to *Revue d'histoire des Missions*, Paris, vol. IV, no. 1, April 1936, p. 53. We still must add that this text from the Congregation of the Propaganda, worthy of admiration as Father Perbal says, remained a

dead letter for centuries and was not sufficient to avoid the condemnation of a missionary approach like that of Ricci in China, de Nobili in India and the Jesuits in Latin America.

<sup>23</sup> *Acts of Benedict XV*, Paris, 5 rue Bayard, 1926, vol. II, page 90. It seems that Benedict XV's letter set in motion the founding of a seminary in Lesotho. In a 1896 article, Father F. Porte stated that he did not foresee the day when a Mosotho would become a priest (see “Les Réminiscences...”, in *Missions*, 34 (1896), p. 279) In a 1908 report to the Congregation of the Propaganda, Bishop Jules Cénez wrote that up to this point in time nothing had been done in terms of education of a local clergy and that there was no possible hope of seeing any vocations for a very long time. (Oblate General Archives, *Lesotho* file) But in his 1920 report, he noted that one Mosotho had begun his studies for the priesthood. Finally, a 1923 letter by Father Odilon Chevrier, O.M.I., informs us that he had been appointed to found a seminary and that this was, it seems, in response to the request made by Benedict XV's letter and at the urging of an envoy of Pius XI, a certain Bishop Demont who was appointed Vicar Apostolic of Aliwali North in South Africa (in *Missions*, 56 (1924), p. 270).

<sup>24</sup> With reference to Oblate mission territories, we can mention the following cases:

1. In Lesotho before the 1966 independence, the first black bishop, Bishop Emmanuel ‘Mabathoana was appointed Bishop of Leribe in 1952. Then, in 1961, the ecclesiastical province of Lesotho was created with Bishop ‘Mabathoana as its first Archbishop. He had two suffragans: Bishop Delphis Desrosiers, O.M.I., a Canadian, and Bishop Ignatius Phakoe, O.M.I., Mosotho.

2. In Ceylon (today Sri Lanka), Bishop Edmond Emmanuel Peiris, O.M.I., was appointed Bishop of Chilaw in 1940. Bishop Thomas Benjamin Cooray, O.M.I., was appointed coadjutor to the Archbishop of Colombo in 1946 (becoming titular bishop one year later) and Bishop Emilianus Pillai, O.M.I., was appointed Bishop of Jaffna in 1949. The hierarchy had already been established by Leo XIII, September 1, 1886.

<sup>25</sup> And yet, Pius XII had already come to an awareness of the principle of cultural pluralism as seen in his 1944 speech to the Pontifical Works for the Missions (*Documentis Pontificaux de S.S. Pie XII*, Saint-Maurice, Switzerland, Saint Augustine Editions, 1963, p. 113), a text which he quoted in his missionary encyclical. But it was John XXIII, in his encyclical letter *Princeps Pastorum* in 1959 who would cause mission theology to make a qualitative leap when he set forth the equality of cultures and a multi-cultural Church. The Church, he wrote, is not identified with any culture to the exclusion of others, not even with the Western and European culture to which it is so closely linked historically. (art. 17)

<sup>26</sup> Even if, in the sixties, the vocabulary of adaptation was still being used, missionary theology took on more importance and changed its point of view very quickly, probably as a result of Vatican II where the vocabulary shifted from "mission territories" or "foreign missions" to "the mission of the Church" in the singular. In spite of the term adaptation, the notion took on more depth and embraced culture in a more global way. To give only one example, a personal example, in a 1967 article about adaptation in Lesotho, I wrote: "One has to approach the Mosotho in a more all-encompassing fashion: extract the essence of his thinking, his way of feeling and acting and infuse Christianity into this essential element. Genuine adaptation of the most enduring and at the same time the most effective kind will find there its point of departure and its power of penetration." See Lapointe, Eugene, "Problème d'adaptation au Lesotho", in *Kerygma*, 1 (1967), p. 110. In this text, we see that we are no longer dealing with external cultural elements, but with culture in its overall dimension. Obviously, the question which remains to be answered is who is the agent in adaptation described in this way and what role belongs to the missionary in this process. The real answer will be found only when we speak of inculturation as such.

<sup>27</sup> Jaouen, René, "Les conditions d'une inculturation fiable", in *Lumière et Vie*, 30 (1985) July-September, p. 33.

<sup>28</sup> "Evolutionary process [of culture] set in motion by the agency of inherent factors (without being in contact with two or more distinct cultures)." See Poirier, John, director, *Ethnologie régionale*, Paris, Encyclopédie de la Pléiade, Gallimard, 1972, vol. 1, p. 24. Transculturation is the normal evolutionary process of every culture since it is essentially dynamic and is always in the process of change.

<sup>29</sup> Father Arrupe described this process in the following way: "It [inculturation] is an ongoing dialogue between the Word of God and the manifold ways people have of expressing themselves." *Op. cit.*, p. 448.

<sup>30</sup> *Redemptoris Missio*, art. 52

<sup>31</sup> Here, the term "group" is understood in the full anthropologic sense of "an organized population enjoying a permanent existence," that is a gathering of human beings bonded among themselves according to recognized principles with common interests and norms determining the rights and duties of the ones toward the others. For this definition, see Mair, Lucy, *An Introduction to Social Anthropology*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1872, 2nd edition, p. 25.

<sup>32</sup> For René Jaouen, the agent of inculturation is the Holy Spirit himself. Since this theologian uses the parable of the seed which sprouts by itself as a symbol of inculturation, the people who are recipients of the Gospel constitute the soil in which the seed (of the Gospel) is planted and the Spirit is the one who makes the seed sprout and grow. See "Les conditions d'une inculturation fiable", in *Lumière et Vie*, 33 (1984), no. 168. The 1986 General Chapter limited itself to the following statement: "We acknowledge the fact that the local people themselves are the first artisans of inculturation. Therefore, we accompany them with humility and trust in their efforts to make the Gospel their own and to express it in their culture." (*Missionaries in Today's World*, no. 59). This was probably following the lead given by the *Constitutions* of 1982 which asked the Oblates to have "as our goal to establish Christian communities and Churches deeply rooted in the local culture and fully responsible for their own development and growth" (C. 7).

<sup>33</sup> This paragraph uses Bosch, David J., *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books, 1991, p. 453-455.

<sup>34</sup> With a few modifications, this sketch is drawn from that of Luzbetak, Louis J., S.V.D., in *The Church and Cultures*, Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books, 1991, p. 82-83.

<sup>35</sup> It is still possible to speak of inculturation of the Oblate charism since the Congregation welcomes into its ranks members of very different cultures and offers them the possibility of developing in Provinces which are relatively autonomous. It is in this sense that Father Gilles Cazabon, O.M.I., today a bishop, spoke of "Oblate formation and inculturation" (*Documentation O.M.I.*, no. 151, 1987) and that Father Alexander Mo-

tanyane, O.M.I., spoke of "the inculturation of religious life in Africa" (*Documentation O.M.I.*, no. 191, 1993).

<sup>36</sup> Letter to Father ÉTIENNE Semeria, May 9, 1848 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 4, no. 3, p. 11.

<sup>37</sup> Letter of May 14, 1849 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 4, no. 12, p. 39. In his letter of November 10, 1857 to Bishop Allard, Bishop de Mazenod strongly rebuked the missionary bishop who had not yet learned to speak Zulu and he could not understand that after one year in the missions they were not able to speak to the people in their own language. (*Oblate Writings I*, vol. 4, no. 27, p. 209)

<sup>38</sup> Letter of May 30, 1857 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 4, no. 26, p. 207.

<sup>39</sup> *Missionaries in Today's World*, no. 55.

## INTERIOR LIFE

*Summary: I. The "inner" structure of the Founder's soul. II. The "interior" dimension of Oblate life. 1. The Oblate community as "interior space"; 2. The Oblate Rule as "interior commitment"; 3. Interior life and mystical vision. III. Changes in our perception of the interior life: 1. A deepening of lived theological virtues; 2. A less "privatized" and "sequestered" prayer; 3. The spiritual guide and the interior life.*

One would have to search long and hard through the writings of Eugene de Mazenod to find the actual expression "interior life". It just simply was not part of his usual yet otherwise extensive vocabulary. Having scrutinized the twelve volumes of his published letters to the Oblates, his diaries and retreat notes, the present writer was able to find only two instances in which the Founder let fall from his pen the actual expression "interior life", and this, not too surprisingly, in a letter to Father Tempier.<sup>1</sup>

The absence of any real, significant use of this venerable expression by the Founder (or for that matter, of the classic distinction between "the interior man" and "the exterior man" which belongs to the Christian vocabulary ever since the time of St. Paul)<sup>2</sup> is remarkable for several reasons. The expression was certainly utilized and well-known in his day. The word "interior", used as an adjective or a noun, had already known an extraordinary success in seventeenth-century France and would remain a "household" word among spiritual writers well into the nineteenth century. What the authors understood as interior life could be summarized as follows: the more or less sustained attention that a person gives to the internal workings of grace along with his willing cooperation with that movement and to the development of divine life within it in an effort to de-

tach oneself from created things and to draw closer to God. No matter how attentive a man may be to his interior life, that person still cannot avoid being influenced by his times and his milieu.

At Saint-Sulpice Seminary, moreover, where Eugene de Mazenod received his spiritual and intellectual formation and where the traditions of the French School were carried on with "deep reverence",<sup>3</sup> one of the principle tenets of Sulpician spirituality was certainly that of fostering the "interior life".

Disciple of Pierre de Bérulle through Charles de Condren, Father Olier had always considered devotion to the interior life of Jesus as the cornerstone of piety in his seminary. Even more than Pierre de Bérulle, he emphasized the practical consequences of this inner dimension of the spiritual life. To live the life of Christ, according to him, meant taking on the inner dispositions of Jesus Christ in their entirety, and not merely imitating some of his virtues. As Father Tronson would later put it, our soul is not a canvas on which one applies this or that color, this or that trait of Jesus, as a painter might do with a model in front of him; rather the soul is like a piece of cloth that must be plunged into a tub of dye until it becomes completely and thoroughly saturated with a new color. We know, too, that the *Feast of the Interior Life of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, which had been instituted by Father Olier and approved by Rome in

1664, was still honored and being celebrated at Saint-Sulpice during the seminary days of Eugene de Mazenod. Moreover, he speaks of it in a letter to his grandmother, Catherine Elizabeth Joannis.<sup>4</sup>

What is, of course, curious in all this is that despite the very real influence that his Sulpician training had on him, an influence that would mark him throughout his entire life, the Founder seems always to have been reluctant to make explicit use of the expression "interior life". Was this deliberate, and if so, what might have been his reasons? Or was it more the nature of an unconscious avoidance of an expression that did not "speak" to his heart, that somehow did not adequately capture and hence do full justice to the complex structure of his soul or his spiritual outlook? The answer, as we will attempt to show, lies in the singular way in which Saint Eugene experienced and came to perceive his own quest for holiness, his own mission in life. The originality, attractiveness, and dynamic nature of this very quest, *as he himself lived and loved it*, is where we must begin in order to fully appreciate the Founder's view on personal interiority and the importance he attaches to it in the life of every Oblate.

## I. THE "INNER" STRUCTURE OF THE FOUNDER'S SOUL

*Firstly*, it should be remembered that Eugene de Mazenod, by his own admission, was a practical man. Leflon says of him: "There was nothing of the speculative in Eugene de Mazenod and he remained a practical man throughout his life".<sup>5</sup> It will come as no surprise to see that in his interior life as well as throughout his whole spiritual journey

Eugene de Mazenod was a "hands on, practical man" both with regard to his interior life as well as in his apostolic work. Yet it is true that in his spiritual writings he often makes an explicit distinction between the end and the means to achieve this end: between the end of our mission, for example, "to revive the faith which is dying out among the poor",<sup>6</sup> and the practical spiritual means to achieve this end, that is, the evangelical counsels, prayer and observance of the Rule.<sup>7</sup> But in his mind, it was the urgency and the intrinsic value of the end which contributed any importance and value the means might have. All the more is this true that the means he had in mind and that he set forth were precisely the same as those used by the Savior and the Apostles as the first to employ them. Whence his cry from the heart: "Could anything bring greater pleasure to bring us to imitate them! Jesus, our Founder, the Apostles, our forerunners, our first Fathers!"<sup>8</sup>

The Founder's spirituality has obviously been influenced by his Sulpician formation with this constant introspection, with recollection and oraison in view of reviewing how one stands before God with the objective of making one's soul more open to the will of God. But, for him, pure introspection, an exercise completely detached and having no reference to its external milieu, could not embrace the sum total of the interior life. For the Founder, these two were always wedded together.

On the contrary, whenever he would enter into prayer or spend long hours before the Blessed Sacrament as he so often did, it was always in the crowded company of everything that was happening to him and around him. There is a sense, indeed a very real sense, in which it can be said the Founder never prayed *alone*. As a man who was pas-

sionately in love with the Church, Eugene de Mazenod's interior life and prayer – like his letters – were always filled and peopled with the dreams and concerns of his missionaries his diocese, his Pope, and of course, the poor, the “most abandoned”. None of these real people or these real concerns were ever left “out in the cold”, outside, that is, of his deep affectivity and prayerful interiority.

His prayer like his vision embraced the entire world! By frequently placing his soul in the presence of God, the Founder was always present and intimately united with the men and women he carried in his heart. Moreover, he states this most explicitly himself. For example, in a letter to Father Joseph Fabre, he wrote: “I was alone in my little chapel to celebrate such a great feast [February 17th]... and you comprehend that space did not at all separate us in that moment. In this centre, that is, our divine Saviour, we all found ourselves reunited. I did not see you, but I did hear you and felt your presence, and I rejoiced with you as though I were in Marseilles, which is more than 200 leagues distant from where I was”.<sup>9</sup>

It may well have been this very sense of spiritual solidarity with everything and everyone he loved so passionately that made him shy away from the expression “interior life”, at least in its more *individualistic* shades of meaning which the expression undoubtedly carried in his day. In the framework of his spiritual outlook the so-called “interior life” and the “exterior life” compenetrated each other to such an extent and to such a degree that it was virtually impossible for him to separate the two. This, to my mind, explains Eugene's alleged conflict between a life of prayer and a life of apostolic service.<sup>10</sup> Magnanimity is not

known for making limited or highly selective choices. And for someone as big-hearted and magnanimous as Saint Eugene was, the real dilemma must have been less a question of choosing one vocation over the other but more a matter of just now he might conjoin and embrace the best of *both* vocations. In this, as in so many other ways, he lived up to his own words: “Leave nothing undared”. He would let himself be inspired by spiritual writers and edified by the lives of great saints, but in the end – invariably – he knew that he had to follow his own “way”, his own inspirations.

A *second* consideration should also be borne in mind if we are to grasp the unique richness of Eugene de Mazenod's understanding of personal interiority. Throughout his spiritual journey, the Founder was and always knew himself to be “his own man” – or, as we say today in our Constitutions and Rules, he always saw himself as “*the principal agent of his own development*” (C 48). If there is one principle he unswervingly believed in, for himself and for his Oblates, it was this one: we must never abandon or shirk our personal responsibility in the quest of saving others or sanctifying ourselves. He was never able to tolerate the abandoning or the neglect of one's personal responsibility in the pursuit of perfection and of holiness. In this, he would have fully ascribed to the wisdom of an old Russian proverb: “Pray to God, but continue to row to the shore”. We see this confirmed time and time again in the Founder's life. Two examples will suffice to illustrate our point.

The Founder's *Preface* to the Constitutions, with its fifteen emphatic and unmitigated appeals to personal responsibilities (We must...; they must...), bears this out. Without wishing to preempt the will of God or minimize the

role of grace, the Founder never wavered in his basic conviction that in some mysterious yet real way we remain forever responsible for our personal sanctification and the salvation of others. This stands out clearly in Eugene de Mazenod's numerous retreat resolutions, resolutions aimed at fostering his advancement in the spiritual life. They are noteworthy not only for their number, but also for the minute attention they pay to the details of concrete living.

This abiding sense of responsibility is also illustrated in the Founder's intolerance of what he perceived as spiritual mediocrity or infidelity to the holy Rules. The harsh words with which he denounced harshly those who left or were tempted to leave the Congregation or the way he would reprimand and seriously take to task even the most trusted of his beloved Oblates, still surprise us today and leave us somewhat embarrassed. Yet to ascribe these "paternal outbursts" solely to his passionate nature or his *tempérament Provençale* would be to overlook the extent to which one's faith convictions only rarely run counter to the personality and human make-up of an individual. Even though Saint Thomas was practically ignored in his seminary training,<sup>11</sup> it was as if Eugene de Mazenod sensed instinctively that grace really does "build on nature". Just as the Founder could not bring himself to separate apostolic service and prayer, so too was he firmly convinced that there can be no inherent contradiction between "virtue" and "talent", between "being faithful to God" and "being true to oneself". This desire for authenticity would become a lifelong habit through the whole course of his spiritual journey. Even today, this is part and parcel of the mystery of each saint the Church dares to canonize.

This rapid sketch of the internal structure of the Founder's soul enables us to draw one certain conclusion: in his innermost depths, the Founder saw no trace of dualism, no dichotomy between the two ways of life, the active and the contemplative. He seems to have always grasped their real unity. Throughout his life, Eugene de Mazenod would sing the praises of this profound penetration of the "external" and the "internal" life. For example, in his meditations on the Rule during his annual retreat in 1831, he thanks the Saviour for "a happy blend of the active and the contemplative life of which Jesus Christ and the Apostles have set us an example [...] and of which our Rules are but the development".<sup>12</sup>

Especially in his spiritual writings, it is obvious that, even if he never used the expression as such, the Founder certainly had some very precise views on the interior life. Two things stand out with regard to the way he made himself a "practitioner" of the interior life. First of all, in his case, the interior life was an indispensable means of acquiring self-knowledge. Those who have achieved the love of God or those who want to achieve it must attain to *self-knowledge* and in order to achieve this, they must ask God for his enlightenment. From the time of his entry into the seminary and his whole life through, Eugene de Mazenod gave witness to an intense interior life in which he was making a sustained effort to see himself as God saw him.<sup>13</sup> The unusual knowledge he achieved of himself and the candor with which he presents himself in his retreat notes are an initial indication that Eugene possessed a rather outstanding interior life.

For Eugene de Mazenod, self-knowledge as well as the various kinds of divesting of self that he had to accept

were only the first fruits of his interior life. The second was *his experiential knowledge of God's goodness in his regard*. Self-knowledge with its attendant knowledge of his weaknesses, his inadequacies, things lacking in his training, led the Founder to a deeper gratitude to God for his goodness toward him. This two-fold knowledge – of self and of God's goodness toward him – flows from *gratitude*. If we can point to any one outstanding trait that characterizes the Founder's entire spiritual journey, it is truly that of his deeply felt gratitude for the free gift of God which goes before any work or merit on the part of man. It is only in silence and recollection, in the heart of our internal forum, that we truly learn to appreciate the free gift, "grace", God's prevenient love. That is what Eugene de Mazenod did. That explains why his writings read like a great hymn of thanksgiving.

Having sketched something of the basic structure of the Founder's "inner" life, we can now turn to the way he expressly articulated the "interior" dimension of religious life for his Oblates.

## II. THE "INTERIOR" DIMENSION OF OBLATE LIFE

In Oblate life, we can distinguish three degrees of interiority. These must not be construed as separate or unrelated in the Founder's thinking, but rather as three interdependent components of a single dynamic concept. It should be pointed out here that the sequential order in which we have chosen to expose these three levels of interiority is our own: we proceed from the more tangible level to the more mystical. No priority is herein intended or attributed to the Founder. In this sec-

tion, moreover, we will let Bishop de Mazenod speak largely for himself, making only those observations that we think may prove helpful to the reader.

### 1. THE OBLATE COMMUNITY AS "INTERIOR SPACE"

For Bishop de Mazenod, the most obvious yet indispensable kind of interiority, one that he felt ever so strongly about, was the Oblate community itself. Time and again he cautioned his missionaries not to over-work themselves in the mission field and urged them to return "at least for brief intervals" to their communities. He saw the community as a haven, a home, an "interior space" where his missionaries could relax, renew their strength, and rekindle their commitment – in short, an oasis where they might "recreate" their energy and look after their personal well-being. It was the well-being of the "whole" person that Bishop de Mazenod was thinking of and concerned about: their physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual well-being. And it was "in the interior of your house", he felt, that these personal needs should be addressed and taken care of. Let us listen to him:

"It is more than enough during a mission to be entirely at the service of the people but within the precincts of our dwelling all needs must be cared for – whatever concerns the missionary personally must not be neglected".<sup>14</sup>

"I am sorry that you are overloading yourself with work. I do not approve of this at all: it has the double disadvantage of exhausting your men and keeping them too long outside the house... In God's name, let them return, let them return to their communities to renew themselves in the spirit of

their vocation; otherwise it is the end of our missionaries, they will soon be nothing more than sounding cymbals".<sup>15</sup>

"Plan all things wisely. Above all, always reserve time for study and for your personal sanctification in the interior of your house. That is indispensable".<sup>16</sup>

"One must moreover be greatly attached to the house. He who only looks on it as a hotel where he only passes through would do no good therein".<sup>17</sup>

In this way, the Oblate is able to venture out safely into the wide world of the apostolic ministry provided that his heart and his community are solidly bound together in an indivisible unity. This is at the origin of the following rule from the Founder's pen: "As soon as the business which occasioned their journey has been taken care of, they will immediately return to their house, considering themselves happy to be able to rejoin the heart of their community which they should have regretted to leave".<sup>18</sup>

## 2. THE OBLATE RULE AS "INTERIOR COMMITMENT"

If attachment to the community already marks an important dimension of Oblate interiority for the Founder, what actually take place there marks yet another. That is why he was so happy at Father Tempier's decision to join his future society and why he looked upon it as "a present from heaven". It was, he said, "the need we have of a priest who thinks as you do about the interior life of the community".<sup>19</sup>

At this level of interiority what exactly did the Founder have in mind? What elements would he come to regard as the salient features of the of the "interior life" of his community, and

thus for all his missionaries? In short, what would it take to have the Oblate community become what he would later call the "common center", the "earthly paradise", the "delicious rendezvous"?

It is our view that three essential elements combine to form Bishop de Mazenod's idea of the "interior life" of the Oblate community:

a. "*Among yourselves, charity, charity, charity...*"<sup>20</sup>

To his dying day, the Founder always advocated a "most tender, affectionate and sincere charity among ourselves". In the thinking of the Founder, fraternal charity was another word for "interior life", that is, a life regulated above all by the bonds of love between the members of the community, bonds that would "make our house an earthly paradise".<sup>21</sup> His idea of charity was not a stoic or platonic type of affection, "an intellectual love devoid of all feeling, more appropriate to stoics than to true Christians".<sup>22</sup> On the contrary, he had in mind something of the deep affection that characterized Jesus' friendship with his disciples. To achieve a good grasp of what the Founder had in mind for his followers, we have to refer back to what he himself called "his immense capacity to love others", a quality for which he always thanked God. In a letter from Rome, he explains:

"I cannot get used to living apart from the people I love. We will be so happy in heaven... although fully absorbed in God we will love our friends more than ever. Jesus loved man – some more than others – even though he had an intuitive vision of God. Here, then, is our model – with all due respect to those refined mystics who, in the name of perfection, would give us a different nature which would certainly not be as good as the one God has given us."<sup>23</sup>

b. *"In the name of God, let us be saints."*<sup>24</sup>

To Leon Bloy we owe this thoughtful phrase: "There is only one sadness in life – not to be a saint".<sup>25</sup> In many ways, however, Eugene de Mazenod anticipated it by several decades. The inner desire for perfection is another important element in the Founder's notion of Oblate interiority. When it came to perfection, he would urge, "we must never say, "That is enough!"<sup>26</sup> "How could you dream of accomplishing a mission like yours if you did not exert every effort to attain the perfection of your vocation?"<sup>27</sup> Or again: "They ought to live... in the perpetual desire of attaining the summit of perfection".<sup>28</sup> Without such a lofty resolve, quickened and maintained in the secret depths of one's heart, there could be no interior life to speak of, at least not in the Founder's eyes. It should be noted moreover that Saint Eugene de Mazenod never conceived or thought of this desire for perfection in an individualistic or strictly "private" sense; on the contrary, it was always seen and willed in terms of apostolic service to the Church and zeal for the salvation of souls.

c. *"Live always in conformity to your holy Rules"*<sup>29</sup>

The third dominant principle of Oblate interior life as Saint Eugene envisaged it, was fidelity to the Rule. "Read, meditate and observe your Rules", he said, "and you will become true saints".<sup>30</sup> "Let us therefore value these Rules as precious, let us ever keep them before our eyes, still more in our hearts; let us nourish our souls regularly with the principles contained in them, let us act, speak and think only in conformity with their spirit".<sup>31</sup>

The Founder never separated the "letter" and the "spirit" of the Rules. For him, both were sacred: the two con-

stituted a holy alliance, a "two-in-one-flesh" type of union, as it were, that was never meant to suffer separation or divorce.

Thus the structure of the Founder's notion of interiority for his Oblates is remarkable for its simplicity and, one might say, its "spiritual economy": a) a deep, heartfelt love for one another, b) a sincere and lively desire for perfection, and c) a faith-filled observance of the Rules. With these, he felt, his missionaries would lack nothing of any significance "to walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ and his Apostles".<sup>32</sup>

### 3. INTERIOR LIFE AND MYSTICAL VISION

Finally, at a third and even deeper level of interiority – one that lies at the heart of Saint Eugene de Mazenod's life of faith and hence his spirituality – is what we have chosen to call (I think quite rightly) "mystical union". Now the Founder was not a mystic in the generally accepted sense of the term, but a mystic he certainly was, albeit – once again – "in his own way"! It is to this more mystical side of the Founder's life of faith that we now turn our attention, a dimension all the more remarkable since, as we have already indicated, he was a very practical, "down-to-earth" type of person, administratively as well as spiritually.

One must concede at the outset that this is an area of the Founder's life that has not yet been explored or researched as thoroughly as one might wish. What we give here are but a few parameters within which such a study might be fruitfully conducted. In what follows, we take *mysticism* to mean "a genuine experience of God emerging from the very heart of our existence" (K. Rahner).<sup>33</sup>

It goes without saying that such an experience is already present in the tini-

est acts of faith, hope and charity. That is why the simple act of hope is essentially a mystical act: it consists in a real possibility which transcends our present reality. Love of one's neighbor and of the poor is also a mystical activity. In this case, one's interior vision sees through external – sometimes repulsive – appearances, and “sees” the face of Christ in the poor individual. It is the Founder's special manner of attaining an in-depth knowledge, purifying and reaching to the very heart of these theological virtues which reveal to us his spiritual journey. In this sense, mystical takes on the meaning of the Founder's effort of *total interiorization* with the resulting transformation of his awareness, or even of the most profound depths of his innermost being, the *ultimate mystery of his belonging to God in the service of the Church*.

By drawing upon Evelyn Underhill's profound insight with regard to mysticism, we can see how several of the traits characteristic of the mystic apply to Eugene de Mazenod. As far as the present author is concerned, mysticism is, above all, an activity, a labor to which one devotes one's entire being in the hope of achieving an encounter with God, even at the risk of the transformation of one's entire person. Such was the case for Eugene de Mazenod. His spirituality, a type of mysticism, is one of total commitment. He dedicates all his resources, his intellectual faculties as well as his physical and social existence to one sole end: to achieve an encounter with God in his inner life and in his daily life. Like many mystics, the Founder was often aware of the painful inadequacies of his effort to carry out this exalted project. He has the impression of always falling short of what he should be doing. In his constant effort to transform himself, in spite of some

successes, his goal seems to ever lie beyond his grasp.

Evelyn Underhill stresses yet again another aspect common to mystics<sup>34</sup>: the fact that they, like the Founder, have an immense capacity to love. Only love can explain mysticism. The mystic always remains a great lover, someone who has fallen in love with an Ultimate, an absolute that is every bit as living as it is personal. Can one have any doubt that the Founder's deeply lived experiences in prayer and oraison before the Lord were anything if not rooted in a passionate love? This is what he writes to one of his missionaries in Canada: “You could never love me with one hundredth of the love with which I love you. God, who destined me to be the father of a large family, has made me a sharer in the immensity of his love for men”.<sup>35</sup> And when he lets his heart speak, as it often does in his letters and his other writings, he does not need to carefully “select” his words; they flow spontaneously from within him as from a unique, mysterious internal abyss.

Genuine mystics also have this in common: they are particularly productive and fruitful – and that in the midst of a very intense apostolic service. Paradoxically, their intimate union with God is paralleled by a very keen sense of the mission and needs of the Church. The person who immediately comes to mind in this regard is the great mystic, Catherine of Siena and her incessant appeals for civil peace and the reform of her fourteenth century Church. We can think as well of Catherine of Genoa who constantly criss-crossed her native city seeking out poor people to help and sick individuals whom she would care for herself. There is also Mary of the Incarnation (Guyart) that exalted mystic who went searching for the Amerindians and set up a mission for them. Can

we in any way doubt that Eugene de Mazenod has won his place among these great mystics for whom Mary and Martha's personality was fused into one, for whom mystical union and apostolic activity became one as if solely by the grace of God? The bond between the interior commitment to God by faith and of bearing testimony to him as a missionary is one which is vital and organic, one that the Founder always understood very well.

But what really characterizes the mystic is the ability to see beneath external appearances, that is, *the ability to see the invisible and to perceive as truly present that which transcends time and space*. And was it not through the eyes and heart of his *faith*, that is, through his "spiritual senses", that he was given to see hear and touch his missionaries from afar? And did he himself not value, trust, and try to communicate these mystical perceptions and insights which others seem not to have perceived so profoundly or clearly?

In his study of the spiritual life of Bishop de Mazenod, Father Joseph Pielorz tells us that, already as a seminarian, Eugene was drawn to the great mystery called "the Communion of the Saints".<sup>36</sup> Here is an initial indication that he was given to see beyond what appeared on the surface. "The militant Church forms but a single whole with the Church triumphant".<sup>37</sup> But it was – and indeed would always remain – the Church around him, the Church "here on earth", that captured his heart and fired his religious imagination. It was this Church, the Church "incarnate", that would always occupy center stage in both his dreams and moments of highest consciousness. An early indication of this is his great trust in the prayers of those pious souls whom he knew personally. In a December 3, 1808 letter

to his mother, he wrote: "You have no idea how powerful are the prayers of the just. I have received more graces through their intercessory prayers than through the prayers of the saints, who already enjoy the glory to which we all aspire".<sup>38</sup>

Yet it was in his more mature years, as Founder and Bishop, that this notion of mystical union became more intense in Eugene de Mazenod's interior life. We can see it especially in his moments of solitude when he was alone, absorbed in prayer and oraison before the Blessed Sacrament and separated geographically from those with whom he so ardently yearned to be reunited. In those privileged moments the thought of his missionaries, dear to his heart, were not for him a distraction to be rejected. On the contrary, they served to intensify his sense of mystical union. There, perhaps more so than at other times, he experienced the "real" presence of those he loved so dearly. It was not the purely physical presence of his Oblates in prayer that captured the Founder's attention, but rather their mutual mystical sharing in his dialogue with God. Often, in his letters to his Oblates, he would describe his mystical encounters. We give below but a few examples:

"You could not believe how much I think in the presence of God of our dear Red River missionaries. I have only one way of drawing near to them and that is in front of the Blessed Sacrament, where I seem to see you and to touch you. And you for your part must often be in his presence. It is there that we meet each other in that living center which serves as our means of communication".<sup>39</sup>

"Oh no! Distance only separates bodies; the spirit and the heart leap over it easily".<sup>40</sup>

“The only means of bridging the distances is to be together at the same moment in the presence of the Lord. It is like finding each other side by side so to speak. We do not see each other, but we hear each other, we are conscious of each other, we become united in the same centre”.<sup>41</sup>

“I must say that it happens sometimes when I find myself in the presence of Jesus Christ that I experience a kind of illusion. It seems to me that you are adoring him and praying at the same times as I and with him being as present to you as to me, we feel as if we were close to one another, although not able to see each other. There is something very true in this idea. I revert to it constantly and cannot describe the good and the consolation I derive from this. Try to do the same and you will experience it as I do”.<sup>42</sup>

“The only thing that I do recommend to you is not to neglect your holy Rule... We raise the same prayers to heaven, we are inspired by the same feelings. You are present to us just as if we could see you. [...]”<sup>43</sup>

### III. CHANGES IN OUR PERCEPTION OF THE “INTERIOR LIFE”

As we have already pointed out, today and yesterday as well, our interior life does not nor did it ever exist in a vacuum separated from the time and space in which we live. It is continually conditioned and nourished by the “signs of the times” such as major changes in the history of the world and of the Church. There is no call here to dwell on all the historic – even paradigmatic – changes that have taken place. Suffice it here not to forget this dimension of the issue when we talk about *interior life* today. Father Fernand Jetté expressed it

well: “During the ten years that I have been Superior General, I have become more and more aware of the depth and extent of the change affecting the world and together with it the Church and ourselves. We are living a transition period that penetrates to the very depths of our being. [...] We feel that the change is profound even radical: a new world is being born and so is a new Church and a new man [...]”<sup>44</sup>

Times have certainly changed a great deal. The same can be said of our faith life and life in the Spirit and in the way we try to practice the interior life today. That means that the interior life must be conceived as a journeying, an asceticism, as progress being made along a well-marked road. From all time, the interior journey has, in fact, been presented as a road, a method, the following of a pathway. That is why, today and as it has been in the past, we can speak of the practice of the interior life.

The most substantial food for the interior man has always been found in an intense use of sacred texts which permitted him to attain knowledge of himself on a deeper level and a sense of his calling in life. This is as true today as it was in the time of the Founder. A spiritual awakening takes place when the soul bears the brunt of the shock of Sacred Scriptures – be it the Word of God either in the Bible, in our Constitutions and Rules or in history and the signs of the times: *vox temporum, vox Dei*. The reading of such sacred texts as an essential nourishment for the interior man leads inevitably to prayer: “When we pray, we speak to God, but when we read, it is God who speaks to us”.<sup>45</sup>

Obviously, today we read the Bible differently than it was read and interpreted in the time of the Founder. We can benefit from the entire biblical and liturgical renewal as well as a much

more nuanced and subtle hermeneutics and theology than we previously enjoyed. Naturally, all of this has its impact on our interior vision, and as a result, on our subjective way of viewing today the practice of the interior life. In the plethora of ascetical practices and devotions to which our new Rule invites us, there is less rigidity and more flexibility, spontaneity and room for personal creativity. Article 46 of our Constitutions, for example, invites us to follow Jesus Christ "in an *always creative* fidelity". The shifting of a number of major emphases and points of view with regard to the interior life notwithstanding, there exists between our new Constitutions and the old, a real, fundamental continuity with regard to the interior life of Oblates. To make us aware just how deep and substantive this is, especially in what concerns our faith life and prayer, we cannot do better than read Father Fernand Jetté's work, *O.M.I. The Apostolic Man: A commentary on the 1982 edition of the Oblate Constitutions and Rules* (see especially p. 186-219). In what follows, we want to point out certain new contributions the 1982 Rule has made to the interior life of Oblates.

#### 1. A DEEPENING OF LIVED THEOLOGICAL VIRTUES

First of all, the Rule puts a much greater and more explicit emphasis than before on the lived theological virtues. As Father Jetté has often stated: "Our new Constitutions insist on living the theological virtues. In doing so they take a real step forward from the old ones".<sup>46</sup> The reason for this is obvious today, even if it has not always been as well understood. Consecration in the religious life can no longer be seen or defined without reference to its being

rooted in Baptism and consequently in our dignity as Christians.

It was not a case of our former Constitutions being silent on this topic. We do indeed read in our 1928 Rule: "We ought especially to meditate on the theological virtues, and on the virtues of our Lord Jesus Christ, which the members of our Society must labour to acquire, and to show forth in their life and conduct". (Art. 254) This is an echo of the 1818 Constitutions where Father de Mazenod wrote: "They will especially meditate on the theological virtues and on the life and virtues of our Lord Jesus Christ [...]".<sup>47</sup> And yet, if the theological virtues are mentioned, it is only in passing, and so to speak, as one of many edifying topics on which one could meditate with great benefit.

On the other hand, our new Constitutions give the theological virtues a much more central and dynamic role in our religious life. "We are pilgrims, walking with Jesus in faith, hope and love" (C 31). "Growing in faith, hope and love, we commit ourselves to be a leaven of the Beatitudes at the heart of the world" (C 11). Father Jetté's enlightening commentary merits being quoted more at length: "Like the lay Christian, the religious is called to enter into a relationship with God, to live God's life and to grow in that same life. This life is expressed through the practice of the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity. Generally speaking, these virtues are little mentioned in the Constitutions of religious and often not much more in the formation of religious. There is a simple reason for this: these virtues are not specific to the consecrated life, whereas the evangelical counsels are. And yet everything in the religious life from fidelity to vows to the least observance,

is oriented to growth and development in the life of the theological virtues".<sup>48</sup>

## 2. A LESS "PRIVATIZED" AND "SEQUESTERED" PRAYER

Our old Constitutions and Rules, even the earliest editions, envisaged the interior life as a private, sequestered sort of undertaking, a life that had to be "immersed" in the protective womb of strict silence and solitude in order to develop and flourish. Today we are somewhat amazed at the extent to which the former Rule stressed the point of "strict silence" in the community, which was to be observed "from evening prayer till after the religious exercises of the next morning; and also during the three hours which follow the afternoon recreation",<sup>49</sup> and how it was "absolutely forbidden to break silence at those times, without the Superior's permission".<sup>50</sup> Add to this if you will, article 252 which stipulated: "It is not permitted to speak in the church, the choir, the sacristy, the kitchen, and the refectory, or the corridors, unless when necessary, and then only in a whisper".<sup>51</sup>

The picture that emerges is clear! In former times, there was an understandable conviction that progress in the interior life would be assured in proportion to how we prevented the world from disturbing our meditation and contemplation. Accordingly, "continual recollection" presupposed solitude, withdrawal, and silence. The world had to be quiet so that God might begin to speak. It was, one might say, "praying with closed eyes".

There can be no doubt that such a form of prayer still retains much validity for us today, especially since the world presses in on us with an ever greater immediacy and pervasiveness.

Yet the Oblate of today has a new challenge: *he must also learn to pray with "open eyes"*. Thus our new Rule would not have us turn our backs on the world for the duration of our prayer thus leaving the world, so to speak, completely "outside". Rather, as we have seen, the Founder never totally excluded the world from his oraison. Rather our new Constitutions broaden the scope and possibilities of prayer by encouraging us to believe that "each act in life is an occasion for personal encounter with the Lord who through us gives himself to others and through others gives himself to us" (C 31). And the article continues: "While maintaining within ourselves an atmosphere of silence and inner peace, we seek his presence in the hearts of the people and in the events of daily life". And so it is that, even totally absorbed in ministry, the interior man maintains a private area of his innermost life, a zone where the tumult of the world falls silent before the sound of God's voice.

Praying always involves changing our lives. And the more our lives change, the more we have to find new ways of praying. The Founder certainly understood this: "If we knew how to pray better", he said, "we would have more courage".<sup>52</sup> Today, the Rule gives us more latitude in our way of praying: "New forms of personal and community prayer can help Oblates encounter the Lord; they will welcome them with discernment and accept the challenges they present" (R 20) [R 38a in CCR 2000]. This is important because we are more sensitive today to the fact that God does not repeat himself, that he always comes up with something new, that each person is unique and therefore unique in his own particular needs and gifts. The 1972 General Chapter had already stressed this important point in its

message to the Oblates: "There can be no growth unless there is respect for one's uniqueness, unless one is free to respond to his personal graces and charism".<sup>53</sup> There is nothing new in this idea. Some centuries ago, Saint Francis de Sales had already stated it with characteristic simplicity: "I want to praise my Creator with the face he has given me". We do, indeed, find this in the Founder's life in his constant search for authenticity in his personal life, a quality which always remains a source of edification for all the men and women who know him well. As a result, our Oblate spirituality invites us, especially by our ability to listen, to be sensitive to people as individuals. Listening to others with sensitivity and in an attentive manner constitutes one more way of having "a pure heart", "the heart of a poor man". With this interior disposition of more attentive listening, our availability to others becomes, in turn, "an occasion for personal encounter with the Lord" (C 31).

### 3. THE SPIRITUAL GUIDE AND THE INTERIOR LIFE

We should have no illusions: the will of God has always been a source of continual discernment and the object of an indefatigable spiritual quest. This was true in the Founder's time; it is also true today. Yet in today's world – the only world in which we really "live and move and have our being" – the discernment of God's will and presence appears to us more complex, more problematic. In this important discernment process, we no longer feel comfortable with what we perceive as "easy" answers, "pre-emptive" solutions, or "authoritative" dictates. In short, we do not readily accept what has been called "premature foreclo-

sure" in the interior realm. Ambiguity, we have come to realize, is not something that can be completely overcome or eliminated, either from the human condition or from the experience of faith itself.<sup>54</sup>

The free and unsolicited initiatives that God constantly takes in our regard are always fraught with a profound ambiguity. In spite of this threatening aspect, the ambiguity of faith harbors a remarkable grace: it invites us to plumb the farthest reaches of our inner depths, and there in the vulnerability of a "dark night" to abandon ourselves more completely to the God of mystery. In any case, Saint Paul had already warned us: "We walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7). An Oblate spirituality that would eliminate or prematurely exclude ambiguity would, in contemporary eyes, be suspect and offer little to make it attractive.

For the Oblate, to accept ambiguity in his life does not imply always knowing what to do in his life, in the journey of his existence towards interiority. That is why it is necessary more than ever that he seek the advice of seasoned individuals, men equipped to interpret for him the call of God in his life. No doubt, an awareness of his vocation always retains the character of a personal discovery, but it is even more that of being surprised on the road and seized by God. The role of the spiritual guide is that of introducing one to this mystery. The man seeking the interior dimension needs a guide, someone to journey with him, a spiritual master. And in choosing this individual, the important thing is to choose someone who has experienced "the vertigo of the Absolute" and who in the course of his own journey of interiority has already had an experience of God and his Spirit. In short, the one who takes on the re-

sponsibility of guide in the matter of the interior journey should be a mystagogue who knows how to initiate others into the mysteries, especially that great mystery which was at the centre of the Founder's life, "the indispensable necessity of imitating Jesus Christ".<sup>55</sup>

It is obvious that our way of seeing and practicing the interior life has undergone an evolution. Nevertheless, who can doubt the fact that, if Eugene de Mazenod was alive today, he would endorse wholeheartedly the emphases of our day? In our interior life as well as in our apostolic zeal, he would tell us that "we should leave nothing undared". Because, in the last analysis, Eugene de Mazenod's interior life was always lived in function of his mission to the poor. In an inspired moment, the 1986 Chapter defined the Oblate as "a person completely available to others, having the innermost disposition of Mary".<sup>56</sup>

RICHARD COTE

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> December 13, 1815 letter in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, no. 7, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> See the article, "Homme intérieur", in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, vol. 7, Paris, Beauchesne, 1969, col. 650-674.

<sup>3</sup> LEFLON I, p. 310.

<sup>4</sup> October 18, 1808 letter in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, no. 29, p. 63.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 300.

<sup>6</sup> June 29, 1808 letter to Madame de Mazenod in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, no. 27, p. 56.

<sup>7</sup> See retreat notes of 1831 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 15, no. 163, p. 182-194.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 191.

<sup>9</sup> February 20, 1859 letter in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 12, no. 1405, p. 130-131.

<sup>10</sup> See TACHÉ, Alexandre, *La vie spirituelle d'Eugène de Mazenod, fondateur des Oblats de Marie Immaculée, aux origines*

*de la société, 1812-1818*, an historical-doctrinal study, Rome, 1963, 102 p.

<sup>11</sup> See LEFLON I, p. 330.

<sup>12</sup> See retreat notes of 1831 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 15, no. 163, p. 184-185.

<sup>13</sup> See "Eugene's self-portrait, for Mr. Duclaux", in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, no. 30, p. 65-69.

<sup>14</sup> July 30, 1858 letter to Father Joseph Arnoux in *Selected Texts*, no. 259, p. 307.

<sup>15</sup> May 27, 1835 letter to Father Guignes in *Selected Texts*, no. 255, p. 303; also in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 8, no. 516, p. 160.

<sup>16</sup> March 26, 1842 letter to Father Jean-Baptiste Honorat in *Selected Texts*, no. 256, p. 304; also in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 1, no. 10, p. 20.

<sup>17</sup> August 12, 1817 letter to Father Henry Tempier in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, no. 20, p. 33.

<sup>18</sup> Constitutions and Rules of 1826, art. 348.

<sup>19</sup> December 13, 1815 letter to Abbé Henry Tempier in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, no. 7, p. 13.

<sup>20</sup> Legacy of the Founder, quoted in C 37.

<sup>21</sup> August 12, 1817 letter to Father Henry Tempier in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, no. 20, p. 32.

<sup>22</sup> Diary, September 3, 1837, see REY I, p. 734.

<sup>23</sup> December 9, 1825 letter to Father Henry Tempier in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, no. 211, p. 208 & 209.

<sup>24</sup> February 18, 1826 letter to the Oblates after the approbation of the Rules in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 7, no. 226, p. 40; also in *Selected Texts*, no. 208, p. 235.

<sup>25</sup> BLOY, Léon, *Textes choisis par Albert Béguin*, Paris, Eglhoff, 1946, p. 44.

<sup>26</sup> Act of Visitation of Billens, August 26, 1831 in *Selected Texts*, no. 290, p. 342.

<sup>27</sup> January 17, 1843 letter to Father Jean-Baptiste Honorat in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 1, no. 15a, p. 33.

<sup>28</sup> Act of Visitation of the Province of England, July 22, 1850 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 3, no. 4, p. 186.

<sup>29</sup> August 2, 1853 circular letter in *Selected Texts*, no. 213, p. 243.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 243.

<sup>31</sup> Retreat notes of October 8, 1831 in *Selected Texts*, no. 209, p. 236.

<sup>32</sup> November 4, 1831 letter to Father Hippolyte Courtès in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 8, no. 407, p. 40; also in *Selected Texts*, no. 210, p. 239.

<sup>33</sup> RAHNER, Karl, *Concern for the Church, Theological Investigation*, XX, New York, Crossword, 1981, p. 149.

<sup>34</sup> UNDERHILL, Evelyn, *Mysticism*, New York, New American Library, 1974, especially chapter 4: "The Characteristics of Mysticism", p. 81-94.

<sup>35</sup> May 1, 1852 letter to Father Henry Faraud in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 2, no. 165, p. 40 & 41.

<sup>36</sup> PIELORZ, Józef, *The Spiritual Life of Bishop de Mazenod, 1782-1812: A critical study*, doctoral thesis, Rome, 1955, p. 268-270.

<sup>37</sup> In a note written probably at the seminary, *ibidem*, p. 267, footnote 102.

<sup>38</sup> July 1-3, 1808 letter to his mother in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, no. 34, p. 76.

<sup>39</sup> March 6, 1857 letter to Father Albert Lacombe in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 2, no. 229, p. 140.

<sup>40</sup> May 26, 1854 letter to Oblates of the diocese of Saint Boniface in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 2, no. 193, p. 75.

<sup>41</sup> January 10, 1852 letter to Father Mark de L'Hermite in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 11, no. 1096, p. 71; also *Selected Texts*, no. 265, p. 315 & 316.

<sup>42</sup> February 3, 1847 letter to Father PIERRE

Aubert in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 1, no. 81, p. 162; also *Selected Texts*, no. 263, p. 311.

<sup>43</sup> November 24, 1858 letter to Father Augustine Maisonneuve and John Tissot in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 2, no. 258, p. 199; also *Selected Texts*, no. 350, p. 400-401.

<sup>44</sup> JETTÉ, Fernand, *The Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate: Addresses and Written Texts, 1975-1985*, Rome, 1995, p. 316 & 317.

<sup>45</sup> ISIDORE DE SEVILLE, *Sentences III*, 8, P.L., LXXXIII, 679.

<sup>46</sup> JETTÉ, Fernand, *The Missionary Oblate....* p. 262.

<sup>47</sup> Constitutions and Rules of 1818, Second Part, Chapter One, par. 5 in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 61.

<sup>48</sup> JETTÉ, Fernand, *The Missionary Oblate...* p. 125.

<sup>49</sup> Constitutions and Rules of 1928, art. 249.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem*, art. 250.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*, art. 252.

<sup>52</sup> August 12, 1817 letter to Father Henry Tempier in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, no. 20, p. 32.

<sup>53</sup> *Community*, (Rome 1972), no. 12, p. 15.

<sup>54</sup> See COTE, Richard, "Dieu chante dans la nuit. L'ambiguïté comme invitation à croire" in *Concilium*, no. 242, 1992, p. 117-128.

<sup>55</sup> Retreat notes of October 1831 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 15, no. 163, p. 191.

<sup>56</sup> *Missionaries in Today's World*, Rome, 1986 no. 57, p. 27.

## JESUS CHRIST

*Summary; I. Jesus Christ in the life of Eugene de Mazenod:* 1. Beginnings of this relationship and its development up to the priesthood; 2. As Founder and Father of the Oblates; 3. As Bishop of Marseilles. *II. In the 1982 Constitutions and Rules:* 1. Foreword and Preface; 2. The Oblate charism; 3. Oblate formation; 4. Organization of the Congregation.

Eugene de Mazenod: "a person passionately committed to Jesus Christ"; his spirituality: an "essentially Christocentric" spirituality; that is how the spirituality of the Founder has been described.<sup>1</sup> In the present article, we will study the place occupied by Christ in Eugene de Mazenod's life and in the Constitutions and Rules published in 1982.

### I. IN THE LIFE OF EUGENE DE MAZENOD

Three theses have been presented at the Gregorian University on the spirituality of Eugene de Mazenod.<sup>2</sup> A few articles in the review, *Etudes oblates*, later known as *Vie Oblate Life*,<sup>3</sup> also treated of Christ in the life of our Founder. In the light of these studies, and in a special way in the light of the series *Oblate Writings*,<sup>4</sup> we will consider the place Jesus Christ held in the life of Eugene de Mazenod.

A clear demarcation of this area, and especially a doctrinal synthesis of this subject matter is difficult to establish. Adherence to Jesus Christ was a distinguishing feature of Eugene's whole life. It was an experiential encounter with a person, the person of Jesus Christ, and the living relationship established between the two expressed in an ongoing fashion. This friendship showed itself through the events and grew through the pains and joys of life.

Knowing and loving Christ lie at the heart of his life, but they do not exist there in isolation. They are united to the love of the Father and the Holy Spirit. They find their expression in striving to attain the glory of God, in faithful loyalty to his will, in the love of the Church and the poor. For Eugene de Mazenod, Church and Christ were one and the same thing: "to love the Church is to love Jesus Christ and vice versa".<sup>5</sup> This knowledge and love are evident in his devotion to the Sacred Heart, his attachment to the priesthood, his love of the Eucharist.

To love Jesus Christ, to be faithful to him, permeate all aspects of the Founder's personal life, all aspects of his relations with the Oblates and all aspects of his pastoral responsibility as priest and bishop.

To get a better grasp of the place Christ held in Eugene de Mazenod's life, we will pursue it through the stages of his life. The first stage is that of the inception and development of this relationship until his ordination to the priesthood; the second, that of the direction he took as Founder and Father of the Oblates; the third, that of his apostolic development with regard to the people of his diocese.

### 1. ITS INCEPTION AND DEVELOPMENT TO THE PRIESTHOOD

Eugene de Mazenod was born into a Christian family in Aix-en-Provence on

August 1, 1782. During his childhood, he was initiated into the realities of the faith. He would later write: "God placed in me, I would almost say, a kind of instinct to love him. My reason was not yet formed when I loved to dwell in his presence, to raise my feeble hands to him, listen to his word in silence as if I understood it. By nature lively and irrepresible, it was enough to bring me before the altar to make me gentle and utterly tranquil, so ravished was I by my God's perfections, as if by instinct I would say, for at that age I did not understand them."<sup>6</sup> His mother and his maternal grandmother Joannis taught him to kneel, make the sign of the cross and pray.

In 1791 at eight years of age, Eugene was exiled to Italy with his family because of the French Revolution. In 1792 at Turin, he would make his First Holy Communion and receive confirmation. But it was in Venice especially (1794-1797), thanks to the efforts of a young priest and good educator, Don Bartolo Zinelli, that his Christian spirit would develop along with the first signs of his devotion to Jesus Christ. Eugene was in his adolescent years and he began to consider a vocation to the priesthood.

Don Bartolo set up a well defined rule. After rising in the morning and reciting morning prayers, "I will unite my puny acts of adoration to those of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, [...] I will slowly pray an Our Father with great respect for this prayer which issued forth from the lips of our Lord Jesus Christ himself [...] [I will offer to God] my exercises of piety, my studies, my work, my most insignificant actions, [...] in union with the sentiments of his adorable heart. [...] You, O Mary [...] you, my Guardian Angel, my holy patrons [...] be my intercessors before God

and the heart of Jesus. [...] Before leaving my room, I will turn toward the church and pray on bended knee for Jesus to bless me, saying: *Jesu, fili David, non dimittam te, nisi benedixeris mihi.* [...] I will then take some holy water, kissing respectfully the wounds and heart of my crucifix [...]." And the rule ends with these words: "If I remain faithful to this rule, my life will be worthy of the name I bear and Jesus Christ will be my reward in heaven, my strength and consolation throughout my life and at my death".<sup>7</sup> In October 1795, when Eugene accompanied his mother to Livorno on her way back to France, he hung a large crucifix around his neck and under his jacket; the crucifix was large enough to be noticed from the outside.<sup>8</sup>

Father Pielorz makes the observation: "By guiding his disciple especially to a love of God adapted to his age and temperament, that is, a love which was vivid, sensitive, tender and demonstrative, given concrete form in a personal devotion to Our Lord, to the Blessed Virgin and the saints, Don Bartolo gave him the tools to overcome his personal demons".<sup>9</sup>

The following period (1797-1805) was a period of crisis. Eugene experienced lukewarmness, flaunted his self-conceit, committed sin and became "slave of the devil".<sup>10</sup> In 1797, he left Venice in the company of his father and his uncle. He traveled to Naples where he spent a year of suffering and boredom; then, again in their company, he proceeded to Palermo (1799-1802). In 1799, he was seventeen. In Palermo, a family would come to his assistance; it was the family of the Duke of Cannizzaro. Especially helpful was the Duchess, a holy person. May 12, 1798, Don Bartolo had written him: "Always keep in mind your devotion to the adorable

heart of Jesus [...] be faithful to all your Christian duties".<sup>11</sup> But no, even if he remained a good enough Christian, it was worldliness and lukewarmness that were gaining the upper hand in his life.

In 1802, Eugene returned to Aix-en-Provence to live with his mother. His spiritual condition had not changed. At twenty years of age, he wanted his own place in the world; he felt no attraction for marriage. In vain, he sought to return to Sicily. For some time he devoted himself to working for the prison population in Aix. Grace was certainly at work in him. One fine day, on a Good Friday, it revealed its presence in a much more intense manner. It would change his life. In 1814, he recalled: "I looked for happiness outside of God and for too long with resulting unhappiness. How often in my past life had my wounded, tormented heart taken wings for God from whom it had turned away! Can I forget the bitter tears that the sight of the cross brought streaming from my eyes one Good Friday? Indeed they welled up from the heart, there was no checking them, they were too abundant for me to be able to hide them from those who like myself were assisting at that moving ceremony. I was in a state of mortal sin and it was precisely this that made me grieve. I could then, and also on some other instance, perceive the difference. Never was my soul more satisfied, never did it feel such happiness; for in the midst of this flood of tears, despite my grief, or rather through my grief, my soul took wings for its last end, towards God its only good whose loss it felt so keenly. Why say more? Could I ever express what I experienced then?"<sup>12</sup>

This was his "conversion". Several things strike us here: Eugene realizes

that he is in the state of mortal sin; the sight of the Cross opens his eyes; he weeps copiously and he takes wings towards God his only good. This grace would leave its imprint on his whole life: He experiences the mystery of Christ; he turns heart and soul to God, Father of mercy; he is washed in the blood of Christ. This was a day he would never forget, as he would never forget the person of Jesus crucified who saved him.

At this stage, he felt an ever more pressing need to become a priest. In October of 1808, he entered the major seminary of Saint Sulpice. Two things are noteworthy during his time at the seminary: His ever more profound devotion to Jesus Christ which shows up in his letters and other writings, and the impact the French school of spirituality has on him.

Volumes 14 and 15 of *Oblate Writings* offers us a lot with regard to his letters. Eugene learned that his uncle Fortuné would not accept being named a bishop. He wrote to his father: "Is that the difficulty that puts my uncle off? My goodness, when one wears the livery of Jesus Christ, ought one to fear anything, and should one not place one's hope in him who strengthens us? Let us thoroughly go over the duties that our character as Christian and priest impose upon us."<sup>13</sup> That was in 1815. That same year, he sent some Scripture texts to his friend Emmanuel Gaultier de Claubry who had shared with him his difficulties as a Christian because he "publicly professed faith in Jesus Christ". And he added: "So it is by no means Eugene, it is Jesus Christ, it is Peter, Paul, John, etc., who send you this wholesome food which when received with that spirit of faith of which you are capable will certainly not be without effect".<sup>14</sup> In a letter to the same

individual, December 23, 1807, he expressed his congratulations because “you carried the standard of the Cross rising above all human respect, braving the sarcasm and slights that your fidelity to this God, unknown today even amongst Christians, drew down on you”.<sup>15</sup> He wept over it, he said, “But these tears of compassion and grief were soon changed into transports of joy when I saw that, as you recalled to mind who he was, this Lord you serve, you behaved in a way worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ [...] and this victory comes to you from God, for it is a grace that he worked for you, not only because of your faith in Jesus Christ but also because you suffer on his account. Sweet effects of charity amongst Christians, by which all the members of the mystical body of which Jesus Christ is head, *caput*, feel and take part in the sufferings as well as the victory that each member suffers or wins. If this marvelous communion is not sufficiently felt, it is because one does not reflect on its excellence, for it takes its origin in the very bosom of the divinity.”<sup>16</sup>

Letters to his mother and his sister are numerous. His mother showed little enthusiasm for his inclination to the priesthood. In writing to her, he continually sought to offer compelling reasons for his choice; his way of doing this was to reaffirm his relationship with Jesus Christ. In writing to his sister who was preparing to marry, he reminded her of her Christian duties and obligation of fidelity to Christ. Here are a few examples.

He reassures his mother of his deep bond with Jesus Christ and asks how he could say “no”, to Jesus Christ who loved him so much and has invited him to follow him in the priesthood. Christmas Day of 1808, he wrote her: “Ah! my very dear mother, did you think that I was not with you this night. Indeed,

yes, darling mother, we spent the night together at the foot of the altar, which for me represented the crib in Bethlehem; together we offered our gifts to our Saviour and asked him to come to be born in our hearts and strengthen all that is weak in us. [...] So let us offer God all these travails; let us consider that Jesus Christ left the bosom of his Father to clothe himself in our flesh [...] Let us often look for one another in the heart of our adorable Master, but above all let us share often in his adorable Body; it is the best way to bring us together, for by identifying ourselves with Jesus Christ, we become one with him, and through him and in him we become united with one another. Last night my thought was that you would have wanted to honour the coming of this blessed Child, born for us, by laying him down in your heart. As I had the same happiness at practically the same hour, I united myself to you with all my soul. Do you not wonder at the greatness of our soul? How many things it takes in at the same time! What an immense expanse it covers in a flash! It is ravishing. I was adoring Jesus Christ in my heart, I adored him in yours, I adored him on the altar and in the crib, I adored him in the heights of heaven.”<sup>17</sup>

In February of 1809, he told his mother what a happiness it was “sharing in the divine mission of the Son of God”, and how for a long time, “I should rather have been at war with it [the world], enemy as it is to Jesus Christ [...]” “Am I to resist his voice and pine away in an alien land? [...]” “We are Christians [...]” “What royal family would not feel itself honoured to become extinct in the person of a priest, invested with all the powers of Jesus Christ [...]?”<sup>18</sup>

A man such as he, “strongly moved by God’s spirit to imitate Jesus Christ in

his active life”, could he “sit back with arms folded” and do nothing?<sup>19</sup> At the time of receiving minor orders and the sub-diaconate, he came back to the same theme: “If only you could have been there, dear mamma. How fervently you would have beseeched the Lord to grant me the grace of making a worthy response to so many favours [...] I must confess that I feel a sense of confidence that astounds me [...]”<sup>20</sup> And upon receiving the sub-diaconate: “So do not grudge, dear mamma, do not grudge this poor Church, so terribly abandoned, scorned, trampled under foot but which even so was the one who gave birth to us all in Jesus Christ, the homage that two or three individuals [...] wish to pay her. [...] And what reason could you possibly have for wanting me to delay any longer from committing myself, and from devoting to the Spouse of Jesus Christ, which this divine Master formed by the shedding of all his blood, every moment of a life I received only to use for God’s greater glory.”<sup>21</sup> Finally, on the day of his priestly ordination, December 21, 1811, in a letter bearing the abbreviation, L.J.C. (Praised by Jesus Christ) which he had been using for a few months already, Eugene wrote his mother: “Dear, darling mother, the miracle has been wrought: your Eugene is a priest of Jesus Christ”.<sup>22</sup>

In these texts, we can see many references to Christ already present, that will resurface in Oblate spirituality, namely, Christian identity, spirit of faith, persecution endured for Christ’s sake, suffering for Christ’s sake, the cross of Jesus as standard, the mutual presence of individuals in the Mystical Body, the birth of Christ in us, our common union in the reception of the Body of Christ, sharing in the divine mission of Christ the Savior, war waged against the world, enemy of Jesus

Christ, the Church abandoned and despised, the blood of Christ shed for us, confidence, loyalty to the divine will...

In writing to his sister, Eugenie, Eugene would remind her of her Christian identity, her obligations: a life of prayer, the cross of Christ, Eucharistic observances. He would make allusions to his own “conversion” and to his past life. He prayed for her before her marriage.<sup>23</sup> When she was married, he proved to be strict with her, in keeping with the spirit of the times and his own temperament, with regard to her attendance at the theater and dancing: “But you have too clear an idea of the sanctity of our vocation, the purity of the law of Jesus Christ, not to be aware that the cowardly abandonment of a single point of that heavenly teaching [...] is to set oneself apart, turn one’s back on Jesus Christ [...] Heart of mine, you understand very well that in imagining such things, I am far from supposing that they will happen; I have every expectation of seeing you resist courageously all the world’s allures, honouring the virtue which you have always professed, and setting an example of Christian perfection in the midst of the host of the enemy of Jesus Christ. To live in this perfection, you will have several things to observe: as your brother and a cleric, I have a two-fold title to spell them out for you. [...] By your change of state, of necessity you are thrust into the world and obliged to live in the midst of that corrupter, you therefore need to embrace the cross of Jesus Christ even closer than you did in your hidden life, you must go and draw even more often from the graces of the Saviour in the perennial well-spring of his adorable sacraments. I have often said to you and I repeat it with even more reason today, you do not go often enough to holy communion.”<sup>24</sup>

January 21, 1809, in a letter to his mother, he says: "Let her go into the world, she is cut out for that, but once there let her be Christian and very much the Christian. People must realize that the reason she does not go to the theater is that she is a disciple of Jesus Christ, that she does not go dancing because she is a disciple of Jesus Christ, that she does not eat meat at suppers given on days of abstinence because she is a disciple of Jesus Christ. In other words, she must give witness that Our Lord has his chosen ones in all classes of society, who are faithful to him in all life's circumstances. Above all, I pray she will not give up the practice of frequenting the sacraments; that is where she will find strength."<sup>25</sup> And February 9, 1811, after congratulating his sister on the care she lavished on her daughter, Natalie, he said again: "Carnival time is back again [...] Let us take a look now and again at our crucifix; we will find in our divine Model's wounds the answer to all our miserable excuses. It is in this faithful mirror that we will discern what he will tolerate and what he forbids. Let us open our hearts to his, listen to his voice, let's not stupefy ourselves and then we'll see if all the petty reasonings of the world's followers don't collapse and dissolve before a single one of the rays of light that emanate from Our Lord when we have recourse to him in silence and meditation. [...] He wanted you to serve as an example for all the persons in whom he would inspire thereafter the holy desire to work out their salvation in the world. [...] When you are obliged to be present at a ball, or in other rowdy gatherings, bring often to mind God's presence, a precious practice you cannot be too familiar with; and make use too of the other practices I gave you last year: death, the moment of the point of death,

judgment, hell; according to what time it is, take yourself off in spirit and keep company with saintly people praising and blessing the holy Name of God, the Carmelites [...] the Religious [...] the Trappists [...] When one has faith and even a tiny modicum of love of God, it is easy to find ways of not losing sight for too long of one's well-beloved. [...] But the infallible way [...] is going often to the sacraments."<sup>26</sup>

Already previously Eugene had complained that his family were not receiving communion frequently enough. In a letter to his mother, he wrote: "I will not be happy until I see a change on this matter. It is the only quarrel I have with my darling family: Our Lord Jesus Christ is not being honoured in it in the way he wants: mother, grandmother and sister – all give me cause for sorrow on this matter."<sup>27</sup> To conclude, we quote one last letter, a letter to his sister, Eugenie. This passage summarizes the whole matter: "Let us love the good God with all our heart, let us use this world as if we did not use it, that is without becoming fond of its vanities and lies. I do not know if you ever put into practice a suggestion I think I gave you, namely never to let pass a single day without meditating on some saving truth. [...] Alas! What a subject for regret it is for me as I speak to you; I know better than anyone how I have abused the Saviour's graces, and I know what it costs to have kicked against the goad, and it is to save others some tardy and almost irremediable regrets that I do not cease to cry out: children of men, how long will your hearts be closed? [...] Pending my return when we will be able to fix together what is the most expedient thing for you, continue to frequent the sacraments [...] Are you not a married lady, a mother, a nursing mother because it is God's

will? So in fulfilling the duties of a woman, a mother, a nursing mother you are doing what is pleasing to God, and how could one maintain that in fulfilling the duties that God has imposed on us, be they what they may, we are not fit to respond to all the sweet invitations he makes to all his own to come to him, to draw from his Sacrament strength and life [...]”<sup>28</sup>

In these letters, we see what a deep impression Jesus Christ had made on Eugene and how the life of Christ was a source of inspiration for his correspondence. If we now examine Eugene’s attitude during his seminary days, we find the same bent with, in addition, the influences of the spirituality of the Sulpicians and of the French school. His prayers, his meditation, his exercises of piety, his apostolate are a reflection of this inspiration. What comes to my mind is his morning prayer to the Trinity and the prayer, *Jesu vivens in Maria*, which has become a part of the Oblate prayer tradition. I think of his spiritual life firmly focused on Christ. Concerning this, Father Taché wrote: “Jesus is constantly the point of reference for him. [Eugene] turns to him as to the perfect priest, the model of those who are bound to render to God the worship that is his due. Consequently, devotion to Jesus is par excellence that of the priest totally faithful to his vocation. As one who contemplated Jesus in all his mysteries, he would examine himself with regard to the perfection demanded of each action to make it similar to that of Jesus and would demand of himself an unwavering love. United to Jesus in this way, he would have only one desire, that of having others love Him.”<sup>29</sup>

Eugene was ordained to the priesthood December 21, 1811. In a letter to

his mother, he expressed the fullness of his joy.<sup>30</sup> He wrote to his spiritual director, M. Duclaux, describing his emotions: “Very dear and beloved Father, I am writing this on my knees, prostrate, overwhelmed, stunned, to share with you what the Lord, in his immense, incomprehensible mercy, has just accomplished in me. I am a priest of Jesus Christ. [...] O my dear Father, there is only love in my heart. I am writing at a time when my heart overflows, to use an expression the Apostle must have used in a moment like the one I am experiencing. If the underlying sorrow for my sins, that is always with me, still persists, it is also true that love has changed its nature. [...] I am a priest! You have to be one to understand what it means. Just to think of it sends me into transports of love and gratitude, and if the thought of my sinfulness recurs, love abounds all the more. *Jam non dico vos servos*, [John 15:15] etc. *Dirupisti vincula mea. Tibi sacrificabo hostiam laudis* [Psalm 115:16-17] etc. *Quid retribuam Domino* [Psalm 115:12] etc., are like so many arrows that pierce this heart that has been so cold until this day. [...] Starting with the days preceding ordination and especially after ordination, I think I know Our Lord Jesus Christ better. What would it be like to know him as he is!”<sup>31</sup>

These same reactions are the ones that predominate in his Mass intentions and his general resolution. “First mass, Christmas Eve: for myself. To obtain forgiveness of my sins, love of God above all things, and perfect love of neighbour. [...] The Spirit of Jesus Christ. Final perseverance, and even martyrdom [...] Love of the cross of Jesus Christ, suffering and humiliation. [...] General resolution to be wholly God’s and for all, to flee the world and

all it may offer as pleasures, etc., to seek only the cross of Jesus Christ and the penance due to my sins [...] Do we resemble Jesus Christ? Do we imitate Jesus Christ with all our strength; do we live the life of Jesus Christ? Then we shall infallibly be saved.”<sup>32</sup>

## 2. AS FATHER AND FOUNDER OF THE OBLATES

Toward the end of 1812, Eugene left Paris to return to Aix. In 1813, he gave sermons in Provençal in the church of the Madeleine among which was his talk to the poor of Jesus Christ. “The Gospel must be taught to all, and in a way in which it can be understood. The poor, that precious portion of the Christian family, cannot be left in their ignorance. So important did our divine Saviour consider them that he took it upon himself to instruct them; and he gave as proof that his mission was divine, the fact that the poor were being instructed: *Pauperes evangelizantur*. [...] It is a matter of learning what the Lord asks of you in order to give you eternal happiness. [...] Come now and learn from us what you are in the eyes of faith. You, the poor of Jesus Christ [...] my brethren, my dear brethren, my dear respectable brethren, listen to me. You are the children of God, the brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, the co-heirs of his eternal Kingdom [...] There is within you an immortal soul [...] a soul redeemed at the cost of the blood of Jesus Christ [...] O Christians, recognize your dignity [...]”<sup>33</sup>

In Aix, Eugene also founded the Congregation for Youth. “The endeavor is a difficult one, I have no illusions on this point; it is even dangerous [...] But I fear nothing because I put all my confidence in God and because I am seeking only the glory of God and the sal-

vation of the souls he redeemed through his Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ [...]”<sup>34</sup> And in the act of consecration for his young people: “Once again, through this official document, we boldly declare that we acknowledge Our Lord Jesus Christ as our God and Savior, sovereign Lord and Master, whose faithful disciples we wish to be for our entire life”.<sup>35</sup>

In December of 1814, Eugene made an eight-day retreat. It was based on a Jesuit author, Father Francis Nepveu, in his work, *Retraite selon l'esprit et la méthode de saint Ignace pour les ecclésiastiques*, 1749 edition. It would prove to be very helpful to him and would bring increased flexibility to his spiritual life, perhaps too dependent on his Sulpician education where the priest was first and foremost “God’s monk”.<sup>36</sup> In this context, the priest would primarily be the apostolic man, the man of Jesus Christ’s Kingdom. The Founder’s twenty-one meditations need to be re-read.<sup>37</sup> We find there: “Humility is visible in particular in the incarnation, poverty in his birth, mortification in the circumcision, abandonment to his Father’s will in the flight into Egypt, obedience in the dependence he had on Mary and Joseph during the 30 years of his hidden life. These are the five virtues opposed to the five principal obstacles that impede the re-establishment of God’s glory, and his Reign in man’s heart [...]”<sup>38</sup> And further on, with the “two standards” and the “three degrees of humility”, we find “the obligation of declaring oneself boldly for Jesus Christ and imitating him in his public life”.<sup>39</sup> And in conclusion, “All metaphor aside, I have been a sinner, a great sinner, and I am a priest. With the exception of having defiled my body with women, a wretchedness from which the goodness of God has preserved me as by a mira-

cle, I have followed every maxim of a corrupted world. The evil has been done, good alas still remains to be done. What I have done up to now is not worth mentioning. People are deceived, I am falling far short of my obligations. I must pay double and when I compare my way of acting with that of my model, my God! How far I still am from it! Pride, anger, seeking of self, etc. How indeed can I say: *Vivo ego iam non ego vivit enim in me Christus* [Galatians 2:20] There are no half-measures, if I want to be like Jesus Christ in glory, I must first resemble him in his humiliations and sufferings, like Jesus crucified; let me try therefore to conform in all I do to this divine model so as to be able to address to the faithful these words of St. Paul: *Imitatores mei estote sicut et ego Christi* [I Corinthians 4:16] If these words cannot be applied to me, I must renounce reigning with Jesus Christ in his glory.<sup>40</sup> "Yes, my King, I seem to burn with desire to distinguish myself by some striking feat of arms, my every desire is to wash away in my blood the shame of my past defections and to prove to you, if need be, in fighting for you that your magnanimity has found the way to triumph over an ingrate and his treachery."<sup>41</sup>

In 1815-1816, Eugene founded the Mission of Provence which would become the Congregation of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. In July of 1816, he clearly explained to the Missionaries of Aix that for them, Christ is Christ the Savior: "P.S. I wish you to change the end of our litanies; instead of saying *Jesus sacerdos*, we must say *Christe salvator*. That is the aspect under which we ought to contemplate our divine Master. Our particular vocation is such that we are associated in a special manner with the redemption of men;

Blessed Liguori has likewise put his Congregation under the protection of the Saviour. Would that we, by the sacrifice of our entire being, endeavour not to render his redemption useless, both in regard to ourselves and in regard to those whom we are called upon to evangelize."<sup>42</sup>

In 1818, Eugene wrote the first Constitutions and Rules. A number of these elements are present in the Constitutions and Rules of 1982. Here are the main texts from the 1818 Constitutions which deal with Jesus Christ. "In a word, use the same means as those used by our Savior when he wished to convert the world; you will achieve the same results. What did Our Lord Jesus Christ do? [...] What must we do, in turn, to succeed in re-conquering for Jesus Christ so many souls who have shaken off his yoke? [...] It is urgent, therefore, [...] to teach these degenerated Christians who Jesus Christ is [...] and to extend the empire of the Saviour [...]"<sup>43</sup> And the definition the Oblates: "[...] to form a group of diocesan priests who will live together and who will strive to imitate the virtues and examples of Jesus Christ, mainly by dedicating themselves to preaching the word of God to the poor."<sup>44</sup> Their founder is Jesus Christ, the very Son of God; their first fathers are the Apostles. They are called to be the Saviour's co-workers, the co-redeemers of mankind. [...] The Church, that glorious inheritance purchased by Christ the Saviour at the cost of his own blood, has in our days been cruelly ravaged."<sup>45</sup> What is asked is that they "preach, in a word, like the Apostle, Jesus Christ and him crucified, *non in sublimitate sermonis, sed in ostensione spiritus*, that is, showing that they are imbued with what they are teaching and they have already started to put it into practice themselves before teaching

it to others."<sup>46</sup> "In a word, [the missionaries] will strive to become other Jesus Christs, scattering abroad in every direction the good odor of his wonderful virtues."<sup>47</sup> "The priests will live in such a way that they will be able to celebrate worthily each day the Holy Sacrifice [of the Mass]"<sup>48</sup> "Their only distinctive sign will be that which is proper to their ministry, that is, a crucifix which they will always wear about their neck [...]. They will often fix their eyes on this Crucifix, take it in their hands, and address aspirations to Him of whom it reminds them. They will kiss it in the morning when they hang it round their neck, and at night when they place it near their pillow; also before putting on, and after taking off the priestly vestments and on every occasion they judge appropriate to offer it to someone to kiss."<sup>49</sup> "Mental prayer will be made in common [...] in the evening before the altar as a kind of visit to the Blessed Sacrament for one half hour. They ought especially to meditate on the theological virtues, and the life and virtues of Our Lord Jesus Christ which the members of our Society must profoundly reproduce in themselves."<sup>50</sup> "The ministers of the Gospel will hold Christian mortification in highest esteem. [...] Mainly, they will apply themselves to interior mortification, subduing their passions, overruling their self-will at every turn, striving, in imitation of the Apostles, to glory in the sufferings, rejection and humiliations of Jesus Christ."<sup>51</sup> To be accepted among our ranks, "one must have a great desire for one's own perfection, a great love for Jesus Christ and his Church, a great zeal for the salvation of souls."<sup>52</sup> "The novices ought to make it their aim to honour in a special manner the hidden life of our Lord Jesus Christ [...] Ambitious to walk in the footsteps of this Di-

vine Model, their sole endeavor will be to imitate him in his private life. [...] They will show the most profound respect for all priests, honouring in them the person of the Son of God whom they represent on earth."<sup>53</sup> It is "the spirit of charity that binds them all together in Jesus Christ".<sup>54</sup>

February 17, 1826, Leo XII granted the Congregation his approval under the title of Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. It was a grand celebration, but the years that followed proved painful for Father de Mazenod: misunderstandings, problems in Marseilles, bereavement, sickness.<sup>55</sup>

These trials proved to be a very painful for Eugene, but the Lord helped him through them all. To Father Tempier, he expressed his confidence in Jesus Christ and told of the consolations he received from him. "Although I expect each day more bad news, when they arrive it is impossible to ward off a profound impression of sadness, especially when domestic sorrows come and pile themselves on top of the burden already too heavy to bear. I will say to you however that I am not discouraged and that I am afflicted without being laid low. It seems to me that Our Lord will help us by his grace to endure all our sorrows."

"This morning, before communion, I dared to speak to this good Master with the same freedom that I would have had if I had had the happiness to live when he walked on earth, and if I had found myself in the same predicament. I said Mass in a private chapel, I was not impeded by anyone's presence. I exposed to him our needs, asked his light and his assistance, and then I surrendered myself entirely to him, wishing absolutely nothing else than his holy will. I took communion in this frame of mind. As soon as I had taken

the precious blood, it was impossible for me to withstand such an abundance of interior consolations that it was necessary, in spite of my efforts not to reveal before the brother server what was going on in my soul, to utter sighs and shed such a quantity of tears that the corporal and the altar cloth were saturated. No painful thought provoked this explosion, on the contrary, I was well, I was happy and if I was not so miserable, I would believe I was loving, that I was grateful. This state lasted quite a long time; it was prolonged during my thanksgiving, which I only shortened for a reason." "I concluded from this that our good Saviour had wished to give me proof that he accepted the sentiments that I had just expressed to him in the simplicity of my heart. I share this happening with you with the same simplicity, for your own consolation and for your encouragement. Do not bring it up again to me, and continue to pray for me."<sup>56</sup>

If we examine the correspondence of the Founder with his Oblates, references concerning Jesus Christ come back constantly. The Oblates "announce Jesus Christ from one sea to the other";<sup>57</sup> they make "redolent the good aroma of the name of Jesus Christ";<sup>58</sup> they "spend their lives in extending the kingdom of Jesus Christ";<sup>59</sup> they see "the souls redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ";<sup>60</sup> they "would suffer such an affront for the love of Jesus Christ";<sup>61</sup> they are "real apostles of Jesus Christ";<sup>62</sup> they are united together in Jesus Christ: "Dear Courtès, let us be united in the love of Jesus Christ, in our common perfection, let us love each other as we have done up to now, let us, in a word, be one [...]"<sup>63</sup> "Every day they must be careful to celebrate the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass [...] And whence will you draw the strength, but

from the Holy Altar, and from Jesus Christ your Head?"<sup>64</sup> They direct their prayers for the mission to Jesus Christ and Mary: "We must look to her for the prayer of Jesus Christ to be extended to those too (now so many) he said he would not pray for. *Non pro mundo rogo.* (John 17:9) This thought is one I often dwell on, I pass it on to you, with my blessing and a brotherly embrace."<sup>65</sup> When faced with the death of his Oblates, the Founder suffered like Jesus suffered when confronted with the death of Lazarus.<sup>66</sup> He sees them in Heaven "close to our Lord Jesus Christ whom they have followed on earth";<sup>67</sup> when dealing with Oblates who were leaving the Institute, he recalls their relationship with Jesus Christ: "[...] I am affected to the point of saying like Our Lord: *Tristis est anima mea usque ad mortem.* (Mt 26:38). [...] And while I see Turks die rather than not live up to their word, when in doing so they invoke the name of God, priests will falsify promises of quite another kind, made knowingly and willingly to Jesus Christ, taking him as witness and under his own eyes! It is frightful."<sup>68</sup>

In this correspondence, it was truly the spirit of Jesus Christ who was inspiring Father de Mazenod. To M. Viguier, a priest who wanted to join the Oblates, the Founder sent this clear synthesis: "The missionary, being specifically called to the apostolic ministry, should aim at perfection. The Lord destines him to show forth anew, amongst those of his own time, the marvelous things that were done of old by the first preachers of the Gospel. [...] What we have found most apt to help us attain thereto is to come as close as we can to the evangelical counsels, faithfully observed by all those who have been employed by Jesus Christ in the great work of the redemption of souls. [...] We live

in a community. [...] The spirit of charity and of the most perfect brotherhood reigns amongst us. Our ambition is to gain souls for Jesus Christ. All the wealth of the earth cannot satisfy our avarice, we must have heaven or nothing or, to say it better still, we wish to assure ourselves of heaven while earning nothing on earth but to be persecuted by men. If this prospect does not frighten you and if you are firmly resolved to persevere all your life in our holy Society, come running – our arms and our hearts are open to you and we promise you the same happiness that the Lord deigns to let us enjoy.”<sup>69</sup>

### 3. AS BISHOP OF MARSEILLES

October 14, 1832 in Rome, Eugene de Mazenod was ordained titular bishop of Icosia. The French government was not informed of this. The result was a period of humiliation and deep suffering for the new bishop, but three years later, in 1835, the affair was settled. December 24, 1837, Eugene would take possession of the See of Marseilles as bishop.

Faced with the prospect of becoming a bishop, Father de Mazenod experienced a genuine joy: “I am called suddenly to receive the plenitude of the priesthood [...]”<sup>70</sup> to become fully “successor of the Apostles”.<sup>71</sup> At the same time, he is mulling over his past and his former sins; he renews his confidence in the goodness of God: “[...] I acknowledge myself to be without virtues and merits, and notwithstanding that I do not despair of my God’s goodness, and I count always on his mercy, and I hope that I will finish by becoming better, that is, by dint of supernatural helps and habitual assistance of grace, I will acquit myself better of my duties and cooperate with the plans of

the heavenly Father and his Son Jesus Christ, my most lovable Saviour, and the Holy Spirit who hovers over my soul prior to invading it again in a few days time.”<sup>72</sup> Before his episcopal ordination, he “entertained the hope of carrying there [to Icosia, in Algeria] myself and in the person of our missionaries the cross of Jesus Christ”.<sup>73</sup> The same held for Marseilles: “I must attach myself to this people as a father to his children”,<sup>74</sup> become “pastor and father invested with the very authority of Jesus Christ whom I must represent in the midst of that portion of his flock that will become thus my own flock [...]”.<sup>75</sup> The letters of Saint Paul to Timothy and Titus would be a constant source of inspiration for him.<sup>76</sup>

In his pastoral letters as bishop, the importance of Jesus Christ for the sanctification of the faithful becomes obvious.<sup>77</sup> They are “Christians”; they must contemplate Jesus Christ; they must nourish themselves from his body; they must live with him through the liturgical seasons; they must cooperate with him in the work of salvation. Often these pastoral letters were written for the season of Lent; they made it possible to give a more complete synthesis of the role Jesus Christ played in the Christian life. I quote some examples.

February 28, 1838, Bishop de Mazenod reminds the people of his diocese of their obligation to practice penance: “Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who came into the world to save mankind, Jesus Christ who willed to take upon himself all the sins of the world to expiate them by the shedding of his blood and his death, excludes no one from this obligation. On the contrary, he proclaims to all those who wish to benefit from his Redemption that they must apply to themselves the infinite value of his merits through personal

penance which they will impose upon themselves [...] Indeed, Jesus Christ had clearly manifested his intentions to the Jews when, in response to their questions, he answered that a day would come when his disciples would fast when he would no longer be with them. [...] The Apostles so thoroughly integrated the knowledge of their Master's will that from the time when he was taken up, they always fasted in preparation for important endeavors in their holy ministry [...]"<sup>78</sup>

"For the Christian, Lent is a time of renewal in faith and piety [...]"<sup>79</sup> "A knowledge of catechism teachings communicates to the already baptized child, the very object of faith. [...] He knows what he believes and professes. [...] The teachings of Jesus become his own teaching. He is truly a Christian by belief, and as Saint Paul says, Jesus Christ is formed more and more in him to the extent that he grows in knowledge of this holy truth."<sup>80</sup> "The world did not learn to know Jesus Christ (John 1:10) because it was unable to receive this Spirit of truth. If it had been able to receive this Spirit of truth (John 14:17) and if it had been obedient to its inspirations, it would have acknowledged that Jesus Christ himself is the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6) and that salvation is found in none other than he (Acts 4:12). [...] Even more, united to Jesus Christ, going through him to God as its end, being illumined by his light and living with his life, already clothed in Jesus Christ himself (Galatians 3:27), according to the vigorous expression used by the Apostle, it would work to achieve an ever higher level through interior growth beyond the powers of its own nature to the form of the perfect man and the full stature of the fullness of Jesus Christ."<sup>81</sup>

"The Church has brought you to

birth in Jesus Christ [...]"<sup>82</sup> "You are Catholics, children of this holy Church that Jesus Christ has acquired at the price of his own blood (Acts 20:28). It is a public society of which you are the members [...] It has a supreme head who in your regard represents its invisible head, Jesus Christ, the pastor and bishop of your souls. (2 Peter 2:25)"<sup>83</sup> Pastors, missionaries, religious bodies work to bring this task to completion. "Yes, justifiably, we rely upon the secondary pastors since they are already sufficiently identified with us that from now on our thinking is their thinking, our sentiments, their sentiments, our words, their words, or rather that their thoughts sentiments and words along with ours are identified to those of Jesus Christ [...]"<sup>84</sup> "No, we have no need of some recent experience to know what good results always come from the missions. Assuredly, who could doubt it, when we know that they are nothing else than the exercise of the power to teach Jesus Christ bestowed on his Church; when we know that the priests who conduct these missions do not become involved in this work of zeal and of charity on their own initiative, but they are sent by the bishops who, in turn, are sent by Jesus Christ [...]"<sup>85</sup> "The religious orders, ever engaged in hand to hand combat with errors and wayward human passions, always dedicated to forming Jesus Christ in souls, to re-establishing or extending his reign, always opposed to evil and powerful for good, live only for the life, happiness and future of the Church."<sup>86</sup>

Bishop de Mazenod put a lot of emphasis on the reception of the sacraments, the Sacrament of Penance in particular, and as he had done with his family, the reception of the Eucharist: "This is not the way that the Lord, rich in endless mercy, acts toward men. He

invites them, he urges them to come to conversion, to come sit at this table, to eat his flesh and drink his blood, at every moment, he opens to them the treasures of his love [...]”<sup>87</sup> “The intention of this holy Mother [the Church] is not for you to limit yourself to a mere annual fulfillment of the obligation of receiving the Eucharistic Bread; she would like to see her children properly prepared to receive the Bread of Life at least on the occasion of every solemn feast. On these days, she calls them, she invites them to come to the sacred banquet. It is especially by this means that she wishes to have them share in her celebrations. These are divine nuptials she is celebrating in a holy union with her heavenly Spouse and she feels a keen desire to see all her own people share in the happiness of this union, that no words can express, by taking their place in the banquet hall after having donned the wedding garment. As we have already said, united to Jesus Christ we enter into a blessed solidarity with him, a solidarity upon which our salvation exclusively depends. The Christian life itself is nothing other than a never-ending communion with Jesus Christ. It is therefore incumbent upon us in loyal gratitude to take advantage of the Church’s invitation in order to bond ourselves in ever stricter union with our Savior who constantly desires with an ardent desire to eat the Passover with us (Luke 22:15).”<sup>88</sup>

Later on, in 1859, he returns to the theme of union with God and union with Jesus Christ: “This happiness of the elect consists in the intuitive vision of God and in possession of him whom we attain by possessing Jesus Christ whose very person is the prize that we must win, as the Apostle’s vigorous language expresses it: *Ut Christum lucrifaciam* (Philippians 3:8). Now, it is

not in God’s plan for us to enjoy that intuitive vision in this earthly life; in this life, we know God through faith, but as for possessing him, we attain this shrouded by the veil of mystery in holy communion. A most strict union between Jesus Christ and ourselves is then established; it is so close that it can be said: The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him. (John 6:57) And just as Jesus Christ’s divinity is inseparable from his humanity, the Father and the Holy Spirit are also inseparable from the person of the Divine Word and take up their abode with Him in the one in whom Jesus Christ lives and who lives in Him. Thus the union between the Creator and the creature, in communion, is the most perfect that one could possibly think of. [...] Our prerogatives as children of God and brother’s of Jesus Christ could not have a higher expression. [...] Moreover, it is incomprehensible that a Christian could refuse to share in this union of infinite worth [...] By uniting himself to Jesus Christ in this way, the Christian is partaking in the most perfect manner in the sacrifice of the cross and according to his good dispositions shares in the infinite merits of this sacrifice. He becomes one with the adorable Victim who sacrificed his life for him and the work of his Redemption is made secure and brought to perfection. Does he want to be saved? Does he seek his own greatness? It lies present there [...]”<sup>89</sup>

At the same time, this Eucharist establishes the closest bond between Christians and ensures resurrection to eternal life. “Indeed, the Church being but one body of which Jesus Christ is the head, those who do not receive life from this head are dead members of the body; they no longer adhere to the body with divine bonds; the blood of Jesus

Christ, so to speak, no longer flows in their veins and in their brothers, with whom this noble blood is shared in all its power in holy communion, are hardly their brothers any longer; they no longer share the same blood. That is why the one who does not take his place at the divine banquet in some way breaks off the union with those who form one exclusive mystical whole with their Redeemer. They can no longer recognize him as one of their own; just like the disciples of Emmaüs who recognized their Master at the breaking of the bread, they cannot recognize a fellow Christian, that is, another Jesus Christ, in the person of the one who does not eat the divine bread and does not drink from the chalice of the Savior."<sup>90</sup> "Supernatural life is communicated to the soul who receives the Son of God and death is the punishment meted out to the one who does not share in the communion of his body and his blood. And in addition, after the death of the body, resurrection to true life will be the reward of this communion. It is the promise of blessed immortality."<sup>91</sup>

A final example is found in the liturgy. The February 8, 1846 pastoral letter is outstanding in this regard. Participation in the liturgical mystery, the mystery of Jesus' birth as well as that of his Passover can transform our lives. "The ancient practice of the Church has always been to prepare by a time of fasting and abstinence the celebration of its main feasts. [...] The four weeks of Advent [...] were distinguished by the same practices of mortification and same intensification of fervor as the vigils and they have the same objective in that they are a preparatory stage for the celebration of Our Lord Jesus Christ. [...] The same holds true for the holy time of Lent. Its goal is especially to prepare souls to share in the great

mystery of the Resurrection of the Man-God by leading them via the path of penance and suffering. He himself traced by leading them up Calvary Hill with him and to descend spiritually with him into the tomb to be born again with him to new life which he acquired by his victory over hell, sin and death."<sup>92</sup>

"Since he chose to walk with us in the likeness of sinful flesh and to be a victim for sin, we must walk with him according to the Spirit in order that the justice of faith might be achieved in us (Romans 8:3-4). Through the Spirit, we must be unceasingly with him [...] By this means, his own merits and the rights to a heavenly reward that he has acquired for us will be communicated to us; by this means we will be another He himself, living, suffering and dying with him in the course of the passing time of suffering and humiliation, resurrecting, triumphing and reigning with him on the day of eternal glory. Now, my very dear brothers, it is to practice this union of spirit and heart with Jesus Christ that the Church invites us to live the holy Forty Days before reaching Easter. During that time, we withdraw with him to the desert, we pray, we fast, we resist temptation with him, we soon engage ourselves in following him to bear in spirit the labors, the fatigue and setbacks of his public life. In the night, we find ourselves together on the mountain to reap the fruit of his prayers, and during the day, witnesses of his miracles, [...] moved by his inexhaustible charity, by his infinite tenderness for men, recollected in spirit, we listen to his divine word, and like Mary, his holy Mother, we mull them over in our hearts (Luke 2:19); we steep ourselves in the sentiments of our Redeemer; we allow ourselves to be caught up by the inspirations of his love; we refashion our soul according to the image of his

soul until he is so formed in us (Galatians 3:19) that we live his life of humility, labor and penance to such an extent that we become so conformed to his image constantly presented to us, that he should be in our regard the first born of a multitude of brethren and after having been called, we were justified and after having been justified, we were glorified (Romans 13:29-30).<sup>93</sup> Eugene de Mazenod would write in his will: "I implore God's mercy, by the merits of our divine Savior Jesus Christ in whom I place all my trust, to obtain pardon for my sins and the grace of my soul being received into holy Paradise".<sup>94</sup>

At the beginning of this article, we presented Eugene de Mazenod's friendship with Jesus Christ as "an experiential encounter with a person" and a "living relationship established between the two expressed in an ongoing fashion". A study of the texts and of Eugene's conduct only make this attitude stand out in bolder relief.

Eugene de Mazenod considered Jesus Christ, Son of God, as Savior: the one who saved him from his sins and the one who saved the world; he considered him as the Spouse of the Church, the one who is indivisibly united to her and who continues to suffer through her; he considered him a Friend without peer, a friend with whom he chose to cooperate fully in the work of salvation; he considered him the Model and Master of life, the one who incorporates us into himself, who introduces us into his mystery by his birth, his work of redemption, the one who asks us to suffer with him, to bear his trials with him, to resurrect with him in the glory of the Father.

Christ is his Mediator, the first object of his devotion; Christ feeds him every day with his bread and his presence; he stands by him in time of failure

and difficulties; he inspires him in his ministry, helps him to hold up when faced with opposition. Christ is the one who bonds him to people, to his family, to all his Oblate brothers with whom he is linked throughout the world. The Eucharist is at the centre of his life; Eugene spends hours before the Blessed Sacrament; he disseminates worship of the Blessed Eucharist everywhere he can; in it, he finds his strength and meets all those he loves. One day while he was in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament exposed in the church of Saint Theodore, he wrote: "I admit that I was the one who obtained for Jesus Christ the glory offered up to him for already six years in the church of Saint Theodore. [...] With a hidden joy [...] I was offering him everything he received in terms of honor, praise, thanksgiving, everything that had been offered him in terms of love of reparation. [...] I offered it to him with joy as if it came from myself in expiation for my own irreverences, my minimal response to the great illuminations and inspirations that God graciously gave me in the course of so many years with regard to the wonderful sacrament of our altars, in reparation for the paltry fruit that I harvested from the extraordinary experiences the person of the divine Savior frequently obtained for me, and which should have made of me a saint while as I have remained a wretched sinner. [...] I feel that God in his goodness is excessively good in making me understand these things, and in addition, in bestowing upon me the consolation I enjoy in overflowing measure during days such as this one and still others."<sup>95</sup>

In conclusion, at least three things are to be retained from this study of the Founder. First of all, the ongoing character of his devotion to Jesus Christ

from his infancy, but especially from the time of his "conversion" on a certain Good Friday and until his death. It held first place among his devotions. In October of 1857, he wrote: "It is a beneficial, praiseworthy and holy thing to pray to the angels and saints, [...] but our principal devotion must always be to Jesus Christ [...] the only sovereign mediator through the infinite merits of whom we may see our requests granted and attain eternal life".<sup>96</sup> Secondly, fidelity. The points, the particular aspects he stressed in his youth such as the cross, suffering with Jesus Christ, the Eucharist, zeal, participation in different mysteries.... are always the same. He studied them in depth, lived them, they became more a part of him, but they remained unchanged. Thirdly, the practical dimension of his love of Christ. It is a concrete love, which is rooted in the encounter with a person, which grows into an everyday friendship and develops from day to day through the experiences of life and the responsibilities in ministry. Saint Paul comes to mind: He pursues his chosen course to grasp Christ, having himself been grasped by Jesus Christ (Philippians 3:12).

To put the finishing touches on this presentation, we can read a very fine text, not one composed by Eugene de Mazenod, but approved by him about 1836 and treating of the novices' devotion to Our Lord Jesus Christ. It speaks of Jesus' hidden life. The text reflects the Founder's attitude and shows how, at the beginning of the Institute, Jesus Christ was at the very heart of Oblate life: "Since the primary end of our Society is to imitate Our Lord Jesus Christ as perfectly as possible, it is easy to understand that the novices' devotion should especially deal with the holy person of our adorable Savior. All they should propose to do during this trial

period is to set up the reign of Jesus Christ in their hearts and to arrive at the point that they no longer live except with his divine life and that they can say with Saint Paul: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me: *vivo ego, jam non ego*, etc. The Divine Savior must continue in some way in each one of them the life that he himself led on earth, a life of innocence and purity, of mortification and humility, in a word, a life embracing all the virtues [...]"<sup>97</sup>

## II. IN THE CONSTITUTIONS AND RULES OF 1982<sup>98</sup>

In the first part of this study, we have grasped up to what point Christ was present in the life of our Founder, Eugene de Mazenod. All the Oblate Constitutions from 1826 to 1966 have substantially adhered to the Founder's text. In 1966, in the light of the Second Vatican Council, a new text was composed and promulgated *ad experimentum*. At the 1980 Chapter, a final text which strove to be both faithful to the Council and deeply rooted in the thought of the Founder was adopted and approved by the Church. That is our present text. What about Christ in this text? Is his presence in it as constant as in the Founder's position, and faithful to it? In this second part, we will try to see if it is.

Christ is present in the *Foreword*, in the *Preface*, and all over in the first part of the Constitutions. It is the inspiration for the second part on formation and re-emerges in the third part on organization of the Congregation. The Oblate vocation is inconceivable without Christ both with regard to mission in the world and religious apostolic life. Firstly, we will reread the texts, pointing out all the

texts in the Constitutions and Rules which deal with Jesus Christ. At the same time, we will put forward a few special points that naturally flow from these texts.

## 1. FOREWORD AND PREFACE

The Foreword which introduces the Constitutions has as its first words: "Our Lord Jesus Christ". This text brings to mind the vocation of Christ, describes Eugene's vocation and that of the Oblates.

"Our Lord Jesus Christ, when the appointed time came, was sent by the Father and filled with the Spirit 'to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free, to proclaim the Lord's year of favour' (Luke 4: 18-19). He called men to become disciples to share in his mission; in the Church he continues to call others to follow him."

That is how the vocation of Eugene de Mazenod was born.

"Eugene de Mazenod heard that call. Burning with love for Jesus and his Church, he suffered deeply on seeing how God's people were abandoned. He chose to become 'the servant and priest of the poor' and to give his life wholly to them."

From there was born the vocation of the Oblates.

"Live together as brothers", he urged them; "Strive to imitate the virtues and example of our Saviour Jesus Christ principally through preaching the Word of God to the poor".

In the *Preface*, the first word is "the Church", – the Church as the Savior's inheritance and Spouse of Christ: "The Church, that glorious inheritance purchased by the Saviour at the cost of his own blood, has in our days been cruelly

ravaged. The beloved spouse of God's only-begotten Son is torn with anguish as she mourns the shameful defection of the children she herself bore".

After having passed in review the misfortunes of the Church – "we would hardly be able to recognize the religion of Christ from the few remaining traces of its past glory that lie scattered about", – we hear the call of the Church, the Spouse of Christ: "Faced with such a deplorable situation, the Church earnestly appeals to the ministers whom she herself enrolled in the cause of her divine Spouse, to do all in their power, by word and example, to rekindle the flame of faith that has all but died in the hearts of so many of her children."

Few priests respond to this call, but there are a few men, "zealous for the glory of God, who love the Church, and are willing to give their lives, if need be, for the salvation of souls". These are the ones whom the Founder immediately reminds of the attitude of Jesus Christ: "How, indeed, did our Lord Jesus Christ proceed when he undertook to convert the world? He chose a number of apostles and disciples whom he himself trained in piety, and he filled them with his Spirit. These men he sent forth, once they had been schooled in his teaching, to conquer the world which, before long, was to bow to his holy rule."

That is what we must do: "And how should men who want to follow in the footsteps of their divine Master Jesus Christ conduct themselves if they, in their turn, are to win back the many souls who have thrown off his yoke? They must strive to be saints. [...] They must work unremittingly to become humble, meek, obedient, lovers of poverty and penance, mortified, free from inordinate attachment to the world or to

family, men filled with zeal, ready to sacrifice goods, talents, ease, self, even their life, for the love of Jesus Christ, the service of the Church, and the sanctification of their brethren."

Then, filled with confidence in God, they could enter the lists and wage valiant combat on behalf of God's Kingdom. The field of action is vast in the extreme. There is need to "teach these degenerate Christians who Jesus Christ is. [...] We must spare no effort to extend the Saviour's empire and to destroy the dominion of hell [...]"

"Such are the great works of salvation that can crown the efforts of priests whom God has inspired with the desire to form themselves into a Society in order to work more effectively for the salvation of souls and for their own sanctification. [...]"

Having laid this basis, our Constitutions and Rules go on to speak of Jesus Christ and make reference to him.

## 2. THE OBLATE CHARISM

Already in article 1, Christ is present. He issues a call to us and we respond: "The call of Jesus Christ, heard within the Church through people's need for salvation, draws us together as Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate" (C 1). "[...] Cooperating with the Saviour and imitating his example, we commit ourselves principally to evangelizing the poor" (C 1).

In article 2, our gift is total. We abandon everything to follow him: "[...] [The Oblates are] men ready to leave everything to be disciples of Jesus. The desire to co-operate with him draws us to know him more deeply, to identify with him, to let him live in us. We strive to reproduce in ourselves the pattern of his life. Thus, we give ourselves to the Father in obedience even

unto death and dedicate ourselves to God's people in unselfish love" (C 2).

Article 3 goes on to explain that our gift is offered in community with him and the Apostles: "The community of the Apostles with Jesus is the model of our life. Our Lord grouped the Twelve around him to be his companions and to be sent out as his messengers (cf. Mark 3: 14). The call and the presence of the Lord among us today bind us together in charity and obedience to create anew in our own lives the Apostles' unity with him and their common mission in his Spirit" (C 3).

Article 4 adds that the cross of Jesus is in us and that it is through his eyes that we see the world redeemed through his blood: "The cross of Jesus Christ is central to our mission. Like the apostle Paul, we "preach Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ crucified". (1 Corinthians 2:2) If we bear in our body the death of Jesus, it is with the hope that the life of Jesus, too, may be seen in our Body. (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:10) Through the eyes of our crucified Saviour we see the world which he redeemed with his blood, desiring that those in whom he continues to suffer will know also the power of his resurrection. (cf. Philippians 3:10)" (C 4).

Article 5 states that the Congregation is missionary. "We are a missionary Congregation. Our principal service in the Church is to proclaim Christ and his Kingdom. [...] Wherever we work, our mission is especially to those people whose condition cries out for salvation and for the hope which only Jesus Christ can fully bring" (C 5).

Article 6 defines more accurately our mission, a mission received from Christ and which can be carried out only within the Church and in union with all his disciples. "Our love for the Church inspires us to fulfill our mission

in communion with the pastors whom the Lord has given to his people; [...] Our efforts will be characterized by a genuine desire for unity with all who consider themselves followers of Jesus, so that, according to his prayer, all may believe that the Father has sent him. (cf. John 17:21) Finally, [...] we are united with all those who, without acknowledging Christ as Lord, nevertheless love what he loves" (C 6).

Article 7 which treats of the work of the Oblate Fathers and Brothers reminds them of their common goal: "We spare no effort to awaken or to re-awaken the faith in the people to whom we are sent, and we will help them to discover 'who Christ is'" (C 7).

Article 9 deals with the Oblates as members of the prophetic Church and points out their basic mission: "We announce the liberating presence of Jesus Christ and the new world born in his resurrection" (C 9).

Article 10 speaks of Mary Immaculate, patroness of the Oblates. She is presented as the model of our faith and mission. Christ is clearly present there: "Open to the Spirit, she consecrated herself totally as lowly handmaid to the person and work of the Saviour. She received Christ in order to share him with all the world, whose hope he is. In her we recognize the model of the Church's faith and of our own" (C 10).

We welcome Christ and offer him to the world just like the Virgin Mary did. Open and obedient to the Spirit, we consecrate ourselves entirely to the person and the work of the Savior. This is what the Virgin did "as humble servant"; we will do it as well as humble servants and cooperators who freely dedicate ourselves to his work of salvation.

In Rules 1 to 10, two references are made to Jesus Christ. In Rule 3 [R7c in CCRR 2000], which treats of Oblate

Brothers, we read: "Oblate Brothers share in the common priesthood of Christ. They are called to cooperate in their own way in reconciling all things in him. (cf. Colossians 1:20)" And in Rule 7 [R 7g in CCRR 2000] which deals with reconciliation, we find: "We will reflect the understanding, patience and compassion of the Saviour".

That is the focus of the Constitutions on the mission of the Congregation. Christ lies at the centre of it. It is he who calls us, asking us to work with him. We leave everything to follow him; we allow him to live fully in us; we live in community with him like the Apostles did; we carry his cross; we see the world redeemed by his blood through his eyes; we are dedicated to spreading his Kingdom and to making him known to the world, especially the poor, who he is, Jesus Christ; we do this in the Church with all the disciples and we do it like he would do it, with his welcoming manner, his patience, his understanding as Savior. And in order to do it more effectively, we do it in union with Mary Immaculate who is mindful of receiving him to offer him to the world whose hope he is.

The following chapter, which deals with the religious apostolic life of the Oblate, teaches us how to bring it about, how Christ can and must become the centre of our lives.

From the outset, in article 11, we are placed in this perspective: our mission consists in the Kingdom of God, to proclaim it and to seek it above all things. We do it in community, in Christ: "Our communities are a sign that, in Jesus, God is everything for us. Together we await Christ's coming in the fullness of his justice so that God may be all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:28) (C 11).

And to achieve this, "growing in faith, hope and love, we commit our-

selves to be a leaven of the Beatitudes at the heart of the world". To this end, we will practice the evangelical counsels and living in faith, we will march forward in apostolic community.

The practice of the evangelical counsels, which finds its expression especially in the vows of religion, roots us even more deeply in Jesus Christ: "[...] we follow Jesus who was chaste and poor and who redeemed mankind by his obedience. [...] Community is the life-giving reality fashioned by the vows which bind us in love to the Lord and his people" (C 12).

It is in response to an invitation from Christ that we choose chastity. By chastity, "we consecrate ourselves to the Lord" and "this choice is also our way of giving witness to the depth of the Church's covenant with Christ, her only Spouse" (C 15). "In answer to a special invitation from Christ, we choose consecrated celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom (cf. Matthew 19:12)" (C 14).

And in Rule 12 [R 18b in CCRR 2000], it is specified that this chastity will help the Oblate to love others, love the world and the poor "as Jesus loves them." "Sincere friendship can foster the growth of an apostolic person, enabling one to love others as Jesus loves them" (R 12) [R 18b in CCRR 2000].

Poverty, chosen in like manner in response to a call from Jesus bonds us more strongly to him: "We follow a Master who became poor for our sake. "If you wish to be perfect", he said, "go and sell what you own and give the money to the poor... Then come, follow me." (Matthew 19:21) In answer to his call, we choose evangelical poverty" (C 19). And this choice, article 20 tells, leads us to a closer union with him: "Our choice of poverty compels us to enter into a closer com-

munion with Jesus and with the poor [...]" (C 20).

The same holds true for obedience. In following Jesus, the Oblates will be listening to the Father in order to dedicate themselves totally to the salvation of the world: "Christ's food was "to do the will of the one who sent him" (John 4:34). He "became obedient unto death, even death on the cross" (Philippians 2:8). Called to follow Jesus, we too listen attentively for the Father's voice so that we may spend ourselves without reserve to accomplish his plan of salvation" (C 24). And "in the Superiors we will see a sign of our unity in Christ Jesus; through faith we accept the authority he has been given" (C 26).

Finally, the vow of perseverance unites them to Jesus and leads them to a steadfast love, to love as Jesus did: "Jesus always loved those who were his own in the world, and to the very end "he showed how perfect his love was" (John 13:1). His Spirit inspires all Christians to constancy in their love. The same Spirit develops in us a close attachment to the Congregation. Our perseverance is thus a sign of Christ's fidelity to the Father" (C 29).

However, reaching beyond the demands of their vows and in order to achieve spiritual unity, Oblates are invited to live constantly in the faith. Consequently, they will ever live with Christ and will find him all over. That is the teaching of article 31 and those which follow on prayer, sacraments, asceticism, spiritual renewal (C 32-36): "We are pilgrims, walking with Jesus in faith, hope and love".

"We achieve unity in our life only in and through Jesus Christ. Our ministry involves us in a variety of tasks, yet each act in life is an occasion for personal encounter with the Lord, who through us gives himself to others and

through others gives himself to us. While maintaining within ourselves an atmosphere of silence and inner peace, we seek his presence in the hearts of the people and in the events of daily life as well as in the Word of God" (C 31).

In actual fact, "our life in all its dimensions is a prayer [a missionary prayer] that, in us and through us, God's Kingdom come" (C 32). Article 33 which describes our spiritual resources refers constantly to our relationship with Jesus Christ.

— Through the Eucharist which they place at the heart of their life and their action: "As we participate in its celebration with all our being, we offer ourselves with Jesus the Saviour; we are renewed in the mystery of our cooperation with him, drawing the bonds of our apostolic community ever closer and opening the horizons of our zeal to all the world" (C 33).

— Through visits to the Blessed Sacrament: "In gratitude for this great Eucharistic gift, we will seek the Lord often in his sacramental presence" (C 33).

— Through the Word of God: "The Word of God nourishes our spiritual life and apostolate. We will not only study it diligently but also develop a listening heart, so that we may come to a deeper knowledge of the Saviour whom we love and wish to reveal to the world. This immersion in God's Word will enable us to understand better the events of history in the light of faith" (C 33).

— Through the Liturgy of the Hours: "The Liturgy of the Hours is the prayer of the Church, the spouse of Christ. In it we praise the Father for his wonderful works and invoke his blessing on our mission" (C 33).

— Through periods of prayer: "In the prolonged silent prayer we make each day, we let ourselves be molded

by the Lord and find in him the inspiration of our conduct" (C33).

— Through examination of conscience: "Examination of conscience is important in helping us become aware of the ways in which the Lord calls and is present to us throughout the day. In this examen we evaluate the faithfulness of our response to him" (C 33).

In article 34, we are invited "to accept for love of the crucified Lord our personal sufferings, the various trials of the ministry and the daily demands of community life (cf. 2 Corinthians 12:10). Moreover, we will heed the invitation of the Lord when he calls us to practice other forms of voluntary penance..." (C 34).

And article 36 reminds us that we live this life of faith, this deepening of our intimate union with Christ, in union with Mary Immaculate. "With Mary Immaculate, the faithful handmaid of the Lord, and under the guidance of the Spirit, we enter into closer union with Jesus Christ. We will contemplate with her the mysteries of the Incarnate Word, especially in praying the rosary" (C 36).

In the rules which follow (20-22) [R 33a – c in CCR 2000], Rule 20 [33a] mentions new forms of prayer which can "help Oblates encounter the Lord." We welcome them with discernment.

Finally, in the section entitled, "The Apostolic Community", the theme that Jesus lives among us and constitutes our unity in view of evangelization surfaces again. "By growing in unity of heart and mind, we bear witness before the world that Jesus lives in our midst and unites us in order to send us out to proclaim God's reign" (C 37).

In article 40 which deals with prayer in common "one of the more

intense moments of the life of an apostolic community”, we remember the presence of the Lord and our spiritual bond with our absent brothers: “[...] One in spirit with those who are absent, we turn to the Lord to praise him, seek his will, beg forgiveness and ask for the strength to serve him better” (C 40).

Such is the religious apostolic life of the Oblate! Christ is truly at the heart of it: To follow him is our commitment and this loyalty in following him will cause us to leave everything else behind; it will help us to find him everywhere, in everybody and everything; it will lead us to live with him in prayer and self-denial and will urge us on to cooperate with him in the work of salvation. It is in him and him alone that we find the unifying element for our lives.

### 3. OBLATE FORMATION

In the second part of the Constitutions, the section dealing with Oblate formation, this presence of Christ is every bit as consistent. He it is, through his Spirit, who calls us and who molds us; this formation will consist in making him live more and more in us; it will cause us to enter into, understand, relish “the mystery of the Savior and his Church”, it “moves them to dedicate themselves to the evangelization of the poor”. It will take the form of a profound interior apostolic friendship with Jesus. In our studies, our attention will be focused on him; and in our ministry, he is the one we will find everywhere. Little by little, the Oblate who has made a personal commitment to Christ will grow to adulthood in the faith and as a genuine disciple and friend of Jesus.

Article 45 gives us the general picture: “Jesus personally formed the disciples he had chosen, initiating them

into ‘the mystery of the Kingdom of God.’ (Mark 4:11) As a preparation for their mission he had them share in his ministry; to confirm their zeal he sent them his Spirit. This same Spirit forms Christ in those who endeavour to follow in the Apostles’ footsteps. As they enter more deeply into the mystery of the Saviour and his Church, he moves them to dedicate themselves to the evangelization of the poor” (C 45).

In the following article (C 46), the Oblate’s commitment is defined more precisely. It is a commitment to Jesus Christ: “The goal of the formation process is that each of us become an apostolic man, capable of living the Oblate charism. Inspired by the example of Mary, we live in creative and ongoing fidelity our personal commitment to Jesus Christ, while serving the Church and God’s Kingdom” (C 46).

Article 50 puts this goal in sharper relief in first formation: “The purpose of initial formation is to develop gradually those whom Jesus calls to total discipleship [...]” (C 50).

Article 51 adds that educators and Oblates in formation are “disciples of the same Lord”; “formation personnel along with those in formation make up one community” (C 51).

We keep in mind the fact that “Jesus never ceases to call people to follow him and to proclaim the Kingdom. [...]” “We will also pray and have others pray that the Lord send labourers into his harvest” (C 52).

In article 53, it is pointed out that it will often be in Christian families or in youth groups that Jesus will be discovered and these youth will have to be assisted in discerning “what the Lord expects of them”: “Christian families, youth groups and Christian communities, whether parish or other, provide a favourable environment for the growth

of vocations. Many young people discover there the person of Jesus and feel the attraction of his message. [...] In a brotherly way we will help them discern what the Lord expects of them [...]” (C 53).

In the novitiate, the emphasis is on discernment of one’s vocation, on the novice’s response and his effort to grow in his friendship with Jesus and his preparation to discover him in everything. Two articles are dedicated to this theme: “Under the guidance of the Novice Master, the novice comes to grasp the meaning of religious consecration. He can thus discern the Lord’s call and, in prayer, make himself ready to respond” (C 55). “The novice, led by the Spirit living within him, develops his personal relationship to Jesus and gradually enters into the mystery of Salvation through liturgy and prayer. He becomes accustomed to listen to the Lord in Scripture, to meet him in the Eucharist and to recognize him in other persons and events” (C 56).

After the novitiate comes religious commitment, and there too, the focus on Christ, the Savior, will be more intense: “The novice, having experienced the Father’s love in Jesus, dedicates his life to making that love visible. He entrusts his fidelity to the one whose cross he shares, whose promises are his hope” (C 59).

His religious profession is made “in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (C 62), and his Oblate cross is a constant reminder of the love that unites him to Christ: “The Oblate cross which is received at perpetual profession is a constant reminder of the love of the Saviour who wishes to draw all hearts to himself and sends us out as his co-workers” (C 63).

In the formation which takes place after the novitiate, the Oblate scholas-

tics and brothers “will live out their consecration in such a way that it permeates all aspects and activities of their daily life. [...] They will gradually become men of God, missionaries rooted in Christ, who are ready to give themselves totally through their perpetual Oblation” (C 65).

And Rule 52 [R 65a in CCRR 2000] adds this point: “Spiritual formation aims at maturity in faith based on a personal decision for Christ” (C 52).

With regard to scholastics, the emphasis is on esteem for the ministry of Christ the priest, and it is asked that their studies be centered on Christ the Savior: “They will, moreover, be led to appreciate the gift of the priesthood through which they are to share in a unique way in Christ’s own ministry of priest, prophet and shepherd” (C 66). “Studies are centered on Christ the Saviour” (R 59) [R 66a in CCRR 2000].

With regard to the Brothers, the emphasis is on the necessity of knowing Christ: “In their prayer life Brothers will seek a personal and growing knowledge of the Incarnate Word so that they may encounter him in the lives of those who toil, especially among the working poor” (R 65) [R 67a in CCRR 2000].

As for ongoing formation, article 68 establishes its meaning and reminds us of the role of the Oblates as instruments of the Word: “God is ever at work in the world; his life-giving Word seeks to transform mankind, to build his People. We are instruments of that Word. We have thus to be open and flexible, learning how to respond better to new needs, how to find answers to new questions [...]” (C 68).

We have to remain open and available to accomplish the Word’s work in the new world which is unfolding.

Thus, Oblate formation will seek to make us genuine disciples of Jesus,

friends united to him by unbreakable bonds, who will have as their goal in life to make him known, loved, and to spread his Kingdom.

#### 4. ORGANIZATION OF THE CONGREGATION

In the third section of the Constitutions, the section dealing with the organization of the Congregation, the name of Jesus appears less frequently. At this point, we have to keep in mind the teachings that preceded: Jesus is present in all our communities; together, we form our communities around him (see C 3, 11, 37, 40). This thought should be a source of inspiration for us as we read the third section. It will surface in a few articles, but what will be especially stressed is that "Jesus is the source and model of authority in the Church. Just as he washed his disciples' feet, so too those in charge among us are called to serve and not to be served. Their service [...] [is to] foster a way of life based on faith and on a deeply shared love of Christ" (C 71) [C 72 in CCRR 2000].

Article 74 reminds us that the superiors as "stewards of the Lord [...] are accountable at each level of government to higher authorities [...]".

Article 80 [C 81 in CCRR 2000], repeats again that "our superiors are a sign of the Lord's loving and guiding presence in our midst" (C 81; see also C 26).

And finally, article 105 [C 125 in CCRR 2000] which treats of the General Chapter, says that Christ is with us: "United around Christ, the Oblate family shares the lived experience of its communities as well as the challenges and hopes of its ministry".

What must we retain from this second part? At least three conclusions:

First of all, no one can make a serious commitment to live the Oblate life without having experienced a genuine encounter with Jesus or having a burning desire to achieve this experience. To choose to become an Oblate implies first and foremost choosing Jesus, Jesus evangelizer of the poor.

Secondly, from the time of entering the novitiate, the entire formation always comes back to this same point for each candidate. Why have I come here? What place does Jesus Christ hold among my concerns? What am I doing to get to know him better? How do I daily express my commitment to him? How do I express my commitment to him on a daily basis? To what extent is he urging me on to a greater loyalty to the will of the Father and to a limitless devotion to the service of the Church and the poor?

Thirdly, every Oblate lives in Jesus Christ and for Jesus Christ: "he grows in friendship with him", "he seeks to become a missionary rooted in Christ"; he leaves everything to follow him; through his chastity, poverty, obedience and perseverance, he commits himself radically to follow him; his personal prayer, his community life, his mission through which he finds him all over, in events as in people, everything tends to foster his growth into adulthood in the faith and as a man who belongs to Jesus Christ. When that happens, he is truly a son of Eugene de Mazenod.

FERNAND JETTÉ

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See Paul VI, October 19, 1975 *Homily*, and VILLENEUVE, J.-M. Rodrigue, O.M.I., *Etudes analytico-synthétique de nos Saintes Règles*, Deschâtelets Archives, 1929; 1912 French commentary on the Preface.

<sup>2</sup> PIELORZ, Józef, *La Vie spirituelle de Mgr de Mazenod, 1782-1812*, Ottawa, Oblate Studies Edition, 1956; TACHÉ, Alexander, *La Vie spirituelle d'Eugene de Mazenod, 1812-1818*, Rome, 1960; MOOS-BRUGGER, Robert, *The Spirituality of Blessed Eugene de Mazenod, 1818-1837*, Rome, 1980.

<sup>3</sup> For example, GRATTON, Henry, "La dévotion salvatorienne du Fondateur", in *Etudes oblates*, I (1942), p. 158-171; D'ADDIO, Angélo, "Eugène de Mazenod et le Christ", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 38 (1979), p. 169-200; LAMIRANDE, Emilien, "Le Sang du Sauveur. Un thème central de la doctrine spirituelle de Mgr de Mazenod", in *Etudes oblates*, 18 (1959), p. 363-381; Oblate team from Frascati, "La relation personnelle avec Jésus eucharistique selon le bienheureux de Mazenod", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 37 (1978), p. 237-250; CIARDI, Fabio, "L'Eucharistie dans l'action pastorale du Bx de Mazenod", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 38 (1979), p. 39-50; Idem, "The Eucharist in the Life and Thoughts of Eugene de Mazenod", *ibidem*, p. 201-231.

<sup>4</sup> A collection of the writings of Eugene de Mazenod edited by Father Yvon Beau-doin, volumes 1 to 16, Rome, 1977-1995.

<sup>5</sup> Pastoral letter of February 16, 1860, in CHARBONNEAU, Herménégilde, *Mon nom est Eugène de Mazenod*, Montreal, 1975, p. 174.

<sup>6</sup> Retreat at Amiens, December 1811, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, no. 95, p. 215-216.

<sup>7</sup> REY I, p. 25-27.

<sup>8</sup> See PIELORZ, Józef, *The Spiritual Life of Bishop de Mazenod, 1782-1812*, in the manuscript English translation, p. 89.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 90.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 156.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 107.

<sup>12</sup> Retreat at the seminary in Aix, December 1814, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 15, no. 130, p. 81.

<sup>13</sup> Letter to his father August 16, 1805 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, no. 10, p. 20.

<sup>14</sup> Letter to Emmanuel Gaultier de Claubry, November 1805 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, no. 13, p. 25.

<sup>15</sup> Letter to the same person, December 23, 1807 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, no. 22, p. 41.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 41-42.

<sup>17</sup> Letter to his mother, December 25, 1808 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, no. 37, p. 84 & 85.

<sup>18</sup> Letter to his mother, February 28, 1809 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, no. 46, p. 102-103.

<sup>19</sup> Letter to his mother, April 4, 1809 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, no. 50, p. 117.

<sup>20</sup> Letter to his mother, May 29, 1809 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, no. 55, p. 126.

<sup>21</sup> Letter to his mother, October 11, 1809 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, no. 61, p. 139.

<sup>22</sup> Letter to his mother, December 21, 1811 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, no. 97, p. 227.

<sup>23</sup> See letter to his mother, November 19, 1809 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, no. 32, p. 73.

<sup>24</sup> Letter to Madame de Boisgelin, December 4, 1809 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, no. 35, p. 78-79.

<sup>25</sup> Letter to his mother, January 21, 1809 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, no. 43, p. 94.

<sup>26</sup> Letter to Madame de Boisgelin, February 9, 1811 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, no. 78, p. 176-177.

<sup>27</sup> Letter to his mother, November 11-14, 1809 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, no. 63, p. 144.

<sup>28</sup> Letter to Madame de Boisgelin, August 12, 1811 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, no. 90, p. 198-199.

<sup>29</sup> TACHÉ, Alexander, *La Vie spirituelle d'Eugene de Mazenod, 1812-1818*, p. 87. See also PIELORZ, Józef, *op. cit.*, p. 242 in the English manuscript translation.

<sup>30</sup> See December 21, 1811 letter in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, no. 97, p. 227.

<sup>31</sup> Letter to M. Duclaux, December 21, 1811 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, no. 98, p. 228-229.

<sup>32</sup> My Mass Intentions, December 25-27, 1811 and General Resolution, end of December 1811 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, no. 100 & 101, p. 230-232.

<sup>33</sup> Quoted in CHARBONNEAU, Herménégilde, *op. cit.*, p. 42-47; *Selected Texts*, no. 37, p. 58-59; 61-62.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 50.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 51.

<sup>36</sup> See PIELORZ, Józef, *op. cit.*, p. 243; TACHÉ, Alexander, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

<sup>37</sup> Retreat at the seminary in Aix, December 1814, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 15, no. 130, p. 77-108.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 97 & 98.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 104 & 105.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 97.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 97.

<sup>42</sup> Letter "To my dear brothers, the missionaries at Aix", July 1816 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, no. 12, p. 20.

<sup>43</sup> "Constitutions and Rules of the Society of the Missionaries of Provence", 1818, First Part, Chapter One, "End of the institute", par. 3, *Nota bene in Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 17-19.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibidem*, par. 1, article 1, p. 13.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*, par. 3, *Nota bene*, p. 15-16; *Selected Texts*, no. 8, p. 30, no. 18, p. 70.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*, Chapter Three, "Of other exercises, par. 1, Concerning preaching", p. 36.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*, Second Part, Chapter One, par. 4 "Of other principal observances", p. 55.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 57.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 57-58.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem*, par. 5, "Concerning prayer and exercises of piety", p. 61.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*, Second Part, Chapter Two, par. 2, "Concerning mortification and bodily penances", p. 64.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem*, Third Part, Chapter Two, par. 1, "The qualities required to be accepted", p. 85.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibidem*, par. 2, "The Novitiate", p. 87.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 90.

<sup>55</sup> See *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 7, p. XVII-XXVIII and MOOSBRUGGER, Robert, *The Spirituality of Blessed Eugene de Mazenod, 1818-1837*, p. 53-67.

<sup>56</sup> Letter to Father Henry Tempier, August 23, 1830 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 7, no. 359, p. 211-212.

<sup>57</sup> Letter to Father Jean-Marie Fleury Baudrand, January 21, 1847 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 1, no. 77, p. 154. See also vol. 1, no. 81, p. 164, vol. 2, no. 234, p. 146, vol. 4, no. 43, p. 136, vol. 5, no. 87, p. 177-178, vol. 13, no. 49, p. 68-69, no. 167, p. 197, no. 178, p. 208.

<sup>58</sup> Letter to Father Baudrand, January 11 & 25, 1850 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 1, no.

126, p. 233. See also, vol. 4, no. 33, p. 223, vol. 8, no. 485, p. 124.

<sup>59</sup> Letter to the Oblates of Saint Boniface, May 26, 1854 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 2, no. 193, p. 75, no. 211, p. 103. See also vol. 3, *Appendix*, no. 4, p. 187, 190, vol. 4, no. 2, p. 6, vol. 5, no. 79, p. 165, vol. 11, no. 1037, p. 6, vol. 13, no. 145, p. 168.

<sup>60</sup> Pastoral letter of December 21, 1845 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 3, *Appendix*, no. 1, p. 163. See also vol. 4, no. 31, p. 220, vol. 7, no. 259, p. 122.

<sup>61</sup> Letter to Father Étienne Semeria, June 3, 1851 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 4, no. 19, p. 69. See also vol. 2, no. 234, p. 146, vol. 3, *Appendix* no. 3, p. 182-183, vol. 6, no. 37, p. 140, vol. 7, no. 303, p. 158, vol. 8, no. 387, p. 17, vol. 10, no. 812, p. 29.

<sup>62</sup> Letter to Bishop Jean-François Allard, June 11, 1855 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 4, no. 23, p. 199. See also vol. 2, no. 273, p. 228, vol. 10, no. 990, p. 237.

<sup>63</sup> Letter to Father Hippolyte Courtès, March 3, 1822 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, no. 80, p. 89. See also vol. 3, *Appendix*, no. 2, p. 178, vol. 7, no. 350, p. 202, no. 371, p. 224, vol. 8, no. 403, p. 36 & 37, no. 406, p. 39, no. 511, p. 153-154, vol. 10, no. 811, p. 27, vol. 12, no. 1340, p. 44; also LAMIRANDE, Emilien, "Aspects du coeur de Mgr de Mazenod" in *Etudes oblates*, 13 (1954) p. 272-274.

<sup>64</sup> Act of Visitation of the Province of England, July 22, 1850 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 3, *Appendix*, no. 4, p. 189-190. See also, vol. 2, p. 176, vol. 3, no. 79, p. 128, vol. 7, no. 219, p. 15 & 16, no. 239, p. 93 & 94, vol. 9, no. 752, p. 199.

<sup>65</sup> Letter to Father Vincent Mille, July 24, 1831 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 8, no. 397, p. 32. See also vol. 11, no. 1234, p. 229.

<sup>66</sup> See letter to Bishop Toussaint Casanelli d'Istria, January 5, 1859 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 13, no. 177, p. 207.

<sup>67</sup> Letter to Father Courtès, July 22, 1828 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 7, no. 307, p. 164.

<sup>68</sup> Letter to Father P. N. Mye, October 31, 1823 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, no. 118, p. 126-127. See also vol. 6, no. 109, p. 118-119, vol. 7, no. 332, p. 184, vol. 8, no. 411, p. 47 & 48, no. 553, p. 203-204, no. 575, p. 234-235, no. 594, p. 259, vol. 9, no. 714, p. 151.

<sup>69</sup> Letter to M. Viguiier, priest, January 6, 1819 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, no. 38, p. 55-56. See also vol. 5, no. 62, p. 125.

<sup>70</sup> Retreat for the episcopate, October 7-14, 1832 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 15, no. 166, p. 201.

<sup>71</sup> Retreat preparatory to taking possession of the episcopal see of Marseilles, May 1837 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 15, no. 185, p. 235.

<sup>72</sup> Retreat for the episcopate, October 7-14, 1832 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 15, no. 166, p. 202.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 205.

<sup>74</sup> Retreat preparatory to taking possession of the episcopal see of Marseilles, May 1837 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 15, no. 185, p.235.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 238.

<sup>76</sup> See retreat for the episcopate, October 7-14, 1832 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 15, no. 166, p 208-209.

<sup>77</sup> See the article on *Eugene de Mazenod. His experience and his spiritual teaching*. The volume of Bishop de Mazenod's pastoral letters has yet to be printed. We used the copy kept in the Deschâtelets Archives in Ottawa. Our references give only the date and sometimes the theme of the pastoral letter since the pagination of the text is inadequate.

<sup>78</sup> February 28, 1838.

<sup>79</sup> February 28, 1848.

<sup>80</sup> October 21, 1849. For the new catechism of the diocese of Marseilles.

<sup>81</sup> February 2, 1850.

<sup>82</sup> February 2, 1842.

<sup>83</sup> March 12, 1849. The expression "acquired at the cost of his blood" or equivalents thereof appear over twenty times in the pastoral letters.

<sup>84</sup> December 25, 1837.

<sup>85</sup> February 2, 1839.

<sup>86</sup> January 19, 1845.

<sup>87</sup> February 14, 1844.

<sup>88</sup> February 8, 1846.

<sup>89</sup> February 20, 1859.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibidem*. The idea of the communion of the saints or of the Mystical Body in Jesus Christ is often present in the pastoral letters.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>92</sup> February 8, 1846.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>94</sup> Excerpt from his will of August 1, 1854 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 15, no. 191, p. 248.

<sup>95</sup> *Diary of the Founder*, March 17, 1839, quoted in *Vie Oblate Life*, 38 (1979), p. 46-47.

<sup>96</sup> October 14, 1857, Summary of Christian Doctrine.

<sup>97</sup> "Des dévotions propres aux membres de la Société", in *Etudes oblates*, 16 (1957), p. 267. See the complete text p. 267-274.

<sup>98</sup> This text was voted by the General Chapter of 1980 and published in 1982. Along with this text – in addition to the Preface – several excerpts from the Constitutions from the time of the Founder are quoted on various pages: 14, 16, 20, 24, 30, 36, 40, 46, 48, 54, 68, 72, 76, 98, 104, 122, 141.

## JOSEPH (SAINT)

*Summary: I. The Founder. II. The Rule. III. The General Chapters. IV. Superiors General. V. Observances and customs. VI. Preaching and publications. VII. After Vatican II.*

Devotion to Saint Joseph in the Congregation has gone hand in hand with the development of this devotion in the Church and even sometimes contributed to its development. "If devotion to Saint Joseph, according to his Holiness Benedict XV, has developed progressively in this last half century, there is no call for our Family, which led the way for this movement, to lag behind now."<sup>1</sup> The impulse came from high because this devotion held a prominent place in the personal piety of the Founder and in his rules of conduct for the Congregation.

### I. THE FOUNDER

Despite Father Eugene Baffie's<sup>2</sup> claims, one can hardly find traces of this devotion on the part of Eugene de Mazenod "from his tenderest years". These manifestations of piety and confidence were to come later on. It would seem that one has to see this devotion as being associated to his vision of the Church, bought by the blood of Jesus Christ, a vision which extended beyond the limits of the Church here on earth and led him to enter into constant communion with the Church of heaven. This was the source of his deep devotion to the saints, especially to Mary Immaculate and as Father Toussaint Rambert<sup>3</sup> wrote: "immediately after the Blessed Virgin, Saint Joseph held first place in his heart".

The depth of the Founder's thinking with regard to devotion to Saint Joseph

is revealed to us in a letter to Father Eugène Guigues: "I believe his soul more excellent than all the celestial intelligences, above which it is indubitably placed in heaven. In that blessed abode Jesus Christ, Mary and Joseph are just as inseparable as they were on earth. I believe in these things with the most certain faith, that is to say, just as certainly as I believe in the Immaculate Conception of Mary and for the same reasons, due proportion being observed. I am going to tell you too another thought that is dear to me: I am quite persuaded as well that the body of St. Joseph is already in glory and that is where it is meant to be for all time. Speaking of his soul close to Jesus and Mary I said it was: *super choros Angelorum*. And so you would search in vain for his relics over the face of the earth. You will no more find his relics than any of his holy spouse. Of neither the one nor the other do we possess anything except articles, while the world is filled with the relics of the Apostles, and of saints who were the Savior's contemporaries: St. John the Baptist, etc. No one has ever presumed to produce even false ones of these two eminent personages, and I consider this as due to a special divine disposition. I simply record the fact, you will give it what value you please. For myself, it is by a confirmation of my strongly held view and I make bold to profess it. If it attracts your piety, meditate on it and I have no doubt that you will accept it, I mean the whole body of my teaching on

the arch-saint whom we venerate with all our hearts."<sup>4</sup>

This profound devotion is rooted in a broad faith vision of Saint Joseph's predestined role as spouse of Mary and foster father of Jesus. His motives for venerating Saint Joseph and his confidence in him arise from his entirely exceptional relationship with the Savior and Mary Immaculate, the Servant of God's two greatest devotions.

This explains why he obtained the Holy See's permission to commemorate Saint Joseph in all the Offices of the Blessed Virgin (Mass and Divine Office)<sup>5</sup>. In addition, we see him having constant recourse to his intercession, confiding to him the material interests of his Congregation, the recruiting of vocations, the health of missionaries, the success of their apostolate, the success of General Chapters which he officially placed "under the patronage of Saint Joseph, our beloved Patron"; he often placed our houses under his protection, "after that of the Holy Virgin who is always to be the first patron of our houses"<sup>6</sup>.

## II. THE RULE

The Founder makes no explicit mention of Saint Joseph in his Rule. However, as the Superior General, Father Leo Deschâtelets, observed in a letter to the Provincials, Saint Joseph is the inspiration for a series of articles which describe life at the novitiate and which were supposed to be a guide for life in all our houses: "It seems to me that it is in the spirit of Saint Joseph that we should carry out the articles of our holy Rules which describe with consummate tact all the fine points of community charity consisting of kindness, humility, courtesy, modesty, piety,

a mixture of the most pleasant natural virtues and the most refined supernatural virtues. I have in mind articles 707 and following where the novices are treated explicitly, but also by the very fact of the spirit which should permeate our entire communitarian or congregational spirituality. These articles, I believe, associates us with the Holy Family and in particular to its revered head: Saint Joseph. It is unfortunate that we do not refer to him more frequently. And yet, the novices are not the only ones who have need of these communitarian virtues [...] What a model Saint Joseph is for us! What an inspiration for our preaching! In the company of this great patriarch, we are bathed in an atmosphere of pure faith so much in contrast with the spirit of our age."<sup>7</sup>

## III. THE GENERAL CHAPTERS

Time and again General Chapters bore witness to the confidence the Congregation bore its holy patron. So it was that in the 1837 Chapter presided by the Founder, the following resolution was unanimously adopted: "On the day of oblation, we will receive the cross, the authentic sign of our mission and the scapular of the Immaculate Conception which we should wear beneath our clothes. Finally, in order to show Saint Joseph a new mark of affection and confidence, the Chapter decided the following: at night [during evening prayers] immediately following the prayer *Defende*, will be added the prayer *Sanctissimae Genetricis tuae Sponsi...* of Saint Joseph, the special protector of our Congregation."

On the occasion of the proclamation of the fiftieth anniversary of Saint Joseph's being named patron of the Universal Church as celebrated by Pope

Benedict XV, the General Chapter of 1920 decided to add the litany of Saint Joseph after the daily recitation of the rosary.<sup>8</sup>

It was also during the course of this 1920 Chapter that Bishop Emile Grouard at the urging of Father Giuseppe Ioppolo sought and obtained the insertion of the invocation: "Blessed be Saint Joseph, the Spouse of the Blessed Virgin" in the Divine Praises recited after the benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.<sup>9</sup>

#### IV. THE SUPERIORS GENERAL

All Superiors General, in turn, entrusted themselves to Saint Joseph's care and recommended devotion to him. Noteworthy is the fact that about fifteen of their administrative circulars bore the date either of the feast of Saint Joseph or of that of his patronal feast.

On the occasion of the serious financial crisis the Congregation experienced at the beginning of this century, it was to Saint Joseph that the authorities had recourse.<sup>10</sup> It was as Superior General as well as bishop that Bishop Augustine Dontenwill signed the petition requesting that the name of Saint Joseph be inserted in the Canon of the Mass.<sup>11</sup>

When the Founder's cause for beatification was introduced in 1936, Father Euloge Blanc who was Vicar General at the time, after having expressed the Congregation's gratitude toward the Blessed Virgin for such a favor, added: "How can we forget her holy Spouse, Saint Joseph, the one our revered Founder called 'his great patron'? To him as well we extend our joyful, loving gratitude."<sup>12</sup>

In this way, the members of the Congregation were invited to have re-

course to Saint Joseph in times of joy, but in times of sorrow as well: sickness, problems in the apostolate, poverty in the missions, etc. The reasons for this trust are the excellence of our holy patron, his holiness, his power, his role as foster father of Jesus, his union with Mary, in a word the admirable role he was assigned.

Saint Joseph was seen as a special patron and the choice model for the Oblate brothers. Father Louis Soullier, the Assistant General, explained: "We can call them what the Church called Saint Joseph: faithful and prudent men, truly worthy of our confidence and of being set over the temporal affairs of the house of God."<sup>13</sup>

#### V. OBSERVANCES AND CUSTOMS

Under the impetus of such a devotion, the patronage of Saint Joseph took on a variety of concrete forms with various customs and many prayers. Consequently, we presently have some hundred houses, institutions or missions that bear Saint Joseph's name. But it is especially people who are placed under his protection: "Very early on, candidates to the Oblate way of life are called to cultivate a special devotion to Saint Joseph. The Oblate prayer book used in minor seminaries published in 1891 contains no less than twenty-eight pages on devotion to Saint Joseph, prayers of all kinds and for all circumstances [...] The same is true for novices and scholastics. The different directories for novitiates and scholasticates devoted one or two paragraphs to devotion to Saint Joseph."<sup>14</sup>

For Oblates in general, exercises of piety in honor of Saint Joseph were set down in the various editions of the Oblate Prayerbook. This consisted of pray-

ers before and after Mass, litanies after recitation of the rosary, the visit to Saint Joseph after that of the Blessed Sacrament and the Blessed Virgin as well as prayers addressed to them at evening prayer, commemoration at Mass and in the Divine Office for feasts of the Blessed Virgin, as well as in the consecration to the Blessed Virgin and in the course of pious exercises of the month of the rosary, then the celebration of the month of Saint Joseph, and finally, various prayers provided for special circumstances.

## VI. PREACHING AND PUBLICATIONS

Such a devotion must necessarily have been evident in preaching and in the written word. However, it is rather difficult to research the amount of preaching done because we have very little preserved for us except for manuscripts kept in archives.<sup>15</sup> It is appropriate here to point out various homiletic helps published by Oblates as resources for preachers in the course of the liturgical year, helps which grant Saint Joseph his rightful place. Among others, one can mention: *Service de l'homilétique*, published in French from Saint Paul University, *Gottes Wort im Kirchenjahr*, in German founded by Father Bernard Willenbrink, as well as *The ABC Catechism: a Method of Adult Religious Instruction* by Father John W. Mole, in English.

Strictly theological or historical works on Saint Joseph published by Oblates are few in number. One can point to various months of devotion to Saint Joseph in the language of the people being evangelized, articles on the veneration of Saint Joseph as well as some chapters on this theme in works of

spirituality and books of meditations. But it is especially by means of publications on the popular level, parish bulletins, and annals of pilgrim sites that the desire to spread devotion to Saint Joseph manifest themselves.

## VII. AFTER VATICAN II

One cannot but notice a certain shift of emphasis in recent years, especially after Vatican II. It was the desire of liturgical reform in particular to center everything on Christ. Veneration for the saints fittingly took a secondary place. A danger does exist, however, to have the liturgy rule everything in such a way that there is no place left for flexible forms of piety. It will take some time to achieve a balance. As *Marialis Cultus* has reminded us<sup>16</sup>, that is true of Marian devotion as well. All the more is this true for devotion to the other saints, even for the great and humble Saint Joseph. Here, once again, the Congregation wants to be an integral part of the Church. Its Christocentric spirituality, inherited from its Father and Founder, is open to all contexts of the life of the Church and of the world.

MAURICE GILBERT

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## JUSTICE

*Summary: I. The Founder. II. The Superiors General. III. General Councils. IV. The Constitutions and Rules and the General Chapters. V. Oblate practice. VI. Justice and Oblate Spirituality.*

Justice has become more evidently an Oblate virtue as the Church has come to perceive action for justice as essential to evangelization. Concern for the poor has always characterized Oblate life, as has concern for the rights of the Church; but more recently, recognizing when people are poor because of various forms of injustice (and discerning when they are poor for other reasons) and then evangelizing by helping those who are working to overcome injustice have made concern for social justice integral to Oblate spirituality.

### I. THE FOUNDER

In the Founder's day, justice in the Church was treated as one of the four cardinal virtues, and Church teaching on social justice as a way of relating to others evangelically was largely restricted to considerations of commutative and distributive justice. Nonetheless, De Mazenod's love for the poor led him to come often to their defense and to dedicate his life to their instruction in the riches of the faith. In his well-known inaugural sermon at the Church of the Madeleine in Aix during Lent, 1813, he preached: "truth must be known by all since all have an equal right to possess it"<sup>1</sup>. In the same sermon he denounced unjust attitudes towards the poor, contrasting the dignity of workers, servants, farmers, peasants and beggars with what an unjust world

thinks of them. He encouraged them to recognise their dignity, to see themselves as Jesus revealed that God sees them. Throughout his life, he often mentioned their condition and other social questions in his letters. As Founder of a missionary Congregation, he instructed his sons in the foreign missions to teach their people crafts, farming techniques, mechanics. He told them to open schools in every mission, to attend to public health and to foster civil peace. He also warned Oblate missionaries against becoming directly involved in governing peoples they have converted<sup>2</sup>. At the end of his career, when he was a Senator of France because he was the dean of the French episcopacy, he defended the rights of the Church against government interference<sup>3</sup>.

### II. THE SUPERIORS GENERAL

What came to be called "the social apostolate" in the 1950s and "ministry for justice" in the 1970s first appeared in Oblate discussions in the 1930s under the rubric "Catholic Action". Father Théodore Labouré, 7th Superior General, asked the Congregation in general and the members of the 1938 General Chapter in particular to make "this movement of Christian renewal" an Oblate missionary priority<sup>4</sup>. His concern for re-evangelization or renewal of the faith was classic, but his analyses and vocabulary were new. Oblates were

to minister to workers in the suburbs of large cities, because these were now more de-Christianized than were the rural poor of the Founder's time. The method of Catholic Action – observe, judge, act – introduced a form of social analysis into Oblate mission, even though most Oblates did not get directly involved with Jocist movements.

Father Léo Deschâtelets also spoke from the new social awareness of the Church in the 1950s and 60s. He encouraged the training of specialists in both the ecclesiastical and secular disciplines. Oblate sociologists, anthropologists and educationalists would help the Congregation understand the contemporary world and move Oblates to respond intelligently to its needs<sup>5</sup>. With the capitulars of the 1953 General Chapter, he encouraged Oblates everywhere to be more committed to “the apostolate of the masses most abandoned and most exposed to the danger of Marxist materialism”<sup>6</sup>.

Father Richard Hanley, during his two and a half years as Superior General, based his animation largely on elements of the 1972 General Chapter's *Missionary Outlook* document (cf. section III, below). He saw Oblate mission as a form of action for justice in the world more than as a way of implanting the Church; he regarded the struggle for justice in the world as a sign of our times and of God's Kingdom among us. His homilies and letters encouraged the ministry for justice without stating clearly what evangelical justice means. Nevertheless, his term as Superior General prepared the creation of a consensus around justice as an Oblate virtue during the twelve years of Father Jetté's mandate as Superior General (1974-1986).

Father Jetté, when he wrote of justice in his letters and conferences, re-

turned often to four basic points. First of all, he identified the “new poor” and signalled that their presence in the world demanded changes in Oblate ministry. Among these new poor, we find “the refugees, the emigrant..., the drug addict, the young delinquent..., the atheist..., the believers without religion or church...”<sup>7</sup>. Secondly, after identifying the new poor, Fr. Jetté examined what they expect of the priest and the Oblate: “They certainly expect us to show them much esteem, respect and love... They also expect the priest and the Oblate to bring God to them, to reveal to them their own greatness in the light of faith... And if they are Christians, they expect the priest to give them Jesus Christ by bringing them the Eucharist ... They also expect us to help them break out of their misery... this also means the promotion of justice...”<sup>8</sup>.

Thirdly, Fr. Jetté spoke and wrote often of integrating justice into regular Oblate ministry for and with the poor: “... the promotion of justice as an integral part of evangelization... has come into our ministry and in our ministry it will henceforth remain. What is important now is that it be developed and really integrated into its true place in the Congregation's evangelizing work. In this regard, I repeat here what I said in May 1982 at Cap-de-la-Madeleine:

‘For an adequate discernment in this kind of commitment, two criteria seem important to me. The first one is this: our orientation should be clearly one of evangelization, that is to say, the purifying and transforming of structures according to the values of the Gospel and the Beatitudes. This excludes certain methods incompatible with the Gospel: for example, the promotion of hatred among people or class struggle. The second one is this: the concrete form of our activity should correspond to the

vocation that is specifically ours in the Church, as religious and as priests... In our activity, the formation of conscience, Christian education, the spiritual support of the committed laity and, at times, taking opportune public stands will normally take the first place'.<sup>9</sup>

The third point leads naturally into a fourth, Fr. Jetté's frequent insistence that the ministry for justice be rooted in faith. Fr. Jetté brought clarity around these points to meetings with Oblates around the world as well as to discussions in General Council<sup>10</sup>.

### III. GENERAL COUNCILS

The General Council first discussed ministry for justice at length during two Plenary Sessions in 1977. These discussions were part of a series of Council studies linking various forms of Oblate ministry with the Oblate charism. The question took the following form: 'How does ministry for justice fit into the missionary action of the Congregation?' Three different approaches gradually surfaced regarding the foundation of Oblate justice ministry: the ministerial approach, the charism approach and the Kingdom approach.

Beginning with ministry seen as the total activity of the Church, some members distinguished Oblate *ministry* by certain qualities, e.g., prophetic, evangelically critical, etc. This approach enables Oblates to start with the work of the Congregation as it exists today, rather than with an 'ideal spirit' or a merely historical model, and then move toward something even more recognizably Oblate, more effective in working for justice, without bringing into question the totality of our present commitments. Safeguarding institutional continuity, this mode of ques-

tioning enabled the Council to see ways in which Oblates could, in the context of their present ministry, place greater emphasis on justice issues.

A second approach started from a sense of the lived reality of the Church as a family with various religious Institutes, each contributing its special *charism*. Charism was seen as a kind of specific difference, helping Oblates to define their proper place in the Church because of their "spirit" (their values or what is most important to them) and their activity. Discussing about oblate ministry for justice using this approach helped the Council to deepen its understanding of what is meant by 'evangelization' and what is meant by "the poor". This approach makes it possible to clarify major ministerial options in continuity with the Congregation's history.

A third approach started with a vision of the Reign of God, the biblical *kingdom* of justice, peace and love proclaimed by Jesus and identified substantially but not completely with the Church. In this perspective, any action which promotes justice, fosters peace and increases love becomes a kind of ministry. It becomes an oblate ministry to the extent that Oblates identify themselves as men of the Kingdom of God, devoted to fostering in the world those values proper to this Kingdom. This approach safeguards some continuity with the values that have always been close to Oblate hearts, but institutional structures become problematic. The action of God in the world, even outside the Church, is explicitly recognized; liberated men are to become instruments of this action.

Each approach has its advantages, as indicated. Each also has its drawbacks: the first may not force the Congregation into an adequate questioning of its pres-

ent commitments: the second can be confining; the third tends towards secularization, unless the distinction between using secular means and becoming secularized oneself is rigorously maintained.

The results of the Council discussions were published in two *Communiqués*<sup>11</sup> which pointed out, first, that the promotion of justice is intrinsically connected with the Congregation's mission to the poor, and, second, that even though this connection makes justice ministry the task of every Oblate, some Oblates will have specialized tasks in this area. The ways in which concern for justice might permeate Oblate lives and ministries were set forth in a program for the Congregation. The goal of this program was to foster "an enlightened and effective commitment of the Congregation to work for a more just and peaceful world". Among the means suggested are various forms of prayer, of dialogue, of study and specialization, and of direct activity. A word about each of these:

1. *Prayer* is at the heart of ministry for justice. Each morning Oblates pray that they may serve the Lord "in holiness and justice" all the days of their lives (Luke 1, 75). Their lives are consecrated to a God who is both holy and just. The source of their ministry is not an idea but a Person; its motivation is not self-righteousness in a cause but love, even of enemies.

2. *Dialogue*, between different groups and tendencies in the Congregation, between different levels of government, between specialists in justice ministry and other Oblates, is also requested in the program. Dialogue of any sort is itself an exercise in justice, since it presupposes a reciprocity or mutuality between partners in the dialogue. Dialogue lives in a climate of participation

rather than domination, of trust rather than control. The General Council asked for dialogue among Oblates because they recognized that no one has all the answers in a field as complex as justice ministry in the world today.

3. *Specialization* and study are also part of the program, because the field is vast and the problems perplexing. If the Congregation as a whole is to commit itself to justice ministry, all Oblates need to be conversant with the Church's teaching in this area; and the Congregation needs at least a few Oblate economists and political scientists, community organizers and development specialists. Above all, Oblates should be able to help the laity become leaders in these fields.

4. *Direct activity* of some sort is called for, because, finally, justice is known by doing it. There is need of a unity of action and reflection, of projects and prayer.

In 1978 an issue of Oblate *Documentation*<sup>12</sup> contained a series of questions for community evaluation of Oblate works, published with the hope of fostering the kind of discussion at the base which the General Council's program had called for. The following questions were put forward as useful in helping Oblates form opinions about the relative injustice of current economic, political and social situations:

1. What is the degree of actual *suffering* inflicted on people: starvation, individual or group discrimination, reliance on imprisonment to subdue people? Who or what is being sacrificed in order to maintain the social system? What are the complaints of the poor themselves? What do they feel most strongly about?

2. What is the extent of *reliance upon* hatred of another nation, race or class which is institutionalized in order

to maintain the political system in which the Oblate finds himself? Is suspicion of others systematically inculcated?

3. What is the *moral quality of leadership*? Is it possible for honest people to become leaders? How is power obtained, maintained and exercised? Do all people have a voice in the choice of their leaders?

4. What is the degree of *manipulation* employed to maintain the present system? To what extent do people really participate in the making of decisions which control their future?

5. What are the *possibilities of renewal* within the system? Is life arranged in such a way that opposition is systematically eliminated?

After the General Chapter of 1980, the newly elected General Council continued discussing ministry for justice in the Congregation, but their point of departure was now C 9 and R 9 [R 9a in CCRR 2000] in the *Constitutions and Rules* approved by the Chapter<sup>13</sup>. During Council sessions in 1982 and 1983, differences surfaced around methods of doing social analysis and, even more fundamentally, around the vision of how priests and religious should minister in the Church and the world. These differences had a history in previous editions of the *Constitutions and Rules* and in discussions in General Chapters.

#### IV. THE CONSTITUTIONS AND RULES AND THE GENERAL CHAPTERS

While Catholic Action was chosen as a form of Oblate apostolate in the Chapter of 1938, the social apostolate in its more global form was first discussed in the Oblate Chapter of 1947. The Chapter Commission dealing with the

works of the Congregation considered the question: "How might we render our apostolate effective with the masses which are beyond reach of our ministry"<sup>14</sup>. Speaking of mission to those "beyond reach" raised the question in continuity with Oblate history; mentioning "the masses" put the question in a new context. The Chapter of 1953 also spoke of "the masses" and mentioned the communist movement, while adding a new consciousness about a world much more interconnected than in the past. It called for research on mission and also indicated its disquiet about the value of religious life as witness to the poor, without however questioning religious life as primarily a personal consecration to God<sup>15</sup>.

The Chapter of 1966 had as its goal the revision of the *Constitutions and Rules* in the light of the reforms of the Second Vatican Council. It gave the Oblates *Constitutions and Rules* which enlarged the sense of "ministry" and "poor". In the Founder's Rule (*Constitutions* of 1826, 1853 and 1928), ministry to the poor meant primarily strengthening the faith of those lost to the Church, although neither oblate theory nor Oblate practice excluded other kinds of service, and those to whom we went were most often people materially in need or in very modest circumstances. The *Constitutions* of 1966, however, made explicit reference to this fuller signification of "ministry" and "poor": "The Missionary Oblate will cherish with a special affection those who are poor, those who are harassed by hunger or by fear of insecurity" (C 4). These materially poor people are later further specified: 'the human groups with which the Church has practically lost all contact ... slum areas in large industrial cities, abandoned rural areas, certain racial minorities, im-

migrants, migrant workers, the young workers, students.." (R 13).

The 1966 *Constitutions* also added the concept of social justice to Oblate discourse about ministry to the poor: "In the spirit of the social teaching of the Church, they will seek to inspire and support those who endeavor to provide a more equitable distribution of this world's wealth" (C 32). "...Under the direction of Superiors, the members will take part in social organizations, and even strive to improve the condition of the underprivileged masses by working for social justice" (C 58).

In 1971, the Roman Synod of bishops treated ministry for social justice as integral to full evangelization; in 1972, the Oblate General Chapter drew up a re-statement of Oblate missionary outlook, in which the poor were defined in sociological terms as "marginalized" and ministry for justice was described in terms of movements for development and liberation. The third section of this Chapter document presents lines of action for Oblates under three general headings: preference for the poor (*Missionary Outlook*, 15), solidarity with the men of our times (*Missionary Outlook*, 16), and greater creativity (*Missionary Outlook*, 17).

Perhaps more novel than *Missionary Outlook's* description of the poor was its ecclesiology. Implied in the document is the distinction, then new to Oblate documents, between the Kingdom of God and the Church. While this distinction had entered Protestant ecclesiologies over one hundred years earlier, it became part of official Catholic teachings only through paragraphs in the Vatican II documents on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*) and the Missions (*Ad Gentes*) and the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*). This distinction shifts the focus of mission from

Church to secular society. The purpose of mission is to establish the Kingdom of God, a kingdom of justice, peace, love and other Gospel values. Oblate mission henceforth was to cover concerns and works which were outside of ecclesiastical institutions and influence.

The *Missionary Outlook* document therefore called for a Congregation-wide review of our present commitments to see if they really advanced Kingdom values in the society or merely maintained Church structures. The document did not define the connection between Church and Kingdom and therefore left the Congregation's ministry open to being secularized if "Kingdom values" were to be conceived in terms of secular ideologies rather than the Gospel.

In the reports submitted to the 1980 Chapter, practically every Oblate Province mentioned ministry for justice, problems associated with it, groups which merit Oblate attention because they are victims of injustice. The discussions in Chapter after the presentation of the reports from the Regions indicated that the Congregation must further clarify and intensify its mission to the poor and determine how to integrate ministry for justice into its ordinary works; the verbal commitment to this emphasis in Oblate evangelization was clear. It was also clearly expressed in the *Constitutions and Rules* approved by this same Chapter. Rule 9 quotes the 1971 Synod of Bishops: 'Action on behalf of justice is an integral part of evangelization' and then continues:

"Responding to the call of the Spirit, some feel the need to identify themselves with the poor, sharing their life and commitment to justice; still others feel they should be present where decisions affecting the future of the poor are being made.

"Whatever their work, however, Oblates will collaborate, by every means compatible with the Gospel, in changing all that is a cause of oppression and poverty; they thereby help to create a society based on the dignity of the human person created in the image of God".

Before approving this text, in 1982, the Congregation for Religious added two ideas to it: 1. Not only the Gospel but also the demands of their specific vocation in the Church must be a criterion for discerning what Oblates should do in this area; 2. Oblates will receive their mission for this ministry from their Superiors.

Elsewhere in the 1982 *Constitutions and Rules*, justice is described as an attribute of God (C 9) and a characteristic of the reign of Christ (C 11). It is not only the goal of Oblate evangelizing but also describes their way of life, the relations of Oblates among themselves (cf. C 81, 84 and 44) [C 82, 89, 44 in CCRR 2000].

## V. OBLATE PRACTICE

Oblates are involved in social works and justice ministry, in announcing Christ and denouncing injustice, according to the needs of the poor they serve in various circumstances around the world. Details of this ministry can be found in reports from Province Congresses since 1972 and in reports to recent Chapters.

At the level of the General Administration, an office for Justice and Peace was set up in 1977, and a Congregation-wide network of Oblates most directly involved in this ministry was organized. This network communicates through an *Oblate Justice and Peace network Bulletin*, published in Rome two or three times a year. The back issues of this

Bulletin contain many details of Oblate practice and thinking about justice issues. The General Administration Justice and Peace office maintains contacts with similar groups, from the Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace to local development organizations. Many projects, especially justice education and small development projects designed to directly help the poor, are funded by the Oblate Sharing Fund. In 1982, the General Administration discussed ethical guidelines for making ordinary investments and set up a special fund for alternative investments (investment for special purposes)<sup>16</sup>. Depending on advice from local Oblates, the General Administration has occasionally advocated certain causes or defended human rights.

## VI. JUSTICE AND OBLATE SPIRITUALITY

Justice is an Oblate virtue. It touches Oblate sensibilities, first of all, because it is an evangelical virtue and Oblates are men of the Gospel; secondly, it speaks to the situation of the poor and Oblates are dedicated to their evangelization; thirdly, its promotion is desired by the Church, and Oblates are Churchmen. Justice therefore shapes Oblate life and spirituality with a certain natural affinity.

Justice can shape Oblate life, however, only if it is evangelical justice. Contemporary notions of justice often start with contrasting ideal economic equality with actual economic differences among peoples. This entails a kind of religious dilemma: if a person finds himself on the side of those who have less, then justice seems to demand that he call for revindication, even if this involves violence. If, on the other hand, a person is obliged to confess

that he is on the side of those who have much, justice would seem to demand that he recognize himself as unjust, even though he believes he is putting to good use the gifts he acknowledges to have received from God.

The biblical notion of justice, on the contrary, seems to be less concerned about the distribution of goods than about the relations between people and their relation to God. In the Old Testament, the guarantor of this relationship of justice was the judge. It was his task to restore peace when just relationships had broken down. He was an unjust judge if he took account of people's economic situation, of their being rich or poor, when he rendered judgment. His judgment was a restitution of right relationships, a proclamation of salvation. It is the judge who creates justice in judging. Judging is therefore first of all the work of a merciful God who, in his judgments, renders just the unjust.

Christian justice depends upon the restoration of our relation to God through Christ. The sign of this restored relationship is justice among men. Our relation to God determines our relations with others. Only to the extent that we have received pardon and salvation through Christ are we able to establish true justice, even in its material expression, among ourselves. In the work of establishing such justice, the Christian is free to choose his means, but these must be consistent with the nature of the justice he has been given by God (cf. Rule 9, 2nd and 3rd paragraphs). The Church's social doctrine recalls the difference between the biblical notion of justice and that proposed by any contemporary ideology. This ecclesial teaching provides a properly religious base for justice ministry and anchors such ministry in Catholic spirituality.

For the oblate doing justice minis-

try, the spiritual life makes him sensitive to the possibility of his being instrumentalized, to the need for religious community for sustained action for justice, to a purification of motives and emotions, to an adequate New Testament theology of "prophecy" which keeps him in communion with the Church and aware of the need to combine holiness and justice in his own life. Combining contemplation and commitment to justice supposes loving and sustained personal attention to God who, in Jesus, is one with his people.

The hope and love born and sustained in prayer are, finally, what move Oblates to get involved with justice ministry: hope for a better future and love for those who suffer now. If, at times, Oblates have acted more from anger than from deeply spiritual values, the results are mixed. Some have found themselves unable to sustain their commitments – to their people, to the Gospel, to their religious community and to the Church – when social activism brings difficulties into their life. In other cases, however, the consequences for men who have suffered through great difficulties have been an increased understanding of the sacrificial life of the religious and a deepened commitment to the poor.

FRANCIS E. GEORGE

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. the 1851 *Instructio de exteris missionibus*, in CC and RR, Rome, 1910, p. 211-212.

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, par. 56, p. 35, vol. 6, p. 141-142. Compare Circular 247, vol. 8, 1967-1972, p. 426-429 where Fr. Deschâtelets used the language of the 1971 Roman Synod on Justice in the World and encouraged the members of the 1972 Chapter to become "witnesses to justice".

<sup>7</sup> JETTÉ, Fernand, O.M.I., "The Oblate an apostolic man and a religious", given in Belleville, Ill., July 1978, published in *The Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate: Addresses and written texts, 1975-1985*, Rome, 1985, p. 77-78. Cf. in the same volume, "The Congregation, present and future", p. 329-333 and also talks about ministry to retreatants, to parishioners, to university students.

<sup>8</sup> JETTÉ, Fernand, O.M.I., "The Oblate and the Poor", given in Cotabato, Philippines on December 10, 1982 and published in *Letters to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate*; Rome, 1984, p. 133-134.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. JETTÉ, Fernand, O.M.I., "The Congregation: Present and Future" in *The Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate*, Rome, 1985, p. 342-343. Cf. similar comments in *Letters to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate*, when Fr. Jetté wrote to the Oblates of Latin America, Canada and South Africa.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. JETTÉ, Fernand, O.M.I., "Action for Justice", work document prepared for the Plenary Session of the General Council in *The Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate*, Rome, 1985, p. 173-178.

<sup>11</sup> *Acta Administrationis Generalis OMI*, vol. III, Secunda pars, Rome, 1977, p. 254-259 (Plenary Session, January 24-February 11), 320-326 (Plenary Session, September 19-October 7).

<sup>12</sup> *Oblate Documentation*, no. 79/78, February 1, 1978.

<sup>13</sup> *Acta Administrationis Generalis OMI*, vol. VI, Prima pars, p. 117-118 (Plenary Session, May 31-June 25, 1982), and vol. VI, Secunda pars, p. 262-264 (Plenary Session, April 11 - May 6, 1983).

<sup>14</sup> Leo Deschâtelets, O.M.I., *Circulaires Administratives*, Circular 181, November 1, 1947 on the 1947 Chapter, vol. 5, 1947-1952, p. 174-175.

<sup>15</sup> Leo Deschâtelets, O.M.I., Circular 203, December 8, 1953 on the 1953 Chapter, par. 58, p. 36, in *Circulaires Administratives*, vol. 6, 1953-1960, p. 142.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *Acta Administrationis Generalis OMI*, vol. VI, Secunda pars, Rome, 1983, p. 291-292, "Justice and Investment Policy" and COMMUNIQUE for Plenary Session of May 20-June 7, 1985, no. 39/85, p. 4 and COMMUNIQUE for Plenary Session of September 23-October 13, 1985, no. 40/85, Appendix II, "Charter for the Social Investment Fund".

## LAITY

*Summary: I. A look at our history. II. Emergence of the laity. III. Laity in the Constitutions and Rules and General Chapters. IV. Models of laity sharing the Oblate charism. V. Criteria for promoting lay association to the Oblates. VI. International congress of lay associates.*

The association of lay people is a new form of belonging to the Congregation. Not only do some of them want to collaborate in the ministry of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate or support their missions, but they also want to share their charism. This desire to participate took shape during the 1980s. It developed simultaneously and often to a greater degree in other religious institutes.

### I. A LOOK AT OUR HISTORY

The Founder never established any association, third order or movement to support the Oblate mission or vocations, or even to spread the spirituality which animates the Oblates.<sup>1</sup> Before founding the Oblates however, he had set up the Association for Christian Youth in Aix.<sup>2</sup> Later on, in the course of parish missions, he felt the need to organize associations, clubrooms, confraternities, to ensure the perseverance of the converted and the fruits of the mission itself.<sup>3</sup> In 1825 and 1856, he even petitioned Rome to obtain privileges, favors and indulgences in an effort to attract members, to strengthen their bonds of association and to express the deep communion which united them among themselves and with the Oblates.<sup>4</sup>

Even if the Oblate charism was the product of religious missionaries, organized in the form of the Congregation

of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, it enjoyed an astonishing diffusion. It took on various forms such as the founding of congregations and many and varied institutes,<sup>5</sup> and the formation of local associations which, from 1905 on, joined together to form the Association of Mary Immaculate.<sup>6</sup>

The work of the Oblates in developing the laity was much broader in scope. For example, they fostered the organization of Catholic Action<sup>7</sup> and the training of catechists in mission territories. They did not limit themselves to evangelization, but they strove to develop the Church and to establish living Christian communities according to the dictates of circumstances and needs.

### II. EMERGENCE OF THE LAITY

Today's Church is characterized by the emergence of the laity through various forms of associations and commitments. It is further distinguished by a renewed awareness of its identity. The Second Vatican Council deepened the study of the mystery of the Church. The 1987 Synod on the vocation and mission of the laity drew the logical conclusions that flowed from it.<sup>8</sup> The laity define themselves in function of their insertion in Christ and thus in the Church, and not in relation to the clergy or the religious. They are fully a part of the Church; they are called to the holiness of the disciples of Christ and are

protagonists of the mission which is entrusted to the People of God.

Alongside the multitude of associations created during the recent decades, there developed a variety of forms of ecclesial communities and many Catholic movements such as the "Charismatics", "Focolare", "l'Arche", and the family movements. Third orders have taken on new structures and a renewed dynamism. Contemporary charisms have a tendency of expressing themselves through the various states of life of the People of God and to become movements. Moreover, the powerful spirituality of certain saints has always had a tendency of influencing various milieus and creating movements in the Church. This influence is more evident and the movements are better organized.

### III. LAITY IN THE CONSTITUTIONS AND RULES AND GENERAL CHAPTERS

The 1982 Constitutions and Rules mention the laity in three articles: one speaks of the laity in general (R 6) [R 7f in CCRR 2000] and the other two treat of the laity in relation to the Oblates. The first of these two latter references states: "In various places lay people feel called to participate directly in the Oblate mission, ministry and community" (R 27) [R 41b in CCRR 2000]. The second speaks of the Missionary Association and of "lay groups which seek to share in Oblate spirituality and apostolate" (R 28) [R 41c in CCRR 2000]. It must be admitted that the area of common sharing for these two rules is not all that clear; the same holds true for the two forms of cooperation. Rule 27 [R 41b] makes use of terms such as "active" and "community", terms not found in the following rule. However, it

speaks of "spirituality", which is a basic element in all forms of association. Rule 28 [R 41c] which speaks of the Missionary Association seems to be less demanding.

Subsequent Chapters returned to this theme. In its document, *Missionaries in Today's World*, the 1986 Chapter stressed the development of the Catholic laity in all their forms. Placing it in the context of the life and theology of contemporary Church life, it compared the laity with various Oblate values such as service to the local church, close contact with the people and a commitment to service of the poor, with and through the poor themselves.<sup>9</sup>

The document indicates two important aims which merit respect: "[...] the primary, irreplaceable role of the baptized in all the circumstances of their daily lives [... and] their specific role in the ecclesial community, since evangelization is a duty of every baptized person".<sup>10</sup> Some concrete recommendations follow: to search with them for new forms of evangelization, to give them an integral place in the decision-making structures of the Church, to promote the place and role of women, to support their participation in organizations involved in transforming society and their involvement in the media. It is stated that we are ready to put "our resources at the service of the laity whose missionary activity is exercised at the heart of the world" and that this sharing would be "a privileged occasion for mutual formation and evangelization".<sup>11</sup> The 1987 Synod on the vocation and mission of the laity and the apostolic exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, which followed it, confirmed this outlook and explored more in depth the directives given in the Chapter document.<sup>12</sup>

The 1986 Chapter once again brought what is specific to the vocation and mission of Christian laity to the fore. But the Chapter stressed certain characteristics of the Oblate charism such as commitment to serve the poor, with and through the poor themselves, and seeking new forms of evangelization adapted to the needs of today's world.<sup>13</sup> It is to be hoped that the laity who cooperate with the Oblates will take our missionary charism as their model, a charism that has as its objective the evangelization of the poor.

In *Witnessing as Apostolic Community*, the 1992 Chapter returned to the theme of the laity and the new forms of association mentioned in Rule 27 [R 41b in CCRR 2000] and the document of the preceding Chapter (no. 76).<sup>14</sup> The text emphasizes the fact that the desire to share the charism often originates from the laity themselves (nos. 40, 44, § 3). Consequently, Oblates should be better prepared to welcome and support them (no. 44, § 3), to seek out structures of sharing (no. 41). These structures should not be too quickly institutionalized (no. 43) and an appropriate formation must be assured for these people (no. 44, § 6). We must recognize that "there are different modes of sharing the Oblate charism" (no. 43). In contrast to Rule 27 [41b], the text not only stresses the centrality of the missionary aspect, but focuses on the spiritual aspect (no. 44, § 2). This sharing has as its objective not only the mission and its ministries, but the charism as a whole which is mentioned several times (nos. 40, 44, § 2, 3 and 4). Instead of speaking of an active participation in community life as is done in Rule 27 [41b], the document adopts the terms communion and participation (nos. 41, 42, 44 § 7), communication and information (no. 44, 5), mutual enrichment

(nos. 41, 42, 44, § 2). These forms of association are a sign of the times (no. 40); they delineate a priority for the future of the Congregation (no. 39), and already show some mutual benefits - in being sources of life for everyone and in affecting the quality of our witnessing (no. 41, 42).

To ensure that these directives of the Chapter were applied, the General Administration undertook a number of initiatives.<sup>15</sup> Among others, in 1992, it conducted a survey in the provinces and delegations of the Congregation. Thirty-six answers were received and twenty six did not answer. From those who did respond, eight stated that they did have a structure in place to associate the laity, and five of them were engaged in setting up structures. To these latter, we must add four other provinces that do have lay associations. Nonetheless, interest in these forms of sharing is growing. More information is being requested with regard to the forms of the existing associations, on the way of setting them up and on the animation material available.

Father Ernest Ruch made a summary of the responses to the General Administration's survey.<sup>16</sup> I will add here (in parentheses) a few complementary observations:

"In spite of the different situations and the evident diversity of cultural milieus and of terminology that we must respect, the responses are similar:

1. There are laity who share a mission with Oblates (a ministry, a common work or life experience). What came out of it was a mutual knowledge and admiration. This gave the laity a desire to share even more in the spirituality and the charism that was the inspiration for the Oblates with whom they worked. Others had seen Oblates at work and conceived the desire to share

their charism in order to be able to collaborate in their mission.

2. The need for flexibility in structures was often stressed to ensure that the laity could continue to work at their professions if they so wished. In fact, some people maintained that this was necessary so as to retain the lay character of their commitment.

3. A certain number mentioned that a communitarian expression of faith (prayer, retreats, etc.) was important or essential to be able to share the Oblate charism. Others spoke of the importance of a common strategy in mission and ministry.

4. All of them presupposed the existence of a period of formation and of discernment and seemed to take for granted a mutual commitment between Oblates and lay associates. The concrete form taken by these initiatives varied.”

#### IV. MODELS OF LAITY SHARING THE OBLATE CHARISM

1. There is a multiplicity of ways in which laity can be associated with the Oblates. Among these various forms of collaboration, an important distinction must be made.

a. Cooperation with the Oblates can take the form of working with them in a specific ministry as is the case for any other cooperator in the Church's pastoral work, for example, in a parish, a school, a mission. In these ministries, the Oblates generally have a special style and the stress the values that express their charism. In this way, they pass something on to their co-workers. But above all, the Oblates are an expression of the Church, and the laity who commit themselves to working with them do so in virtue of their status as members of the local church community.

b. In other respects, the laity can support the work and the life of the Oblates and cooperate with them by being one with the Oblates and sharing in their particular charism. The extent of this sharing can vary considerably and can even take the form of a commitment based on the Oblate spirituality and mission in the world. It is in this context that we situate the two generally accepted forms of association, that is: membership in the Missionary Association of Mary Immaculate and lay associates. The distinction between the two categories has not been clearly defined in the sense that in certain places there exists only one organization with different degrees of belonging. However, the distinction could be expressed as follows: the members of MAMI support Oblate works from the outside; associates, in a manner of speaking, share the Oblate charism from the inside. I would like to treat this latter form of belonging in more in detail.

2. By its nature, a charism is open and capable of developing in harmony with the Church. It can be lived by a group of persons who choose religious consecration, as the case has been from the time of the foundation of the Oblates. The group that makes up the Oblate Congregation constitutes the core group and the main means through which the Oblate charism is transmitted.

Through the course of history, this charism has given rise to other forms of consecrated life in religious institutes and, more recently, in secular institutes. In general, these institutes were founded by Oblates or with their assistance. More recently still, it emerged that the charism can be lived by laity both in groups and individually.

Some of the statements made in the 1992 Chapter document, *Witnessing as Apostolic Community*, are based on this

historic reality. "There are different modes of sharing the Oblate charism" (no. 43). Precisely because "we are not the owners of our charism; it belongs to the Church" (no. 40), the different ways of "incarnating" the charism have been brought into harmony with the development of the life of the Church. In this regard, Eugene de Mazenod was not a precursor like Father Pierre-Bienvenu Noailles, Founder of the Holy Family movement.

3. The different groups share in the charism according to their status as religious or as laity. There is a complementary difference between religious life and the lay state. The former expresses in a special way the transcendence of the Kingdom, and the latter the immanence of the Kingdom – even though both of them constitute a seeking of evangelical perfection and bear witness to the same God. However, their mode of existence and action is different. Religious as well as laity can be called to live the same charism in common, while maintaining their independence because of the differences that mark their respective callings. Consequently, one must see diversity in the way of living the charism as being simultaneously dialectic and complementary and therefore mutually enriching without being limited to one point of view.<sup>17</sup>

4. A charism possesses various facets or dimensions. Fully in line with a long tradition, the 1975 Congress listed nine of them.<sup>18</sup> We can classify them in three groups according to how they deal with mission, spirituality or communion.

It is commonly accepted that religious and laity share spiritual values and missionary outlook. The aspect of "community life", however, can be lived as a communion associated with certain exterior manifestations, rather than a sharing in the canonical sense of

the term. Here is what Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes had to say on this subject: "We are speaking of *associating* the laity to our spirit and our mission. This association generally takes place on two levels: on the spiritual level and that of commitment to the apostolate. We do not see how it can be realized at the level of community life unless it happens on the level of everyday community activity. In any case, association would be characterized not by simple 'assistance' or subordination of the laity to the religious, but through a certain analogy. In this context, religious institutes tend to consider themselves as heirs and the main guardians of the charism [...]. In order that it not be reduced to a simple cooperation in apostolic endeavors, an integral part of the association must be a permanent sharing in the spirituality of the charism as inspiration and foundation for everything. However, the spirituality of the charism needs to be reinterpreted in terms of the spirituality of lay persons. Of course, a missionary association requires that the laity maintain an extensive field of initiative and independence in all they do [...]. On the level of community and the institution, the association is more complex. [...] In religious institutions, it seems basic to intensify the possibility of 'spiritual osmosis': to have laity who participate in the spirit of the Institute [...]. The cooperation should not be only on the level of activity but on the level of the spiritual as well."<sup>19</sup>

## V. CRITERIA FOR PROMOTING LAY ASSOCIATION TO THE OBLATES

In the document, *Witnessing in Apostolic Community*, the 1992 Chapter stated that "our relationship with lay persons is a priority for the future of our

Congregation and our religious life" (no. 39). The "sharing of our life and mission is a source of life, dynamism, and fecundity for both Oblates and lay persons alike" (no. 41). "Where these forms of association already exist, they are a positive influence on the faithfulness of persons and communities to the Gospel. They therefore affect the quality of our witness and reveal a new facet of the Church" (no. 42). But how can one promote these forms of association in a concrete and life-giving way?

1. A common missionary outlook would have to be set forth, an outlook which would be in harmony with the Oblate charism and which would consequently have as its objective the evangelization of the most abandoned. The *Preface* and Constitutions 5, 7, 8 and 9 are the sources of inspiration. The idea of a new evangelization as set forth by John Paul II echoes the Oblate tradition.<sup>20</sup> The "common missionary outlook"<sup>21</sup> can, in certain cases, lead to common forms of mission, but in most cases it is limited to a common witness which finds its very origins in different activities.<sup>22</sup>

2. A *common spirituality* must be fostered which is the inspiration for a missionary Oblate commitment flowing from the same charism.<sup>23</sup> The essential elements of this spirituality are: to be centered on Christ the Savior (see C 2 and 4), to practice fraternal charity and zeal (see C 37) and, following the example of Mary (see C 10). Other aspects are complementary.<sup>24</sup> I believe that it is there that we find the aspect that must be stressed the most and which can bond the movement of associates to the Congregation in different circumstances. Depending on the Provinces, the ministry and the sharing could take different forms just as it does among the Oblates themselves.

3. It is necessary that the *lay character of the life situation be respected* both in the mission and in the spirituality. The Chapter directives tell us that we should "foster and develop the various forms of association that already exist and that we encourage new forms which are adapting to different local settings, always safeguarding the essential elements of the Oblate charism and respecting the specific vocation of the laity".<sup>25</sup> The golden rule to be followed is that of the double principle of safeguarding the essentials of the Oblate charism and of respecting the specific vocation of the laity. Even if the laity can be associated to certain forms of Oblate ministry, their main role is to promote the Kingdom of God in society.<sup>26</sup> The possibilities and the range of service are enormous.<sup>27</sup> For example, they could play a determining and complementary role in the field of promoting justice in conjunction with the activity of Oblates.<sup>28</sup>

4. While respecting their mutual autonomy, *communion between Oblates and lay associates* must be fostered. It is not a case of aspiring to a life in community, but rather "in a spirit of creativity and concerted action [...] to explore structures for communion that are at the service of the mission",<sup>29</sup> to "establish means to exchange information and share experiences",<sup>30</sup> precisely because we are "aware that the time is more than ripe for communion and sharing".<sup>31</sup> The 1992 Chapter document differs from Rule 27 [41b] by not speaking of laity sharing in an active way in the community life of the Oblates - and rightly so.

There are two forms of communion to be promoted: regular meetings of Oblates and lay associates and regular meetings of the lay associates themselves in order that they form living

groups similar in character to base communities. These forms of communion will bear the kind of testimony that will evangelize.

5. *Structures must remain flexible.*

A movement based on the charism needs structures and rules, even if they have to remain flexible and adaptable. The Chapter's concern was concentrated on a single body of centralized structures in preference to provincial structures.<sup>32</sup> Lay people request something visible, organized, and capable of giving them support and inspiration. Oblates should see that this formation is received, so that they can become involved in the charism in all its aspects.<sup>33</sup>

6. On the provincial, regional and general level, the Congregation must *move forward courageously*, doing what is necessary to respond to the aspirations of lay people and taking the initiative in this. We must "be attentive to the aspirations of lay persons; these aspirations are often more comprehensive than our response. Let us call, invite, and challenge laity to share the Oblate charism and welcome those who express the desire to do so".<sup>34</sup> Even though certain experiences remind us that we have to exercise prudence and discernment, the time has arrived to take action. The Chapter drew up some norms of action to guide provincial and general administrations.<sup>35</sup>

## VI. INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF LAY ASSOCIATES

The first international congress for associates was held in Aix-en-Provence from May 18 to 21, 1996. There were 43 participants: 32 lay persons and 11 Oblates. The laity came from 13 countries, representing each of the Oblate

regions: 11 from Europe, 8 from Canada, 5 from the United States, 4 from Latin America, 2 from Asia-Oceania and 2 from Africa-Madagascar.

The congress set as its objectives: to share experiences among the associates themselves, to clarify what it means to be Oblate associates, and to map out a direction for the future. In the course of the congress, two conferences: Father Motte's "Eugene de Mazenod, a saint for our times" and that of Father Marcello Zago: "Lay associates in the ecclesial context" established the points of reference. The final document, "Impassioned for Christ, the Church and the Mission", was worked out and voted on at the end of the third day.

Part one of the document treats of the identity of lay associates. Here is the text:

"In response to a call from Christ, Lay Associates live their baptism, enlightened as they are by the charism of Eugene de Mazenod. Animated by a family spirit, they share among themselves and with Oblates the same spirituality and missionary outlook".

"Lay Associates are *impassioned for Jesus Christ*. They are disciples of his in the footsteps of the Apostles. They give living witness to Christ the Saviour in the midst of the world. They deepen their relationship with Christ through their frequent contact with the Word of God, meditation, prayer and liturgy. The Eucharist and the Gospel are well-spring and center of their whole life. Their model is Mary who gives Christ to the world".

"Lay Associates are *impassioned for Mission*. Impassioned for humanity, they have faith in the dignity of every person before God. They see the reality of the world through the eyes of Christ the Saviour and Evangelizer. Fully involved in secular realities, they make

the family one of the priorities of their mission. They live this mission with daring, initiative, creativity and perseverance. They give value to proximity, to attention for and listening to persons. They reach out to them. They make a privileged option for the poor with many faces. They name, denounce and fight injustices, all the while making certain to take an active part in the history of their people."

"Like the Founder, they love the Church, the *Body of Christ*, the People of God – sign and instrument of Jesus Christ in today's world and its new calls. They wish to build as Church, to answer to the challenges of today's world and to new calls".

"Lay Associates have a *living link with the Oblates*, normally with a community. This link may vary in form according to situations, but it is essential".

"Oblates and Lay Associates acknowledge their need for each other. There is a living relationship of reciprocity in openness, trust and respect for every person's vocation. All deepen Eugene de Mazenod's charism according to their own specific vocation and enrich others with their discoveries and experiences. Oblates and Lay Associates live and complement one another in mutual growth."

"Lay Associates and Oblates come together to renew their lives and their commitments in the world - in the light of the Word of God and of the Founder's charism. The identity of Associates, however, is realized as well through their associating among themselves."

"To be Associates supposes a simple *life-style*, marked by togetherness, characterized by charity, fraternity and openness to others. They are persons of prayer. Conscious of their poverty before God and before others, they live in solidarity with the people of their area."

"Various modes of formal or informal *commitment* are possible, according to Regions and the will of the Lay Associates themselves."

MARCELLO ZAGO

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> PIETSCH, Jean, Quelques notes sur l'histoire de l'Association de Marie Immaculée, in *Etudes oblates*, 8 (1949), p. 371-384.

<sup>2</sup> See *Journal in Ecrits oblats* I, vol. 16; *Journal de la Congrégation de la Jeunesse chrétienne d'Aix*, 1813-1821, p. 125-218; LAMIRANDE, Emilen, "Les règlements de la Congrégation de la Jeunesse chrétienne d'Aix et nos saintes Règles", in *Etudes Oblates*, 15 (1956), p. 17-33; BEAUDOIN, Yvon, "Le Fondateur et les jeunes" in *Vie Oblate Life*, 36 (1977), p. 135-149.

<sup>3</sup> LEFLON II, p. 87-102.

<sup>4</sup> See circular letter no. 2 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 12, p. 221-222.

<sup>5</sup> GILBERT, Maurice, "Congrégations et Instituts fondés par les Oblats", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 47 (1988), p. 177-208, 313-348; 48 (1989), p. 103-137.

<sup>6</sup> Supérieurs généraux et A.M.M.I., circular letter no. 57 in *Circ. adm.*, II (1886-1900), p. 178, § 5; circular letter no. 141 in *Circ. adm.*, IV (1922-1947), p. 149-167; circular letter no. 182 in *Circ. adm.*, V (1947-1952), p. 204-228; JETTE, Fernand, *The Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate*, Rome, 1985, p. 129-137. TOURIGNY, Irénée, "Etude sur la spiritualité oblate et celle de l'A.M.M.I.", in *Etudes oblates*, 10 (1951), p. 49-62. He wrote: "The spirituality of the Missionary Association of Mary Immaculate is the same as that of the Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate which the M.A.M.I. makes live on among the faithful".

<sup>7</sup> "Oblats et Action Catholique", in *Etudes oblates* 3 (1944), "Travaux des journées sacerdotales d'Action Catholique", p. 132-164.

<sup>8</sup> John Paul II, *Christifideles laici*, post synodal exhortation, Rome, 1988.

- <sup>9</sup> Nos. 68-85, especially 72.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, no. 75.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibidem* nos. 77-84.
- <sup>12</sup> See circular letters no. 305, December 8, 1987, in A.A.G., X (1987), p. 55-60 and no. 313, September 13, 1989 in A.A.G., XII (1989), p. 16-18.
- <sup>13</sup> See *Missionaries in Today's World*, nos. 72-77.
- <sup>14</sup> *Witnessing as Apostolic Community*, no. 39-44: New Forms of Association with the Laity.
- <sup>15</sup> LALONDE, Albert: *New Associations and the General Government of the Congregation*, Rome, 1992, manuscript, Rome, 1994, manuscript.
- <sup>16</sup> RUCH, Ernest, *Les laïcs associés*, Rome, 1994, manuscript.
- <sup>17</sup> See GARCIA PAREDES, J. Cristo Rey, *Associazione dei laici secolari e religiosi in comunione di spirito e di missione*, U.S.G., 1990, p. 10-29.
- <sup>18</sup> "Actes du Congrès sur le charisme du Fondateur aujourd'hui", *Vie Oblate Life*, 36 (1977).
- <sup>19</sup> See GARCIA PAREDES, J. Cristo Rey, *Associazione dei laici secolari e religiosi in comunione di spirito e di missione*, U.S.G., 1990, p. 27-29.
- <sup>20</sup> See *Redemptoris Missio*, nos. 33-34.
- <sup>21</sup> *Witnessing as Apostolic Community*, no. 44, § 2.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, nos. 39 and 42.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, no. 44, § 2.
- <sup>24</sup> ZAGO, Marcello, "Sharing the Same Charism. Values in the Mazenod Charism Which Can Also Nourish a Lay Spirituality", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 51 (1992), p. 31-47.
- <sup>25</sup> *Witnessing as Apostolic Community*, no. 44, § 4.
- <sup>26</sup> See *Lumen Gentium*, 31; *Christifideles Laici*, post-synodal exhortation, 1991.
- <sup>27</sup> See *Redemptoris Missio*, nos. 37-38, 71-74, 82.
- <sup>28</sup> See *Witnessing as Apostolic Community*, no. 42.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, no. 41.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, no. 44, § 5.
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, no. 44, § 7.
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, nos. 44, 43, and 44.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, no. 44, § 6.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, no. 44, § 3.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*, no. 44

## LAUDETUR JESUS CHRISTUS ET MARIA IMMACULATA

When was the last time you heard this ejaculatory prayer, this family greeting in an Oblate community? Where has it gone, this old, almost two hundred year-old tradition of using L.J.C. et M. I. at the conclusion of a series of exercises of piety or of community meetings? Why have we practically abandoned the custom of using this Christological-Marian prayer which was a distinguishing mark for the Congregation and which would often be found on the lips of an Oblate of Mary Immaculate in the course of a day?

In the first volume of his work *Méditations pour tous les jours de l'année*. Father Boisramé dedicated meditation XIX to this Oblate greeting. Here are a few lines of what he wrote: "In principle, the Patriarch of the Oblates used to begin his letters with L.J.C. Later on, about the time when our Institute received the glorious title with which Leo XII graced it, he added, et M.I. Amen. *Laudetur Jesus Christus et Maria Immaculata. Amen.* There you have the greeting in use throughout the whole family. Meditate upon it so that it does not remain an empty phrase. It follows that Jesus Christ and Mary Immaculate are the inexhaustible subject of our praise, our admiration and our love."<sup>1</sup>

And as resolutions flowing from this meditation, Father Boisramé suggested:

1. To maintain the blessed habit of beginning whatever you write with *L.J.C. et M.I.*;

2. To piously greet in this manner all those with whom you live in those places where this custom exists;

3. Today, to begin and end all exer-

cises done in private by these same words which will serve as a spiritual bouquet: *Laudetur Jesus Christus et Maria Immaculata. Amen!*<sup>2</sup>

The passages quoted were written in 1887, but we must recognize that the Founder had already begun the practice of using the greeting *Laudetur Jesus Christus* at the seminary of Saint Sulpice where it was commonly practiced. In addition to that, a similar expression *Laudetur Jesus et Maria* was a traditional practice among the Redemptorists at the time of our Founder.

In his circular letter of March 19, 1865, Father Joseph Fabre quoted:

– from an October 9, 1815 letter of Abbé de Mazenod written at Aix.

– from an October 27, 1815 letter in response to Abbé Henry Tempier in Arles,

– from two letters of Abbé de Mazenod written at Aix, November 15 and December 13, 1815;

– from Abbé Tempier's response written at Arles, December 20, 1815.

All these letters from Abbé de Mazenod and Abbé Tempier bear at the upper left-hand corner of the first page the invocation *L.J.C.*

The *Missions* volume of 1872 is telling with regard to this subject in its pages entitled, *Voyage à Rome du Révérendissime Père Charles Joseph-Eugène de Mazenod, fondateur et premier supérieur général de la Congrégation des Oblats de Marie Immaculée (1825-1826)*.<sup>4</sup> This narrative is made up of a series of twenty-six letters written by Father de Mazenod from November 1, 1825 to March 16, 1826: one to Father Hippolyte Courtès, one to

Bishop Fortuné de Mazenod and twenty-four to Father Tempier. All of these letters are headed by the invocation *L.J.C.* A twenty-seventh letter from Rome addressed to Father Tempier and dated March 20, bears for the first time the formula *L.J.C. et M. I.* All the other letters which follow during this trip, numbers 27 to 40, bear the invocation *L.J.C. et M.I.*

But let us come back to the letter the Founder wrote Father Tempier from Rome, on March 20, 1826, and let us quote a few lines in order to savor all his ardor on the occasion of our name being approved as Oblates of Mary Immaculate. That is without any doubt why he immediately added *et Maria Immaculata* to the invocation *L.J.C.* so long used at the top of the page of all his correspondence.

"May we understand well what we are! I hope that the Lord will give us this grace with the assistance and by the protection of our holy Mother, the Immaculate Mary, for whom we must have a great devotion in our Congregation. Does it not seem to you that it is a sign of predestination to bear the name of Oblates of Mary, that is, consecrated to God under the patronage of Mary, a name the Congregation bears as a family name held in common with the most holy and immaculate Mother of God? It is enough to make others jealous; but it is the Church who has given us this beautiful name, we receive it with respect, love and gratitude, proud of our dignity and of the rights that it gives us to the protection of her who is All Powerful in God's presence."<sup>5</sup>

There can be no doubt that, following the approbation of the Congregation under the title Oblates of Mary Immaculate in 1826, it was the Founder's explicit will that the greeting *Laudetur Jesus Christus et Maria Immaculata*

should become a part of the family treasures. He often stressed using the invocation by pointing out that people had forgotten to use it. For example, in a letter to Father Charles Bellon, he added a brief observation as a *post-script*: "*P.S.*: You forgot to start your letter with *L.J.C. [and] M.I.*"<sup>6</sup> And a little later, on August 15, 1846, he wrote to the superior of the community in Ajaccio in the following words: "Uniformity in our customs is something I am keen about, and rightly so: that of writing at the top of their letters the invocation in honor of our Lord Jesus Christ and his most holy Immaculate Mother has been adopted from the beginning. We must, therefore, make it a habit and see it as being important that others will obey."<sup>7</sup>

In his book on the spirit and virtues of the Founder, Father Eugène Baffie once again confirms for us the custom of our family greeting. Here is what he wrote: "At the beginning of his endeavor, not yet having foreseen the name it would bear in the Church, without even hoping that it would ever bear any name, Father de Mazenod used to see to it that all public exercises, either in the chapel in Aix or during parish missions, should conclude with this blessed acclamation three times repeated by the people present: "May Jesus Christ be eternally praised and may Mary always Immaculate with her divine Son be likewise praised." This acclamation from the crowds in honor of the Immaculate Conception was too pleasing to the Heart of Jesus for it not to draw down on the missionaries who instigated it the most abundant of blessings [...] In any case, these humble priests of the poor enjoyed greeting each other during the day with this exclamation springing from their hearts in honor of their Immaculate Mother:

*Praised be Jesus Christ and Mary Immaculate.* When recreation time arrived, they used this as a signal to break their silence and launch into their edifying conversations.”<sup>8</sup>

Devotion to Mary Immaculate is very deeply rooted in the Congregation and our invocation *L.J.C. et M.I.* is merely one of its manifestations. Confraternities grew numerous; the scapular of the Immaculate Conception was introduced with solemn ceremony; Marian preachers abounded.

In his *Mélanges historiques*, Bishop Jacques Jeancard wrote a delightful paragraph on the topic of Bishop de Mazenod’s attitude towards the Immaculate Conception: “Then, when the time preordained by God had arrived, the name of Mary Immaculate was inscribed on the foreheads of the Oblates just as it is engraved in their hearts, Providence brought their father to the attention of Pius IX who by a special mark of honor invited him to come to participate in the glorification of that same name while the holy pontiff was preparing to make it shine forth before the whole Church like a ray of light affixed to the crown of the Mother of God. As bishop and as Superior General of the Oblates, Bishop de Mazenod was keenly conscious of the favor bestowed upon him. He left for Rome his heart filled with a holy joy.”<sup>9</sup>

Consequently, the use of our family greeting *L.J.C. et M.I.* has been from the very beginnings of our Institute a sign or a manifestation of our life with Mary. “*Sentire cum Maria.*” As was so aptly stated by Father Leo Deschâtelets in his letter on “Our Vocation and Life of Intimate Union with Mary Immaculate”: “If we want to understand our vocation, this is not a case of having an ordinary devotion to Mary Immaculate. It is rather a kind of identification with

Mary Immaculate; it is a case of giving ourselves to God through her and with her which reaches to the very depths of our life as Christians, religious, missionaries and priests.”<sup>10</sup>

Yes, “we are the Oblates of Mary Immaculate in the strictest sense of the word. It is through her that we will be Oblates in our souls, Oblates of Jesus Christ, Oblates of the divine charity.”<sup>11</sup> So let us take all the means necessary of expressing to our Immaculate Mother in whom we possess the most refined manifestation of divine Love, an “uncommon devotion”, the love of real sons and the surrender of children amenable to their mother’s wishes.

Our family greeting *Laudetur Jesus Christus et Maria Immaculata* can certainly help us to awaken or simply to rekindle in each one of us this Marian devotion to the Immaculate, the Virgin who is the bridge leading to God because she is the creature who mediates God to us. Can we allow this noble tradition of our Oblate history to lapse or should we not pull ourselves together again and breath new life into it?

“If only you would listen to him today, do not harden your hearts...” (Psalm 95)

GASTON J. MONTMIGNY

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> BOISRAMÉ, Prosper, *Méditations pour tous les jours de l’année*, Tours, Mame and Sons, 1887.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 81.

<sup>3</sup> Circular letter no. 15 in *Circ. adm.*, I, p. 131 ff.

<sup>4</sup> *Missions*, 10 (1872), p. 153 ff.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 277; in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 7, no. 231, p. 63.

<sup>6</sup> July 10, 1844 letter in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 10, no. 846, p. 74.

<sup>7</sup> In YENVEUX, Alfred, *Les Saintes Règles*, vol. VI, p. 53; also, COSENTINO, Georges, "Notre salutation de famille", in *Etudes oblates*, 22 (1963), p. 443.

<sup>8</sup> BAFFIE, Eugene, *Esprit et vertus du missionnaire des pauvres C. J. Eugène de Mazenod, évêque de Marseille, fondateur de la Congrégation des Missionnaires de*

*Marie Immaculée*, Paris-Lyon, Delhomme and Briguet, 1894, p. 203-204.

<sup>9</sup> *Mélanges historiques sur la Congrégation des Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, Tours, 1872, p. 271

<sup>10</sup> Circular letter no. 191, August 15, 1951 in *Circ. adm.*, V (1947-1952), p. 348 (51).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 347 (50).

## LITURGY OF THE HOURS

*Summary: I. Background. II. Eugene de Mazenod, Founder. III. Practice prior to 1966. IV. The brothers. V. Vatican II and the new Constitutions. VI. Obligation and dispensation.*

At the risk of being accused of an anachronism, this article is given the title of "Liturgy of the Hours" in order to conform to post Vatican II usage, although this terminology would be foreign to Saint Eugene de Mazenod and earlier generations of Oblates.

### I. BACKGROUND

One may wonder whether the fact that his great uncle Charles-Auguste-André de Mazenod and uncle Charles-Fortuné de Mazenod were canons of the Aix-en-Provence cathedral chapter influenced Saint Eugene's outlook on the liturgy of the hours and their importance in the life of the Church. It is clear, that de Mazenod grew up at a time in which great emphasis was placed upon the role of the public celebration of the Divine Office as a work of the Church. There is no doubt that his Venetian experience with Don Bartolo Zinelli and his brother, devout and cultured priests, had a notable influence in generating his esteem for the Divine Office.

Many years later he wrote: "From then on, every day for nearly four years (1794-1797), I went after Mass to these unpaid [The translation found in *Missions O.M.I.* has *benevolent* teachers; the French text is *maîtres bénévoles*] teachers, who made me work up to noon. After dinner, Don Bartolo, whose health needed great care, came to take me for an outing with him ending at

some church where we stopped to pray. On returning, I sat down again to work, which lasted until evening. Several priests met together about that time to recite the Office in common. We then went down into the salon where friends and family indulged in quiet recreation... Four years passed in this way... I confessed every Saturday, I received Communion every Sunday. Reading good books and prayer were the sole distractions which I accorded to the assiduity of my studies. I heard and served Mass every day, and every day likewise I recited the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin..."<sup>1</sup>.

Among the prized relics on display at the General House in Rome is the *Officium Beatae Mariae Virginis* printed in Venice in 1793 and used by de Mazenod as a youth.

Upon his return to Aix as a young priest de Mazenod's personal schedule reflected both his esteem for the breviary by assigning precise times for its recitation, and also the mentality of that time. The day began and ended with vocal prayers other than the Office; a definite time was assigned for the celebration of each of the canonical hours with vespers at 4:30 P.M. compline (night prayer) at 7:00 P.M.; matins and lauds (readings and morning prayer) for the following day were said latter in the evening<sup>2</sup>.

Upon his return to Aix after his ordination, de Mazenod founded the Association of Christian Youth (*Congrégation de la jeunesse chrétienne*)

and he revealed his own regard for the liturgy of the hours in the statutes that he composed for this association:

“In the new [law], the recitation of the Office is also an indispensable duty, and one of the most important of the priesthood. The holiest clerics (as the religious) and those who have the highest dignity in each diocese (as the canons) are especially charged by the Church to sing day and night in the name of all the faithful these beautiful canticles<sup>3</sup>.

He wrote this as the foundation for requiring the members to recite in common at the meetings the Office of the Blessed Virgin, and to sing vespers on solemn feasts<sup>4</sup>. If a member could not be present at the Sunday and Thursday meetings, he was still to say the Office. On the other days of the week, the members were to say three additional decades of the rosary if they could not say the Office<sup>5</sup>.

## II. EUGENE DE MAZENOD, FOUNDER

In the first edition of the Constitutions and Rules, he stated that the institute had three ends: the preaching of the word of God; the replacement of the ancient orders suppressed by the French Revolution; and the reform of the clergy<sup>6</sup>. In naming the works of the suppressed orders that the missionaries were to do, he included “the public recitation of the Divine Office in common”<sup>7</sup>. The original Constitutions were divided into three parts: the ends and the works of the institute; the particular obligations of the members; and government, the qualities for admission, the novitiate, oblation, the Brothers, expulsion from the Congregation. The public recitation of Office in common was

placed among the works or ministries of the institute, and not among the obligations of the members which included the various spiritual exercises and devotions.

Over and above the obligation of canon law requiring those in major orders to recite the entire Office everyday, the Constitutions imposed a similar duty on all other members, except the brothers, and required that it be done in common. The celebration of the Office in common, and its celebration by those not in sacred orders was from the Constitutions<sup>8</sup>.

All, whether oblates or novices, priests included, are bound to recite the Divine Office according to the rite of the Roman Church, at the time prescribed by the Rule<sup>9</sup>.

The Office will be recited in choir, without chanting or intoning, but without haste, with gravity, with exact observance of the pauses, and with deep recollection too, lest we incur the reproach addressed to the Jews: “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me”<sup>10</sup>.

As all the members of the Society are bound to say the Office, those novices and oblates [i.e., scholastics, according to the terminology of the time] who may be lawfully absent from common recitation will recite the Office in private<sup>11</sup>.

Among the exercises of piety performed in common were morning and evening prayers at the beginning and end of the day. Following the custom of the time, the various hours of the Divine Office were not celebrated according to their original times of the day. Thus, vespers and compline were often celebrated during the afternoon – even early afternoon, and matins and lauds were anticipated the previous evening – often during the afternoon.

This practice is easily comprehended in the understanding of the Office prior to the liturgical renewal – it was seen almost exclusively as the praise God by the Church by those officially deputed to this work, i.e., the *Opus Dei* performed by those in major orders and religious, who were members of institutes with solemn vows – not as prayers to sanctify the various parts of the day<sup>12</sup>.

De Mazenod insisted upon the importance of recitation of the Office in common:

“No one can forget the importance we in our Institute attach to the recitation of the Divine Office in common. Hence it is recommended that all our communities be so attached to the fulfillment of this duty in accordance with the spirit proper to us, that even if the greater number in a house happen to be absent and there are only two present in the community, they are to assemble in choir at the fixed time to recite the Office together”<sup>13</sup>.

At that time, in addition to the hour or the hour and a quarter required for the recitation of the Office in common, the priests, scholastics, and scholastic novices spent about two hours and forty-five minutes a day in the church or chapel for the celebration of Mass and the various spiritual exercises. To this must be added the daily recitation of the rosary in common and spiritual reading in common for the scholastics. At the 1843 General Chapter, it was proposed to exempt the scholastics not in major orders from the recitation of the Office because many of them had poor health, and they needed more time for studies. De Mazenod was requested to explain to the chapter the obligation for the scholastics to recite the Office in common.

In recalling his concerns at the time of the foundation of the Society, our

Superior General and Founder said that one of his principal thoughts had been to replace in God’s Church the ancient religious institutions. He had been in particular painfully hurt by the suppression of the Divine Office, and consequently he had decided to impose on our members, priests and simple oblates [i.e., scholastics], the same obligation carried by members of other religious orders<sup>14</sup>.

Following the Founder’s intervention, the proposal was rejected by a vote of nineteen to three.

During the 1856 chapter, the question was raised again. According to some, the scholastics’ health was poor because of the excessive number of spiritual exercises and so much time given to study. It seems that no one mentioned other possible causes – poor diet, a damp building with little heat, and rampant consumption or tuberculosis. At the time there were twenty-nine scholastics; eight had died from poor health since the previous chapter, including three during the previous three months. The recommendation was that only those in major orders recite the Office in common, and that several others by turn would join them. De Mazenod found this difficult to accept as contrary to the letter and spirit of the Constitutions, but said that the chapter should discuss the question seriously. One of the members suggested that the scholastics recite the Office of the brothers, which consisted of a number of Credo, Our Fathers, Hail Marys, and Glory Be’s replacing the various liturgical hours.

All the fathers of the chapter rallied around this view, and it seems to our most Reverend Superior General to have less drawbacks<sup>15</sup>.

From that time until after Vatican II, the scholastics not in major orders were,

as a rule, dispensed during the school year from those parts of the Divine Office not said by them in common. At least at the Roman Scholasticate until the 1950s, they continued to substitute the *Brothers' Office* for the hours from which they were dispensed.

The importance of the recitation of the Office in common was repeated regularly in the various documents of the Congregation.

No one ignores that our holy Rules consider the recitation of the Divine Office, not as a pious exercise, but as a ministry<sup>16</sup>.

The Divine Office should be considered as a ministry, preferably performed in common and at a time most constant with tradition<sup>17</sup>.

In commenting on this resolution, Deschâtelets pointed out that it pertained to the provincials with the advice of their councils to make the necessary applications according to articles 144 and 147 of the Constitutions.

The 1873 *Directoire des noviciats et des scolasticats* went into great detail on pages 28-49 on the proper spirit and way to celebrate the Office with reverence. It prescribed:

"Modesty and respect forbid also spitting on the floor in choir (one should do this in one's handkerchief, without noise and only by necessity"<sup>18</sup>.

### III. PRACTICE PRIOR TO 1966

It was in fact impossible for many of the priests to recite even parts of the Office in common because of the other demands of their ministry. Many, especially in the missions, lived alone or with a brother not bound to recite the Office, which was said in Latin. Consequently, in spite of the explicit language of the Constitutions, it was accepted

that not all could fulfill this norm. This was clearly recognized by the 1926 General Chapter, which revised the Constitutions to bring them into conformity with the 1917 Code of Canon Law.

*De Horis Canonicis*: – The chapter kept all the prescriptions of the Rule concerning the recitation of Divine Office; but it declared that our communities do not have, in virtue of the laws of the Church and under pain of sin for superiors, the daily obligation of choir, as the communities of orders with solemn vows. It is for this reason that it expressly authorized a custom existing among us from the beginning, i.e., that the community itself can at time be dispensed from the public recitation of Office. But it wanted at the same time to keep, and even urge, the obligation of common recitation in all the houses, even in those where because of restricted personnel or very demanding external ministry, it is impossible to say in common habitually the entire Office. In these cases, the provincials are to establish special norms, in order to approach as closely as possible the prescriptions of the Rule<sup>19</sup>.

Prior to Vatican II, with rare exceptions it was the practice for communities to recite in common the traditional morning and evening prayers. The recitation of Office in common varied from province to province, and from community to community. Outside the general house and the novitiates it was rare that the entire Office was recited in common except during retreats. In the reports to the 1959 General Chapter a number of provincials and vicars of missions addressed the question.

"France North: Insofar as external work permits, community exercises are held regularly: morning and evening prayer, recitation of the breviary (eve-

rywhere sext and none, vespers and compline: in some houses prime and terce, and on some days matins and lauds)<sup>20</sup>.

“Anglo-Irish: A horarium was drawn up for each house in 1955 by the canonical visitor. It has not been necessary to alter or add to this. At least part of the Divine Office is recited in common in each house daily, e.g., the little hours and vespers and compline in most houses. In the novitiate all of the hours of the Divine Office are said in common each day<sup>21</sup>.”

“Central U.S.A.: In our regular communities, as the juniorates, the novitiate, the scholasticate, and the pastoral house, the rule is strictly observed. The entire Office is recited in common almost daily at the novitiate; a part is said in common at the scholasticate, juniorates, and in the house of pastoral<sup>22</sup>.”

It is interesting to note that in report that the provincials and vicars of missions were to prepare for the 1966 General Chapter the question concerning “recitation in common of the holy Office; fathers and brothers” is placed under the heading of religious community life and not under the works or ministries<sup>23</sup>.

#### IV THE BROTHERS

Until Vatican II, the Office in the Latin Church had to be recited in Latin by those bound by canon law to its celebration. As a rule the Office books or breviaries were printed only in Latin and not in vernacular translations. The novices and scholastics not in major orders said the Office in Latin, both in private and in common with those in major orders. For this reason and because before elementary education was

universal some of the brothers were illiterate, de Mazenod adopted the practice of other religious communities in prescribing a substitute Office for the brothers.

However, lest they be deprived of what may be termed the public recitation of the Divine Office practiced among us, and of its inestimable advantages, and in order that they may share in the merits of such an excellent exercise, they will instead of saying the Divine Office, recite the following prayers: for matins: *Pater, Ave, Credo*, and nine *Aves* and the *Gloria Patri*; for lauds: *Pater, Ave, Credo*, six *Aves*, and the *Gloria Patri*; for prime *Pater, Ave, Credo*, three *Aves, Gloria Patri*; for terce, sext, and none, respectively, the same as for prime; for vespers: *Pater, Ave, six Aves, and Gloria Patri*; for compline: *Pater, Confiteor, Misereatur, Indulgentiam, five Aves, Gloria Patri, Pater, Ave, Credo*<sup>24</sup>.

The 1953 General Chapter considered the question of the brothers' Office and decided that it was opportune to study thoroughly the possibility of making a change.

After a long discussion about the project of a type of Divine Office to be recited by our coadjutor brothers, the chapter finally accepted a methodical tryout when an Oblate committee, named for this purpose, will have presented a solution which is widely accepted<sup>25</sup>.

The French text of this circular has a sentence which is not present in the English: “D’ici là ne rien innover [Until this is done, there are to be no changes]”. Since both texts were official and of equal value, in some places, especially the English speaking brothers, began to recite the little Office of the Blessed Virgin or some other short Office in the vernacular. With the cele-

bration of the Divine Office in the vernacular after Vatican II's *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the brothers gradually began to use the official Roman liturgy of the hours.

## V. VATICAN II AND THE NEW CONSTITUTIONS

In its first document, the constitution on the sacred liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Vatican II ordered a reform of the Divine Office with the adaptation to existing circumstances and stated:

Because the purpose of the Office is to sanctify the day, the traditional sequence of the hours is to be restored so that as far as possible they may once again be genuinely related to the time of the day at which they are prayed. Moreover, it will be necessary to take into account the modern conditions in which daily life is to be lived, especially by those who are called to labor in apostolic works (no. 88).

Clerics not bound to the Office in choir, if they are in major orders, are bound to pray the entire Office every day, either in common or individually (no. 96).

Members of any institute dedicated to acquiring perfection who according to their constitutions, are obliged to recite any parts of the Divine Office are thereby performing the public prayer of the Church. They too perform the public prayer of the Church who, in virtue of their constitutions, recite any short Office, provided this is drawn up after the pattern of the Divine Office and is duly approved (no. 98).

In response to Vatican II, the 1966 General Chapter wrote and adopted the *Constitutions and Rules "ad experimentum"*. The liturgy of the hours was

considered in part two: "The Apostolic Man", not in chapter one: "Mission to the World", but in chapter two: "Apostolic Requirements", in a special section: "The Liturgical Life".

"C. 50 – Likewise he (the Oblate) will adore the Father in spirit and in truth through the recitation of the Divine Office, which is the prayer of the body of the Christ. By it he will seek to nourish his spiritual life and his personal prayer. When they are together in community, the members, both priests and brothers, will hold in high esteem its recitation in common. In the Divine Office they will ask God to make their ministry and that of the whole Congregation efficacious and fruitful."

"C. 51 – Holy Mass and the Divine Office will be the center of their community prayer and will take precedence over all other forms of piety."

"R. 109 – The superiors, with the approval of the provincial, will determine what hours of the Divine Office are to be recited in common, and also what hours the brothers should take part in."

"R. 129 – To ensure for the novices a solid foundation for their spiritual life, they will be given courses in the history of salvation and in sacred liturgy by competent teachers. They should gradually be introduced to the Divine Office."

"R. 150 – The life of prayer [of brother novices] will be centered on the mystery of Christ, especially as studied in the Bible and lived in the liturgy. They will take part in the celebration of the Divine Office insofar as possible."

With the adoption of the Constitutions *ad experimentum*, the traditional morning and evening prayers in our communities were replaced by the recitation of lauds and vespers. In many communities the daytime hour is recited

at noon. The brothers now celebrate the liturgy of the hours with the rest of the community.

The 1982 Constitutions dedicates article 33 to the spiritual resources, and after addressing the role of the Eucharist and the scriptures in our lives, it states:

The liturgy of the hours is the prayer of the Church, the spouse of Christ. In it we praise the Father for his wonderful works and invoke his blessing on our mission. Each community will ordinarily celebrate part of the hours in common. Where possible, the faithful will be invited to join us in this public prayer of the Church<sup>26</sup>.

Without speaking of an obligation to recite or celebrate the liturgy of the hours, our Constitutions appeal to the motives invoked by Vatican II in inviting us to join in the Church's official prayer for our own spiritual welfare and for that of the whole Church. In commenting on this article Fernand Jetté, former Superior General, wrote:

The liturgy of the hours is the official prayer of the Church. The Council adapted it, simplified it, made it available to the faithful. It always remains the "prayer of the Church", and, for the Oblate as for the Council, the Church is the "Spouse of Christ". "It is the very prayer which Christ himself together with his Body addresses the Father" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 84). When we celebrate it, the whole Church prays with us and it is a normal thing that we should do so, bearing in our hearts all the joys and the sorrows of the Church.

Our Founder set a very high value on this prayer. He had two reasons for this: it was a "ministry" of the Congregation, a ministry in some way rooted in replacing the old religious orders, and it enabled him to bear the burden of

his missionary work. In the present article, basically the same goals are mentioned: "(the Oblates) praise the Father for his wonderful works and invoke his blessings on our mission".

To glorify the Father, "praise the Father for his wonderful works", is an aspect mentioned less frequently in our day, but it was always present in the heart of our Founder. In like manner, "invoke his blessing on our mission": the way we celebrate the holy Office takes on a definite missionary quality. We celebrate the hours to ensure the success of our mission in the Church and in the Congregation.

This article recommends two things with regard to the way of celebrating the Office: 1) that one part of the Office should be celebrated in common by the community; 2) that wherever possible the lay faithful should be invited to participate in this prayer of the Church<sup>26</sup>.

The *General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours* speaks of the importance of their celebration as part of our ministry: This work of prayer belongs especially to all who have been called by a special mandate to carry out the liturgy of the hours: to bishops and priests as they pray in virtue of their Office for their own people and for the whole people of God, to other sacred ministers also to religious.

"Those then who take part in the liturgy of the hours bring growth to God's people in a hidden but fruitful apostolate, for the work of the apostolate is directed to this end, "that all who are made children of God through faith and baptism may come together in unity, praise God in the midst of the Church, share in the sacrifice and eat the supper of the Lord" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* #10).

Thus by their lives the faithful show forth and reveal to others "the mystery of Christ and the genuine nature of the

true Church. Its characteristic is to be... visible, yet endowed with invisible realities, fervent in action, yet devoted to contemplation, present in the world, yet a pilgrim and a stranger (*Ibidem*, #2).

In their turn the readings and prayers of the liturgy of the hours form a wellspring of Christian life, which is nourished at the table of Sacred Scripture and the writings of the saints, and receives strength from the prayers. Only the Lord, without whom we can do nothing, can give, in response to our request, power and increase to what we do, so that we may be built up each day in the Spirit into the temple of God, to the full stature of Christ, and also receive greater strength to bring the good news to those outside (*ad Christum evangelizandum iis, qui foris sunt*).

## VI. OBLIGATION AND DISPENSATION:

The 1983 Code of Canon Law in speaking of religious prescribes:

"They are to devote themselves to reading the sacred Scriptures and to mental prayer. In accordance with the provisions of their own law, they are to celebrate the liturgy of the hours worthily, without prejudice to the obligation of clerics mentioned in can. 276 § 2, n. 3. They are also to perform other exercises of piety" (Can. 663, par. 3).

The *General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours* explains this obligation: "Hence, bishops and priests and other sacred ministers, who have received from the Church the mandate of celebrating the liturgy of the hours (see no. 17), should recite the full sequence of the hours each day, as far as possible at the appropriate times."

"They should, first and foremost, attach, due importance to those hours

that are, as it were, the hinge of the liturgy of the hours, that is morning and evening prayer, which should not be omitted except for a serious reason (*nisi gravi de causa*)."

"They should faithfully recite the Office of readings, which is above all a liturgical celebration of the word of God. In this way they fulfill daily a duty that is particularly their own, that is, of receiving the word of God into their lives, so that they may become more perfect as disciples of the Lord and experience more deeply the unfathomable riches of Christ.

In order to sanctify the whole day more perfectly, they will have also at heart the recitation of the daytime hour and night prayer, to round off the *Work of God (Opus Dei)* and to commend themselves to God before retiring."

From the fact that a cleric should not omit morning and evening prayer "except for a serious reason", it is implied that one may omit the other hours for a somewhat lesser reason. It does not mean that there is no obligation to celebrate them. Since the various liturgical hours – with the exception of readings – are not atemporal, but intended for a specific time of the day, whenever a particular hour cannot be celebrated at the proper time, there is no obligation of saying it earlier or later. Such celebration would not respect the nature of the particular hour.

Without speaking of an obligation to recite or celebrate the liturgy of the hours, our Constitutions appeal to the motives invoked by Vatican II in inviting us to join in the Church's official prayer for our own spiritual welfare and for that of the whole Church. The 1982 Constitutions grant various superiors broad dispensing authority from disciplinary prescriptions of the Constitutions and Rules<sup>27</sup>. This certainly in-

cludes the faculty to dispense non-ordained Oblates from the recitation of the Office. The obligation for clerics comes not from our proper law, but from the Code.

Concerning clerics, i.e., bishops, priests, and deacons, the Code prescribes:

“Can. 276 – § 1. Clerics have a special obligation to seek holiness in their lives, because they are consecrated to God by a new title through the reception of orders, and are stewards of the mysteries of God in the service of His people.

§ 2. In order that they can pursue this perfection:...

§ 3. Priests, and deacons aspiring to the priesthood, are obliged to carry out the liturgy of the hours daily, in accordance with their own approved liturgical books; permanent deacons are to recite that part of it determined by the Conference of Bishops.”

Since most priest were wont – even when heavily burdened by external ministry – to interpret most strictly their obligation to recite each day the breviary, de Mazenod requested and received on April 15, 1826 from Leo XII a dispensation from the Office during parish missions<sup>28</sup>. In 1866 it was decided that this *viva voce* indult was invalid, the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars said that the Oblates were bound to say the canonical hours during parish missions<sup>28</sup>. On June 19, 1866, Joseph Fabre, Superior General, informed the Oblates of this decree and added: “Theology moreover indicates the reasons for a legitimate dispensation”<sup>30</sup>. Even though, it would have been better for Fabre to have said excuse, rather than dispensation, his meaning is clear.

The General Chapters of 1887, 1893, and 1898 requested that an indult

be requested from the Holy See. On June 12, 1899, the Sacred Congregation of Rites granted to Cassien Augier, Superior General, the faculty to commute the obligation of the Office to the recitation of other vocal prayers during the preaching of missions, novenas, and tridua, and also to the missionaries attached to a church of the Congregation during those times in which their ministry was equivalent to the work of parish missions. Augier commuted the celebration of the Office to the recitation of vespers and compline whenever the necessary conditions were fulfilled.

Vatican II granted all ordinaries the faculty to “dispense their subjects wholly or in part from the obligation of reciting the Divine Office”<sup>32</sup>. At that time major superiors of non-exempt institutes were not ordinaries. Later that same year the following faculty was granted:

The faculty given to all ordinaries to dispense their subjects, in individual cases and for a just reason, from the obligation of the Divine Office in whole or in part or to commute it, is also extended to major superiors of nonexempt clerical, religious institutes and of societies of apostolic life<sup>33</sup>.

If formerly clerics were overly conscientious, if not scrupulous, in reciting the breviary – even when there was a serious cause exempting them from this duty – this is rarely a problem today. If anything, it seems that in spite of the fact during the ordination ceremony all deacons preparing for the priesthood promise to celebrate daily the liturgy of the hours, a number of clerics consider themselves excused with little or no reason. If this is the case, it indicates a real lack of understanding of the importance of the liturgy of the hours in the life of the Church. However, there are some clerics who need the assis-

tance of a spiritual director or confessor in judging when they are not obliged in certain circumstances. Some may need a dispensation from a competent superior or his delegate for peace of conscience.

Do Oblate major superiors – superior general, provincials, and their vicars – still have the faculty to grant such dispensations to their priests and deacons? The question arises because the 1983 Code makes no mention of this faculty. Certainly a superior may declare that a cleric is exempt from this obligation whenever it would be a serious burden for the individual, e.g., other duties or because of scrupulosity. The Church did not intend to take away from major superiors the faculty to dispense. According to the 1983 Code of Canon Law, our major superiors are now ordinaries<sup>34</sup>, and the faculty from the celebration of the liturgy of the hours granted to ordinaries is contained in liturgical law and was not revoked by the 1983 Code<sup>35</sup>.

According to the letter and spirit of both canon and liturgical law, the obligation to celebrate the liturgy of the hours and exceptions to that obligation must be understood “keeping in mind the salvation of souls, which in the Church must always be the supreme law”<sup>36</sup>.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> “Souvenir de famille”, in *Missions O.M.I.* 79 [1952] p. 644-645.

<sup>2</sup> See LEFLON I, p. 406.

<sup>3</sup> “Règlements et status”, handwritten Ms. by de Mazenod; printed in *Missions O.M.I.*, 37 [1899] 19-107, c. 12 art. 45.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, c 12, art. 39 and 49.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, c. 13, art. 4-6.

<sup>6</sup> CC. & RR. 1818, pars 1, c. 1; cf. CC. & RR. 128, art. 2, 4, 6.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*; cf. CC. & RR. 1928, art. 4.

<sup>8</sup> Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, decree, January 5, 1866, in J.

FABRE, circular letter, no. 17, *Circ. adm.*, 1:158

<sup>9</sup> CC. & RR. 1827,<sup>3</sup> pars. 1, c. 3, par. 6, art. 1; cf. CC. & RR. 1928, art. 144.

<sup>10</sup> CC. & RR. 1827, pars 1, c. 3, par. 6, art. 2; cf. CC. & RR. 1928, art. 145.

<sup>11</sup> CC. & RR. 1827, pars 1, c. 3, par. 6, art. 10; cf. CC. & RR. 1928, art. 154.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, nos. 88-89.

<sup>13</sup> Act of Visitation of Notre Dame de l'Osier, July 16, 1835, *Selected Texts Related to the O.M.I. Constitutions and Rules*, Rome, 1984, no. 269, p. 318.

<sup>14</sup> *Registre des Chapitres généraux*, 1874, 74; J. PIELORZ, *Les Chapitres généraux aux temps du Fondateur*, 1:193-195.

<sup>15</sup> *Registre*, 1856, 146; PIELORZ, 1:254.

<sup>16</sup> Anthime DESNOYERS, "Idéal de perfection tracé par nos saintes Règles, extrait de l'acte général de la visite de la province du Canada, Montreal, 1942", in *Etudes oblates*, 1 (1942), 184.

<sup>17</sup> Léo DESCHATELETS, Superior General, circular letter, December 8, 1953, no. 203, *Circ. adm.*, 6:113.

<sup>18</sup> *Directoire des noviciats et des scholasticats*, p. 49, no. 5.

<sup>19</sup> Augustine DONTENWILL, Superior General, July 16, 1928, circular letter, no. 140, *Circ. adm.*, 4:119.

<sup>20</sup> *Missions O.M.I.* 86 [1959] 41.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, 82-83.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, 632.

<sup>23</sup> Léo DESCHATELETS, Superior General, March 7, 1965, circular letter, no. 218, *Circ. adm.*, 7:117.

<sup>24</sup> CC. & RR. 1827, pars 3, c. 2, par. 4, art. 20; cf. CC. & RR. 1928, art. 777.

<sup>25</sup> Léo DESCHATELETS, Superior General, December 8, 1953, circular letter no. 203, *Circ. adm.*, 6:125.

<sup>26</sup> *O.M.I. The Apostolic Man, A commentary on the 1982 edition of the Oblate Constitutions and Rules*, Rome, General House, 1992, p. 200-201.

<sup>27</sup> C 85.

<sup>28</sup> See CC. & RR. 1827, 186-187; CC. & RR. 1853, 203-204; COSENTINO, Georges, "Dispense du bréviare pendant les travaux apostoliques", in *Etudes oblates*, 19 (1960), p. 75.

<sup>29</sup> See COSENTINO, *ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>30</sup> Circular letter, June 29, 1866, no. 17, *Circ. adm.*, 1:158.

<sup>31</sup> See circular letter, October 17, 1899, no. 71, *Circ. adm.*, 2:419-420.

<sup>32</sup> *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 97; cf. PAUL VI, *motu proprio*, January 25, 1964, *Sacram liturgiam*, AAS 56 [1964] p. 142.

<sup>33</sup> *Congregation of Rites*, instruction, June 23, 1964, *Inter Oecumenici*, AAS, 56 [1964] no. 79, p. 896.

<sup>34</sup> See can. 134, par. 1.

<sup>35</sup> See can. 2.

<sup>36</sup> Can. 1752.

## MARY

*Summary: I. Mary in Eugene de Mazenod's Formation before his entry into the seminary: 1. His family (1782-1791); 2. In Venice (1794-1797); 3. In Palermo (1799-1802); 4. In Aix (1802-1808). II. Mary in Eugene de Mazenod's formation at the seminary of Saint Sulpice: 1. Spiritual formation; 2. Intellectual formation; 3. Eugene's interior life. III. His first years of priesthood: 1. Association for Christian Youth; 2. His experience of August 15, 1822. IV. Mary in the Spirituality of the Congregation according to the Founder: 1. The Congregation's title; 2. The spiritual content of the Congregation's title; 3. Consequences of the change of title. V. Mary in the Community Life and the Apostolate of the Congregation: 1. Prayer life; 2. Community problems; 3. The apostolate. VI. Bishop de Mazenod and the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. VII. The Superiors General and the Virgin Mary: 1. Main letters of the Superiors General on Mary; 2. The main themes developed in their circular letters.*

### I. MARY IN EUGENE DE MAZENOD'S FORMATION BEFORE HIS ENTRY INTO THE SEMINARY

Until 1791, Eugene's formation took place mainly within his family. During the period which followed, i.e. his eleven years in exile, he met a number of different people and situations which left their mark on him and which he called "a continuance of creation".<sup>1</sup>

#### 1. HIS FAMILY (1782-1791)

Father Achilles Rey in his biography of Bishop de Mazenod speaks of Eugene being taught lessons "within his own family circle, at the school of his father, his mother and his worthy uncles" thanks to which, he adds, "we saw him practice the virtues of childhood to a high degree already".<sup>2</sup>

However, contemporary documents teach us very little about the religious atmosphere of his family. We do know that recitation of the Office of the Blessed Virgin was Marie-Rose Joannis' favorite prayer, but Eugene tells us nothing about the influence his mother

had on him. Nor did his father give him a concrete example of Marian piety, even though he did have a "special" devotion to her and that he "never let a day pass without invoking her several times... even in the midst of his greatest dissoluteness".<sup>3</sup>

#### 2. IN VENICE (1794-1797)

In Venice, Eugene encountered Don Bartolo Zinelli who composed a rule of life for him in order to introduce him to the life of faith.<sup>4</sup> From the few excerpts still extant, we can see the plan laid out of a spiritual journey focused on Christ and Mary.<sup>5</sup> It was assuredly a case of practices of piety (Office of the Blessed Virgin, rosary, etc.), but an interior attitude as well through which Eugene was to unite his "acts of adoration with those of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary".<sup>6</sup> His rule urged him to ask Mary to assist him in all his actions. Jesus was presented as one who had placed his entire confidence in Mary. Eugene was supposed to follow this example "in union with the sentiments of his adorable heart."<sup>7</sup>

This rule does not present a cold piety. In it we read: "This will make up my morning exercise. Before leaving my bed room, I will turn toward the church and pray on bended knee, asking Jesus to bless me, saying to him: *Jesu, fili David, non dimittam te, nisi benedixeris mihi*. I will also turn towards the image of Mary and I will humbly beg her maternal blessing in these words of Saint Stanislaus: *Mater vera Salvatoris, Mater adoptata<sup>8</sup> peccatoris, in gremio maternae tuae pietatis, claude me*. Then, I will take some holy water; I will kiss my crucifix with respect in the place of the wounds and of the heart, and the hand of Mother Mary."<sup>9</sup>

Taking into consideration Eugene's age and temperament, these expressions filled with tenderness allowed him to engage his whole being in his spirituality. Indeed, they invited him to love Jesus and Mary with a genuine love, a sensitive, tender love capable of expressing itself even through external signs.<sup>10</sup> We know of no other written documents that could change our knowledge of Eugene's Marian devotion in Venice. In the General Archives, there is, however, a painting of a boy kneeling before a statue of the Blessed Virgin holding Jesus in her arms. With hands folded, the child gazes into the eyes of the Blessed Virgin with an evident expression of confidence and simplicity.<sup>11</sup>

### 3. IN PALERMO (1799-1802)

At seventeen, Eugene arrived at Palermo where he stayed for four years. That is where he acquired his convictions concerning the Immaculate Conception and the Christocentric aspect of Marian devotion. While he was at the seminary and the question of the Immaculate Conception would arise, he

would remember Palermo. In the margin of his notebook with regard to this dogma, on the page containing the testimony of tradition as given by his professor, the seminarian added: "The Archbishops of Palermo and all the officials of this great city renew every year the oath to shed the last drop of their blood to uphold this truth".<sup>12</sup> His other memory deals with the feast known as "The Triumph of the Redemption". In his *Diary of Emigration*, two pages are filled with the description of the procession in which among the New Testament personages Mary is ever present beside Christ or associated with him.<sup>13</sup> It seems that Eugene was accustomed to seeing her in the perspective of salvation.

### 4. IN AIX (1802-1808)

We possess few documents from this period in order to be able to establish Mary's place accurately in Eugene's piety. It must be said, however, that even for an event as important as his "encounter" with Christ crucified on Good Friday we have only some twenty lines written a few years later. We do know that in 1805 Eugene considered the day of the Assumption not only a "great feast," but that he started the day off by reciting Lauds from the Office of the Blessed Virgin in the church of Notre-Dame in Paris.<sup>14</sup>

Father Eugène Baffie and Father August Estève, the first Postulator of the Founder's cause, state that upon his return from exile his favorite places where he went pray were the miraculous altar of Our Lady of Grace in the church of the Madeleine and the chapel of Notre-Dame de la Seds.<sup>15</sup> That is all we can say with certainty about the Marian piety of Eugene from 1802 to 1808. We do believe, however, that we

perceive a lively sense of Mary's presence, since from the beginning of his stay in Paris we find some strongly Marian passages among his writings. For example, six days after he entered the seminary he writes a letter to his grandmother in which he speaks with awe of "a feast which fills the seminary with its fragrance and is proper to it, it is the feast of the Interior Life of the Holy Virgin, that is to say of all the virtues and the greatest marvels of the Omnipotent. What a lovely feast! And how fully I am going to celebrate with the most holy Virgin all the great things God did in her! Oh, what an advocate at God's side! Let us be dedicated to her; she is the glory of your sex. We profess that we wish to approach her Son only through her, and we look to receive everything from her holy intercession."<sup>16</sup>

## II. MARY IN EUGENE DE MAZENOD'S FORMATION AT THE SEMINARY OF SAINT SULPICE

October 12, 1808, Eugene entered the seminary of Saint Sulpice in Paris. We now try to identify the Marian elements of the formation he received and his reaction with regard to the values set before him.

### 1. SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Jean-Jacques Olier, the founder of the seminary, developed a spirituality in which he stressed the fact that the priest is an *alter Christus*,<sup>17</sup> and therefore someone who follows Christ in everything, including his relation to Mary. One of the main driving forces that led M. Olier to a Marian devotion was "the desire of adopting the same sentiments as our Lord with regard to his Blessed

Mother".<sup>18</sup> That is why the Sulpicians were vigilant to see that every priest whom they trained could say: "I live now not with my own life but with the life of Christ who lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). Mary was given to them as a model of this attitude since Christ lived in her in the fullest sense of the word. As a result, in the seminary spirituality, "to honor Mary" meant to contemplate in her the life of Jesus and to see to it that Jesus lived in us like he lived in Mary. The best expression of this Christocentric Marian spirituality seems to be the prayer *O Jesu vivens in Maria*<sup>19</sup> which was recited after meditation. We can say that the ideas which it contains constitute the essence of Sulpician Marian spirituality and this was the spirituality in which Eugene was formed.

The prayers recited every day also helped to make him advance along the path of formation through a continued presence of Mary. Almost all exercises began with the *Veni Sancte* and the *Ave Maria* and ended with the *Sub tuum*.<sup>20</sup> The rosary was recited in common every day.<sup>21</sup> Among the seven methods being used for preparation for communion and thanksgiving, there was found that of Saint Louis Mary Grignon de Montfort, under the title of "preparation with Mary". It consisted in uniting oneself to Mary and invoking her aid and finally praying that she would stir up in her devotee sentiments similar to hers.<sup>22</sup> In the course of their day, the seminarians used to make a special visit to Mary. Eugene continued this pious practice after he had finished his studies.

### 2. INTELLECTUAL FORMATION

We possess 1373 pages of Eugene's class notes in his courses of Holy

Scripture, Dogma, Moral Theology and Canon Law. The name of Mary appears in the treatise of the New Testament and in the one on sin. Among the one hundred and twenty-five pages dealing with the New Testament, about ten pages of notes are devoted to this subject. Mary is presented as being closely united to her Son. The virtues by which she is characterized are humility, a faith without the shadow of doubt and her attitude of meditating while keeping in her heart all that which she heard and saw with regard to her Son.<sup>23</sup> In spite of his admiration for the Blessed Virgin, the professor characterized Mary and Joseph as "unknown individuals" and "poor".<sup>24</sup>

In the treatise on sin, the professor posed the question as to whether Mary had been preserved from all sin. While letting his students know Louis Bailly's opinion<sup>25</sup> that "the Blessed Virgin sinned [...] in Adam," the professor clearly explained that Mary "was never touched by original sin".<sup>26</sup> When Eugene was told that some men of genius like Saint Bernard and the Abbot Rupert opposed the Immaculate Conception, he observed: "What conclusion must we draw from this? That they failed to grasp the sense of tradition and that they made a mistake".<sup>27</sup>

### 3. EUGENE'S INTERIOR LIFE

For Eugene, Mary is present and intimately united to the mystery of Christ. There lies the theme that often resurfaces in his writings. Christmas Day, 1808, he observed that Mary made her Son's vexations her own. She "had to experience so vividly the poverty, weakness and misery to which she saw her Divine Master reduced for love of men [...]".<sup>28</sup> This idea reappeared the following year: "We intoned the litanies

of the Blessed Virgin [...] to include her in the triumph of her Son, she who had shared so much in the sorrows and torments of his passion".<sup>29</sup> From the time of his entry into the seminary, Mary was present to Eugene as a concrete individual, a life companion "to whom," he declared, "I dedicate myself in a special way".<sup>30</sup>

On the reverse side of the first page of his first book of notes, the seminarist wrote: *Ad maiorem Dei Laudem et gloriam, necnon Beatae Virginis Immaculatae. Sub auspiciis eiusdem Virginis sine labe originali conceptae [...] ut isti et prae istis Mater Immaculata praesto mihi sint in difficili studiorum curriculo*.<sup>31</sup> The day of his ordination to the subdiaconate, he asked that "by the intercession of the Blessed Virgin" God might receive the offering of his "freedom and his life".<sup>32</sup> When he was preparing himself to receive the diaconate, he enjoined his mother to pray to the Lord to provide for his needs "through the intercession of his Holy Mother".<sup>33</sup> After receiving the diaconate, he continued to invoke the Blessed Virgin's help.<sup>34</sup> During his retreat in preparation for priestly ordination, he saw in Mary a model to imitate so as to learn to love God and an example of total gift of self.<sup>35</sup>

### III. HIS FIRST YEARS OF PRIESTHOOD

Eugene was ordained to the priesthood on December 21, 1811, and at the beginning of January 1812, he began to carry out the responsibility of director at the Seminary of Saint Sulpice. In the conferences and homilies which he delivered at that time, he presents Mary as the Immaculate One, the Mother of God, "masterpiece of the Almighty."

He gave a few homilies dealing with the Assumption.<sup>36</sup>

In the autumn of 1812, he returned to Aix. Two incidents at that time show us how his life was influenced by the presence of Mary.

#### 1. ASSOCIATION FOR CHRISTIAN YOUTH

On April 25, 1813, Eugene founded the Association for Christian Youth, sixteen months after his ordination. The rules and statutes that he wrote are filled with Marian thinking.<sup>37</sup> From the very first lines, it is stated that the society in question is one "established under the intercession of the Immaculate Conception of the most Holy Virgin". Eugene got his young people in the habit of seeing in Mary the Mother of Jesus and "ours as well", a mother filled with tenderness,<sup>38</sup> who in virtue of this title desires "to cooperate in [our] salvation".<sup>39</sup> In the Association, "public declaration was made to honor and love"<sup>40</sup> Mary with "unbounded filial tenderness".<sup>41</sup> There is a clear idea of what love is: the trust that leads to a total surrender of oneself into the hands of the person who is loved. That is why it states that the association members "openly declare the most complete devotion [to Mary]".<sup>42</sup> The highest point in this devotion to Mary is reached in the recommendation to "consecrate oneself [...] to the Most Holy Trinity [...] through the intercession of the Mary Immaculate, the most holy Virgin".<sup>43</sup> For Eugene, consecrating oneself "to the Most Holy Trinity" is the most basic way of following Mary, totally dedicated to the Trinity and available for the plan of salvation. On the other hand, consecrating oneself "through the intercession [of Mary]" is the fullest expression of our trust in her because this attitude is born of the certainty that the

Holy Virgin will not keep us to herself, but will offer us to God! (Corinthians 3:21b-23).

The Rule sets forth a life-style both for the individual and for group activities. With regard to activities for the individual, he invites them to a daily recitation of Saint Bernard's prayer: "Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary",<sup>44</sup> and makes the suggestion that "in addition, frequently in the course of a day, they let fly some arrows of love toward her maternal heart by means of short but fervent aspirations".<sup>45</sup> While calling upon them to make a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, he reminds them that "before leaving the church [...] they should not forget to say a few prayers to the Blessed Virgin because the Mother must never be separated from her Son".<sup>46</sup> In 1813 Eugene suggested that they should recite a decade of the rosary<sup>47</sup> and to fall asleep "in peace with the holy names of Jesus and Mary on their lips, but even more so in their hearts".<sup>48</sup>

As a result, the presence of Mary permeated not only the days of the personal lives of the associates, but the time they spent together as well. Mary's image was to be found on the Association's coat of arms.<sup>49</sup> All exercises were brought to a conclusion by the following prayer recited in Provençal: "May Jesus Christ be praised and Mary, ever Immaculate, be praised as well together with her divine Son".<sup>50</sup>

Meetings opened with the recitation of the *Ave Maria* and ended with the *Sub tuum praesidium*. The Rule bound the young people to recite the Divine Office in common every Thursday and Sunday: recitation of Matins and Lauds of the Blessed Virgin<sup>51</sup> and singing of Vespers of that same Office. Consequently, it would seem that Eugene had forgotten his Venetian spiritual master's teaching: "Never too much, always well done"! It

is clear that he wanted to imbue the activities and the day of his young people with the presence of Mary.<sup>52</sup>

## 2. HIS EXPERIENCE OF AUGUST 15, 1822

According to oral tradition, on August 15, 1822 the statue of Mary, consecrated that day in the chapel at Aix, opened its eyes and nodded its head slightly in the direction of the Founder while he was in prayer before it.<sup>53</sup> The only contemporary witness of this event is found in a letter written the evening of the same day to Father Tempier by Father de Mazenod. Based on this text alone, it is not possible for us to affirm exactly what the statue did because the Founder does not give us a description of the visible incident, but rather of his own state of mind. Four different features can be distinguished: he grasped or was able to perceive the essential truth concerning Mary, the Congregation, himself and the external difficulties facing his Institute. 1. He, who from the beginning of his spiritual life considered Mary his Mother, achieved a deeper understanding of the meaning of this motherhood and what it meant "to place all his hopes in her". 2. He saw the Congregation in an entirely new light "as it was in reality". He perceived it as beautiful and "of service to the Church"<sup>54</sup>; 3. That day he internalized the call to holiness. He understood that he was to seek the cause of problems in the Congregation, not only in others or in historic circumstances, but also in himself; 4. Finally, with serenity, he looked realistically at the difficulties his young Institute was facing. He even saw "the obstacles [...] as if drawn up in battle array" and became aware that an enemy wanted "to bring all efforts to naught".

As we can see, the lack of any direct reference to an apparition and expres-

sions like "I experienced", "I found", "I seemed to see; it seemed palpable", along with the deep joy and the serene strength the Founder experienced seem to point to the fact that in this incident he experienced an interior vision expressed as "a smile" bestowed upon him by the Blessed Virgin.<sup>55</sup> In a moment of moral exhaustion when Father de Mazenod was experiencing more intensely the burden of the trials which were assailing the Congregation, this smile enabled him to find new strength to endure the more severe trials which the future would bring.

Expelled from France in 1903, the Oblates carried the statue of the "Virgin of the Smile" to Rome. It was placed above the main altar of the General House.

## IV. MARY IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE CONGREGATION ACCORDING THE FOUNDER

The title of a religious congregation reflects its goals and the nature of its spirituality. Firstly we will examine the problems linked to the Congregation's title, and secondly, the Marian aspect of the spirituality which distinguishes the Oblates' community life and apostolate.

### 1. THE CONGREGATION'S TITLE

The first title borne by the Congregation was that of Missionaries of Provence. This name was no longer appropriate when the missionaries established a foundation beyond the borders of Provence and exercised their ministry there. Consequently, the name Oblates of Saint Charles was adopted. This may have been suggested by some members of the Society since Father de Mazenod wrote in this regard: "I must admit to you that I was quite surprised, when it was

decided to take the name I had thought should be left aside, at being so imperious, at feeling so little pleasure, I would almost say a kind of repugnance, at bearing the name of a saint who is my particular protector, for whom I have so much devotion".<sup>56</sup> The first document we know of which bears the title, Missionary Oblates of Saint Charles, is the letter of approbation of the Rules signed by Bishop Fortuné de Mazenod on May 8, 1825.<sup>57</sup>

Before the attending the audience granted by the Pope in 1825, Father de Mazenod made the decision to change the name of his religious family. He then made an addition to the petition prepared on December 8<sup>58</sup> and he spoke about it to Pope Leo XII on December 20. The change, introduced at the last moment, could be indicative of a certain amount of hesitation on his part or of the instability of the project – factors which made pontifical approbation difficult, if not impossible.

What was the real motive behind this decision? Bishop Jacques Jeancard states that while in Rome the Founder learned that an association of diocesan priests founded in Milan in 1578 by Saint Charles Borromeo already bore this title. But this does not correspond with the truth since Father de Mazenod drew inspiration from the Rules of the Oblates of Saint Charles when he wrote the Rules of his Institute.<sup>59</sup> It has already been written that the desire to join up with Father Bruno Lanteri's Oblates of the Virgin Mary had a role to play here.<sup>60</sup> What must be especially stressed is the fact that he prepared the petition for the Pope during the novena and octave of the Immaculate Conception, celebrated with solemnity in the Church of the Twelve Apostles near the house of the Lazarists where he had taken up residence.<sup>61</sup>

These are not the only motives involved. As Father Fernand Jetté stated, the title of a religious family usually expresses its nature, essence and function.<sup>62</sup> It really seems that the choice of the title "Missionary Oblates of the Most Holy and Immaculate Virgin Mary" must have been the culmination of a new and deeper insight into the mission of the Congregation on the part of Father de Mazenod. He discovered Mary as the person who was the most committed to the service of Christ, the poor and the Church and saw her as the most comprehensive model of apostolic life as required by his Congregation. In the letter he began to write to Father Tempier on December 22, 1825, one is struck by two of his reflections: a certain fascination with the new title as well as a regret that he had not thought of it sooner. He seems to become aware of the fact that, even if he had always loved Mary, he had not yet understood the essential role she played in the plan of Redemption. In searching for the patron who best expressed the goal of his Congregation – that is a person walking in the footsteps of Christ, committed to the apostolate of service and to the instruction of the poor – he had not thought of Mary. While in Rome, he understood who Mary really was. The title of the Congregation was thus born from a discovery that, in order to respond in an authentic way to the urgent needs of the Church, its members should identify with Mary Immaculate "to offer themselves" to the service of God's plan of salvation like she did.

## 2. THE SPIRITUAL CONTENT OF THE CONGREGATION'S TITLE

Father de Mazenod did not choose the title of his Congregation because of a devotion on his part, but was moved rather by the desire that the identifica-

tion of Oblates with Mary should be their life project. He expressed himself through two equivalent expressions: "It will be as glorious as it will be consoling for us to be consecrated to her in a special manner"<sup>63</sup> and "consecrated to God under the patronage of Mary".<sup>64</sup> What we are dealing with here is much more than external gestures done out of habit of personal devotion, and more than the promotion of some practice of Marian devotion. From the day of their oblation onward, it would not be enough for Oblates to be "simple servants of Mary",<sup>65</sup> but it would be necessary for them to be "consecrated to her in a special manner".

As Father Leo Deschâtelets observed, "what is involved is a type of identification with Mary Immaculate [...], a gift of ourselves to God through her and like her, a gift which reaches to the depth of our entire Christian, religious, missionary, priestly<sup>66</sup> life, [...] in the manner of a deep involvement, in thought, heart and action, in the mystery of Mary so as to live better our total commitment to the service of Christ and of souls. It is in this perspective that she is for us *exemplar totius perfectionis*,<sup>67</sup> then, "to become Oblate of Mary Immaculate, is [...] in some way to be incorporated into Mary in order, with her, to generate Jesus in souls, teaching by word and by example who Christ is".<sup>68</sup> Consequently, we have here a mystical and real identification<sup>69</sup> through which each Oblate becomes Mary herself, living and serving in today's Church.

### 3. CONSEQUENCES OF THE CHANGE OF TITLE

It can be said that nothing had essentially changed since in the Congregation, Mary was already playing the

role which was her due. In chronological order, the first secondary consequence – even if it is the least measurable – is the concern of loving Mary even more. On December 22, 1825, Father de Mazenod called upon his sons to renew themselves "especially in devotion to the Most Holy Virgin in order to render themselves worthy of being Oblates of Mary Immaculate". In his March 20, 1826 letter, he wrote *L.J.C. et M.I.* for the first time, instead of *L.J.C.*, as was his previous custom. The following July 13, in closing the first General Chapter held after the pontifical approbation, the Oblates signed the Rules adding "Oblate of Mary" after their name.<sup>70</sup>

## V. MARY IN THE COMMUNITY LIFE AND THE APOSTOLATE OF THE CONGREGATION

It was the Founder's wish that Mary should always be present in the life of the Congregation. As a result, he allotted her a suitable place in individual and community prayer. He asked the Oblates to entrust all their problems to this "Good Mother". He fostered Marian devotion among the faithful and wanted to lead them to Jesus and Mary.

### 1. PRAYER LIFE

One of the practices the Founder introduced at the beginning of the Congregation's existence was the greeting: Praised be Jesus Christ and Mary Immaculate. This custom already existed in the Association for Christian Youth in Aix as Eugene used to use this as a closing for their exercises and meetings by having them sing it. He did the same thing at the closing of exercises in parish missions.<sup>71</sup> Another pious practice

was the visit to the Blessed Virgin, a practice imposed upon the Congregation as an obligation by the first Rule.<sup>72</sup> It is worthy of note that this visit was made in a very intimate context. Indeed, we read in the Directory of the Novitiate: "What a consolation for the child of Mary Immaculate to be able to greet his Good Mother as well, to express to her his devotion and tenderness, to rest upon her maternal heart".<sup>73</sup>

The Founder and the Oblates meditated the eighteen mysteries of the rosary each day.<sup>74</sup> During the first years of formation, candidates were reminded that "the main exercise in her honor is the rosary recited in common. We should, therefore, love this exercise, devote ourselves to it with tender piety, apply ourselves to carrying it out with the greatest attention; it is through this devotion that we will discharge the debt of love that we owe Mary."<sup>75</sup>

According to Oblate tradition, all exercises and most important meetings begin with the *Veni Sancte Spiritus* and the *Ave Maria*, and end with the *Sub tuum* in order to entrust to Mary their spiritual fruits and resolutions taken. The *Sub tuum* is one of the prayers that the members of the Congregation recite the most often at every occasion. From 1821 on, the *Tota pulchra es Maria* is recited after Compline as the last prayer of the day.<sup>76</sup> On August 6, 1856, during the General Chapter, the Founder took the decision of reciting this antiphon in honor of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception.<sup>77</sup>

Following upon the suggestion made by Father de Mazenod, the General Chapter of 1826 had decided that "in every one of our houses, after night prayer, there will be a daily recitation of a *Salve Regina* for Pope Leo XII our distinguished protector; and after his death, instead of this prayer, on the day

of the anniversary of his death, a solemn service will be celebrated in perpetuity in the house or the residence of the Superior General".<sup>78</sup> When Leo XII died, on February 10, 1829, this prayer for his intentions was no longer recited. The custom was taken up again after the death of the Founder who breathed his last when the last words of the *Salve Regina* were being recited. The Founder also requested that after supper the *Maria Mater Gratiae* should be sung. Father Marius Suzanne died on January 31, 1829 while it was being sung. Consequently, in commemoration of him, this custom was carried on in the seminary of Marseilles, and then in our houses of formation.<sup>79</sup>

## 2. COMMUNITY PROBLEMS

Engraved on the pedestal of the statue erected by the Founder in the garden of the house Notre-Dame de l'Osier the following text can be read: *Cui Nomen dederas, Cui Cor, Sobolem aspice praesens*.<sup>80</sup> These words seem to describe perfectly the relationship which existed between the Oblates of Mary Immaculate and their patron. This relationship is not the result of intellectual speculation but comes rather from everyday living. Father de Mazenod encouraged his sons to place their problems in the hands of the Blessed Virgin, and he was the first to do so. To the Immaculate One he entrusted, not only the task of finding vocations,<sup>81</sup> but their formation and perseverance as well. It was to Marian shrines that he sent those who had doubts about their vocation, telling them: "It is my last effort to save you. Go there with an upright heart, call fervently upon this powerful protector."<sup>82</sup>

To those undertaking new ministries, he assigned Mary as their patron-

ess and guide. In his letter of obedience to the first Oblates sent to Canada, a move launching the Congregation into the vast field of the missions *ad gentes*, he wrote: “[...] may the Blessed Virgin conceived without stain be your guide and patroness. You must bear in mind that devotion to her is a special duty of our vocation to propagate in every place.”<sup>83</sup> To Father Anthony Mouchette, recently ordained to the priesthood and appointed as moderator of scholastics, he wrote: “Place all your trust in God, and in our Good Mother, invoke her often in the sanctuary in whose shadow you live; do not exclude me as you say your prayers there for the whole family’s prosperity and salvation.”<sup>84</sup>

Not only did he entrust new activities to Mary, but when they bore fruit, he acknowledged in them the results of her maternal protection.<sup>85</sup>

At the beginning of the Congregation, the Founder experienced the sickness and death of the “best” Oblates as a personal trauma. As a result, he commanded the sick person to ask for “the miracle of healing.”<sup>86</sup> It was also his desire that his sons should die in the presence of Mary,<sup>87</sup> but in the wake of these numerous trials he gradually learned to say over and over Mary’s *Fiat*.<sup>88</sup>

### 3. THE APOSTOLATE

Eugene saw in Mary the one who desired above all the glory of the Son “and the conversion of souls which he redeemed at the price of his precious blood”.<sup>89</sup> Consequently, he is convinced that our first duty consists in helping her to fulfill his wishes.<sup>90</sup> In the course of parish missions, even though Mary was always present, she did not hold center stage. She was the mother and companion of the missionaries and

along with them strove to lead souls to Christ. Already in the first Rule it was stated that before leaving the house the missionaries were to gather in the chapel before the Blessed Sacrament to sing the “Clerics’ Song for the Journey,” adding the *Sub tuum* and the antiphon, *Dignare me laudare te, Virgo sacrata. Da mihi virtutem contra hostes tuos*.<sup>91</sup> During the mission, two special Marian ceremonies were planned: the celebration for children and the solemn consecration of the parish to Mary<sup>92</sup> which was to be considered “absolutely obligatory.”<sup>93</sup>

Another ministry privileged, in a sense, in the Congregation was pastoral ministry at Marian shrines.<sup>94</sup> One third of the Oblate works accepted by the Founder were shrines: Notre-Dame du Laus in 1818, Notre-Dame de la Garde shortly after 1830, Notre-Dame de l’Osier in 1834, Notre Dame de Lumières in 1837, Notre-Dame de la Croix de Parménie in 1842, Notre-Dame de Bon Secours in 1846, Notre-Dame de Sion in 1850, Notre-Dame de Talence in 1853 and Notre-Dame de Cléry in 1854. The Founder considered these shrines as “a non-itinerant mission,”<sup>95</sup> and pilgrimages became occasions to think over certain truths, to come to conversion and to live the Christian life better. He characterizes as a “form of decadence” visits made to the shrines as places for outings, get-togethers or simply locations where people went to seek to be entertained. Concerning the lamentable situation of Notre-Dame de l’Osier before the advent of the Oblates, he wrote: “[...] devotion was seen to imperceptibly decline. Little by little it was reduced to being nothing more than a place to go for an outing where people came out of habit to say that they had visited l’Osier. On certain days, in large part, it was nothing more than a loca-

tion to seek distraction where people congregated solely to be entertained without religious thought of any kind, an activity which even if it could not make anyone holier could at least legitimize the journey."<sup>96</sup> Consequently, he wanted the Oblates to strive to "direct in the right direction a piety which was still rather misunderstood by a large number of people [...]"<sup>97</sup>

In his writings, we notice that he is concerned with the conversion of the pilgrims.<sup>98</sup> According to him, in a certain sense, sinners have first claim on the pastoral care offered the pilgrims by the missionaries. The missionaries should, however, care just as zealously for fervent souls.<sup>99</sup> In addition to preaching repentance, they were to awaken in souls an enlightened love of Mary.<sup>100</sup> The Founder also wished to see that, in their prayers, the Oblates working in the various shrines should not forget the Congregation and world problems.<sup>101</sup>

## VI. BISHOP DE MAZENOD AND THE PROCLAMATION OF THE DOGMA OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

In addition to Bishop de Mazenod's personal life and his activity as Founder, we must also speak of the Marian dimension of his ministry as Bishop of Marseilles. Here, too, he made a contribution to the development of a more genuine Marian spirituality. He was a man open to the supernatural, possessing a great simplicity and a total trust in Mary. At the same time, he was a man with a solid Scriptural and patristic formation, a man who fought valiantly against all distortions in Marian devotions.

His ministry as bishop was especially influenced by the definition of the

dogma of Mary's Immaculate Conception.<sup>102</sup> When, through his encyclical *Ubi primum* of February 2, 1849, Pope Pius IX asked to bishops to inform him about "the devotion and expectations of their clergy and their faithful and their own personal feelings" with regard to the Immaculate Conception, Bishop de Mazenod hastened to send him the enthusiastic response which appears in the first pages of the first volume of *Pareri*. He sent one as Bishop of Marseilles, but he also sent one in the name of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, pointing to the Congregation's title as a testimony of the Church's traditional belief. This document reads like the *Exultet* and shows clearly "what [our] father did on this occasion so glorious for our Immaculate Mother".<sup>103</sup> "Happy, yes, happy is the day when God through the Spirit of his Divine Son inspired the heart of his Vicar on earth to bestow this crowning honor upon the Virgin Mary! Happy and holy is the day when, amidst the bitter anxieties of his heart and the painful trials to the Holy Church, the sovereign pastor and doctor of the sheep and the lambs has raised his thought to Mary Immaculate of the unblemished Lamb and directed his eyes towards the shining star set by God in the sky like the rainbow of the covenant and the pledge of victory! Let it come, let it come, this hour so deeply desired when the entire universe will be able to assert with certainty that the most Holy Mother of God has crushed the head of the venomous serpent and hold as revealed that the Blessed Virgin Mary, through a wonderful and unique privilege due to the superabundant grace of her Son has truly been preserved from all trace of original sin!"<sup>104</sup>

During the extraordinary meeting of the world's bishops in 1854, Bishop de Mazenod did everything in his power to

see that the dogma was proclaimed in the most solemn fashion possible. Upon seeing that people were "astounded and almost frightened in certain theological circles", he hastened to write three letters to the Pope (November 21 and December 2 and 5) to encourage and sustain him. "Most assuredly, I do not think it important to set myself in the spotlight, but I look upon it as being incumbent upon me to do everything in my power to make a contribution to the glory which should redound to the most holy Virgin from this definition."<sup>105</sup>

On the day of the definition of the dogma, profoundly moved, he stood beside the Pope. As an accompaniment to the bull *Ineffabilis*, he issued his important February 3, 1855, pastoral letter, a letter brimming with admiration and love for Mary. On the occasion of the first anniversary of the definition of the dogma, Bishop de Mazenod organized celebrations in Marseilles comparable to those in Rome and erected a monument to the Immaculate Conception similar to the one which stands in Piazza di Spagna in Rome. In the 19th century, he was one of the great apostles of Mary Immaculate.

CASIMIR LUBOWICKI

## VII. THE SUPERIORS GENERAL AND THE VIRGIN MARY

Faithful to the Founder, the Oblates have always had a great devotion to Mary and have spread devotion to her. The Congregation's tradition took many forms. Among others, it can be seen in the circular letters of the Superiors General. Often brief, these letters were usually written for specific occasions to keep the Congregation abreast of events of vital interest to it: to an-

nounce a General Chapter, to describe the work it will be called to do, etc. We rarely find in these letters solidly constructed doctrinal treatises like Father Louis Soullier's letter on preaching (no. 59 of 1895) and on studies (no. 61 of 1896). With reference to Mary, only Father Leo Deschâtelets wrote a letter directed to the whole Congregation exclusively dedicated to this topic.<sup>106</sup>

In spite of the topical character of these letters, the name of Mary often appears on their pages, sometimes unexpectedly, through a spontaneous expression of affection, a few words of praise, or yet again a pressing appeal for Mary's protection as patroness and mother of the Oblates. Often it is a case of Mary in association with the apostolic mission of the Congregation.

### 1. THE MAIN LETTERS OF THE SUPERIORS GENERAL ON MARY

It is difficult to say which Superior General loved Mary more and spoke of her most often. Father Joseph Fabre spoke of her in at least twelve of his thirty-six circular letters written from 1861 to 1890. After the death of our Founder and Father, he felt the need of asking for Mary's protection as mother of the Oblates. It was in this vein that on March 19, 1865 he wrote: "May the Immaculate Virgin who watched over the crib of our infancy with a mother's care grant our Congregation a divine fruitfulness to inspire in you the sentiments with which our Father and his first companions were animated."<sup>107</sup>

In six of Father Louis Soullier's eleven letters written from 1892 to 1897, we find a paragraph on Mary. He especially restated in a powerful way the Oblates primary calling: to evangelize the poor. He also stressed

that they evangelize with the help and support of Mary.<sup>108</sup>

Father Cassien Augier, Superior General from 1898 to 1905, spoke of Mary in three of his twenty letters. Two events provided him the opportunity to do this. On April 4, 1890, Pope Leo XIII approved the scapular of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, a devotion intended to simultaneously honor the Blessed Virgin under the title, Mother of Mercy. A second decree issued on the 19th of May the following year granted the Superior General of the Oblates the power to bless and confer this scapular and to grant these same powers to Oblates and "to every priest, be he a diocesan or a religious priest". Father Augier devoted his August 27, 1900<sup>109</sup> letter to this event. He explained the rationale behind the granting of this privilege and what it meant. He invited the Oblates to deepen their awareness of the link which bound their lives to the Immaculate Virgin, Mother of Mercy and to the Sacred Heart.

In 1904 the fiftieth anniversary of the definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception was celebrated. The Chapter held that year reminded the Oblates that they were religious, priests who were missionaries to the poor as members of a family consecrated to the Immaculate Conception. In the Chapter report, Father Augier announced that in virtue of a Chapter decree, on the eighth day of each month, the Superior General "would offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass to thank God for having preserved Mary from original sin and for having made her immaculate". He then invited the Congregation to participate in "this honor that the Superior General would offer in its behalf to the Immaculate Virgin, its patroness and mother".<sup>110</sup>

In the wake of Father Augier's resignation, Father August Lavillardière, Superior General from 1906-1907, mentioned Mary in six of his seven circular letters. Immediately after his election, he wrote: "In my heart, I am firmly convinced that with God's blessing called down upon us by the intercession of our venerated Founder, united more than ever under the banner of the Immaculate One, we will see once again after these days of devastation and ruin, a new era of prosperity and joy."<sup>111</sup>

In his letter on the deliberations of the 1906 Chapter, he recalled that among the works of their apostolate, Oblates should spread devotion to the scapular of the Sacred Heart and that of the Immaculate Conception. He also made a discrete allusion to the crisis of modernism and on this point specified: "Up until now, our Congregation has stood out because of the orthodoxy of its doctrine. We would not be genuine sons of the Immaculate Virgin if we did not preserve our spirits from the stain of error with the same concern with which we guard our hearts from the stain of corruption."<sup>112</sup>

Father Roger Gauthier characterizes Bishop Augustine Dontenwill as "the most powerful Marian voice" second only to the Founder among the early Superiors General.<sup>113</sup> Yet we find only a few pages on Mary and that in seven of his forty-one circular letters written from 1908 to 1930. However, his devotion seems to be a very keen one. In 1908, he asked all the Oblates to celebrate in solemn fashion the feast of the Immaculate Conception on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the apparitions at Lourdes.<sup>114</sup> In 1910, he chose the feast of the Immaculate Conception to promulgate the changes made to our Constitutions and Rules in 1906.<sup>115</sup>

When he was announcing the celebration of the hundredth anniversary of the Congregation, he exhorted the Oblates to go to the Sacred Heart of Our Lord "under the auspices of his holy Mother who deigned to adopt us as her sons, a fact that bestows glory on our name because it proclaims for ever more the most basic of her privileges".<sup>116</sup>

At the end of the 1920 General Chapter, he published some decrees. The first of them asked the Oblates to consecrate themselves to Mary Immaculate on February 17 and December 8 of every year.<sup>117</sup> In the report he presented to this Chapter, he mentioned the name of Mary several times and when he spoke of the act of consecration exclaimed: "Oh, if only we loved Mary Immaculate as she loves us! If only we preached about her, if we knew how to make known her goodness, her perfections, her glory! If only our entire ministry bore this Marian character which the Chapter wanted to possess while trying to communicate it to all our members!"<sup>118</sup>

Bishop Döntenwill's Marian devotion surfaced again in the report of the 1926 Chapter<sup>119</sup> and in the letter promulgating the new edition of the Constitutions and Rules in 1928. On that occasion, he wrote: "Our Rules make frequent mention of the tender devotion that Oblates should have for their Immaculate Mother. And yet, there was no special article dealing with the most Holy Virgin as titular patroness of the Congregation [...]." The capitulants approved by a unanimous vote article 10 "which proclaimed the Immaculate Virgin Mary as Mother and Patroness of the Congregation".<sup>120</sup>

We find a few paragraphs on Mary in four of the nineteen circulars of Father Theodore Labouré, Superior General from 1932 to 1942. Just like Father

Soullier did in former times, it was his desire that the Oblates should evangelize the poor with the help of Mary Immaculate. He requested that in our works, we should not forget that we are Oblates. He wrote: "Whenever possible, let the organizations established under the banner of the Holy Virgin have our preference and may the Immaculate One ever be the model and the source of Catholic action".<sup>121</sup> He invited educators to rely upon our Immaculate Mother to raise up "our co-workers and successors in the lofty work of evangelizing the poor".<sup>122</sup>

The majority of the circular letters of Father Leo Deschâtelets, Superior General from 1947 to 1972 bear the hallmark of his devotion to Mary, a devotion like that of the Founder, the Founder whom he knew well and in whose enthusiastic and inspiring spirit he shared to some extent. In at least nineteen of his seventy-two circular letters, he spoke at length of the Blessed Virgin. Circumstances often offered him a chance to do this, especially the occasion of his election, when he asked the Oblates to re-think the Rule<sup>123</sup>, upon the death of Father Hilary Balmès, the Vicar General who had a great devotion to "our Good Mother".<sup>124</sup> During the 1953 Chapter, he spoke of Father Frans Demoutiez, a Belgian Oblate, who "accompanies through hemispheres and continents a statue of our Lady of Fatima, achieving resounding success. In my opinion, this is perhaps the greatest Marian epic of our modern times".<sup>125</sup> He spoke of her again at length on the occasion of the centenary of the definition of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception,<sup>126</sup> in the course of Chapters and in relation to the Second Vatican Council.

In his long circular letter no. 191 entitled *Our Vocation and Our Life of*

*Intimate Union with Mary Immaculate*, Father Deschâtelets wrote a far-ranging treatise on Marian Oblate spirituality.<sup>127</sup> Far in advance of the crisis which burst forth in the wake of the Council, he seemed already to foresee the self-examination of identity of the religious life and the priesthood and on the character specific to the Oblate vocation.

In the first part of his letter, he seeks to define clearly which elements are characteristic of Oblates and in what is the originality of our Oblate life. In the second part, he answers the questions: "Why and how can we live this Oblate life in a Marian way?" He begins by making a categorical affirmation: "If we want to understand our vocation, it is not a case of having an ordinary devotion to Mary Immaculate; it is a case of identifying ourselves in some way with Mary Immaculate; it is a case of a gift of ourselves to God through her and like her, a gift that attains the depths of our entire Christian, religious, missionary, priestly life".<sup>128</sup> He then shows that this idea did not go beyond the Founder's thinking and Oblate tradition whose main lines of thought he summarizes in general terms. After an explanation of a few principles of Marian theology, he explains what Mary is for the Oblates and what the Oblates are for Mary. Mary is "our Immaculate Mother", "the All Pure One, the Highly Favored One, the Gracious One [...], Perfect Mother", "Masterpiece of Divine Mercy", "Mother of God and men", etc. "Consecrated to this Immaculate One in a special way, the Oblates should be in the forefront of those souls who have been chosen to establish the Kingdom of God", "special apostles, specialists of the divine mercy", etc.<sup>129</sup> He then went into detail with regard to "the Oblate program of Marian life", consisting of Marian devotions

(rosary, visits, the wearing of Mary's scapulars and the spreading of this devotion, litanies of the Immaculate Conception, the invocation: Praised be Jesus Christ and Mary Immaculate, etc.) as well as being made up of the Marian apostolate (studies and writings on Mary, example of one's life, preaching, apostolate in Marian shrines, Marian associations, etc.).<sup>130</sup> No one from the Founder's time on had exhorted the Oblates to live so intensely their Marian lives along with so many Marian exercises within our community life and zeal for those outside.

After the Council, Father Deschâtelets toned down to some extent this tendency while still encouraging the Oblates to love and venerate Mary, "to crowd around so good a Mother, purifying our Marian devotion by following the teachings of the Constitution on the Church, always bringing our devotion into line with the Church's devotion, especially since our Holy Father Pope Paul VI has just approved Mary's title as Mother of the Church".<sup>131</sup> Among the themes for the 1966 Chapter's consideration, he proposed the theme of "our Marian devotion, particularly in relation to the mystery of Mary seen in its totality, especially her role as Mother of the Church".<sup>132</sup>

Fathers Fernand Jetté (Superior General from 1974 to 1986) and Marcello Zago have something to say on Mary in about one out of every two of their circular letters.<sup>133</sup> But their teaching, including the teachings on Mary, are no longer contained only exclusively in their circular letters. Father Jetté's main speeches and addresses have been published.<sup>134</sup> In the book *The Missionary O.M.I.*, we often find allusions to Mary, especially in a conference delivered at Cap-de-la-Madeleine on March 23, 1979, treating of "The

Oblate and the Blessed Virgin Mary".<sup>135</sup> In this speech, Father Jetté speaks initially about Mary's place in our past history, in the Founder's life and in Oblate tradition, then in our present-day life. With regard to this topic, he notes that in the Congregation, much like in the Church, devotion to Mary is in crisis, and yet, he states: "I do have the impression that most of us, despite all these upheavals and questionings, retain in the depths of our hearts a lively love for Mary and a filial trust in her". He concludes his address by suggesting three attitudes to be developed in the future, attitudes which are in harmony with our spirit as well as our history: 1) First of all, Mary must be the model of our faith and of our commitment to the service of God; 2) She should be for us the path which enables us to advance ever more deeply into the mystery of Jesus; 3) She must be for us a friend, a genuine companion in our life as missionaries. The idea of the presence of Mary in the life of the Oblate reappears often in Father Jetté's writings as well as in those of Father Zago.

Each year for the feast of February 17, Father Zago has written a letter to the Oblates in first formation. His letter of 1988 dealt with "Mary in the life of the Congregation and in particular in first formation, so as to be in harmony with the Church which is celebrating the Marian Year".<sup>136</sup> It deals with Mary in the experience of the Founder, of the name of Oblate of Mary which means: consecrated to God under the auspices of the Blessed Virgin, of Mary model and formator, and ends off by saying what he expects from the Oblates: that they live the reality of these simple, profound words of Blessed Eugene: "The members will always look upon Mary as their Mother!"

## 2. THE MAIN THEMES DEVELOPED IN THEIR CIRCULAR LETTERS

In their circular letters, references to Mary can be grouped according to four themes linked to the thinking of the Founder. The first two deal with personal or community piety; the other two deal with mission.

First of all, the Superiors General refer to Mary to ask for her intercession. That is the thought that most often recurs. Their appeal for the protection and help of the Mother and Patroness of the Congregation becomes more intense on the occasion of their election,<sup>137</sup> the calling and holding of General Chapters,<sup>138</sup> or other serious events. The latter are frequent in the Congregation's history.

In his report to the 1873 Chapter, Father Fabre feared lack of unity among the capitulants who came from all over and no longer knew each other as was the case in the Founder's time. He wrote: "May our kind heavenly Mother also deign to show once more her tender love for us by maintaining among us the spirit of union and of charity and keeping far from us any factionalism or spirit of strife".<sup>139</sup> At the time of the disbanding of communities in France in 1880, he exhorted the Oblates to have recourse "to the Immaculate Heart of our Mother".<sup>140</sup>

After Father Augier's resignation, the Assistants General "faithfully kneeling before the altar of the Immaculate Virgin" begged "our Mother and Patroness" to protect the Congregation.<sup>141</sup> During Father Lavillardière's illness shortly after his election, Father Eugene Baffie, Vicar General, asked the Blessed Virgin for a miracle. He wrote: "Let us continue to pray with this intense faith and we will see the goodness and power of Mary burst forth on behalf of our religious family".<sup>142</sup>

Bishop Dontenwill called upon Mary's aid when he promulgated the changes to the Rule in 1910.<sup>143</sup> In 1932, Father Euloge Blanc, Vicar General, and his Assistants General, Isidore Belle, Servule Dozois and Auguste Estève, in announcing the illness and death of Bishop Dontenwill.<sup>144</sup> After having rebuked the young priests for not having proceeded to the places assigned to them by obedience "recto tramite et more oblatorum," Father Labouré petitioned Mary to help educators in their task of formation.<sup>145</sup>

The death of Father Fernand Thiry in Durban in 1945 of Father Jean Pietsch in 1946, the celebration of one hundred years in Sri Lanka in 1947, the resignation of Father Richard Hanley in 1974 were all occasions for Fathers Balmès, Deschâtelets and Jetté to call upon Mary with confidence.<sup>146</sup> Father Jetté prayed to Mary on the occasion of the Founder's beatification in 1975<sup>147</sup> and Father Zago did likewise at the beatification of Father Gérard in 1988 and the canonization of Bishop de Mazenod.<sup>148</sup> Fathers Jetté used a prayer for Mary's intercession as a conclusion for many of his circular letters.

The second theme which often emerges is that of personal and communitarian devotion of Oblates for Mary Immaculate. It was expressed in many ways: praise, gratitude, various titles bestowed upon Mary, and especially a recalling of the various exercises of piety in her honor and her presence among the Oblates.

Father Fabre who, like Bishop de Mazenod, felt the importance of "regularity," and stressed especially visits to our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament and to "our kind Mother," in whose presence "the heart of the priest and Oblate of Mary can securely reveal itself with all its ardor and vigor".<sup>149</sup>

Under Father Soullier, the 1893 Chapter approved by vote "the introduction among the Offices proper to us, the Office of Our Lady of Good Counsel."<sup>150</sup> In 1900, when he made the announcement that Pope Leo XIII had approved the scapular of the Sacred Heart, Father Augier stated that devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and to the most Holy Virgin conceived without sin and Mother of Mercy should be considered "as the most precious of our family treasures".<sup>151</sup>

We have seen that Bishop Dontenwill had adopted as his own and proposed to the Oblates a special devotion for Mary Immaculate. It was while he was making this devotion that he died.<sup>152</sup> At the 1938 Chapter, a motion was made asking for the insertion into the proper of the Oblates some fifteen feasts of the Blessed Virgin. The capitulants were not in favor of this, but the decision was made to add to the litany of the Blessed Virgin the invocation: "Regina Congregationis nostrae, ora pro nobis." The Holy See refused to grant this and the invocation was inserted in the litanies of particular examen.<sup>153</sup>

Father Labouré's devotion to Mary appeared in the long letter he wrote on the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of the Oblates' arrival in Canada. He concluded the letter by citing the names of those he called our martyrs and added: "Let us ask them as well to present on our behalf to our Immaculate Mother, Queen of all our missions and special patroness of our missions in the polar regions, our filial tributes of gratitude and love, begging her to bless the efforts of our missionaries, called by the Church to spread the Catholic faith throughout the world. Her throne stands at the heart of the Canadian Province at the national shrine of Cap-de-la-Madeleine which filled our

Founder with joy when he saw it entrusted to his sons; she is our protectress under many titles of a great number of our houses and mission outposts right up to the Arctic Ocean and the chilly Hudson Bay. Everywhere, our preachers and missionaries make her known, loved and invoked. Everywhere, she presides over our missions, blesses our efforts and receives the tribute of our successes. In this centenary, bringing to a close a century filled with so many conquests, but also with so much suffering and virtue, the balance sheet that we are trying to set up would not be complete if it did not contain the name of our gentle Mother."<sup>154</sup> In the same vein, Father Hilaire Balmès praised and thanked Mary on the occasion of the "centenary of our missions in Ceylon" in 1946.<sup>155</sup>

Father Deschâtelets spoke very often of the personal and communitarian devotion of Oblates to Mary,<sup>156</sup> as well as of exercises of Marian piety.<sup>157</sup> Father Jetté called the Oblates to a genuine devotion to Mary and explained its meaning.<sup>158</sup> He gave as the second reason for the M.A.M.I. pilgrimage to Lourdes in 1985 "the tribute to be paid to Mary Immaculate".<sup>159</sup> Father Zago did not often mention Marian exercises of piety, but pointed to "the discreet presence of Mary Immaculate",<sup>160</sup> and invited the Oblates to love Mary and have confidence in her.<sup>161</sup>

The third and fourth themes have to do with the mission and apostolate of the Oblates. The third arises from the mission entrusted to the Oblates by Pope Leo XII in his letter of approbation of this Institute. He said, "Finally, it is our hope that the members of this holy family who [...] acknowledge as patroness the Mother of God, the Immaculate Virgin, will apply themselves with all their strength to bring back to

the bosom of Mary's mercy the men that Jesus Christ, raised high on the cross, wanted to give her for her children."<sup>162</sup>

The primary goal of the Congregation is not to spread devotion to Mary; it is first and foremost to evangelize the poor. But as Father Jetté wrote: "we are to preach the Gospel to the poor under the patronage of Mary, with the help and support of Mary and with Mary's sentiments in our hearts."<sup>163</sup> Father Soullier was the first to allude to Leo XII's text without quoting it. In his circular letter on preaching, he said that he visited "with growing admiration" the countries where the Oblates work and then he added: "Yes, our missionaries walked in the footsteps of the Apostles: with the cross and the Word of God, they have converted entire nations and led them, through the Mother of Mercy, to Jesus Christ, the Son of God".<sup>164</sup>

In the circular letters where they spoke of the Sacred Heart scapular, Fathers Augier and Lavillardière quoted Leo XII's text word for word. Father Lavillardière added: "Oblates of Mary Immaculate, let us make known far and wide the glorious privilege of our Mother and we shall see her join us as co-worker for the conversion of unbelievers and sinners."<sup>165</sup>

In his report to the 1926 Chapter, Bishop Dontenwill quoted and commented Leo XIII's text: "What fine and consoling words! [...] Acknowledging as Patroness and Mother, Mary conceived without sin, we enjoy a special quality; we are endowed with a special mission to snatch souls from the devil and hell and lead them to the bosom of the Mother of mercy. Through her Immaculate Conception, Mary triumphed over the devil and she bestows on those who serve under her banner the same power."<sup>166</sup>

The most recent Superiors General have scarcely developed this idea, although they do allude to it, especially Father Deschâtelets in his letter dealing with our vocation. He wrote: "As missionaries, we are special apostles, specialists of God's mercy. We will never truly understand this specialization except in the context of our belonging to Mary Immaculate. It is only in that context that we will gradually experience this all-encompassing compassion for poor souls, the most wretched of souls, a compassion which constitutes one of our most characteristic features."<sup>167</sup>

In the articles of the 1818 Rule dealing with "public functions in the church", Oblates were asked to pray daily "the public prayer which, in the evening, will be followed by a lecture or meditation into which will be subtly inserted all the principles of the Christian life and the strictest piety to lead souls to a knowledge and love of God and of his Son Jesus Christ [...], to devotion to the Blessed Virgin all of whose octaves will be faithfully celebrated".<sup>168</sup> To propagate devotion to Mary is one of the goals of the Congregation<sup>169</sup> and that is the fourth theme developed by the Superiors General.

Father Fabre did not dwell on this obligation except at the time of his election. At that time, he wrote that we should show ourselves worthy of showing forth the glory "of our Immaculate Mother whom we have the obligation to have respected, loved and honored everywhere".<sup>170</sup> In 1898, speaking of the act of consecration to the Sacred Heart Father Augier evoked the Congregation's double mission: "to seek the glory of the Immaculate Virgin Mary whose title we bear [and] to see to it that the Sacred Heart of Jesus is loved".<sup>171</sup> In his report to the 1904 Chapter, on the occasion of

the fiftieth anniversary of the definition of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception, he stated that the Chapter "wished to honor Mary's privilege in a special way, a privilege which our religious family should especially preach about and make known to the world".<sup>172</sup> The same idea surfaced with Bishop Dontenwill in 1908 on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Mary's apparitions at Lourdes.<sup>173</sup>

In his letter treating of the deliberations of the 1932 Chapter, Father Labouré stated that the Chapter "enjoined the body of the priests of the Congregation to teach and preach more often and more earnestly [...] veneration and devotion to the Immaculate Conception of Mary".<sup>174</sup>

The mission of "being the champions of our Immaculate Mother by preaching everywhere the glory of the privilege which is for us a title of honor,"<sup>175</sup> is one of Father Deschâtelets' favorite themes appearing in all the letters he wrote about Mary before the Second Vatican Council.<sup>176</sup> This theme appeared only rarely in the letters of Fathers Jetté and Zago.<sup>177</sup> In his conference on the Oblates and the Blessed Virgin, Father Jetté wrote that it was just as important in our day as it was in former times for "the Oblates to continue preaching the Blessed Virgin, to make her known and loved" even though we might not be able to do so now as we had done in the past.<sup>178</sup>

In August 1822 before a new statue of Mary in the Mission church in Aix, Father de Mazenod experienced the presentiment that under the aegis of his kind Mother "within her [the Congregation] lies hidden the germ of very great virtues, and that she can achieve infinite good".<sup>179</sup> We find this same thought contained in Father Deschâtelets' farewell speech as Superior Gen-

eral at the 1972 Chapter. He reaffirmed his confidence in the future of the Congregation "by very virtue of his devotion to the Virgin Mary [...]. It is not possible that we deteriorate and that we lose our strength".<sup>180</sup> In the same way, in his final circular letter, Father Jetté wrote: "My trust in God, my faith in the Congregation and the men who are its members, remains solid and unshaken" because of attachment of the Oblates to Jesus Christ, the charity which unites them, of zeal for the poor and "devotion to Mary. Her name we bear as a family name. She has been watching over us since the beginning of our history. If we remain faithful to her, she cannot fail to help us today."<sup>181</sup>

YVON BEAUDOIN

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Retreat in preparation for the priesthood, December 1811 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 14, no. 95, p. 218.

<sup>2</sup> REY I, p. 25.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Anthony de Mazenod to Eugene, February 27, 1816. Original in Aix, Méjanès Archives, Boisgeline section.

<sup>4</sup> Later on, on the reverse side of the first page, Eugene wrote: "This rule of life is more precious to me than all the gold in the world [...]. I pray [...] that I will treat it with the same respect as [...] some of the writings of Saint Francis de Sales," see REY I, p. 25.

<sup>5</sup> MORABITO, Joseph, *Je serai prêtre*, Ottawa, 1954, p. 15 & 16.

<sup>6</sup> REY I, p. 26.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>8</sup> PIELORZ, Józef, *The Spiritual Life of Bishop de Mazenod, 1782-1812*, Selected Oblate Studies and Texts, vol. II, Rome, 1998, p. 58.

<sup>9</sup> REY I, p. 26. We find a commentary on this text in BOUTIN, Louis Napoleon, *La spiritualité de Mgr de Mazenod, fondateur des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, Montreal, 1970, p. 66.

<sup>10</sup> PIELORZ, Józef, *op. cit.*, p. 58-59; 61-62.

<sup>11</sup> Oblate General Archives, DM-6A.

<sup>12</sup> Mazenod, Eugene de, *Traité des péchés*, p. 3., Ms.: Oblate General Archives, DM-III 4.

<sup>13</sup> In *Ecrits oblats* I, vol. 16, p. 97-98.

<sup>14</sup> Letter of Eugene to his father, August 14, 1805 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 14, no. 10, p. 18 & 19.

<sup>15</sup> ESTEVE, Augustine, *Articles produits par la postulation de la cause du Serviteur de Dieu C.-J.-Eugène de Mazenod*, 1926, p. 22. See also BAFFIE, Eugene, *Esprit et vertus du missionnaire des pauvres...*, Paris-Lyon, 1884, p. 186.

<sup>16</sup> Letter from Eugene to his grandmother Catherine Elisabeth Joannis, October 18, 1808 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 14, no. 29, p. 63.

<sup>17</sup> OLIER, John James, *Traité des saints Ordres*, Part III, Chapter 2 in *Oeuvres complètes*, published by Migne, col. 663-664.

<sup>18</sup> ICARD, I.H., *Traditions de la Compagnie des Prêtres de Saint-Sulpice pour la direction des grands séminaires*, Paris, 1886, p. 264.

<sup>19</sup> CONSENTINO, Georges, *Exercices de piété de l'Oblat*, Ottawa, Oblate Studies Edition, 1962, p. 58.

<sup>20</sup> PIELORZ, Józef, *op. cit.*, p. 222-223.

<sup>21</sup> Letter from Eugene to his grandmother, October 18, 1808 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 14, no. 29, p. 64.

<sup>22</sup> COSENTINO, Georges, *op. cit.*, p. 78-85.

<sup>23</sup> Mazenod, Eugene de, *Explications ou Notes sur le Nouveau Testament*, p. 4, 12 and 15. Ms.: Oblate General Archives, DM-III 2b.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 6 and 15.

<sup>25</sup> The work in question is the manual *Theologia dogmatica et moralis ad usum seminariorum*, Dijon, 1789, 8 vols. See NOGARET, Marius, *Eugène de Mazenod: enseignement du séminaire Saint-Sulpice, 1809-1811*. Ms.: Oblate General Archives, DM-XX 7E.

<sup>26</sup> *Notes sur le traité des péchés*, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 37.

<sup>28</sup> Letter from Eugene to his mother, December 25, 1808 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 14, no. 37, p. 84-86.

<sup>29</sup> Letter from Eugene to his grandmother, September 19, 1809 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 14, no. 59, p. 136.

<sup>30</sup> MAZENOD, Eugene de, *Resolutions taken during the retreat made on entering the seminary in October 1808* in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 14, no. 28, p. 62.

<sup>31</sup> *Traité de la pénitence*, Ms. Oblate General Archives, DM-III 8a.

<sup>32</sup> Letter from Eugene to his mother, January 6, 1810 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 14, no. 67, p. 154.

<sup>33</sup> Letter from Eugene to his mother, May 11, 1810 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 14, no. 69, p. 159.

<sup>34</sup> May 1811 retreat in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 14, no. 85, p. 189.

<sup>35</sup> Retreat made in Amiens, December 1811 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 14, no. 95, p. 216.

<sup>36</sup> Topics of meditation and lectures. Ms.: Oblate General Archives, DM-IV 5a, nos. 1 and 2; *Pour l'Assomption*, *ibidem*, DM-V 4, etc.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 37.

<sup>38</sup> *Abrégé du règlement de vie*, *ibidem*, p. 15 and *Statuts*, chap. XII, art. 50, p. 87.

<sup>39</sup> *Abrégé...*, p. 10.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 15.

<sup>41</sup> *Statuts...*, p. 87.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>43</sup> *Consécration et protestation qui doit être approuvée par chaque congréganiste le jour de sa réception*, Ms.: Oblate General Archives, DM-VIII 3.

<sup>44</sup> Règlement, chap. III, art. 2, in *Missions*, 1899, p. 32.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 87.

<sup>46</sup> *Abrégé du règlement de vie*, p. 16.

<sup>47</sup> *Statuts*, p. 87.

<sup>48</sup> *Abrégé...*, p. 18.

<sup>49</sup> Coat of arms kept among the souvenirs of the Founder at the postulation.

<sup>50</sup> LAMBLIN, E., "Souvenirs d'Aix: l'Immaculée Conception et la congrégation de la jeunesse chrétienne", in *Missions*, 1904, p. 470.

<sup>51</sup> *Statuts*, chap. XIII, art. 7 in *Missions*, 1899, p. 89.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 85, 87-88.

<sup>53</sup> DUBOIS, Edmond, in *Positio super Introductione Causae S. D., Eugenii de*

*Mazenod...* Rome, 1935, p. 716; LAMBLIN, E., *art. cit.*, p. 472-473.

<sup>54</sup> Letter from Father de Mazenod to Father Tempier, August 15, 1822 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 86, p. 94-96.

<sup>55</sup> Concerning this point, see LUBOWICKI, Casimir, "L'expérience du 15 août 1822", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 47 (1988), p. 11-22 and *Maria nella vita del beato Eugenio de Mazenod e della sua Congregazione*, Frascati, 1988, p. 120-148.

<sup>56</sup> Letter from Father de Mazenod to Father Tempier, December 22, 1825 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 213, p. 223-224.

<sup>57</sup> *Missions* (1952), p. 411, 413.

<sup>58</sup> Petition presented to Pope Leo XII, December 8, 1825 in *Missions* (1952), no. 280, p. 57-62.

<sup>59</sup> CONSENTINO, Georges, *Histoire de nos Règles*, I, Ottawa, Oblate Studies Edition, 1955, p. 165-166; letter from Father de Mazenod to Father Tempier, October 9, 1815 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 4, p. 6.

<sup>60</sup> THIEL, J., "Relations du Fondateur avec le Père Lanteri", in *Etudes oblates*, 5 (1946), p. 136-138.

<sup>61</sup> DROUART, Jean, "L'Immaculée Conception dans la vie du bx Eugène de Mazenod", in *Pôles et Tropiques*, February 1981, p. 54.

<sup>62</sup> JETTÉ, Fernand, "Essai sur le caractère marial de notre spiritualité, I: Chez le Fondateur", in *Etudes oblates*, 7 (1948), p. 25.

<sup>63</sup> Letter from Father de Mazenod to Father Tempier, December 22, 1825 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 213, p. 223.

<sup>64</sup> Letter from Father de Mazenod to Father Tempier, March 20, 1825 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 7, no. 231, p. 63.

<sup>65</sup> Letter from Father de Mazenod to Father Honorat, August 18, 1843 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 1, no. 24, p. 59.

<sup>66</sup> DESCHATELETS, Leo, "Notre vocation et notre vie d'union intime avec Marie Immaculée", circular letter no. 191, August 15, 1951 in *Circ. adm.*, V (1947-1952), p. 51.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 67.

<sup>68</sup> JETTÉ, Fernand, *art. cit.*, p. 43.

<sup>69</sup> GILBERT, Maurice, "Notre consecration à Marie Immaculée", in *Etudes oblates*, 12 (1953), p. 193.

<sup>70</sup> Record book of General Chapter pro-

ceedings... Ms. Oblate General Archives I, p. 29. See also, Letter from Father de Mazenod to Father Guigues, December 5, 1844: "When the newspapers write something about you, insist that they add 'of Mary' to the word 'Oblate,'" in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 1, no. 50, p. 112.

<sup>71</sup> LAMBLIN, E., *art. cit.*, P. 470.

<sup>72</sup> *Constitutions et Règles de la Société des Missionnaires de Provence*, Part Two, Chapter One, par. 5 in *Missions* 78 (1951), p. 61.

<sup>73</sup> *Directoire du noviciat de N.-D. de l'Osier*, 1853, p. 8 and 79.

<sup>74</sup> After the fifth joyful mystery, they used to meditate on the adoration of Jesus by the angels, the shepherds and the Magi; before the fifth sorrowful mystery, they used to meditate on Jesus covered with shame; before the fifth glorious mystery, they used to meditate on Jesus seated at the right hand of the Father. See COSENTINO, George, *Les exercices de piété*, *op. cit.*, p. 160-161. The Rosary was recited this way until the 1893 General Chapter, *ibidem*, p. 161.

<sup>75</sup> *Règles et Constitutions à l'usage des frères convers de la Société des Missionnaires Oblats de la très sainte et Immaculée Vierge Marie*, Part Three, *Directoire ou règle de conduite dans les principaux exercices*, chap. VI.

<sup>76</sup> *Acts of Visitation of Notre Dame du Laus*, August 12, 1821. The author of the commentary on the manual *La prière oblate* was not aware of this fact. He stated that this custom began in 1843. See *La prière oblate*, Rome, 1986, p. 39.

<sup>77</sup> *Registre des délibérations des Chapitres généraux de la Société...*, ms. I, 1, p. 168-169.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 30-31.

<sup>79</sup> With regard to the practices of Marian piety that come to us from the Founder, see LUBOWICKI, Casimir, *Maria nella vita del beato Eugenio de Mazenod e della sua Congregazione*, *op. cit.*, p. 210-216.

<sup>80</sup> BAFFIE, Eugene, *op. cit.*, p. 213.

<sup>81</sup> Letters from the Founder to Father Tempier, April 13, 1826 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 7, no. 236, p. 85, to Bishop Ignatius Bourget, February 6, 1845, *ibidem*, vol. 1, no. 51, p. 115, to Father Bruno Guigues,

November 23, 1845, *ibidem*, vol. 1, no. 59, p. 124, to Father Gustave Richard, May 29, 1852, *ibidem*, vol. 11, no. 1104, p. 82.

<sup>82</sup> Letter to scholastic brother Saluzzo, December 8, 1831 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 8, no. 411, p. 47-48.

<sup>83</sup> Letter to Father John Baptist Honorat, September 20, 1841 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 1, no. 6, p. 10. See also letters to Father Stephen Semeria, October 21, 1847 and January 25, 1848 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 4, no. 1, p. 3 and no. 2, p. 9 and to Father John Verdet, September 23, 1851 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 2, no. 153, p. 25.

<sup>84</sup> Letter to Father Anthony Mouchette, July 9, 1853 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 11, no. 1160, p. 147.

<sup>85</sup> Letters to Father Bruno Guigues, September 25, 1844 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 1, no. 47, p. 105 and to Father Hippolyte Courtès, January 11, 1847 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 10, no. 920, p. 152.

<sup>86</sup> Letter to Father Mille, June 5, 1838 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 9, no. 665, p. 93 and *Mazenod Diary*, November 17, 1838, Ms.: Oblate General Archives. JM.

<sup>87</sup> Letters to Fathers Joseph Alexander Ciamin, April 9, 1853 and to Father Etienne Semeria, September 29, 1853 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 4, no. 33, p. 111 and no. 34, p. 113.

<sup>88</sup> *Mazenod Diary*, January 3, 1859 in REY II, p. 708. See also circular letter no. 4, on the occasion of the death of Father Casimir Aubert, February 1, 1860 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 12, p. 225.

<sup>89</sup> *Acts of Visitation of Notre-Dame de l'Osier*, July 16, 1835. Copy in Oblate General Archives.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>91</sup> *Constitutions et Règles de 1818*, Part One, Chapter Two, par. 2, Latin text of 1826, Chapter 2, 2, art. 5.

<sup>92</sup> For a description of the two ceremonies, see BAFFIE, Eugene, *op. cit.*, p. 195-196; also AUDRUGER, A., *Directoire pour les missions à l'usage des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, Tours, 1881, p. 98-109.

<sup>93</sup> Letter to Father Guigues, November 5, 1837 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 9, no. 652, p. 73.

<sup>94</sup> LAMIRANDE, Emilien, "La desserte des sanctuaires de la très sainte Vierge. Place parmi les fins de la Congrégation d'après Mgr de Mazenod", in *Etudes oblates* 17 (1958), p. 97-118; *Idem*, "L'apostolat des pèlerinages et Mgr de Mazenod", *ibidem*, 21 (1962), p. 41-54.

<sup>95</sup> LEFLON, IV, p. 263.

<sup>96</sup> *Acts of Visitation of Notre-Dame de l'Osier*, July 16, 1835. Copy in Oblate General Archives.

<sup>97</sup> Letter to Madame de Mazenod, July 5, 1835. Original in Oblate General Archives, FB I-9.

<sup>98</sup> Letter to Father Guigues, September 3, 1835 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 8, no. 541, p. 191. *Acts of Visitation of Notre-Dame du Laus*, October 18, 1835 and July 24, 1836. Copy in Oblate General Archives.

<sup>99</sup> JETTÉ, Fernand, "Essai sur le caractère marial de notre spiritualité. I: Chez le Fondateur", *Etudes oblates*, 7 (1948), p. 43.

<sup>100</sup> Letter to Father Mie, October 1818 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 31, p. 49; *Acte d'érection de la communauté de N.-D. de Lumières*, June 2, 1837, copy in the Oblate General Archives.

<sup>101</sup> Letter to Father Mouchette, August 9, 1853 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 11, no. 1169, p. 160.

<sup>102</sup> HOFFET, Emil, "Mgr C. J. Eugène de Mazenod [...] et la définition du dogme de l'Immaculée Conception", in *Missions* 1904, p. 227-368.

<sup>103</sup> *Mazenod Diary*, December 5, 1854 in *Missions* 1873, p. 39.

<sup>104</sup> See *Pareri*, vol. III, p. 1. Translation of the text HOFFET, Emil, *op. cit.*, p. 252.

<sup>105</sup> *Mazenod Diary*, December 5, 1854 in *Missions* 1873, p. 39.

<sup>106</sup> Circular letter no. 191, August 15, 1951 in *Circ. adm.* V (1947-1952), p. 298-386. We will soon treat of this letter as well as Father Fernand Jetté's March 23, 1979 conference on "The Oblate and the Blessed Virgin Mary" and the April 1988 letter of Father Marcello Zago to the Oblates in first formation.

<sup>107</sup> Circular letter no. 15 in *Circ. adm.* I, (1850-1885), p. 131-132.

<sup>108</sup> See several references to this topic in an article by Father Roger GAUTHIER:

"Essai sur le caractère marial de notre spiritualité", in *Etudes oblates*, 7 (1948), p. 184.

<sup>109</sup> Circular letter no. 73 in *Circ. adm.*, II (1886-1900), p. 435-442.

<sup>110</sup> Circular letter no. 84, July 2, 1905 in *Circ. adm.* III (1901-1921), p. 82. The money required to pay for the stipends of this monthly Mass was offered and paid for by the province of Germany.

<sup>111</sup> Circular letter no. 90, September 24, 1906 in *Circ. adm.* III (1901-1921), p. 136-137.

<sup>112</sup> Circular letter no. 92, April 21, 1907 in *Circ. adm.* III (1901-1921), p. 195, 197.

<sup>113</sup> Article quoted p. 187.

<sup>114</sup> Circular letter no. 104, November 12, 1908 in *Circ. adm.* III (1901-1921) p. 230-231.

<sup>115</sup> Circular letter no. 108, December 8, 1910 in *Circ. adm.* III (1901-1921), p. 252.

<sup>116</sup> Circular letter no. 113, December 25, 1915 in *Circ. adm.* III (1901-1921), p. 287-288.

<sup>117</sup> Circular letter no. 126, November 9, 1920 in *Circ. adm.* III (1901-1921), p. 349-352.

<sup>118</sup> Circular letter no. 128, April 13, 1921 in *Circ. adm.* III (1901-1921), p. 398, see also, p. 397, 399, 411-412.

<sup>119</sup> Circular letter no. 137, March 19, 1927 in *Circ. adm.* IV (1922-1947), p. 91.

<sup>120</sup> Circular letter no. 140, July 16, 1928 in *Circ. adm.* IV (1922-1947), p. 116-117.

<sup>121</sup> Circular letter no. 164, March 19, 1939 in *Circ. adm.* IV (1922-1947), p. 376.

<sup>122</sup> Circular letter no. 165a, May 1, 1939 in *Circ. adm.* IV (1922-1947), p. 392e.

<sup>123</sup> Circular letter no. 175, June 13, 1947 in *Circ. adm.* V (1947-1952), p. 7.

<sup>124</sup> Circular letter no. 183, June 29, 1948 in *Circ. adm.* V (1947-1952), p. 224, 226.

<sup>125</sup> Circular letter no. 201, May 1, 1953 in *Circ. Adm.* VI (1953-1960), p. 64.

<sup>126</sup> Circular letters no. 202, November 1 and no. 203, December 8, 1953 in *Circ. Adm.* VI (1953-1960), p. 85-97, 144-145, 160.

<sup>127</sup> Circular letter no. 191, August 15, 1951 in *Circ. Adm.* V (1947-1952), p. 298-385.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 348.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 364-372.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 372-383.

<sup>131</sup> Circular letter no. 215, February 17, 1965 in *Circ. Adm.* VII (1965-1966), p. 20.

<sup>132</sup> Circular letter no. 216, February 22, 1965 in *Circ. Adm.* VII (1965-1966), p. 36.

<sup>133</sup> Father Jetté wrote forty-four circular letters (nos. 258-302) and from 1986 to 1995, Father Zago wrote thirty-one, most of them rather brief as in the past with the exception of those that had to do with the General Chapters.

<sup>134</sup> JETTÉ, Fernand, *Letters to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate*, Rome, 1984; *The Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate*, Rome, 1985, and *Lettres et homélie*s, Rome, 1993.

<sup>135</sup> *The Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate*, p. 105-127.

<sup>136</sup> This January 25, 1988, letter was published in *OMI Documentation*, no. 156, 11 p.; it followed the publication of John Paul II's encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*.

<sup>137</sup> See especially the first circular letters of Fathers Fabre, Soullier and Deschâtelets.

<sup>138</sup> See practically all the letters promulgating the holding of Chapters and asking for prayers for the Chapters.

<sup>139</sup> Circular letter no. 25, September 8, 1873 in *Circ. adm.* I, p. 272.

<sup>140</sup> Circular letter no. 31 and 32, June 4, 1880 in *Circ. adm.* I, p. 348 and 351.

<sup>141</sup> Circular letter no. 86, January 26, 1906 in *Circ. adm.*, III, (1901-1921), p. 114.

<sup>142</sup> Circular letter no. 99, January 1, 1908 in *Circ. adm.* III, (1901-1921), p. 220-221.

<sup>143</sup> Circular letter no. 108, December 8, 1910 in *Circ. adm.* III, (1901-1921), p. 252.

<sup>144</sup> Circular letters nos. 149, January 6, 1932 and 151 May 31 in *Circ. adm.* IV, (1922-1947), p. 212, 214 and 243 "We have faith in Mary, our Mother. She is the mediatrix of all graces. She will give us help at the appropriate time. She is especially the Mother of Oblates; can a mother abandon the fruit of her womb?"

<sup>145</sup> Circular letter no. 165a, May 1, 1939 in *Circ. adm.* IV, (1922-1947), p. 392 e.

<sup>146</sup> Circular letters nos. 172 and 174 written by Father Hilary Balmès, Decem-

ber 8, 1945 and June 28, 1946, Father Deschâtelets' no. 178, September 12 1947 letter in *Circ. adm.* IV (1922-1947), p. 469 and 481; V (1947-1952), p. 51-52, nos. 258 and 259 written by Father Jetté, June 22, 1974 in A.A.G., 1974, p. 36 and 41.

<sup>147</sup> Circular letter no. 264, June 6, 1975 in A.A.G., 1975, p. 350.

<sup>148</sup> Circular letters no. 306, April 3, 1988 in A.A.G., 1988, p. 34, 38-40 and no. 329, April 17, 1994 in A.A.G., 1994, p. 16.

<sup>149</sup> Circular letter no. 13, November 21, 1863 in *Circ. adm.* I, (1850-1885), p. 100-101.

<sup>150</sup> Circular letter no. 57, March 26, 1894 in *Circ. adm.* II (1886-1900), p. 174.

<sup>151</sup> Circular letter no. 73, August 27, 1900 in *Circ. adm.* II (1886-1900), p. 441.

<sup>152</sup> Circular letter no. 149 by Father Eulogus Blanc, January 6, 1932 in *Circ. adm.* IV (1922-1947), p. 214.

<sup>153</sup> Circular letter no. 164, March 19, 1939 in *Circ. adm.* IV (1922-1947), p. 350-351.

<sup>154</sup> Circular letter no. 168, August 15, 1941 in *Circ. adm.* IV (1922-1947), p. 457-458.

<sup>155</sup> Letter by Father Balmès, October 3, 1946 in circular letter no. 178 by Father Deschâtelets, September 12, 1947 in *Circ. adm.* V (1947-1952), p. 51-52.

<sup>156</sup> Especially in circular letters nos. 194, September 12, 1951, no. 200, August 15, 1953 and no. 201, May 1, 1953 in *Circ. adm.* V (1947-1952), p. 402-403, VI (1953-1960), p. 29-30, 76-77.

<sup>157</sup> Circular letters nos. 181, November 1, 1947, no. 191, August 15, 1953, no. 202, November 1, 1953 and no. 208, September 1, 1959 in *Circ. adm.* V (1947-1952), p. 155-157, 378-381; VI (1953-1960), 86-93, 228.

<sup>158</sup> Circular letters nos. 282, February 17, 1981, no. 292, October 20, 1983, no. 300, October 19, 1985 in A.A.G., 1981, p. 196, 1983, p. 243-244, 1985, p. 67.

<sup>159</sup> Circular letter no. 298, May 21, 1985 in A.A.G., 1985, p. 31.

<sup>160</sup> Circular letter no. 306, April 3, 1988 in A.A.G., 1988, p. 34, 38-40.

<sup>161</sup> Circular letter no. 308, October 15, 1988 in A.A.G., 1988, p. 52-53.

<sup>162</sup> Apostolic letter, March 21, 1826 in the 1827 Rule.

<sup>163</sup> *The Missionary...*, p. 108.

<sup>164</sup> Circular letter no. 59, February 17, 1895 in *Circ. adm.* II (1886-1900), p. 204-205.

<sup>165</sup> Circular letters no. 73 by Father Augier, August 27, 1900 in *Circ. adm.* II (1886-1900), p. 436 and 441 and no. 92 by Father Lavillardière, April 21, 1907 in *Circ. adm.* III (1901-1921), p. 195-196. This scapular of the Sacred Heart bears on the one side the image of the Blessed Mother under the title of Mother of Mercy.

<sup>166</sup> Circular letter no. 137, March 19, 1927 in *Circ. adm.* IV (1922-1947), p. 91.

<sup>167</sup> Circular letter no. 191, August 15, 1951 in *Circ. adm.* V (1947-1952), p. 370-371; See also circular letters no. 294 by Father Jetté, March 25, 1984 in A.A.G., 1984, p. 22 and no. 309 by Father Zago, November 1, 1988 in A.A.G., 1988, p. 71.

<sup>168</sup> 1818 Constitutions and Rules, Part One, Chapter Two, par. 7.

<sup>169</sup> *The Missionary...*, p. 107.

<sup>170</sup> Circular letter no. 10, December 10, 1861 in *Circ. adm.* I, p. 70.

<sup>171</sup> Circular letter no. 66, June 1, 1898 in *Circ. adm.* II (1886-1900), p. 328. Father Lavillardière evoked the same idea in his circular letter no. 92, April 21, 1907 in *Circ. adm.* III (1901-1921), p. 195.

<sup>172</sup> Circular letter no. 84, July 2, 1905 in *Circ. adm.* III (1901-1921), p. 82.

<sup>173</sup> Circular letter no. 104, November 12, 1908 in *Circ. adm.* III (1901-1921), p. 230.

<sup>174</sup> Circular letter no. 154, February 1, 1933 in *Circ. adm.* IV (1922-1947), p. 259.

<sup>175</sup> Circular letter no. 175, June 13, 1947 in *Circ. adm.* V (1947-1952), p. 7.

<sup>176</sup> See in particular circular letters nos. 178, September 12, 1947, no. 191, August 15, 1951, no. 198, December 30, 1952 and no. 202, November 1, 1953 in *Circ. adm.* V (1947-1952), p. 52, 373-377, 485; VI (1953-1960), p. 93-97.

<sup>177</sup> Father Jetté made a discrete allusion to this in his circular letters, no. 292, October 20, 1983, A.A.G., 1983, p. 243-244 and no. 294, March 25, 1984, A.A.G., 1984, p. 49 and in Father Zago's writings, circular letter no. 309, November 1, 1988, A.A.G., 1988, p. 71.

<sup>178</sup> *The Missionary...*, p. 123-125.

<sup>179</sup> Letter to Father Tempier, August 15, 1822 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 86, p. 93.

<sup>180</sup> Circular letter no. 247, April 11, 1972 in *Circ. adm.* VIII (1967-1972), p. 443.

<sup>181</sup> Circular letter no. 302, May 21, 1986 in A.A.G., 1986, p. 193.

## MAZENOD (EUGENE DE)

*Summary: I. Personal Spiritual Evolution. II. The Spirituality of a Christian. III. The Spirituality of the Oblate of Mary Immaculate: 1. Fundamental element: the Oblate is an apostolic man; 2. Complementary elements. Conclusion.*

Jean Leflon, the main biographer of Eugene de Mazenod, wrote: "In no way did the Bishop of Marseilles consider himself a master of a school of spirituality. [His spiritual efforts are] in keeping with the general movement of the Church in France [...] they conformed with the style of that period without adding anything very original [...]. ... Although he wrote much concerning the paths leading to communion with God, he did so in a completely haphazard fashion – that is, through his episcopal acts, through the Rule of his Congregation and through his correspondence – and never did it occur to him to organize what circumstances led him to counsel into a compact body of teachings."<sup>1</sup>

This seems to me to be an accurate judgment. Nonetheless, it encourages us to plumb more in depth the issue in question, to define more in detail the more personal features in the "style of that period" and the most outstanding attitudes he wanted to see his disciples incorporate into their lives. The "body of teachings" which he never composed, still remains to be drawn up. This is even becoming possible as his writings are published and as monographs appear on the various periods of his spiritual evolution or on specific points of his teaching. In this domain, the review, *Vie Oblate Life*, has rendered and continues to render outstanding service. In this article, we will make a brief study of Eugene de Mazenod's spiritual evolution and the most

basic elements of his spiritual teaching for the Oblates as well as for Christians in general.

### I. PERSONAL SPIRITUAL EVOLUTION

Several factors influenced this evolution. The following four are worth noting.

— *Family influence and social milieu.* Eugene was a young nobleman from Aix-en-Provence. He was born into a deeply Christian though rather worldly family. He experienced the French Revolution and the sufferings of exile. He also experienced family divisions and the humiliation of the Church, the wretched state of the clergy and the high degree of religious ignorance among the poor.

— *His own temperament.* Eugene was every inch a man of southern temperament with burning desires, a lively, authoritarian and very frank character with a judgment which was rarely in error. At the same time, he was a man of extreme sensitivity, a temperament which loved passionately and which demanded a response. Father Józef Pielorz sums it up in two words: "Strength and sensitivity [...]. Neither the one nor the other are compatible with mediocrity in either doing good or doing evil."<sup>2</sup>

— *His theological and spiritual formation.* His formation was that of his times with, however, a few influences specific

to his life history. During his exile in Italy (1791-1802), a holy priest from Venice imbued with the spirit of the Company of Jesus, Don Bartolo Zinelli, certainly left his mark on him. His rule of life at Venice consisted of weekly confession and communion, daily Mass and daily recitation of the little Office of the Blessed Virgin, a regular practice of mortification, pious reading, prayer and study. This lasted from 1794-1797, from age twelve to sixteen. He would later write: "My vocation to the priestly life dates back to that time".<sup>3</sup> Also, during this time, he read *Lettres édifiantes sur les missions étrangères écrites par des missionnaires de la Compagnie de Jésus*, which left their mark as well.

In France at the seminary of Saint Sulpice in Paris from 1808 to 1812, Eugene received a doctrinal formation which was predominantly apologetical and with moral theology being given more emphasis than dogma. The formation was rather strict, but not Jansenist. It was a formation in which devotion to the Pope and the independence of the Church with regard to the civil power was taught. The seminary training did have its gaps; nonetheless, it still remained the best training that time had to offer.

In the area of spirituality, a spirit of fervor, regularity and work prevailed. Eugene was particularly influenced by Monsieur Emery, the superior, and Monsieur Duclaux, his spiritual director; both were loyal disciples of Monsieur Olier. Monsieur Emery's commitment to serve the Roman cardinals, a commitment which involved Eugene as a liaison person, certainly had an impact on him. Other things which certainly influenced him as well were his active participation in the Marian Congregation and in the seminary's Aa, an organization of Jesuit inspiration, and the

missionary group established by his colleague and fellow countryman, Charles de Forbin-Janson.

With his seminary training behind him and to the extent that his missionary and religious life began to take shape, other spiritual influences appeared and the old influences reasserted themselves, as for example, the influences of his patron saint, Charles Borromeo, Saint Ignatius of Loyola and a few Jesuit spiritual masters such as Jean Rigoleuc, Jean-Joseph Surin, Claude Judde, François Nepveu, Blessed Alphonse Liguori (especially for moral theology and the drawing up the Constitutions and Rules), Saint Vincent de Paul, the Lazarists and, in a more general way, the old religious orders. But we cannot say that Eugene de Mazenod was a man of one particular school of spirituality. No, he drew from many sources according to the circumstances, his own personal needs and those of his project. This is where a fourth factor comes into play: the grace of God in his life.

— *The grace God bestowed upon him.* This grace transformed and led him. It guided him gradually toward the priesthood and the founding of a missionary religious institute before making of him the head of an important diocese of France, at the crossroads of the world, the diocese of Marseilles. Eugene did his best to cooperate with the workings of divine grace. He considered fidelity to this action as one of the main foundation stones of his spiritual life.<sup>4</sup>

Eugene de Mazenod was an apostolic man. His spiritual journey is practically inseparable from his missionary action. Also, it is very difficult to determine the stages of his interior life by relying solely on events or interior graces which could point to his entering into a new stage. It is not that such

graces were absent; there are some present in his life; they are manifestly present. But they are perhaps less strikingly present than in the lives of saints of the contemplative way and they are given especially to confirm an action or an apostolic commitment.

Finally, Leflon's division of his biography of Eugene de Mazenod into three stages seems to me to be the simplest, and the most objective to treat of his spiritual life as well.

*a) First stage, 1782-1814*

This is the period in which Eugene's vocation as an apostolic man at the service to the poor buds forth, takes on its particular character and develops. God prepared him by the external events of his life: the experience of exile, family trials, the birth and then the crisis of his vocation, his "conversion", his becoming aware of the Church's needs, his ordination to the priesthood and the beginnings of his ministry to the poor.

During this period of time, two interior graces are worth noting. The first is the grace of the Good Friday "conversion", probably in 1807, during the veneration of the cross. This grace consisted in a personal experience of the love of Christ who shed his blood for him. He was permeated by a profound trust in the mercy of God along with a desire to make reparation by making a total gift of himself. The second one was a "strong impulse from the outside", a genuine spiritual impulse which, at the age of twenty-six, convinced him to set his sights on the priesthood.

He determined to become a priest, a priest for the poor. In this orientation, there was then, on Eugene's part, a desire to make reparation: reparation for

his own sins and for those of the great number of Christians who had left the Church. His desire was particularly to cooperate with Christ in the work of the world's redemption so that the blood shed by Christ, blood not shed in vain for him, would not be shed in vain for the world either. The four years he spent at the seminary of Saint Sulpice gave him an even deeper awareness of the needs of the Church and provided him with an opportunity to deepen his devotion to Christ and the Blessed Virgin. These years also provided a certain structure to his spiritual life in terms of exercises of piety, a method of oraison, examination of conscience and a rule of life.

*b) Second Stage, 1814-1837*

This period is exteriorly one of major projects: the founding of the Congregation of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, January 25, 1816, and its approbation by Pope Leo XII, February 17, 1826, Eugene's being named bishop, October 14, 1832, and the re-establishment of the diocese of Marseilles, and a period of struggles, apostolic trials, as well as the experience of his own limits. He began his ministry in Aix in 1812 at thirty years of age. He would be fifty-five when he would succeed his uncle Fortuné to the episcopal see of Marseilles in 1837.

Internally, it was a period of maturation, purification, of apostolic choices and the quest for balance. The spiritual adult called to guide others as Founder of a missionary institute and as head pastor of a vast diocese was gradually being formed. First, he had to make a definite option for an apostolic and communitarian ideal and divest himself of his desire for a monastic life which was more contemplative than mission-

ary. Subsequently, in his own life, he had to strike a balance between prayer and devotion to service of neighbor. This would be a long and difficult endeavor. He would have already made substantial progress in this direction when, in September of 1818, he would draw up the first Constitutions of the Missionaries of Provence. In October of that same year, he wrote: "God forbid that I should wish to renounce service of my neighbor! Far from it, since, if possible, it would be my desire to do more than I have done up until now [...], but I will act more prudently and, while serving my neighbor, I will not forget my own needs as I have done in the past. I will not so easily convince myself that the exercise of charity towards my neighbor can prevail over everything, excusing myself from meditation, preparation for Mass, thanksgiving, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, prayer, etc."<sup>5</sup>

Apostolic choice is, then, deeply rooted in him. Some special graces or signs from God confirmed him and sustained him in his journey, for example, in September 1815, at the time of founding the Oblates, a "strong impulse from the outside", which confirmed him in this direction, as was the case for his commitment to the priesthood and, August 15, 1822, a kind of spiritual confirmation with regard to the value and worth of his endeavor, while he was in prayer before the statue of Mary Immaculate, a statue he had just blessed in the Mission church in Aix-en-Provence. This is how he describes this grace in a letter to Father Henry Tempier: "I believe I owe her (to Mary) also a special experience that I had today, I will not go so far as to say more than ever, but certainly more than usual. I cannot describe it too well because it comprised several things but all related,

however, to a single object, our dear Society. It seemed to me that what I saw, what I could put my finger on, was that within her lies hidden the germ of very great virtues, and that she can achieve infinite good; I found her worthy, everything pleased me about her, I cherished her rules, her statutes; her ministry seemed sublime to me, as it is indeed. I found in her bosom sure, even infallible, means of salvation, such is how they looked to me."<sup>6</sup>

On February 17, 1826, Pope Leo XII officially approved the young Society. Preparatory negotiations for this approbation had been visibly blessed by God. Eugene de Mazenod felt this entire period was tangible proof that the existence of this Society was God's will. He emerged from it filled with joy overflowing with hope as if it was "the happy beginning of a new era for the Society".<sup>7</sup>

The Lord was waiting for him there. The ten years which followed, 1827 to 1836, were a genuine night of the soul for Eugene, a time of intense purification such as one encounters in apostolic men. Trials came thick and fast: dissension, illness, defections and bereavement, and even a temporary loss of his French citizenship in addition to being considered suspect by the Holy See. To his great cost Eugene had to learn the price of handing himself over to the Lord and serving his Church. It would be a bruising experience for him, but he would emerge from it more humble with a deeper understanding for others and stronger in his faith and love.

Father Yvon Beaudoin made a good analysis of this difficult period in the life of the Founder in his introductions to volumes VII and VIII of Eugene de Mazenod's *Letters to the Oblates of France*. He indicates the main causes: "Failure to improve the training and

perseverance of the members, failure of the Congregation to attain the desired level of religious and apostolic life, resistance of the diocese of Marseilles to the reforms that had been judged necessary, the death of cherished persons such as Marcou, Suzanne, Nathalie de Boisgelin and Leo XII, the illness of several fathers and of the Founder himself who was incapacitated for eighteen months.”<sup>8</sup>

In addition to Eugene’s illness, the immediate impact would be moments of discouragement and depression. January 2, 1828, he wrote Father Hippolyte Courtès: “Dear Courtès, I am at the end of my tether while death comes near as I approach old age. When I shall be free, [he was Vicar General of Marseilles at the time] I will no longer be able to act. While waiting for the good God to deliver you from the non-entity of the man that I have become, the rest of you act on my behalf. May the work of the Lord be accomplished...”<sup>9</sup> And on another occasion, August 20, 1835, while he was Bishop of Icosia and relegated to forced retirement, he confided to Father Tempier: “What am I lacking, after all? Absolutely nothing. ... At one time the labours of the greatest bishops in Christendom, the works even of those who have done most to shed luster on the Church, didn’t seem beyond my courage; I asked but the opportunity to follow in their footsteps, and to rival them, if I dare speak in this way, in zeal. Today, whether because I am too old to begin again, or because men’s injustice has embittered or changed my character, I don’t view things any longer in the same way, and my only happiness lies in the hope of finishing the course busying myself with naught but my personal sanctification and that of the family I am already charged with; it is really a lot.”<sup>10</sup>

The end of the trial period would finally come. As we said, Eugene would emerge transformed: even stronger and more zealous for the glory of God, service of the Church and the salvation of souls. His retreat in preparation for taking over the episcopal see of Marseilles in 1837 is significant in this regard: “I shall have to become attached to these people as a father is to his children; my existence, my life, my whole being will have to be devoted to them; I must have no thought except for their benefit, no fear except that of not doing enough for their welfare and sanctification, no solicitude except that which concerns all their spiritual interests, even in a certain sense their temporal interests. In short, I must spend myself for them, prepared to sacrifice my comfort, my inclinations, my repose, even my life itself for them.”<sup>11</sup>

### *c) Third stage, 1838-1861*

This is the period of full maturity. Exterioirly, his activity was intense. The Congregation for which he was still responsible was developing rapidly; in a few years it extended to England, Canada, the United States, Ceylon [Sri Lanka], South Africa. At the same time, his diocese was growing; he saw new parishes develop; he welcomed a number of religious institutes to the diocese and its population grew.

Interiorly, Bishop de Mazenod was filled with zeal; he encouraged, inspired, corrected and supported people. Filled with courage for himself and others, he maintained an imperturbable peace. His confidence in God was without limits.

His pastoral letters and correspondence with his fellow Oblates reveal him as a pastor, a genuinely apostolic man entirely devoted to his two-fold

task of bishop and superior general. In both instances, he was motivated by the glory of God, the good of the Church, the edification and salvation of souls. He possessed a profound sense of his paternal spirituality. It would be very difficult to envision him as anything other than the bishop of a diocese and the father of a religious family.

Throughout the course of the entire period of the last twenty-four years of his life, Eugene de Mazenod's spiritual life was characterized by internal equilibrium and a deep unity. Solidly grounded in his love of Christ and the Church, he no longer thinks of himself, but of all the people for whom he is responsible and the work of evangelization entrusted to him. Interiorly, he became very free. Faced with the prospect of the cardinalate which had been promised and which slipped away from him because of political considerations, he had this to say: "After all, it is all the same whether one is buried in a red cassock or a purple one; the main thing is to get to heaven".<sup>12</sup> To the very end, he maintained an intense devotion to the Blessed Virgin; his joy overflowed when on December 8, 1854 Pope Pius IX promulgated the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of Mary.

When Bishop de Mazenod died, May 21, 1861, he gave the impression of being a man in full possession of his faculties, conscious of having fulfilled the mission that the Lord had entrusted to him and eager to carry out his holy will until the end. To his doctor, he said: "Oh! How I would like to die fully conscious in order to wholeheartedly accept the will of God!"<sup>13</sup> And to the people surrounding him, he said: "If I happen to fall asleep or my condition gets worse, please wake me up; I want to die knowing that I am dying".<sup>14</sup> To the Oblates, he left this legacy, a legacy

which captured his life in a nutshell: "Among yourselves practice charity, charity, charity – and outside, zeal for the salvation of souls".<sup>15</sup>

His death was a death of love, not caught up in the ecstasy of contemplation, but in the attitude of the loyal servant who is bent on doing the will of his Lord to the very end.

## II. THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE CHRISTIAN

There are two ways of approaching Eugene de Mazenod's spiritual teachings; they are, no doubt, complementary, but are characterized by a different emphasis. Eugene taught his Oblates the way to holiness as members of his religious family. That is the best known and most developed of his spiritual teachings. He also taught the Christian faithful, those who heard his preaching or benefited from his ministry as bishop.

On this second aspect, very little has been written. What ideal of Christian life did he present to the faithful? By what means could they attain to it? A serious study of that aspect still remains to be done. There are some sources available: the acts of his ministry with the Association for Christian Youth of Aix, his correspondence with his family, his sermons as missionary and preacher, his pastoral letters as bishop. I am cannot develop that topic here. I do indicate, however, a few guideposts that seem necessary to provide an adequate idea of his spiritual teaching. Then, we will see what he demanded from his Oblates.

Eugene de Mazenod's most basic attitude before the human individual was one of trust and faith – even if, in certain circumstances, he deplored hu-

man weakness and took the time to describe the evils of his times. Two very solid convictions on his part explain this attitude. The first one was that everything which occurs on earth, on the personal as well as the civil and social level, depends on Divine Providence. The second is that God wants all men to be saved and all, rich and poor, have been purchased by the blood of Christ.

From his writings, especially his pastoral letters, the following points can be gleaned:

1. *All are called to salvation and holiness.* In our ministry toward them, we must strive to "lead men to act like human beings, first of all, and then like Christians, and finally, we must help them to become saints".<sup>16</sup> Father de Mazenod reminded the Oblates that their existence was dedicated to "the service of the Church and the sanctification of souls".<sup>17</sup> As bishop, his dream was to make of Marseilles, "a city of saints",<sup>18</sup> following the example of one of his predecessors Jean Baptiste Gault. Yet again, on February 20 1859, he wrote: "We are intensely concerned with finding means of ensuring your sanctification. Before God, that is what we care about the most, because over and above our paternal affection for you and the charity of Jesus Christ which spurs us on (2 Corinthians: 5, 14) like it spurred on the Apostle, your sanctification is the very will of the one who set us over you (1 Thessalonians 4:3) for us to work at it with all our strength."<sup>19</sup>

2. *To remain on the road to sanctity and make progress, the Christian should look upon himself with the eyes of faith.* No matter how poor or destitute he might be, in the eyes of faith, he is "a child of God", "brother of Jesus Christ", "heir of his eternal kingdom".<sup>20</sup> He was ransomed by the blood of Christ; this expression constantly recurs

in his Lenten pastoral letters. There lies his true dignity, his greatest riches.

3. *Holiness consists in conversion of heart, fidelity to the law of God, to the inspiration of his grace, in the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ.* The Lenten pastorals of February 2, 1842, February 8, 1846, February 2, 1850 and February 16, 1860 give us some very fine pages on these themes. The first pastoral gives us a description of the "servant of God"; the second deals with our living union with Christ; the third sketches the portrait of the "Christian"; the fourth reminds the Christian that he is a "member of the Church" and that "to love the Church is to love Jesus Christ".

4. *The journey to holiness demands a constant ongoing conversion.* Lent is the opportune time for this conversion. The theme recurs in almost all the Lenten pastorals. The Bishop of Marseilles wrote: "Each year, we watch the coming of the season of Lent with a mixture of fear and hope. We tell ourselves: Once again the people entrusted to our care will be put to the test of mercy in a general and solemn way [...]"<sup>21</sup>

"If, at the present time, the Church is urging you, if she threatens you, if she uses all the means available to her charity and her power to involve you, once and for all, in emerging from your state of indifference that is leading you to destruction, the reason is that knowing the value of your souls and the value of the treasures you are losing by your own fault, she could never agree to see you put your salvation in jeopardy through lack of reflection and courage [...] Come out, then, come out of your inexcusable apathy, my very dear Brothers; listen this time to the voice of your Mother and yield finally to such great and such just reasons for conver-

sion. Do today what you were planning to do tomorrow. [...] What could you give in exchange for your souls and what good will it do you to gain the whole world if you end up losing your soul? (Luke 16:26) Return to God, therefore, my very dear Brothers. Be consistent in your own regard in what has to do with your most precious interests."<sup>22</sup>

5. *The Church offers the Christian a number of means to achieve this ongoing conversion and spiritual progress.* Eugene de Mazenod elaborated on these various means as circumstance allowed. He did this especially in his role as Bishop of Marseilles, in his Lenten pastoral letters. No doubt, he had help in writing them – a study needs to be made on that point – but we can affirm without fear of error that, in their content, these pastorals are an accurate reflection of Eugene de Mazenod's thinking. It is even easy to pick out certain features that are truly characteristic of the Founder of the Oblates: emphasis on the effectiveness of parish missions, preference given to the apostolate in contrast to an exclusively contemplative attitude, an openness to foreign missions. For the rest, he himself sometimes makes reference to his former experience as a preacher of parish missions and his status of Founder and person in charge of a missionary religious institute spread over several continents.

Here, then, is a brief commentary on the main means of spiritual progress recommended by the Bishop of Marseilles:

a) *Religious education, listening to and meditating on the Word of God.* This means is necessary to enlighten the intelligence, acquire true knowledge and receive guidance on the way of salvation. Eugene observes in particular

that parish missions are a priceless help in bringing about spiritual renewal. They are "a great means of sanctification [...] perhaps the only means of rousing entire populations from a kind of general lethargy and of converting them to the Lord."<sup>23</sup>

b) *Prayer and penance.* These were recommended by Jesus himself. The Bishop of Marseilles mentions them again and again, especially as a means to prepare for the solemnity of Easter: "The Holy Spirit teaches us that the life of man is one of unceasing combat (Job 7:1) No matter what his station in life, he is commanded to always be armed and ready against the enemies of his salvation [...] It is at the moment of launching into the Blessed Forty Days that it is especially fitting for us to exhort you to stand as a force to offset the godlessness of this age by fasting, prayer, alms and eagerness to listen to the Word of God."<sup>24</sup>

c) *Keeping Sunday holy. Receiving the sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist and participating in the liturgical life of the Church.* On a number of occasions, the Bishop of Marseilles evoked the need to keep Sunday holy, this "sign of the New Covenant", this "holy rest which gives the Christian the time to spend in prayer and provides him the means of working with more care at his salvation, to listen to the Holy Word" and "to render solemn homage to God."<sup>25</sup>

Furthermore, he strongly recommends frequent reception of the sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist. It is in them that sinners "will find the strength to triumph over sin, while at the same time, at the wellsprings of salvation, they will draw living water (Isaiah 12:3) which cleanses every stain and which should satisfy for all eternity this unquenchable thirst for happiness

which seems to lie in the heart of each one of us. (John 4:13)"<sup>26</sup> It is his wish that Christians should receive these sacraments not only at Easter, but at the celebration of every liturgical feast.<sup>27</sup>

Indeed, it was his desire that every person in his diocese should make it a point to seriously participate in all of the liturgical feasts. He devoted his Lenten pastoral of February 1846 entirely to this theme: "Our Lord wanted to experience in his mortal life all the fortunes mortals are heir to, the fortunes of that mortal nature he had assumed in his mysterious Incarnation [...] He espoused our cause to the extent of identifying with us. [...] In this wonderful union of Jesus Christ and our souls lies the mystery of our participation in his grace, his glory. [...] [The feast of Easter] is ratification of the dignity of other feasts. [...] What the Church desires is that we should enter into the spirit of other feasts. They are a sort of journeying toward the great solemnity of the Resurrection; they lay before us the entire life of our Lord who was bound to be born, live and die in order to resurrect; they are distributed throughout the year like wayside stations so that we can restore our strength from time to time on our pilgrimage toward the happy destination where, in our resurrected state, we will die no more."

*d) Devotion to the angels and saints and especially devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary.* Eugene dedicated a pastoral letter to the good and the evil angels.<sup>28</sup> He likewise urged the people of his diocese to pray to the saints, especially those who were more closely linked to the church of Marseilles such as Saint Serenus.<sup>29</sup> His main emphasis, however, was on the Blessed Virgin Mary. He frequently exhorted the people of Marseilles to have fervent re-

course to her. He asked them to be generous in her regard during the reconstruction of Notre-Dame de la Garde<sup>30</sup> and for the erection of a monument to the Immaculate Conception.<sup>31</sup>

Regarding devotion to Mary, he wrote: "Second only to what has to do directly with God, nothing is more valuable for a piety enlightened by authentic knowledge than that which has to do with giving honor to the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is the devotion of a son for his mother – and what a mother! A mother who gave us the one who is the salvation and light of the world; a mother who brought us forth spiritually as her children at the foot of the cross in the throes of the passion and death of the Man-God; [...] a mother who is aptly called the new Eve and the co-redemptrix of the human race. [...] Even our existence in this life is under the protection of her maternal love."<sup>32</sup>

"It is the glory of God which is associated to the glory of Mary. [...] It is the Son whom we honor in the person of his Mother and that is why it is impossible for us to be excessive in the homage we render to Mary as long as we keep in mind her creaturehood with God as always the ultimate object of this homage."<sup>33</sup>

*e) Alms and sharing of wealth, especially with the destitute.* Eugene de Mazenod was not afraid to stress this point. He asked the people of his diocese to be generous toward the Pope and the Church;<sup>34</sup> he asked them to help the poor of the diocese.<sup>35</sup> He urged them to relieve the destitution of Christians and the victims of plagues in other countries such as Ireland.<sup>36</sup> He reminded them of their duty to support the Society for the Propagation of the Faith.<sup>37</sup> He urged them to give generously for the Notre-Dame de la Garde project.<sup>38</sup>

f) *Concern for the salvation of others and apostolic commitment.* Christians are children of the Church; they must have souls in tune with the Church, open to all persons redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ and intent on spreading the faith. He wrote two fine pastoral letters treating of this aspect of Christian spirituality: the February 18, 1848 letter, more pastoral in tone, which dealt with the apostolic vocation of the Christian and the February 16, 1860 letter, more doctrinal, devoted to exploring its foundations by contemplating the mystery of the Church.

The Church is "a regenerated humanity". Through it and in Jesus Christ, we make up "one single blessed family"; we are "the children of God, the heirs of his eternal kingdom and the co-heirs of Jesus Christ". We are "all brothers in the most perfect way", for "the same blood flows in our veins and that blood is the blood of a God".<sup>39</sup>

In the Christian life during the season of Lent, each individual seeks to renew himself in a spirit of faith and piety: "Each person works on himself and draws down graces on himself in order to grow in perfection before God"; but, Eugene de Mazenod notes that for the majority of them, there are "some duties that are more important than the individual needs of the soul, if not all the time, at least in the overall picture of life. [...] The apostle is more perfect than the monk. [...] Do not be surprised if we associate you in some way to our ministry and lead you to share in the laurels of apostolic men, glorious instruments of the salvation of souls created in the image of God and redeemed by his blood. [...] It is natural for faith to share of itself just as it is for charity to reach out to help others."<sup>40</sup>

The Bishop of Marseilles ends his letter by asserting the obligation of apostolic duty and suggesting four ways for the Christian to carry it out: 1. *Good example*: "Our Lord Jesus Christ started off by using this means"; 2. *Prayer for the conversion of sinners*: "It will be your private prayer, supporting in an invisible way the preaching of the sacred ministry or even the warnings of Providence, that will draw down from the heart of God the incursion of grace"; 3. *The Word*: "The Christian, vibrant with the truths of faith, is like Job, teeming with discourse. (Job 32: 18). [...] Expose [the truth] if you can in a tactful way which will avoid wounding those to whom you wish to bring healing; avoid making the presentation boring by a too frequent repetition; people are put off by impatient requests. But in this work of mercy, even if you are obliged to treat your brethren with consideration, have no fear of the world"; 4. *Help for the foreign missions*: "The universe abounds with men of God who will carry the Good News to every shore. [...] Guardian angels for these countless populations that await the day of the Lord ask us on their behalf for alms which, through the power of grace, will become transformed for us into fruits of life."<sup>41</sup>

With regard to this issue of the spirituality of the Christian, a most interesting study could be made on the way the Founder dealt with his relatives, especially his sister, Eugenie. We already see his attitude in volume 14 of *Oblate Writings*. He was studying at the seminary of Saint Sulpice; he has a great love for his sister and wants to see her become a saint. She had just been married; she spoke to him about her life and he gave her copious advice. He revealed himself to be stern

with regard to the world; he came out against balls and dances. He strongly recommended that his sister receive the sacraments, especially the Eucharist and asked her to pray and live united to God.<sup>42</sup>

### III. THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE OBLATE OF MARY IMMACULATE

Eugene de Mazenod dreamed of renewing the Church and helping all to sanctify themselves; he was also a realist. He knew full well that not all human beings, not even all priests, were interested in becoming saints. In order to achieve his goal, he always relied upon groups of chosen people who would have a well defined mission within the People of God and would act as the yeast in the dough.

Already during his clerical formation at Saint Sulpice, he had been involved with these groups through participation in the Marian Congregation and the seminary's Aa. In addition to this, upon his arrival in Aix as a young priest, we see him among the youth, much neglected from the religious point of view, organizing the Association of Christian Youth. This organization's goal was two-fold: to curb religious decadence and ensure the sanctification of its members. I quote here the first article of the general rule: "The main end of this congregation is to form in the city of Aix a body of very pious young people who, by their example, their counsel and their prayer will make a contribution to curbing the license and general apostasy which is daily making such rapid and frightening progress, while at the same time, they will work for their own sanctification."<sup>43</sup>

A few years later, when he would

feel called to work to renew the faith of the poor people in the rural areas, he would react in a similar way: to set up among priests a group of fervent men who would devote themselves to this work, especially through the preaching of parish missions. In 1816, this gave birth to the Society of Missionaries of Provence which, in 1826, would become the Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. Eugene de Mazenod dedicated the best of himself to this endeavor. The principles of spiritual life he later taught to the people of his diocese, he taught beforehand to his missionaries and in a more developed, even more radical form, because what he had in mind was precisely the setting up of an elite corps at the service of the Church. From these men, he could demand everything and that is what he did.<sup>44</sup>

It seems to me that Eugene de Mazenod's spiritual teaching must be considered under various aspects. A first, *generic* and basic element is that of the Oblate as an apostolic man, whose concern is the glory of God, the service of the Church and the salvation of souls. Under this aspect, the Congregation is related to and substantially resembles the apostolic institutes of priests which had preceded it, in particular, the Jesuits, Lazarists and Redemptorists.

A second, *more specific*, more personal aspect gives the Oblate a more precise identity. The Oblate, an apostolic man: 1. lives and works in community; 2. binds himself to God through vows of religion; 3. devotes himself entirely to evangelizing the poor, the most abandoned souls; 4. lives and works under the patronage of Mary Immaculate. Under this second aspect, the Oblate still resembles the Redemptorist a great deal.

Finally, through all these constitutive elements of his spirituality, a *specific spirit* animates the Oblate: a spirit of simplicity and daring, a spirit of total devotion to the Church and to the poor, a spirit of great availability and nearness to the people, a profound family spirit.

In the following pages, we will briefly develop these various aspects after having treated more at length the fundamental element: the Oblate, an apostolic man.

### 1. FUNDAMENTAL ELEMENT: THE OBLATE IS AN APOSTOLIC MAN

This expression appears often in the writings of Father de Mazenod and is especially found in very significant contexts. For example, in his December 13, 1815 letter to Father Tempier in which he described the men he wanted as companions and members of his Society: "Be as humble as you wish but know, just the same, that you are *necessary* for the mission work. I speak to you before God and openly from my heart. Were it a question of going to preach more or less well the Word of God, mingled with much alloy of self, of going far and wide for the purpose, if you wish, of winning souls for God *without taking much trouble to be men of interior life, truly apostolic men*, I think it would not be difficult to replace you. But can you believe I want merchandise of that sort?"<sup>45</sup>

Likewise, in the *Preface of the Constitutions and Rules* of 1826, we read: "The sight of these evils has so touched the hearts of certain priests, zealous for the glory of God, men with an ardent love for the Church, that they are willing to give their lives, if need be, for the salvation of souls. They are convinced that if priests could be formed,

afire with zeal for men's salvation, priests not given to their own interests, solidly grounded in virtue – *in a word, apostolic men* deeply conscious of the need to reform themselves, who would labour with all the resources at their command to convert others – then there would be ample reason to believe that in a short while people who had gone astray might be brought back to their long-unrecognized religious responsibilities."

Where did he find this expression "apostolic men"? It seems that this expression was in common usage at the time. Alphonsus Liguori, whose works were becoming ever more widely distributed in France, had used this phrase as the title of one of his works, a sort of guide for confessors and spiritual directors: *Homo apostolicus instructus in sua vocatione ad audiendas confessiones* [The apostolic man trained in his role of confessor]. His thinking was that "the Church did not need a great number of priests, but she needed 'good priests,' 'apostolic men' who would devote themselves entirely to the salvation of souls, especially the most grievously wounded."<sup>46</sup>

Even closer to the Founder's times and in the very context of parish missions, we find the expression used in the writings of Félicité de Lamennais. In 1809, he had published a work entitled *Réflexions sur l'état de l'Eglise en France pendant le dix-huitième siècle et sur sa situation actuelle*. Almost immediately suppressed by the government, the work reappeared in 1814. Eugene de Mazenod had a copy. The Founder's analysis of the situation of the Church in the *Preface of the Constitutions and Rules* shows great similarity to that of Lamennais. Here is a significant passage from *Réflexions sur l'état de l'Eglise* in which Lamennais speaks of

the "apostolic man" in relation to parish missions: "As for myself, when I consider this astounding insensitivity, this profound forgetfulness of all the commandments, of all the duties of Christianity, with dread I ask myself if we have not already attained those times announced by Jesus Christ when he said: "Do you believe that when I return I will still find some little faith on earth?"

"If there was something that could rekindle in their hearts this faith, alas, so dull and listless, it would undoubtedly be parish missions. What good could they not achieve in our rural areas, and even in our cities! What a field lies there for cultivation! What a harvest to reap! One has had to have been a witness of the fruits for sanctification that a few genuinely apostolic men can achieve to know how powerful this means is and what is possible in the present circumstances. The pageantry of the mission, the zeal and virtues of the missionaries, the exhortations, prayers, hymn singing, everything, even the novelty of the display, touches hearts, moves people, draws them along, and whole parishes have been entirely renewed in a few days time. And to accomplish such marvels, what is needed? Great talent? No, a great faith rather."<sup>47</sup>

What then is an "apostolic man" in the Founder's thinking? He is a man driven by the spirit of Jesus Christ, more especially the spirit of the Apostles, a man who walks in their footsteps. After having heard Jesus' call, he has left everything to follow him, to be his companion, to live his life and to be sent by him into the world in order to proclaim the Good News of salvation.<sup>48</sup>

In the apostolic man, two elements are always found inseparably linked: spiritual fervor and missionary zeal. The latter quality does not suffice; the

former is needed as well.<sup>49</sup> Eugene's December 13, 1815 letter to Father Tempier is particularly worthy of note in this regard. The Founder brought together two expressions "men of interior life" and "truly apostolic men". And after writing: "But can you believe I want merchandise of that sort?" he added: "We must be truly saints ourselves. That word says it all".<sup>50</sup> Then, he describes the requirements for this apostolic holiness: self-sacrifice, self-denial, self-renunciation, poverty, labors, etc. The *Preface of the Constitutions and Rules* will pick up the same idea: in order to walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ and to be apostolic men, Oblates "must diligently strive to be saints. [...] They must wholly renounce themselves, striving solely for the glory of God, the good of the Church, and the edification and salvation of souls." "Then", he says, – *then*, the word has its importance, even if it is a case of priority of nature rather than a priority of time – "filled with unbounded confidence in God, they are ready to enter the combat, to fight even unto death, for the greater glory of his most holy and sublime Name."

This idea of the "apostolic man" is an idea which Eugene received from the Founders of institutes who immediately preceded him, from Saint Ignatius Loyola to Saint Vincent de Paul. According to Saint Ignatius, the Jesuit, an apostolic worker, is an "*instrumentum Deo conjunctum*, an instrument linked and united to God". And he established this absolute principle with regard to the welfare and the success of the Company of Jesus: "The means which unite the instrument to God and induce him to willingly allow himself to be lead by divine guidance are more efficacious than those which incline him to human means."<sup>51</sup> The formula "linked instru-

ment" or its equivalent would be taken up by the majority of French spiritual authors who influenced Eugene de Mazenod in varying degrees.

Louis Lallement, S.J., teacher of the Third Year of Rouen from 1628 to 1631, used it with the audience of his spiritual conferences and did so with an emphasis on contemplation and the search for one's own perfection that was at times judged excessive. He taught: "Whoever does otherwise can be assured that, even if he wears the religious habit of the Company, he in no way embodies its spirit. Our rule and our religious profession oblige us to set more store by means of perfection which unite us to God as instruments to the principal cause from whom we must receive movement, than by all the other exercises. This is how all the rest must be managed according to that principle, an interior principle."<sup>52</sup>

Pierre de Bérulle, Founder of the Oratory in France, would present a similar ideal to the members of his Institute. He wrote to a parish priest: "You must be an instrument united with the Son of God on earth; your condition as a priest and pastor obliges you to this *state*.<sup>53</sup> According to his thinking, the Oratorian, an apostolic man, must live in a state of interior adhesion to the Son of God in his public life in order to be, along with him, a perfect instrument of salvation for others.

Jean-Jacques Olier, Founder of the Sulpicians, would go even farther in the same direction. He used the word "instrument", but very often the terms "minister", "house servant", "servant", and "slave" were used. The apostle is the instrument of God in the fullest sense of the word, like "the slave", who has become the chattel of the Master.<sup>54</sup> In some way, he has to eclipse himself interiorly so that the entire glory of the

endeavor will redound to God. Moreover, he must allow himself to be guided by the Spirit of Jesus and always maintain, in the very midst of activity, an attitude of adoration before God.<sup>55</sup>

Vincent de Paul, Founder of the Lazarists, expresses himself to the same effect. The priest of the Mission, an apostolic man, is an "instrument through which the Son of God continues to do from heaven what he did on earth".<sup>56</sup> "That we should be called to be an associate and sharer in the designs of the Son of God is beyond the scope of our understanding. What! to make of us ... I would not dare say it ... the fact remains that the task of evangelizing the poor is such a sublime endeavor that it is par excellence the task of the Son of God; we are involved in it as instruments."<sup>57</sup>

But where Peter de Bérulle speaks of the state of adhesion to the Son of God in his public life and Jean-Jacques Olier of eclipsing oneself and of looking in adoration at God during one's activity, Vincent de Paul more simply asks that they strive to "always do the will of God".<sup>58</sup>

"I ask you, gentlemen and brothers, if you know of anyone who adheres more to God and, as a result, who is more united to God [...] than the one who fulfills only the will of God and never his own, who desires and wishes nothing other than what God does or does not want?"<sup>59</sup>

Monsieur Vincent's attitude leads us directly to Eugene de Mazenod. For him as well, the Oblate, the apostolic man, "cooperator with the Savior, redeemer of the human race",<sup>60</sup> would be an instrument in the hands of God and an instrument ever available to fulfill his will in everything. The term itself "instrument" is not often found in the Founder's writings. It is found now and then, but the idea is always present.

That is what explains how demanding Father de Mazenod appears to be as regard the apostolic man.

Here are excerpts from two letters where he himself uses the term. The first is a January 17, 1835 letter addressed to Father Ambrose Vincens after the outstanding success achieved by a parish mission: "My dear Father Vincens, the Lord be praised for what he has accomplished by means of your ministry and dear Father Dassy's. Good master as he is, he wanted to give you some encouragement and he let his blessings accompany your words. Like us I'm sure *you give all credit for our work's success to his grace and his grace alone*. That's what gets through to the heart while our words merely enter the ear, and here we see precisely where the immense difference lies between our sermons and those of fashionable preachers which are infinitely superior in other respects. At the voice of the missionary miracles abound and he is so struck by the wonder of so many conversions that the poor instrument of these marvels is the first to be confounded, and while praising God and rejoicing he humbles himself in his littleness and nothingness."<sup>61</sup>

The second letter, written December 2, 1854, almost twenty years later, was addressed to the superior of the scholastics, Father Anthony Mouchette: "My prayer is that the scholastics be really imbued with what the Church expects of them; a mediocre virtue will not be an adequate response to the demands of their holy vocation. Should they turn out like the common run of clerics, they would not be achieving their goal, it would fall short. They are called to quite a different perfection, they must strive towards it, and more than that, they have to be actually

walking this path so as *to become in God's hands instruments of his mercy*. They have to realize that their ministry is the continuation of the apostolic ministry, and that it involves nothing less than performing miracles. The news that reaches us from the foreign missions is proof of this. What encouragement for our young scholastics to read the marvels worked by their confreres in these far away countries! So let them lose no time in becoming saints, if they are not already at the height required to respond to the Sovereign Pontiff's appeal."<sup>62</sup>

Consequently, to become an effective instrument of salvation in the hands of God, the Oblate, an apostolic man, must have to be first and foremost, a man of *self sacrifice*. Such a man is dead to himself, interiorly free, "free from inordinate attachment to the world or to family, a man filled with zeal, ready to sacrifice his goods, talents, ease, self, even his life, for the love of Jesus Christ, the service of the Church, and the sanctification of his neighbor" (*Preface*). He will "consider the mortification of Christ of capital importance" and will bear it about "in a manner of speaking, continually in his own body"; he "will apply himself assiduously to repressing his passions, to renouncing his own will and, in imitation of the Apostles, he will glory in his weaknesses, in insults, persecutions and sufferings endured for Christ".<sup>63</sup> However, his asceticism and his bodily mortifications with regard to sleep, food, bodily penances will be moderate; they will take into consideration the apostolic work demanded of him. "Your missionary life is far and away sufficient penance", wrote Eugene de Mazenod to Bishop Étienne Semeria concerning the Oblates in Ceylon.<sup>64</sup> The same idea comes back frequently in his correspondence. It

holds good for home missions as well as the foreign missions.<sup>65</sup>

The Oblate, an apostolic man, will be a man of prayer as well. He will seek to live “in continuous recollection of spirit”;<sup>66</sup> he will “apply himself assiduously to walking always in the presence of God”.<sup>67</sup> To enable himself to do this, he “will spend time in mental prayer with the community twice a day [...] The usual subject of this oraison will be the theological virtues, the virtues of our Lord Jesus Christ that the members of our Society must reproduce in living form in their conduct”.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, twice a day, in the morning before the noon meal and in the evening before going to bed, he will make an examination of conscience with the community.<sup>69</sup>

His whole life is to be imbued, transformed by Christ, so that gradually he will live the life of Christ and be led by his Spirit. “In a word, he will strive to become another Jesus Christ, spreading everywhere the pleasing fragrance of his gracious virtues.”<sup>70</sup>

The Oblate’s life of prayer – like his life of asceticism – will have an apostolic bent. It will be a prayer that urges him to reach out to others, to put himself at their service in order to proclaim to them the mystery of salvation in Jesus Christ, and not one especially of experiencing and praising God in the tranquillity of contemplation. I quote only one example of this as found in a letter to Father Casimir Aubert, who was in charge of the novices’ formation. It seems Father Aubert enjoyed special favors in oraison. Here is the advice the Founder gave him: “I urge you not to be selfish in savouring all alone God’s communications. Be generous with your riches, share them with others. Draw them, impel them if need be by the power given you by the light and

grace you have received. I’m not asking this just for your handful of novices but for all those around you, especially those I’ve placed expressly under your direction. I knew you would be faithful and I was counting without hesitation on an overflowing abundance in which I wanted certain of our men to share.”<sup>71</sup>

To maintain the fervor of this apostolic man and his constant renewal, spiritual, physical and intellectual, Eugene de Mazenod wanted to see his life divided into two parts: one would be entirely devoted to external activity and the other to prayer, study, exercises of community life within the religious community. “In imitation of these great models [Christ and the Apostles], one part of their life will be spent in prayer, interior recollection, contemplative in the privacy of the house of God where they will live together.”

“The other part will be entirely devoted to external works of the most active zeal such as missions, preaching and hearing confessions, catechism, youth work, visiting the sick and prisoners, spiritual retreats and other exercises of a similar nature.”

“But both when on mission or within their own houses, their main focus will be to make progress in the way of ecclesiastical and religious perfection. They will especially practice humility, obedience, poverty, self denial, the spirit of mortification, the spirit of faith, purity of intention and the rest. In a word, they will strive to become other Jesus Christs, spreading everywhere the pleasing fragrance of his gracious virtues.”<sup>72</sup>

A number of people – especially in the second half of the 20th century – have seen in this text a lack of realism, a kind of mistrust of the apostolate and even the introduction of a very real dichotomy in Oblate spirituality. They are

perhaps right, especially if we are looking at an exclusively mechanical application of this rule, a rule which would become practically impossible to implement with the increase of ministries in the Congregation: the directing of seminaries, taking charge of parishes, foreign missions.

To get a good grasp of this Rule, we have to see it in the context of the time. The expression "a Carthusian in his religious house and an apostle (or Jesuit) outside" was applied to the Lazarists<sup>73</sup> as well as to the Redemptorists,<sup>74</sup> it seems. It was probably applied to the Oblates as well. The Founder responded to this in a letter to Father Louis Tousseint Dassy: "It is somewhat of a farce to call you Jesuits; you are no more Jesuits than you are Carthusians. You are priests exercising the ministry of preaching under the jurisdiction of the diocesan Bishop who gives you work according to the needs of his diocese. You have no obligation to answer as to what you do within the community. You say Mass, you recite the Office, you study, you compose sermons to preach, especially to the poor when the Bishop sends you."<sup>75</sup>

The goal of this Rule was to assure the quality of the apostolic man, especially his spiritual quality, his holiness. Eugene de Mazenod well knew that, for most priests, there is usually not an excess of prayer and meditation, but too much work and external activity. That is what he wanted to avoid for Oblates. On this point, he was probably more of a realist than one might be led to believe.

We can note, as well, all the virtues he stresses in the text: humility, obedience, self denial, spirit of faith, purity of intention. These are virtues which all tend to make the apostolic man entirely responsive in God's hands. Just as in

the case of the contemplative, the apostolic man possesses a genuine spiritual passivity: the passivity of the instrument, an instrument fully free and adult which opts to become a cooperator with the Savior in the work of redeeming the world. This passivity makes him flexible, responsive in God's hands, not primarily for the purpose of plumbing more deeply the mysteries of God, but in order to speak at the right moment, and under the guidance of the Spirit, the word that needs to be spoken, or to perform that which will become for one's neighbor an avenue of God's grace. The apostolic man's holiness, in union with Jesus the Savior, consists in perfect fidelity to the Father's will. The Founder will require other virtues as well, virtues much more active in nature such as zeal, daring, the spirit of initiative, sociability ... but the basis will always remain the same: to want only what God wants.

An outstanding example of this attitude is Eugene's own conduct when he was in Rome from November 1825 to May of 1826 to obtain the approbation of his Institute. One principle, Saint Ignatius' principle, guides him: "In affairs one must act as if success depended on our skill and put all our confidence in God as if all our efforts could produce nothing."<sup>76</sup> In point of fact, he left no stone unturned to achieve his end, but we can see how he insists on remaining united to God and grounded in his holy will: "Having in my hands an affair of the utmost importance, of which the consequences must so influence the building up of the Church, the glory of God and the sanctifying of souls, an affair that... can only succeed thanks to a very special protection from God, to whom alone belongs the power to touch the hearts and guide the wills of men, I have had of necessity to con-

vince myself *that it is my duty to do all in my power to live in the most intimate state of union possible with God, and consequently be resolved to be faithful to his grace and not to give cause for grief to his spirit. As things stand at present, the least voluntary infidelity would seem to me a crime, not only because it would be displeasing to God, which doubtless would be the worst evil, but still more because of the consequences it could bring about.*"<sup>77</sup>

Christ and the Church, especially the abandoned Church, "the beloved spouse of God's only-begotten Son ... [who] mourns the shameful defection of the children she herself bore", (*Preface*) are at the heart of Oblate spirituality. In the mind of Eugene de Mazenod, Christ and the Church were one. He wrote: "These two loves blend into each other; to love the Church is to love Jesus Christ and vice versa".<sup>78</sup>

One particular detail very much in harmony with the theology of that period is worthy of note. In the writings of Eugene de Mazenod, the expression "apostolic man", just like the term "missionary", its synonym, is applied exclusively to the priest. The lay person, the religious who is not a priest is a cooperater of the apostolic man<sup>79</sup> or of the missionary.<sup>80</sup>

This "sacerdotal" aspect played a major role in the life of Eugene de Mazenod. He would become "a priest" in spite of his family's lack of enthusiasm, not only on the part of his mother, but on the part of his uncles as well. As Father Joseph Morabito wrote: "His uncles did nothing to foster this vocation. They remained oblivious to the birth of this vocation. His [great-] uncle, [André], feigning to know nothing about it, asked Eugene if he was really thinking of becoming a priest and

thereby bring about the extinction of the family line."<sup>81</sup>

At Venice, under the guidance of Don Bartolo, Eugene had given the matter some serious consideration. In his *Diary*, he wrote: "My vocation to the ecclesiastical state, and perhaps to a more perfect state as well, dates from that time".<sup>82</sup> The "ecclesiastical state" was the priesthood; the "perfect state" was probably that of the apostolic man, the priest who gives his all, who is a man of prayer and who commits himself totally with Christ to the work of mankind's Redemption.

Eugene de Mazenod insisted on being a priest. He felt "called" by God.<sup>83</sup> "So do not grudge, dear mama, do not grudge this poor Church, so terribly abandoned, scorned, trampled under foot but which even so was the one who gave birth to us all in Jesus Christ, the homage that two or three individuals out of the whole of France (a small number I count myself happy to be one of) wish to pay her of their liberty and life. And what reason could you possibly have for wanting me to delay any longer from committing myself, and devoting myself to the Spouse of Jesus Christ [...]"<sup>84</sup>

He felt himself called all the more because he was from a noble family. In the same letter, he wrote: "Religion finds here some small consolation for the sheer panic, or to speak more plainly, the utter dismay with which our self-styled good society fled its sanctuary; she sees ranging themselves beneath her banners a few individuals who, over and above the priestly character of Jesus Christ's ministers, naturally command respect in view of their education and birth."<sup>85</sup> In addition to this, he wanted to be a priest educated in the ecclesiastical sciences. Once again, to his mother he wrote:

"Ecclesiastical science covers so many things that you must not imagine it can be acquired with a few words here and there as you go along, so to speak. [...] Don't you attach any value to the profound experience of those who are directing me here? [...] A knowledge that would perhaps suffice for most, would not suffice for me. That is obvious, for you know yourself there isn't anyone who, seeing who I am, my position, the rank I hold in the world, would not have every right to demand and would not in fact demand that I have an education above the ordinary. Who is going to put to rest all the doubts, the difficulties that are always cropping up, if not a priest who by reason of his birth enjoys a greater prominence than others and to whom other priests will perhaps one day be going for counsel? This extra period of formation is therefore necessary and indispensable if I am to exercise fruitfully the ministry to which I am called. Honour due the ministry is another valid reason for it."<sup>86</sup>

Having chosen to be a priest in reparation for his own sins, Eugene would be a priest especially to associate himself more intimately with the redemptive work of Christ, the Savior. "He is above all a priest because of all the vocations which he experienced in his heart: the apostolic vocation to the point of shedding his blood, love of the poor, love of souls and of the most abandoned souls, love of the Church to the point of sacrificing himself for her; the entire spectrum of loves he felt in his heart as so many divine calls were summed up and realized in his call to the priesthood. By being a priest, he was all of these things: priest of the poor, priest for souls and for the most abandoned souls, priest for the Church and for all its most urgent needs."<sup>87</sup>

## 2. COMPLEMENTARY ELEMENTS

The idea of the Oblate as "apostolic man" is, therefore, basic for Eugene de Mazenod. The other elements, no matter how important they might be, remain complementary. I will say only a few words on each one of these. Beforehand, I will take the liberty of quoting a text written for the use of major superiors and educators in which the Founder himself describes what kind of candidate he wanted to see for the Congregation. He pointed out their human as well as their spiritual aptitudes.

"It is important for the good of the Church and to obtain for our Society the means it needs to achieve its goal, to welcome into our ranks only those who are able, with the help of God's grace to be of service to her and to build her up. Consequently, we cannot take too many precautions to assure ourselves of the vocation of those who ask to join us and to gain a thorough knowledge of their virtues, their talents and their good qualities. [...]"

"Let the Superior General and his council consider attentively before God that to be worthy of being admitted into the Society, one must be called by God and have the qualities specific to a good missionary and capable of forming a holy priest. The individual must possess a great desire for his own perfection, a great love for Jesus Christ and his Church, a great zeal for the salvation of souls; he must have a heart free from all disordered attachments to things of this earth, a great detachment from his family and the place of his birth, a detachment which goes to the point of despising riches; he must have a will to serve God and the Church, either in parish missions or in the other ministries that the Society embraces, and he

must want to persevere unto death in the faithful observance and obedience to the holy Rules of the institute."

"It is desirable that those who plan to enter the Society should be naturally gifted in the area of learning, if they have not already acquired that knowledge. Let them be endowed with common sense, intelligence, a sound judgment, good memory and good will that can stand any test. Let them be courteous, honest, well-bred, healthy, without any bodily deformity that might undermine the dignity of the ministry which will be entrusted to them some day and which would expose them to being vilified."<sup>88</sup>

From this text, we can immediately see what qualities the Founder demanded of candidates for his Society of missionaries. On the human level, he wanted men who were already mature, men of good sense and sound judgment, men of adequate intelligence with a natural aptitude for study and learning, men who were socially accomplished: courteous, honest, well-bred, with a solid good health, no physical deformities, especially men of strong will power whose good will was proof against any test. On the spiritual level, he wanted men with a genuine vocation, men with an ardent love for Jesus Christ and his Church, men imbued with a great desire for their own perfection and a great zeal for the salvation of souls, men interiorly free from all disordered attachment to earthly things with a great detachment from their family and place of birth, finally, men who were totally dedicated, capable of obedience and of persevering unto death.

In this text, we should take note of the clear preference Father de Mazenod gives to qualities of the heart and will, and the very high quality he wants to see in his men. The adjective *great* ap-

pears four times: "a great desire", "a great love", "a great zeal", "a great detachment". He wants the Oblates to be above average, to form a truly "elite corps" in the Church. In practice, to help them, he would especially ask four things of them:

1. To live in community;
2. To consecrate themselves to God by vows of religion;
3. To dedicate their lives to evangelization of the poor and the most abandoned souls;
4. To live and work under the patronage of Mary Immaculate.

#### *a. Community life*

Life in community constitutes an essential element of Oblate life. This is something Eugene de Mazenod wanted from the beginning of his endeavor. He even made it the primary condition for becoming members of his small Society. According to him, evangelization of the poor, especially through parish missions, could not be carried out in a lasting and effective fashion without community life. The apostolic men of his dreams would also need the support of a community as much for their personal sanctification as for the better accomplishment of their apostolate.

His objective was not to provide free-lancers for the service of the Church, but a genuine apostolic body, "an elite corps" made up of men capable, not only of working together and of complementing each other in carrying out the mission, but also capable of living together in the regular life of the same house, of praying together and of renewing themselves spiritually and intellectually after the exhausting work outside. To this purpose, he stressed heavily the two virtues basic for all genuine common life: fraternal charity

and obedience. It is worthwhile reading here once again what the Founder wrote on community and on the unity among Oblates.<sup>89</sup>

He wanted to see a genuine family spirit prevail among them, the *cor unum* and *anima una* of the first disciples of Jesus. His model was the community of the Apostles gathered around Jesus. For all Oblates, whether they were missionaries in the far North, or whether they were labouring in Asia or Sri Lanka, there was a twice daily appointment: the celebration of the Eucharist and oraison at night before the Blessed Sacrament.<sup>90</sup>

Eugene de Mazenod attributed such importance to community life for priests engaged in the apostolate, that when he was Bishop of Marseilles he recommended that even his diocesan priests live in small communities. He considered it a necessary thing both for the service rendered the people of God and for the spiritual advantage of the priests.

In any case, it was this kind of motivation that gradually led him to propose a commitment by the vows of religion to the members of his small society.

#### *b. Religious life*

In 1815, Father de Mazenod had no thought of asking his first companions to take vows of religion, but rather he required life in common, the spirit of the vows with the practice of religious virtues. What he wanted for them was Gospel radicalism lived under a rule which drew its inspiration from Saint Ignatius, Saint Charles Borromeo, Saint Vincent de Paul, and Blessed Alphonsus Liguori, but without the vows.<sup>91</sup> For him, this requirement was inseparable from his idea of the missionary, an

“apostolic man”. On December 15, 1815, he wrote to Father Tempier: “Now are there many priests who thus wish to be saints? Only by not knowing them could we believe that they do. I myself know the contrary. Most wish to go to heaven by a road other than that of abnegation, renunciation, forgetfulness of self, poverty, fatigue, etc. Perhaps they are not obliged to do more or differently than they do but at least they should not take offence if some, *believing that more is demanded by the needs of the people*, want to devote themselves to save them.”<sup>92</sup>

Actually, the vows would soon follow: on the evening of Holy Thursday, April 11, 1816 for Fathers de Mazenod and Tempier and November 1, 1818 for the others. On February 17, 1826, at the time of the approbation of the Institute by Leo XII, the Oblates were truly religious. They even made a fourth vow, a vow drawn from the Rule of Blessed Alphonsus Liguori, the vow of perseverance in the Institute, as a way of better resisting the temptation to return to the diocesan priesthood and the pressure of certain bishops who were pushing them in that direction. Through their religious consecration, they gave themselves totally and definitively to the work of the mission.

#### *c. Evangelization of the poor*

Among the ministries open to his zeal, Eugene made a very specific choice for himself and for his Institute, a choice which was both exciting and crucifying, the choice of evangelizing the poor and the most abandoned. He asked the Oblates to remain faithful to this choice, to leave to others the task of high profile preaching in the rich parishes of the cities and to go to “the poor people scattered over the countryside

and to the inhabitants of rural villages, who have the greatest need of this spiritual assistance."<sup>93</sup> Likewise in the foreign missions, he insisted that the Oblates should not linger ministering to the Christian population, but that they go to the pagans who as yet did not have the faith. Writing to Father Semeria in Jaffna he asks: "When will you begin to win the unbelievers? Are you only on your island as parish priests of old Christians? I had always thought the idea was to convert the pagans. That is what we are made for rather than anything else."<sup>94</sup>

We must note that when speaking the Founder makes little or no distinction between the poor, the most destitute, the most abandoned. But in his thinking, that poverty which consisted in being deprived of religious assistance always remained the specific focus of our mission. What he had in mind first and foremost was the state of religious ignorance and often of spiritual decline in which people found themselves. Most of the time, these persons or groups also lived in precarious or wretched material conditions which made them marginal people in relation to those Christians who were more well-off. Generally, the Church's ordinary ministry did not reach these people. To get into contact with them, special initiatives needed to be taken. A certain distance would have to be maintained with regard to the circles of the rich. One would have to accept to be uprooted, to learn another language. Sometimes, too, one would have to leave one's own country since the poor at that time lived in remote, isolated places, difficult of access, where few priests were able or even desired to go.

It was to them that the Oblates must go and they do so to proclaim the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ. Ord-

narily, this would be the source of their deepest joy and their most painful suffering. Like Saint Paul, they strive to become everything to everyone in order to win over the greatest number to Jesus Christ. Their virtues were to be those of the apostolic man: an unshakable faith, an invincible hope, an unbounded charity, an immense daring, and much humility. They were capable of attempting anything to extend the Kingdom of God and, at the same time, they lived in an attitude of complete self-abnegation, and of total fidelity to obedience and the Spirit of God that dwelt in their hearts.

#### *d. The patronage of Mary Immaculate*

All his life, Eugene de Mazenod displayed a great devotion to the Blessed Virgin. And yet, it was only in December of 1825, ten years after the founding of the Oblates, that he thought of putting them under the official patronage of Mary Immaculate. Why? He does not say, but it really seems that at that time he achieved a new, much more lively awareness of the importance of Mary in a mission society such as his. It was through Mary that Christ, our salvation, entered into the world. It was through her, as well, that he pursued and brought his work to completion. December 22, 1825, he wrote to Father Tempier: "Let us renew ourselves especially in devotion to the most holy Virgin and render ourselves worthy to be Oblates of the Immaculate Mary. But this is a passport to heaven! How have we not thought of it sooner? Avow that it will be as glorious as it will be consoling for us to be consecrated to her in a special manner and to bear her name. The Oblates of Mary! This name satisfies the heart and the ear. I must admit that I was quite sur-

prised, when it was decided to take the name I had thought should be left aside, at being so impervious, at feeling so little pleasure, I would almost say a kind of repugnance to bearing the name of a saint who is my particular protector, for whom I have so much devotion (Saint Charles). And now I see the reason; we were remiss in regard to our Mother, our Queen, she who protects us and who must obtain for us all graces whereof her divine Son has made her the dispenser. Let us rejoice to bear her name and her livery."<sup>95</sup>

On March 20, 1826, after Leo XII's approbation of the Institute, Father de Mazenod added this: "Oh! yes, we must needs tell ourselves that we have received a great grace! The more closely I consider it in all its aspects, the more I see the worth of this gift. We can never properly respond to it other than by an unwavering fidelity, and by a redoubled zeal and devotedness on behalf of the glory of God, the service of the Church and the salvation of souls, especially the most abandoned, in keeping with our vocation. [...] You are quite right in saying that you all seem to have become other men: this is truly so. May we understand well what we are! I hope that the Lord will give us this grace, with the assistance and by the protection of our holy Mother, the Immaculate Mary, for whom we must have a great devotion in our Congregation. Does it not seem to you that it is a sign of predestination to bear the name of Oblates of Mary, that is, consecrated to God under the patronage of Mary, a name the Congregation bears as a family name held in common with the most holy and immaculate Mother of God? It is enough to make others jealous; but it is the Church who has given us this beautiful title. We receive it with respect, love and gratitude, proud of our dignity

and of the rights that it gives us to the protection of her who is All Powerful in God's presence."<sup>96</sup>

Consequently, the Oblate is called to live his personal life and to carry out his mission in close union with Mary. He remains a missionary and an evangelizer of the poor, but he proclaims the Gospel to the poor with the help and support of Mary, triumphant over all evil and mother of mercy. In his heart, he cultivates a profound devotion to Mary and strives to make her better known and loved by those outside.

## CONCLUSION

What was Eugene de Mazenod's spirituality? To this question, one must simply reply: It was that of the *apostolic man* of his time. The present study has demonstrated, I hope, how based on his own personal experience and his view of the religious needs of his age, the Founder of the Oblates was capable of using the many elements of the spiritual and apostolic life available to him. He drew them from a variety of sources; he tried them out and put them into practice according to the missionary goal which he had set for himself.

He never sought as such to create something new or original, but rather to respond to the apostolic challenge of his milieu and his time, in particular, that of the religious ignorance among poor people and the most abandoned. The only synthesis of the spiritual life he ever authored was the book of the *Constitutions and Rules* of his own Institute, a kind of handbook for missionary action and religious apostolic life.

Into elements drawn from a number of sources, he breathed new life, a special spirit. This spirit is characterized by

Gospel-rootedness and by the ardor, the dynamic power that drives him.

On August 22, 1817, he wrote to Father Tempier: "Our Lord Jesus Christ has left to us the task of continuing the great work of the redemption of mankind. It is towards this unique end that all our efforts must tend; as long as we will not have spent our whole life and given all our blood to achieve this, we have nothing to say; especially when as yet we have given only a few drops of sweat and a few spells of fatigue. *This spirit of being wholly devoted to the glory of God, the service of the Church and the salvation of souls, is the spirit that is proper to our Congregation*, a small one, to be sure, but which will always be powerful as long as she is holy."<sup>97</sup>

Thirteen years later, on July 29, 1830, he reminded Father Hippolyte Guibert what the Oblate spirit was: "The spirit of the Bernardine is not that of the Jesuit. Ours also is our own". This spirit is entirely focused on charity, "the pivot on which our whole existence turns": love of God who "made us renounce the world and has vowed us to his glory by all manner of sacrifice, were it even to be our lives", charity toward our Oblate confreres, "considering our Society only as the most united family which exists on the earth", and charity towards the rest of the human race, "in considering ourselves only as the servants of the Father of the family, commanded to succour, to aid, to bring back his children by doing the utmost, in the midst of tribulations, of persecutions of every kind, without claiming any reward other than that which the Lord has promised to faithful servants who have worthily fulfilled their mission."<sup>98</sup>

Finally, the spirituality of Eugene de Mazenod is the spirituality of the "good and faithful servant" mentioned in the

Gospel, the spirituality of one who wants to live to the full and to the end the commandment of charity. It is out of this very charity that he himself lived his whole life; and it is this same love he enjoined upon the members of his religious family: "Among yourselves practice charity, charity, charity – and, outside, zeal for the salvation of souls".

FERNAND JETTÉ

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> LEFLON IV, p. 314.

<sup>2</sup> PIELORZ, Józef, *The Spiritual Life of Bishop de Mazenod 1782-1812*, Ottawa, Oblate Studies Edition, 1956, p. 241 in the manuscript English translation.

<sup>3</sup> See LEFLON I, p. 107.

<sup>4</sup> Three doctoral theses have been dedicated to Eugene de Mazenod's spiritual evolution: PIELORZ, Józef, *The Spiritual Life of Bishop de Mazenod 1782-1812*, Ottawa, Oblate Studies Edition, Oblate Historical Archives, vol. 14, 1956, 378 p., in the manuscript English translation. TACHÉ, Alexandre, *La vie spirituelle d'Eugène de Mazenod, 1812-1818. Historical-doctrinal study*, Rome, P.U.G., 1963, 102 p., MOOSBRUGGER, Robert, *The Spirituality of Blessed Eugene de Mazenod from 1818 until 1837*, Rome, 1981, 153 p.

<sup>5</sup> October 1818 retreat.

<sup>6</sup> Letter to Father Henry Tempier, August 15, 1822 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, no. 86, p. 93.

<sup>7</sup> Eugene de Mazenod to the 1826 General Chapter, quoted in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 7, p. XVII.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. XVII.

<sup>9</sup> Letter to Father Hippolyte Courtès, January 2, 1828 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 7, no. 289, p. 148.

<sup>10</sup> Letter to Father Tempier, August 20, 1835 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 8, no. 535, p. 182.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted by LEFLON III, p. 8.

<sup>12</sup> Letter to Father Tempier, June 12, 1853 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 11, no. 1155, p. 141.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in REY II, p. 858.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 857.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 855.

<sup>16</sup> "Constitutions et Règles de la Société des Missionnaires de Provence", Part One,

Chapter One, par. 3 in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 19.

<sup>17</sup> Letter to Father Courtès, March 13, 1830 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 7, no. 344, p. 196.

<sup>18</sup> Pastoral letter of January 12, 1856.

<sup>19</sup> Pastoral letter of February 20, 1859.

<sup>20</sup> Sermon in the Church of the Madeleine, Aix, 1813, see LEFLON I, p. 412.

<sup>21</sup> Pastoral letter of January 30, 1853.

<sup>22</sup> Pastoral letter of February 2, 1842.

<sup>23</sup> Pastoral letter of February 2, 1839. In this regard, we can read the Lenten pastorals of February 2, 1839, February 14, 1844, January 30, 1853; also the pastoral letter on the occasion of launching the new diocesan catechism, October 21, 1849 and the *Ordonnances synodales*, chapters IV and V, July 14, 1857.

<sup>24</sup> Pastoral letter of January 19, 1845; see also the pastoral letter of February 14, 1857, which contains some fine passages on renunciation and that of January 24, 1858 which deals with the importance of prayer.

<sup>25</sup> Pastoral letter of February 2, 1839.

<sup>26</sup> Pastoral letter of February 2, 1842.

<sup>27</sup> Pastoral letter of February 8, 1846.

<sup>28</sup> Directive of February 20, 1854.

<sup>29</sup> Pastoral letter of July 1840.

<sup>30</sup> Pastoral letters of November 1, 1852 and January 30, 1853.

<sup>31</sup> Pastoral letter of December 21, 1855.

<sup>32</sup> Pastoral letter of July 8, 1849.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*; see also pastoral letter of December 21, 1859.

<sup>34</sup> Pastoral letters of March 12, 1849 and February 10, 1852.

<sup>35</sup> Pastoral letters of November 25, 1850 and January 30, 1853.

<sup>36</sup> Pastoral letter of February 24, 1847.

<sup>37</sup> Pastoral letters of December 21, 1845, February 7, 1847, February 28, 1848, February 10, 1852.

<sup>38</sup> Pastoral letter of January 30, 1853.

<sup>39</sup> Pastoral letter of February 16, 1860.

<sup>40</sup> Pastoral letter of February 28, 1848.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>42</sup> On this topic, we can read the letters of December 4, 1808 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, no. 35, p. 76-82, January 21, 1809, *ibidem*, no. 43, p. 94, February 4, 1809, *ibidem*, no. 44, p. 97, mid-April 1809, *ibidem*, no. 51, p. 118-119, July 12, 1809, *ibidem*,

no. 57, p. 128-131, 11-14 November, 1809, *ibidem*, no. 63, p. 142-145, February 9, 1811, *ibidem*, no. 78, p. 174-178, August 12, 1811, *ibidem*, no. 90, p. 197-199, and September 19, 1811, *ibidem*, no. 92, p. 204.

<sup>43</sup> See REY I, p. 161.

<sup>44</sup> A few texts give a better summary of his thought, but we find various elements of this spirituality in almost all of his correspondence with the Oblates. The most important documents for our purpose are the following: the October 9, 1815, November 15, 1815 and December 13, 1815 letters to Father Tempier; pages 77 and 78 of the "Constitutions et Règles de la Société des Missionnaires de Provence", Honorat manuscript (1821?) in *Etudes oblates*, 2 (1943), p. [59]; the *Préface* and the text of the *Constitutions et Règles de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de la Très Sainte et Immaculée Vierge Marie*, 1826 edition; Eugene de Mazenod's circular letters of August 2, 1853 and February 2, 1857, as well as his reflections on our holy Rules of October 8, 1831. These three texts are quoted in their entirety in the May 20, 1864 *Circular letter* no. 14 by Father Joseph Fabre, O.M.I., Superior General.

<sup>45</sup> In *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 7, p. 12 and 13.

<sup>46</sup> THEBERGE, Rodrigue, c.s.s.r., "Une morale pour une pastorale de la miséricorde: l'Homo apostolicus" in *Alphonse de Liguori, pasteur et docteur*, Paris, 1987, p. 137.

<sup>47</sup> LAMENNAIS, Félicité de, *Réflexions sur l'état de l'Eglise en France pendant le dix-huitième siècle et sur sa situation actuelle*, p. 144-145.

<sup>48</sup> See Mark 3:14.

<sup>49</sup> We can read the Founder's texts on this subject in *Selected Texts*, Rome, 1983, nos. 11 to 20, p. 34-44.

<sup>50</sup> In *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 7, p. 13.

<sup>51</sup> *Constitutions of the Company of Jesus*, no. 813.

<sup>52</sup> LALLEMANT, Louis, *Doctrine spirituelle*, Desclée de Brouwer, 1959, p. 110-111.

<sup>53</sup> June 11, 1617 in *Correspondance*, vol. 1, p. 241.

<sup>54</sup> *Esprit d'un directeur des âmes*, article 1.

<sup>55</sup> See *Lettres*, vol. 1, p. 25, 201-202, 321-322, 325-326, 441, 573.

<sup>56</sup> COSTE, Peter, *Oeuvres de saint Vincent de Paul*, vol. XII, p. 80.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 152; quoted by DEFRENNES, P., "La vocation de saint Vincent de Paul", in *RAM*, 1932, p. 165.

<sup>59</sup> Quoted by DELARUE, J., "Un guide de lecture pour saint Vincent de Paul", in *Vie spirituelle*, 1960, p. 257.

<sup>60</sup> "Constitutions et Règles de la Société des Missionnaires de Provence", Part One, Chapter One, par. 3, *nota bene* in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 15.

<sup>61</sup> In *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 8, no. 503, p. 144.

<sup>62</sup> In *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 11, no. 1256, p. 253; see also pastoral directive on missions, February 14, 1844 and *Mandement pour le carême*, February 28, 1848.

<sup>63</sup> Constitutions and Rules of 1826, Second Part, Chapter Two, par. 3, article 1.

<sup>64</sup> October 10, 1857 letter in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 4, no. 44, p. 139.

<sup>65</sup> See JETTÉ, Fernand, "Esprit oblat et Règles oblates" in *Etudes oblates*, 21 (1962), p. 148-149.

<sup>66</sup> Constitutions and Rules of 1826, Second Part, Chapter Two, par. 1, article 1.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibidem*, article 2.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibidem*, article 1.

<sup>69</sup> See *ibidem*, article 6.

<sup>70</sup> Constitutions et Règles, Honorat manuscript in *Etudes oblates*, 2 (1943), p. [37].

<sup>71</sup> January 3, 1836 letter in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 8, no. 554, p. 207.

<sup>72</sup> "Constitutions et Règles de la Société des Missionnaires de Provence", Part Two, Chapter One, "Of the other principal observances" in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 55; see also Honorat manuscript, loc. cit., p. [37].

<sup>73</sup> See DODIN, A., "Spiritualité de saint Vincent de Paul" in *Divus Thomas*, Piacenza, 1960, p. 439.

<sup>74</sup> See GROULX, Lionel, *Le Canada français missionnaire*, Montreal, 1962, p. 151.

<sup>75</sup> Letter to Father Louis Toussaint Dassy, March 28, 1848 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 10, no. 972, p. 219-220.

<sup>76</sup> Letter to Father Tempier, December 28, 1825 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 214, p. 225.

<sup>77</sup> Letter to Father Tempier, January 10, 1826 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 7, no. 217, p. 10.

<sup>78</sup> Pastoral letter of February 16, 1860.

<sup>79</sup> Pastoral letter of February 18, 1848.

<sup>80</sup> See WOESTMAN, William H., *The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, a Clerical Religious Congregation With Brothers*, Rome, 1984, p. 173-184, 204, 207.

<sup>81</sup> MORABITO, Joseph, *Je serai prêtre*, Ottawa, Oblate Studies Edition, 1954, p. 33.

<sup>82</sup> In *Missions*, 5 (1886), p. 128-129.

<sup>83</sup> April 5, 1809 letter to Madame de Mazenod in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, p. 117.

<sup>84</sup> October 11, 1809 letter to Madame de Mazenod in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, p. 139.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 138-139.

<sup>86</sup> April 14, 1810 letter to Madame de Mazenod in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, p. 156-157.

<sup>87</sup> MORABITO, Joseph, *Je serai prêtre....*, p. 199.

<sup>88</sup> "Constitutions et Règles de la Société des Missionnaires de Provence", Honorat manuscript, Part Three, Chapter Two, par. 1, in *Etudes oblates*, 2 (1943), p. 57 & 59.

<sup>89</sup> See *Selected Texts*, nos. 301-321, 333-350.

<sup>90</sup> See *ibidem*, nos. 260-268, 350.

<sup>91</sup> October 9, 1815 letter to Abbé Tempier in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, no. 4, p. 6.

<sup>92</sup> Letter no. 7, *ibidem*, p. 13.

<sup>93</sup> "Constitutions et Règles de la Société des Missionnaires de Provence", Part One, Chapter One, par. 1, article 2, in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 13; quoted in *Selected Texts*, no. 38, see also nos. 36-43.

<sup>94</sup> Letter to Father Étienne Semeria, February 21, 1849 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 4, no. 10, p. 32; in *Selected Texts*, no. 148, see also nos. 143-164.

<sup>95</sup> Letter to Father Tempier, December 22, 1825 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, no. 213, p. 223-224.

<sup>96</sup> Letter to Father Tempier, March 20, 1826 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 7, no. 230, p. 63.

<sup>97</sup> Letter to Father Tempier, August 22, 1817 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, no. 21, p. 35.

<sup>98</sup> Letter to Father Guibert, July 29, 1830 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 7, no. 350, p. 202-203.

## MERCY

*Summary: I. The meaning of mercy. II. Eugene, a beneficiary of God's mercy. III "Be merciful as your heavenly Father is merciful." IV. Pastoral mercy. V. The Founder's merciful profile. VI. New perspectives.*

### I. THE MEANING OF MERCY

Everyone has their own idea of mercy. Without making an exhaustive study of the term and of its history,<sup>1</sup> the scope of our study here focuses only on the religious and Christian sense of the word. In a general way, it means a compassionate pity, freely bestowed when in the presence of every form of wretchedness. Saint Augustine took full note of this contrast: "O, God, you are merciful; I am wretched".<sup>2</sup> We are dealing with wretchedness in all its forms, but especially its most extreme form which is that of sinfulness and everything derived from it. As a result, this pity will be expressed through forgiveness of the offense. It consists of clemency and leniency. It is also the tenderness and gentleness of a heart which refuses to close in on itself and become hardened. It is giving without charge and generosity which transcends the limits of strict justice. It overflows in the form of all kinds of assistance to alleviate wretchedness.

God is mercy itself. This can even be said to be the attribute which most befits him with regard to his creatures, even his most perfect and beautiful creatures, since these creatures are far removed from all wretchedness only to the extent that this is due to a gift of his mercy. "The love of God in the form of mercy is at the basis of all of God's works."<sup>3</sup> For us sinners, this attribute shows forth most splendidly in God's pardoning of sinners, since sin – let us say it again – is the most profound

wretchedness and the cause of so much other misery, or the cause of all misery. This divine mercy is the prototype of the mercy we must show. Matthew's "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:36) is formulated by Luke as: "Be merciful as your Father is merciful" (Luke 5:36).

One should not expect Eugene de Mazenod to come up with definitions and systematic treatises on different topics. But what we will find are lived experiences of the mercy of God in his regard. From here will come solid convictions and consistent attitudes with regard to his neighbor in general and specifically in his pastoral practice. As we shall see, he sees himself particularly in the light of a forgiving mercy, a mercy received from God and one which he shares in his missionary activity. We will concentrate almost exclusively on the Founder, both with regard to his own personal life and in his apostolic work. Here and there, we will refer to the history of the Congregation; but to treat accurately and in a sufficiently comprehensive manner the impact of mercy in the apostolate of the Oblates, we would have to become involved in studies which would far exceed the limits of this article.

### II. EUGENE, A BENEFICIARY OF GOD'S MERCY

Not only is he incidentally aware of the mercy of God in his regard, but it is

a rather characteristic feature of his spiritual life – at least in the form that we find it in what we have of his writings which can be termed “spiritual”, that is, until 1837, according to Father Yvon Beaudoin’s edition. We do, indeed, find clear indications of other virtues in his life as various studies of his spirituality have found.<sup>4</sup> According to classical theology, are not all the virtues integrated together as one? But in each individual person, the way they combine and the emphasis given to various individual virtues varies. Now, in the case of Eugene de Mazenod, the awareness of having been generously the subject of divine forgiveness is keen and constant.

To understand this, it is enough to read through the list of the references to the word mercy and other words associated with it as listed in the subject index of *Spiritual Writings*. What one will see is that not only do these words reappear with frequency, but they contain a deep and lasting meaning.

The editor of *Writings* gives an explanation in his introduction when he highlights two outstanding themes. The first is precisely the awareness of one’s sinfulness, something which surfaces so frequently in Eugene’s life, and as a result, the acknowledgment of the forgiveness which he owes to God’s mercy. The manner of expression is not in theological terms, but rather as an intense personal experience. There is nothing of the artificial or the superficial here; he is engaged in it with every fiber of his being. Nor do we discover there the least trace of a more or less unhealthy guilt.

After what others have written, there is no need here to tarry over what Eugene understands as his sins. As far as he was concerned, they were serious and he acknowledges that he lived for a

more or less considerable length of time in this state. He recalls how and on what occasions he became more painfully aware of it and arrived at the repentant state of genuine conversion of a Good Friday before 1808.<sup>5</sup> Not only did he keep and in a way maintain a keen remembrance of this past experience, but his retreat notes give witness to his ongoing concern to keep before him even his most insignificant faults to which he was still subject. He lovingly maintains a state of continuous contrition.<sup>6</sup>

These occasions of taking stock of his spiritual condition are all bathed in an explicit and lively awareness of God’s mercy. Far from closing in on himself in his pain, this awareness always directs him to the God who forgives. We are not dealing here with shame alone, but also with the keenest sense of sorrow for his ingratitude toward a God who was so good. Eugene never ceases to turn to the mercy of God. With total trust, he takes refuge in it. He was well aware that it was grace which took the initiative with its multiple solicitations to get out of his sinful state. That only served to deepen his sorrow. He could not get over the fact that God crowned these graces by calling him to the priesthood. He relied on the same source of strength to avoid the smallest failings. He subjected himself to a rigorous self-examination. He often received the sacrament of forgiveness. He overflowed with gratitude. He felt the need to proclaim publicly the mercy God had heaped upon him. The bitterness of sorrow gave way to consolation and moments of exquisite love in response to the beauty and goodness of Jesus Christ, especially as Redeemer, to the point of calling him, “the Spouse of my soul”, “my heart’s beloved”.<sup>7</sup>

Many are the pages where these sentiments are expressed. They can be found at regular intervals throughout his retreat notes and other spiritual writings. They even appear in his letters from the time of his entry into the seminary in 1808 to his retreat in preparation for the taking over of his See as Bishop of Marseilles in 1837. The texts concerned are easily available now. There is no necessity, therefore, of heaping up lengthy texts. It is sufficient to go to the subject indices of the *Spiritual Writings* edition.

Even in view of the fact that after 1837 the texts become less numerous, we must not be led to believe that the mercy of God was less present in the heart of Bishop de Mazenod. Firsthand proof of this is the simple fact that he kept all his retreat notes with the knowledge that they would be read after his death.<sup>8</sup> For him, it was more than an act of humility; it was a way of publicly sharing the mercies of God in his regard. Another testimony in the same vein is his will drawn up in 1854. The expressions used in this document are more restrained, but all the more carefully pondered. We can consider them as the ultimate expression of this aspect of his spirituality. Immediately after his profession of faith, he added: "I implore God's mercy, by the merits of our divine Saviour Jesus Christ in whom I place all my trust, to obtain pardon for my sins and the grace of my soul being received into holy paradise. With this in mind I invoke the intercession of the most Holy and Immaculate Virgin Mary, Mother of God, daring to remind her in all humility, but with the consolation, too, of the filial devotion of my whole life and the desire I have always had to make her known and loved and to spread her devotion in every place by the ministry of those the Church has

given me as children and who are united with me in my desires." After calling upon the intercession of the angels, the saints and his holy patrons, Saint Joseph and the souls in purgatory of those who survive him, he continued: "I have indeed complete trust that God in his goodness, in virtue of his infinite mercy, will grant me his holy paradise. [...] But it is precisely the knowledge of the imperfection of this charity in me and the countless infidelities I have to reproach myself with and which have made it grow cold in my soul, despite the graces with which I have been blessed all my life, that make me fear the length and severity of my purgatory. Acknowledging that I deserve hell, I cannot but acquiesce unreservedly in the sentence of temporal suffering that God's justice, tempered by his mercy, will pronounce for me. [...] It is this persuasion that, to shorten the desirable term, has me cry out to the friends I leave behind me, to borrow the words of the Church's prayers: *miseremini mei saltem vos amici mei.*"<sup>9</sup>

It should be noted that Bishop de Mazenod especially invokes the intercession of Mary to obtain divine mercy. For him, this is not a more or less stock formula. His devotion to Mary is well known. It is important to note that he saw the Blessed Virgin Mary especially as being the Mother of Mercy. Father Louis Napoleon Boutin's book on the spirituality of the Founder has accurately brought this to light. There is no need to restudy that theme here. Along with that same author, it is fitting to add one more trait associated with mercy. This trait emphasizes tenderness and gentleness. Eugene loves to describe Mary as a gentle, tender Mother. God's mercy will always remain a mystery to us. In Mary's maternity in our regard, she takes on some of the tenderness that

makes her more human for us and brings her closer to us. Through this, she inspires a greater trust. In the Rule, the Founder was quite justified in urging the Oblates to foster trust in Mary among the faithful. On his deathbed, he himself would have the consolation and the reward of hearing as his last prayer, the *Salve Regina*, a greeting and invocation of the Mother of Mercy, the clement, loving and gentle Virgin Mary.

It was not only for himself, but for all of his own that the Founder saw a great gesture of God's mercy in the fact of having been called to live and die in the Congregation as children of Mary. A few years before his death, he referred to it in an ordinary letter addressed to one of his missionaries in danger of death in Ceylon: "Yes, my dear Father, it is the Holy Spirit who has inspired you to say to me what you say, which is so true, so harmonious with the divine vocation to which you have been called by a special favor of the divine mercy. [...] All who have died in her [the Congregation's] bosom [...] all of them without exception said they knew no terms to express the happiness they felt in dying as sons of Mary in the Congregation to which the mercy of God had called them."<sup>10</sup>

### III. "BE MERCIFUL AS YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER IS MERCIFUL"

There is no question of asking whether Saint Eugene de Mazenod showed himself to be merciful towards others, both to individuals or towards groups of people whom he was evangelizing, or who were under his responsibility. He who had such a vivid grasp of the mercies of God in his regard could not do other than have a sort of

instinct, both human and spiritual, to pass on this mercy to his neighbor. We can say he had an instinct, but he also had a conviction based on his understanding of the Gospel and the meaning of Church. This would become especially apparent in his priestly ministry and pastoral practice, as we shall see at length later on. One should still not neglect to consider his attitudes and his way of acting with regard to individuals, especially the "unimportant people" and his spiritual sons and Oblate confreres. Let us start by a few observations on this latter consideration.

Here is where we must consider Eugene's temperament. As everyone knows, he could give vent to storms of vehement indignation, and in an equivalent space of time, he could calm himself and let mercy and tenderness take over. This comment from Bishop Jacques Jeancard has often been quoted: "I have seen, as well, the Superior General burst out in holy and virtuous indignation with an overwhelming vehemence; then, with a charity equal in warmth, focus the most merciful and consoling concentration on humility and repentance".<sup>11</sup>

These few lines expose effectively a whole aspect of Eugene's personality. In spite of his plain-spoken and explosive character, we easily detect in him a heart even more strongly inclined to mercy. His natural inclinations would contribute to this, inclinations which, on the contrary, he never wished to repress.<sup>12</sup> He himself highlights these traits in his self-portrait which he drew up for his spiritual director during his retreat in October 1808.<sup>13</sup> After describing himself as a plain-spoken individual, he went on to say: "It is hard to understand, given the portrait of myself I have just painted, how sensitive a heart I have, overly so in fact". From

his childhood, he was inclined to help the needy. He readily made up for any offense he may have offered anyone, even if the person involved was an ordinary house servant. He had an incredible affection for the house servants who were really attached to him.

A few examples. Some two years before his entry into the seminary, Eugene was appointed to be one of the directors of prisons. Far from considering this position as a sinecure, he gave it his full attention. He wrote to his father that he strove: "to ease their sufferings by every means in our power but above all with the consolation that religion brings".<sup>14</sup> In the same letter, he relates how he stayed by the side of the wife of a friend of the family, through many long hours of the agony of her dying, suggesting to her all sorts of prayers suitable for a preparation for death.

Later, when he was a priest, he wrote to a longtime friend to urge him, in virtue of their long-standing friendship, to remain or to commit himself to genuine Christian living. To obtain this result, he had not ceased calling down upon him "*every day*" the mercy of God for ten years. [Emphasis in his original].

We can see rather well that if Eugene was so naturally inclined to help and assist fellow humans in need, it was because he was commending and leading them to the mercy of God.

These were sentiments the Founder expressed even more frequently toward his Oblate sons and brothers. His mercy flowed from that boundless sensitivity and generosity which imbued his heart. His was a heart of a father, he claimed, but it did not end there; it was a mother's heart as well. A number of times, he repeated this. For example, towards the end of his life, he wrote:

"Often I have told the good Lord that, since he has given me a mother's heart and sons who merit my love under so many titles, he must allow me to love them immeasurably. This I do in good conscience. It seems to me, dearly beloved son, that the more I love someone like yourself, the more I love God who is the source and bond of our mutual affection. This sentiment is a permanent feature in my soul: I bear it with me wherever I may be, and when these cherished persons are not present, I pour out my feelings before Our Lord in my evening visit, during which I concern myself with them."<sup>16</sup>

Since they stemmed from the Founder, we would have expected to come upon the word mercy in the Rules he wrote for his Congregation. It is not found there as such. Obviously, we must read between the lines to bring out the idea of mercy. The Founder gave a good description of the merciful man he aspired to be in his description of what the Superior General should be: "He will patiently tolerate the faults of each individual; he will listen to each one with kindness; he will gently correct; in a charitable manner, he will help each one at every occasion; he will lend himself zealously to addressing all their spiritual and temporal needs [...]".<sup>17</sup> Beyond the circle of superiors and always according to the Rule, he spoke to all when, for example, on October 9, 1841, he wrote to the missionaries departing for Canada: "Be of one mind; put up with each other. Even though something be not to your liking, take care not to grumble. Communicate the observations that you believe useful, but mildly, not contentiously or bitterly. If they are not adopted, keep your peace and do not swerve from obedience. Never make personal remarks, never be touchy, let there be candor, frankness,

simplicity, mildness and especially charity [...]."<sup>18</sup> A lot of mercy is contained in this.

We have now come to the stage of treating the manner in which he dealt with Oblates guilty of some transgression. Without considering all the cases, we see the paradoxical character of the Superior General showing from behind the condemnations or exhortations involved. Since he was a no-nonsense individual himself, he found it difficult to understand or tolerate the failings or mediocrity of others; and yet, he never failed to incline toward leniency and clemency. When the occasion arose of expelling a member, it seemed to him that the Congregation was "being sifted by the devil". He continued to the effect that justice should have been meted out before this, if it had not been for the duplicity of the culprit in question; yet he could not refrain from justifying his actions in the following way: "But, Lord, shall I ever be cured of leaning always towards mercy, when I hope for the repentance of the culprit!"<sup>19</sup>

Concerning another "deserter" whom he has just delivered over to Satan by a decree of expulsion, he wrote: "I used the approach of superabundant mercy, but he obliged me by his extravagant and culpable obstinacy to use the severity he incessantly provoked".<sup>20</sup> One more and this one a very touching example: to one of his priests in Canada, the Superior General ends off a stern letter by this invitation of most admirable tenderness to come to meet him in Marseilles: "Face to face with me, leaning on my paternal heart, you will be able to tell me whether I am not for you what I should be, that is to say, the most loving, affectionate, and let me say the most merciful, of fathers, for I certainly have things to forgive you for."<sup>21</sup>

Faced with faults that were manifest and grave, the Superior General could prove merciless. So it was that he ordered the immediate expulsion of a scholastic brother convicted of having been engaged in a particular friendship, understood in the worse sense of the term. In addition, he demanded of that entire community a series of reparative prayers.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, the previous year, he was ready to admit to the sub-diaconate a scholastic of good will, but who was not lacking in negative signs. He boldly wrote that his course of action was to "rely on God's mercy who will, so we hope, bless our decision which is more charitable than it is prudent".<sup>23</sup>

Did the aging Bishop put too much trust in God's mercy? In any case, in this school of God as well as in the school of human experience, he had learned to take into account human weakness and the torpor of the human heart. This is quite apparent in the advice which he wrote to Father Tempier in 1837. Father Tempier had sent to his superior a stern note with regard to a certain penitent. The Founder's response was: "[...] the note inserted in ... [your letter] meant for the penitent concerned was neither friendly nor charitable. People do not expect such hard expressions. If one knows the human heart, one should not expect to heal wounds with such a remedy. Knowing the individual's sensitivity, I can assure you that he would have been extremely upset by it. That is why I have burnt this little piece of paper which did not at all fit the need."<sup>24</sup>

#### IV. PASTORAL MERCY

The different passages we have quoted and the actions recorded there

already belong to his apostolic activity. They paved the way for an understanding of a much broader expression of mercy in the ministry of parish missions. That is where his mercy would take on a more powerful and vibrant form.

We are getting down to the matter at issue, but before we do, we will comment on what could be broadly termed, Eugene de Mazenod's corporal works of mercy. Jean Leflon provides a description of it.<sup>25</sup> It might be good to note here that his works of assistance to individuals and social assistance did not have the full scope that the promotion of justice and human dignity have achieved since that time. However, this perspective was not foreign to him since the Founder listed in the Preface of the Constitutions and Rules the stages of the apostolate to which he was summoning the Oblates to "lead men to act like human beings, first of all, and then like Christians, and, finally, we must help them to become saints". The 1982 Constitutions and Rules are solidly set in this context. We will come back to this toward the end of this study.

When we think of mercy in Saint Eugene de Mazenod's life, the idea that always comes to mind is the attitude he adopted and practiced and that he bade his fellow Oblates to practice in their pastoral work as missionaries. He made the deliberate choice of making mercy prevail over the contemporary rigorism. In order to understand what was remarkable about the position he took, we have to see it in its historical context.

We do not have to treat of this topic at length. Jansenism, especially in questions of morality was far from absent in the France of the first half of the 19th century. The after-effects from previous centuries still had their influence, espe-

cially with regard to the sacrament of penance.<sup>26</sup>

It is difficult for us, in our day, to picture the impact Jansenism had in France right up to the beginning of the 19th century. As Philip Rouillard O.S.B. wrote: "Two spiritualities and two sacramental practices confronted each other in 17th century France. While the Jesuits presupposed trust in human nature, the Jansenists were convinced that the human person was corrupt and that healing could come only through stern discipline. Anthony Arnaud in his work, *De la fréquente communion* (1643) and Nicholas Pavillon, Bishop of Alet in his *Rituel latin-français* (1667) recommend moral and sacramental rigorism and this had an enduring influence. But were the ethics they were defending still Gospel ethics?"<sup>27</sup>

There still remained very stubborn vestiges of this attitude in Eugene de Mazenod's day. In the meantime, however, Alphonsus Liguori's moral theology was spreading more and more. Without tending to any laxity, it showed much more understanding and compassion, in a word, more mercy. This is the theology and its pastoral application that Father de Mazenod adopted with full knowledge of the surrounding circumstances. Ultramontanism was gaining ground. It was his ultramontanism which inclined him to this, especially since the Holy See looked favorably on Saint Alphonsus' theology. It was also in harmony with Father de Mazenod's preferential option for the poor, not simply poor sinners in general, but those groups of more or less abandoned people because it was the poor and abandoned that felt most severely the impact of rigorism, which favored a certain elitism. As Andrew Haquin pointed out in the article referred

to above, "the Christian people and especially the poorest felt abandoned and left to their banal existence".<sup>28</sup> Father de Mazenod felt an authentic call to reach out to the poor to lift them out of their second rate religious existence. He would carry it out by winning them over through the merciful goodness of the Redeemer. At this point, it is appropriate to read once again his first instruction for Lent in 1813: "The poor, a precious portion of the Christian family, cannot be abandoned to their ignorance. Our divine Saviour attached such importance to this that he took on himself the responsibility of instructing them [...]."<sup>29</sup>

Eugene de Mazenod's struggle against Jansenism has been treated at great length by his biographers. We will only point out a few incidents here. Eugene had to face rigorist opinions in his own relatives. From the beginning he resolutely distanced himself from these opinions. Already from 1806 on, he vigorously withstood an uncle whose virtues he admired, but whose Jansenist opinions he categorically rejected.<sup>30</sup> He read and made an in-depth study of a writer with Jansenist tendencies and condemned his errors through a profession of faith written already in 1806.<sup>31</sup> In the seminary, he applied himself conscientiously to the study of moral theology. Even if, according to the Jean Leflon, he received a teaching still tainted with rigorism, he would not incline in that direction.<sup>32</sup> In fact, a few years later when he had become a priest and mission preacher, he would write that, for a long time already, he had set about studying especially Alphonsus Liguori's moral theology.<sup>33</sup> For the same reasons, he would entrust to Father Domenico Albini the courses of moral theology at the scholasticate; then at the major seminary of Marseilles and

later on at the major seminary of Ajaccio.<sup>34</sup> Again in 1830, he exhorted one of his seminarians to temper the severity of his opinions by reading Alphonsus Liguori.<sup>35</sup>

These few references suffice to show that Father de Mazenod's convictions were based on his trust in the favor shown by the Magisterium for the teaching of Saint Alphonsus. These convictions were deepened by a careful study of these same teachings. They grew to maturity in the practice of parish missions. They would not be shaken by the opposition he would encounter in the clergy and even on the part of a bishop like Bishop Charles-François-Melchior de Miollis.<sup>36</sup> As bishop, he himself had to intervene to counter rigorist tendencies in the ministry of the sacrament of penance.<sup>37</sup>

Indeed, it was in this ministry that he gave vigorous expression to his leniency, gentleness and mercy. This is how, while still a young priest, he described it: "My brothers our menacing tone is only for the pulpit, in the sacred tribunal our language is quite different, perhaps then we are all too indulgent".<sup>38</sup> But the preaching should already be trying to touch hearts: "After setting out the duties, make an appeal to the heart, don't be afraid of letting go. It always worked for me, I don't recall a single occasion of resistance when I used to exercise your holy ministry."<sup>39</sup> In any case, if they had the choice, they should give priority to the ministry of confessions rather than preaching. The Founder explained his thinking on this matter in a rather long chapter in the Oblate Rule. Woe betide the faint-hearted minister who would fear to carry out this ministry. No hesitation in responding to calls for it. Oblates should be neither too lenient nor too stern. Oblates should not be too lenient

or too stern. Let them welcome people with an inexhaustible charity; through their kindness and mercy, let them put heart into the discouraged.<sup>40</sup>

It goes without saying that one should be prepared beforehand “by the practice of the most excellent virtues to become worthy ministers of the mercy of God”.<sup>41</sup> But also through study. We said a few things about it earlier in this article. Let us add here that Eugene the seminarian carefully compiled a study notebook dealing with the treatise on penance, desiring, as Jean Leflon wrote, “to acquire the knowledge he would need for his ministry among the humble and poor”.<sup>42</sup>

This ministry would be carried out even at the risk of one’s life in times of epidemics.<sup>43</sup> Even if, in the course of a mission, there were great numbers of people, they were to take the necessary time to carry out this ministry. “Since we follow the confessional method of [...] Saint Vincent de Paul, that is, hearing confessions without intermission, we don’t go very fast.”<sup>44</sup> In point of fact, they “stayed there [hearing confessions] for the following 28 hours”.<sup>45</sup> Even during ordinary times, even though Father de Mazenod was faithful to his prayer commitments, he was ready to interrupt contemplation if “someone comes for confession, I must leave O.L., without complaint and regret so as to fulfill this duty of charity [...]”.<sup>46</sup>

At a time when the practice was to still require of the penitent that he make his confession several times with a certain amount of time in between confessions to ensure his sincerity and perseverance, he insisted that absolution should not be withheld as if one were waiting to ensure impeccability on the part of the penitent. Otherwise, one risks driving the sinner to despair. Fa-

ther de Mazenod explained his thinking in a fine letter to a pastor who was unhappy with the fruit of a mission because the number of people receiving communion had diminished at Easter: “We must remember that reconciliation in the sacrament of Penance does not give impeccability any more than justification in baptism does. [...] In instituting the sacrament of Penance in such a way that it may be worthily received several times by the same person, he [Jesus Christ] has reassured in advance the priest who administers it according to the rule, and at the same time has held back the poor sinner from the despair to which he might have given in without this provident mercy [...]”.<sup>47</sup>

Bishop de Mazenod’s mercy in administering the sacrament of penance was concretized in another form which, even if it was not frequent, was not for all that less important. Acting in opposition to the prevailing custom of his time, he felt it was very important to offer the sacraments to those condemned to death.<sup>48</sup> “My liturgical function on Sunday was wonderful. I did not only administer Confirmation to the poor condemned man, but to sanction by my example the principles I have upheld.” He celebrated Mass at the prison and addressed a moving exhortation to the repentant guilty man before placing the Body of Christ on the tongue of this wretched Christian who “burst into tears”.

Perhaps the best portrayal of Eugene de Mazenod’s humane and evangelical heart is to be found in a letter he wrote to Eugene Bruno Guigues following a rather prosaic incident; it seems that some young people had sought some diversion in disrupting one of the ceremonies during a mission. But the superior’s response was by no means insignificant – all the more so in that this

was not a carefully pondered official response but rather a spontaneous reaction on the spur of the moment springing from an insight which had been mulled over for a long time and then lived. It seems to me it is worth the trouble of quoting it at length, even if it is lengthy. "I have just received your letter of the 15th and I am leaving aside everything to reply to it. May God save you, my dear friend, from refusing Communion to those, who, being guilty of the mischief which you mention to me, have been repentant. You yourself admit that they were only carried along by their exuberance and not at all by hostile intention. Oh! you are sent by God to forgive greater sins than theirs and even greater scandals than the one they may have given by their thoughtlessness. Once they had been reconciled, it was your duty to admit them to the Holy Table to make them fulfill, at the same time, their Paschal duty and the obligation they had undoubtedly been feeling to receive Communion which they had neglected. I am afraid that the anxiety in which I find you has not permitted you to accord a fairly kind welcome to these young people. The opposite gesture would have won their hearts and would have urged them to draw towards you those who were more guilty than they. And if these latter end up by surrendering themselves, no doubt you must make them also receive Communion at the end of the mission. Remember that you are sent to sinners, and even to hardened sinners. You must expect resistance from the devil; he will not easily let go of his prey. This resistance manifests itself now in one way, and now in another. Jesus Christ is always the victor, "*Christus vincit*". He demands sacrifices, "*Christus imperat*". He establishes his reign in souls, "*Christus reg-*

*nat*". This is all that we desire, this is the result of and compensation for our labours. We are the ministers of his mercy, and so let us always have the tenderness of a father towards all; let us easily forget the insults that are sometimes committed against us in the exercise of our ministry as the good Lord wishes to forget the offenses continually being committed against him. The father of the prodigal son was not content with putting the best robe on him and having a ring put on his finger, he had the fatted calf killed as well. In the same way, we must not only reconcile sinners, but in view of all the graces granted to them during the mission, of the guarantees their fidelity gives to respond thereto and of the efforts they have had to make for all this, we admit them to the sacred banquet, we give them the bread of life so that they can advance in this new path which they are to follow, and may, at the same time, fulfill an imperative duty that urges them."

We know that the saint cherished a great devotion to the Sacred Heart. Another article will deal with this subject. I offer just a few lines here to highlight the link between this devotion and mercy in the spirituality of the Founder and a few of his sons. One could very well expect that the Heart of Jesus would reveal to Eugene the deep roots of his merciful love and would be for him a vigorous incentive to give back love for love.<sup>50</sup> What sharing of love took place between him and Jesus remains a secret between them. To me, what seems to especially stand out is the aspect of reparation. The mercy he received made him all the more sensitive to insults directed at the Heart of Jesus and he felt the need to make reparation for them. The public ceremonies he organized or which he led were de-

signed to be acts of reparation in view of asking God's forgiveness and other blessings. In this matter he was following the trend of this devotion as it was practiced in his time after the apparitions to Saint Margaret Mary and as fostered by the Church.

It also seems that the Oblates were working along the same lines when they built the basilica in Montmartre and promoted devotion to the Sacred Heart through ministry from the basilica. The inscription on the pediment of the basilica captures this well: *Sacratissimo Cordi Jesu Christi Gallia paenitens et devota* (To the Sacred Heart of Jesus, a repentant and devoted France). Having established these shades of meaning, the fact remains that reparation consists in asking for forgiveness and by having recourse to the mercy of God.

One would have to retrace the whole history of devotion to the Sacred Heart among the Oblates and as promoted by them. I limit myself here to what went on in France as associated with names like Alfred Yenveux, John Baptist Lemius and Felix Anizan, the latter particularly through his books and his review *Regnabit*. Their influence was considerable, to give only one example among many other possible examples, in the life of an Oblate originally from France but who worked in Canada, Father Victor Lelièvre. A recent book authored by Father Mary Louis Parent bearing the title *Victor Lelièvre, a Man Electrified by the Sacred Heart*, gives us the picture of an apostle for whom devotion to the Sacred Heart bore marvelous fruit in the form of mercy. Many Oblates have experienced a profound affinity with this peerless confrere. He had learned from his formators in France this most vivid sense of divine mercy as revealed in the Heart of Jesus.

While acknowledging the need of a more carefully nuanced study of this matter, I would be inclined to believe that Saint Eugene's sense of mercy appears in a stronger light in his devotion to Mary. We have already touched on this point when speaking of the mercy he implored and received from God through Mary. The same held true for his apostolate. He never forgot to call upon his sons and through them the whole Christian people to entrust themselves to Mary. She is, not more merciful than God – that would be absurd – but rather a special revelation of God's mercy, a revelation particularly adapted to the human heart: a gentle and tender Mother, mother of mercy. These are terms which came easily to mind for the Founder and Pastor. Almost as an official prayer, he prescribed for the Oblates the prayer *Sub tuum praesidium*.<sup>51</sup>

We could multiply the events and texts that tell of Bishop de Mazenod's trusting recourse to the Mother of Mercy. Just one example. When a cholera epidemic was raging in Marseilles, he described to his mother how this calamity called forth "a holy explosion of devotion to the Blessed Virgin [...] my heart bursts so amid this very wonderful devotion. I think the Lord cannot but allow himself to be touched nor his divine Mother fail to obtain us mercy."<sup>52</sup> In a subsequent letter to another correspondent, he was able to announce cessation of the plague and he added: "It is a fine compensation for my sufferings to see God glorified in this way, so many souls converted, and our town healed by these all-powerful means employed by infinite mercy".<sup>53</sup>

This is the point to conclude this section on mercy in the Founder's pastoral practice by a brief reference to the apostolate carried out in the pilgrimage centres. As we know, he was pleased to

accept on behalf of the Congregation the staffing of pilgrimage sites dedicated to Mary. He saw in this a kind of ongoing mission and did not fail to give full value to and stress how in those places the mercy of God was made available to sinners.<sup>54</sup> Let us note here a passage from the acts of his visitation in which he congratulated the fathers of Notre-Dame du Laus on their zeal for the ministry of confession: "Whence an ever growing gathering of the faithful who flock to our good Mother with the assurance that on the steps leading to the earthly throne of the Queen of Heaven they will find zealous servants of her divine Son invested with the special responsibility of bringing sinners to reconciliation; upon these sinners, this Mother of Mercy by her powerful protection calls down pardon and peace. This is the source of so many conversions."<sup>55</sup>

It would be superfluous to elaborate on the fact that practically all over the world the Oblates have continued to carry on this ministry of mercy. To give only one example, the same experiences of mercy recur in great numbers at Notre Dame du Cap in Quebec.

A text taken from the last years of his life illustrate in concise but striking fashion how the aging bishop united into the same act of trust his recourse to the hearts of Jesus and Mary with expectation of their mercy, favors and help. This text has been taken from a speech presented at the closing session of a council held by the ecclesiastical province of Aix, on September 23, 1850: "We are especially justified in expecting these blessings [desired by the council], from the most merciful heart of Jesus while we ask for them by invoking at the same time the maternal mercy of the heart of Mary so intimately united to the heart of her Son and through which is communi-

cated to mankind, as through a wonderful channel, the graces of God. Ah! From the depths of this valley of tears, the heart of a mother in which we perceive our hope will pour forth blessings on us all the more to the extent that her glory will be reflected in our works."<sup>56</sup>

## V. THE FOUNDER'S MERCIFUL PROFILE

Like every other human being and even more so, the person of Bishop de Mazenod is made up of contrasts. Like many others, Jean Leflon did not fail to stress them.<sup>57</sup> For the person who wishes to find full integration without sacrificing anything that is good, the trick is to bring these contrasts into harmony, by transcending them in a higher state of balance. So, in the case of our subject, how will severity and gentleness find resolution in Saint Eugene?

In giving us a comprehensive picture of the bishop, Leflon offers us the following assessment on the episcopacy of the Bishop of Marseilles: "His manner, during his episcopate, was influenced less by Saint Francis de Sales than by Saint Charles [Borromeo], whose character more closely mirrored his own than did that of de Sales, who was always gentle and cheerful even in his strictest demands."<sup>58</sup> Let us not lose sight of the fact that we are dealing with the administration of the Diocese of Marseilles, and even there, of the bishop's style of administration, not whether his actions were justified or not. In another place in his book, the same biographer acknowledges that "his experiences in the ministry eventually inclined him toward a certain "pessimism" which may have contributed to making him less rigorous than the confessors of his day in discouraging the weaknesses of sinners".<sup>59</sup>

Saint Eugene underwent a certain evolution. Leflon sees this reflected in three of his portraits, each as different as their dates. The first reveals "the determination of a young missionary, launched upon the regeneration of a society drastically changed by the Revolution. The second portrait, made when he became Bishop of Icosia, accentuates his self-assurance [...] he still retains the same rigidity and the same lack of gentleness found in the first portrait. Completely different, however, is the photograph of the old man, marked by his trials: it leaves an impression of fatigue and sad weariness; the forcefulness is still there but one guesses that it lacks any illusions about human capabilities and that it is mingled with meekness and serenity; in the deep-set and half-closed eyes, what was once a flame has now become a glow."<sup>60</sup>

Even if we do not find the word in Leflon's text, can we not say that it is mercy that is the predominant feature in this gaze, its strength and its glow? In the end, these tendencies, too strongly contrasting in the beginning join into something exalted, something simpler. As well as into something more closely related to the mystery of the Father's mercy in which we see divine perfection at work in our world. "The work of justice in God always presupposes the work of mercy and is based on it."<sup>61</sup> "Be perfect, that is merciful, as your heavenly Father is merciful" (Matthew 5:48; Luke 6:36).

## VI. NEW PERSPECTIVES

This theological digression prepares us for the reading of two Oblate texts which are important to consider. In the first place, we deal with Father Leo Deschâtelets' circular letter dated the

Feast of the Assumption 1951 and bearing the title: *Our Vocation and our Life of Intimate Union with Mary Immaculate*.<sup>62</sup> Of a very different character than the writings of the Founder, through this document one of his successors places the calling shared by Mary Immaculate and the individual Oblate at the heart of the mystery of divine mercy.

The thinking behind this letter is based on that which is most profound and most beautiful in the plan of redemptive mercy: it is not just that humanity benefits from it, but that it is called by an ever growing love to cooperate actively with it. Now in this order of cooperation Mary holds pride of place: herself redeemed by the most sublime redemption, she is the one most closely associated with the entire work of that same redemption in all its scope from the time of the offering made on Calvary to the consummation in holiness of all the members of Christ. That is her role as mother. Immaculate in virtue of the highest degree of redemptive mercy, Mary is, in virtue of the same design, universal Mother of Mercy. Consequently, the more a vocation summons someone to collaboration in carrying out this design, the more he must rely upon and involve himself in intimate dependence on Mary Immaculate. How intimate then is the communion that the mystery of divine mercy establishes between the Oblate missionary and the one whom the Founder loved to call Mother of Mercy!

The image of the Virgin Mary leads us to another text we should consider, that of the Constitutions and Rules of 1982. The only passage where the word mercy is used, is the one used to describe Mary as Mother of Mercy (C 10). This topic will be treated elsewhere in

this dictionary. But here it is fitting to point out that the mention of Mary in this particular place in the Constitutions sets off in sharper relief the articles about which we wish to speak, namely, C 9 and C 10 and R 7-10. Even though the word is not used in these texts, mercy is the inspiration for and influence behind this aspect of the apostolic endeavors of Oblates. Here we find new perspectives.

It is still and more than ever so mercy which strains to alleviate wretchedness, but in a new way and with a deeper and broader scope. Something beyond commiseration for those who suffer, something even more than understanding and leniency for those at fault, mercy includes all these qualities but goes beyond them. It is akin to what the Scriptures call in Greek *crestoths* and which could be translated as generosity. That is God's style, not only to give help from above or from afar to his wretched creature, but to draw close to it. The Most High makes himself personally present to his creature. Obtaining for us the free gifts of freedom and access to his kingdom are not the only things he does. He sends us his Son to take on our flesh and dwell among us. He is and contains all of humanity. In him, through him, with him, it is the whole of humanity which is restored and finds its way back to the Father. As a result of this closeness, each and every one is led to cooperate in his work of salvation to bring it to fulfillment. This is what shows forth divine mercy. It is more honorable for us and therefore more merciful on the part of God to enable us to be, through a member of our race, cooperators with God's gifts.

These considerations allow us to see the significance of the articles which are of interest to us, without analyzing of them.<sup>63</sup> Indeed, they begin with this ex-

pression which is simple but fraught with meaning: "We will always be close to the people with whom we work [...]" A few features, then, explain the consequences: constant attention to their aspirations and to the values they carry in their hearts; boldness in presenting the Gospel demands and to open new avenues to the message of salvation; humility in the face of our own shortcomings and trust in the power of God; to lead all, especially the poor, to full awareness of their dignity as human beings and of their divine sonship. Constitution 9 and the corresponding rules 9 and 10 develop it even further.

As members of the prophetic Church, bearing witness to the justice and the holiness of God; proclaiming the liberating presence of Christ and of a new world; hearing and making heard the cry of the voiceless, like a cry (allusion to the *Magnificat*) to God who casts down the mighty and lifts up the poor. To know how to learn from the poor new ways of practicing Gospel poverty; to allow ourselves to be enriched by their culture and their religious traditions. Finally and even more, according to the specific calls, to identify with the poor to the point of sharing their lives and their commitments or to make oneself present where decisions are made that affect their lives.

This complex of features will not fail to have an impact on the practice of the vows and on the interior life. This theme runs throughout the Constitutions and Rules. Let us point out a few of its more obvious manifestations. "[Celibacy] expresses our total gift of self to God and to others with all our affection, with all the life-giving powers of our being. Our celibacy allows us to be present where the

most urgent needs are to be found, to give witness as a group to the Father's love for us and to our enduring love for him" (C 16). The vow of poverty "compels us to enter into a closer communion with Jesus and with the poor [...] When faced with the demands of our mission and the needs to be met, we may feel weak and helpless. It is then that we can learn from the poor, especially making our own their patience, hope and solidarity." (C 20) "By obedience we become the servants of all. Challenging the spirit of domination, we stand as a sign of that new world wherein persons recognize their close interdependence" (C 25). "[...] we seek his presence in the hearts of the people and in the events of daily life as well as in the Word of God, in the sacraments and in prayer" (C 31). In exchange, "we come before him bearing with us the daily pressures of our anxiety for those to whom he sends us" (C 32).

It seems to be obvious enough that in the Constitutions and Rules the great trend for mercy is summed up in the already quoted phrase taken from Constitution 8: "close to the people with whom we work". The concrete expressions this will take can assume infinitely renewable forms, but they will always issue forth from their main source, the merciful generosity of the Father. It manifested itself in us when we saw his Son draw close to us and became our road to reach Him. Imitating God and walking in the footsteps of Christ, we should be inspired by the same mercy (Ephesians 4:32-5:2). "Be good as the Most High is good (*crestos*). Be merciful as your Father is merciful" (Luke 6:35-36).

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See "Miséricorde" in DS, p. 1313-1349.

<sup>2</sup> *Confessions*, X, 26-29.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Aquinas, 1<sup>a</sup>, q. 21, a. 3 and 4.

<sup>4</sup> See a list in the introduction to *Spiritual Writings (1794-1811)*, *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 14, p. XVI.

<sup>5</sup> See "Retreat made in the Aix seminary", December 1814 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 15, no. 130, p. 81.

<sup>6</sup> See "On frequent communion", *ibidem*, no. 102, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> See *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 14, p. XXVII-XXVIII.

<sup>9</sup> In *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 15, no. 191, p. 248-249.

<sup>10</sup> Letter to Father Joseph Alexander Ciamin, April 9, 1853 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 4, no. 33, p. 110.

<sup>11</sup> *Mélanges historiques sur la Congrégation des Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, Tours, A. Mame and Sons, 1872, p. 334; also, LEFLON IV, p. 309-310.

<sup>12</sup> See letters to Father Tempier, December 9, 1825 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 211, p. 209 and January 11, 1831 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 8, no. 380, p. 4-5; no. 403, p. 36.

<sup>13</sup> In *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 14, no. 30, p. 65-69.

<sup>14</sup> In *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 14, no. 21, p. 36-37; LEFLON I, p. 281-286.

<sup>15</sup> Letter to Francis Cannizzaro, July 1816

in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 15, no. 136, p. 124.

<sup>16</sup> Letter to Father Anthony Mouchette, March 22, 1857 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 12, p. 49.

<sup>17</sup> C and R of 1818, Part Three, Chapter One, par. 2 in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 73.

<sup>18</sup> Letter to Father John Baptist Honorat, October 9, 1841 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 1, no. 9, p. 15-16.

<sup>19</sup> Letter to Father Hippolyte Courtès, December 6, 1825 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, p. 207.

<sup>20</sup> Letter to Father Stephen Semeria, January 8, 1841 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 9, no. 723, p. 163.

<sup>21</sup> Letter to Father Peter Rouge, July 8, 1858 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 2, no. 250, p. 184-185; see also letter to Bishop Bruno Guigues, October 9, 1859, *ibidem*, no. 266, p. 216.

<sup>22</sup> See letters to Father Mouchette, August 26, 1860 and to the fathers and scholastics of Lumières, August 19, 1860 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 12, nos. 1459 and 1460, p. 194-195.

<sup>23</sup> Letter to Father Tempier, March 15, 1859, *ibidem*, no. 1415, p. 146.

<sup>24</sup> Letter to Father Tempier, July 24, 1837 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 9, no. 631, p. 48-49.

<sup>25</sup> LEFLON III, chap. III, p. 77-121; IV, chap. XI, p. 43-93 and for some incidents of a more personal nature, IV, chap. XV, p. 320-332.

<sup>26</sup> Just to get an idea of what has been published, here is a list of some more recent works: DELUMEAU, Jean, *L'aveu et le pardon. Les difficultés de la confession (XIII<sup>e</sup>-XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles)*, Paris, Fayard, 1990; Alphonse de Liguori, *pasteur et docteur*, Bourdeau et alii Collection, Paris, Beauchesne, 1987; GUERBER, Jean, *Le ralliement du clergé français à la morale ligurienne: l'abbé Gousset et ses précurseurs (1785-1832)*, Rome, Gregorian University, 1973; SEVRIN, Ernest, *Les missions religieuses en France sous la Restauration (1815-1830)*, Paris, Vrin, 1957, vol. I; GIBSON, Ralph, *Théologie et société en France au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* in *Histoire et théologie* Collection, under the direction of Jean Dominique Durand, Paris, Beauchesne,

1994; HAQUIN, André, "Rigorisme en théologie et en pastorale des sacrements aux XVII<sup>e</sup> et XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles" in *Liturgie, éthique et peuple de Dieu* Collection, Saint George Conferences, Liturgical Studies Weeks, Week XXXVII, 1990, Rome, Liturgical Editions, 1991.

<sup>27</sup> *Esprit et Vie*, no. 48, 1991, p. 653 where he reviews André Haquin's article.

<sup>28</sup> *Opus citatum*, p. 159.

<sup>29</sup> "Homily instructions in Provençal, given at the church of the Magdalene in 1813" in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 15, no. 114, p. 35.

<sup>30</sup> See the December 26, 1805 letter to his father in *Oblate Writings I*, no. 14, p. 26; Extract from "Conversation with a Jansenist on the topic of convulsions provoked by religious experience", February 17, 1808, *ibidem*, no. 25, p. 52; letter to Mrs. de Mazenod, December 14, 1810, *ibidem*, no. 76, p. 168-169.

<sup>31</sup> "Profession of Faith", 1806 in *Oblate Writings I*, no. 14, p. 27-28.

<sup>32</sup> See LEFLON I, p. 332; 335.

<sup>33</sup> See letter to Charles Anthony de Mazenod, May 1, 1816 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 13, no. 3, p. 6.

<sup>34</sup> See LEFLON II, p. 589.

<sup>35</sup> See letter to scholastic brother Alexander Marie Pons, January 28, 1830 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 7, p. 195.

<sup>36</sup> See LEFLON II, p. 129-130.

<sup>37</sup> See LEFLON III, p. 74.

<sup>38</sup> "Colloquial instruction on confession, preached in Provençal, on the fourth Sunday of Lent, March 28 in the year 1813" in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 15, no. 115, p. 47

<sup>39</sup> Letter to Father Courtès, December 18, 1836 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 8, p. 265.

<sup>40</sup> See C and R of 1818, Part One, Chapter Three, par. 2: "De la confession", in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 36-38; also C and R of 1853, art. prima pars, caput quartum, par. II, art. 1; C and R of 1909, art. 123; C and R of 1928, art. 118.

<sup>41</sup> Letter to Nicholas Riccardi, deacon, February 17, 1826 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 7, no. 225, p. 35-36.

<sup>42</sup> LEFLON I, p. 335.

<sup>43</sup> Letters to Father Tempier, August 7 and 16, 1835 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 8, p. 177; 179-180.

<sup>44</sup> Letter to Mr. Figon, October 5, 1822 in 1815-1861, *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 13, no. 42, p. 58.

<sup>45</sup> Letter to Charles Anthony de Mazenod, May 1, 1816 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 13, no. 3, p. 5.

<sup>46</sup> See annual retreat at Bonneveine, July-August 1816 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 15, no. 139, p. 131.

<sup>47</sup> Letter to the parish priest of Brignoles, August 23, 1821 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 13, no. 39, p. 54.

<sup>48</sup> Letter to Father Tempier, July 18, 1837 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 9, no. 629, p. 45-46; letter to Father Courtès, October 11, 1837, *ibidem*, no. 648, p. 64-65.

<sup>49</sup> Letter to Father Guigues, February 20, 1837, *ibidem*, no. 605, p. 13-14.

<sup>50</sup> See BOUTIN, Louis Napoleon, *La spiritualité de Mgr de Mazenod*, Montreal, Rayonnement, 1970, p. 57-61.

<sup>51</sup> At the time, he was not aware that this formulation with its origins in the fourth century is the most ancient prayer bequeathed to us by the early church.

<sup>52</sup> Letter to his mother, March 10, 1835 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 15, no. 176, p. 222.

<sup>53</sup> Letter to Bishop L. Frezza, April 27, 1835, *ibidem*, no. 177, p. 223.

<sup>54</sup> See LAMIRANDE, Emilien, "L'apostolat des pèlerinages et Mgr de Mazenod" in *Etudes oblates*, 21 (1962), p. 41-56.

<sup>55</sup> Acts of visitation of the house of Laus, October 18, 1835, quoted in LAMIRANDE, Emilien, *Opus citatum*, p. 49.

<sup>56</sup> Quoted by BOUTIN, Louis Napoleon, *Opus citatum*, p. 80-81.

<sup>57</sup> LEFLON IV, p. 306.

<sup>58</sup> *ibidem*, p. 319.

<sup>59</sup> *ibidem*, p. 315.

<sup>60</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 307.

<sup>61</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, I<sup>a</sup>, q. 21, a. 4; also II<sup>a</sup> II<sup>ae</sup>, q. 30, a. 4.

<sup>62</sup> Circular letter no. 191, August 15, 1951 in *Circ. adm.*, V (1947-1952), p. 298-386.

<sup>63</sup> One can read with profit Father Fernand Jetté's book, *O.M.I. The Apostolic Man: A Commentary on the 1982 edition of the Oblate Constitutions and Rules*, General House, Rome, 1992, 541 p.

## MISSIONARY ASSOCIATION OF MARY IMMACULATE

*Summary: I. The practice of Saint Eugene de Mazenod. II. The first beginnings. III. Initiatives of the Superiors General. 1. Father Louis Soullier; 2. Father Cassian Augier; 3. Bishop Augustin Dontenwill; 4. Father Leo Deschâtelets. IV. In the Constitutions and Rules: 1. The 1972 and 1980 General Chapters; 2. The Constitutions and Rules of 1982*

### I. THE PRACTICE OF SAINT EUGENE DE MAZENOD

One could say that the remote beginnings of the Missionary Association of Mary Immaculate (M.A.M.I.) emerge even before the Congregation it was meant to help.

The first appeal for financial aid with the assurance of prayers and spiritual benefits in recognition of help given antedates the actual founding of the Congregation. In making plans to open the mission house of Aix, Eugene de Mazenod, a practical man, realized that it was up to him to find the money to meet all the necessary expenses of the community of missionaries. Since the allowance he received from his mother and help from the diocese would not be adequate, he composed a *Prospectus for the Missions* in which he outlined his plans for the Missionaries of Provence:

“But an institution, which ought to produce such great fruit, an institution, which can be said to be so necessary, cannot be formed without the help of the faithful who assist with their charity. There is no doubt that those who have in their hearts a sincere love of religion, will consider it a pleasant duty to sow material goods in order to reap spiritual benefits.

Would they want to deprive themselves of the graces which God will grant to those cooperating with this holy enterprise? ...

An easy way of contributing is that of donations or pledges for several years, according to the means of each person. Daily prayers will be said at the Church of the Mission at Aix for the benefactors, and during the missions the people will be asked to do the same.

Pledge Form: I promise to donate every year for years [...] as long as my means permit me to do so, the sum of [...] as a contribution to the cost of “establishing of the house of the Missions of Provence, founded at Aix in the former convent of the Carmelites.”<sup>1</sup>

In response to the direct-mail appeal made between October 1815 and January 1816, one benefactor was willing to loan de Mazenod 12,000 francs without interest for one year and his cousin Roze-Joannis promised a gift of 300 francs. The members of the Aix youth organization each contributed from one to six francs.

Even before the first Oblates were sent to the foreign missions, as Vicar General and later as Bishop of Marseilles, de Mazenod was an ardent supporter of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith founded by Pauline Jaricot in Lyons in 1822. In responding to his appeals the faithful of the diocese of Marseilles were among the most generous in France<sup>2</sup>. On the other hand he later showed no hesitation in seeking funds from the Society in Lyons as well as in Paris<sup>3</sup>.

In September 1842 he granted spiri-

tual participation in all the good works of the Congregation to Mr. and Mrs. Olivier Berthelet, in recognition for the gift of a house and property in Montreal, to Mrs. Jules Quesnel for several gifts of money, and to Miss T. Berthelet for prevailing on her brother to donate the house<sup>4</sup>.

In 1848 he granted participation in the spiritual benefits of the Congregation to the Sisters of St. Joseph of Hôtel-Dieu of Montreal for their temporal and spiritual assistance to the Oblates<sup>5</sup>, and in 1861 he did the same for the Sisters of the Holy Family of Bordeaux<sup>6</sup>.

There can be no doubt that the Founder admitted the principle of lay people and other religious participating in the spiritual life of the Congregation and sharing in its good works in recognition for help afforded by prayer and almsgiving. In his 1848 Lenten pastoral de Mazenod urged the faithful of his diocese to follow the example of Jesus in working for the salvation of others:

“My dear Brethren, it is this divine Master, who was imitated by the Apostles, that we propose as the example of your zeal, within the limits of your means and of the obligations of your state of life. We urge you to sanctify Lent by spiritual works that are useful to the salvation of your brothers and sisters. Those who have in their hearts zeal for the truth are obliged to use all their means to bring about the victory of truth in minds closed to the light... Do not be surprised that we in this way associate you in a certain manner in our ministry, and have you share in the crown of apostolic men, glorious instruments of the eternal salvation of souls created in the image of God and redeemed by his blood.<sup>7</sup>”

By asserting that at times the faithful were bound to proclaim with charity the

truth in a way to avoid hurting others in order to bring about their conversion, de Mazenod showed that the laity are also called to be evangelizers<sup>8</sup>. Here he clearly announced a principle on which the apostolate of the laity is founded – another element in associating the laity to the Congregation.

During the 1850 General Chapter de Mazenod opposed a motion for a sort of third order of laity associated to the Congregation. The same motion was again proposed at the following General Chapter in 1856 and he acknowledged its opportuneness and stated that he would apply to the Holy See for the privilege of the scapular of the Immaculate Conception as granted to the Theatines. Although this privilege was granted on September 21, 1856, it seems that nothing further was done in establishing the confraternity. The Founder’s lack of enthusiasm for a special Oblate society for lay supporters can be explained by his wholehearted support for the Society of the Propagation of the Faith<sup>9</sup>.

## II. THE FIRST BEGINNINGS

Three different kinds of initiatives lead to the establishment of the Missionary Association. The first consisted in the resolutions of General Chapters. As was seen above, motions were made in the 1850 and 1856 General Chapters for the founding of an organization that would be a sort of third order.

The 1879 Chapter approved in principle the idea of a confraternity or third order for the purpose of affiliating laity to the Congregation for their benefit and in view of aiding the works of the Congregation.

The General Chapter of 1893, inspired by steps taken by the Oblates in

France and England, approved the two resolutions: the first for the foundation of an association or third order; the other for an association to seek financial help for the juniorates. The 1898 Chapter admitted the *Marianischer Missionsverein* (Marian Mission Society) of the German Province to share in the prayers, suffrages and good works of the Congregation.

These various resolutions, however, had little effect on the Congregation as a whole. The General Administration did, in fact, ask the Holy See for various spiritual favors for the benefactors and associations founded in the provinces.

If there was little united effort in the Congregation as a whole, concrete steps were taken in various provinces. Two different approaches were used: the one for the support of the juniorates, the other in the direction of a confraternity or kind of third order.

In 1896 a brochure with the title "Association of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate" (*Association des Oblats de Marie Immaculée*) was printed in Paris with the imprimatur of Archbishop Balain, O.M.I., of Auch. This Association was organized as a real third order – novitiate, oblation, meetings, etc. Was it ever in fact founded?

Until 1906 all scholasticates and their personnel were subject to the Superior General and he was financially responsible for their support; the juniorates were the financial burden of the provinces. It is precisely those provinces that had juniorates that founded societies for their financial support.

The province of Southern France established a scholarship fund (*Caisse des bourses*) for formation expenses of novices and juniors, and money was raised for this purpose by pledges or subscriptions to the "Work of the Young Missionaries" (*l'Œuvre des Jeunes Mis-*

*sionnaires*). The Northern French province followed the same pattern. Later the project was called the "Work of Vocations" (*Oeuvre des vocations*). In 1907 *Petites Annales* for the first time called it the "Association of Mary Immaculate, Work of Vocations", (*Association de Marie Immaculée, Œuvre des vocations*). In 1912 it was spoken of as the work of religious and apostolic vocations under the patronage of Mary Immaculate, or "Association of Mary Immaculate to promote religious and apostolic vocations".

A juniorate was also opened in England and a scholarship fund was established to support it. In 1877, the Provincial with his council decided that the juniorate of Kilburn should remain open because of the bursaries given by benefactors.

Not long after, we see the same thing happen in Canada. The Sacred Heart Juniorate was opened in 1891 in Ottawa. Two years later *La Bannière*, its official organ, was launched. At the end of the volume of the issues 1900-1906 is a list of subscribers (*souscriptions*) who are called "associates" (*associés*). The *Denier du Sacré-Cœur* was also founded in connection with the juniorate for its financial support.

In 1876 a society under the title of the Immaculate Conception was founded at Inchicore, which was parallel to the fund raising activity for vocations. In 1883 William Ring, Provincial in Ireland, organized the first pilgrimage from England and Ireland to Lourdes and as a follow-up he founded the "Association of the Month of May". Upon leaving office as Provincial in 1888, he devoted all his efforts to the May Association with the cash surplus going to support the novitiate, juniorate and missions. It was given the name "Association of Mary Immaculate".

In 1891 the "Missionary Record" was founded and published in London. In addition to this, in the province there were "Apostolic Circles" founded by M. Gaughren, later Vicar Apostolic of Kimberley. These groups of twelve contributors prayed and made donations for the Oblate missions.

In 1893 the first issue of *Maria Immaculata* was edited at the German province's juniorate of St. Charles at Valkenburg in Holland and printed in Germany. The following year Max Kasiepe, a scholastic, founded the *Marianischer Missionsverein*, at St. Charles to support by prayer and alms the Oblate Missions and the juniorate. The office was transferred to Hünfeld in 1897.

### III. THE INITIATIVES OF THE SUPERIORS GENERAL

#### 1. FATHER LOUIS SOULLIER

In 1893 Louis Soullier, Superior General, requested and received from Leo XIII a number of indulgences for the members of the "Association (*Consociatio*) of Mary Immaculate for the Promotion of Religious and Apostolic Vocations". In his petition Father Soullier stated that the primary purpose of the association was the promotion by alms and daily prayers of priestly and religious vocations among poor boys who, once ordained, could dedicate themselves to the missions.

#### 2. FATHER CASSIEN AUGIER

Because of the difference of title and slight difference of purpose, Cassien Augier as Superior General requested that the indulgences be extended to the *Marianischer Missionsverein*, whose purpose was the support

of the houses and missions which the Congregation had in Germany and its colonies. The request was granted by Pius X.

#### 3. BISHOP AUGUSTIN DONTENWILL

In his report to the Congregation following the General Chapter of 1920, Archbishop Augustin Dontenwill said that the objective of the Association of Mary Immaculate had been only juniorate vocations, and that it must be enlarged to include all apostolic efforts of the Congregation. The center of the Association was henceforth to be at the General House, but all provinces and vicariates could ask the Superior General for the establishment of their own center. All Provincials were invited to spread the Association. With the authority to found a center was included approval for a magazine, newsletter, etc., as a means of union between the directors and associates.

The 1928 General Chapter requested that the notion of "missionary" be included in the title of the Association.

In 1929 Dontenwill addressed the circular "The Association of Mary Immaculate" to the whole Congregation in which he asked all Provincials to name a provincial director of the Association and presented an outline of his duties. He also named John Pietsch first Secretary General of the Association.

"The Association of Mary Immaculate is like an extension of our Congregation into the ranks of the faithful. It wants to bring together with us all who befriend our undertakings, our missions especially. Its members intend to work, with the means at their disposal, to support us and to help us in our missionary apostolate. Under the protection of Mary Immaculate, the Mother of Mercy, they become apostolic auxiliaries to the

Missionary Oblates; they are, to some degree, part of our religious family, sharing its joys and sorrows, its battles and struggles, rejoicing in our successes, making our Congregation ever more known, winning new friends for it, propagating its publications, recruiting vocations for it and supporting its apostolate with their alms. In return, we grant them a share in our prayers and good works, in the sacrifices and merits of our missionaries; we pray in a special way for them and make our juniorists as well as the faithful of our old and new Christian territories pray for them through the Association, we group together across the world people who are devoted to us, look upon our religious family as their own, take to heart its interests and lead more and more vocations to it.<sup>10</sup>

Bishop Döntenwill showed no hesitation in stating the purpose of the Association:

"It is especially necessary to see to it that our houses of formation prosper in order to obtain for our religious family the workers required by our Provinces and by the missions entrusted to us.

To obtain this result, we are faced with the real necessity of perfecting our means of communication...

The 1926 General Chapter spent a lot of time on this question. It studied different methods apt to spread knowledge of our Congregation, it strongly recommended our various publications and again directed attention to an organization that we have had for a long time, and which has produced excellent results, and which we need to improve.

It is our Association of Mary Immaculate.<sup>11</sup>

While strongly promoting the Association, the circular did not demand uniformity or seek to promote one model for its organization and development

rather it recognized the necessity of adaptation according to the local situation:

"In each province the organization can be adapted to the situation and the spirit of the country. One should profit from the experiences that we and others have had, either within the Congregation or outside it, to give the Association the form that is most apt for the milieu where one works and for the public which one addresses.<sup>12</sup>"

This left great freedom to the provincial directors to respond to the needs of their provinces. Perhaps it would be best to say that there was not one Association throughout the Oblate world, but a federation of many Associations with the same goals, but using the means best fitting their own people and situation.

Following the circular there was a real expansion of the Association throughout the Congregation as can be seen from the reports of many provinces to the 1947 General Chapter. The Chapter requested the Superior General to publish a detailed circular concerning condition of enrollment, spiritual benefits accorded to the members, Masses to be said, etc.

#### 4. FATHER LEO DESCHÂTELETS

The newly elected Superior General Léo Deschâtelets fulfilled this mandate on January 25, 1948 with the circular, "The Missionary Association of Mary Immaculate". After sketching its history and correcting the error that had been often repeated since the time of Joseph Fabre that the Association was founded by de Mazenod in 1840, he set forth his desires for the Association:

"... we would like to see an immense army of lay people lined up about us on the great battle field of the missions where we are striving to carry aloft the banner of Christian Faith and Charity.

There are the relatives and other young folk, truly Christian, and taking special interest in our Juniorists, Novices and Scholastics as if they were their own children or brothers. Let the battle cry of this giant army of Christian Charity be the challenging phrase of the great Pope of the Missions: "All believers in behalf of all the unbelievers". And to this we add that other phrase, taken from our Holy Rule: "We must spare no effort to extend the Savior's empire" (Preface) ...

The training of the Associates to a truly Christian way of life, is what we consider to be the first and most important purpose of the Association... When we consider that our Associates are, in some manner, a part of our religious family, then we realize that it is our duty to work seriously at their sanctification and to develop in them a real missionary spirit...

It is altogether foreign to our mind to consider the material aid that we receive from the Association as its main purpose. The greatest help that our Associates can ever give is and always will be that of prayer. Their prayers will be all the more fruitful if animated by an earnest and deep piety, and accompanied by a filial devotion to the Blessed Virgin. We should urge our Associates to an interior life, but, always in conformity with the duties of their state in life... Our Immaculate Mother, Queen of the Missions, exemplar of all Oblates, will be the model that we will hold before the eyes of those who are cooperating with us in the work of saving souls...

Our ideal as Oblates of Mary Immaculate is so beautiful that we do well to allow the faithful to draw inspiration from it. It is a treasure that is meant to be shared.<sup>13</sup>

The most positive element of this circular was the insistence upon the spiri-

tual formation of the members. The precise title to be used for the Association in French, German, Flemish, Polish, Italian, Spanish, and English was specified. The inclusion of the missionary was mandatory and the Secretary General became the Director General. It was also inaccurately stated that the Association was a pious union as defined by canon 707 of the 1917 Code of Canon Law.

An impetus was given toward a uniformity in the Association that had not existed up to that time, and even toward structures that were unknown in many parts of the Congregation. The mission magazine of the province was to be considered as the official organ of the Association. After initial efforts in some provinces, the Association in most places continued to exist and function as it had before the circular. In fact the Missionary Association remained a federation of Associations, each functioning its own way, as it had been up to that time. The centre and heart of the activities of the Missionary Association is not at the General House in Rome, but in the provinces, where the local history and needs are respected.

A new feature was a tax of fifteen percent on the entire income of the Association that was to be sent twice a year to the Superior General for the foreign missions. This provision was changed into a voluntary contribution by the 1953 General Chapter, and even that was soon forgotten.

#### IV. IN THE CONSTITUTIONS AND RULES

##### 1. THE 1972 AND 1980 GENERAL CHAPTERS

The Director General presented the request from some provincial directors

that the Constitutions include an article mentioning the M.A.M.I. The 1972 General Chapter responded by adding:

“Rule 89 bis: The Missionary Association of Mary Immaculate is strongly recommended as a most important association, and a valid help from the laity in favor of our missionary thrust and outlook”<sup>14</sup>.

The 1980 General Chapter in separate articles (Rules 27 and 28) clearly distinguished the involvement of the laity “in the Oblate mission, ministry, and community” from the Missionary Association of Mary Immaculate. In this way the historical origins and particular nature of the Association were respected. There was no attempt to reform the Missionary Association into something else; at the same time the door was left open for other initiatives for the laity to share in the mission of the Congregation.

## 2. The Constitutions and Rules of 1982

The 1980 Chapter view is now part of the 1982 Constitutions and Rules in which Rule 28 [R 41b in CCR 2000] concerning the M.A.M.I. reads as follows:

“Communities are invited to cooperate with the provincial director of the Missionary Association of Mary Immaculate in organizing and animating lay groups which seek to share in Oblate spirituality and apostolate.”

An excellent statement on the nature and purpose of the M.A.M.I. today is that made in Rome, on February 12, 1978, to the M.A.M.I. provincial directors, by the then Superior General, Father Fernand Jetté. He quoted Archbishop Dontenwill (cf. above) and commented:

“Let us take note of the expressions: ‘an extension of our Congregation into the ranks of the faithful’; its members

become ‘the apostolic auxiliaries of the Missionary Oblate’; ‘they are, to some degree, part of our religious family as their own’.”

They are laity, fully remain laity; at the same time, however, they have the heart of an Oblate and are, to some degree, part of the Oblate family.<sup>15</sup>”

In addressing the role of the Missionary Association of Mary Immaculate, Superior General Fernand Jetté pointed out the mutual giving and receiving on the part of the Oblates and the members of the Missionary Association:

“What the M.A.M.I. brings to us.

The Association’s members bring to us, first of all, a definite interest in our works, our missionary activity, our vocation apostolate, the growth of our religious family. This they do through prayer, enlightened promotion, devotedness to our works, financial support.

All of these benefits are easy to understand; they are especially external in nature. There is however, another type of support they offer us: it is more important and much more interior, more spiritual in nature. I deeply experienced it at the time of the beatification of Bishop de Mazenod. It is their faith in the Congregation and the way they see the Congregation. Their faith in the Congregation is a support for many Oblates and in a certain way strengthens our own faith. Their outlook on the Congregation is often a more objective view, one that is more detached from the details and pettiness of our daily internal existence, and it purifies our own outlook and makes us more capable to marvel and properly admire the wonderful things that exist in our Congregation. We need these laity for our own good health!

What we ought to give the M.A.M.I. members:

For our part, as Oblates, we can and ought to give much to the M.A.M.I. members. As Circular no. 182 explicitly says: in becoming members, they have a right to our special prayers and "share in the merits of the prayers, suffrages and good works of all the Oblates". (p. 7). This is already an important contribution, but our duty is not fully accomplished thereby. When we accept these men and women as Missionary Associates, we undertake to help them grow in the interior life and in Oblate spirituality.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Missions O.M.I.*, 83 (1956), p. 234-235.

<sup>2</sup> LEFLON III, p. 120-121.

<sup>3</sup> Letters to the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide and to the Society of the Propagation of the Faith in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 5, nos. 79-187, p. 165-312.

<sup>4</sup> September 25, 1842 letter in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 1, no. 13, p. 26-27.

<sup>5</sup> May 24, 1848 letter in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 1, no. 98, p. 196.

<sup>6</sup> Circular letter no. 5 in *Circ. adm.*, I (1850-1885).

<sup>7</sup> Lenten Pastoral Letter, February 28, 1848, p. 4-5.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 9-11.

<sup>9</sup> KOWALSKY, Nikolaus, "Mgr de Mazonod et l'Oeuvre de la Propagation de la Foi", in *Etudes oblates*, 11 (1952), p. 238-260.

<sup>10</sup> Circular letter no. 141 in *Circ. adm.*, IV (1922-1947) p. 151-152.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 151.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 157.

<sup>13</sup> Circular letter no. 182 in *Circ. adm.*, V (1947-1952), p. 5-15.

<sup>14</sup> General Chapter of 1972, *Administrative Structures*, no. 42, p. 40-41.

<sup>15</sup> JETTÉ, Fernand, *The Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate: Addresses and Written Texts, 1975-1985*, Rome, 1985, p. 131-132.

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## MORTIFICATION

*Summary: I. Introduction. II. The Founder's spirit of mortification. III. The Bishop and the Superior General. IV. Mortification in the Congregation: 1. According to the Rules from 1818 to 1966; 2. The 1966 revision; 3. The 1982 Constitutions and Rules; 4. Mortification among the novices and scholastics. V. Conclusion.*

### I. INTRODUCTION

"Most wish to go to heaven by a road other than that of abnegation, renunciation, forgetfulness of self".<sup>1</sup>

Saint Eugene de Mazenod, founder of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, had the soul of an apostle. For himself and his colleagues, his original insight was to model themselves on Jesus and the Apostles who established the Kingdom of God through the Cross and all the sacrifice that entailed. That is why, in addition to what he wrote in the *Preface*, the Founder energetically described the way he wanted his sons to walk. "Gospel workers must also hold Christian mortification in high esteem if they want their work to produce abundant fruit. As a result, all members of the Society will devote themselves mainly to interior mortification, to denying their self-will in everything and in imitation of the Apostles, striving to embrace with joy the sufferings, scorn and humiliations of Jesus Christ".<sup>2</sup>

The Founder, like all individuals consecrated to Christ, understood that the Cross is the law of all redemption. Christ himself did not consider that he was immune to this law. "The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer are sprinkled on those who have incurred defilement and they restore the holiness of their outward lives; how much more effectively the blood of Christ, who offered himself as the perfect sacrifice to God through the eternal

Spirit, can purify our inner self from dead actions so that we do our service to the living God".<sup>3</sup>

Redemption won by Christ is far superior to salvation brought by the Old Covenant, not only in virtue of there being a different victim, but especially because of the loving will expressed by Christ at the inception of his offering. "And this will was for us to be made holy by the offering of his body made once and for all by Jesus Christ".<sup>4</sup>

For himself, Saint Paul desired no other glory than that of the Cross. "As for me, the only thing I can boast about is the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world is crucified to me and I to the world".<sup>5</sup>

The reason why those who follow him also embrace the Cross is that they are his members; their cross is a continuation of his. The disciples of Christ offer him personally their own humanity so that he can continue to save the world by lavishing on it the infinite merits of his passion. Jesus suffered to establish the Reign of God, and all those who share in his work must likewise share in his sufferings. Evidently, the Christian does not presume to make any further addition to the specific redemptive value of the Cross where nothing is lacking, but he does associate himself with the "trials" of Jesus, that is, with his apostolic sufferings. Really united to Christ in virtue of the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist, the Christian belongs bodily to Christ.<sup>6</sup>

That is why the life of his body, his sufferings and even his death become mystically that of Christ who lives in him and achieves glory from it.<sup>7</sup>

## II. THE FOUNDER'S SPIRIT OF MORTIFICATION

In the mind of the Founder, mortification is a normal commitment flowing from ascetic love, the kind of love through which the soul becomes aware of being bathed in the light issuing from Christ crucified: "Jesus Christ's interior life was one of continual martyrdom and a perpetual Cross. Consequently, I will concentrate on conforming my existence to his through the practice of internal and external mortification".<sup>8</sup>

Our regard for the Cross of Christ will manifest itself by a resolve to carry it continually in our bodies, so to speak. The cross we will wear on our breasts will stand as a certificate of authenticity for our mission to various peoples. "These will also be inclined to show respect; and the missionaries themselves will be taught an ongoing lesson of humility, patience, charity and the other virtues they must practice in the course of their most holy and lofty ministry".<sup>9</sup>

Beginning with his entry into the seminary of Saint-Sulpice in 1808, I would now like to briefly retrace our Founder's spiritual journey with regard to the theme we are considering.

All of the Founder's biographers and the other studies done on his life and his autobiographical writings show that Eugene de Mazenod allotted a special place to mortification of every aspect of his being. Before dealing with the testimony of the various texts, I would like to outline the motives that inspired the young seminarian, then the priest and even the venerable bishop to

attach special importance to voluntarily accepting to suffer as a means of achieving a greater conformity with Christ the Savior.

His motives for doing penance can be attributed to different realities of the spiritual journey common to every Christian who desires to follow the Lord more closely.

The first consistently recurring motive found in his efforts to develop his interior life is that of making reparation for his sins. He often accuses himself of having spent too much time in the state of sin; that is why he must make reparation through penance. Later on, we will see how he arrived at the simple conclusion: if I am a disciple of Christ, like him, I must accept suffering. His second motive is that of making reparation for the offences Christians have committed against the holiness of God. From his very first years in the seminary, he started a group among the seminarians to make reparation for the offences committed by Christians at carnival time.<sup>10</sup> Another motive which often surfaces – especially during his years as a young priest – is that of assigning himself penances in order to recover and maintain on an ongoing basis the fervor of his union and devotion to the Lord.

Eugene de Mazenod plunged headlong into the apostolate. One day, however, he became aware that the penances he had taken on in addition to his exhausting apostolic activity had undermined his health, while his apostolic work in itself offered a broad field open for him to practice abnegation.

With regard to the apostolate, Father Joseph Morabito, in his book, *Je serai prêtre*, rich in spiritual theology, reveals another of the Founder's profound motives for seeking self-purification. This motive is very closely associated with

his own particular charism: "With his priesthood and his sins as sources, there sprang forth a sentiment of humility and a reaction which was personal to him: to put his priesthood at the service of the most humble children in the Master's family".<sup>11</sup>

Another observation remains to be made with regard to the Founder's spirit of mortification, an observation which Father Morabito very astutely pointed out. Why did the Founder leave us such detailed personal notes in which he inveighs, sometimes mercilessly, against his own sins and unworthiness? The author responds: "When one has done something wrong, there are two ways of making reparation: the first is to consign one's sin to the oblivion of forgetfulness if it is a public sin, and to cloak it in silence if it is a secret sin; the second is to acknowledge one's sin, humble oneself, revealing oneself for who one truly is, for one's humiliation and for the glory of God. The first course of action is characteristic of ordinary folk; the second is that of the saints".<sup>12</sup>

In the light of these general observations which give us a sense of how the Founder understood penance, let us now examine his writings and his life to see the ardour with which he committed himself to following his convictions.

He defined his own condition as being that of sharing in the "ecclesiastical" state. In his mind, this put him in a very lofty position. On the one hand, it led him to disassociate himself from those members of the clergy who were not living up to the dignity their state demanded, and on the other hand, he carefully guarded against ill-considered haste in his own preparation. The following texts will reveal to us the burning enthusiasm which Eugene, the seminarian, would apply to his chosen path.

"God would not be happy with my being willing to neglect taking every precaution that might assure the success of my ministry. God's grace has already got enough to contend with in my lack of virtue and multitudinous imperfections without my creating further difficulties of an exterior nature that I could easily erase. I want to disappear, I want people to forget Eugene so that there can be no risk of mistaking him for the priest. I want to take on the challenge only when I am armed at all points and morally sure of not compromising the honour of the faith entrusted to me".<sup>13</sup>

While at the seminary of Saint-Sulpice, the young Eugene sought to dispose his soul in the best possible way to please God. He would certainly repent of his sins, but that would be done with the greatest trust in God. The one who aspires to be a minister closer to God must strive to live a Christian life superior to that of the ordinary faithful.

"Absolute devotedness to the orders of the superiors, perfect submission to their least command, however puerile it seems to someone who has lived to be 26 in the fullest independence, even as regards piety".<sup>14</sup>

A frank and truthful examination of his past life pressed him strongly to take on a life of penance to atone for his past sins and to bring himself up to the standards demanded by his new state in life. With his own hand, he drew up a list of the penances he was to do: to rise from bed at the waking call, to remain on his knees during meditation; never to take a second helping at meals; to fast on Fridays by omitting breakfast and eating little at the noon meal and supper. But he did not limit himself to corporal penances; there were spiritual penances as well: "[...] I will try above all to mortify my spirit, to stifle the disorderly desires of my heart, bring this will of mine into

submission; I will do all I can to overcome my temperament [...]".<sup>15</sup>

In the course of this retreat before his ordination to the priesthood, he deplored the falling off of his fervor. The solution he proposed was to vigorously renew his bodily mortifications because he was becoming aware that they were burdensome. Consequently, he concentrated his efforts on the strict observance of the rule: to rise earlier in the morning in order to get more things done; to reject anything that would distract him from his studies; to resume recitation of the rosary three times a week; to recite the Divine Office more slowly.<sup>16</sup>

From December 1 to December 21 of 1811, he made his retreat in immediate preparation for the priesthood. His meditation on the Prodigal Son led him to ask himself what he would have to do to satisfy the justice of God. Even if the Prodigal Son's father does not demand any atonement upon his return, the Scriptures often speak of the necessity of penance to atone for sin. Adam and David did penance. All the saints were exemplary when it came to penance. Was he any less a sinner? Or did he enjoy a deeper understanding of the Savior's teachings? He then listed the virtues he wanted to practice through penance. One of the main virtues listed was humility, not only humility before one's superiors, but humility before inferiors as well. Another area of mortification was the struggle against fastidiousness and what he termed sensuality, but which was probably a concern for comfort. To oppose these tendencies, his main recourse was mainly to bodily penance.<sup>17</sup>

As soon as he was ordained he drew up for himself a way to follow, since he had now attained the goal he so desired. At the end of December 1811, he es-

tablished his program which he called "general resolution": "General resolution to be wholly for God and for everyone, to flee the world and all it may offer as sops, etc., to seek only the Cross of Jesus Christ and the penance due to my sins, to seize every opportunity that arises to mortify myself, trample nature under foot and deny it without letting up. As St. Peter says, I will not set my heart on any earthly thing: *Obsecro vos tamquam advenas et peregrines abstinere vos a carnalibus desideriis* [I urge you ... while you are visitors and pilgrims to keep yourselves free from the selfish passions that attack the soul.] (1 Peter 2:11)".<sup>18</sup>

In 1812 when he had been a priest for some time, he drew up a personal rule for himself in an attempt to more easily master his fervor. A section dealing with penance is not lacking: "To try to obtain that the Lord will hear my prayers, I will join to the most exact observance of his Law the practice of mortification in such a manner that it flows through all my actions, and into every circumstance of my life, reminding me that the whole life of Jesus my model was a perpetual cross and a continual martyrdom".<sup>19</sup>

After a few years in the priesthood, Eugene examined himself on the lasting quality of his fervor. In the course of a retreat, he set down in writing suitable means for perseverance in this area: "If I want to progress as I ought this year, it is indispensable that I be stern with myself and let nothing sway me from the exact observance of my personal rule".<sup>20</sup>

He imposes on himself a bodily penance proportionate to the exercise of piety that was omitted or badly executed; and if that is not enough, he imposes it upon himself by vow. From this set of exterior failings, he then goes on

to a greater internal mastery of pride, vanity, self-love, “an acute tendency of speaking about the good I do”<sup>21</sup> and sensitivity of the heart. So then, his penance was not exclusively exterior, but interior as well. His manner of struggling interiorly against his defects is truly admirable. For example, in opposing envy, he commits himself to speak well of all those who may have stolen the spotlight from him and his accomplishments.

In 1814 during a retreat, he returns to the theme of mortification, especially interior mortification: “Work on the virtue of gentleness, on mortification in the use of my tongue when I am crossed, on humility, self-love [...]”<sup>22</sup>

From this retreat we have various meditations on God, the four ends of man and the sacerdotal state. The idea which surfaces most often is that of his moral situation in the face of these great realities. The conclusion is always the same: God loved me and I was ungrateful. If I want to be like Jesus Christ in glory, I will have to be like him in his humiliations and sufferings, like Jesus on the Cross.<sup>23</sup>

In the fourteenth meditation, he is struck by a truth in regard to God’s plan of salvation: “[...] Jesus Christ who is Eternal Wisdom having chosen humiliations and self-emptying to make reparation for his Father’s glory, it follows necessarily that this is the most suitable means to glorify God.”<sup>24</sup>

It was his hope that this thought would prove continually useful in his life.

In the course of that same retreat, in the meditation on the suffering of Jesus Christ during the circumcision, the young priest confronts mortification in a systematic way. His director, to whom he owes obedience, will not permit him to punish his body as he would wish.

His thirst for mortification causes him to think up other ways of keeping his body in check. It is at this point that his mortification becomes rather subtle. He goes from a mortification which is more exterior to one that is more interior. He wants to be more diligent in service, in the sacrifice of his comforts, in mortification of the eyes, speech and taste.

“But that is not all. Mortification of the mind and heart must not be forgotten. [...] To continually stamp out those passions that would be reborn from their embers, to calm the first movements of a heart susceptible to a number of disordered affections, to combat especially that self-love, eternal enemy of our every action that it corrupts [...]”<sup>25</sup>

His retreat at Bonneveine in 1816 undoubtedly shows some progress. He has grown aware that the limited time he has allotted for sleep and meals has ruined his health. He believed that he was like the other saints: “The saints’ example seduced me, but it seems God in his goodness does not ask the same of me, as he seems to be warning me by a lessening of my energy and the upsetting of my health.”<sup>26</sup>

These reflections reveal to us that it is not so much Eugene who is ardently seeking the means to suffer with his Lord; quite the opposite is true. It is the Spirit himself who is guiding him by the hand to discover in the very gift of self a means of sanctification. As Father Morabito pointed out, from this time on for Eugene there was no more duality in his quest for personal sanctification and the apostolate. The apostolate itself became the exclusive way for the gift of self. It is a total self-sacrifice: “I must above all be really convinced that I am doing God’s will when I give myself to the service of my neighbour, immerse myself in the external business of our house, etc., and then do my best without

worrying if, in doing work of this kind, I am unable to do other things which I would perhaps find more to my taste and seem more directly adapted to my own sanctification".<sup>27</sup>

From now on he is aware that he cannot be his own judge with regard to ascetic endeavors. The Holy Spirit leads him to understand that he must rely on his spiritual director. Indeed, in his 1817 retreat, he once again resolves to allow himself to be guided by the advice of his director without indulging in excess in one direction or the other. The following year, he brings this point up again and focuses on it more sharply with a vague sorrow for having to abandon the penitential practices which had made him grow in his love of the Lord, of the priesthood and the apostolate: "I felt the need of leading a still more mortified life and I ardently desired to do it. One thing alone distressed me and that is the fear that it will meet with opposition and my director will take advantage of the vow of obedience I have made to him to put obstacles to what seems to me evidently God's will. [...] I will plead with my director to let me follow the attraction that pulls me strongly to lead a penitential life. I believe it would be to go against the spirit of God to try to resist this any longer, on the pretext that my health needs attention".<sup>28</sup>

### III. THE BISHOP AND THE SUPERIOR GENERAL

While he was Bishop and Superior General, the Spirit of God who was guiding him led him to understand that the time devoted to the thousand and one things of his ministry constituted a sacrifice in itself.

"Young people of good will, you will not succeed in making me feel

guilty, distressed as I am that I cannot do more. When one gets up at 5 o'clock in the morning and goes to bed about midnight, when one does not allow oneself a half hour walk, when one is from dawn to dusk at the service of everybody and when one spends at one's desk, pen in hand, all the time of which demands or tactless interruptions do not rob one, one cannot reproach oneself for not doing one's duty".<sup>29</sup>

In his 1831 annual retreat notes, the Founder wrote a brief commentary on the Rules, rules he wrote himself. But when we read it, we would not think that he was the author. He quotes the Rules as an endeavor of God and the Church. He gives the impression of being somewhat like a novice reading them for the first time as he expresses his astonishment when faced with the beauty and vigor of its directives.

In commenting on article 6, he wrote: "These things are all precious. They are eminently suited to keep us in the spirit of our vocation, to have us acquire new virtues and the most abundant merits; that is why the Rule insists that the missionary, especially one who has rendered the most striking services to the Church, procured the most glory for God and saved the greatest number of souls in the exercise of the holy missions, hasten joyfully into the bosom of our communities there to make himself forgetful of man and renew himself by the practice of obedience and humility and all the hidden virtues, in the spirit of his vocation and the fervour of religious perfection, without neglecting his other duties".<sup>30</sup>

Obviously, the Founder did not have himself in mind when he wrote these words; he was thinking of the ideal Oblate. However, we know that in practice in his life he left us the example of an Oblate according to the Rule.

#### IV. MORTIFICATION IN THE CONGREGATION

##### 1. ACCORDING TO THE RULES FROM 1818 TO 1966

In the first edition of the Rules, chapter VIII was dedicated to mortification and bodily penance. It drew its inspiration from a paragraph in the Rule of Saint Alphonsus; the paragraph was entitled: "Concerning mortification and bodily penance". But the Founder made some significant changes in regard to fasting, the "discipline" and sleep. He omits two articles and adds two others.

In the first French manuscript of 1818<sup>31</sup>, the Founder began the paragraph on mortification with an admonition for the Gospel workers that if they wished their work to bear fruit, they would have to take mortification into account, especially interior mortification of the will and the passions. He continued with a list of days when Oblates were called upon to fast as an exercise of external mortification. For this fast, he even specifies the amount of food that could be consumed. The Founder did not prescribe any flagellation, but by the fact that he mentions what Saint Philip Neri and Saint Alphonsus prescribed for their members, he seems to be inviting his fellow Oblates to follow suit. Among the different mortifications listed is one where he recommends sleeping on a pallet rather than on a comfortable bed since the comfortable bed might lead to prolonged rest and in consequence run counter to mortification.<sup>32</sup>

In the first text of the Rule the *Nota bene*<sup>33</sup> found in the chapter on the ends of the Institute would become the famous *Preface* of all subsequent editions. In it, the Founder had already traced out the way of penance for the

new missionaries who were called to be new apostles and to proclaim the Gospel, even by means of mortification: "To live in a habitual state of self-denial [...] working ceaselessly to become humble, gentle, obedient, lovers of poverty, penitent, mortified, detached from the world and from family, filled with zeal, ready to sacrifice our goods, our talent, our rest, our persons and our lives for the love of Jesus Christ".<sup>34</sup>

The period from 1819 to 1825 was one of refining. This work is found in a document known under the title of the *Honorat Manuscripts I and II*.<sup>35</sup>

In Manuscript I under the paragraph heading "Concerning mortification and bodily penance", fasting on Friday, which is either preceded or followed by a fast day, is suppressed, and there is the addition of a prohibition of using the discipline without the superior's permission.<sup>36</sup> In manuscript II, the fasts during the octave of Christmas and the vigil of the feast of Saint Paul are suppressed and there is added the fast for the vigil of the patron saint of the local church.

Manuscript III offers nothing new and manuscript IV, the last in the process of refinement, is identical to manuscript V, known as the Jeancard manuscript. The Jeancard manuscript is the one the Founder presented in Rome; it can no longer be found. Manuscript VI is a copy based on the Jeancard manuscript.

In the 1843 revision, no changes were made. In the 1850 revision, there was added, "Exercises at the end of the year": exposition of the Blessed Sacrament to beg God's pardon for all the acts of unbelief and for the sins committed during the year. There is added as well a fast day on the vigil of the feast of the Sacred Heart while the fast on the vigil of the feast of Saint Al-

phonusus is suppressed. In his resolutions made during his 1818 retreat at Saint-Sulpice, Eugene de Mazenod had made the decision to be content with the first piece of bread given him at breakfast without asking for a second piece.<sup>37</sup> He would continue this habit even after he left the seminary and wanted to insert it into the Rule. But he had to take into account the often overwhelming work the missionaries were called to do and also the needs of the students for whom this practice was often relaxed as years went by.<sup>38</sup>

As for the discipline, at the beginning in 1818, it was optional. But the custom was to use it every Friday. The Founder gave us an example of this by whipping himself until he drew blood.<sup>39</sup> Even in 1826 it was not obligatory. However, the Founder often promoted it in his writings and in his letters.<sup>40</sup> Also in 1826, the use of a mattress was left as an open question, but the Founder always remained constant in his use of a pallet.<sup>41</sup> In 1908, when treating of the vow of chastity, the following addition was made: "To achieve [the purity of the angels] let us apply ourselves assiduously to the practices of oraison and mortification [...]". In the 1926 revision, the article on breakfast was suppressed as it was no longer possible to observe it. The article on the bed was toned down as well.<sup>42</sup>

## 2. THE 1966 REVISION

When they speak of the *apostolic man*, the Constitutions and Rules of 1966 remind the Oblates of the need for mortification to overcome self-complacency or shyness, sloth or rashness through imitation of "the one who emptied himself taking the form of a slave".<sup>43</sup> "In a society where the spirit of atheism and unbelief are powerful",

the Oblate is urged, like Saint Paul "to pay off the debt which the afflictions of Christ still leave to be paid, for the sake of his Body, the Church".<sup>44</sup> Relying on the help of grace he will generously accept the purifications which God sends him or inspires him to practice, in order to be better able to love men with the heart of Christ.<sup>45</sup> Finally, the Constitutions encourage the scholastics, under the patronage of Mary Immaculate, to "develop a missionary spirituality based on the self-denial which is necessary if they are to follow Christ".<sup>46</sup>

To confront the dangers inherent in their ministry the missionaries will practice mortification, moderation and custody of the senses.<sup>47</sup> In the paragraph dealing with our prayer life, the Rule reminds us that we must accept "all the trials of the ministry, the inconveniences of community life, and personal afflictions", and strive to correspond "generously with the invitations of the Lord to other forms of personal penance".<sup>48</sup>

## 3. THE 1982 CONSTITUTIONS AND RULES

Just as the 1966 Constitutions contain no detailed section dedicated to penance, so too the 1982 Constitutions are lacking such a section. Nevertheless, the need for mortification is vigorously affirmed. In the first part which deals with the Oblate charism, Constitution 4 plants the Cross of Jesus in the very heart of the Oblate mission. We preach Jesus Christ and him crucified: the present sufferings we endure in our bodies are a sign that the life of Christ is likewise present.

Constitution 18 takes up again the theme of mortification as one of the means of ensuring fidelity to our vow of chastity. Constitution 34 refers to the

principle of mortification which is rooted in ministry and the common life, and in the inspiration that comes from the Lord as well.<sup>49</sup>

#### 4. MORTIFICATION AMONG THE NOVICES AND SCHOLASTICS

Mortification has been a constant tradition in all of the houses of formation in the Congregation. In a 1951<sup>50</sup> report on the novitiates, Father Daniel Albers, the then Director of Studies, notes that all novices do public penance, at least the penance which consists in extending their arms in the form of a Cross during the reading of Sacred Scripture. But he observes that already at that time, “the young are loath to engage in such practices, less through a lack of the spirit of mortification [...] than because of the fact that they look upon them as ‘artificial posturing’. We strive to make them understand that these penitential gestures maintain the penitential spirit and for some individuals even prove to be an authentic and profitable exercise of mortification and humility. They highlight the failing for which they have been taken on and in addition manifest a spirit of docility with regard to the Master of Novices who considers these practices important, but does not impose anything”.<sup>51</sup>

In the novitiates, penances are performed for reasons related to the apostolate. These are generally found in all schools of spirituality of the time. They definitely reveal a constant belief in these practices throughout the Church. Moreover, the Founder reminds us in the *Preface*: “If priests could be formed, afire with zeal for man’s salvation, priests not given to their own interests, solidly grounded in virtue – in a word, Apostolic men deeply conscious of the need to reform themselves, who

would labour with all the resources at their command to convert others – then there would be ample reason to believe that in a short while people who had gone astray might be brought back to their long-unrecognized responsibilities”.

In his article on the spiritual life of the scholastic, Father Maurice Gilbert dedicated one whole section of it to asceticism. Taking as his starting point Saint Vincent Ferrier’s maxim that one must “adapt one’s body to the service of Christ”, he concluded that if the service of Christ takes on many forms, one’s ascetical practices must adapt according to the nature of the service required. The ascetical life of the scholastic should adapt itself to his life of study in preparation for the apostolate.<sup>52</sup>

The scholastic’s life should also take into account his relationship with the world. In our eyes, article 726 of the 1926 Rule can appear exaggerated, but is consecrated life in itself not a sharing in the “portion” of the Lord?

“They will make it their duty to flee from the world, to shun conversations with laymen, and to hold in abhorrence the pomps and amusements and profane maxims of worldlings. They will repress curiosity to hear news and rumours. They will keep away from every kind of meeting, show and public amusement, and will take care not to loiter in the streets, looking at the various objects which usually attract the curiosity of frivolous people attached to the world.”

Father Gilbert wrote: “For the scholastic who wishes to sacrifice himself, opportunities are everywhere to hand: an exam to prepare for, a boring course to accept joyfully, an outing to deliberately pass up, to replace *dolce far niente* [sweet repose and rest] with a research project. [...] Sometimes the

desire to see the life of perfection as fully in harmony with nature or one's culture is so strong that one risks watering down and rendering insipid the demands of Christian and religious asceticism. Like any other religious, the scholastic must not shrink from sacrifice, nor sidestep the cross. But he must above all concentrate on the asceticism demanded by his life as a student religious. He should also concentrate on mortification of those numerous activities and tendencies, perhaps good in themselves, but which he will have to renounce to conform perfectly to the service of Christ".<sup>53</sup>

## V. CONCLUSION

To conclude, I would like to quote a passage from the most recent biography of the Founder, written just before his beatification. This is taken from the chapter entitled: "The Human Being, Man of the Spirit, the Apostle": "The intensity and depth of Bishop de Mazenod's spiritual life could not go unnoticed by his diocese. His austerity especially impressed them. His intransigence in the matter of abstinence was common knowledge, even at official receptions, including those of His Imperial Majesty. Whenever meat was served at these receptions on days of abstinence, the Bishop refused every course, and even refused to unfold his napkin. It was commonly known that he increased his fasts and observed them so strictly that his evening collation on days of fast became restricted to a glass of water and a few mouthfuls of bread. Even in his old age, the prelate refused to reduce either the number or the rigor of his fasts and to those who cited his old age as a justification for lessening them, he replied: "My eighty years

might dispense me from fasting, but they do not dispense me from doing penance for my sins". As for his corporal chastisements, he never ceased inflicting them on himself from the days of his seminary training".<sup>54</sup>

In the area of mortification, many things have changed, not only in Christian practice, but also in theological and ascetical thought. Nevertheless, the demands of the Gospel, apostolic preaching and the example of the saints have made such a profound impact on us that it would be difficult for the followers of Christ in any age to ignore them.

NICOLA FERRARA

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Letter from Eugene de Mazenod to Henry Tempier, December 13, 1815, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 7, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Constitutions and Rules of 1818, Second Part, Chapter Two, par. 2, in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 64.

<sup>3</sup> Hebrews 9:13-14.

<sup>4</sup> Hebrews 10:10.

<sup>5</sup> Galatians 6:14.

<sup>6</sup> See I Corinthians 6:15.

<sup>7</sup> See Philipians 1:20.

<sup>8</sup> *Notes intimes*, quoted by GRATTON, Henri, in "La dévotion salvatorienne du Fondateur aux premières années de son sacerdoce", *Études oblates* I (1942), p. 163-164; see also *Règlement*, December 1812, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 15, no. 109, p. 23-24.

<sup>9</sup> Constitutions and Rules of 1928, article 309.

<sup>10</sup> Letter to his mother, Paris, February 13, 1809, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 14, no. 45, p. 99.

<sup>11</sup> MORABITO, Joseph, "Je serai prêtre", in *Études oblates*, 13 (1954), p. 66.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 67.

<sup>13</sup> Letter to his mother, April 14, 1810, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 14, no. 68, pp. 157-158.

<sup>14</sup> Resolutions taken upon entering the seminary, October 1808, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 14, no. 28, p. 59.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 61.

<sup>16</sup> May 1811 retreat in Paris, *ibidem*, no. 85, pp. 188-189.

<sup>17</sup> Retreat notes in preparation to receive the priesthood, Amiens, December 1-21, 1811, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 14, no. 95, pp. 224-225.

<sup>18</sup> In *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 14, no. 101, p. 231-232.

<sup>19</sup> Retreat notes of December 1812, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 15, no. 109, p. 14.

<sup>20</sup> Retreat notes of December 1813, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 15, no. 121, p. 57.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 58.

<sup>22</sup> Retreat notes of December 1814 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 15, no. 130, p. 29.

<sup>23</sup> See *ibidem*, 5th day, 13th meditation, pp. 96-97.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, 14th meditation, p. 98.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*, 6th day, 16th meditation, p. 101.

<sup>26</sup> Retreat of July-August 1816 at Bonneveine, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 15, no. 139, p. 136.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 131.

<sup>28</sup> May 1818 retreat in Aix in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 15, no. 145, pp. 145-146.

<sup>29</sup> Letter to Father Ambroise Vincens, August 1, 1853, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 11, no. 1167, p. 157.

<sup>30</sup> Constitutions and Rules of 1928, Part Two, Chapter Three, par. 1, art. 6 [293]. Notes from the October 1831 annual retreat, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 15, no. 163, pp. 226-227.

<sup>31</sup> Constitutions and Rules of 1818, Part Two, Chapter Two, par. 2, in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 64.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 65.

<sup>33</sup> Constitutions and Rules 1818, Part One, Chapter One, par. 3, art. 3, in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 15-19.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 65.

<sup>35</sup> In *Études oblates* 2 (1943), p. (1-72).

<sup>36</sup> "Constitutions et Règles de la Société des Missionnaires dits de Provence", "Honorat" manuscript in *Études oblates*, 2 (1945), p. (43).

<sup>37</sup> COSENTINO, Georges, *Histoire de nos Règles, III, première révision de nos Règles (1843-1823)*, Ottawa, Coll. Archives d'histoire oblate, Éditions des Études oblates, 1955, p. 74.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 75.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 80.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 82.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 88.

<sup>42</sup> COSENTINO, Georges, *Histoire de nos Règles, VI*, p. 143.

<sup>43</sup> Constitutions and Rules of 1966, Part Two, Chapter One, C. 14.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibidem*, C. 15.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*, C. 23

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*, C. 92.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*, R. 46.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibidem*, R. 114.

<sup>49</sup> See 1966 Constitutions and Rules, R. 114.

<sup>50</sup> "Compte rendu des rapports sur les noviciats de la Congrégation", in *Études oblates*, 10 (1951), pp. 153-248.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 206.

<sup>52</sup> "La vie spirituelle du scolastique et la Règle", in *Études oblates* 12 (1953), pp. 39-55.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 49.

<sup>54</sup> LEFLON III, p. 319.

## OBEDIENCE

*Summary:* *I. The Thought of the Founder:* 1. The nature of obedience; 2. The distinguishing marks of obedience: a. Prompt obedience; b. Humble obedience; c. Comprehensive obedience. 3. Motivation for obedience: a. In imitation of Christ; b. The apostolate; c. The unity of the Congregation; d. The peace and well-being of the subjects; e. The merit of our actions; 4. The notion of obedience in the Founder's writings: a. Ignatius of Loyola's blind obedience; b. The Founder's character and nobility; *II. Obedience in the Congregation from 1861 to 1965:* 1. General Chapters; 2. Circular letters; *III. From Vatican II to the present:* 1. The 1966 Chapter and Father Deschâtelets' circular letter; 2. The 1980 Chapter; 3. The main ideas on obedience: a. General means; b. Specific means. *Conclusion.*

The object of this article is to study the vow of obedience as it was understood by the Founder, developed by the General Chapters and Superiors General and defined in the 1982 Constitutions and Rules. It is not the author's intention to present a theology or spirituality of this vow, nor to study the virtue of obedience.

### I. THE THOUGHT OF THE FOUNDER

In the light of the Founder's writings from 1809 to 1857, we can see that his thinking concerning the vow of obedience drew its inspiration from the teaching commonly held at his time. It is based on the teaching of the saints such as Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure, Teresa of Avila or the Venerable Caraffa, and especially on Ignatius of Loyola's teaching concerning blind obedience. This thinking remained constant and almost rigid right to the end of his life.

#### 1. THE NATURE OF OBEDIENCE

In the 1818 Constitutions and Rules, the Founder gives no definition of obedience. But he does cite reasons why this

vow must be considered "the main vow, the most basic of all the vows".<sup>1</sup> He makes his own the thinking of Saint Thomas Aquinas, for whom the vow of obedience is the one through which "we offer more to God than through the other vows": "it includes all the others" and "the closer a thing causes us to come to the end for which it was established, the more perfect it is".<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, when dealing with the scope of obedience, the Founder briefly indicates the essential elements of this vow: a. it requires submission of "the will and even of the intellect"; b. the superior is the one "who has the power to command in the name of the Lord", and c. "one is much more assured of doing; the will of God by obeying than by doing anything else we may choose ourselves".<sup>3</sup>

Obedience was always of capital importance in the religious and priestly life of the Founder. In his eyes, obedience was the "foundation of the entire religious life"<sup>4</sup>; the Oblates must be "sons of obedience".<sup>5</sup> The high esteem in which he held this virtue was already evident when he entered Saint-Sulpice Seminary. An example is found in the resolutions from his October 1808 retreat: "Absolute devotedness to the orders of the superiors, perfect submis-

sion to their least command, however puerile it seems to someone who has lived to be 26 in the fullest independence. [...] Scrupulous obedience to the rule, even though I may seem over-meticulous in the eyes of my confreres".<sup>6</sup> He adds: "*Nothing against God* is the wholly indispensable watchword of every Christian".<sup>7</sup>

For him, obedience was a sure way of always doing God's will and of ensuring one's salvation. "Oh holy obedience! Sure road which leads to heaven, may I never deviate from the way you mark out for me, may I ever be docile to the least of your counsels! Yes, my dear brother, outside this path there is no salvation for us."<sup>8</sup>

Once he became the founder of a congregation, it was a natural thing for him to exact total obedience from his Oblates. When he heard that Father Jacques Santoni had been talking about a disagreement they had had, he wrote to Father Pierre Aubert that religious life is to be found where "we know of nothing but obedience".<sup>9</sup>

## 2. THE DISTINGUISHING MARKS OF OBEDIENCE

It is interesting to note that the same characteristics mentioned in the first edition of the 1818 Constitutions reappear in the second circular letter of February 2, 1857.<sup>10</sup> In these two documents, he requires that obedience should be prompt, humble and all-encompassing. These same distinguishing qualities would remain part of all the editions of the Rule until Vatican II.

### a. *Prompt obedience*

The Founder seems to demand a certain promptness in carrying out the decisions of superiors. In 1842, he

wrote to Father Bermond that he needed men of "absolute obedience [...] who act promptly and willingly in opposition to their own ideas."<sup>11</sup> It was his expectation that once a superior had taken a decision, the subjects would abandon their opinions and objections and engage themselves completely and immediately in carrying out what was ordered. They should set aside their arguing in such a way that, even if the decision seemed unreasonable, it would still be carried out. He wrote to Father Vincent Mille: "For God's sake, never argue when it is a question of obedience. The best thing would always be to do simply what is prescribed."<sup>12</sup> All debate and arguments should cease "when there is nothing more to discuss and when I have pronounced myself in the most categorical manner".<sup>13</sup>

In 1836, in a letter to Father Casimir Aubert, the Founder uses an allegory to illustrate the importance of prompt obedience: "All I ask in these painful and perplexing circumstances is that the pilot be in charge during the storm, that the crew obey in silence [...]".<sup>14</sup> He demands this promptness because of the urgency called for in pursuing the work that God has entrusted to him.

### b. *Humble obedience*

For the Founder, humility in obedience manifested itself especially by a complete lack of concern with regard to one's personal tastes and opinions so as to accept the superior's decision in complete submission. The detachment of a religious when faced with the decisions of superiors demands a profound humility. In 1831, he wrote to Father Hippolyte Courtès: "The root of the matter is the acceptance of obedience and absolute detachment as to whether one does this or that, whether this one

or that one is the superior. Without that, you haven't got anything."<sup>15</sup>

The Founder demanded a humility which led the religious to avoid all grumbling, criticizing, and all recriminations once a superior had made a decision. It was the kind of humility which would demand a total renunciation of all internal preferences and tastes that might arise. In 1831, he wrote to Father Mille: "So if you renounce yourself entirely, together with your tastes and even the reasonings your mind may entertain, you will give a good account of yourself in the delicate task imposed on you"<sup>16</sup>

As a result of a decision made by the Founder – a decision he could not carry out – Father Santoni, Provincial Superior of the mission in Canada, had submitted his resignation. It goes without saying that the Founder refused to accept it. He answered Father Santoni in the following words: "Read our holy Rules on obedience [...] it is not a question of agreement [...] this agreement of which you speak is not something for which one must look in relations with a superior. [...] you would nonetheless still be lacking one essential thing, the grace of office [...] To end the matter, in religion it is not a matter of agreement: obedience alone is known [...]. And so in virtue of holy obedience I command you to continue to serve the Congregation in your present office of Provincial."<sup>17</sup>

The submission of one's will and even of one's intelligence as demanded by the Founder presupposed in his Oblates a profound humility because it involved surrendering that which is most personal and precious in the human heart.

### *c. Comprehensive obedience*

According to the Founder's thinking, a superior could demand of a sub-

ject, either according to the vow or the virtue of the vow, any action which was not manifestly sinful. He wrote the following in a letter: "Only offending God is adverse to the Congregation. Everything else falls under obedience. [...] You have committed yourself to everything that obedience can prescribe, and everything that is not sin comes under its domain. [...] For the members the chapter is closed when they have received their obedience. [...]"<sup>18</sup>

Obviously the Founder demanded this kind of obedience only when his decision was final, that is, "when they [the subjects] have received their obedience". Obedience, then, was not limited to the articles of the Constitutions and Rules, but extended to all acts that were not sinful. For the Founder, "this principle is indisputable"<sup>19</sup>

In virtue of this idea of obedience, the Founder invested his superiors with an almost unlimited power. To Father Henry Tempier who was about to conduct a canonical visit of the mission in Canada, he wrote: "Act with authority, yield to nobody when it is a matter of reestablishing regularity, obedience [...]"<sup>20</sup> In another instance, he wrote to Father Mille: "The superior cannot bind himself to any conditions". To our modern way of thinking, this view of obedience can seem blown out of all proportion. But if the Founder, like all founders of orders, demanded total availability from his subjects, it was in order that Christ's mission entrusted to the Congregation through the Church might be brought to fulfillment.

### 3. MOTIVATION FOR OBEDIENCE

Why did the Founder stress the need for obedience so much? We can deduce a number of reasons for this. Suffice it to highlight only the following: imita-

tion of Christ, the apostolate, unity of the Congregation, the peace and well-being of the members and the merit of the actions carried out.

#### *a. In imitation of Christ*

The Founder's entire life was centered on imitating his Savior. While he was still a deacon at Saint-Sulpice, he wrote in a spiritual conference: "Not having imitated my model in his innocence, will it be denied me to imitate him in his devotion to his Father's glory and our salvation?"<sup>21</sup> We can say that he was obsessed with Christ and that his only wish was to be conformed to him. It is thus not surprising that the first article of the 1818 Constitutions and Rules stresses this point: "The end of the Missionary Institute, styled 'of Provence', is firstly to form a group of priests [...] who will strive to imitate the virtues of Jesus Christ, our Savior".<sup>22</sup> In his 1831 retreat notes, he likewise wrote: "It is all there: *They will strive to imitate the virtues and the examples of Jesus Christ, our Savior*. If only one could engrave these words on one's heart, have them written everywhere to have them always before one's eyes".<sup>23</sup> The Founder's invitation to imitate Christ is an invitation to holiness. "To work seriously to become saints" is what he tells us in the 1818 Rule.<sup>24</sup>

#### *b. The apostolate*

For the Founder, obedience is a tool at the service of an apostolic endeavor. The vow is not primarily and exclusively ordained to the creation of a community. It is above all focused on carrying out a task. This is what emerges from a letter he wrote to Father Casimir Aubert: "All I ask in these painful and perplexing circumstances is that the pilot be in charge during the

storm, that the crew obey in silence and that I be spared complaints that are out of place in a crisis when each one must carry out his task as best as he may in the post assigned to him".<sup>25</sup> All that obedience asks is that the entire community prove faithful to the prompting of the Holy Spirit with regard to the mission being carried out.

#### *c. The unity of the Congregation*

As in the ancient monastic Orders, the Founder saw in obedience a means of establishing unity among the members, a unity through which they were all servants of each other. One of the basic values of obedience is the creation of the fraternal *koinonia* where each one strives to love God and his neighbor. The 1818 Constitutions and Rules mention that "obedience is the bond of union in every well-regulated society".<sup>26</sup> In a letter to Father Jean-Baptiste Honorat, the Founder forges a link between obedience and the words of the Acts of the Apostles "one heart and one soul": "[...] of one heart and mind, moved by the same spirit under that ordered regularity which marks you in the eyes of all as men living up to the exigencies of their rule, in obedience and charity, devoted to all works of zeal conformed to such obedience [...]"<sup>27</sup> Writing to the community of Ceylon (Sri Lanka), he said: "Be united among yourselves, live in perfect obedience to the man who represents me, or rather who holds the place of God among you".<sup>28</sup>

#### *d. The peace and well-being of the subjects*

Moreover, it would be through obedience that the Oblates would experience profound peace and interior happiness. He wrote to Father Mille about "[...] holy obedience alone which gives value to all

your actions".<sup>29</sup> This theme always emerges in those of his letters in which he is giving guidance to Oblates with a tendency to scrupulosity. To Father Jacques Antoine Jourdan who was being troubled by scruples, he wrote: "May the peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be with you! What's this? Could you be without this precious peace [...] Ah! if that were so, my good friend, it would indeed be your fault. [...] Our Lord wishes that his children be led by the way of authority and obedience; it is thus that he manifests his very holy will: *qui vos audit me audit*."<sup>30</sup> And to Father Mille, he wrote about "[...] finding contentment in all things and a real happiness under the gentle yoke of obedience".<sup>31</sup>

The peace of which the Founder speaks flows from the fact that obedience offers the religious a sure means of knowing and faithfully carrying out the will of God. In his eyes, it is the only means of knowing God's will and thus saving one's soul.

#### *e. The merit of our actions*

In his retreat notes of 1814, he wrote: "I must certainly not forget that what made me suffer most at the time I was ill was finding myself in a position where I was acting wholly autonomously, in such a way that I did not know if my works, which lacked the merit of obedience, were agreeable to God".<sup>32</sup> The same thought emerges in a letter to Father Mille when he speaks of "[...] obedience alone which gives value to all your actions".<sup>33</sup>

#### 4. THE NOTION OF OBEDIENCE IN THE FOUNDER'S WRITINGS

##### *a. Ignatius of Loyola's blind obedience*

While it is true that the Founder took many articles of the 1818 Rule

from the writings of Alphonsus of Li-guori, it is surprising that he names him only twice, whereas he mentions Ignatius of Loyola by name five times. As Father Yvon Beaudoin expressed it so well, it would seem that the Founder took from Saint Alphonsus the letter of the Rule, but from Saint Ignatius he took "much more the spirit and spirituality than the letter".<sup>34</sup> Father Beaudoin adds: "the Ignatian influence appears in the articles on obedience [...]."<sup>35</sup> In addition to that in his letters he "is always setting forth the Jesuits as the models to be followed".<sup>36</sup>

Consequently, it is important to study Ignatian obedience if we want to understand the obedience that the Founder demanded from his first Oblates.

The obedience Saint Ignatius demanded from his followers was the kind described by the phrase "blind obedience", an idea which he expounded to the fathers and brothers in Portugal in a still-famous letter of 1553. The *Letter on Obedience* made a significant impact on the lives of religious for the last four hundred years. The majority of religious congregations of the active life adopted the Ignatian idea of obedience.

The idea of blind obedience is made up of the following components<sup>37</sup>:

1. Obedience is extolled as the foundation of all other virtues, and only faith can provide the motivation for the kind of submission that expresses total trust in the Lord. The *Letter* makes reference to Saint Paul who places obedience at the heart of the Christian mystery: "He was humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on a cross" (Philippians 2:8). It also refers to Luke 10:16: "Who listens to you, listens me." It is this passage from Luke that the Founder used in his letter to Father Jourdan quoted above.<sup>38</sup> Faith alone

must rule the attitude of the religious in this matter.

2. Then, Saint Ignatius' *Letter* focuses on the self-sacrifice required to submit one's will to the will of the superior. Obedience is "the gift of one's will, surrendering itself in the light of faith in order to do God's will more surely".<sup>39</sup> Without this surrendering of self-will, obedience is without substance.

3. Saint Ignatius teaches that, for the religious, obedience attains its perfection only when it implies making the sacrifice of one's own judgment by conforming it to the will of the superior. It is not only a question of subduing one's own will, but also of convincing oneself that the order given is good, even if one's own personal judgment deems the opposite to be true. Only a leap of faith could render such a sacrifice possible and save it from appearing totally absurd. It is at this point that we come to the main idea presented by the *Letter*. Seven times Saint Ignatius reminds his readers "that the religious must close his eyes to the qualities and the defects of his superior". And seven times more he presents "this blindness as only the dark side or the product of a vision that only faith can fill with the splendor of light".<sup>40</sup> Saint Ignatius teaches that, because of the interdependence of one's faculties, it is psychologically possible for the intelligence to commit itself to a decision which is not evidently so. "On the one hand, it is the intelligence's gift to incline the will to carry out an act which it presents. On the other hand, the will acts on the intelligence by directing it to concentrate on motives that may modify its judgment."<sup>41</sup> It is precisely this lack of conformity which makes obedience intolerable and ineffective. Obedience of the judgment is required because it

alone renders obedience pleasing to God.

It is obvious that the Founder was influenced by this notion of Ignatian blind obedience with regard to government in the Congregation. In his writings, we find all the elements presented by Saint Ignatius as the following quotes reveal: "[...] but it would be necessary for the will to submit interiorly<sup>42</sup>; "[...] our obedience must submit the will and even the intellect"<sup>43</sup> Toward the end of his life, he wrote in his February 2, 1857 circular letter: "They will be especially punctilious in obedience [...] to the extent that it could be said they have no will of their own, but have given it into the hands of those placed in authority over them [...]"<sup>44</sup> In this same document, he makes his own the famous words of Saint Ignatius: "In their hands, we should be like soft wax which takes on the form they wish. We should consider ourselves as lifeless corpses which have no power to move of themselves."<sup>45</sup> Immediately after this, he quotes Saint Francis-Xavier who said: "You must submit your will and your judgment to your superiors [...]"<sup>46</sup>

4. What can be said, then, about one's duty to devote the necessary reflection to discerning the will of God before making a decision? According to Saint Ignatius, obedience does not excuse us from the duty of due reflection. The superior is not infallible and he could be lacking in prudence. He recognizes the right to "remonstrate", a right dating from the most ancient monastic tradition.<sup>47</sup> The superior should seek to make himself clearly understood and invite his religious to react. On the other hand, it is the duty of the religious to help the superior in carrying out his responsibility by offering him advice and counsel, while at the same time

maintaining in his internal forum an attitude of openness to allow the person in authority to have the last word.

Saint Ignatius takes this consultation one step further by allowing his religious to offer the superior their advice and opinions. But after the superior has taken his decision: "If, after the superior has taken his decision, the person dealing with him is still convinced that a different course of action is called for or would believe he had good reason to do so even without having this deep conviction, after three or four hours, he could tell the superior that this or that would be a good thing while maintaining in his speech and his words the kind of decorum which would exclude any dissent or disagreement by not rejecting the decision already made. And even if the superior has stood by his decision once or twice, when a month or more has elapsed, the religious could tell the superior once again of his thinking. [...] Indeed, with time, experience becomes aware of many things and it even happens that things are seen in a totally different light by the same person."<sup>48</sup>

In spite of the Founder's apparent sternness in his demands concerning obedience, he still remained open to and called for suggestions from his followers. In the 1818 Rule, he wrote: "Nevertheless, it is permitted to state the reasons which one might have for being disinclined to undertake a certain duty. But when this has been done, with all modesty and submission, the Superior's decision ought to be accepted as a manifestation of God's will."<sup>49</sup> When Father Bruno Guigues was named bishop, the Founder received a number of objections to this appointment. To Father Jean-Fleury Beaudrand, he replied: "One could wish that this might not happen. Very well, up to that point, there was nothing to blame. They wrote

to prevent this promotion from taking place and adduced their reasons accordingly. This was still all right. It was permissible to have this opinion. But when [...] the affair was settled, then their not knowing what to think, uttering cries of revolt, going so far as [...] making remarks derogatory to the respect and obedience due to superiors [...] all this was lunacy."<sup>50</sup>

The Founder did not seem to tolerate the questioning of decisions already taken by superiors. To Father Mille, he wrote: "For God's sake, never argue when it is a question of obedience. The best thing would always be to do simply what is prescribed."<sup>51</sup> To Father Eugene Guigues for whom one of the decisions taken by the Founder seemed impossible to execute, he wrote: "You give out reams of reasons when there is nothing more to discuss, and when I have pronounced myself in the most categorical manner. Yet you should know that such a procedure is never admissible [...]"<sup>52</sup>

It seems that the reason the Founder would not listen to observations presented to him after a decision was made was because they almost always came in the form of criticism, blaming others and grumbling: "[...] complaints. I am decided not to listen to them."<sup>53</sup> "I detest too the habit of complaining without reason about an infinite number of things, as if with us each and every subject were called to govern the Congregation."<sup>54</sup> It is especially the grumblers who draw down on themselves his sternest rebukes: "Cursed be the murmurers, [...] they are veritably the fiends of hell [...]"<sup>55</sup>

In the thinking of the Founder, once a superior had taken a decision, the religious was expected to take action since obedience is especially an aspect of action and essentially apostolic. Obedience is required for the most per-

fect realization of the apostolic endeavor. It focuses only on fidelity of the community to the promptings of the Spirit and is indispensable as a tool to carry out the mission.

*b. The Founder's character and nobility*

Two other factors had a contribution to make in molding the Founder's thinking with regard to obedience. In the document he wrote for Mr. Duclaux when he entered the seminary, Eugene described himself as having a lively and impetuous disposition. He added: "I am a lively and impetuous type of character. When I want something I want it very badly, I am impatient of the least hold-up and I find delays unbearable."<sup>56</sup> He reacts very strongly against any obstacles that stand in the way of the achieving of his objectives: "[...] and I would not let anything stand in my way to overcome even the most difficult obstacle."<sup>57</sup> At the very suggestion of an obstacle in his path, his whole being rises up to confront it. And if the obstacle still remains, he is all the more convinced that if people are opposed to what he wants, it is only because of some greater good. We can add that he is inclined to sternness, is very determined to never allow himself to relent in the least, but he also has a strong inclination not to tolerate this in others. "I cannot accept the least compromise in anything to do with duty."<sup>58</sup> The mettle in his character had, no doubt, a strong influence on his notion of obedience and his practice of it throughout his life.

In addition, Eugene originated from the nobility. Throughout his childhood, he was surrounded by servants. During his years of exile, he socialized with Italy's nobility and no doubt absorbed certain attitudes common to the people of that social class. During his exile, he

received a religious formation from the two Zinelli brothers, Jesuits who probably introduced him to the teachings of Saint Ignatius. All of these experiences played their part in making of Eugene the leader that God was training up for ministry in the Lord's vineyard.

The notion of blind obedience was so widespread in the religious communities of the Founder's day that consultation and discussion were often overlooked in the exercise of obedience. This is the situation which prevailed for the four centuries which led up to the Second Vatican Council. In the renewal which preceded and especially followed the Council, Saint Ignatius' blind obedience did not enjoy a good press in religious writings. M. Dortel-Claudot expressed this well in his exhaustive study on obedience when speaking of communities of women: "[...] before the Council, the authority of the local superior weighed too heavily on the sisters, stifling their personalities and smothering their endeavors."<sup>59</sup> The same thing could be said for communities of men, especially in the period which preceded 1939-1945 and the Second World War. Nevertheless, this kind of obedience made a contribution to a great number of religious and to the spreading of the Kingdom of God to the four corners of the globe.

## II. OBEDIENCE IN THE CONGREGATION FROM 1861 TO 1965

After the Founder's death in 1861, the General Chapters and the circular letters of the Superiors General elaborated and commented on the notion of Oblate obedience while trying to adapt it to ever-changing social conditions.

To date, the Congregation has celebrated thirty-two General Chapters and

the Superiors General have written more than three hundred circular letters. These documents constitute an inexhaustible source of light illuminating all aspects of Oblate life.

### 1. THE GENERAL CHAPTERS

Before Vatican II, four Chapters, the Chapters of 1850, 1867, 1908 and 1926, worked on revisions of the Rule. After Vatican II, two other Chapters were obliged to recast the Rule. The 1966 Chapter drew up a new text of the Constitutions and Rules in order to bring them into line with the directives of Vatican II. The 1980 Chapter worked out and approved the definitive text.

The majority of the Chapters that were held from 1818 to 1992 dealt with the problem of obedience. Their legislation treated especially of the scope of the demands made by the vow of obedience. It was the 1850 Chapter which inserted in the Constitutions and Rules the phrase "among us the vow of obedience is made"; the Constitutions and Rules of 1826 make no explicit mention of us making this vow. The Chapter also legislated on questions such as permission to hear confessions or to publish a work as well as on several aspects of the local superior's responsibility and on some other aspects of the vow.<sup>60</sup>

The 1898 Chapter declared that among us the vow of obedience is absolute, that is, that it cannot be limited by any conditions or restrictions. Consequently, the Superior General may assign any Oblate to any ministry which the good of the Congregation may require.<sup>61</sup>

But it was the Chapters of 1908 and 1926 which were responsible for bringing the Constitutions and Rules in line with the new decisions taken by the

Holy See. In 1901, in a document entitled *Normae*, the Congregation for Religious had published a list of changes that all religious congregations had to make to their Constitutions. To conform with these norms, the 1908 Chapter introduced a definition of the vow of obedience using the same terms as appear in the document. Indeed, the original Rule contained no definition of the vow. Consequently, it was difficult to distinguish between the vow and the virtue of obedience.<sup>62</sup>

In addition to that, the old Rule did not define the scope of the vow, that is "when is one bound by the vow itself as opposed to the virtue of obedience?"<sup>63</sup> As a result, two articles were added, drawn verbatim from these norms.<sup>64</sup> "The professed religious is bound to obey by reason of his vow, when, and only when, a lawful superior commands him 'in the name of our Lord' or 'in virtue of holy obedience'. When the superior simply gives an order in the usual way, it is only by the virtue of obedience that the religious is bound to obey" (C and R of 1908, art. 236). "Rarely, cautiously, and prudently will superiors give a command in the name of obedience, and only for a grave cause – that is to say, when it seems to be called for by circumstances of very great importance to the community or an individual. It is desirable that a formal precept of the kind should be given in writing, or at least in the presence of two witnesses" (C and R of 1908, art. 237). Finally, to conform with the new directives, the 1908 Chapter defined the obligation imposed by the Rule and the obedience due to superiors.<sup>65</sup>

In 1917, for the first time in the Church's history, a Code of Canon Law containing all the Church's legislation was published. In the wake of the publication of the Code, the decree of the

Congregation for Religious of June 26, 1921 bound all religious congregations to undertake to revise their constitutions to bring them in line with the new Code. In addition to that, on October 26, 1921 this same Congregation stated that, in doing this work, only those constitutions contrary to the Code were to be changed and, as much as possible, "the wording of the Code itself should be used".<sup>66</sup> Such was the task carried out by the 1926 Chapter. Since the 1908 Chapter had already revised the Constitutions and Rules according to the norms of 1901, the 1926 Chapter "in addition to a few corrections in form [...] changed the articles on the scope of the vow of obedience, on obedience to the Pope and the bishops, on the binding force of the Rules, obedience to Superiors, vice-superiors, presentation for Orders, permission to hear confessions, obedience to the prefect of the sacristy and permission to publish works."<sup>67</sup>

Without commenting on all the revisions made, it would still prove useful to stress the following points:

a. With regard to the scope of the vow, the 1926 Chapter added to the 1908 text the words "in explicit terms" to signify that for it to be a matter of the vow, it must be "a genuine command about a specific thing and not on religious life in general".<sup>68</sup>

b. The Chapter determined that one must obey the Pope "even in virtue of the vow" as supreme superior of the Congregation. It added an article on obedience to the bishops, not in virtue of the vow, but in the virtue of obedience.<sup>69</sup>

c. This same Chapter also determined that all the members of the Congregation, both subjects and superiors, must live according to the requirements of the Constitutions and strive toward the perfection of their own specific

state. To achieve this end, Oblates must place their will in the hands of their superiors and humbly submit to all their brothers who have authority over them.<sup>70</sup>

## 2. CIRCULAR LETTERS

The majority of circular letters were written on the occasion of General Chapters, either as reports on the state of the Congregation at the time the Chapter was held or as commentaries on decisions taken by the Chapter. Obviously it is impossible to make an exhaustive study here of the teaching on obedience as contained in these letters. Suffice it to highlight certain letters so as to stress their relationship to the practice of obedience in the Congregation.

a. Ten years after the death of the Founder, his successor, Father Joseph Fabre, wrote a circular letter on the occasion of the publication of the acts of the 1867 Chapter. In it he reminded the Oblates that obedience should be "prompt, humble and comprehensive, not only effective, but affective as well; these are the qualities that the obedience of a good religious should have. Does ours contain these qualities?"<sup>71</sup> He pointed out that the contemporary period presented "grave problems"<sup>72</sup> with regard to obedience. He then reminded his Oblates of the Founder's teaching on affective obedience, the kind that submitted not only one's will but also one's judgment to one's lawful superiors.

This circular had as its goal to remind Oblates of the beauty and holiness of their vocation and their corresponding duty to respond generously to this calling.

b. The following year, he wrote a circular letter to the local superiors and directors of residences.<sup>73</sup> In it, Father

Fabre explained the mission of the local superior and the obligations inherent in it. The letter has the same quality as that of the Founder's letters because it springs from his heart and seems rather to be an outpouring of his paternal heart and soul rather than an expression of his authority as superior. After telling the superiors that they should "maintain a family spirit",<sup>74</sup> spread the "love or our holy vocation",<sup>75</sup> "concern themselves with the obligation they have of maintaining in their houses the spirit of charity among the members who make up this family",<sup>76</sup> Father Fabre reminds them that "we all make up one family; obedience alone assigns us to the community of which we should be a part. Our duty is no doubt to devote ourselves to the well-being of this house and to maintain with those of our brothers who live with us relationships that spring from a charity which is steadfast and a part of everyday life."<sup>77</sup> He fears that "the spirit of individualism and insubordination which reigns in our world might have penetrated too deeply into our communities."<sup>78</sup> That is why he asks of superiors: "Example! Example! My dear fathers, [...] keep in mind the irresistible efficacy of this kind of action within our communities."<sup>79</sup> He strongly recommends that the superior "must make himself loved in his house and gain the trust of his subjects, [...] the reason he is superior is for the welfare of his brother Oblates".<sup>80</sup>

Concerning the duties of the superior, Father Fabre gave the following instructions: "Let him observe the Rule; that is his duty, but he should know how to make bearing this yoke as sweet as possible. Let his actions be those of a loving father and not those of a master issuing commands. Let him take an authentic interest in each one of his religious; let him always welcome them

with kindness; sympathize with them in their sorrows and miseries; let his words not come solely from his mind, but let the perception be that they flow from a devoted heart."<sup>81</sup> Finally, he asks of the superiors that they "allow each one, within the confines of the Rule, the necessary freedom to do good in holy ministry and also to fulfill the tasks for which he may be responsible in the house or outside it [...] It is not fitting that he should intervene directly in everything and get personally involved in everything. Let him keep his place."<sup>82</sup>

This letter is worthy of being read and meditated by all Oblates who hold office as local superiors. Father Fabre wants to mitigate the harshness of obedience by exhorting superiors to practice the virtues of gentleness, kindness and charity in the exercise of their roles. This letter is brimming with common sense, tenderness and Gospel charity. This: same advice was repeated in another circular letter; which was also addressed to local superiors.<sup>83</sup>

c. In his report to the 1887 Chapter, Father Fabre made the observation that obedience was on the wane in the Congregation. "As religious, we must above all hold obedience in high esteem. Now the understanding, love and practice of this basic virtue are failing and have declined considerably. People never lose sight of their rights, real or imagined. [...] Authority is considered harsh; it is found to be worthy of blame and is misunderstood."<sup>84</sup> He adds that we are dealing here not merely with "a trend, but with a cruel reality".<sup>85</sup> He attributes this lack of obedience to "the profusion of external works", which has become "one of the great obstacles to the observance of the Rule".<sup>86</sup> To remedy such a situation, he reminds his Oblates: "In a Congregation, there cannot be and there

must not be any personal works. All works must be carried out according to the Rule, that is, according to obedience [...].<sup>87</sup> It is, therefore, necessary that all Oblates submit their activities to “the monitoring Influence of obedience”.<sup>88</sup>

d. Father Louis Soullier’s letter of March 26, 1894<sup>89</sup> has a totally different flavor. It sets forth a military notion of religious obedience, a notion characterized by remoteness and coldness in the relationship between subjects and superiors. “In an army, the army is only as good as its discipline. Among us, in the upper levels, discipline consists in just and worthy government exercised in the name of a set, authoritative rule; [...] on the lower echelons, it consists in a noble, filial obedience [...] which makes the role of superiors easy by offering a respect which is deep and tender [...]. Discipline consists in *esprit de corps*, love of the flag, valiant loyalty to all orders given – even if they involve great danger, suffering and even death.”<sup>90</sup>

In the same letter, Father Soullier states that the religious should be obedient to the Rule, but always as it is interpreted for him by his superior. “The vow of obedience made by subjects is to the Rule as the superiors apply it and not to the Rule as independent of the superior’s will. The living authority overrides the dead letter.”<sup>91</sup>

He specifies, moreover, that a candidate for religious life cannot set as a condition *sine qua non* the right to be assigned to the foreign missions. He stresses: “When the vow of obedience is made, it is made without any conditions attached [...] there are no exceptions”.<sup>92</sup> However, he does add that “those who are truly called to it by God can rest assured that they will be sent to the missions”, because “a person’s personal inclination will never be abso-

lutely thwarted because they are never entirely separated from the natural gift-ness of a person”.<sup>93</sup>

e. In his circular letters of March 19, 1899 and July 2, 1905<sup>94</sup>, Father Cassien Augier mourned the state of rebellion that existed in the Congregation: “Intolerance of any restriction [...] a life made up of superficial impressions and frenetic activity shot through with the natural and human mentality [brings it about] that the house stands to become nothing more than a hotel, where people come together to eat and sleep”.<sup>95</sup>

f. In his March 19, 1927<sup>96</sup> circular letter, Bishop Augustin Dontenwill promulgated the decisions of the 1926 General Chapter. He devoted a considerable portion of this document to the vow of obedience. He reiterated the commonly held teaching of the time which was the teaching of Saint Ignatius. After having made reference to the fact that “the vow of obedience is the religious vow par excellence”,<sup>97</sup> he added that the holy Rule “distinguishes three levels of obedience: effective obedience, affective obedience and the submission of one’s judgment”.<sup>98</sup> “Effective obedience has to do with external obedience; one does what one has been ordered to do and avoids doing what one has been forbidden to do”<sup>99</sup>; “affective obedience goes one step further; the will yields to what has been ordered and the individual’s soul complies with the exterior act”.<sup>100</sup> Then, he holds forth at greater length on the submission of one’s judgment. This takes place when the individual leads his will to see “God in his superior when it is his order that you receive and that you accept it as being such. Now that is the very object of obedience of judgment.”<sup>101</sup> If obedience were lacking this quality, it would be imperfect; it would be robbed of its laurels, deprived

of its merit, despoiled of any supernatural character".<sup>102</sup> According to this teaching, "submission of one's judgment would always be not only possible, but necessary if we intend to obey in a supernatural way".<sup>103</sup>

g. Finally, in his August 15, 1951<sup>104</sup> letter, Father Léo Deschâtelets defined Oblate obedience: "There is only one way of obeying as Oblates and that is in a way which leaves no more room for self-will, in short, an affective and effective obedience to the will of God as made known to us by our superiors. It is only at this personal cost that one becomes an Oblate."<sup>105</sup> This kind of obedience is necessary to better accomplish the task assigned to us by the Church. In the Church, good can be done "only by maintaining within one's grasp the wills of all subjects to launch them in the direction of accomplishing the most difficult tasks".<sup>106</sup>

In his December 8, 1953 letter<sup>107</sup>, Father Deschâtelets reported the decisions taken by the 1953 Chapter. In number 9 of this document, the Chapter addressed the question of obedience: "Since religious obedience is not well understood and personal independence is widespread, the Chapter was asked to remedy the situation". In answer to this request, the Chapter responded: "For their part, let the subjects keep in mind the true reason for obedience and the absolute necessity of obedience, and humbly submit to all the legitimate orders of their superiors and strive to identify fully with their spirit".<sup>108</sup>

In conclusion, it is worth noting that all the decisions of the General Chapter as well as all the circular letters of the Superiors General where this problem was treated were all motivated by an effort to address the abuses spread throughout the Congregation. The only

document which treats of this subject in the light of a positive teaching is Father Fabre's March 5, 1872 letter. That is the reason why this vow was not the subject of an in depth study from the time of the Founder's death. The texts simply repeat Saint Ignatius' traditional teaching on blind obedience while making it more palatable by admonishments to the superiors, encouraging them to be kind, prudent and to carefully watch over the common good of the community entrusted to them.

In addition to this, all these documents stress the obligation of obeying the decisions of the superior in all matters that are not sinful. The superior's authority seems unlimited, even if it is to be exercised according to the Constitutions and Rules. The adjective "comprehensive" as applied to the obedience subjects owe their superiors implies that superiors are always infallible in their decisions and always are an expression of God's will. However, there is rarely any mention made of the superior's obligation to seek the will of God and of taking the necessary means to discover that will. It is true that all superiors do have their councils to assist them in this endeavor, but in the statements of General Chapters and the circular letters, no mention is made of the obligation to consult the community or the individual concerned. It is not that blind obedience is a mistaken notion; indeed, it has made a contribution to the sanctification of a considerable number of religious. But it needs to be complemented by the kind of discernment required of a superior in making a decision. Up until this point, authoritative documents had stressed the obedience due to the decisions of superiors. During this period, the word of the person in authority was the voice of God and very little leeway

was allotted for an active contribution coming from subjects.<sup>109</sup>

### III. FROM VATICAN II TO THE PRESENT

With Vatican II and the new awareness of the need for a discernment which should precede decisions made by religious superiors, the notion of obedience regained its equilibrium. First, the Council reminded religious that they should make a total offering of their will to God and that they should submit to their superiors with humility and reverence according to the Constitutions and Rules in a spirit of faith and love with regard to the will of God.<sup>110</sup> Then, it added: "[Superiors] should [... foster] in them a spirit of voluntary submission. [...] They should train their subjects to cooperate with them by applying themselves to their ordinary duties and to new undertakings with an active and responsible obedience. Superiors therefore ought to listen to their subjects willingly and ought to invite their cooperation as something beneficial to the institute and the Church, retaining, however, their own authority to decide and to prescribe what is to be done."<sup>111</sup> This change of orientation towards an obedience which included dialogue with subjects as an integral feature upset a number of the Council fathers. More than four hundred and fifty of them demanded that this notion be struck from the document because of the democratic spirit it might spread within communities.

Vatican II obliged all religious congregations to renew themselves according to the spirit and the principles it had adopted. To achieve this end they would have to hold three General Chapters, if necessary, in order to come up with a definitive text before 1980.

#### 1. THE 1966 GENERAL CHAPTER AND FATHER DESCHÂTELETS' CIRCULAR LETTER

The Oblates were one of the first congregations in the Church to respond to this desire expressed by Vatican II. In January of 1966, hardly a month and a half after the closure of the Council, the Oblates held a Chapter which had as its objective the renewal of the Congregation. This Chapter completely remodeled the Constitutions and Rules. It stated that the section on obedience "represents the greatest development in a renewed understanding of our vows".<sup>112</sup>

In 1968, Father Deschâtelets wrote a circular letter entitled "The Spirit of Renewal in the Congregation"<sup>113</sup> in which he listed and laid out all the elements of renewal contained in the decisions of the 1966 General Chapter. The main points contained in the letter are:

*a.* "The Church [...] delegates some of its authority to the community – superiors and members – to help it in its mission of proclaiming the Gospel. It could not be otherwise."

*b.* "In a community [...] the principle and invisible bond fusing all wills into one [...] is the Spirit of Christ [...]."

*c.* "This internal unity [...] must find an external expression. It needs a visible sign. It needs an animator. [...] This leader, this sign of unity in Christ is the superior [...]."

*d.* "The superior [...] invites the latter (subjects) to work with him. Far from imposing decisions from on high, he encourages his team to lay the groundwork for them along with him and, once his decisions are taken, it supports their translation into action. [...] He leaves open to them a latitude for initiative and personal action [...]."

*e.* "The relation of the head with its members constitutes the exercise of

authority; on the other hand, the relationship of the members with the head offer the foundation for obedience.”

f. “The superior is not above, much less outside the community, [...] it is a case of everyone seeking the will of God and helping each other to carry it out under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. [...] The spirit of charity makes their collaboration easier and renders more palatable their acceptance of decisions which, even after a frank and open dialogue, could remain in conflict with their own personal feelings in the matter.”<sup>114</sup>

Father Deschâtelets ends this section of his letter by asking, “does it not lead us to rethink the service that [obedience] must render in unity and charity?”<sup>115</sup>

## 2. THE 1980 CHAPTER

The 1980 Chapter brought to a close the enormous task of renewal of our Constitutions and Rules. The text was approved by the Congregation for Religious by their decree of July 3, 1982. The theme of obedience was treated in Constitutions 24 to 28 and Rules 18 and 19. These constitutions and rules defined Oblate obedience in the light of the principles of Vatican II while integrating a number of the principles of the 1966 Chapter. That is why the 1966 commentary on the Constitutions, *The Congregation Renewed*, stands alongside the definitive text by Father Fernand Jetté, O.M.I., *The Apostolic Man*<sup>116</sup>, as one of the two best commentaries on Oblate obedience in the contemporary world.

In these new Constitutions, “the same spirit is found, but with a new insistence on each one’s commitment, responsibility and ‘freedom fortified by obedience’.”<sup>117</sup> A balance is struck and

Vatican II’s principles of renewal are fully integrated into the life of the Congregation. Obedience does not only consist of the duty of the individual religious to obey all the decisions taken by his superiors. It also requires that the basis for every decision be laid through discernment – either community discernment or the discernment of the superior with the individual concerned – in order to discover together what is the will of God. Without diminishing the superior’s authority, the obligation to obey is now balanced by the duty of the superior to seek this will in the context of discernment and dialogue, while maintaining his right to make the final decision.

The 1982 Constitutions preserve intact the spirit of obedience “but with a new insistence on each one’s commitment, responsibility and ‘freedom fortified by obedience’.” The section which deals with this vow contains five constitutions and two rules. The 1986 Chapter added to Constitution 26 a paragraph which obliges religious to obtain the permission of the major superior to publish anything of a religious nature. The addition was suggested by the Congregation of Religious in order to bring the Constitutions and Rules into conformity with the new 1983 Code of Canon Law.<sup>118</sup>

Since its foundation, the Congregation has accumulated as part of its family heritage a number of important landmarks which it had to complement by integrating the new insights of Vatican II. The task of the 1980 Chapter was to integrate the principles of Vatican II with the Oblate patrimony.

## 3. THE MAIN IDEAS ON OBEDIENCE

According to the new Constitutions and Rules of 1982, then, what are the

dominant ideas which should inspire every Oblate in the realm of obedience?

a. Just as in the Founder's case, obedience remains a fundamental means of *imitating Christ*. Vatican II tells us: "After the example of Christ, who came to do his Father's will [...] religious moved by the Holy Spirit subject themselves in faith to those who hold God's place, their superiors [...]"<sup>119</sup> Thus the first article on obedience in the Constitutions quite naturally begins with these words: "Christ's food was "to do the will of the one who sent him" (John 4:34)" (C 24). It follows, then, that the theological basis of our obedience is the very obedience of Christ. It must be rooted in the attitude of Christ and be in conformity with his attitude. As a result, with Christ we live his obedience to the Father and we reproduce the pattern in ourselves. Following in his footsteps, we identify with him in the total abandonment of himself to the Father. He had only one desire: that of pleasing God. Our obedience must always be based on the obedience of Christ who remains the foundation and reason for the existence of our vow.

b. Obedience leads us to enter into the *plan of salvation* of God. The Oblates make a vow to "spend ourselves without reserve to accomplish his plan of salvation" (C 24). In his exhortation, *Evangelica testificatio*, Paul VI said: "By making this profession [...] you make a total offering of your will and you enter more steadfastly and more surely into his plan of salvation".<sup>120</sup> Later on, he picks up the same theme: "It is a matter of putting themselves at the service of the Father's plan of love in the persons of their brothers".<sup>121</sup> The purpose of our acts of obedience is to allow God to "fulfill through us his unique plan of salvation of men in Jesus

Christ. In other words, through obedience we share in Christ's mission."<sup>122</sup>

c. Obedience remains a *mystery of faith*. The Constitutions tell us: "[...] through faith we accept the authority [the superior] has been given" (C 26). This vow remains a mystery to be lived in the obscurity of faith and through love for Christ. A faith vision of our life and the world we live in always helps when it comes to obedience because "that gives us no other option than to turn to God".<sup>123</sup> Our obedience casts us headlong into the heart of the mystery of Christ by making our own the detachment and death to self that this vow entails. This faith must be present at all stages of obedience: First of all the seeking of God's will, then the willing acceptance of decisions made by superiors and, especially on those occasions when the vow demands it, detachment and death to self. We must leave behind our own ways to walk in the ways of the Father.

d. The vow of obedience puts us under the obligation to *seek the will of God*. "As individuals [...] we have the responsibility to seek the will of God" (C 26). God communicates his bidding to religious and makes his will known to them. Consequently, the individual Oblate should take advantage of all the means that God uses to make his will known. The Constitutions tell us what these means are. Some of them are common to all Christians seeking the will of God because the religious is first and foremost a Christian like other followers of Christ. Therefore, "certain means used by God to communicate his will to religious will be the same ones he uses to make his will known to any other Christian".<sup>124</sup> Other means will be specific to religious life because the commitment to religious life, which is a second baptism, identifies the religious

more closely with Christ and offers him means specific to his state of life to discover the will of the Father.

— *Common means.* First and foremost, God speaks to us through means common to all the disciples of Christ.

The most common of these means, the one that should be at the head of the list is obviously *Sacred Scripture*: “[...] The Word of God nourishes our spiritual life and apostolate. [...]” (C 33, § 2).

Next is *the Church* which “earnestly appeals to the ministers whom she herself enrolled in the cause of her divine Spouse, to do all in their power, by word and example, to rekindle the flame of faith that has all but died in the hearts of so many of her children” (Preface). That is why our Constitutions bind us “to obey the Holy Father [...]” (C 27).

In third place, we can group together *the world, events of daily life, others, the poor*, etc. “Our life is governed by the demands of our apostolic mission and by the calls of the Spirit already dwelling in those to whom we are sent” (C 25, § 2).

— *Specific means.* Nevertheless, the religious is a Christian with a special vocation. He belongs to a religious congregation. Naturally, certain means of revealing the will of God are specific to religious life “in the sense that God does not use these specific means to reveal his will to the Christian who is not a religious”.<sup>125</sup> Means specific to the religious are the following:

The most important means of all is obviously that of the *Constitutions and Rules*. “By our vow of obedience we assume the obligation to obey [...] our lawful Superiors in any matter pertaining directly or indirectly to the observance of the Constitutions and Rules” (C 27). The next Constitution adds:

“Members will conform their lives and their missionary activities to the Constitutions and Rules of the Congregation” (C 28). The Constitutions have always been the primary subject of the vow of obedience. That is why during the taking of vows we are handed a copy of the Constitutions and Rules and have these words addressed to us: “Do this and you will live”.

The second means specific to Oblate life is the *superior*, a term which must be understood to include superiors at all the different levels: general, provincial and local. “By our vow of obedience we assume the obligation to obey [...] our lawful superiors [...]” (C 27). The Constitutions remind us that the superior is “a sign or our unity in Christ Jesus” (C 26) and “a sign of the Lord’s loving and guiding presence in our midst” (C 80). Father Jetté reminds us, “A religious community’s unity is largely based on their activity and on our attitude in their regard”.<sup>126</sup>

Finally, the Constitutions indicate that the *community* is a medium for expressing the will of God. “Decisions which express this will are best reached after community discernment and prayer” (C 26 § 1). What is involved here is not the establishing of a democratic system where all decisions are taken on the basis of a majority vote. The Constitutions are clear on this point: “We will give our loyal support once a decision has been made and, in a spirit of cooperation and initiative, we will devote our talents, our activity, our very lives, to our apostolic mission in the Church” (C 26 § 2). However, Rule 18 [R 26a in CRR 2000] does have this to say: “In major decisions and in matters concerning the life and mission of the whole community, there will be a process of discernment conducive to consensus”. To foster this kind of dia-

logue and this kind of discernment, the Constitutions specify that superiors should be chosen who show the qualities of “an ability to animate a community so that it can share and dialogue in a climate of mutual trust and acceptance” and “a spirit of discernment and a capacity for making decisions once consultation has been carried out” (C 81). This dialogue and discernment are important, but especially so before people “are appointed to new responsibilities” (R 19) [R 26b in CRR 2000]. On occasions like this, the superior must consult the individuals and give them the opportunity “to express their own views” (R 19) [26b].

A climate of dialogue does not absolve the superior from the responsibility of making the final decision. In the course of the dialogue, the individual religious or the community and the superior must discern the signs indicating the will of God. In the initial stage, the individual religious has the right and the duty of laying before the superiors the signs of God’s will as he sees them in current events. The superior is bound to take this collaboration on the part of this religious seriously. But when the time comes to make a decision, the superior must do this before God. From that moment on, the religious is bound to obey.

*e.* Obedience is not an abdication of one’s freedom, but a committing of oneself to the guidance of the Spirit – the Spirit which leads us to *true freedom*. The Constitutions state that our corporate acceptance of God’s will “is our way of making real the freedom of the Gospel” (C 25 § 1). This principle was already set forth in the Council’s document, *Perfectae caritatis*: “In this way, far from lowering the dignity of the human person, religious obedience leads it to maturity by increasing the

freedom of the sons and daughters of God.”<sup>127</sup> The vow of obedience, far from repressing our personality, catapults it forward by bonding it with the obedience of Christ and giving it access to full development by uniting our wills with the will of God.

*f.* Finally, our Constitutions remind us that obedience takes on a *prophetic character* for our times. “By obedience we become the servants of all. Challenging the spirit of domination, we stand as a sign of the new world wherein persons recognize their close interdependence” (C 25 § 1). Our obedience already proclaims the Kingdom of God, which can be realized only through love, humility and service. Through our obedience, we become witnesses of the dawning of a new world where people no longer seek to lord it over their brothers and sisters and where power is devoted to the service of others. Obedience well lived brings to birth bonds of communion. It also becomes good news for the men and women of today and bears witness to a world which has been re-created by a God who is love.

## CONCLUSION

Through his obedience, the Oblate makes a total offering of himself to God “an offering that is without reserve, to belong to Jesus Christ and, as a consequence, to being sent anywhere in the world, as needed, to cooperate in his work of salvation”.<sup>128</sup> Father Jetté expressed well the basic reality at stake in the realm of obedience when he said: “That the Oblates as a whole, as persons, renew themselves in an attitude of complete *availability*: that they be ready to sacrifice their personal tastes, their personal apostolic project [...] to place

themselves at the Congregation's service and dedicate themselves to evangelizing the poor according to the Congregation's apostolic priorities".<sup>129</sup>

The sentiments that inspired the Founder on the occasion of the first revision of the Constitutions of 1850 still hold true for the Oblate of today. In his August 2, 1853 letter, he wrote: "All my hope, my most dear sons, is that this second promulgation of our laws may arouse new fervor in the heart of each one of you, that it may bring a kind of renewal of your youth [...]"<sup>130</sup>

FRANK DEMERS

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> "Constitutions et Règles de la Société des Missionnaires de Provence", Part Two, Chapter One, par. 2. Concerning the vow of obedience in *Missions*, 73 (1951) p. 50.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 50-51.

<sup>4</sup> Letter to Father François Bermond, August 19, 1841 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 1, no. 4, p. 6.

<sup>5</sup> Letter to Father Jean-Baptiste Honorat in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 1, no. 6, p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> Retreat of October 1808, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, no. 23, p. 59.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>8</sup> Letter to Father H. Bourrelier, September 19, 1821 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, no. 72, p. 84.

<sup>9</sup> December 5, 1853 letter in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 2, no. 186, p. 70.

<sup>10</sup> In the *1818 Constitutions and Rules*, the Founder wrote: "It (obedience) must be prompt, humble and all-inclusive." in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 50. In circular letter no. 2, he asks that "our obedience should be prompt, humble and comprehensive", in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 12, p. 192-193.

<sup>11</sup> Letter to Father François Xavier Bermond, September 8, 1842 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 1, no. 12, p. 24.

<sup>12</sup> Letter to Father Vincent Mille, June 4,

1837 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 9, no. 624, p. 40.

<sup>13</sup> Letter to Father Eugene Guigues, May 24, 1845 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 1, no. 54, p. 118.

<sup>14</sup> November 26, 1836 letter *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 8, no. 590, p. 253.

<sup>15</sup> January 3, 1831 letter in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 8, no. 378, p. 2.

<sup>16</sup> September 25, 1831 letter in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 8, no. 404, p. 37; see also letter to Bishop Guigues, September 26, 1848, *ibidem*, vol. 1, no. 103, p. 203. In a letter to Father Mille, May 21, 1836 he wrote: "A virtuous religious must understand that all are bound to accept humbly their superior's observations and even their criticisms", *ibidem*, vol. 8, no. 573, p. 232.

<sup>17</sup> November 24, 1853 letter in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 2, no. 183, p. 62-63.

<sup>18</sup> Letter to Father Péliasser, May 30, 1839 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 9, no. 693, p. 126

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>20</sup> Letter of June 24, 1851 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 2, no. 147, p. 17.

<sup>21</sup> Spiritual conference in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, no. 48, p. 110

<sup>22</sup> CC and RR of 1818, Part One, Chapter One, par. 1, art. 1, *Missions*, 73 (1951), p. 13.

<sup>23</sup> Notes of his October 1831 annual retreat, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 15, no. 163, p. 220.

<sup>24</sup> CC and RR of 1818, Part One, Chapter One, par. 3, *Nota bene*, in *Missions*, 71 (1951), p. 18.

<sup>25</sup> September 26, 1836 letter in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 8, no. 590, p. 253. To Father Marc de L'Hermite, who was to leave Bordeaux to go to Notre-Dame de Cléry, he wrote: "[...] it is for the good and the benefit of the Congregation, everything must take second place to the accomplishment of this goal [...]" in a February 24, 1855 letter in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 11, no. 1259, p. 257-258.

<sup>26</sup> CC and RR of 1818, Second Part, Chapter One, par. 3 in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 50.

<sup>27</sup> March 26, 1842 letter in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 1, no. 10, p. 19; see also his letter to Father Tempier, March 9, 1826 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 7, no. 229, p. 53.

<sup>28</sup> June 5, 1854 letter, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 4, no. 38, p. 121. To Father Tempier he wrote: "Why can Fr. Touche not live under the obedience of Fr. Honorat? Whence this repugnance which troubles the order of a nascent Society in which there should be only one heart and one soul?", March 9, 1826 letter, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 7, no. 229, p. 54.

<sup>29</sup> April 21, 1832 letter, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 8, no. 420, p. 59. Also: "We must study the chapter on obedience a little better and live in peace under the direction of those who are charged by the major authority with the government of communities and provinces." January 24, 1852 letter to Father Joseph Francis Arnoux, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 3, no. 53, p. 86.

<sup>30</sup> March 30, 1823 letter, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 99, p. 108; see also August 11, 1843 letter to Father Damas Dandurand, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 1, no., 23, p. 55, where the Founder declares that through obedience the community becomes "a true paradise on earth."

<sup>31</sup> May 21, 1836 letter, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 8, no. 573, p. 232.

<sup>32</sup> Spiritual Writings in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 15, no. 130, p. 104.

<sup>33</sup> Letter of April 21, 1832 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 8, no. 420, p. 59. To the same correspondent he wrote: "[...] the Lord does not reward good that is done outside of obedience, less still the good we attempt to do against the norms of obedience." April 6, 1837 letter, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 9, no. 611, p. 23. To Father Justin Barret, he wrote: "Humility and obedience are strong supports and sure guides. [...] It is only then, that zeal is meritorious", April 23, 1856 letter in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 4, no. 25, p. 204. To Brother Jean-Bernard Ferrand, he wrote: "So stay at Aix, you will be able to sanctify yourself there by obedience and regularity", in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 10, no. 912, p. 144.

<sup>34</sup> BEAUDOIN, Yvon, "M<sup>gr</sup> Eugène de Mazenod et les Jésuites", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 51 (1992), p. 166.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 170.

<sup>37</sup> See OLPHÉ-GAILLARD, Michel, S.J., "La lettre de saint Ignace de Loyola sur la vertu d'obéissance", in *Revue d'ascétique et de mystique* (RAM), 30 (1954), p. 7-28; PARENTEAU, H. A., F.I.C., "La notion d'obéissance aveugle dans la lettre de saint Ignace aux pères et frères du Portugal (1553)", in *Revue d'ascétique et mystique* (RAM), 38 (1962), p. 31-51, 170-196. TILLARD, Jean-Marie, O.P., "Aux sources de l'obéissance religieuse", in *Nouvelle revue théologique*, 98 (1976), p. 592-626; p. 817-838.

<sup>38</sup> March 30, 1823 letter, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 99, p. 108.

<sup>39</sup> OLPHÉ-GAILLARD, Michel, S.J., art. cit., p. 16.

<sup>40</sup> PARENTEAU, H. A., F.I.C., art. cit., p. 38; TILLARD, Jean-Marie, O.P., art. cit., p. 616-626.

<sup>41</sup> OLPHÉ-GAILLARD, Michel, S.J., art. cit., p. 16.

<sup>42</sup> Retreat of December 1814 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 15, no. 130, p. 127.

<sup>43</sup> C and R of 1818, Second Part, Chapter One, par. 3 in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 50.

<sup>44</sup> In *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 12, p. 215.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 216.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>47</sup> OLPHÉ-GAILLARD, Michel, S.J., art. cit., p. 18.

<sup>48</sup> IGNACE DE LOYOLA, "Instruction sur la manière de traiter ou d'avoir affaire avec quelque supérieur", May 29, 1555, in MHSJ Epist., IX, p. 90-92, quoted by OLPHÉ-GAILLARD, Michel, S.J., art. cit., p. 19-20, footnote 25.

<sup>49</sup> C and R of 1818, Second Part, Chapter One, par. 3 in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 52-53.

<sup>50</sup> September 30, 1849 letter, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 1, no. 124, p. 228. The Founder expressed the same thought in a December 14, 1841 letter to Father Jean-Joseph Lagier: "To inform me of what you knew, to disclose your way of thinking to me is good, it is even your duty. However my dear Father, you should have allowed me to judge a case regarding which your only role is to inform [...]", in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 9, p. 199.

<sup>51</sup> June 4, 1837 letter, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 9, no. 624, p. 40.

<sup>52</sup> May 24, 1845 letter, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 1, no. 54, p. 118.

<sup>53</sup> August 17, 1847 letter to Father Tempier, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 10, no. 939, p. 174.

<sup>54</sup> Letter to Bishop Guigues, January 20, 1857, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 2, no. 227, p. 137

<sup>55</sup> Letter to Father Honorat, July 18, 1844, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 1, no. 43, p. 99.

<sup>56</sup> Eugene's self-portrait for Mr. Duclaux, October 1808, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 14, no. 40, p. 65.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>59</sup> DORTEL-CLAUDOT, Michel, S.J., *Obéir aujourd'hui dans la vie religieuse, pourquoi? à qui? comment?*, Canadian Religious Conference, 1986, p. 56.

<sup>60</sup> COSENTINO, Georges, *Histoire de nos Règles*, vol. III, Oblate History Archives Collection, vol. 5, Oblate Studies Edition, Ottawa, 1955, P. 69-72.

<sup>61</sup> See COSENTINO, Georges, *Nos Chapitres généraux*. Oblate History Archives Collection, vol. 16, Oblate Studies Edition, Ottawa, 1957, p. 147.

<sup>62</sup> See COSENTINO, Georges, *Histoire de nos Règles*. vol. V, Oblate History Archives Collection, vol. 7, p. 101: "Itaque apud nos vovetur obedientia. Per hoc votum, assumitur obligatio obediendi praecepto legitimi superioris in iis qua pertinent directe vel indirecte ad vitam Instituti, hoc est ad observantiam votorum et Constitutionum." "For these reasons, the vow of obedience is enjoined in our Society. By this vow is contracted the obligation to obey the lawful superior in those matters which concern, directly or indirectly, the life of the Institute — that is to say, the observance of the Vows and Constitutions." (C and R of 1908, art. 235).

<sup>63</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 101-102: "Vi voti tenetur professus tunc tantum obedire, cum legitimus superior praecepit expresse 'in nomine Christi Domini' vel 'in vjrtute sanctae obedientiae', superiori autem simpliciter praeipienti, vi solius virtutis obedire tenetur." "Raro, caute ac prudenter superiores praeceptant in virtute sanctae obedientiae, et

nonnisi ex gravi causa, quando videlicet bonum commune aut privatum maximi momenti id requirere videbitur. Expedit praeterea ut formale praeceptum imponat in scriptis, vel saltem coram duobus testibus."

<sup>64</sup> See *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 10-229.

<sup>65</sup> See COSENTINO, Georges, *Histoire de nos Règles*, vol. V, Oblate History Archives Collection, vol. 7, p. 102; see also C and R of 1908, art. 238.

<sup>66</sup> See *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 13-538.

<sup>67</sup> See COSENTINO, Georges, *Histoire de nos Règles*, Oblate History Archives Collection, vol. 8, p. 130; see CC and RR of 1908, art. 240.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 131.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 131.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 132; see CC and RR of 1926, art. 228 and 229.

<sup>71</sup> See circular letter no. 22, August 1, 1871, in *Circ. adm.* I, (1850-1885), p. 216.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 216.

<sup>73</sup> Circular letter no. 24 "To Reverend Fathers local superiors and directors of residences", March 5, 1872, in *Circ. adm.* I, (1850-1885), p. 239-267.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 242.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 242.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 244.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 245.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 253.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 255.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 259.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 259.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 261.

<sup>83</sup> Circular letter no. 32, June 4, 1880, in *Circ. adm.* I (1850-1885), p. 349-352.

<sup>84</sup> Circular letter no. 42, June 29, 1887, in *Circ. adm.* II (1886-1900), p. 30.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 30.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 46.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 47.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 48.

<sup>89</sup> Circular letter no. 57, March 26, 1894, in *Circ. adm.* II (1886-1900), p. 151-198.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 168-169.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 184.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 185

<sup>93</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 185-186.

<sup>94</sup> Circular letters no. 70, March 19, 1899 in *Circ. adm.* II, (1886-1900), p. 345-374

and no. 84, July 2, 1905 in *Circ. adm.* III, (1901-1921), p. 48-106.

<sup>95</sup> Circular letter no. 84, p. 75-76.

<sup>96</sup> Circular letter no. 137, March 19, 1927 in *Circ. adm.* IV, (1922-1946), p. 61-98.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 69.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 70.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 72.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 72.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 72-73.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 73.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 75.

<sup>104</sup> Circular letter no. 191, August 15, 1951 in *Circ. adm.* V, (1947-1952), p. 298-386

<sup>105</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 337.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>107</sup> Circular letter no. 203, December 8, 1953, in *Circ. adm.* VI, (1953-1960), p. 107-160.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 117-118.

<sup>109</sup> See KING, John, "Vie religieuse et obéissance", in *Actes du Chapitre général de 1966*, vol. 2, p. 14.

<sup>110</sup> *Perfectae caritatis*, no. 14.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>112</sup> *The Congregation Renewed*, Rome, 1968, p. 137.

<sup>113</sup> Circular letter no. 240, March 19, 1968, in *Circ. adm.* VIII, (1967-1972), p. 166-169.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 166-167.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 168.

<sup>116</sup> JETTÉ, Fernand, O.M.I., *The Apostolic Man. A Commentary on the 1982 edition of the Oblate Constitutions and Rules*, Rome, General House, 1992, p. 541.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 166.

<sup>118</sup> Code of Canon Law, Canon 832.

<sup>119</sup> *Perfectae caritatis*, no. 14.

<sup>120</sup> *Evangelica testificatio*, 1971, no. 23.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibidem*, no. 25.

<sup>122</sup> DORTEL-CLAUDOT, Michel, S.J., *Obéir aujourd'hui...*, p. 16.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 18.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 28.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>126</sup> JETTÉ, Fernand, op. cit., p. 172.

<sup>127</sup> No. 14.

<sup>128</sup> Circular letter no. 301, May 20, 1986 in A.A.G., IX (1986), p. 160.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 108.

<sup>130</sup> Circular letter no. 1, August 2, 1853, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 12, p. 204.

## OBLATE CROSS

*Summary: Introduction; I. The Cross; II. The Cross and the Founder: 1. The Founder and the Missionary Oblate Cross; 2. The founder and the Mission Crosses; 3. The Founder, the Cross and Christ the Saviour; 4. The Founder and the Blood of Christ; III. A companion: Father Tempier; IV. The Cross, Constitutions and Rules, and Oblate Life. Conclusion.*

### INTRODUCTION

During a retreat in 1814, Eugene de Mazenod remembers what happened to him when he prayed before the cross in a church in Aix, on Good Friday, some seven years earlier: "I looked for happiness outside of God and for too long with resulting unhappiness. How often in my past life had my wounded, tormented heart taken wings for God from whom it had turned away! Can I forget the bitter tears that the sight of the cross brought streaming from my eyes one Good Friday? Indeed they welled up from the heart, there was no checking them, they were too abundant for me to be able to hide them from those who like myself were assisting at that moving ceremony. I was in a state of mortal sin and it was precisely this that made me grieve. I could then, and also on some other instance, perceive the difference. Never was my soul more satisfied, never did it feel such happiness; for in the midst of this flood of tears, despite my grief, or rather through my grief, my soul took wings for its last end, towards God its only good whose loss it felt so keenly. Why say more? Could I ever express what I experienced then? Just the memory of it fills my heart with a sweet satisfaction"<sup>1</sup>.

It was a turning point in Eugene's life, possibly one of the most decisive moments of conversion in his life. It brought him face to face with the cross,

upon which hung the lifeless body of Jesus, the utmost sign of human poverty in suffering and death, bringing bitter tears to the eyes of Eugene when he recognized his ingratitude, in offending God who had shed His blood for him. Yet, it is also the utmost sign of the immensity of the love and the mercy of God, creating in Eugene happiness and the ardent desire to make reparation by a total gift of self.

In this article on the Oblate cross, we will see some of the traces of the encounters between the cross and Eugene de Mazenod, which made him adopt, and treasure, the cross as a particular sign for the Missionary Oblates.

### I. THE CROSS

The cross has always had its unique place in the history of salvation, as a sign of contradiction, where suffering and death turn into resurrection and salvation. Yet, depending on time and culture, the cross has evoked different ways for us to respond to this mystery<sup>2</sup>. Scripture often relates the death of Jesus with his obedience and his fidelity to his Father (e.g. Phil. 2: 8; Rom. 5: 19), but we are well aware of the fact that the disciples and the early Christians saw the cross as a scandal, a sign of a death of the out-cast and abandoned. Saint Paul's letters testify to the fact that fairly soon the Christians were

able to see the death of Jesus as the perfect sacrifice, which redeems sinners and re-establishes the covenant with God – in short, it is a sign of love and of reconciliation. It is not until Christianity is recognised in the Roman Empire that the cross is brought out in the open and publicly venerated in liturgies and pilgrimages. Throughout Medieval times the cross has a particular significance for monastic life, where the one professed was called to be crucified to the world. The cross also became more important in popular piety, and crosses in wood or stone began to appear as a blessing or for protection, being recognised officially when Pope Sergius I instituted the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, in 701. This devotion culminated, in a certain sense, with the spirituality of Saint Bernard (+1153), Saint Bonaventure (+1274), and Saint Gertrude (+1302), when the human element of the mysteries of the Incarnation was emphasized, which centred much of the popular devotion on the suffering and the crucifixion of the Saviour.

During the 16th century, St. Ignatius Loyola, St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross, contributed to this devotion with their ascetic rules and their mysticism, respectively, based on their meditation of the passion of Christ. With St. Paul of the Cross (+1775) and St. Alphonsus Liguori (+1787), the passion of Christ and the love of the crucified Christ becomes a dominant theme in preaching, and this carries over as an integral part of the spirituality of many new Religious Congregations, founded during the 19th century. There are also many particular devotions appearing during these centuries, all linked to the mystery of redemption, such as the Sacred Heart and the Precious Blood.

In our own century we still see many of these popular devotions, but our way of looking at the cross is changing, as we tend to speak more often about the resurrection and as we tend to see the cross in the poor and in the suffering around us.

## II. THE CROSS AND THE FOUNDER

In the earlier writings of the Founder, particularly during his retreats as a seminarian at Saint-Sulpice, the cross is often an important theme of meditation and prayer<sup>3</sup>. In a long letter to his grandmother, in 1809, he describes at length a day's pilgrimage to the Calvaire at Mont-Valérien with processions, the Via Crucis, a High Mass, and "a little talk by the parish priest... *delivered at the foot of the Cross*"<sup>4</sup>. By the time of his ordinations, the cross appears in his notes directly linked to this sacrament. So, for example, the account of his ordination to the sub-diaconate: "If today the casual spectator who is drawn by idle curiosity into the Temple should find himself entranced at the sight of a host of levites drawn from every part of this vast empire pressing forward in holy rivalry to beg with insistence, some for admission to, others for promotion in, the saintly ranks; ... if, astonished by a devotion which makes them doubt the evidence of their own eyes, they remain in wonderment that men should run to embrace the cross of the Saviour with more joy today, when this sacred wood offers but bitterness and sorrow, than they did in the days when on taking it for one's lot one *shared much more in the glory than in the sufferings of Jesus;...*"<sup>5</sup>

Eugene also stated clearly that the "love of the cross of Jesus Christ" were to be part of the intention for his First

Mass<sup>6</sup>, and in a text titled "General resolution" (from about the same time), his resolution is to be "wholly God's and for all... *to seek only the cross of Jesus Christ...*"<sup>7</sup>.

Another significant event during his time at Saint-Sulpice, was the expulsion of his Superior and friend Fr. Émery, by the French authorities. In a letter to his mother in 1810 he tells of the sad event of Fr. Émery's departure: "'Dear Father', I cried out with all the sorrow I was feeling, 'Dear Father, don't leave your children without giving them your blessing'. At these words everyone sobbed all the more and we all fell spontaneously to our knees. This went right to the depths of his heart and melting into tears he said: 'As you wish', as if violence had been done to his humility. Then with a prayerful gesture towards the crucifix at the end of the hall, and with his eyes fixed firmly on our Saviour, the source of all his strength, he prayed for his blessing on us and then bestowed it in his name"<sup>8</sup>.

Throughout his life the cross continues to be present, particularly in his letters, as he meets difficulties, or as he, as Bishop and Superior General, has to console and encourage others<sup>9</sup>.

Even at the very end of Eugene's life, Fr. Henry Tempier writes to the OMI Fathers and Brothers that "it is not possible to tell you the example he gave, the sentiments he manifested during these three days [of preparing himself for the Sacrament of the sick]. We consider it a special grace to have seen and heard what we did. 'I am on the cross', he cried out. '*I gladly stay on the cross and offer my sufferings to God for my dear Oblates*'."<sup>10</sup>

Some of the more significant moments in his life were at the foot of the cross, either at the times when he felt

ready to go into battle for his Master, or, when there was nothing to say, only to kneel humbly in silence before the crucifix<sup>11</sup>. However, we recognise two well-known events that took place before the crucifix, the first one being the Founder's first, and unsigned, letter to Fr. Tempier: "My dear friend, read this letter at the foot of your crucifix with a mind to heed only God and what is demanded in the interests of his glory *and of the salvation of souls from a priest like yourself...*"<sup>12</sup>, and the second being the beginning of the Congregation when the Founder wrote the first Constitutions and Rules at Saint-Laurent in 1818, sitting or kneeling before his missionary cross, which he had put on his desk<sup>13</sup>.

## 1. THE FOUNDER AND THE MISSIONARY OBLATE CROSS

The missionary cross, at the time of the founding of the Congregation, would have been common among the missionaries preaching missions<sup>14</sup>. However, the Founder adopted it, and recognised it as having a particular value. At a very early date, he even ventured to challenge the founder of the Missionaries of France, Fr. Forbin-Janson, on the use of the crucifix, a challenge which is worthwhile to quote in its entirety: "While on this subject, I take the liberty of telling you that you would have done well to adopt the use of the crucifix, at least during the conducting of your missions. You would hardly believe the effect it produces and how useful it is. People accustomed to ecclesiastical attire are little impressed; but the crucifix to them is awesome. How often have I seen, even amongst libertines, some who, when they see it, cannot help removing their hats. It gives a decided authority; it distinguishes the

missionaries from other priests; and that indeed is good because the missionary should be regarded as an extraordinary man. It is useful to the priest in the confessional and, on the day of absolution, it helps the penitent, in whose hands we place it, to conceive sorrow for his sins, to detest them and even to weep because of them. It must needs be that what we have experienced has at all times been acknowledged since, in other Catholic countries, all missionaries carry it as a sign of authority for their mission, etc. I cannot imagine how you have been prevented by the feeble reasons that those who think you should not carry it have given. *This to me is an act of weakness, a shameful tribute that you are willing to give to the philosophy of a small number of persons whose antipathy you should have scorned. It would seem that you are fearful of taking part in the folly of the cross. What shall I say to you? I blame this human prudence. You must be more openly a Christian, a priest and an apostle than you have been in this circumstance. You know that I speak my thoughts frankly. But only to you do I say this. It is not a matter of excuses*"<sup>15</sup>.

Obviously, wearing the missionary cross is not only for the people whom the missionary encounters, but also for the missionary himself. According to the 1818 Constitutions and Rules, the missionary cross will serve as a constant reminder of the virtues of humility, patience, charity, and modesty<sup>16</sup>.

At the very end of the mission in Aix, 1820, the Archbishop turned to Eugene, as the preacher, asking him to bless the people. After a moment of hesitation, Eugene slowly removed his missionary cross and blessed the people with it<sup>17</sup>.

In 1830 the passing on of missionary crosses from deceased Oblates to

new Oblates is already part of the Oblate tradition: "They [the missionary crosses] must be passed on to the new Oblates who will profit from such a heritage. *I wish to have proper care shown in this distribution*"<sup>18</sup>. Fr. Courtès, who wanted to keep the cross of Fr. Arnoux, got the following reply from the Founder: "As I read your modest plea regarding the cross of our Fr. Arnoux, I almost sided with your opinion, feeling that the reasons you gave were well founded, but to decide thus would occasion some inconvenience. We would in fact have to keep a forest of crosses in our houses for I hope, thanks to the goodness of God, that all those who die in the bosom of the Society will arrive in heaven laden with merits after having edified their brothers and dedicated their lives in the service of the Church and the sanctification of souls. Who will be the judge of the degree of heroism to which one must attain in order to be preferred, *supposing that we wish to grant this only to an excellence that is remarkable.*"<sup>19</sup>

This outward sign of the missionary Oblate cross continues to be crucial for the Founder. In 1852 he replies to Fr. Étienne Semeria, in Ceylon, when challenged by a Bishop who did not want the Oblates to wear their crosses: "As for Bishop Bravi's whim in not wanting our Oblates to wear the Crucifix of their profession openly, I cannot agree to that in the ordinary way of their life and in the places where they have missions. If there is any serious reason for not showing the crucifix openly in the city of Colombo, it could there be put under the cassock as is sometimes done elsewhere, so long as the cord is left outside so that it is clear *that a man is really wearing this sacred sign of our apostolic mission*"<sup>20</sup>.

And, when the Bishop seems to insist, he writes again to Fr. Semeria: "If necessary, it should be explained that with us the cross is an essential part of our religious habit. We do not wear a hood or a rosary hanging from our belts, but the cross is given on the day of profession as a distinctive sign of our ministry. *We do not therefore wear it ad libitum as other missionaries do*"<sup>21</sup>.

## 2. THE FOUNDER AND THE MISSION CROSSES

During the missions preached in cities and villages, a large crucifix played a major role. It was to be given to the Superior of the Mission, by the parish priest, to be venerated by all the missionaries of the Mission, and then used to bless the people<sup>22</sup>. At the end of the mission the cross remained "planted"<sup>23</sup> somewhere in the city or in the village. It suffices to read the account of the mission in Marignane, 1816, to see how important this cross was, in the overall conducting of the mission.<sup>24</sup> And, they must have been quite impressive, some of these missions, gathering sometimes several thousand people around the cross!<sup>25</sup>

Yet, it is precisely these mission crosses which so often were the visible objects of the disagreements and conflicts with the French authorities. There are many letters by the Founder, dealing with the necessity of defending these crosses from having them being taken down. The following is an example from 1831: "In heaven's name, gather closely around this good Saviour who has made his home amongst you, redouble your love and your reverence for his divine person, press your lips again and again to the altar where he lies. Prostrate yourselves before him and pay him all the honour that is his due. Give

him tangible proof of your desire to make reparation for all the outrages he is receiving in France. It is not only images of him that are being profaned: his very body has in these days been trodden underfoot and devoured by wicked men in the church of Saint Louis in Paris. A shudder goes through me as I felt it. This is where the illusion of freedom has brought us. For our part here, we have done our duty and rallied to the defense of the sacred wood of the Cross. They did not only want to take it away from us but to make us tear it down with our own hands. Twice his Lordship the Mayor sent us a member of the Town Council to persuade us to do that infamous thing on the pretext that it was the only way to save the town from a massacre. You can imagine how we replied and with what indignation we repulsed that infamous suggestion and so frustrated their wicked plan. But I would not be so bold as to say they will not have their way in the end, if anti-religious acts continue to get protection. The fact remains that *no priest of Jesus Christ will ever make himself an accomplice in such grave crimes nor be an idle on-looker while mankind's Saviour endures anew his passion*"<sup>26</sup>.

On the other hand, when the Founder can show even the French authorities that a Feast of the Cross in Marseilles (in 1831) can be conducted successfully and with no incidents, there is real joy: "It was consoling to think that, while in most French towns Christ had been profaned and his cross torn from the people's midst, our cross in the heart of an immense population soared above every head and was displayed as in the greatest days of its triumph. As a help to our people's piety and to make reparation as far as it lay in our power for the outrages that Jesus our God had

suffered elsewhere, we decided to give to this beautiful feast all the pomp that the people had the right to expect, in line with this, the full octave was announced at Calvaire, a triumphal arch was erected above the cross, the holy place was adorned with garlands of greenery, banners and tapestries and drew the attention of the passers-by, ravished with joy on learning of a ceremony so much in tune with their sentiments...

...Nothing like it has been seen since the mission. Good order, piety and joy overflowing amongst the faithful. The presence of the crowd around the cross went on throughout the day and it was quite a job to move them out from Calvaire – from the outer boundary I mean, needless to say that the church was full too – when we wanted to lock up at nightfall. There were no incidents, whether in the course of the procession or later, that could have given the least cause for alarm; on the contrary, tears flowed from all eyes as countless throats cried out with full voice: *Long live Jesus, long live his cross!*<sup>27</sup>

It is not surprising then that he replies somewhat harshly when Fr. Eugene Bruno Guigues, in 1838, suggests a few changes in the conducting of a mission: "If it were a question of modifying some customs, that would be understandable, but to change according to each one's caprice now one thing, again something else, that will never be as long as there is order and a sense of religion, and some religious who wish to preserve our traditions in the Congregation. Bishops and Cardinals carry the processional cross during Jubilees and times of disasters, and a missionary would blush if he were to carry this precious burden when it is a question of drawing God's mercy on a people gone astray! Would he not realise that it is so

much in conformity with the spirit of Jesus Christ to make public reparation in the name of the sinners he has come to save? I am not speaking about going bare-footed, this has never been prescribed, but the ceremony itself, the sermon on this subject, we do these things without a spirit of faith? What an acknowledgement!"<sup>28</sup>

### 3. THE FOUNDER, THE CROSS, AND CHRIST THE SAVIOUR

Having seen some traces above of the encounters between Eugene and the cross, we now turn to some related themes, which are needed in order to appreciate what the cross means for Eugene. Jesus Christ as Saviour is intrinsically linked to the cross, and such an important and vast theme that we can here only hint at its relevance for the theme of the cross.

In Eugene's earlier writings, where we see a more visible journey of conversion, his sins are very often put, as a contrast, before the God of mercy, who came among us only to call sinners, whom he holds to his heart, and for whom He is the Saviour<sup>29</sup>. In his notes from the retreat preceding his priestly ordination, in 1811, he begins by calling his many sins to mind, yet turns immediately to God, whom he calls "my Saviour", and whom he constantly recognises as being a God of mercy and a "good Father"<sup>30</sup>. As time passes, Eugene seems to be less preoccupied with his past sins, and writes more and more about sins and the Saviour in terms of redemption, and in terms of co-operating with the Saviour in the redemption of the world, by reaching out to the poor and the sinners, and by making reparation. In a *post scriptum* added to a letter to the missionaries of Aix, in July of 1816, he writes: "I wish

you to change the end of our litanies; instead of saying *Jesus Sacerdos*, we must say *Christe Salvator*. That is the aspect under which we ought to contemplate our divine Master. Our particular vocation is such that we are associated in a special manner with the redemption of men; the Blessed Liguori has likewise put his Congregation under the protection of the Saviour. Would that we all endeavour, by the sacrifice of our entire being, not to render his redemption useless, both in regard to ourselves and in regard to those whom we are called upon to evangelise.<sup>31</sup>

And, in a *Nota bene*, in the 1818 Constitutions and Rules: "What more sublime purpose than that of their Institute? Their founder is Jesus Christ, the very Son of God; their first fathers are the Apostles. *They are called to be the Saviour's co-workers, the co-redeemers of mankind...*"<sup>32</sup>

#### 4. THE FOUNDER AND THE BLOOD OF CHRIST<sup>33</sup>

A second crucial theme is the Blood of Christ, which relates both to the cross and to Jesus Christ Saviour. Being an important theme for Eugene and for the Church of his time, it certainly contained many images, and perhaps, for some, a particular devotion, yet for Eugene it remains an integral part of the whole mystery of salvation<sup>34</sup>. Before this God of mercy and of sinners, who calls Eugene and the Congregation to become co-redeemers, Eugene sees the Blood of Christ as the very price of the redemption of humankind. Further, his writings and his life are fully imbued with a kind of certainty that God really wants the salvation of each and everyone, and, therefore, the Blood of Christ is the price paid for all of us.

In his study on the "Blood of the Saviour", Émilien Lamirande claims that this theme constitutes one of the central themes of Eugene's spirituality, gradually growing to a deeper understanding of the Blood of the Saviour through which "humanity in its entirety was redeemed, the Church given to Christ as inheritance, and souls brought to life and infinitely exalted"<sup>35</sup>.

We already recognise the thoughts of the "early" Eugene, in 1808, where his sins are put before the God of mercy, and the Blood of Christ is a sign of redemption: "Ah, if it was in my power to betray the first vows I made in baptism, is it not open to me to follow my Master on to Calvary and do him homage afresh of my fidelity at the foot of his cross *and wash my robe in his blood after staining it with my own?*"<sup>36</sup>

From here on, according to Lamirande, Eugene progresses to a more universal consideration, to the dignity of the redeemed and of the Church<sup>37</sup>.

Towards the end of his life, in his pastoral letter of 1860, we find the following: "This union between the children of men and Jesus Christ was achieved on Calvary when the divine blood flowed in redemption and when grace was merited for them through the passion and death of the Saviour. Through grace we are united to the adorable Mediator and through him to his Father; grace is the bond that links us to him and makes us participants in his merits just as if we had died with him and his blood had mingled with ours and communicated to it the value *and power that are essentially inherent in the sacrifice of the God-man*"<sup>38</sup>.

Although redemption is for all, and the God of mercy always is close to sinners, the image of the Blood of Christ also brings out the necessity of the obligations that follow from our re-

demption. To remain fully a living part of the body of Christ, to let the Blood of Christ "run in our veins", we have to take our place at the Eucharistic banquet; if not, in a certain sense, we are no longer "of the same blood"<sup>39</sup>. Hence, redemption is a great gift, but, so to speak, it demands something from us as well.

However, redemption might seem to be for people individually, but we are gathered together in the Church, as a "purchased people" filled with dignity because of the price of our redemption. Yet, the Church is particularly great, in the eyes of Eugene, only because she is born by the Blood of Christ: "Born of the blood of God dying upon the cross, she will always exist in conformity to her origin; always, whether robed in purple or bound in dungeons, *she will carry this painful cross on which the world's Salvation is hanging*"<sup>40</sup>.

It is not only the Church which is precious, because of her great price, but every soul receives an infinite dignity through the Blood of Christ. This conviction on the part of Eugene is seen clearly from the beginning of his ministry as a priest, when he turned to the poor in the church of Saint Mary Magdalene, in 1813: "There is within you an immortal soul made in the image of God whom it is destined to possess one day; a soul redeemed at the cost of Jesus Christ's blood, which is more precious before God than all the earth's wealth, than all the kingdoms of this world; *a soul of which God is more jealous than he is of governing the entire universe*"<sup>41</sup>.

This was to be a leading theme throughout his life, which he passed on to his Oblates as a legacy: to be the "*glorious instruments of the eternal salvation of souls created in God's image and redeemed by his blood*"<sup>42</sup>.

### III. A COMPANION: FATHER TEMPIER

Perhaps, Fr. Tempier was the companion who most closely followed the Founder and who most of all shared the cross. From the very beginning, he is at the side of the Founder, supporting him and encouraging him: "whatever we may have done, how have we deserved this grace thus to share in the precious cross of the Son of God? ... It is a grace of predilection which God gives only to his saints; *how could we then complain?*"<sup>43</sup>

On July 8 1823, Tempier was named Vicar General of Marseilles (Eugene was named Vicar General two days before, on the day of the episcopal consecration of his uncle Fortuné) and this new ministry meant a vast amount of work. Fr. Tempier did decline at first, stating among his reasons that Eugene would be absent so much, which meant that the burden would be on the shoulders of Fr. Tempier himself. And this was exactly what happened. If not complaining, at least Fr. Tempier writes often to the Founder, with reports of all that has to be done and all the difficulties.<sup>44</sup> The difficulties increased with the French authorities, and after Eugene was named Bishop, there was suddenly a new conflict, as the authorities demanded that the nomination get royal approval before it was accepted. Fr. Tempier had a very difficult time trying to persuade the Founder to do what was asked of him. Being alone as Vicar General again, he writes to the Founder in 1835: "I think this is the last time that I shall speak to you about all this, for I am sick and tired of it. I can tell you that if a rest is so pleasing to you, I also call and desire a rest at least as much as you. Why is it that I have to be here and let my blood run dry for

twelve years, forever harnessed to the cart, in most difficult situations! Providence has always arranged things in such a way that, what ever be the crisis we have had to undergo, no matter what its nature, *I have ended up all alone to taste its sweetness...*<sup>45</sup>

Once Eugene took possession of the See of Marseilles, things became easier, both as regards the relation to the French authorities, and for Fr. Tempier as Vicar General. However, because of the deep friendship between him and Eugene the time between Eugene's death in 1861 and his own in 1870, was to be the most painful in his life. He spent months at the bedside of Eugene, announced his death to the Congregation, and had to deal with the opposition which came out into the open immediately after Eugene's death<sup>46</sup>. The successor of the Founder as Bishop of Marseilles was part of this opposition, and Fr. Tempier was directly involved in all the difficulties, trying to defend the memory of the Founder, as well as interests of the Congregation. On November 9, 1861, Fr. Joseph Fabre, the successor of the Founder as Superior General, wrote to Bishop Jeancard: "*He [Tempier] is really on the cross, this devoted Father who has done so much, for whom we did and are doing so little*"<sup>47</sup>.

The example of Fr. Tempier, of his entire life and of his spirituality, tells of an Oblate who very much lived in the shadow of the cross, who, together with the Founder and alone, accepted the cross, to let it be part of his life and his ministry.<sup>48</sup>

## V. THE CROSS, THE CONSTITUTIONS AND RULES, AND OBLATE LIFE

In this section will make a rapid reading of the Constitutions and Rules,

taking as our point of departure the 1982 Constitutions and Rules and making reference to earlier editions and some commentaries.

In the first part, on the Oblate charism, in the first chapter, on Mission, we find our first reference in C.4: "The cross of Jesus Christ is crucial to our mission. Like the apostle Paul, we "preach Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2: 2). If we bear in our body the death of Jesus, it is with the hope that the life of Jesus, too, may be seen in our body (cf. 2 Cor. 4: 10). Through the eyes of our crucified Saviour we see the world which he redeemed with his blood, desiring that those in whom he continues to suffer will know also the power of his resurrection (cf. Phil. 3: 10)."

This Constitution is read together with two excerpts from 1826, one on "to preach Christ crucified", and the other on "with Jesus on the cross"<sup>49</sup>. The 1853, the 1928 and the 1966 Constitutions and Rules have all incorporated these<sup>50</sup>. In his apostolate, the Oblate shares in the passion and the cross, which calls for self-denial, but also for daring. The 1966 C. 57 speaks of being "witnesses to the truth" and servants, challenging the Oblate to practice what he preaches and never to act out of self-interest<sup>51</sup>.

We recognise immediately some themes from the Founder: the Blood of our crucified Saviour redeems the world, which calls us to reparation, to be witnesses in humility and truth. However, in today's context, we often speak of the cross together with Easter and the joy of the resurrection, and we are also challenged to look at the world through the eyes of the crucified Saviour, to let this purify the way we look at the world and our apostolate<sup>52</sup>.

Our second reference is C. 24, on

the vow of obedience, quoting Phil. 2: 8 "became obedient unto death, even death on a cross". We find this only in 1966, speaking of the extent of our obedience<sup>53</sup>.

Thirdly, we find in the section on "Living in Faith" C. 34 on "Suffering and Penance". The 1853 and 1928 editions have kept the verbatim version of the 1826 edition, whereas the 1966 edition is the basic text of the 1982 edition<sup>54</sup>. In his commentary on the 1982 edition of the Constitutions and Rules, Fr. Fernand Jetté has a rather lengthy passage on this particular Constitution, which he treats as missionary asceticism within the frame of a total oblation, where self-denial and self-discipline call forth a generosity and a conforming of one's will with the will of God<sup>55</sup>.

Fourthly, in the section on "Religious Commitment", C. 59, speaking of First Vows for the novice. None of the other editions has the wording of C. 59.

Fifthly, in the section on "Religious Commitment", C. 63 and 64, on the Oblate cross and the Religious Habit. The 1826, 1853, and 1928 editions have the same article (although not verbatim) and the 1966 edition states only that "*the crucifix received on the day of their perpetual oblation will be their only distinctive sign*"<sup>56</sup>.

In the 1826 edition, the cross, as we have already seen, is also mentioned in the section on how to conduct a mission<sup>57</sup>. However, there is also a clause on a tradition of having a cross in every new house, in a conspicuous place, which was to be placed in the hands of the dead Oblates. The cross that went with the Oblate in his grave, was not to be the cross of profession, as this cross was to be passed on to a new Oblate<sup>58</sup>.

As we look at the cross today, it seems so often to go together with the

question of a good and loving God and all the suffering and evil around us. It is a question of why all this is allowed to happen. Yet, we are asked by our Constitutions and Rules to look at this through the eyes of our crucified Saviour, to recall that all those who suffer become participants in the sufferings of Christ, and we are called to integrate all this in our own lives. As Fr. Jetté writes, on Jesus Christ as the first formator of Oblates: "What Jesus insists on most is that they [the apostles] be able to go beyond a purely human and earthly perception of the Kingdom of God. The criterion he gives them is the mystery of the cross, of salvation through the cross – a scandal to the Jews, *foolishness to the pagans, but the very wisdom of God*"<sup>59</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

Certainly, the cross is about suffering. But, in contemplating the cross and the suffering of Christ, the Founder sees the love of God, Saviour and Redeemer, and here he finds his vocation and the vocation for all Oblates. To live this vocation means suffering, the kind of suffering that comes with the denouncing of the spirit of this world, the suffering of self-denial. Further, what really makes it suffering is the extent of his response before the cross, a response which calls him to a total giving, a total generosity and a total love.

Being mindful of our weaknesses, we Oblates will never lose our dignity as redeemed by Christ our Saviour, a dignity which makes us witnesses and servants..., and which calls us, not to decrease, but, to increase and to grow as persons. Yet, the Founder stresses early on a certain *passivité*, where we are happy to recognise and to receive from

God his many gifts, and where we respond fully to his call to be Oblates, to be his co-operators in redeeming the world.

FREDRIK EMANUELSON

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> First day, second meditation of the retreat made at the seminary in Aix, December of 1814 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 15, no. 130, p. 81.

<sup>2</sup> For an overview of the development of spiritualities of the cross, see, for example, AHERN, B. M., "Croce", in *Nuovo Dizionario di Spiritualità*, Roma, Edizioni Paoline, 1979 p. 366-375.

<sup>3</sup> Sometimes the cross is not only an object, but also a symbol and a gesture, as in a meditation on the sign of the cross, D'ADDIO, A., *Cristo crocifisso e la Chiesa abbandonata*, Frascati, 1978, p. 85-86.

<sup>4</sup> September 15, 1809 letter to his grandmother in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 14, no. 59, p. 133-136.

<sup>5</sup> Conference for ordination (subdiaconate), December 23, 1809 in *Oblate*

<sup>6</sup> "My Mass intentions", December 25-27, 1811 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 14, no. 100, p. 231.

<sup>7</sup> End of December, 1809 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 14, no. 101, p. 231.

<sup>8</sup> June 19, 1810 letter to his mother in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 14, no. 71, p. 163.

<sup>9</sup> See RAMBERT T., *Vie de Monseigneur Charles-Joseph-Eugene de Mazenod*, vol. I, Tours, A. Mame et Fils, 1883, p. 109. RAMBERT II, p. 47. November 26, 1858 letter to Father Augustine Gaudet in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 2, no. 260, p. 202-203.

<sup>10</sup> Circular letter no. 2 of January 29, 1861 in *Oblate Writings* II, vol. 2, no. 116, p. 171-172.

<sup>11</sup> D'ADDIO, Angelo, *Cristo crocifisso....*, p. 88.

<sup>12</sup> October 9, 1815 letter to Father Tempier in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 4, p. 6.

<sup>13</sup> See RAMBERT I, p. 284.

<sup>14</sup> Actually, they were not that common in

Aix. Tempier added a line in a letter to the Founder, asking him to buy some missionary crosses in Paris, since it was hard to find them in Aix. August 25, 1817 letter to the Founder in *Oblate Writings* II, vol. 2, no. 6, p. 26.

<sup>15</sup> October 9, 1816 letter to Charles de Forbin-Janson *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 14, p. 24.

<sup>16</sup> CC and RR's of 1818, Second Part, Chapter One, "Of the Other Principal Observances" in *Missions*, 78 (1951) p. 58.

<sup>17</sup> See RAMBERT I, p. 321.

<sup>18</sup> March 8, 1830 letter to Father Hippolyte Courtès, *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 7, no. 343, p. 196.

<sup>19</sup> March 13, 1830 letter to Father Hippolyte Courtès, *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 7, no. 344, p. 196.

<sup>20</sup> April 16, 1852 letter to Father S. Semeria in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 4, no. 27, p. 94. See also June 1, 1860 letter to Father Augustine Gaudet in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 2, no. 274, p. 230.

<sup>21</sup> July 2, 1852 letter to Father E. Semeria in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 4, no. 30, p. 102.

<sup>22</sup> See CC and RR's of 1818, Part One, Chapter Two, par. 2, *Règlement particulier pour les missions* in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 28. The Via Crucis would have been included in the mission, but could obviously take place at any Oblate church or chapel, as for instance, at Calvaire in 1821. See RAMBERT I, p. 332.

<sup>23</sup> See CC and RR's of 1818... *Règlement particulier pour les missions*, p. 34.

<sup>24</sup> RAMBERT I, p. 224-226.

<sup>25</sup> The accounts of the missions in Marseilles and Aix in 1820, as well as a later mission in Marseilles in 1836, are some examples of successful missions. See RAMBERT I, p. 309-321 and RAMBERT I, p. 573-578, even if Leflon discards some of the reports from the earlier missions as being obsolete and "not exactly characterized by sobriety and brevity". LEFLON II, p. 114.

<sup>26</sup> March 19, 1831 letter to Father Vincent Mille in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 8, no. 387, p. 16-17. See also September 13, 1830 letter to Father Tempier in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 7, no. 363, p. 214-215.

<sup>27</sup> May 7, 1831 letter to Father Vincent Mille in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 8, no. 390, p. 23-24. See also RAMBERT I, p. 573-578 and RAMBERT I, p. 732.

<sup>28</sup> January 26, 1838 letter to Father Eugene Bruno Guigues in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 9, no. 657, p. 83.

<sup>29</sup> Retreat notes of October 1808 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 14, no. 28, p. 58-59.

<sup>30</sup> Retreat notes of 1811 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 14, no. 95 p. 213-214.

<sup>31</sup> July 1816 letter to the missionaries of Aix, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 12, p. 20.

<sup>32</sup> CC and RR's of 1818, Part One, Chapter One, par. 3, in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 15. See also CC and RR's of 1982, p. 14.

<sup>33</sup> Closely linked with the theme of the blood of Christ is the theme of the Sacred Heart. However, important it may be, it is too vast to be covered in this article and will be found treated in a separate article. For an outline of the theme see BAFFIE, Eugène, *Esprit et vertus du missionnaire des pauvres C.-J.-Eugène de Mazenod*, Paris Delhomme et Briguët, 1894, p. 169-184.

<sup>34</sup> See GRATTON, Henri, "La dévotion salvatorienne du Fondateur aux premières années de son sacerdoce" in *Etudes oblates*, I (1942), p. 164.

<sup>35</sup> See LAMIRANDE, Emilien, "Le sang du Sauveur, un thème central de la doctrine spirituelle de Mgr de Mazenod", in *Etudes oblates* 18 (1959), p. 363-381.

<sup>36</sup> Spiritual Conference of March 19, 1809 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 14, no. 48, p. 110.

<sup>37</sup> See LAMIRANDE, Emilien, "Le sang du Sauveur..." p. 118.

<sup>38</sup> Pastoral letter of February 16, 1860, quoted in LAMIRANDE, Émilien, "Le sang du Sauveur..." p. 119.

<sup>39</sup> Pastoral letter of February 20, 1859, quoted in LAMIRANDE, Émilien, "Le sang du Sauveur..." p. 121.

<sup>40</sup> Pastoral letter of February 19, 1845, quoted in LAMIRANDE, Émilien, "Le sang du Sauveur..." p. 127.

<sup>41</sup> Instruction no. 3, quoted in LAMIRANDE, Émilien, "Le sang du Sauveur..." p. 130.

<sup>42</sup> Pastoral letter of February 28, 1848, quoted in LAMIRANDE, Émilien, "Le sang du Sauveur..." p. 132.

<sup>43</sup> October 23, 1817 letter of Father Tempier to the Founder in *Oblate Writings* II, vol. 2, no. 8, p. 29.

<sup>44</sup> See the biographical sketch by BEAUDOIN, Yvon, *François de Paule Henry Tempier* in *Oblate Writings* II, vol. 1, p. 49-57.

<sup>45</sup> August 24, 1835 letter of Father Tempier to the Founder in *Oblate Writings* II, vol. 2, no. 83, p. 117-118.

<sup>46</sup> See BEAUDOIN, Yvon, *François de Paule Henry Tempier* in *Oblate Writings* II, vol. 1, p. 191-192. See also TEMPIER, Henry, circular letter no. 2, January 29, 1861 in *Oblate Writings* II, vol. 2, no. 116, p. 171-172.

<sup>47</sup> November 9, 1861 letter of Father Fabre to Bishop Jeancard quoted in BEAUDOIN, Yvon, *François de Paule Henry Tempier* in *Oblate Writings* II, vol. 1, p. 219.

<sup>48</sup> It is worthwhile reading the obituary as recorded in *Notices nécrologiques*, II, 85, 96, 101, 102, an excerpt of which is quoted in BEAUDOIN, Yvon, *François de Paule Henry Tempier* in *Oblate Writings* II, vol. 1, p. 186-187; 220-223.

<sup>49</sup> CC and RR's of 1826 pars prima, caput tertium, par. 1, *De praedicando verbo divino*, art. 5; pars secunda, caput secundum, par. 3. *De mortificatione et corporis afflictationibus*, art. 1.

<sup>50</sup> "To preach Christ crucified", CC and RR's of 1853 (verbatim), pars prima, caput quartum, par. 1, art. V; 1928 edition, art. 98 (verbatim); 1966 edition, constitution 57; "With Jesus on the cross", 1853 edition pars secunda, caput secundum, par. III art. I; 1928 edition, art. 263; 1966 edition, constitutions 14, 15, and 23.

<sup>51</sup> See *The Congregation Renewed - A Reading Guide for the Constitutions and Rules*, Rome, General House, 1968, p. 174-175.

<sup>52</sup> See JETTÉ, Fernand, *O.M.I. The Apostolic Man: A commentary on the 1982 edition of the Oblate Constitutions and Rules*, Rome, General House, 1992, p. 58.

<sup>53</sup> See 1966 edition of CC and RR's, C. 33 and 37.

<sup>54</sup> CC and RR's of 1826 pars secunda, caput primum par. 3, *De obedientiae voto*; 1853 edition, pars secunda, caput primum,

par. III; 1928 edition, art. 222, 230 and 232; 1966 edition, constitution 33.

<sup>55</sup> See JETTÉ, Fernand, *O.M.I. The Apostolic Man*: .... p. 207-213.

<sup>56</sup> CC and RR's of 1966, C 41; 1826 edition, pars secunda, caput tertium, par. 3, *De vestibus ac refectione*, art. 3; 1853 edition, pars secunda, caput tertium, par. III, art. II; 1928 edition, art. 309. On the topic of the Oblate cross as a distinctive sign, there is an article from 1936 in *Missions* entitled, "Pourquoi l'Oblat porte-t-il la croix sur sa poitrine?" which re-echoes the Founder's October 9, 1816 letter to Charles de Forbin-Janson. See *Missions*, no. 256, mars 1936, p. 129-132.

<sup>57</sup> CC and RR's of 1826, pars prima, caput secundum, par. 2, *Prescriptum pro missionibus*, art. 21, 64 and 67.

<sup>58</sup> CC and RR's of 1826, pars secunda, caput quartum, par. 2, *De exsequiis*, art. 4 and 5. In the Honorat manuscript, immediately after article 11 of chapter four in the second part, the Founder wrote: "In every house of the Society, in order to provide the subjects who dwell there some salutary thoughts on death, there will always be retained a crucifix which will be placed in a conspicuous location of some common room of the house. This is the crucifix which will be placed in the hands of the deceased and will be buried with him in the coffin", in *Etudes oblates*, 2 (1943), footnote 132, p. [45].

<sup>59</sup> "Jesus Christ, the First Formator of the Oblate", in JETTÉ, Fernand, *The Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate: Addresses and Written Texts, 1975-1985*, Rome, General House, 1985, p. 239.

## OBLATE FEASTS

*Summary: Introduction. I. The period 1825 to 1832. II. The Oblate calendar of 1832. III. The Oblate calendar in the period 1833 to 1965. IV. The Oblate calendar from 1832 to 1929. V. After Vatican II.*

### INTRODUCTION

Part Two of *Oblate Prayer*, the most recent edition (1986) of the Oblate prayer manual, is entitled "The Celebration of Oblate Feasts". All of the occasions mentioned in the manual are firmly established in the traditions of the Congregation and most of them take their origins from the practices of the Founder and his companions.

Under the title *Oblate Feasts*, we shall attempt to follow the historical development of the Oblate calendar and the various celebrations therein which, at different times, have been approved by the Holy See.

### I. THE PERIOD 1825 TO 1832

Already in 1825, the Congregation – then known as the Missionaries of Provence – obtained a Rescript authorizing its members to celebrate the feast of Blessed Alphonsus Liguori. The request was made in the name of the then Bishop of Marseilles, Bishop Fortuné de Mazenod, uncle of the Oblate Founder. However, we can well believe that it was the initiative of his Vicar General, Fr. Eugene de Mazenod. The privilege of celebrating this office had previously been obtained for the clergy and Chapter of the Marseille Cathedral.

The Founder had a special regard for Blessed Alphonsus Liguori and maintained a close relationship with his followers, the Redemptorists. By a Re-

script of the Holy See, dated April 28, 1826, he obtained that his newly approved religious family should benefit from the same "graces, favours, indults, privileges and indulgences" as the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer. In fact, the Oblate calendar approved in 1832 combines the offices celebrated in the Redemptorist calendar with some of those "pro aliquibus locis" and one or other Franciscan office.

The first Rescript for a celebration granted to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, after the approval of the Congregation by Pope Leo XII in 1826, was for the feast of Blessed Leonard of Port Maurice. Fr. de Mazenod had a special devotion to this Franciscan preacher of parish missions<sup>1</sup>, who was to be canonized by Pope Pius IX and declared patron saint of parish mission preachers by Pius XI. The Rescript is dated April 26, 1826, and prescribes the celebration of the office on November 26.

By 1832 the Oblates were preaching missions and even had established communities in a number of dioceses. Their Rule obliged them to recite the office in common and, according to the ecclesiastical regulations of the time, this meant a certain inconvenience arising from the change of calendar according to diocese. It was decided to present a petition to the Holy See for special faculties and, at the same time, to present a request for a special Oblate calendar. The Rescript of the Sacred Congregation of Rites granting

the faculties and the calendar is dated February 17, 1832.

The calendar was to be revised in 1868 and again, after the liturgical reforms of Pope Pius X, in 1913. The last major reform before Vatican Council II was by the Rescript of the Sacred Congregation of Rites dated January 7, 1929.

Petitions for individual offices or variations in the Oblate calendar were made to the Holy See and granted by various Rescripts in the intervals between these major calendar changes. These Rescripts will be dealt with in their respective places, either in the comparative calendar or in the text.

## II. THE OBLATE CALENDAR OF 1832

The Founder did not keep a diary from 1826 to 1837. From this source we might have gleaned some of the motivations in his choice of feasts for the calendar presented in 1832 to the Holy See.

However, most of the feasts chosen have an obvious connection with the spirituality of Fr. de Mazenod and of the Congregation which he founded. The feasts dedicated to the instruments of Christ's Passion and Death and to Mary's participation in those events reflect the popular expression of the events of Salvation at the time, but they also reflect the very special devotion of Fr. de Mazenod since the "bitter tears" he shed during his deeply religious experience while attending the liturgy of Good Friday 1807.<sup>2</sup> Thus, among the moveable feasts we have the Commemoration of the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy Shroud, the Precious Blood of Jesus, the Crown of Thorns, the Five Holy Wounds, the Lance and Nails, the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Seven Sorrows of Mary.

The fixed-date feasts reflect primarily the Founder's devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary: Espousals of Mary (January 23), Office of the Conception of Mary commemorating the approval of the Congregation by the Holy See (February 17), Our Lady Help of Christians (May 23), Our Lady of Mount Carmel (July 21), the Sacred Heart of Mary (Sunday in the Octave of the Assumption), Maternity of Mary (2nd Sunday of October), Intercession of Mary (3rd Sunday of October), Conception of Mary (December 8), Transport of the Holy House of Mary (December 10), and Mary's awaiting the Birth of her Son (December 18).

The feast of St. Gabriel is included no doubt because of the Archangel's role in Mary's Annunciation. St. Hyacinth was renowned for his devotion to Mary. St. Roch was patron saint of plague victims and Fr. de Mazenod had heroically attended to the spiritual needs of plague victims and eventually contracted the disease himself in 1814.<sup>3</sup>

St. John Nepomucene had, reputedly, been martyred for his determination to preserve the seal of Confession and therefore was regarded as the patron saint of confessors. Father de Mazenod and his missionaries spent long hours in the ministry of the confessional. It was natural that the confessors' patron should be included in their calendar.

St. Ubaldus, bishop of Gubbio, was a zealous pastor, a natural model for the young Vicar General of Marseille. St. Raymond of Peñafort, as the patron saint of canonists would seem also to have been regarded by the Oblate Founder as among his patrons.

St. Joseph, spouse of Mary, held a special place in the devotion of Father de Mazenod. The third Sunday after Easter was chosen by him as the occa-

sion to commemorate the Saint's powers of intercession. Also, whenever the office of Mary, under whatever title, was celebrated, a commemoration was to be made of St. Joseph.

### III. THE OBLATE CALENDAR IN THE PERIOD 1833 TO 1965

The Chapter of 1837 asked that the Superior General (Bishop de Mazenod) appoint some Fathers to compose offices proper to the Congregation.<sup>4</sup> Eventually, Fathers Semeria and Mille were appointed to this task but, for reasons that are not apparent, the work was not ready until 1851 and even then was not presented to Rome for approval. It was not until 1868 – and therefore after the Founder's death – that approval was obtained for a new Oblate calendar. In the intervening 20 years, as is stated in the Rescript of approval, a number of changes had been made in the previous calendar without recourse to the Holy See. It was time to have things put in order and the 1867 Chapter expressed the desire that this be done. The Rescript approving the new calendar is dated February 27, 1868.

In 1876, the shrine of the Sacred Heart at Montmartre, Paris, was entrusted to the care of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. This event marks a greater intensity in devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the Congregation. The 1879 Chapter voted unanimously that the Holy See be requested to raise the classification of the feast in the Oblate calendar and to include in that calendar the feast of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque to whom revelations about the devotion had been made.<sup>5</sup>

In the course of the following years, the various Rescripts obtained

reflect the origins and spread of the Congregation. The feasts of St. Lazarus,<sup>6</sup> St. Mary and St. Martha<sup>7</sup> were given greater prominence in the calendar because of special devotion to these saints in the diocese of Marseille. As the Congregation developed in English speaking countries, the feasts of St. Patrick and St. George were classed as "double major".<sup>8</sup> The German Province was established in 1898 and the following General Chapter requested that the feast of St. Boniface be also included.<sup>9</sup>

When an office of Our Lady of Lourdes was approved, the 1893 Chapter requested that this too be placed on the list of Oblate feasts.<sup>10</sup>

Various other Rescripts concerning concessions or privileges accorded to the Oblate Congregation are mentioned in the text or footnotes of the comparative calendar. A Rescript which is not mentioned there, however, is that dated April 12, 1946. Fr. Hilaire Balmès, then Vicar General and formerly Superior of the International Scholasticate, requested that the feast of St. Thomas Aquinas be celebrated in Oblate scholasticates as a feast ranking Double of 2nd Class. The privilege was granted in the aforementioned Rescript.

### IV. THE OBLATE CALENDAR 1832 TO 1929

The following shows the development of the Oblate Calendar throughout the period 1832 to 1929. Only the days in each month on which feasts in that calendar were celebrated are indicated. Where there are moveable feasts within a month they are indicated at the end of the month. The other moveable feasts are given in a separate list at the end of the month – by – month list.

Prior to the liturgical reform of Vatican Council II, liturgical celebrations were classified according to the following degrees: *Simple*, *Semidou-*

*ble*, *Double*, *Double major*, *Double of 2nd Class (sometimes with Octave)*, *Double of 1st Class (sometimes with Octave)*.

### January

	OMI Calendar 1832	OMI Calendar 1868	OMI Calendar 1913	OMI Calendar 1929
19				The Holy Family <sup>11</sup> <i>Double major</i>
23	The Espousals of the B.V.M. <i>Double major</i>	The Espousals of the B.V.M. <i>Double major</i>	St Raymond of Peña- fort now on this date in Universal Calendar <i>Semidouble</i>	
28	St Raymond of Peñafort <i>Semidouble</i>	Feast of St Raymond of Peñafort trans- ferred to February 9		

### February

	OMI Calendar 1832	OMI Calendar 1868	OMI Calendar 1913	OMI Calendar 1929
6		St Titus <i>Double</i>	St. Titus now in Uni- versal Calendar <i>Double</i>	
9		St Raymond of Peña- fort later restored to January 23 <i>Semidouble</i>		
11			Apparition of O.L. of Lourdes now in Uni- versal Calendar <sup>12</sup> <i>Double major</i>	
17	Office of the Conception of the B.V.M. with prayer of thanksgiving <i>Double major</i>	Office of the C Conception of the B.V.M. with prayer of thanks- giving <i>Double major</i>	In each OMI Church and Oratory one Mass of the Immaculate Conception with prayer of thanksgiv- ing	Solemn Com- memoration of the Immaculate Con- ception of the B.V.M. In all Masses the prayer of thanksgiving <sup>13</sup> <i>Double 2nd Class</i>
26		St Margaret of Cortona <i>Double</i>	Feast of St Margaret no longer mentioned	

### March

OMI Calendar 1832	OMI Calendar 1868	OMI Calendar 1913	OMI Calendar 1929
18	St Gabriel, the Archangel <i>Double major</i>		
19	St Joseph <i>Double 1st Class</i>	St Joseph now in Universal Calendar as <i>Double 2<sup>nd</sup> Class</i> in OMI Calendar <i>Double 1<sup>st</sup> Class</i>	
22	St. Gabriel, the Archangel <i>Double major</i>		
24			St Gabriel, the Archangel, now in Universal Calendar <i>Double major</i>

### April

OMI Calendar 1832	OMI Calendar 1868	OMI Calendar 1913	OMI Calendar 1929
16		14	
24	The Good Thief <sup>f15</sup> <i>Double</i>	St Fidelis of Sigmar- ingen now in Univer- sal Calendar <i>Double</i>	
27	St Fidelis of Sigmaringen <i>Double</i>		St Peter Canisius <i>Double</i>
28	St Paul of the Cross <i>Double</i>	St Paul of the Cross now in Universal Calendar <i>Double</i>	

### May

OMI Calendar 1832	OMI Calendar 1868	OMI Calendar 1913	OMI Calendar 1929
11		O.L. of Mercy <i>Double major</i>	O.L. of Mercy <sup>16</sup> <i>Double major</i>
15	St Isidore, farmer <i>Double</i>		
16	St John Nepomucene <i>Double</i>	St Ubaldus <i>Semidouble</i>	St Ubaldus Now in Universal Calendar <i>Semidouble</i>
21	St Ubaldus <i>Semidouble</i>		
22	St Ubaldus <i>Semidouble</i>		
24	O.L. Help of Christians <i>Double major</i>	O.L. Help of Christians <i>Double major</i>	
31	O.L. of Graces <i>Double major</i>	St Angela Merici formerly in OMI Calendar for June 1; now in Universal Calendar <i>Double</i>	O.L. Mediatrix of all Graces <sup>17</sup> <i>Double major</i>

### June

OMI Calendar 1832	OMI Calendar 1868	OMI Calendar 1913	OMI Calendar 1929
1	St. Angela Merici <i>Double</i>		
15	St Germana <i>Double</i>		
16	St John Francis Regis <i>Double</i>		
29	A commemoration of all the apostles in the Office and Mass of Sts. Peter and Paul		

## July

	OMI Calendar 1832	OMI Calendar 1868	OMI Calendar 1913	OMI Calendar 1929
3			All Pope Saints <i>Double major</i>	
4				All Pope Saints <i>Double major</i>
15			Holy Redeemer formerly 3 <sup>rd</sup> Sunday of July <i>Double major</i>	Holy Redeemer <i>Double major</i>
16	Triumph of the Holy Cross <i>Double major</i>		B.V.M. of Mount Carmel <i>Double major</i>	
17		Humility of the B.V.M. <i>Double major</i>	St Alexis now in Universal Calendar <i>Semidouble</i>	
21	B.V.M. of Mount Carmel <i>Double major</i>	St Alexis <i>Semidouble</i>		
25		St Anne <i>Double 2<sup>nd</sup> Class</i>		
26			St Anne now in Universal Calendar <i>Double 2<sup>nd</sup> Class</i>	
2 <sup>nd</sup> Sunday		Commemoration of all Pope Saints <i>Double major</i>		
3 <sup>rd</sup> Sunday		Holy Redeemer <i>Double 2<sup>nd</sup> Class</i>		
4 <sup>th</sup> Sunday		B.V.M. of Help <i>Double major</i>		

## August

	OMI Calendar 1832	OMI Calendar 1868	OMI Calendar 1913	OMI Calendar 1929
2		St Alphonsus Liguori <i>Double major</i>	St Alphonsus Liguori now in Universal Calendar <i>Double major</i>	
9				St John Marie Vianney <sup>18</sup>
13		B.V.M. Refuge of Sinners <i>Double major</i>		
16	St Roch <i>Double</i>	St Roch <i>Double</i>		
17			St Hyacinth now in Universal Calendar <i>Double</i>	
18		St Hyacinth <i>Double</i>		
19				St John Eudes <i>Double</i>
25		St Louis King of France <i>Double major</i>	St Louis now in Universal Calendar <i>Semidouble</i>	
26	St Hyacinth <i>Double</i>			
Sunday in Octave of Assumption		St Joachim <i>Double 2<sup>nd</sup> Class</i>		
Sunday after Octave	Sacred Heart of B.V.M. <i>Double major</i>	Most Pure Heart of Mary <i>Double major</i>		

## September

	OMI Calendar 1832	OMI Calendar 1868	OMI Calendar 1913	OMI Calendar 1929
3	B.V.M. Mother of the Divine Shepherd <i>Double major</i>			

## October

	OMI Calendar 1832	OMI Calendar 1868	OMI Calendar 1913	OMI Calendar 1929
1		St Remigius <i>Double</i>	St Remigius now in Universal Calendar <i>Simple</i>	
3				St Therese of Lisieux <i>Double</i>
15		St Teresa of Avila <i>Double 2<sup>nd</sup> Class</i>	St Teresa Of Avila <i>Double</i>	
17		St Margaret Mary Alacoque <sup>19</sup>		
22	St Raphael the Archangel <i>Double major</i>			
24		St Raphael the Archangel <i>Double major</i>		St Raphael the Archangel now in Universal Calendar <i>Double major</i>
30	The Holy Relics <i>Double major</i>			
2 <sup>nd</sup> Sunday	Mother of the B.V.M. <i>Double major</i>	Mother of the B.V.M. <i>Double major</i>		
3 <sup>rd</sup> Sunday	Purity of the B.V.M. <i>Double major</i>	Purity of the B.V.M. <i>Double major</i>		
4 <sup>th</sup> Sunday	Intercession of the B.V.M. <sup>20</sup> <i>double major</i>			

## November

	OMI Calendar 1832	OMI Calendar 1868	OMI Calendar 1913	OMI Calendar 1929
5			Holy Relics preserved in OMI churches and oratories <i>Double major</i>	Holy Relics <i>Double major</i>
13		St Stanislas Kostka <i>Double</i>		
14		St Didacus <i>Semidouble</i>		
26	Bl. Leonard of Port Maurice one solemn Mass in each house	St Leonard of Port Maurice <i>Double</i>		St Leonard of Port Maurice <sup>21</sup> <i>Double</i>
27			Miraculous Medal of the B.V.M. <i>Double major</i>	Miraculous Medal of the B.V.M. <i>Double major</i>
Sunday after All Saints		B.V.M. of Suffrages <i>Double major</i>		

## December

	OMI Calendar 1832	OMI Calendar 1868	OMI Calendar 1913	OMI Calendar 1929
3		St Francis Xavier <i>Double major</i>	St Francis Xavier Now in Universal Calendar <i>Double major</i>	
8	Conception of the B.V.M. <i>Double 1<sup>st</sup> Class</i>	Immaculate Concep- tion of the B.V.M. Titular of the whole Congregation <i>Double 1<sup>st</sup> Class with Octave</i>	Immaculate Concep- tion of the B.V.M. Titular of the whole Congregation, now in Universal Calendar <i>Double 1<sup>st</sup> Class with Octave</i>	Special to OMI Calendar "with privileged Octave of 3rd Order"
10	Transfer of the Holy House of the B.V.M. Loreto <i>Double major</i>	Transfer of the Holy House of the B.V.M. Loreto <i>Double major</i>		Transfer of the Holy House of the B.V.M. Loreto <sup>22</sup> <i>Double major</i>

- 18 The B.V.M. The B.V.M. awaiting  
awaiting the the birth of her Son<sup>23</sup>  
birth of her *Double major*  
Son  
*Double major*
- 26 Commemoration of  
all Martyrs at Lauds,  
Mass and Vespers

### Moveable Feasts I

	OMI Calendar 1832	OMI Calendar 1868
3 <sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Epiphany		The Flight of O.L.J.C. into Egypt <sup>24</sup> <i>Double major</i>
4 <sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany		The Finding of the Child Jesus in the Temple <i>Double major</i>
Tuesday after Septuage- sima Sunday		The Prayer of O.L.J.C. on the Mount of Olives <i>Double major</i>
Tuesday after Sexage- sima Sunday		Commemoration of the Passion of O.L.J.C. <i>Double major</i>
Friday after Quinquage- sima Sunday	Commemoration of the Passion of O.L.J.C. <i>Double major</i>	The Crown of Thorns of O.L.J.C. <i>Double major</i>
Friday after 1 <sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent	The Holy Shroud of O.L.J.C. <i>Double major</i>	The Lance and Nails of O.L.J.C. <i>Double major</i>
Friday after 2 <sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Lent	The Precious Blood of O.L.J.C. <i>Double major</i>	The Holy Shroud of O.L.J.C. <i>Double major</i>
Friday after 3 <sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Lent	The Crown of Thorns of O.L.J.C. <i>Double major</i>	The Five Holy Wounds of O.L.J.C. <i>Double major</i>

## Moveable Feasts II

	OMI Calendar 1832	OMI Calendar 1868	OMI Calendar 1913 and 1929
Friday after 4 <sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent	The Five Holy Wounds of O.L.J.C. <i>Double major</i>	The Precious Blood of O.L.J.C. <i>Double major</i>	
Friday after Passion Sunday	The Seven Sorrows of the B.V.M. <i>Double major</i>		
Friday after Low Sunday	The Lance and Nails of O.L.J.C. <i>Double major</i>		
2 <sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Easter		The Holy Sepulchre of O.L.J.C. <i>Double major</i>	
3 <sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Easter	Intercession of St Joseph <i>Double 2<sup>nd</sup> Class</i>	Intercession of St Joseph <i>Double 2<sup>nd</sup> Class</i>	
Monday before As- cension Thursday		B.V.M. of Mercy <i>Double major</i>	
Friday after Octave of Corpus Christi	Sacred Heart of Jesus <i>Double 2<sup>nd</sup> Class</i>	Sacred Heart of Jesus <sup>25</sup> <i>Double 2<sup>nd</sup> Class</i>	
Saturday after Octave of Corpus Christi			The Most Pure Heart of Mary <i>Double major</i>

## V. AFTER VATICAN COUNCIL II

After Vatican Council II, there were major changes in the liturgy and in the universal calendar. These changes also affected the calendars approved for individual Congregations. The celebrations of the liturgical year were to give more emphasis to the feasts of the Lord and the mysteries of salvation. In the words of the Council: "The minds of the faithful are to be directed towards feasts of the Lord whereby the mysteries of salvation are celebrated throughout the year".<sup>26</sup> Instead of the Oblate calendar (*Ordo*), a leaflet is published

each year since 1973. It lists the days proper to the Oblate Congregation<sup>27</sup>: the anniversary of the foundation of the Congregation, in 1816, (January 25), the anniversary of the approval of the Constitutions and Rules by Pope Leo XII, in 1826 (February 17), the anniversary of the death of Saint Eugene de Mazenod (May 21), the feast of Blessed Joseph Gérard (May 29), the day of commemoration of all deceased Oblates (November 3), and the Solemnity of Mary's Immaculate Conception under which title she is the principal titular and patroness of the Congregation (December 8).

An addendum to the calendar also reminds Oblates of the anniversaries of the deaths of other members of the Congregation whose Causes for canonization have been introduced: Fr. Joseph Cebula (April 28), Fr. Charles Dominic Albini (May 20), Bishop Vital Grandin (June 3), Bro. Anthony Kowalczyk (July 10) and Bishop Ovide Charlebois (November 20).

A reminder is also added of the present Superior General's name day (the feast of his patron saint) and the anniversary of the canonisation of Saint Eugene de Mazenod (December 3, 1995).

*Oblate Prayer*, the most recent edition of the prayer manual of the Congregation, is more explicit in promoting traditional Oblate feasts. The second part of the manual lists fifteen occasions or seasons in the course of the year which are recommended for special commemoration by Oblate communities. Each occasion is introduced by a narration from the Founder's life or by quotations from his writings as well as by quotations from the *Constitutions and Rules* approved by the Holy See in 1982. There is also a section which recommends that the feasts of the Apostles "our first fathers"<sup>28</sup> be marked by special community prayer as should also the feasts of missionaries. It is further suggested that Provinces and Regions should add to this list the feasts of saints important in their particular churches.

EDWARD CAROLAN

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See *Diary*, February 28, 1826.

<sup>2</sup> Retreat of 1814, second meditation.

<sup>3</sup> *Journal des délibérations de l'Association de la jeunesse chrétienne*, March 6, 1814.

<sup>4</sup> *Régistre des Chapitres généraux*, vol. I, p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, vol. II, pp. 227-228 and 238-239.

<sup>6</sup> Rescripts of November 20, 1894 and January 11, 1895.

<sup>7</sup> Rescripts of February 27, 1882.

<sup>8</sup> Rescripts of June 16, 1887 and February 26, 1890.

<sup>9</sup> *Régistre des Chapitres généraux*, vol. III, p. 144.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, vol. III, pp. 80-81.

<sup>11</sup> The feast of the Holy Family had been included in the Oblate Calendar by a Rescript of April 2, 1894. It was later included in the Universal Calendar on the Sunday after the Epiphany.

<sup>12</sup> The feast of Our Lady of Lourdes had been included in the Oblate Calendar by Rescript of July 7, 1898.

<sup>13</sup> A Rescript of May 29, 1919, restored this celebration to the Oblate Calendar after it had been eliminated in the reform of the Universal Calendar under Pius X. A previous request to the S.C. of Rites to have it restored, was refused on January 30, 1914, with the phrase "non expedit."

<sup>14</sup> A Rescript of the S.C. of Rites dated February 27, 1882, included the feast of St. Benedict Joseph Labre in the OMI Calendar. He had been recently canonized. Born in 1748, he became a pilgrim to the shrines of Italy, Switzerland and France and was known for his dedication to the "40 Hours Devotion". Fr. de Mazenod visited his tomb in the Church of Santa Maria ai Monti and has a lengthy entry about the visit in his diary for April 2, 1826. The feast is no longer mentioned in the OMI Calendar after 1888.

<sup>15</sup> The feast of the Good Thief had been in the Oblate Calendar previous to 1868 ("in priore concessione existebat") and had been included in the list submitted to the S.C. in 1868. In the Rescript, however, it was omitted through a secretarial error ("per scriptoris inobservantiam"). Therefore, a further request was made for this feast alone and granted by a Rescript of June 6, 1868.

<sup>16</sup> A Rescript of January 20, 1959 changed the celebration of the Our Lady of Mercy to

May 12 because it coincided with the feast of the Apostles Philip and James in the Universal Calendar.

<sup>17</sup> The celebration of Our Lady Mediatrix of all Graces had been included in the OMI Calendar by Rescript dated January 4, 1922. A further Rescript dated November 8, 1955, changed the celebration to May 14 since it coincided with the Feast of the Queenship of Mary in the Universal Calendar.

<sup>18</sup> The feast of St. John Marie Vianney was included in the Oblate Calendar by a Rescript dated November 14, 1906, for "the first free day after August 4."

<sup>19</sup> A Rescript dated February 12, 1880, included the celebration of St. Margaret Mary in the Oblate Calendar on October 17, on which date it was retained until 1914.

<sup>20</sup> In the OMI Calendar of 1868, the celebration of the Intercession of the B.V.M. is transferred to the last Sunday after Pentecost.

<sup>21</sup> The celebration of St. Leonard of Port Maurice was restored to this date in the Oblate Calendar by a Rescript of November 20, 1927.

<sup>22</sup> The celebration of the Holy House of Loreto was restored to the Oblate Calendar by a Rescript of February 14, 1917.

<sup>23</sup> Through a secretarial error ("amanuensis errore") this celebration had been omitted from the Oblate Calendar in 1868 and was restored by a Rescript dated June 19, 1868.

<sup>24</sup> By a Rescript dated February 13, 1894, the celebration of the Flight of Our Lord Jesus Christ into Egypt was transferred to February 13.

<sup>25</sup> A Rescript dated December 12, 1880, raised the qualification of the celebration of the Sacred Heart in the Oblate Calendar from Double of 2nd Class to Double 1st Class.

<sup>26</sup> *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 108.

<sup>27</sup> A Rescript of the Sacred Congregation for the Sacraments and Divine Worship was obtained approving this calendar on October 26, 1972 and this was confirmed by a Decree of the same Sacred Congregation on December 30, 1975.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *Constitutiones et Regulae*, 1818, Part One, Chapter One, par. 3, *Nota Bene*, in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 15.

## OBLATES OF MARY IMMACULATE

*Summary: I. Missionaries of Provence. II. Missionary Oblates of Saint Charles. III. Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, IV. Spiritual interpretation of the name.*

When Eugene de Mazenod founded his society he foresaw the formation of only one community of secular priests dedicated to the evangelization of Provence by preaching parish missions. "At this period, similar societies sprang up in other dioceses, e.g., Besançon, Toulouse, Lyon, Tours, Poitiers, etc. [...] Regional or diocesan, these societies were restricted to one part of the kingdom, while the Society of the Missions of France, founded by Rauzan and Janson, and the Society of the Fathers of the Faith, established at Laval, had the entire national territory as their field of action. In Provence, the Ancien Régime had seen the same dualism for, while the Lazarists who were located in Marseilles, were called the Society of the Missions of France, the Blessed Sacrament Fathers, founded by Bishop d'Authier de Sisgaud, in the seventeenth century and in the same city, took the name The Society of the *Missions of Provence*. By resuming the work of his meridional predecessors at Aix, Father de Mazenod was renewing a tradition of his section of France."<sup>1</sup>

### I. MISSIONARIES OF PROVENCE

It would appear that, at the time, the name he was to bestow on his society was not of great concern to the Founder. His request for authorization from the Vicars General of Aix gives no name; nor for that matter does the subsequent approbation;<sup>2</sup> the only issue is that of missions and missionaries for

Provence. This, however, did not prevent Father Donat Levasseur in his *Histoire des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée* from drawing the simple conclusion that "the Society of the Missionaries of Provence, currently known under the title *Mission of Provence* [...] was then given official recognition by the diocesan authorities".<sup>3</sup>

This title was soon discarded. Indeed, after founding a house in Nîmes in Languedoc, a city outside the boundaries of Provence, the title no longer reflected the actual state of affairs.

### II. MISSIONARY OBLATES OF SAINT CHARLES

Father Toussaint Rambert gives this explanation of the name change for the society: "As a result, the title Missionaries of Provence would no longer prove suitable; it had no foundation in reality, it was too exclusive, it restricted too severely the activity of a family manifestly called by God to grow, increase in numbers and to extend its sphere of influence. It could even have been an obstacle for the recruiting of vocations and put off candidates inspired by a call to be missionaries, candidates who would not find in them the formal will to dedicate themselves to the missions of Provence. Everyone in the small family had felt and understood this. That was the state of affairs when the Founder was on the point of leaving for Rome to seek the favor of

no longer being restricted to the status of a diocesan congregation, but rather to become a genuine society of religious. There was a common resolve among them to choose another name. The name which first came to mind for the majority of them was Oblates of Saint Charles. Not only was Saint Charles a model for the clergy, he was also the venerated Founder's patron. Moreover, Saint Charles had for centuries been the protector of the Mazenod family whose eldest male members handed on the name from father to son. It seemed fitting that the spiritual family of the one in whom the de Mazenod line would become extinct should possess in perpetuity the name of Saint Charles.<sup>4</sup>

This does not explain why the choice was made of the name "Oblate" instead of some other, for example, simply "Missionaries of Saint Charles". A letter the Founder wrote to his first companion, Father Henry Tempier, informs us that he drew inspiration from "the statutes [...] of Saint Charles for the Oblates"<sup>5</sup> to draw up the rules for his own community. We also know how the Founder made use of the Redemptorist Rule of Alphonsus Liguori in order to draw up his own.<sup>6</sup> It seems that Saint Alphonsus, careful to avoid anything that would give the impression that he was founding a new order, used the words "oblation" and "oblates" for "profession" and "professed member" in order to circumvent the difficulties that might be raised against his Congregation by the royal government.<sup>7</sup> Was Father de Mazenod motivated by the same concern when he chose the name "Oblates"? Already in the original rule of the Missionaries of Provence he had adopted the terminology "oblation" and "oblate" for "profession" and "professed member". The term "missionary" was used exclusively for the priests in active

ministry. Those studying for the priesthood and the brothers were called "Oblates". The introduction of brothers into a society of priests which had become a religious congregation tended to favor the adoption of the name "Oblates" for the entire membership. In any case, as we can see by the name "Oblates of the Virgin Mary", a foundation contemporaneous with Father de Mazenod's, it was a name that was being used in the Church at this time.

It was under the title of "Missionary Oblates of Saint Charles" that the petition was made for approval of the Rules and the Congregation. However, this petition contains a final paragraph which requests a change of title: "At the same time, we beg that in the brief of approbation requested by the missionaries his Holiness bestow upon them the title Oblates of the Most Holy and Immaculate Virgin Mary instead of that of Oblates of Saint Charles to avoid all confusion of this name with other congregations of similar name. [...]"<sup>8</sup> This paragraph, written in an ink of lighter color, clearly appears to have been written as an afterthought when the idea occurred to the Founder to take on this new name.

### III. MISSIONARY OBLATES OF MARY IMMACULATE

The circumstances surrounding the introduction of this new name have often been studied. The reason is clearly stated in the text of the petition: the change is requested "to avoid all confusion of this name with other Congregations of similar name". It has sometimes been stated that it was only in Rome that the Founder learned of the existence of other societies that bore the same name.<sup>9</sup> That is not totally accurate

since already in his letter of October 9, 1815 to Father Tempier, quoted above, he mentions "the statutes of Saint Charles for the Oblates" as one of the sources he intends to use in drawing up his Rule.

We cannot doubt the reason he cites for the name change since all the official documents make explicit mention of it.<sup>10</sup> It could have been made in order to justify the request for the second change, although the latter could have been motivated by a deeper source. Initially we know that the Founder – as he was later to admit – felt a certain uneasiness in choosing his own personal patron, Saint Charles, as patron for the whole Congregation, even in the face of his deep devotion to that saint.<sup>11</sup>

No doubt it was when he was in Rome and while they were celebrating the octave of the Immaculate Conception that he was inspired to adopt the name Oblates of Mary Immaculate. But, one may ask, might not the visit he made in Turin to Father Brunone Lanteri, the founder of the Oblates of the Virgin Mary, and the project of unifying the two societies have been sufficient to give rise to this inspiration? The documentation is silent on this point.<sup>12</sup>

The fact remains that "without consulting his confreres"<sup>13</sup> – as it was impossible under the circumstances – he immediately inserted into the petition a request for a change of name and did the same thing orally during his papal audience of December 20, 1825. To the request for a change of name the Pope replied "neither in the affirmative, nor in the negative". Cardinal Pallotta who was given the task of examining the Rule did raise some difficulties, but the February 17, 1826 decree of approbation calls us for the very first time by the official title "*Missionarii sub titulo sanctissimae Virginis Mariae Imacula-*

*tae*". In the course of the years, we find some twenty different formulations of the same name in official documents, which, according to Father Cosentino are generally "synonyms or abbreviations".<sup>14</sup>

We find a variety of usages in the beginning, even among the Founder and his first companions. The word "Missionary" is often omitted to give simply "Oblate of Mary Immaculate" and sometimes simply "Oblate of Mary", as found for example in the oblation formula of some of the first priests,<sup>15</sup> or yet again in the book published in Marseilles in 1826: *Recueil de cantiques et de prières à l'usage des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie, dits de Provence*. The title commonly accepted and used within the Congregation as well as outside remains: "Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate".

#### IV. SPIRITUAL INTERPRETATION OF THE NAME

It is worthy of note that only one word, the word "Missionary", remained common to the three titles the Congregation has borne. In it, the Founder saw embodied an expression of the Oblate charism: *Evangelizare pauperibus misit me*. In the thinking of the Founder, the Congregation was to relive the apostolic experience of the Savior and the first Apostles. This was his original dream, the one that he described in the letter in which he sought to convince Father Tempier to become his first companion: "We wish to choose men who have the will and the courage to walk in the footsteps of the Apostles".<sup>16</sup>

The text of the original rule would express this ideal in an ingenuous, powerful manner: "Their founder is Jesus Christ, himself, the Son of God; their

first fathers are the Apostles".<sup>17</sup> The Rule in force until its most recent recasting retained this wording and made of it the principle of all Oblate spiritual life: "It has been already said that the Missionaries ought, as far as human nature allows, to imitate in everything the example set by our Lord Jesus Christ, the chief Founder of our congregation, and by the holy Apostles, our first Fathers". "Following in their footsteps the Missionaries will give one portion of their life to prayer [...]" "The other portion they will zealously devote to the works of the ministry".<sup>18</sup>

The present Rule invokes the same ideal: "The community of the Apostles with Jesus is the model of our life. [...] The call and the presence of the Lord among us today bind us together in charity and obedience to create anew in our own lives the Apostles' unity with him and their common mission in his Spirit" (C 3). "We are a missionary Congregation" (C 5).

It was only for a few months in 1825 that the Congregation bore the name of the Missionary Oblates of Saint Charles. It is no surprise, then, that we find hardly any commentaries on this title in contemporary documents. The situation was different when the Church gave its approval to the definitive title of the Congregation: "Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate". As we previously pointed out, this title still contains the term "Missionaries". But it also includes the designation "Oblates", a word adopted in the course of the first change. That was no doubt due to the fact that the Founder and his first companions had perceived in that term a rich expression of the Congregation's very being.

In this regard, Father Joseph Morabito directs our attention to the taking of the vow of obedience by Fa-

thers de Mazenod and Tempier as told to us by the Founder himself in his *Memoires*: "When both of us had taken our place under the structure of the beautiful repository [...] of the Mission church, in the night of that holy day (Holy Thursday), [...] we prayed the divine Master [...] to lead our present companions and those who would be associated with us in the future, to appreciate the full value of this oblation of one's entire self to God, when one wanted to serve him unreservedly and to consecrate one's life to the spread of his holy Gospel and the conversion of souls".<sup>19</sup>

Father Morabito commented: "It is this idea of oblation which, after it was born from the ardent soul of the Servant of God, after it was hallowed in the Rules, after having designated by name the vows taken by Father de Mazenod and his companions, ended up permeating everything by not only characterizing the vows, but also by bestowing its name on the entire Congregation as well as if to stamp its character not only on one act of their lives but on their very persons, their entire lives and their mission in the Church".<sup>20</sup> Throughout the history of the Congregation, we find this idea of oblation expressed and commented on.<sup>21</sup> However, it was only recently that some theological essays on oblation appeared associating the oblation of Christ in the Eucharist with the heart of the spirituality of the Congregation.<sup>22</sup>

The title of Missionary Oblates would take on its full meaning when the Pope approved the Congregation under its new name of Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. Someone has christened this event: "Our Marian baptism".<sup>23</sup> Now it is a question of dealing here with the connection between the name and the vocation according to the

old saying: *nomen est omen*.<sup>24</sup> The Founder was enthused by what he considered an intervention of Divine Providence as if it were a new birth of the Congregation: "May we understand well what we are!"<sup>25</sup>

Father Marcel Bélanger wrote: "For the Founder, it was not only a name, but a Marian mode of existence and a plan of action".<sup>26</sup> This was indeed how the companions of the Founder received the news: "I do not know what we felt in us that indicated to us that we were changed men", the Founder wrote to Father Tempier March 9, 1826.<sup>27</sup>

Subsequently, they wanted to have a concrete sign which would witness to this new mode of being. That is why the General Chapter of 1837 adopted the following resolution by unanimous vote: "On oblation day, along with the Oblate cross, they will receive the scapular of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Holy Virgin Mary which they shall wear constantly beneath their outer garments".<sup>28</sup> The Founder explained: "It will serve as the uniform which distinguishes us from the simple servants of Mary and which constitutes us exteriorly as her elite troops".<sup>29</sup>

In his commentary on this General Chapter decree, Father Marcel Bélanger wrote: "This parenthetical comment related to our crucifix speaks volumes. [...] Mary Immaculate is inseparable from the Savior in Oblate spirituality and [...] with the cross standing as the most fundamental sign of our mission, above all else the Oblate is distinguished by the image of the Savior in such a way that its Marian dimension is entirely focused on nourishing and bringing to full realization one's commitment to the Savior".<sup>30</sup> The Church's decision to bestow upon us the name Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate entails for us a configuring of our-

selves with Mary Immaculate, Mother of Mercy, and makes of us apostles of mercy at the very heart of the present economy of salvation.

In a letter to his first companions, the Founder wrote: "Does it not seem to you that it is a sign of predestination to bear the name of Oblates of Mary, that is, consecrated to God under the patronage of Mary, a name the Congregation bears as a family name held in common with the most holy and immaculate Mother of God? It is enough to make others jealous; but it is the Church who has given us this beautiful name, we receive it with respect, love and gratitude, proud of our dignity and of the rights that it gives us to the protection of her who is All Powerful in God's presence. Let us tarry no longer in taking to ourselves this beautiful name."<sup>31</sup>

MAURICE GILBERT

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> LEFLON, II, p. 601, footnote 18.

<sup>2</sup> See REY, I, p. 190-192.

<sup>3</sup> LEVASSEUR, Donat, *Histoire des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, vol. I, Montreal, 1983, p. 43.

<sup>4</sup> RAMBERT, I, p. 429.

<sup>5</sup> Letter to Father Tempier, October 9, 1815 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 6, no. 4, p. 6-7.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 7.

<sup>7</sup> See LAMIRANDE, Émilien, "Oblation - Oblats" in *Etudes oblates*, 17 (1958), p. 86-87.

<sup>8</sup> COSENTINO, Georges, *Histoire de nos Règles*, II, Ottawa, Oblate Studies Edition, 1955, p. 100.

<sup>9</sup> For example, REY, I, p. 358.

<sup>10</sup> See COSENTINO, Georges, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

<sup>11</sup> See REY, I, p. 362.

<sup>12</sup> See THIEL, Joseph, "Relations du Fondateur avec le père Lanteri" in *Etudes oblates*, 5 (1946), p. 136-138.

<sup>13</sup> See RAMBERT, I, p. 429.

<sup>14</sup> COSENTINO, Georges, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

<sup>15</sup> See the signatures reproduced in ROCHE, Aime, SERVEL, Edmond, SERVEL, Jean, PERRIN, René, *Eugène de Mazenod, biographie par l'image*, Lyon, Chalet Editions, 1960.

<sup>16</sup> Letter to Father Tempier, October 9, 1815 in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 6, no. 4, p. 7.

<sup>17</sup> "Constitutions et Règles de la Société des Missionnaires de Provence," Honorat manuscript in *Etudes oblates*, 2 (1943), p. [4].

<sup>18</sup> 1928 Constitutions and Rules, art. 287-289.

<sup>19</sup> See RAMBERT, I, p. 187-188.

<sup>20</sup> MORABITO, Joseph, "L'Immaculée dans la spiritualité du Fondateur" in *Etudes oblates*, 14 (1955), p. 37.

<sup>21</sup> See LAMIRANDE, Émilien, "Esprit d'oblation, approche historique" in *Etudes oblates*, 15 (1956), p. 326-345.

<sup>22</sup> See SIMON, Joseph-Marie, "Essai d'une spiritualité oblate" in *Etudes oblates*, 15 (1956), p. 246-259.

<sup>23</sup> DEPOORTERE, Gaston, "Notre baptême marial, ses conséquences diverses" in *Missions*, 61 (1927), p. 103-114.

<sup>24</sup> See COSENTINO, Georges, "Les armoiries de la Congrégation" in *Etudes oblates*, 24 (1965), p. 64.

<sup>25</sup> Letter to Father Tempier, March 20, 1826 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 7, no. 231, p. 63.

<sup>26</sup> BÉLANGER, Marcel, "Regina Congregationis nostrae" in *Etudes oblates*, 19 (1960), p. 234.

<sup>27</sup> REY, I, p. 383.

<sup>28</sup> "Acta capitulorum generalium, 1837, canon XX" in COSENTINO, Georges, *Nos Chapitres généraux*, Ottawa, Oblate Studies Editions, 1957, p. 44.

<sup>29</sup> Letter to Father Jean-Baptiste Honorat, August 18, 1843 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. I, no. 24, p. 59.

<sup>30</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 239.

<sup>31</sup> Letter to Father Tempier, March 20, 1826 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 7, no. 231, p. 63.

## OBLATION

*Summary: Introduction: 1. Terms used; 2. Christian oblation. I. In the writings of Eugene de Mazenod. II. Fundamental oblation. III. Ordinary oblation. IV. Definitive oblation. V. Unconditional oblation. VI. Marian oblation*

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1. TERMS USED

The *Dictionary of Spirituality* fuses into one the concepts of "oblation" and "offering".<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, it makes a distinction between the similar ideas: gift of self, surrender and consecration. "*Oblation* signifies an action through which the Christian, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, gives himself to God. The *gift of self* is the state a Christian reaches when, with the help of God's grace and to the extent of which he is capable, he surrenders his person to God in his thoughts, his will and his actions -- in a consistent ongoing manner. The gift of self obviously presupposes oblation. *Consecration* is an oblation. But it is an act which involves committing the future into the hands of God, either by an internal decision or by an external decision in written or oral form. *Surrender* is an attitude of acquiescence and of submission to every event, to every situation permitted by the Lord which effects our existence".<sup>2</sup>

One could add to the notion of oblation the related ideas of sacrifice, immolation, holocaust, etc. These are all found in Mazenodian and Oblate literature: "Sacrifice of love, sublime holocaust", was the hymn used in the oblation ceremony from 1844 on. One must not interpret these notions too strictly, however, remembering that the Oblate, much like the Founder, Eugene de Mazenod "was not the kind of man

given to analyzing his devotions";<sup>3</sup> that he was "a man of action, a decisive individual, an apostle more than a theologian. He shows us who he is and expresses himself more through his actions and his choices than he does through his writings".<sup>4</sup>

#### 2. CHRISTIAN OBLATION

The Synoptic Gospels show us that Christ has established "in his person a new type of oblation. It involves the entire human person because it is nothing less than the giving of one's life as a ransom for many. (Mark 10:45) At the same time, Christ leads us to understand that his disciple must be ready to accept the same kind of total oblation (Matthew 10:39; 16:24-25 and parallel texts). [...] The offering in the oblation is always Christ in person. [...] This saving oblation is unique. It always remains present sacramentally in the Eucharist (1 Corinthians 10:16-21; 11:23-30). [...] And it is exclusively in relation to the oblation of Christ that from now on it is possible and legitimate for one to speak of oblation with reference to men. Every oblation is rooted in Christology".<sup>5</sup>

"Gift of self is an integral part of the Christian life in one form or other. [...] The most intense moment of this is found in the *eucharistic celebration*, "the source and summit of the entire Christian life".<sup>6</sup> [...] Oblation is one of the elements of a fervent spiritual life.

[...] The desire for an oblation that is all-encompassing and permanent has given rise to the *state of a stable way* of living, i.e. the religious life. The vows give expression to the will which inspires the religious to accomplish the oblation of his person in a manner that is total and definitive".<sup>7</sup>

We have a number of concrete witnesses to this; among them are some who had an impact on the life of Eugene de Mazenod. "In the *Spiritual Exercises*, Saint Ignatius of Loyola leads the retreatant to the point of oblation of his person and presents it as being a total, unlimited oblation". According to the French School of spirituality, "the offering becomes an established way of acting, an exercise of piety [...] a total gift of my being, my life, my existential condition and my affections".<sup>8</sup> A prayer formula filled with meaning is the *O domina mea*, the daily "Marian oblation" that the Founder of the Oblates adopted for himself and for his followers.<sup>9</sup>

## I. IN THE WRITINGS OF EUGENE DE MAZENOD

We still have a long way to go in order to get to know Eugene de Mazenod as we should. Certain aspects of his personality in particular would merit a closer scrutiny – especially his thinking on oblation. Writing about Bishop de Mazenod, Paguella de Follenay said: "This task makes us fearful in our weakness, writes Paguella de Follenay about Bishop de Mazenod, because the issue at stake is not only to describe those external elements without which certain features of his moral portrait would remain impossible to explain, but it is a question of penetrating into the inner sanctum of a great soul".<sup>10</sup>

The notion of oblation in the writings of Eugene de Mazenod originates in the youthful years of his exile in Venice: "Would it not be a great honor for our family to end with a priest?" was his reply to his great-uncle one day when the latter had pointed out to him that he was the last male member of the Mazenod line.<sup>11</sup> This ideal took root and grew in his generous heart in the aftermath of the French Revolution in view of the state of destitution of the poor in the Provençal countryside and of the Church in general, "that glorious inheritance purchased by the Savior at the cost of all his blood".<sup>12</sup> "I want to be a priest and please note", he wrote to his mother on November 29, 1809, "I do not want to be an ecclesiastic only for a week, six months, a year, even ten years, I want to be one for my whole life".<sup>13</sup> Later on, he would write in his *Memoires*: "Assuredly, if we had stayed one year more in Venice, I would have followed in the footsteps of my holy director and his brother and become a priest in the religious congregation they had chosen and in which each one died while exercising a zeal of heroic proportions".<sup>14</sup>

Father Joseph Morabito, one of those whose studies led him to know Bishop de Mazenod well, described him to the participants of the International Congress of Mariology held in Rome on October 26 1954. Very accurately, he outlined the three stages of oblation of the Servant of God: his fundamental oblation on April 11, 1816, his ordinary oblation on November 1, 1818, and his definitive oblation on July 13, 1826. "It is this idea of oblation which – after it was born from the ardent soul of the Servant of God, after it was consecrated in the Rules, after it gave the name to the vows taken by Father de Mazenod and his companions – ended up perme-

ating everything. It gave its name not only to the vows, but also to the individual members and to the whole Congregation, as if to stamp its character not only on one act of their lives but on their very persons, their entire lives and their mission in the Church".<sup>15</sup>

## II. FUNDAMENTAL OBLATION

On two occasions, September 12 and October 28, 1814, Father de Mazenod had shared with his friend Charles de Forbin-Janson his desire for the religious life. There can be no doubt that he personally aspired to it from the time of the founding of the Missionaries of Provence, and aimed to lead them little by little to share his own aspiration. That is the origin of the foundation stones he laid in the very beginning in the rule he submitted on January 25, 1816<sup>16</sup> to the Capitular Vicars of Aix-en-Provence. These building blocks stand as a confirmation of what Bishop de Mazenod would later write in his *Memoires*: "Consequently, I considered the evangelical counsels [...] as being essential elements to adopt. [...] My thought was always that our little family needed to consecrate itself to God and the service of the Church by the vows of religion".<sup>17</sup>

We can readily understand his delight in discovering in Father François de Paule Henry Tempier a priest totally inclined to follow him without delay in making an initial fundamental oblation: "Father Tempier and I judged that we should no longer delay and on Holy Thursday (April 11, 1816) both of us having taken our position under the structure of the fine repository that we had set up on the main altar of the Church of the Mission in the course of the night of this holy day, with inex-

pressible joy we made our vows. We bathed in the aura of this happiness that whole beautiful night long in the presence of Our Lord at the foot of the magnificent throne where we had placed him for the next day's Mass of the Presanctified. And we prayed this divine Master that if it was his will to bless our endeavor, to lead our present companions and those who, in the future, would join us to fully grasp the value of this oblation of one's entire self to God when it was one's wish to serve him exclusively and to consecrate one's life to the spreading of the Gospel and the conversion of souls. Our wishes were fulfilled".<sup>18</sup>

Over the course of twenty-five years, Father Joseph Fabre was a privileged witness of the results of this double oblation, and shared with us its nature and its fundamental importance: "In the shadow of the adorable victim who was obedient unto death", Father de Mazenod and Father Tempier read "one after the other, a formula which included a vow of obedience which they made to each other [...]".

"Neither for one nor the other was this an empty ceremony; it was a great act; one of those acts that influences the destiny of individuals. Only in eternity will we become aware of how much merit flowed from this act for the two religious. The one who remained the chief superior throughout his life also remained the first in obedience, and we are at a loss to know to whom belonged the better role: the superior who often was obedient to his subject, or the subject who was sufficiently virtuous to command the one he respected and loved as being the living image of the authority of God. This was perhaps a unique event in the history of religious congregations; we bring it to your attention with the

humble gratitude drawn forth from us by the gifts of God".<sup>19</sup>

### III. ORDINARY OBLATION

The origins of the name Oblates of Mary Immaculate remains shrouded in mystery: "We still have to determine the precise meaning of our name: Oblates".<sup>20</sup> The word "Oblates" appeared for the first time in the writings of Father de Mazenod on October 9, 1815 and antedates the founding of the Missionaries of Provence. He no doubt drew his inspiration for this from the "Statutes of Saint Charles for the Oblates", his patron saint – the "godfather", so to speak, of his religious family for a period of time in 1825 when he was getting ready to present his congregation in Rome as "Oblates of Saint Charles".<sup>21</sup> Before his uncle Fortuné brought him the Constitutions and Rules of the Redemptorists from Palermo, he had already written to him September 16, 1817: "In my congregation, you will find genuine oblates, men ready to do any good work".<sup>22</sup>

Upon finding in the writings of Blessed Alphonsus Liguori the word "oblation" as a way of indicating religious profession, Father Eugene de Mazenod wrote a long paragraph where the word "oblation" appeared six times and the word "oblates" appeared four times.<sup>23</sup>

What is certain is that everything flowed out of his heart at Saint Laurent-du-Verdon after he had drawn up the main articles of the Rule, namely after having "resolutely inserted the formal obligation for all members of his institute to pronounce vows of obedience, chastity and perseverance".<sup>24</sup>

"The eager novice who accompanied him into his solitude tells us that, one day, after having finished compos-

ing the chapter on the vows, he summoned the young Suzanne who did not yet know of the plan that had been formed to bind all the members of the society through vows. He read to him the entire chapter and asked him what his own opinion and resolve was in this regard. At first he was surprised by the reading of the text and the request made of him. He asked for a moment to think about it; deeply immersed in thought, he went out into the chateau's garden and, after about fifteen minutes of reflection and some prayer, he returned to the superior and promised the superior that he would make these vows as soon as he was deemed worthy to do so".<sup>25</sup>

That was in September of 1818. The same witness continued his narration which we find in the report he drew up of the first ordinary oblation among the Missionaries of Provence, an oblation which took place in Aix, on All Saints Day as agreed upon. "At three o'clock in the morning", Father Suzanne tells us, "the members of the Chapter were awakened; before four o'clock they were all in church, prostrate before the altar, preparing themselves for the finest and most consoling of sacrifices".

"After calling upon the Holy Spirit for enlightenment by singing the *Veni Creator*, the superior addressed a moving exhortation to the small group gathered there [...] When this exhortation was finished", Father Moreau tells us, "our father, dressed in priestly vestments, prostrated himself at the foot of the altar, took a candle in his right hand and said in a loud clear voice: "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; in the presence of the most Holy Trinity, of the holy Virgin Mary, of all the angels and all the saints and all my brothers here assembled, I, Charles Joseph Eugène de Mazenod profess, promise to God and vow

chastity and perpetual obedience. I likewise vow to persevere unto death in the holy Institute and in the Society of the Missionaries of Provence. So help me God. Amen".<sup>26</sup>

"Then he began to celebrate Mass which Fathers Tempier and Maunier served since they were the senior priests in the Congregation. "At the moment of communion, with the Superior holding in his hands the adorable Body of our Divine Lord, we came forward", Father Suzanne tells us, "in turn each holding a lighted candle in hand pronouncing our holy vows with an emotion of inexpressible joy [...]".

"Bishop Fortuné de Mazenod, Bishop-elect of Marseilles, was present and seemed enraptured by the proceedings. One had the impression of being part of a gathering of the first Christians who used to meet to sing the praises of God in the catacombs in the dead of night illumined by blazing torches [...]".

"After Mass, the Superior General intoned the *Te Deum* in thanksgiving; then all the members of the community went over to the altar of the Blessed Virgin to put the holy vows they had just made under her protection. They also put themselves under the protection of all the saints by reciting the litany of all the saints".

"With what emotion we exchanged the accolade when we returned to the sacristy! [...] After these first moments of joy and expression of fraternal affection, the superior blessed the crosses of the three newly professed and personally bestowed the crosses upon them".<sup>27</sup>

#### IV. DEFINITIVE OBLATION

Once the Rules of oblation of the Missionaries of Provence were established, what remained was to complete

them and to have them approved by the Church. As an important complementary part, the General Chapter of 1821 introduced the vow of poverty. The General Chapter of 1824 had approved the exception of making Fathers Tempier and de Mazenod available to take up posts at the Vicariate General of the Diocese of Marseilles. Armed with the approval of several bishops, the Founder presented himself in Rome in November of 1825 in the hope of obtaining nothing less than a definitive approval from Pope Leo XII. It was at that time, for reasons that up until now have remained somewhat mysterious and known to him alone<sup>28</sup> that Father de Mazenod decided to change the name of the Oblates of Saint Charles to that of Oblates of the Most Holy and Immaculate Virgin Mary "to avoid having our name confused with that of other congregations" he insisted.<sup>29</sup>

It is true that he himself did not judge the matter as being one of primary importance. Nonetheless, the fact remains that once the exceptional character of the solemn approbation of the Holy See for a society that was still in the cradle, and the sacred character that such an approval conferred on the institute was recognized, the change of name made a remarkable impact. "It is the Church who has given us this beautiful name", Oblates would unceasingly repeat in imitation of their Founder even though they very well knew that they owed it to his inspiration. On March 20, 1826 he wrote: "You are quite right in saying that you all seem to have become other men; this is truly so. May we understand well what we are!"<sup>30</sup> His successor, Father Joseph Fabre would even dare to write: "You will not forget that if it was our venerated Founder who made us missionaries of the poor, it was the

Sovereign Pontiff who made us Oblates of Mary Immaculate".<sup>31</sup>

Upon his return to Marseilles, Father de Mazenod hastened to call an extraordinary General Chapter, on July 10, 1826, to promulgate the apostolic letters of Leo XII in virtue of which the Rule and the Institute had been approved. This event was marked by two exceptionally solemn ceremonies on July 13. First of all in the house chapel of the Calvaire in Marseilles, the Founder celebrated the Mass of the Holy Spirit before the Blessed Sacrament exposed. When Mass was over, all professed members came forward individually in turn to renew their vows for the first time as "Missionary Oblates of the Most Holy and Immaculate Virgin Mary". The identical formula was written and signed by them; they then immediately handed it to the Superior General who placed it upon the altar. "Our Lord's presence in the midst of our whole family gathered there for such an important occasion, the deep recollection on the part of everyone and the lofty purpose upon which we were all focused cast an aura of heavenly beauty over the ceremony".<sup>32</sup>

Upon leaving the chapel, everyone went to the chapter hall. Then, addressing the entire assembled Society, the Founder declared: "This is an auspicious beginning of a new era for the Society; God has ratified the plans we laid out for his glory. He has blessed the bonds that unite us. From now on we will fight the enemies of heaven under a standard which is our very own and which the Church has given us. On this standard reigns resplendent the glorious name of the Most Holy Virgin Mary Immaculate; that very name has become ours because it is to the Virgin Mary that we are consecrated; more especially, we are her children; and her protection over us, so

manifest until now, will be even greater in the future if we show ourselves worthy of such a mother".<sup>33</sup>

As a sign of this special belonging to Mary, a subsequent General Chapter, that of 1837, would choose "from among a number of proposed objects" a scapular. "It was unanimously adopted as follows: on the day of his oblation, along with his cross, the authentic sign of our mission, the individual will receive the scapular of the Immaculate Conception which he should wear underneath his outer garments".<sup>34</sup>

"It is the Church who has given us this beautiful name", and the Church yet again which in the popular mind persists in singling us out as "the Oblates". John XXIII told the General Chapter of 1959, "I also like your name of Oblates".<sup>35</sup> That is why in the concluding section of his analysis in *Our Vocation...* Father Leo Deschâtelets himself stressed that "our most distinctive spirit, as we like to say over and over, is the spirit of *unconditional oblation* which our name very well proclaims".<sup>36</sup> From that time on, it became a hallowed term and found its way into the forefront of article 2 of the 1982 *Constitutions and Rules*. "Our apostolic zeal is sustained by the unreserved gift we make of ourselves in our oblation, an offering constantly renewed by the challenges of our mission".

## V. UNCONDITIONAL OBLATION

On January 25, 1948, Father Joseph-Marie Simon, professor of dogmatic theology at Solignac presented to the research project on Oblate spirituality "a synthesis whose keystone was the idea of oblation".<sup>37</sup> On August 15, 1951 Father Leo Deschâtelets, the Superior General, devoted "a long and substantial

circular letter on the Oblate vocation in union with Mary Immaculate which was read, commented upon and studied by the Oblates".<sup>38</sup> In 1956, in the course of putting together a series of historical texts in support of the Solignac professor's thesis, Emilien Lamirande warned us: "This is not a text which can be put on the same level as those we will soon cite, since it surpasses them all in virtue of the weight of the authority it bears and in some way puts its stamp of approval on what is best in them".<sup>39</sup>

In the first half of his Circular 191 on our vocation, the Superior General spent a great deal of time describing our kind of oblation. As priests and Oblate religious, there are no limits to our personal sanctity. Nor did he set any limits on our zeal. "When these things are taken into consideration, does not our title *Oblates* seem altogether justified? Is it not that this priestly, religious and missionary life of ours is a *total gift of ourselves*, a radical commitment, an unconditional *oblation*? In giving us the title Missionaries of Provence, then Oblates of Saint Charles, then Oblates of Mary Immaculate, was not the Founder obeying a compelling dictate, a natural consequence of the spiritual principles that served as a basis for the new apostolic life that it was given him to raise up in the Church? Perhaps without knowing it, was he not sketching the last feature, the strong and characteristic trait of the religious priest and missionary about whom he had dreamed before God?"<sup>40</sup> "The texts all seem to point to the fact that what really establishes us in our vocation, in our mission, is a kind of *greater degree of commitment to the service of God and of souls*, a kind of reckless gift of self to the service of God, to his glory, to his love and his infinite mercy. It is a thrust, a special intensity of priestly

charity, of zeal for the most difficult tasks – let us use the word since we can find no stronger expression – an *unconditional oblation of ourselves* which prevents us from identifying ourselves in any other way than to say: "*They are Oblates par excellence*".<sup>41</sup> "Such an oblation, a commitment so keen and so absolute to the service of divine love, to the Church and the poor, could not come to birth, maintain itself and intensify itself in us without a deep union with Jesus, our Savior and Redeemer, Love and Mercy personified, without a union with Mary Immaculate, our Mother as well: 'They will always look upon her as their Mother' and our Queen: 'Queen of our Congregation'."<sup>42</sup>

## VI. MARIAN OBLATION

"Let us renew ourselves especially in devotion to the most holy Virgin and render ourselves worthy to be Oblates of the Immaculate Mary".<sup>43</sup> From the time of this inaugural declaration launched by their holy Founder, the Oblates have been unceasing in their efforts to renew themselves in their devotion to their Mother and Patroness. Most especially in the light of Bishop de Mazenod's participation in the proclamation of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception the memory of which is daily recalled when we recite Compline,<sup>44</sup> and on the occasion of various General Chapters, the General Chapter of 1920 made the decision "to solemnly consecrate the Congregation to Mary Immaculate through a public consecration which would be officially declared throughout the whole Institute on February 17 and December 8 every year".<sup>45</sup> What remained to be done was to codify all of this in a more precise way in a text of the Rule. That was the

work accomplished by the General Chapter of 1926 in the renowned article 10 under the heading, Ends of the Congregation, an article which has proved its ability to withstand the vicissitudes of contemporary Marian piety, the renewal of religious life and the 1966 and 1982 revisions of our Constitutions and Rules.

At the very outset, the most recent version of article 10 proclaims "Mary Immaculate is patroness of our Congregation". In a detailed analysis of this article, Father Jetté states: "It is a very fine text". More especially with regard to "Mary, the model of our oblation", he wrote: "Open to the Spirit, she consecrated herself totally as lowly handmaid to the person and work of the Savior". What is referred to here is Mary's general attitude which is presented to us as a model. She was open to the Spirit and she responded to God's invitation by an unqualified "yes". "I am the handmaid of the Lord; let what you have said be done to me!" (Luke 1:38) From that time on, she was entirely consecrated to the person and work of the Savior.

"Mary, in faith and love, and with her whole being, adhered to God's plan for her and that in the measure that God made it known to her. She considered events, meditated them in her heart and committed herself to the fulfillment of the will of her Lord. This is what Oblates are called to do: to become men of God's will, to be totally available to respond to his calls in the measure that he makes them known; and that as servants and friends of Jesus, the Savior of the world. Further on, in article 13, we will read: 'Mary Immaculate, in her faith response and total openness to the call of the Spirit, is the model and guardian of our consecrated life'".<sup>46</sup>

HERMÉNÉGILDE CHARBONNEAU

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> "Offrande", in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, Beauchesne, Paris, 1982, vol. XI, col. 720-733.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, col. 731.

<sup>3</sup> JETTÉ, Fernand, "Essai sur le caractère marial de notre spiritualité", in *Etudes oblates*, 7 (1948), p. 16.

<sup>4</sup> COURVOISIER, Michel, *Eugène de Mazenod missionnaire*, France-Belgium, Oblate Provincial Houses, 1975, "Introduction".

<sup>5</sup> *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, vol. 5, col. 722, 723, 727; see SIMON, Joseph Mary, "Essai d'une spiritualité oblate", in *Etudes oblates*, 15 (1956), p. 229-235; GILBERT, Maurice, "Our Oblation and the Oblation of Christ, the Priest", in *Etudes oblates*, 14 (1955), p. 148-153.

<sup>6</sup> VATICAN COUNCIL II, *Lumen Gentium*, 11, 1; *Perfectae Caritatis*, 6, 2; *Christus Dominus*, 30, 2.

<sup>7</sup> *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, vol. XI, col. 727, 729, 730; see LAMIRANDE, Émilien, "Esprit d'oblation - approche historique", in *Etudes oblates*, 15 (1956), p. 333-336.

<sup>8</sup> *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, *ibidem*, col. 729.

<sup>9</sup> MEUNIER, Ovilla A., "Aux sources de notre spiritualité", in *Etudes oblates*, I (1942), p. 38; COSENTINO, George, *Exercices de piété de l'Oblat*, Ottawa, Oblate Studies Edition, 1962, (Oblate Historical Archives - 19), p. 136.

<sup>10</sup> PAGUELLE DE FOLLENAY, J., *Vie du cardinal Guibert*, vol. I, Poussielgue Edition, Paris, 1896, p. 61.

<sup>11</sup> MAZENOD, Eugène de, "Mémoires", in *Missions*, 5 (1866), p. 129.

<sup>12</sup> "Constitutions et Règles de 1818, *Nota bene*", in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 15.

<sup>13</sup> In PIELORZ, Józef, *The Spiritual Life of Bishop de Mazenod 1782-1812: A Critical Study*, Ottawa, Oblate Studies Edition, 1956, p. 253; JETTÉ, Fernand, "Le Charisme oblat", in *The Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate*, Rome, 1985, p. 48.

<sup>14</sup> In *Missions*, 5 (1866, p. 129).

<sup>15</sup> MORABITO, Joseph, "L'Immaculée dans la spiritualité du Fondateur", in *Etudes oblates*, 14 (1955), p. 37.

<sup>16</sup> See PIELORZ, Józef, in *Missions*, 16 (1957), p. 137 ff.

<sup>17</sup> RAMBERT I, p. 187.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 187-188.

<sup>19</sup> FABRE, Joseph, "Death Notice of Father Tempier", May 2, 1870 in *Notices nécrologiques*, vol. 2, p. 87.

<sup>20</sup> LAMIRANDE, Émilien, "Oblation - Oblats", in *Etudes oblates*, 17 (1958), p. 86.

<sup>21</sup> MEUNIER, Ovilla A., "Aux sources de notre spiritualité", in *Etudes oblates*, I (1942), p. 36.

<sup>22</sup> PIELORZ, Józef, *Les Chapitres généraux au temps du Fondateur*, vol. 1, Ottawa, Oblate Studies Edition, 1968, p. 6.

<sup>23</sup> COSENTINO, Georges, *Histoire de nos Règles, vol. 1, Rédaction et sources, (1816-1818)*, Oblate Studies Edition, 1955, (Oblate Historical Archives - 3) p. 124, 126.

<sup>24</sup> RAMBERT I, p. 285.

<sup>25</sup> PIELORZ, Józef, "Le séjour du Fondateur à Saint Laurent", in *Missions*, 84 (1957), p. 311-312.

<sup>26</sup> Oblation formula as found in the first manuscript of the Rules.

<sup>27</sup> RAMBERT I, p. 290-291, PIELORZ, Józef, *ibidem*, p. 313-314.

<sup>28</sup> PIELORZ, Józef, *Les Chapitres généraux au temps du Fondateur*, vol. 1, Ottawa, Oblate Studies Edition, 1968, p. 50 ff.

<sup>29</sup> "Approbation pontificale des Constitutions et Règles, supplique au pape Léon XII, Rome le 8 décembre 1825", in *Missions*, 79 (1952), p. 461.

<sup>30</sup> March 20, 1826 letter to Father Henry Tempier in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 7, no. 231, p. 63.

<sup>31</sup> *Petites annales*, 1891, p. 5.

<sup>32</sup> See PIELORZ, Józef, *Les Chapitres généraux ...*, p. 75.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 76.

<sup>34</sup> DESCHÂTELETS, Leo, "Le scapulaire oblat", in *Etudes oblates*, 2 (1943), p. 79; PIELORZ, Józef, *Les Chapitres généraux....*, I, p. 153.

<sup>35</sup> DESCHÂTELETS, Leo, Circular letter no. 209, October 26, 1959 in *Circ. adm.*, VI (1953-1960), p. 7 (324).

<sup>36</sup> DESCHÂTELETS, Leo, Circular letter no: 191, "Notre vocation et notre vie d'union intime avec Marie Immaculée", in *Circ. adm.*, V (1947-1952), p. (25) 322.

<sup>37</sup> SIMON, Joseph Mary, "Essai d'une spiritualité oblate", in *Etudes oblates*, 15 (1956), p. 221-259. Original copy is to be found in the Deschatelets Archives, 1948.

<sup>38</sup> LEVASSEUR, Donat, "*Histoire des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*", Montreal, Provincial House, 1986, vol. 2, p. 292.

<sup>39</sup> LAMIRANDE, Émilien, "Esprit d'oblation – approche historique" in *Etudes oblates*, 15 (1956), p. 223-355.

<sup>40</sup> *Circ. adm.*, V, p. (24) 321.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*, p. (25) 322.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem*, p. (28) 325.

<sup>43</sup> MAZENOD, Eugene de, letter to Father Tempier, December 22, 1825 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, no. 213, p. 223.

<sup>44</sup> See "Tota pulcra es", in *Oblate Prayer*, Rome, 1986, p. 39.

<sup>45</sup> COSENTINO, Georges, *Histoire de nos Règles, t. VI, Quatrième révision de nos Règles (1918-1928)*..., p. 32.

<sup>46</sup> JETTÉ, Fernand, O.M.I. *The Apostolic Man: A Commentary on the 1982 edition of the Oblate Constitutions and Rules*, General House, Rome, 1982, p. 113-114.

## PATRONS OF THE CONGREGATION

A distinctly Oblate prayer is that of the litany of the saints invoked as protectors of the Congregation; they are described in our prayer manual, *Oblate Prayer*, as "saints, mostly preachers and missionaries, honored in the Congregation".<sup>1</sup>

Father Georges Cosentino,<sup>2</sup> basing himself on the prayers prescribed for particular examen in 1816 and 1818,<sup>3</sup> states: "These litanies, drawn up by Oblates, were introduced among us from 1816 on". Already on October 9, 1815, Father Eugene de Mazenod had communicated to Father Henry Tempier his intention of adopting a rule "for which we will draw the elements from the statutes of St. Ignatius, of St. Charles for his Oblates, of St. Philip Neri, of St. Vincent de Paul and of the Blessed Liguori".<sup>4</sup> On November 17, 1817, in an attempt to convince his uncle Fortuné to accept being named to the see of Marseilles, he added: "We will take Saint Charles, Saint Francis de Sales for our patrons and models."<sup>5</sup>

"Since the first text available to us is that of the first edition of the prayer manual of 1865, we have no knowledge of the original text of our litanies".<sup>6</sup> And yet, the Founder considered them very important. On December 19, 1847, he wrote to the Master of Novices: "I also recommend that you insist that each one learn from memory and know well the ordinary prayers of our Society, but especially the litanies and the prayers that follow for all the members of the Society must say them during their travels as well as in our communities toward the middle of the day after the particular examen".<sup>7</sup>

At a later date, July 9, 1853, he in-

sisted on this point with the priest in charge of the scholastic brothers: "Everyone must know by heart the prayers recited in the Congregation, and especially those recited after particular examen as I strongly insist that we never leave them out wherever it may be we find ourselves, whether travelling or whatever. That form of prayer, including the litanies, is special to our Congregation, they are distinctive and like a bond, a unity between all members of the family."<sup>8</sup>

Previous to the prayer manual of 1865, during the Founder's lifetime and from 1854 on, there was a printed sheet which could be handed out to missionaries: "You will also receive a printed document which you will place in your breviaries in order that you will not run the risk of forgetting to recite each day the litanies and prayers which follow [and which] are particular to the Order. I am most concerned that they be said exactly as prescribed."<sup>9</sup>

This insistence on Bishop de Mazenod's part leads us to believe that the 1854 "small printed sheet" already provided an authentic list of the Protectors of the Congregation invoked from memory from the beginning. As such, it must have been inserted in the *Manuel de prières et cérémonial* which Father Joseph Fabre, Superior General, promulgated in the Congregation, on May 25, 1865, with the declaration that it was "binding from this day forth in our houses and residences. Members should see to it that they obtain it as soon as possible, follow it meticulously and change nothing either in the formulas given or the prescribed ceremonies."<sup>10</sup>

This strictness would set the tone for

all five of the subsequent editions of *Manuel de prières et cérémonial* until 1932. Until that point any effort to introduce new invocations in the litanies proper to the Congregation were rejected by the General Chapters. Timidly, the General Chapter of 1938 added the invocation "Queen of our Congregation", an invocation which they had initially hoped to add for private usage in the litany of Loretto and the invocation of "Saint Theresa of the Child Jesus", whom Bishop Ovide Charlebois had been instrumental in declaring "Patroness of Missions".<sup>11</sup> Later on, the *Vade mecum* of 1958 added the invocation of Saint Thomas Aquinas. The 1986 *Oblate Prayer* removed the names of Saint Michael, the Archangel and Saints Fidelis of Sigmaringen and John Francis Regis. It added that of Blessed Eugene de Mazenod, Saint Ignatius of Loyola and Saint John Leonard.

What are these litanies? Nothing more than "an abridged version of the litany of the saints".<sup>12</sup> All the angels and all the saints are invoked as a group in the spirit of Eugene de Mazenod whose faith in the Communion of the Saints was as all-embracing and as noble as his apostolic aspirations.<sup>13</sup> It goes without saying that he turns first of all to "Holy Mary, conceived without sin", the title under which the Virgin Mother of God is patroness of his religious family. They wanted to bring this out more strongly by invoking her as "Queen of our Congregation". Saint Joseph's role is clearly indicated. The 1865 *Manuel de prières* already referred to him as "main patron and special protector of the Congregation." It offered him more ornate<sup>14</sup> litanies than those in current usage.

Then come Saints Peter and Paul as representatives of the Apostles to walk in the footsteps of whom Eugene de

Mazenod wanted to lead his followers.<sup>15</sup> But the real distinguishing mark of the "litanies proper to the Congregation" is a harking back to the holy founders of the ancient Orders, the existence and fervor of which Father de Mazenod wished to rekindle.<sup>16</sup>

In the litanies, recalling the founders of ancient Orders does not go beyond Saint Dominic (1170-1221), founder of the Dominicans, and two of his disciples: Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) and Vincent Ferrier (1350-1419). The only other representative of the Mendicant Orders is the Franciscan, Leonard of Port Maurice of a later date (1676-1751).

Other than the Mendicant Orders, attention is focused mainly on the founders of Clerical Orders and Religious Congregations. Heading the list are a line of truly exceptional bishops: Charles Borromeo (1528-1584), "a ground breaker for modern pastoral work",<sup>17</sup> Francis de Sales (1567-1622), "perfection: something within everyone's grasp", Alphonsus Liguori (1696-1787), "reaching out to the most neglected poor", Eugene de Mazenod (1782-1861), "a man dedicated without reserve to the Church".

Then, there is the outstanding Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) heading the group of patrons of the missions along with his companion, Francis Xavier (1506-1552). They are followed by Philip Neri (1515-1595), "the joyful saint", Vincent de Paul (1581-1660), "father of the poor", Joseph Calasanz (1556-1648) "the man of total availability", and John Leonard (1541-1609), founder of the Regular Clerics of the Mother of God and co-founder of the Propagation of the Faith seminary in Rome. Normally, the next in line would be Father Joseph Gerard (1831-1914), "Father of the Church in Lesotho."

Because of the association the Ob-

lates had with the Carmelite convent in Aix-en-Provence and their association with difficult missions, the contemplative life is honored in the persons of Saint Teresa of Avila and Saint Therese of Lisieux.

The *Oblate Prayer* manual suggests: "If litanies are said, names of saints from the local Church and of our time might be added".<sup>18</sup> This touches not only on the present renewal and liturgical calendar, but also corresponds to one of Eugene de Mazenod's concerns: "For years I have never stopped asking for the names of the holy patrons of the places where missions have been given".<sup>19</sup> His object was to obtain the saints' names for the special litanies recited after the rosary. The problem was a sensitive one since the list of "holy patrons of places which had been evangelized" was growing with no end in sight. Its growth paralleled the expansion of the Congregation. No matter, thought the Founder, we will spread them throughout the twelve months of the year: "In this way you need not worry lest you may never recite the martyrologium".<sup>20</sup>

There can be no doubt that the invocation of the saints is a value which stems from the very origins of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. Even now, the fact that the "litanies proper to the Congregation" are included in the prayers for particular examen offers us a special occasion not only for "a full awareness of our ideal of religious and missionary perfection",<sup>21</sup> but a way of expressing our devotion to the Congregation, to our Superior General so that he "guide the Congregation in the spirit of Saint Eugene and be a sign of unity among all Oblates."<sup>22</sup>

HERMÉNÉGILDE CHARBONNEAU

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Oblate Prayer*, Rome, 1986, p. 27. This article bases itself on the various editions of the prayer manual whose first edition bore the title *Manuel de prières et cérémonial à l'usage des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, Paris, 1865, 187 p.

<sup>2</sup> COSENTINO, Georges, *Exercices de piété de l'Oblat*, Ottawa, Oblate Studies Edition, 1962, p. 137.

<sup>3</sup> "Litanies propres à la Congrégation", in *Etudes oblates*, 22 (1963), p. 40.

<sup>4</sup> In *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 4 p. 6.

<sup>5</sup> In RAMBERT I, p. 241.

<sup>6</sup> "Litanies propres à la Congrégation", in *Etudes oblates*, 22 (1963), p. 40.

<sup>7</sup> Letter to Father Ambrose Vincens, December 19, 1847 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 10, no. 958, p. 196.

<sup>8</sup> Letter to Father Anthony Mouchette, July 9, 1853 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 11, no. 1160, p. 146-147.

<sup>9</sup> Lettres to missionaries in Ceylon, June 5, 1854 in *Letters to Ceylon and Africa, 1847-1860*, *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 4, no. 38, p. 122.

<sup>10</sup> See COSENTINO, Georges, "Le Manuel de Prière de la Congrégation", in *Etudes oblates*, 23 (1964), p. 149-150.

<sup>11</sup> COSENTINO, Georges, "Litanies...", p. 40-43; LESAGE, Germain, "Monseigneur Charlebois et sainte Thérèse de l'Enfant-Jésus", in *Etudes oblates*, 10 (1951), p. 6-34.

<sup>12</sup> COSENTINO, Georges, *Exercices de piété...*, p. 137.

<sup>13</sup> BAFFIE, Eugene, "Dévotion de Mgr de Mazenod envers les Saints", in *Esprit et vertus du Missionnaire des pauvres C.-J.-Eugène de Mazenod*, Paris-Lyon, 1894, p. 214-243.

<sup>14</sup> *Manuel de prières et cérémonial*, Paris, 1865, p. 54-57.

<sup>15</sup> GILBERT, Maurice, "Sur les traces des Apôtres", in *Etudes oblates*, 16 (1957), p. 283-301.

<sup>16</sup> LAMIRANDE, Émilien, "Les Oblates et la suppléance des anciens ordres d'après Mgr de Mazenod", in *Etudes oblates*, 19 (1960), p. 185-195.

<sup>17</sup> For the most part, the characterizations of the saints listed are taken from *Histoire*

*des Saints et de la Sainteté chrétienne*, 11 volumes, Paris, 1986-1988.

<sup>18</sup> *Oblate Prayer*, Rome, 1986, p. 27.

<sup>19</sup> Letter to Father Marius Suzanne September 23, 1827 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 7, no. 279, p. 140.

<sup>20</sup> Letter to Father Henry Tempier, August 6, 1829 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 7, no. 334, p. 188.

<sup>21</sup> COSENTINO, Georges, "Litanies...", p. 43.

<sup>22</sup> *Oblate Prayer*, Rome, 1986, p. 30.

## PERSEVERANCE

*Summary: I. The fourth vow in Oblate history: 1. Clarification of the vow: a. A vow that is not unique; b. A vow that is not redundant; c. A vow that is not in bondage to a fixed spiritual program; d) A clarified statement of the vow. 2. Historical development of the vow: a. The obligation by Rule; b. The vow; c. The supplementary oath. 3. Reasons for the vow. 4. The Founder's view of dispensation. II. Perseverance in traditional philosophy. III. Perseverance in developmental psychology: 1. Psychological development by ascent-descent; 2. Spiritual life by immersion-emergence; 3. Perseverance in these contexts; IV. Perseverance in process spirituality.*

The Oblate vow of perseverance has, besides a witness value, two effects: the stability of the individual and the survival of the Congregation. In traditional philosophy, perseverance is a virtue supportive of other virtues. In developmental psychology, it is what transforms a new step into a new path. In process spirituality, it is a firm commitment to a specific process of growth.

*severaturum in sancto Instituto et in Societate Missionariorum Oblatorum Sanctissimae et Immaculatae Virginis Mariae. Sic Deus me adiuvet. Amen. [I also swear and vow perseverance unto death in the holy Institute and Society of the Missionary Oblates of the most Holy and Immaculate Virgin Mary. So help me God.]<sup>1</sup>*

### I. THE FOURTH VOW IN OBLATE HISTORY

#### 1. CLARIFICATION OF THE VOW

What you are about to read may come as a surprise. The fourth vow is not unique to us. We borrowed it. It is not redundant. The effects are distinct from those of the other three vows. And it is not a bondage to a fixed spiritual program. By it we are committed to co-create an evolving process of community and mission.

##### *a. It is not unique*

We are indebted for it to the Redemptorists. From St. Alphonsus the Founder took verbatim the formula in use from 1818 to 1982: *Pariter iureiurando voveo ad mortem usque per-*

##### *b. It is not redundant*

There are two effects distinct from those of the other vows: stability of the individual in the Oblate family and survival of the Oblates as a group. Or, as Father Joseph Reslé puts it: "Perseverance in the Congregation and perseverance of the Congregation"<sup>2</sup>. Let us look at this further.

— *Stability*: Although an Oblate may be dispensed from the vows altogether or be permitted to observe them in another religious congregation, by his vow of perseverance he commits himself not to ask the Holy See for a change. In effect, a dispensation from the fourth vow is the key to dispensation from the other three.

— *Survival*: Obviously the survival of a congregation is dependent on the perseverance of its members. If we all became Trappists, there would be no Oblates in the Church. De Mazenod had

not forgotten the dissolution of the Jesuits (1773 to 1814) when he adopted this vow.

“Our members, by this vow, expressly bind themselves to remain until death in the Congregation, even in those circumstances in which, by some unforeseen event, the Congregation should be obliged to disperse, for then by this very means it would not suffer dissolution. In this case, a special statute would be drawn up prescribing the kind and manner of relations to be maintained, either among the members themselves or with the Superior General and the whole Society”<sup>3</sup>.

*c. It is not a bondage to a fixed spiritual program*

The vow of perseverance commits Oblates to merge their paths in life. “We come together in apostolic communities of priests and Brothers, united to God by the vows of religion. Cooperating with the Saviour and imitating his example, we commit ourselves principally to evangelizing the poor” (C 1).

Note that the Rule does not say that an individual “joins the Oblates”, but that “we come together”. We do not enter a system or subscribe to a method; together we create a process. A contemporary pastoral theologian describes this “coming together” process:

“Each person is a summation of a whole history of families, friends, experiences, influences and values. As... persons continually combine their differences and find ways of harmonizing their diverse energies, they are generating new experiences and new possibilities for future experiences, for themselves, for others, for God”<sup>4</sup>.

The single pilgrims, with their sto-

ries, form a group pilgrimage, with its story and constantly pick up new members and stories along the road. Sharing experiences and gifts they work out solutions as problems arise. The vow of perseverance does not commit them to apply the solutions of kilometer 1826 to the problems of kilometer 1996 but rather to harmonize their gifts within the Founder’s charism and generate new solutions.

‘In this sense, an Oblate who clings to obsolete forms of community, mission and prayer when the Congregation has moved on to new ones, may well be failing against the spirit of the fourth vow.

*d. A clarified statement of the vow*

Perseverance is a public vow of commitment to the evolving process of Oblate community and mission.

2. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE VOW

*a. The obligation of the Rule*

A Rule obligation of perseverance actually preceded all four vows. On January 25, 1816, the initial group of Oblates, not yet under vows, accepted a rule which was approved four days later by the Vicars General of Aix: “The missionaries ought to resolve, when they enter the Society, to persevere in it for their entire lives”<sup>5</sup>.

It should be noted that Liguori and his first companions also began with a promise of perseverance in 1740 and only took the other vows in 1743, but de Mazenod was not aware of this fact in 1816. He only saw the Redemptorist Rule in 1818<sup>6</sup>. The CSSR promise still shows the oath-vow formula (cf. no. 3 below).

### b. The vow

The obligation of perseverance became a vow in the Rule of 1818. Poverty and chastity were not vowed. In 1818, some of the Oblates were not yet prepared to accept religious poverty; and at any rate it would have been difficult since the laws of France, a legacy of the Napoleonic period gave to individual French citizens an inalienable right to dispose of their property but did not grant property rights to religious institutions.

And since every member in 1818 was a priest bound by the law of celibacy, the first Oblates did not vow chastity. Obedience and perseverance were deemed sufficient to form the bond of the Missionaries of Provence.

Father Théophile Ortolan explains the mind of the Founder at the time:

“Absolute detachment, so useful for personal holiness, was less indispensable for the prosperity of the Work.... To assure the continuance of the popular missions the vows of obedience and perseverance were enough”<sup>7</sup>.

But the Chapter of 1821 approved the vows of poverty and chastity, and the Oblates first professed them, along with obedience and perseverance, on November 1 of that year.

On February 17, 1826 the Holy See raised the Congregation to Pontifical status and approved its Rule, including the vow of perseverance. Every edition since then has retained the fourth vow.

### c. The supplementary oath

The Latin formula selected by the Founder for the vow of perseverance was taken verbatim from St. Alphonsus. It consisted of a vow strengthened by an oath *iureiurando voveo* [I swear with and oath], an oath the other vows did not have.

When de Mazenod presented the Rule to the Holy See in 1826, Cardinal Pallotta asked why the oath was added to this vow but not to the other three calling it “*insolito...superfluo*” (unusual...superfluous). De Mazenod responded that he had taken verbatim the Redemptorist formula composed by Blessed Alphonsus Maria Liguori. Pallotta was satisfied<sup>8</sup>.

He could have also have argued from St. Thomas Aquinas: “An oath is added to a vow so that by two immovable things there may be greater firmness”<sup>9</sup>. The stiffening oath was in use from 1818 until 1982.

The formula proposed in the CC and RR of 1982 omits for the first time the oath. The French text, approved by the Holy See and retained as official in the archives of the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes gives the text: “Je fais pareillement voeu de perséverer jusqu’à la mort dans le saint Institut et la Société des Missionnaires Oblats de la très sainte et immaculée Vierge Marie. Ainsi Dieu me soit en aide. Amen”. Or, in the official English text: “I also vow perseverance unto death in the holy Institute and Society...” (C 62).

The supplementary oath, therefore, is now obsolete.

### 3. REASONS FOR THE VOW

All congregations founded after the 16th century take simple instead of solemn vows. Until Pentecost 1917, when the Code of Canon Law was promulgated, the local Ordinary was empowered to dispense from simple vows. A religious merely applied to the local chancery office for permission to return to the lay state. It was rather like easy divorce and led to many abuses.

The 1818 Rule, through the vow of perseverance and the related texts, obliged Oblates not to seek a dispensation from the bishop but only from the Superior General or the Pope<sup>10</sup>.

Canon 638 of the 1917 Code made this superfluous by reserving to the Pope any dispensation from the vows of a pontifical congregation. Accordingly, the Oblate Rules of 1910 (in anticipation) and 1928 dropped all reference to the old procedures and simply stressed perseverance. Unfortunately, both editions explained the fourth vow as redundant:

“Although perseverance is included in the perpetual vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, nevertheless our members by this vow expressly bind themselves to remain until death in the Congregation, etc”<sup>11</sup>.

The false impression that nothing new is added by the fourth vow, if it was not already common among Oblates, became widespread after the publication of this text.

The Rule of 1966 reads about the same:

“To the vows of chastity poverty and obedience the Oblates add that of perseverance. By this vow they intend to bind themselves more explicitly to the Congregation”<sup>12</sup>.

The 1982 Rule, approved by the 30th Chapter is better:

“Although the determination to persevere is already included in the three vows made and received in the Congregation we add a vow of perseverance, thereby publicly attesting our attachment to our religious family and our definitive commitment to its mission” (C 30).

It says, in effect, that the virtue of perseverance is implied in the first three vows, but the vow of perseverance adds something new: a witness to the world

that nothing can separate us from each other or from our mission.

Of course, the Founder knew that the virtue of perseverance was implied in all vows. He adopted the fourth vow to discourage the seeking of dispensations, a practice which he abhorred.

#### 4. THE FOUNDER'S VIEW OF DISPENSATION

De Mazenod himself believed that the bonding of priests, especially through obedience and perseverance, achieves more than the priests can do individually. He did not believe there is any valid pastoral reason for leaving a congregation.

In the 1818 Rule, he wrote a text that remained with us until omitted by the 1966 edition: “For no one must ever be allowed to enter our Community for the sake of experiment, and without having made beforehand a firm resolution to remain in it until death”<sup>13</sup>.

His letter to Father Joseph Martin, dated January 9, 1837, expressed puzzlement that anyone would even dream of quitting:

“Priests who are free are looking for religious communities because they realize that all their efforts of zeal done alone and in isolation, bear no results; and those who are fortunate to live in a Congregation would like to get out of it to do more good?”<sup>14</sup>

And he concluded: “Dispensations can free the individual in conscience only when there are serious reasons which did not exist at the time of profession and which the person concerned did not foresee which will appear all of a sudden and make it impossible for him to fulfill his commitments. Even in such a case the person concerned should accept the dispensation only with regret and with the sincere desire

of removing the obstacle preventing him from remaining in the Congregation to which he had committed himself. The presumption is that this obstacle is quite independent of his will" <sup>15</sup>.

De Mazenod's personal assessment of Oblates who asked for dispensations was quite severe:

"The power of dispensing from vows is a two-edged sword which usually kills the individual in order to save the family. All the members of our Congregation who have been dispensed to date are, in a very true sense, real apostates, because there is not a single one of them who had valid reasons to offer..."<sup>16</sup>.

## II. PERSEVERANCE IN TRADITIONAL PHILOSOPHY

Aristotle praises endurance of the difficult *karteria peri lupas* <sup>17</sup>. He admits, however, that it is human to want a change even from something pleasant<sup>18</sup>.

Cicero defines the virtue: *Perseverantia est in ratione bene considerata stabilis et perpetua permansio*; or in English: "Perseverance is a stable and lasting persistence in a well thought out plan"<sup>19</sup>.

For St. Thomas Aquinas, "Perseverance is a special virtue whose function it is to sustain the long duration of (temperance and fortitude) and the other virtues"<sup>20</sup>. "It is joined to fortitude as a secondary to a principle virtue"<sup>21</sup>.

Perhaps Marcus Aurelius explained best the traditional virtue of persevering in good. "If you see your way clear, go happily forward without looking back. If your way is not clear, stop and get some good advice. If the obstacles come from outside you, go ahead as best you can keeping an open mind

while aiming for what you judge to be right. For it is better to reach a goal you have honestly set for yourself, or, if you are going to fail, to do so trying"<sup>22</sup>.

## III. PERSEVERANCE IN DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY

Much of our contemporary understanding of the human person comes from developmental psychology. Perhaps the best known authors are Daniel Levinson, Lawrence Kohlbert, Robert Selman, Erik Erikson, Jean Piaget and James Fowler.

Father Kelly Nemeck, O.M.I., and Marie Theresa Coombs, Hermit, have studied them in the light of the writings of St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, and Father Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, SJ. They conclude that the developmental psychologists offer "insightful parallels" to various aspects of the spiritual journey.

### 1. PSYCHOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT BY ASCENT-DESCENT

"Carl Jung, the father of developmental psychology, observes three basic stages in a person's life. The first two of these – which comprise infancy to mid life – he compares to an ascent. Jung likens these two stages to the sun rising in the morning, then steadily climbing until it attains its zenith at high noon. From that point, it descends. From mid-life onward, we too commence to go down"<sup>23</sup>.

### 2. THE SPIRITUAL LIFE BY IMMERSION-EMERGENCE

"In the normal course of human events, we must first increase so that Christ can increase. We develop our

talents. We take advantage of the opportunities that come our way. We build up as rich a personhood and as productive a life as circumstances permit"<sup>24</sup>.

"If we are true to life and to grace, we cannot continue indefinitely in the direction of full human development of our energies and talents... The inevitable experience of human life is that we have hardly arrived at the zenith of our accomplishments when we are ready to leave them, retire and move on".

"Having taken our fill of the world and of ourselves, we discover one day that we are possessed by an intense need to die to self and to leave all self-interest behind. Moreover, for one faithful to life and grace this predilection for detachment is not the consequence of failure or of despair, but rather the normal development of effort and of success".

"So begins the next threshold and stage of our formation in Jesus Christ: that of passing all the way through creation (or of emergence) with him"<sup>25</sup>.

"All human life between inception and death is characterized by this two-fold rhythm: immersion in creation for Christ and emergence through creation with him. These are but two phases of a single movement: like breathing in and breathing out: like the arsis and thesis of a musical measure"<sup>26</sup>.

De Chardin writes: "All the different shades of holiness are contained in the innumerable permutations of these two aspects of the breath by which the soul lives: first taking its fill of possessing things, and then sublimating them in God"<sup>27</sup>.

### 3. PERSEVERANCE IN THESE CONTEXTS

How does the vow of perseverance relate to the ascent-descent of Jung and the immersion-emergence rhythm of Chardin? By being a definitive choice.

Perseverance transforms a vow event, which after all could be temporary, into what Nemeck and Coombs call a fork in the road, a commitment.

"A threshold [in spiritual growth] frequently possesses the characteristics of a crossroads, of a fork in the road. It calls forth a fundamental option and commitment of oneself to a particular direction"<sup>28</sup>.

### IV. PERSEVERANCE IN PROCESS SPIRITUALITY

Influenced by the process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead, contemporary Catholic writers are developing a process theology and a corresponding process spirituality.

Kathleen R. Fischer, S.T.D., explains it this way in *Mending Broken Connections: A Process Spirituality*:

"In the past, perfection has been equated with the static and unchanging, a stable condition untouched by the change and turmoil which mar our daily existence. Many Christians still think of perfection as a state at which they will arrive, or where others have arrived, finally free from the unexpected turns and new challenges, the brokenness and incomplete quality of their spiritual lives".

"This notion of Christian perfection undergoes dramatic revision in a process spirituality where change and becoming are recognized as more fundamental aspects of existence than the static and unchanging, where to be is *always to become*"<sup>29</sup>.

An openness to constant change means that "the worship of God is not a rule of safety – it is an adventure of the spirit"<sup>30</sup>. By analogy perseverance in religious vows is not a guarantee of sameness but an ongoing spiritual adventure, leading constantly to risks.

Think of the *nihil linquendum inausum* of the Founder's Preface to the Rule.

Perseverance, in the context of process spirituality, is a commitment to directions and patterns rather than to specific solutions. This fits in well with the Oblate tradition of spirituality, which has always been responsive to change.

For example, the Rule until 1966 prescribed that chastity be *preserved*. "They will be most diligent in their efforts to preserve it. Wherefore, in treating with persons of the other sex, they will use the utmost reserve. They will not enter their houses or the homes of any outsiders without urgent motives..." (CC RR 1928, C 219 ff.).

Today's Rule calls for chastity to be *shared*. "Consecrated celibacy calls us to develop the riches of the heart. It is an affirmation of life and love; it expresses our total gift of self to God and to others with all our affection, with all the life-giving powers of our being. Our celibacy allows us to be present where the most urgent needs are to be found..." (C 16).

Perseverance, therefore, is a firm commitment to an evolving process. Concretely for Oblates today, it is an engagement to respond wholeheartedly to the challenge of the 1986 General Chapter, "an invitation to action, a call to a renewed missionary dynamism in today's world"<sup>31</sup>.

The vow of perseverance is "the *unreserved* gift we make of ourselves in our oblation, an offering *constantly* renewed by the challenges of our mission" (C 2).

WILLIAM L. WATSON

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> C and R of 1966, p. 121.

<sup>2</sup> RESLÉ, Joseph, "Persévérance dans la Congrégation et persévérance de la Con-

grégation", in *Etudes oblates*, 23 (1964), p. 94 ff. This is a thorough coverage of the historical development of the vow before 1966.

<sup>3</sup> C and R of 1928, art. 244-245. This article is found in every edition of the CC RR before 1966.

<sup>4</sup> KINAST, Robert L., "Sacramental Vitality", in *Chicago Studies*, vol. 26, no. 1 (April 1987), p. 66.

<sup>5</sup> Rey I, p. 193.

<sup>6</sup> See LEFLON II, p. 177.

<sup>7</sup> ORTOLAN, Théophile, O.M.I., *Les Oblats de Marie Immaculée durant le premier siècle de leur existence*, Paris, St. Paul's Bookstore, vol. 1, p. 129.

<sup>8</sup> DUVAL, Paul-Emile, O.M.I., "Première approbation pontificale des Constitutions et Règles des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée", in *Missions*, 79 (1952) in *Ecrits du Fondateur*, fascicule 4, p. 510, 512, 515-516.

<sup>9</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologica*, 2a-2ae, question 89, article 8, ad 2m.

<sup>10</sup> C and R of 1818, Second Part, Chapter One, par. 4 in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 53-54.

<sup>11</sup> C and R of 1910, art. 259; C and R of 1928, art. 244.

<sup>12</sup> C and R of 1966, C 40.

<sup>13</sup> C and R of 1818, Third Part, Chapter Two, par. 1 in *Missions*, 78 (1951) p. 84.

<sup>14</sup> January 9, 1837 letter to Father Joseph Martin in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 9, no. 600, p. 5.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 4.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 4.

<sup>17</sup> Nicomachean Ethics, Book VII, Chapter 1, no. 6; Chapter VII, 1.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, Chapter XIV, no. 8.

<sup>19</sup> *De inventione rhetorica*, Book II, no. LIV.

<sup>20</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologica*, 2a-2ae, question 137, article 1.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, question 137, art. 2.

<sup>22</sup> MARCUS AURELIUS, *Meditations*, Book 10, no. 12.

<sup>23</sup> NEMECK, Francis Kelly, O.M.I., and COOMBS, Marie Theresa, *The Spiritual Journey: Critical Thresholds and Stages of Adult Spiritual Genesis*, Wilmington, Delaware, Michael Glazier, 1987, p. 228.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 46.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 47.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 45.

<sup>27</sup> TEILHARD DE CHARDIN, Pierre, S.J., *Writings in Time of War*, New York, Harper and Row, 1968, p. 261.

<sup>28</sup> NEMECK, Francis Kelly, O.M.I., and COOMBS, Marie Theresa, *The Spiritual Journey: Critical Thresholds and Stages of Adult Spiritual Genesis*, p. 20.

<sup>29</sup> FISCHER, Kathleen, R., "Mending Broken Connections: A Process Spirituality" in *Chicago Studies*, 26 (9187), p. 39.

<sup>30</sup> WHITEHEAD, Alfred North, *Science in the Modern World*, New York, MacMillan, 1967, p. 192.

<sup>31</sup> *Missionaries in Today's World*, no. 8, p. 8.

## POOR

*Summary: I. The Founder's conviction. II. Who are the poor for De Mazenod? III. The poor in O.M.I. writings of recent years; 1. The 1966 Constitutions and Rules; 2. The 1972 General Chapter: The Missionary Outlook; 3. The years from 1972 to 1980: a. The 1974 General Chapter, b. The Charism Congress of 1976; 4. The 1982 Constitutions and Rules; 5. The General Chapter of 1986: Missionaries in Today's World; 6. The 1992 General Chapter: Witnessing as Apostolic Community. Conclusion.*

*Evangelizare pauperibus misit me... pauperes evangelizantur* ("He has sent me to evangelize the poor"). This quotation from Luke 4:18 which is the motto of the Oblates, sums up the motive that led Eugene de Mazenod to the priesthood, and to found a society of missionaries in Provence in 1816. It is the one expression that best describes the specific character of the Oblate: missionary of the poor. The poor are the preferred objects of the Oblate's missionary and pastoral activity. Evangelization of the poor is their distinguishing and specific character, not specifically because they are poor, but because they are abandoned. Such was the conviction of St. Eugene. Such has been the conviction of Oblates down through the years.

### I. THE FOUNDER'S CONVICTION

The very root of his priestly vocation is his conviction that he is sent to the poor. When he writes to his mother in 1808 to tell her of his decision to enter the seminary he says: "As the Lord is my witness, what he wants of me, [...] is] that I devote myself especially to his service and try to reawaken the faith that is becoming extinct amongst the poor..."<sup>1</sup>

As a seminarian at St. Sulpice he is

given charge of catechism instruction for some of the poorest children in the parish, a task that he found completely to his liking. We find his thoughts on the experience in another letter to his mother.

"These are the poorest in the parish... but I am not concerned with that, and I am very happy to find myself in the middle of these poor verminous lads, whom I shall try to win over to ourselves"<sup>2</sup>.

In the summer of 1810 having been impeded from returning to Provence for the summer holidays he regrets missing the opportunity to give instruction to the poor of St Julien where his grandmother lived. "I had intended to go and see grandmother in St. Julien, and I was thinking of giving a little instruction to these poor people who are so abandoned. I was already quite enjoying the idea of the fruit these instructions might produce. Poor Christians without the least idea of the dignity that is theirs, for want of meeting someone to break the bread of the word"<sup>3</sup>.

### II. WHO ARE THE POOR FOR DE MAZENOD?

In this last quotation from his letter of July 1810 to his mother we see joined together the expressions "poor

peoples" and "abandoned". These two expressions "the poor" and the "abandoned" come back repeatedly in his writings, "the abandoned" more than "the poor". They are sometimes used almost interchangeably, though the latter is broader in perspective than the former. The fundamental idea underlying all these statements seems to be the abandoned state of the Church especially as it is manifest in certain categories of Christians, namely poor people<sup>4</sup>.

Returning to Aix as a newly ordained priest in 1812 this deplorable situation is uppermost in his mind. He asks his bishop not to be assigned to a parish, but to be left free "to serve the poor and the children"<sup>5</sup>. He begins his priestly ministry by visits to the prison, the sick, and ministry among the youth of Aix.

Lent of 1813 finds him preaching a Lenten series early in the morning at the church of the Madeleine, for the servants and domestic help. His choice of audience is noteworthy, and his notes for the occasion provide a list of these poor.

"During this holy season, numerous instructions will be given to the rich and the educated. Will there be none for the poor and the unlearned? [...] The poor, that precious portion of the Christian family, cannot be left in their ignorance"<sup>6</sup>.

The text of this Lenten instruction, which is one of the earliest written texts we have of his preaching, appeals to the "artisans", "servants", "farmers", "peasants", you "needy, who are obliged [...] to beg for your pitiful subsistence".

At the climax of the passage his sonorous voice certainly echoed through the vault of the Madeleine and stirred the hearts of his listeners.

"The poor of Jesus Christ the afflicted and wretched, the sick and suf-

fering and covered with sores, etc., whom misery overwhelms, my brethren, my dear brethren, my dear *respectable* brethren, listen to me. You are the children of God, the brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, the co-heirs of his eternal Kingdom..."<sup>7</sup>.

Today we would say that he chose by preference the marginalized, those in society which the established Church touched least – literally the abandoned. He chose them as the object of his ministry not because of some humanistic motive nor primarily because they were materially poor, but especially because they were abandoned. Following the example and in the spirit of Jesus Christ the poor and the abandoned have a right to hear the Gospel of salvation. The young preacher of the Madeleine makes this clear in the introduction to his Instruction.

"The poor, that precious portion of the Christian family, cannot be left in their ignorance. So important did our divine Savior consider them that he took it upon himself to instruct them; and he gave as proof that his mission was divine the fact that the poor were being instructed: *Pauperes evangelizantur*"<sup>8</sup>.

Such was his personal choice at the outset of his ministry, and such was the purpose he had for the society of missionaries he founded, as we can see from his retreat notes of 1831.

"Will we ever have an adequate understanding of this sublime vocation! For that one would have to understand the excellence of our Institute's end, beyond argument the most perfect one could propose to oneself in this world, since the end of our Institute is the self-same end that the Son of God had in mind when he came down to earth. The glory of his heavenly Father and the salvation of souls. [...] He was espe-

cially sent to evangelize the poor: *Evangelizare pauperibus misit me*. And we have been founded precisely to work for the conversion of souls and especially to evangelize the poor"<sup>9</sup>.

The evangelization of the poor and abandoned will be the driving force that will carry Eugene de Mazenod and his band of preachers to the poorer rural villages of Provence and finally to the farthest corners of the globe. In his writings we find a variety of expressions to describe the preferred objects of his ministry: "the poor", "the common, ordinary folk", "the uneducated", "inhabitants of the rural areas", "all of those city dwellers wasting away in spiritual anguish"; in the foreign missions they are referred to as the "infidel", the "heretics", the "prisoners", the "dying", or in other words, the "most abandoned souls". Abandoned refers especially to their spiritual distress. However a spiritual poverty which is nevertheless incarnated in a poverty of the natural order<sup>10</sup>. In the Founder's time the most spiritually abandoned were in fact materially in bad straits. The two words are readily used interchangeably under his pen. However, as Émilien Lamirande points out, the underlying idea seems to be the notion of abandonment.

"First and foremost, it seems to us that the idea of abandonment is the most basic. The Founder was moved by the anguish of the Church and of souls. The poor, the ordinary, common folk, are those who are the most deprived of spiritual help. Consequently, it is to them that the Congregation will turn to first of all. Above all, the Congregation will focus its attention on the spiritual devastation it sees, but she will always keep in mind the outcasts of every kind as having a prior claim on her tender care"<sup>11</sup>.

This initial inspiration of the Founder became codified in the first two articles of the Constitutions and Rules in 1826: "praecipuum dent operam pauperibus evangelizandis" (they devote themselves principally to the preaching of the Gospel to the poor). Article 2 of the 1826 text describes the subjects of this preaching: "ut spiritualia auxilia praebeantur populo per rura, necnon pagorum villarumque incolis isto spirituali cibo maxime jejunis" (In order that spiritual help may be provided to the people the length and breadth of the rural area as well as to the people of the villages and country estates with their inhabitants starved to the highest degree for this spiritual food".)

### III. THE POOR IN OMI WRITINGS OF RECENT YEARS

As the Congregation grew and expanded, and its members, in keeping with the spirit of the Founder, became involved in all "the works of zeal which priestly charity can inspire" (*Preface*), they always bore in mind that they were first and foremost "missionaries of the poor" and of the abandoned. Our history, however, does not hide the fact that the Oblates struggled to define the terms in different times and different places, and wrestled with the priority of materially poor or spiritually poor. There was often a tendency to join the two terms without scruple. The immediate successor of the Founder, Fr. Fabre, seems to regard them as synonymous. "That is the objective our venerated Father set for us. We are to *evangelize the poor, the most abandoned souls...*"<sup>12</sup>

In the midst of the Congregation's foreign missionary expansion in 1926, Fr. Émile Bajot, in a brief commentary

on the Oblate motto, praises the Oblate missionaries in far distant lands as true "missionaries of the poor"<sup>13</sup>.

About twenty years later an article by Marcel Bélanger lets us sense the questioning and the struggle of Oblates who are not directly involved with the materially poor: the Oblate in educational institutions, in various chaplaincies, in OMI formation houses, in administration.

Bélanger stresses the dimension of abandonment. The poor who are the object the Oblate's attention are not solely, nor primarily "the wretched, those living in extreme poverty, the crippled"<sup>14</sup>. Such an interpretation, he holds, would be to beg the texts and actual conduct of the Founder. It is, he insists, the spiritual distress of the poor, a problem very particular to the working masses that seem to be the dominant preoccupation of the Oblate, the spirit that is definitely characteristic of the Oblate vocation<sup>15</sup>.

Understood in this way the poor and their problems will always question the conscience of the Oblate. No matter what field of apostolate is his, it is the "feeling for the poor" that will fill it, give it a special character, like a magnetic pole that attracts, a higher goal that finalizes and molds a particular frame of mind and exterior attitude.

While such soul searching and questioning did not resolve the dilemma, nor the debate of the primacy of material poor over spiritually poor, it reveals the honest desire of the Oblate to seek to remain faithful to the Founder's spirit and to the prescription of article 1 of the CRR, "praecipuum dent operam pauperibus evangelizandis" (devote themselves principally to the preaching of the Gospel to the poor).

## 1. THE 1966 CONSTITUTIONS AND RULES

In 1966, just over 100 years after the Founder's death, we are a long way from the little band of missionaries preaching missions in the poor rural areas of Provence. The membership of more than 7000 is spread over all the continents, and involved in a variety of ministries. The interest in parish missions is beginning to wane due to new social realities. The concerns of the Church reflected in *Gaudium et Spes* and other Second Vatican Council documents are being felt by the Congregation gathered in General Chapter.

The spirit of the Council and its concern for the growing phenomenon of worldwide poverty was not without its effect on the Oblates in this "ad experimentum" revision of the CRR, as the numerous references to Council documents in the margin of the 1966 text show.

The revised text of 1966 preserves intact the original 1826 formulation of the Congregation's aim: "We commit ourselves principally to evangelizing the poor"(C 1). It must be noted that through the various revisions of the text the expression of the original Article 1 has remained unchanged. The 1928 revision had added unbelievers and heretics to the list of those most in need of spiritual succor (art. 2). The General Chapter of 1966 reformulates in modern terms the 1826 Article 2 and its emended version of 1928: "Its principal aim is to help those souls who are most in need" (C 3)<sup>16</sup>. It groups the "most in need" into two categories: "those who have not received [the Gospel]", and "where the Church is already established, to those regions and human groups further removed from its influence" (C 3).

While the same Constitution 3 ends by stating that the Congregation will try to respond to all the needs of the world and of the Church, Constitution 4 singles out the "poor, those who are harassed by hunger or by the fear of insecurity" as special objects of the Oblate's affection, and encourages a missionary presence where the future of the world of the poor is being planned: "They will strive to be present, in various ways in all areas where, in fact, the future of this world of the poor is being planned, shaped and decided".

This is an innovation which goes beyond the Founder's vision, but which is very much in consonance with the concerns of the post-conciliar Church. This last concern will become more explicit in the coming years and will find its way into R 9 of the 1982 revised text which states that action on behalf of justice is an integral part of our work of evangelization<sup>17</sup>.

## 2. 1972 GENERAL CHAPTER: *THE MISSIONARY OUTLOOK*

The six years following the 1966 Chapter were years of great stirrings within the Church. Paul VI had issued two strong "calls to action": *Populorum Progressio* (1967) and *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971). The ground swell of the Medellin Conference (1968) had crested with the *Justice in the World* statement of the Third Synod (Nov. 1971). The XXVIIIth General Chapter opened in the spring of 1972, only six months after the Synod. The Chapter statement, *Missionary Outlook* shows that the Pope's "calls to action" were being heeded far and wide, and that the stirrings within the Church were being felt in the hearts of Oblates.

The specific purpose of *Missionary Outlook* is to redefine in terms of a new

world reality the mission of Eugene de Mazenod and his sons to "the most abandoned".

Eugene de Mazenod looked upon the world of his day and saw people whose lives had hardly been touched by the message of Christ... He set out with unbounded confidence in God to serve the most abandoned... (no. 1).

The first part of the document, *A Look at the World*, describes the evolving social situation in each Region (nos. 2-8). The situation varies from one socio-cultural milieu to another, but the picture that emerges is one of political and socio-economic exploitation, massive chronic poverty and underdevelopment, nationalism, racism, dehumanization, secularized social structures, and violence. Each situation presents new challenges, and requires new ways of evangelizing and of being present to the poor and abandoned of our times.

Part II points out some of the new mission demands arising from these challenges: in some areas new forms of apostolate; in others, a presence more clearly responsive to injustice; in others a more explicit solidarity with the poor (no. 9). The Chapter reaffirms our basic charism of "preaching the Gospel to the poor". Then it goes on to affirm the need for each Province to have a definite missionary policy that includes a "clear policy favoring the mission to the abandoned and a life shared with them" (no. 13b). The overall context and description of the world situation lays stress on the materially poor and exploited masses of the southern hemisphere, without overlooking the newly alienated peoples of the secularized societies of the north.

Part III proposes three lines of action that should orient decision making in the entire Congregation: a preference

for the poor; solidarity with the men of our times; and greater creativity. One originality of *Missionary Outlook* is the introduction of a broadened concept of who the poor are today. They are "the abandoned poor with their many faces". There is a specific reference to C 4 (1966) and a more explicit listing of who these people are: "the weak, the unemployed, the illiterate, victims of alcohol or drugs, the sick, the marginal masses... immigrants and minority groups... who are excluded from the benefits of development" (no. 15a). The worst form of poverty is still recognized as not knowing Christ (no. 15b).

*Missionary Outlook* is careful to point out that we will not restrict our mission to the materially poor in some kind of social action or relief service. There is a renewed call to be present in vital international bodies where the destiny of the poor is planned and decided (C 4) (no. 15c).

The concept of the "poor with their many faces" and the need to influence the structures of society with the Gospel will remain constant concerns in future Oblate documents. They will eventually be incorporated into the 1982 revised Constitutions and Rules<sup>18</sup>.

The last section of *Missionary Outlook* calls for greater creativity, re-evaluation of our commitments, and for "the courage to make those concrete decisions demanded of us if we are to remain faithful to the Spirit who speaks to us through the most urgent needs of the poor" (no. 17a). Recognition, encouragement and support are given to those who may be called "to work directly in secular professions or to participate in the political struggles of the working class" (no. 17d). The same is pledged to those Oblates "who feel themselves obliged in conscience to take a clear and definite stand in favor of the op-

pressed, the victims of injustice, war or violence" (no. 17c).

The 1972 Chapter does not hide the fact that there were "great diversities" of opinion (no. 2), nor that the dialogue at Chapter was sometimes very difficult (no. 13).<sup>34</sup> But it is aware that this is an important moment in our history (no. 14). Prudence is called for, since what seem like "minority tendencies", may be tendencies indicating the future direction of the Congregation. The Chapter did not want to impose too quickly a superficial unity that might silence an important contribution to our common missionary outlook (no. 11).

The Chapter's challenge to re-evaluate present commitments in keeping with the movement of the Spirit who speaks to us through the most urgent needs of the poor (no. 17a) was well heeded. It marked the turning point for many Provinces in redefining their commitments and moving into ministries directed more to the new "poor with their many faces", thus leaving to others certain well established ministries which no longer met the criteria of a mission to the abandoned and the poor.

### 3. THE YEARS FROM 1972 TO 1980

The Congregation faces the challenge of integrating action on behalf of justice into its charism of missionaries to the poor.

#### a. *The 1974 General Chapter:*

This Chapter was convened less than two years after the previous one as a result of the Superior General's (Fr. Hanley) resignation. This event sent shock waves through the Congregation which was still struggling to define its mission in a secularized and changing

world. It raised questions about our identity and our ability to confront the new challenges facing our mission. This questioning, however, was not a phenomenon particular to the Congregation, though the Superior General's resignation and departure may have accentuated it.

The Church was also in a period of transition and questioning. Paul VI had asked the Third Synod of Bishops to clarify the relationship between evangelization and action for justice. The Synod issued just two brief declarations, one on evangelization and the other on human rights. Unable to agree on a comprehensive statement, the Synod left it up to the Pope to formulate the results of their exchange. The Chapter opened only days after the Synod closed.

The capitulants felt the need to address the sense of malaise pervading the Congregation. They informed the Congregation about their reflections in the form of a letter<sup>19</sup>. This letter reaffirms our commitment as religious missionaries in a world that still questions and challenges us as it did in 1972.

Among the long list of challenges, which touch upon all the aspects of our ministry, there are two that concern social involvement. "How do we witness Christ the Savior in a world where economic and political structures first create, then quietly shunt away and hide, the poor, the marginal, the silent ones, those in revolt?"<sup>20</sup>

The Chapter's answer is rooted in the heart of our charism. "We are called by Jesus Christ to evangelize the poor. We believe Him to be the only Savior, the One who now and for all time will liberate men. His liberation is neither solely political nor solely spiritual. It is total [...]"<sup>21</sup>. Our answer, then, to the questions put by the world lies in the

authenticity and radicalism of our apostolic religious (vowed) life, both individual and communal: in encountering the Lord... in incarnating the Good News in the world"<sup>22</sup>. The prophetic vigor of our vocation lies in being authentic having, "the courage to speak and the courage to live"<sup>23</sup>.

This Chapter made important steps toward a better integration of mission and religious life. It also gave further impetus to the integration of ministry for justice as one important and valid dimension of our mission to the poor. In so doing the 1974 Chapter planted the seeds of two future Chapter documents, *Missionaries in Today's World and Witnessing in Apostolic Community*.

#### b. The Charism Congress of 1976

One of the priority-tasks entrusted to the General Administration by the 1974 Chapter was the evaluation and renewal of the life and mission of the Congregation. This was reflected in the Chapter's call to continue seeking greater authenticity of life and to maintain the prophetic vigor of our vocation<sup>24</sup>.

Feeling the need to have clear reference points, the new General Council decided to organize a congress on our charism. Its major objective was to identify the Founder's charism and then to situate it in Oblate life and mission<sup>25</sup>.

The Congress singled out several elements as characteristic of the Oblate charism: personal love for Christ – living in community – as religious – for the evangelization – of the poor – love for the Church – *nihil linquendum inausum*<sup>26</sup>.

Without excluding or minimizing any of the above, four elements were

retained as presenting a particular urgency for the evaluation and renewal of the Congregation's life and works: Christ – evangelization – the poor – community<sup>27</sup>.

The Congress is much broader than the Chapter of 1972 in its definition of the poor. "It is to the POOR that we want above all to bring the message of liberating joy: to the most humanly destitute, to those whose situations cry out for justice before God; in no way does this exclude our wanting to share this message with all who are in pressing need of the good news, even if they are not materially deprived"<sup>28</sup>.

There seems to be a consensus reflected at the Congress that the poor and abandoned of the 70s, without being exclusive, are considered to be "the little people", "those oppressed by our modern societies". In a further elaboration of the "Most Important Elements for the Evaluation and Renewal of the Congregation's Life and Works Today" the Congress states: "Our motto comprises two words that are inseparable to us: Evangelize the Poor.... We are sent to the most destitute, to those whom no one looks after, the most deprived of the Good News. We are sent especially to the little people, those oppressed by our modern societies, without forgetting that destitution does not pertain only to one social class, and that it may vary according to time and place"<sup>29</sup>.

The Congress's main focus was our total identity and mission and the unity of life and mission. To remain true to our motto, "He sent me to evangelize the poor", and to be qualified to do so, the Congress insisted on the need to re-become poor ourselves and "to enter into the various areas where are lived the humblest existences, to hear their appeals, to discern their aspirations"<sup>30</sup>.

#### 4. THE 1982 CONSTITUTIONS AND RULES

As we have seen, the Oblate mission vision has evolved along with the Church's understanding of its mission in the modern world. By the time the Chapter opened, the *Justice in the World* statement of the 1971 Synod had been confirmed by the 1974 Synod, and explained by *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. The Puebla Conference of Latin American Bishops (1979) and John Paul II's *Redemptor Hominis* had conscientized the Church to the need for greater solidarity with the poor and oppressed. The term "preferential option for the poor" and its implications for life and ministry were gradually becoming accepted throughout the Church. The Congregation had already accepted in 1972 a broadened concept of "poor", the "abandoned poor with their many faces"<sup>31</sup>.

The General Chapter of 1980 approved a text that leaves no doubt that it sees the Institute's mission of evangelization of the poor in terms of the new understanding of "option for the poor".

The first article of the revised Constitutions states our principal service in the Church using the Founder's formulation of 1826: "We commit ourselves principally to evangelizing the poor". Constitution 5, which is a revision of the 1966 article 3, describes our principal service in Church as the proclamation of Christ and his Kingdom to the most abandoned<sup>32</sup>. The same article, echoing C 3 of the 1966 text, describes the abandoned in a tri-level ascending order of abandonment: those who have not yet received the Gospel; those groups which the Church touches the least; "those people whose condition cries out for salvation and for the hope

which only Jesus Christ can fully bring". These are "the poor with their many faces. We give them our preference" (C 5).

The aim of the proclamation of the Gospel is to bring people to know who Jesus Christ is, and in the light of that knowledge to see their own dignity as human beings created in the image of God and redeemed by Jesus Christ (C 5).

It is in this context and based upon this Christian vision of man that the Oblate is called to take an active role in another dimension of the evangelizing mission of the Church, that of action on behalf of justice (R 9).

The 1982 text stresses the unity of life and mission. The Oblate is not only a preacher of the Word, but a doer of the Word. For this reason later articles emphasize solidarity with the materially poor and suffering.

The vow of poverty is described as a way of solidarity with the poor and a way of contesting the causes of injustice.

"Our choice of poverty compels us to enter into a closer communion with Jesus and the poor, to contest the excesses of power and wealth and to proclaim the coming of a new world freed from selfishness and open to sharing" (C20).

This concern for solidarity with the poor is expressed in daring terms in Rule 14.

... The community... will not hesitate to make use of what it has, even of what is necessary for its sustenance, to benefit God's poor (R 14) [R 22a in CCRR 2000].

Constitution 122 [C 150 in CCRR 2000] goes even further: Since we are a missionary Congregation, the temporal goods of our Institute are, above all, at the service of mission. While meeting

our member's needs, we will look for ways to share what we have with others, especially with the poor (C 122)

"Look for ways to share" (C 122) linked to "even what is necessary for their sustenance" of Rule 14 is definitely a mandate for very active solidarity with the materially poor.

In listing the requirements for entrance into the novitiate, Rule 40 says: "they should show signs... of love for the poor" (R 40) [R 54a in CCRR 2000]. Furthermore, novices are called upon to "adopt a simple style of life that will make them sensitive to the needs of people, especially the poor" (R 42) [R 56b in CCRR 2000]. As part of their training for mission after novitiate, newly professed "will have an opportunity to work with the poor" (R 54) [R 65c in CCRR 2000].

The repeated use of "poor" and "especially the poor" leaves no doubt that the 1980 Chapter in revising the CCRR sees our charism and mission today in terms of a preferential "option for the poor" and all that this implies. The Chapter did not hesitate to include an article like Rule 9 on "action on behalf of justice". Neither did it hesitate to include prescriptions for acceptance and formation of candidates, as well as administrative directives for the use of community goods, that make the link between mission, life and solidarity with the poor and oppressed. The next General Chapter in 1986 continues to spell out the demands of the Oblate mission today in the same vein with a marked concern for an evangelical action that promotes justice.

##### 5. THE GENERAL CHAPTER OF 1986: *MISSIONARIES IN TODAY'S WORLD*

The main theme of the 1986 Chapter was the mission of the Congregation in

today's world. Of the six challenges or calls discerned as demanding a particularly urgent response, the first to be listed in the Chapter document, *Missionaries in Today's World*, is the mission to the poor.

"We believe that our mission must be ever more: a mission to the poor, one in which ministry on behalf of justice is an integral part..." (MTW 5).

This concern is woven throughout each section of the document. The Chapter sees each of the six calls as part of one evangelizing mission to the poor and the most abandoned.

The title of the first section links mission, poverty and justice, and opens with a stark statement: "The ever-widening gap between rich and poor in today's world is a scandal to which we cannot remain indifferent" (MTW 10). The section goes on to describe the depressing world situation which is giving rise to many new groups of "poor and voiceless": the unemployed, political refugees and minorities who are rejected (MTW 10). It points out some of the many causes of unjust economic and political structures. Viewing the world in the light of the Gospel, we see Jesus who "identifies himself with the hungry, the sick and with prisoners. He wants us to find him in those who suffer, in those who are abandoned or are persecuted for their stands in behalf of justice" (MTW 13).

Where does the Oblate stand before this situation? The Chapter answers with a concise statement that describes the varied dimensions of the evangelizing mission of the Church singled out by recent papal statements.

"We Oblates are sent to evangelize the poor and the most abandoned, i.e. to proclaim Jesus Christ and his kingdom (C 5), to be witnesses of the Good News to the world, to motivate actions

which might transform individuals and society, to denounce whatever is an obstacle to the coming of the kingdom". (MTW14)

Referring to the vow of poverty, "we choose to be poor to enter more perfectly into communion with Jesus and the poor" (C 20) (MTW 16). Only in this way can we: "learn to see the Church and the world from their perspective... we are evangelized by them and we become for them better witnesses to the presence of Jesus, who became poor to liberate the human person and the whole of creation" (MTW 16).

Witness to Gospel detachment is only possible by constantly challenging one another to conversion (MTW 17). It must be apparent in our personal and community life. Our communities must be seen as places where the liberation we preach is a living fact, if our announcement of a liberating God is to have credibility (MTW 18). We will support the poor wherever they try to take control of their lives (MTW 19). And furthermore, "we are ready to accept the consequences of our stands in behalf of justice" (MTW 20).

The section closes with six recommendations: (1) to reflect in prayer on the call to serve the poor and abandoned (MTW 23); (2) to evaluate individual and community lifestyle and use of material things (MTW 24); (3) to establish communities in poor areas (MTW 25); (4) to share the community's resources in money, personnel and various skills with the poor (MTW26); (5) to act on behalf of the poor, and to discern whether our attitudes, values, lifestyle, and political and social decisions might not be part of the causes of poverty (MTW27); (6) to study the causes of poverty (MTW 28).

## 6. 1992 GENERAL CHAPTER: *WITNESSING AS APOSTOLIC COMMUNITY*

In describing the present-day need for salvation, the 1992 Chapter statement, *Witnessing as Apostolic Community*, shows a world that is beset by many ills, characterized by fragmentation, violence, oppression and injustice (WAC 2). The Oblate response to “people’s need for salvation” (C1) – especially the poor – is “to seek to gather around the person of Jesus Christ so as to achieve solidarity of compassion” (WAC 6). That is why Oblates choose community as a way whereby they can be continuously evangelized and can be effective evangelizers (WAC 7).

The pursuit of quality in our community life and being is seen as “the first task of our evangelizing activity” (WAC 7). It is the community we create together that challenges in a prophetic way present-day individualism and the arbitrary use of power “that is responsible for the plight of so many poor people” (WAC 8).

Rather than the transmission of a doctrine, our role “is that of taking concrete steps towards peace based on justice and truth” (WAC 17). In order for our style of life to correspond to the values we profess by our religious vows a “life-long conversion renewed daily is indispensable if our witness is to be credible” (WAC 18).

The Chapter calls for regular review and evaluation of the quality of witness in all the elements of our life, among which is listed our commitment to justice and peace (WAC 19). “Because the credibility of our witness depends in part upon our commitment to justice, the Chapter invites the General Administration during the next

six years to challenge our commitment to the weakest in our midst” (WAC 21).

Concerning the implications of the choice to deepen the quality of our life and being, both as individuals and as community, the Chapter insists firmly that we put Missionaries in Today’s World into effect, that we be consistent in regard to living our Constitutions and Rules and our vows. It is only this that constitutes us as witnesses, credible signs and apostolic communities (WAC 24). The end of No. 24 summarizes well the spirit of the 1992 Chapter and is worthy of repeated prayer and meditation.

“That which animates, sustains and justifies this whole process is our missionary concern for the needs of the world. “Because we are missionaries, we need to listen to the cries of persons and groups who hope for salvation, to be challenged by these cries and to respond by our prayer and our availability, and to re-echo this cry wherever we hear it” (Superior General’s Report to the General Chapter, no. 12). These words of Father General have resonated deeply within us. For this reason we choose to be close to the poor to whom we give our preference (C5), while we do not shun the rich who often make decisions that affect the world’s destiny. In solidarity with persons of goodwill, especially those [...] who are dedicated to the pursuit of justice and peace, we commit ourselves to a dialogue with society. We take the risk of both seconding and challenging our world, of acknowledging the good within it, even as we also prophetically confront it. Such is our way of accompanying the world on its painful journey in search of reconciliation” (WAC 24).

## CONCLUSION

Saint Eugene de Mazenod was struck by the spiritual abandonment of the poorer classes of his time. He founded a band of missionaries to evangelize them. Generations of Oblates, seeking to remain faithful to his inspiration, have sought to discern who were the abandoned of their times. Their discernment has led them to give their preference to the materially poor and marginalized. Especially in recent years there has been a marked concern for active solidarity with these people, a solidarity which is manifested in both lifestyle and choice of ministries. As in 1816, the "poor with their many faces" are the preferred subjects of the Oblate's contribution to the evangelizing mission of the Church.

RONALD LAFRAMBOISE

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> June 29, 1808 letter to his mother in *Selected Texts*, no. 36, p. 57 & 58; *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, no. 27, p. 56.

<sup>2</sup> February 4, 1809 letter to his mother in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, no. 44, p. 96.

<sup>3</sup> July 3, 1810 letter to his mother in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, no. 72, p. 163 & 164.

<sup>4</sup> LAMIRANDE, Emilien, "Les pauvres et les âmes les plus abandonnées d'après Mgr de Mazenod", in *Etudes oblates*, vol. 20 (1961) p. 4-5.

<sup>5</sup> *Diary*, March 31, 1839, quoted in LEFLON I, p. 403.

<sup>6</sup> Notes for Lenten Instructions, March 1813, *Selected Texts*, no. 37, p. 58.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 61 & 62.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 58 & 59.

<sup>9</sup> Retreat of October 1831 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 15, no. 163, p. 184.

<sup>10</sup> BÉLANGER, Marcel, "Vocation oblate", in *Etudes oblates*, vol. 3 (1944), p. 91.

<sup>11</sup> LAMIRANDE, Émilien, "Les pauvres et les âmes les plus abandonnées d'après Mgr de Mazenod", in *Etudes oblates*, vol. 20 (1961) p. 19. This study remains the most authoritative and complete treatment on the topic to date.

<sup>12</sup> Circular letter no. 13, November 21, 1863 in *Circ. adm.*, I (1850-1885), p. 84. See JEANCARD, Mgr Jacques, *Mélanges historiques*, p. 65, quoted in LAMIRANDE, Émilien, *opus cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>13</sup> BAIOT, Émile, "Pauperes evangelizantur - La devise des Oblats" in *Messenger de Marie Immaculée* Jambes-Namur, Belgique, 7th year, no. 2, (February 1926), p. 47-50, reprinted in *Missions*, 60 (1926); p. 313-316.

<sup>14</sup> BÉLANGER, Marcel, *opus cit.*, p. 92-93.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 93.

<sup>16</sup> In official translations, this was rendered as *magis derelictis* in Latin, and *les plus délaissés* in French, both of which respect the Founder's notion of abandoned.

<sup>17</sup> See also *Missionary Outlook*, no. 15; *Missionaries in Today's World*, nos. 14 and 19 and the article *Justice* in this dictionary.

<sup>18</sup> See CC and RR of 1982, C 5 and 9, R 9.

<sup>19</sup> "From the 1974 Capitulars to All Their Oblate Brothers", in A.A.G., 1974, p. 7-21.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 10.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 12.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 13.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 19.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 16 and 19.

<sup>25</sup> See *Documentation O.M.I.*, 65/76 (April 15, 1976); *Vie Oblate Life*, vol. 36, (1977), p. 9-14.

<sup>26</sup> Charism Congress Final Declaration, *Vie Oblate Life*, vol. 36 (1977), p. 286.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 288-289.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 287.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 290.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 291.

<sup>31</sup> *Missionary Outlook*, no. 15a.

<sup>32</sup> The 1966 English translation of "magis derelictis" was those "most in need". The 1980 English translation prefers the term "abandoned", which reflects the Founder's own usage. The French text of 1980 retains the "plus délaissés" of 1966.

## POVERTY

*Summary: I. Poverty in the life of Eugene de Mazenod. II. Poverty in the initial stages of the Congregation. III. Poverty in the Founder's rule. IV. Poverty among the Oblates during the Founder's lifetime. V. Poverty among the Oblates from the Founder's death until Vatican Council II. VI. Oblate poverty in the perspective of Vatican II. VII. Synthesis: poverty in Oblate spirituality. VIII. Conclusion.*

Voluntary poverty has always been considered as an essential element of religious life. Without it, we cannot understand what it is to walk in the footsteps of Christ who emptied himself taking the form of a servant (see Philipians 2:7) and who made himself poor to enrich us through his poverty (see Corinthians 8:9). Without it, we cannot fulfill the essential conditions of dedication to the service of the Kingdom, i.e., humility, detachment from material things and total availability for communion and dedication. It is the basic beatitude of Jesus' religious program: "How happy are the poor in spirit; theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3). The poor in spirit, those who have a heart for poverty, are those who are free and open to welcome all the riches of the Kingdom. That is the primary Gospel value of voluntary poverty. All religious adopt it as the expression of their unconditional desire to follow Christ and as a sign of their seeking perfect charity.

However, the evangelical counsel of poverty does not enjoy the same sharp focus of application as do chastity and obedience. There is no form of absolute poverty. History of the consecrated life demonstrates that poverty was lived in rather different ways, according to the times, the socio-cultural influences, and the spiritual movements, as well as according to the specific goals of each institute. Consequently, we can make the

distinction between monastic poverty where the monk has divested himself of everything, but the monastery tends to become correspondingly richer, the charismatic poverty of Francis of Assisi and the mendicants who chose a collective witnessing of radical poverty and the functional apostolic poverty of the Jesuits and other modern Congregations who seek to adapt to the dictates of ministry in an attitude of detachment and missionary availability.

In this third type of poverty, we discover the basic characteristics of Oblate poverty. It is the poverty of the one who, like the Apostles, leaves everything to follow Christ and to be able to dedicate himself freely and entirely to promoting the Kingdom by preaching the Gospel to the poor. This apostolic ideal has adopted typical forms and tones due to the powerful spiritual personality of the Founder and the ongoing stable presence of his charism in the Institute. On the other hand, conciliar and post-conciliar renewal led the Congregation to a new way of perceiving and living the virtual riches of its specific spirituality. We will explain the Founder's thinking on poverty as he lived it and incorporated it into the Constitutions and Rules. Then, we will see its historical evolution as preserved for us in the documentation (letters of the Founder, acts of the General Chapters, etc.) Finally, we will sketch a portrait of Oblate poverty in today's world in the

light of the new Constitutions and Rules, the teaching of the Church and the pressing needs of the poor we wish to evangelize.

### I. POVERTY IN THE LIFE OF EUGENE DE MAZENOD

Eugene de Mazenod was born into a noble well-to-do family which, to a certain extent, loved to flaunt its prosperity. Fortunately, God endowed the child with a heart filled with compassion and generosity as the various anecdotes from his childhood show. Among others, we can cite him giving his own clothes to a charcoal-maker's son.<sup>1</sup> It is this quality which prevented him from becoming enmeshed in the subtle selfishness of his caste. On the other hand, the bitter school of exile allowed him to experience the pinch of poverty in his own body and taught him what it was to live having to depend on the generosity of others. From the College of Nobles in Turin, he graduated to the welcoming home of Don Bartolo Zinelli in Venice, whose influence on his life was a gift of Providence. From there, he went on to Naples to live at the *Chapeau-rouge*, a hotel in keeping with his condition of being an exile, where he would experience "the darkest and weariest hours of his exile".<sup>2</sup> Finally, in Palermo, he is welcomed into the family as a son by the Duke and Duchess of Cannizzaro. He then threw himself into the worldliness of the aristocracy. But the influence of his saintly second mother prevented him from giving in to the lure of wealth and kept him in contact with the poor by involving him in the distribution of her generous alms.

When the young Eugene returned to his homeland at the age of twenty, his dreams of greatness and his aristocratic

mindset were rudely shaken by a confrontation with the changes that had taken place among the ordinary people. He spent a few months of boredom in the country house of Saint-Laurent where he put on a show of being "Lord of the Manor"<sup>3</sup> among farmers and peasants who abhorred the *ancien régime*. His plans for a profitable marriage failed because he wanted "a very rich wife". The young lady as a candidate for this role possessed a dowry of only 40,000 francs, "when I want 150,000!" exclaimed Eugene.<sup>4</sup> He began to plan to return to Sicily to establish himself in a brilliant career, but he was unable to obtain a passport.

The young knight's golden dreams as well as his bitter disappointments were washed away in the torrent of tears he shed one Good Friday before the image of Jesus poor, devastated and broken on the cross. From this encounter with the Savior sprang the first transcendental decision of Eugene's life: Eugene would become a priest and a priest for the poor. In a letter to his mother, he wrote: "As the Lord is my witness, what he wants of me is that I renounce a world where it is almost impossible to find salvation, such is the power of apostasy there; that I devote myself especially to his service and try to reawaken the faith that is becoming extinct amongst the poor".<sup>5</sup> For him, this decision entailed a difficult act of self-denial because of the mentality of his class. At the seminary in Saint-Sulpice, the stern ascetical practices he adopted helped him to attain this freedom. Penitence and poverty are soul mates. "The young chevalier's aristocratic traditions and personal tastes had given him a liking for the outward trappings that stressed the quality of his birth and high rank. [...] The most meticulous care was given even to his hair

styling, his sideburns, and his dress so that everything might do justice to his titles and name and show off his noble bearing to best advantage. However, from the moment he entered the seminary, Eugene renounced all these superfluities by way of mortification [... and] made the following resolution: "To punish myself for the creature comforts I over-indulged in the world and the kind of fondness I had for certain vanities, I shall observe poverty in my cell, and live simply outside it. [...] I will see to my own needs, sweep my room, etc".<sup>6</sup> Poverty led him to satisfy himself with having only that which was minimally essential: a cot with a mattress, a table with three cane chairs and that was all: "And yet I do not miss my beautiful room at Aix, since it no longer suits my taste, nor does it fit in with the simplicity I hope to practice for the rest of my life".<sup>7</sup> "Regardless of whether it is done in order to live more in conformity with evangelical poverty, or to reduce as much as I can, the expenses I am causing you, I have absolutely refused to employ a servant to take care of my room".<sup>8</sup> He considers "a useless commodity" a gold chain someone had offered him. "When I was out in the world, I had a great desire for a gold chain; today, it would embarrass me. Besides the tastes of a Churchman should of necessity be different from those of a layman, and, in this respect, God had indeed blessed me".<sup>9</sup>

This intense asceticism and practice of external poverty found their complement and their normal fruit in a series of interior mortifications, an evangelical self-denial and a spirit of poverty. In Eugene, they gave rise to a desire to serve the Church in the last place and in the most humble ministry. "As the young Provençal seminarian began to divest himself of his selfish inclinations

and his aristocratic mentality that vocation became proportionately more clear cut and more selfless"<sup>10</sup> in the context of a demanding Sulpician spirituality.

As priest and as bishop, he remained faithful to this policy of austerity and poverty which he had adopted at the seminary as well as remaining faithful to the principles of the current spirituality. Through voluntary poverty, he saw a means of making reparation, of interior purification, of gaining mastery over the tendencies of the old man, and of identifying with Christ the Savior. As his charism became clearer, he came to consider poverty an indispensable element in the spiritual configuration of the "apostolic man".

In 1812, one year after his ordination, he drew up a rule which he would follow throughout his life. He stressed the practices of mortification necessary to follow Christ whose "entire life was one of the cross and martyrdom".<sup>11</sup> Austerity, moderation and poverty were to be the distinguishing marks of the disciple of the Savior: "And so I must take little sleep, eat soberly, work hard and without complaint [...] no silk stockings, no silk cinctures, no wavy hair styles [...] When I have the freedom of choice as to the number and quality of the dishes of my meals, I should choose the commonest and coarsest kind. A piece of boiled or roasted meat, some vegetables or eggs. [...] Almost all my life I have drunk water, so I do not need wine, and liqueurs even less".<sup>12</sup> When his uncle Fortuné was named bishop, Eugene urged him to adopt the following program: "We will take St. Charles and St. Francis de Sales as patrons and models; our house will be a seminary in its regularity; your life, an example to your priests [...] Horror of pomp, love of simplicity, economy so as to have more

for the needs of the poor... and all else that can serve to inspire your goodness of spirit, your excellent heart. How many marvels will flow from such an admirable way of life!"<sup>13</sup>

As he sketched the spiritual portrait of Bishop Eugene de Mazenod, Canon Jean Leflon, after having highlighted his great spirit of penance, his strict practice of fasting and abstinence, wrote: "The rich pomp which his episcopal function obliged him to display during public ceremonies contrasted with the poverty of his private life. When he had to appear in public as bishop, he conformed to the requirements of the liturgy in religious ceremonies, and at civil receptions he insisted on the rights which protocol demanded. [...] In his private life, however, there was nothing more simple than his complete and quasi-monastic manner of living surrounded by his Oblates. [...] Well-groomed when making a public appearance, he was quite happy when, at his country retreat of Saint-Louis, he was able to wear an old patched cassock more or less short of buttons and braiding. "I am a bishop, but I have also taken the vow of poverty." [...] "If they could only see what is underneath!" he exclaimed with a hearty laugh. [...] The poverty which Bishop de Mazenod practised in his personal life made him all the more compassionate and generous toward the poor, and thus he maintained the traditions of his own family and of the princely bishops of the *Ancien Régime* [...]"<sup>14</sup>

Eugene de Mazenod's love of poverty – "that precious virtue"<sup>15</sup> – led him to willingly accept the inconveniences and the privations its practice entailed. During his stay in Rome, for example, he changed his clothes three times a day in order to avoid subjecting his new

cassock to excessive wear.<sup>16</sup> Another example is when he refused to avail himself of an interesting trip or a clerical benefice of some kind.<sup>17</sup> The close attention he pays to living this vow is seen in the details. When he was in Paris with his uncle, he took the opportunity of having a simple cassock made for himself so as to spare the broadcloth cassock he already had. He then wrote to Father Tempier: "It would perhaps be suitable to take advantage of my stay here, but I believe I should ask your opinion so as not to deviate from poverty. [...] It annoys me to be obliged to rule for myself whenever there is occasion to buy something for my wretched person"<sup>18</sup>. No doubt, Eugene owed this profound regard for poverty to a special grace of God that freed his heart from any attraction to money and the human acclaim associated with it. This grace opened him up to the beauty of walking in the footsteps of Jesus.<sup>19</sup>

What he lived with so much ardor and generous effort, he sought to have his missionaries live as an evangelical ideal necessary for the apostolic work God had inspired in him.

## II. POVERTY IN THE INITIAL STAGES OF THE CONGREGATION

Convinced as he was that he was to organize a group of missionaries to address the needs of the lowliest sector of the population, Eugene de Mazenod set about looking for companions. At the time, he had not thought of religious vows. But already he wanted men who were detached from all concerns with earthly things, men impervious to all greed, search for ease and creature comforts, "men who have the will and the courage to walk in the footsteps of the apostles [...] men who are dedicated and

wish to devote themselves to the glory of God and the salvation of souls with no more reward on earth than much sorrow and all else that the Saviour announced to his true disciples".<sup>20</sup> These candidates, especially Father Tempier, found themselves to be in harmony with him, and they yearned for the moment when they could live together in the rundown convent in Aix.

At the same time as he gathered his first companions, on January 25, 1816, Eugene de Mazenod presented to the Vicars General of the diocese a request for approbation of the new community of missionaries. He accompanied this with a concise rule which can be considered as being the future Rule in embryo. No mention of vows is made in it, but it is stated that the missionaries plan to practice "the religious virtues", according to the example set by the regular Orders. This ideal took concrete form in the initial fervor which accompanies the beginning of something. Alongside the apostolic spirit and the close-knit family life of the new community one can see shining forth in a wonderful way a poverty which is characteristically evangelical – whereby individuals accept hardship and the lack of creature comforts spontaneously and generously. In the words of Bishop Jacques Jeancard: "Their dedication transformed everything in this makeshift dwelling into a joy, without any concern for their material welfare! [...] This life of poverty found favor with everyone. Every once in a while they would have a good laugh about it and congratulate each other for the happy conformity of their lives with that of their Divine Master and the Apostles".<sup>21</sup>

The Founder often looked back on these years of stern detachment with joy and nostalgia. On January 24, 1831 he wrote to the community of novices and

scholastics recently installed at Billens: "Tomorrow I celebrate the anniversary of the day, sixteen years ago, when I left my mother's house to go and set up house at the Mission. Father Tempier had taken possession of it some days before. Our lodging had none of the splendour of the mansion at Billens, and whatever deprivations you may be subject to, ours were greater still. My camp-bed was placed in the small passageway which leads to the library; it was then a large room used as a bedroom for Father Tempier and for one other whose name we no longer mention amongst us. It was also our community room. One lamp was all our lighting and when it was time for bed, it was placed in the doorway to give light to all three of us".

"The table that adorned our refectory was one plank laid alongside another, on top of two old barrels. We have never enjoyed the blessing of such poverty since the time we took the vow. Without question, it was a foreshadowing of the state of perfection that we now live so imperfectly. I highlight this wholly voluntary deprivation deliberately (it would have been easy to put a stop to it and to have everything that was needed brought from my mother's house) so as to draw the lesson that God in his goodness was directing us even then – and really without us having yet given it a thought – towards the evangelical counsels which we were to profess later on. It is through experiencing them that we learnt their value. I assure you we lost none of our merriment; on the contrary, as this new way of life was in quite striking contrast with that we had just left, we often found ourselves having a hearty laugh over it. I owed this tribute to the memory of our first day of common life. How happy I would be to live it now with you!"<sup>22</sup>

This same attitude was very much in evidence on the occasion of the mission of Rognac in 1819. Nothing had been provided beforehand for the missionaries, Father Henry Tempier, Pierre-Nolasque Mye and François Moreau. They found themselves obliged to scrounge three straw mattresses and three shabby blankets for their beds as well as some bread and a little something to eat. Father Tempier wrote to the Founder: "The result is that we are living like the Apostles. I do not think that Blessed Liguori would have found anything beyond what is necessary in either our furnishings or our bill of fare [...] and we are so happy in this kind of life that if we never experienced anything else, we would bless the Lord a thousand times for having provided us with the means, in some small way, of walking in the footsteps of the saints and of being, once and for all, missionaries".<sup>23</sup> Father de Mazenod's comment was: "Oh! how right you seem to me upon your pile of straw and how much your fare, which is more than frugal excites my appetite! This to my mind is the first time we have had what we should. [...] I dare to speak to you in this way because I envy your position and were it only I who had to decide, I would share it".<sup>24</sup>

We have one other outstanding manifestation of this attitude in the burning desire to make the vow of poverty, a desire which arose in the community of Laus in 1820 and was the original moving force for introducing it into the Rule.<sup>25</sup>

The admirable spirit reflected there reveals the presence of the Gospel ideal in the first Oblate community. This ideal would soon be sanctioned in the Rule of the Missionaries of Provence, at first as a simple apostolic virtue, then as a commitment sealed by a vow of religion.

### III. POVERTY IN THE RULE OF THE FOUNDER

The first Rule, written by the Founder in 1818, deals as follows with the evangelical counsels in its second part: § 1. The spirit of poverty; § 2. The vow of chastity; § 3. The vow of obedience; § 4. The vow of perseverance. The Founder, who initially had not considered the vows of religion necessary, soon became convinced that without these sacred commitments he would be unable to find the apostolic workers he dreamed of for his missionary project. That is why he introduced the three above mentioned vows – not without having to face some resistance on the part of some of his members. As to poverty, he did not judge that the moment had come to impose it by a vow. He limited himself to prescribing it as an essential virtue for the work of the missionary in the hope that the final step could soon be made towards making this sacred commitment.

The paragraph on the spirit of poverty contains these significant words: "Reasons in keeping with the present situation have deterred us for the time being from this thought [of introducing the vow]. Consequently, we leave it to the General Chapters which will follow to perfect this point of our Rule when they judge before God that the time has come to act on this issue. In the meantime, we will strive, without being bound to it by a vow, to grasp solidly the spirit of this precious virtue to love it and to practice it so well that it will be obvious to the more clear-sighted individuals".<sup>26</sup> Father de Mazenod's basic intention remains perfectly clear. He urges his Oblates to practice the virtue of poverty with such generosity that it will be seen as the fruit of the vow of religion by people more perceptive of

Christian values. Even if this vow has not been formally made, it is already present as a life-ideal that they wish to achieve as soon as it becomes possible. Indeed, the rules concerning poverty would be every bit as demanding as those of the strictest institute of religious life. When the vow of poverty was accepted, no change was necessary in these rules. In the conclusion of the paragraph on poverty, the Founder once again expressed his thinking: "While waiting for these rules to be strictly carried out, we will strive to familiarize ourselves with them by practicing them".<sup>27</sup>

What is the content of these rules? We can divide them into two parts. The first contains the principles of ascetical theology; the other contains detailed directions on all aspects of the material life of the missionary: his food, dress, room, furnishings, etc. There is nothing very original in this division into two parts. But they both reflect the thinking and interior disposition of Eugene de Mazenod and the spirit he wanted to instill into his Oblates.

The first section is made up of a long article. In the light of the Gospel and of other spiritual writers, the Founder lays out the spiritual advantages and the necessity for evangelical poverty. His text summarizes a chapter taken from Rodriguez' famous work: *Ejercicio de perfección y virtudes cristianas*.<sup>28</sup> Using as his starting point passages from Scripture, Saint Paul, Saint Ambrose, Saint John Chrysostom, Saint Gregory the Great, and Saint Ignatius Loyola, he demonstrates the basic character of the practice of detachment and poverty for Christian life in general and for the religious apostolic life in particular. It frees the heart for the struggle against the devil and predisposes it to all virtue; it is the impregnable bastion

of religious institutes and an essential element in the following of Christ. We should keep in mind two of the Founder's original sentences: "These reasons should have been more than sufficient for us in our Institute – that wants to make us walk in the footsteps of the first Christians and to do this in the spirit of the most holy among the Religious Orders – to make the option to embrace this essential element of the perfect religious life [...]. Add to this the fact that, since greed is one of the vices which has caused the most devastation in our Church today, we should be inclined, according to the spirit of our Institute, which is a spirit of reparation, to offer to God some compensation for this vice by embracing voluntary poverty like the saints who practiced it before us".<sup>29</sup> We can perceive that to the traditional reasons, either ascetical (self-denial and austerity freeing the heart and training it up for the struggle against evil), or mystical (imitation of the Savior), Father de Mazenod adds that of imitation of the Religious Orders of the most strict observance as linked to the secondary end which he had established for his institute, that of filling the void brought about in the ranks of the Religious Orders by the French Revolution. He also adds the motive of compensating for the devastation caused by greed. In addition, Eugene de Mazenod makes explicit mention that the general recommendation coming from the Fathers of the Church applies in a special way "to evangelical workers who are called to fight against the devil"<sup>30</sup>, something which highlights the apostolic aspect of poverty.

The section containing directives was taken almost word for word from the Rule of Saint Alphonsus with a few modifications and additions. A number

of the former were taken from the statutes of the chapters held by the Redemptorists (1802). We touch on some of the main norms established: "So all will be held in common in our Society and no one will own anything in their own name. The houses will take on the responsibility of providing in a frugal fashion for everything that is needed [...]. As poor men, we will be satisfied with a frugal bill of fare [...]. The rooms will be small, the furniture poor and the same for all [...]. The missionary's dress will be poor as well but will be clean and appropriate for priests of upright character [...]. In harmony with this vow, they will commit themselves to avoid laying claim [...] to any kind of honor, clerical benefice or position [...] outside the Society.<sup>31</sup> [...] Everything stated here will be observed with meticulous exactitude under threat of the most grave penalties, even if this means expulsion from the Society [...]. No matter how great the straits we may be reduced to, begging will never be permitted. We will await the assistance of Divine Providence [...]. Everything given as a gift to a member of the Society belongs to the Society. Never is an individual member allowed to keep money, even money given in trust. But the superior may not allow members of the society to keep anything in their room that is special or individual to them, as for example, clothes, chocolate, liqueurs, fruit, jams, tobacco or any such things [...]"<sup>32</sup>

A recommendation made to superiors puts the finishing touches on these directives and this does not come from Saint Alphonsus: "Occasionally, superiors will test subjects in this area not by depriving them of anything that is necessary, but by giving them the opportunity of experiencing some kind of deprivation so that they can become

aware of the fact that the poor cannot always have a comfortable life and have everything they wish".<sup>33</sup> The rules in force when preaching missions contain additional norms on travel and the meals of the missionaries. They must avoid all affectation and "be satisfied with the simple ordinary food found in that area".<sup>34</sup> In the articles devoted to penance, the recommendation is that one's bed be a straw pallet and the rule is laid down that on ordinary days breakfast will consist of a piece of dry bread.<sup>35</sup>

When we read the first Rule, we discover the high regard in which the Founder held poverty, and the importance he attached to the necessity for poverty for the "apostolic men" he wanted in his Institute. We also see that, in spite of the juridical details, he instills it with a vigorous spirit of asceticism and a genuine Gospel and missionary ideal. For him, poverty is an essential part of the Christian's armor, especially for the apostle whose is called to be champion for and witness of the Kingdom among the poor.

In the subsequent editions of the Rule during the Founder's lifetime, we find the same spirit and the same general legislation, even if a few changes are made on the juridical level. Through an important change to the Rule in 1821, the vow of poverty was introduced. In the course of his May 1818 retreat, Father de Mazenod had already shown that he was ready to make this vow, something he did in fact do personally without delay.<sup>36</sup> In 1820, Father Tempier felt powerfully drawn by grace to do the same, but he did so under condition that it would be approved by the Founder. His novices and the other Oblates fervently awaited the moment of being able to express through the vow their desire to strip themselves of

everything.<sup>37</sup> Since this was the case, the General Chapter of 1821 decided that the Oblates would make the vow of poverty when they made their other vows. From that time on, the Rule would always mention the vow of poverty. They inserted the following sentence into the introductory article on the value of evangelical poverty: "That is why the vow of poverty is mandated among us". There we have the basic norm which gives a new perspective and impetus to the entire content of the directives which follow in the first Rule.

The Constitutions and Rules approved by the Holy See on February 17, 1826, made modifications which were only few and minimal and of a literary character since they were translated into Latin. For example, the first directive of 1818, "All will be held in common in our Society and no one will own anything in his own name", became, at the request of the Cardinal *ponens*: "Everything in the Congregation will be held in common for daily usage".<sup>38</sup> In chapter three of the second part, the Constitutions present a paragraph on traveling. It contains an important article: "They will endure with resignation and even with joy the inconveniences and deprivations of the poverty they have vowed, preferring this situation to that of the state of comfort, as being more in conformity with the spirit of mortification which should be the inspiration for the evangelical worker".<sup>39</sup> It is a reminder of the spirit of austerity that should always inspire the apostolic man.

The 1853 Constitutions repeats everything that was contained in the previous rules except for two slight modifications made to the paragraph on penance. At breakfast, a simple soup is allowed instead of dry bread,<sup>40</sup> and the

passage dealing with rest is changed as follows: "Ordinarily, our missionaries will take their rest on a simple bed".<sup>41</sup> These changes reflect the decisions taken in the 1831, 1837 and 1843 Chapters.<sup>42</sup>

Such is the perception of voluntary poverty as we find it in the Constitutions and Rules during the Founder's lifetime. Oblate poverty is an exacting and austere virtue which can compete with that of the institutes of the most rigorous observance. But this strictness was not simply an ascetical dictate with the purpose of contributing to the purification and interior growth of the individual. It is a necessity for the apostolic man who wants to give himself unconditionally to preaching the Kingdom by following closely in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, the Divine Master who has conquered him and become his all-encompassing treasure. That is how it is expressed in the fiery language of the *Preface*: "And how should men who want to follow in the footsteps of their divine Master Jesus Christ conduct themselves if they, in their turn, are to win back the many souls who have thrown off his yoke? [...] They must wholly renounce themselves [...] They must work unremittently to become humble meek, obedient, lovers of poverty and penance, mortified, free from inordinate attachment to the world or to family, men filled with zeal, ready to sacrifice goods, talents, ease, self, even their life, for the love of Jesus Christ, the service of the Church and the sanctification of their brethren [...]"<sup>43</sup> The same idea is expressed in the paragraph which describes the ideal set forth for candidates: "If anyone desires to belong to us, he must [have a.....] great love of our Lord Jesus Christ and his Church [...] a heart free from every disorderly affection for things of earth; [...] a degree of disinterestedness that amounts

even to contempt of riches, reckons them as filth, and looks for no other gain than Jesus Christ. [...]"<sup>44</sup>

This is the way in which poverty was officially presented in the Oblate family. One needs to see whether this ideal of poverty was lived in this manner by Father de Mazenod's missionaries.

#### IV. POVERTY AMONG THE OBLATES DURING THE FOUNDER'S LIFETIME

It is almost impossible that the entire membership of such a large community spread throughout the four continents of the world should live fully such a lofty ideal. We have to acknowledge that there were shortcomings both on an individual and a community level. But two elements make it legitimate for us to believe that the Congregation remained faithful to the inspiration of its Founder. The first is the life of our more illustrious Oblates who have had a profound impact on our history as outstanding disciples or generous co-workers with the Founder. The second factor consists in the watchful attention of the father of the Oblates as he kept in contact with his sons, lavishing upon them his advice, his suggestions and sometimes his serious criticisms during the forty-five years he spent as head of the Society.

Among the Oblates who left us an example of heroic poverty and detachment, we can mention Fathers Tempier, Domenico Albini, Joseph Gérard and Bishop Vital Grandin.

Father Tempier, "the second father of the Oblates", as Father Yvon Beaudoin has styled him, has left us some touching examples. We know how he relished accepting the situation of extreme poverty he faced during the mis-

sion at Rognac in 1819,<sup>45</sup> and how, in 1820, he was able to communicate to the novices of Notre-Dame du Laus the desire to make the vow of poverty. This is how his biography summarizes the spirit of poverty that was one of the typical characteristics of his entire life: "We remember that he was the first Oblate to take the vow of poverty in 1820. He spent five winters at Laus without making a fire in his room. His poverty became contagious with the novices and scholastics and almost caused a scandal when he came to Marseilles as Vicar General in 1823: he had to have a soutane made for him as soon as possible and he had to buy a hat. For his trip to Canada in 1851, he was advised to buy a coat; he found a used one for which he paid 19 francs and didn't hesitate to wear it in the middle of London. It is thus evident that he cheerfully accepted the responsibility of giving an example of poverty which he preached to the scholastics".<sup>46</sup>

Father Albini, this zealous and heroic man of God who evangelized the island of Corsica and in whose wake wonders and conversions multiplied, also distinguished himself by his austerity of life and his poverty. "He was a poor man filled with joy. With regard to the food he ate, he ate very little and that was simple food; he avoided everything which could give the appearance of being refined or affected, even when he was away from the community and even during the most intense missionary labor. His poverty showed in his dress. In Corsica, he owned only one cassock which ultimately accompanied him to the grave. Certainly, it was clean but badly worn and ragged about the edges, a fact he was not always able to conceal with his cloak. When he went off to preach missions, even if he was to be gone for weeks or even

months, he took no other clothes than the clothes he wore on his back, confiding himself to the charity of his hosts. He was poor in his living quarters. It was only at Vico that, since he was superior, he was free to choose his own room. He chose the smallest, most uncomfortable and badly furnished room of all".<sup>47</sup>

The Apostle of the Basotho, Joseph Gérard's poverty was equally heroic. Under the stern direction of Bishop François Allard, he founded missions with very few resources available to do so and he was forced to build houses and to occupy himself with material things while his heart was burning with zeal for souls. As long as he was able, he traveled from village to village under difficult conditions eating the coarse fare of the native people.<sup>48</sup> Concerning his visit to Saint Monica's mission, a mission founded and administered by Father Gérard, Father Louis Soullier reported the following: "Everything in this settlement has the mark of great poverty. The Mission receives only about 40 pounds a year from the Apostolic Vicar. This meager sum would be very insufficient [...]"<sup>49</sup>

Among the ranks of these illustrious Oblates, we could list the names of many others who have been nobly faithful to the ideal of detachment lived and instilled by Eugene de Mazenod. Missionary life, especially in far off foreign lands, entailed a good measure of self-denial and suffering because of the climate, the food, traveling conditions, the poverty of the people and the lack of hygienic conditions. It provided extraordinary opportunities to practice evangelical poverty in its most radical forms. Let us not forget Bishop Grandin, that holy man who in the course of his long hard journeys had poverty as his constant companion.

The Founder valued and understood the heroism of his missionaries and gave it the fullest possible recognition by citing it as an example to be emulated by all his Oblates: "What can I say of our men in Oregon and on the shores of the Red River? For food they have a little bacon; they have no bed but the bare ground, and with that they are content and happy as men who are doing the will of God. [...] Those who are moving towards Hudson's Bay with cold weather registering 30 degrees, dragged by dogs across the ice, forced to make a hole in the snow in order to pass the night with the snow as their bed, delight one with the story of their adventures. May it be so with you, who have a mission that is less hard than that of your brothers, in spite of the heat which exhausts you".<sup>50</sup> "Let none among us complain any longer of anything, for we have so generous an advance contingent [...]"<sup>51</sup> Writing to the council in charge of the works of the Propagation of the Faith, Bishop de Mazenod pleaded on behalf of his sons: "When we know the privations endured by those of our men who evangelize the savages [...] we are forced to admire the power of grace which makes them abound in joy in the midst of so many sacrifices".<sup>52</sup>

But the father who offered such praise and encouragement sometimes found himself compelled to vigorously rebuke some of his subjects who had strayed from the ideal of apostolic poverty as outlined in the Constitutions. A number of times, he reproved Father Honorat whom he considered "a man of eminent virtue",<sup>53</sup> because of the expenditures he permitted in his community at Nîmes and for his incorrigible bias for engaging in building and renovation projects both in Canada and in France.<sup>54</sup> He also rebukes him for his

lack of moderation in daily diet: "It is intolerable that you eat meat three times a day".<sup>55</sup> Administration of the works in Canada presented the Founder with a number of problems when they were spending money on building at a rate calculated to bring about the financial ruin of the Congregation. The Founder complained bitterly to the provincial, Bishop Guigues about the fact that they were building such an elegant church and a house which lacked nothing: "Would it not have been better to be a little less magnificent and to accept the duty of providing one's brethren with the means of feeding themselves?"<sup>56</sup> This ill-advised display was not the thing calculated to attract vocations: "It is not the magnificence of the house that they have built for themselves at such expense that will draw men to us".<sup>57</sup>

The Founder was also concerned with poverty in the houses of formation. On the occasion of the transfer of the novitiate to Marseilles in 1826, he wrote to Father Tempier: "I cannot overdo it in reminding you to keep to simplicity and strict necessity. [...] Should it be so necessary that the novices have mattresses on their beds? Alas! should we not refrain from having them ourselves".<sup>58</sup> In 1830, after settling the scholastics at Billens, he spent several very pleasant days with them and encouraged them to endure certain deprivations, for example, the lack of wine which was costly in that region and was not an ordinary part of the peasants' fare. "The privation is not felt; besides it is too much in keeping with poverty for anyone to allow himself to regret it".<sup>59</sup>

It is revealing that for the Congregation as a whole, prior to 1853 and 1856, neither the Founder nor the General Chapters had to level serious re-

proaches. In his first circular letter of August 2, 1853, Bishop de Mazenod, after acknowledging the heroic zeal and self-denial of the majority of his sons, complains of abuses that have crept into a number of communities with regard to regularity, obedience, charity, poverty, etc. He reminds them of the severe reproaches made by Saint Alphonsus to his religious and makes his own Saint Alphonsus' fatherly order: "Read and meditate your holy Rules".<sup>60</sup> He then turns his attention to administration and fraternal accord. "[...] We have had to reproach ourselves greatly in this regard. Each house has been considering only its own convenience without being concerned about the general needs of the Congregation. Personal expenses sometimes rise above that which the observance of the poverty that each member has professed by vow allows. Some have been partial to the quality, quantity and form of our clothing. The weakness of certain local superiors has introduced the abuse [...]"<sup>61</sup>

At the General Chapter of 1856, Bishop de Mazenod once again expressed his concern. He pointed out that the faults of a number of people were due to "a weakening of the original spirit of the Congregation", taking the form of an abhorrence of sacrifice and deprivation. When the Procurator General presented his report on the inadequate state of the accounts, the Founder took the opportunity "to remind all members present of the obligation of living more in conformity with the spirit of poverty as outlined in our holy Rules and to avoid all expenses which would not be absolutely necessary".<sup>62</sup> In order to ensure uniformity of dress, the Chapter also asked that the Superior General should determine what clothing each missionary should ordinarily have.<sup>63</sup> In his second circular letter

written subsequent to the Chapter, Bishop de Mazenod encourages his sons to practice a still greater fidelity. He reminds them of a number of different points in the Rule, among them some that treat of poverty: "Have we nothing to blame ourselves for in the area of holy poverty [...]? What does the Rule say about it? "Voluntary poverty [has been regarded by all the Founders of religious Orders] as the foundation and basis of all perfection..." [...] That is already enough to assess it at its proper value. Consequently, everything among us has to be after "the manner of the poor [...]"'. After quoting various articles of the Constitutions, he deplors the fact that there are some Oblates who have more than enough with regard to food and clothing and who longer know how to accept the privations imposed upon them by their vow, privations demanded by the following of Christ.<sup>64</sup>

This shows us how the Founder watched zealously over the missionaries' practice of poverty as being a very important element of the apostolic spirituality with which he wanted to see them imbued. We will now examine whether the Congregation remained faithful to his way of thinking.

## V. POVERTY AMONG THE OBLATES FROM THE FOUNDER'S DEATH UNTIL VATICAN COUNCIL II.

It was not an easy thing to make one's own the spiritual heritage of the Founder and to continue his plan of evangelization through means of a group of apostolic men ready to endure every kind of renunciation. But God provided directors for the Congregation who were wise and spiritual men, along with a multitude of dauntless mission-

aries who succeeded in maintaining the Oblate charism with its radical demands and to make it flourish.

The fundamental and basic document, the Constitutions and Rules (revised in 1928 to bring them into line with the new Code of Canon Law), preserved the directives from the Founder's Rule concerning poverty. An exception was made for the juridical norms about property as such and the acts of administering it. The *Directory for the Missions*, which contained some norms on poverty and mortification, was removed from these Constitutions. This was done because the General Chapters of 1867 and 1920 had drawn up a directory for each province or vicariate, reflecting the local conditions.<sup>65</sup>

They follow the notion of poverty with its distinct ascetical quality and the radical demands attached to the vow. The evangelical virtue calls for a simple, austere life of detachment in following Christ. The vow forbids the disposing of one's temporal goods according to one's own wishes, independently of a legitimate superior. Since this attitude stands in natural opposition to the innate desire to acquire, retain possessions and use them according to one's own choice, the practice of poverty is admittedly a difficult thing and demands a special vigilance on the part of those in authority. That is why a perusal of the Acts of the General Chapters brings to light a repeated insistence on the observance of article 40 of the 1826 and 1853 Rules. This article demands a meticulous observance of the norms dealing with poverty and calls for severe sanctions to be imposed on over-lenient superiors who allow any laxity in this area. The 1928 Constitutions are more moderate in tone: "All that has been laid down in the foregoing articles, is especially

commended to the vigilance of the Superiors and especially of the Superior-General, lest, in a matter so grave, innovations contrary to poverty might creep in amongst us".<sup>67</sup>

The 1867 Chapter brought a clearer focus to certain issues that subsequently passed into the 1928 text of the Constitutions: a) pastors and the directors of works were not allowed to keep any money; b) the entire sum for Mass intentions was to be handed over to the treasurer; c) it would be against the vow of poverty to maintain a secret fund for certain expenses, even if these expenses were for the needs of the community; permission to maintain such a fund would likewise be illegitimate.<sup>68</sup>

In the 1873 Chapter, strong complaints were lodged with regard to the construction and renovation of churches and houses; these activities sometimes disturbed the regularity of religious life and led to the contracting of debts that could not easily be paid off. The superiors, both the General Administration and the provincials were requested not to give their permission for construction unless the projects concerned were necessary or very useful, and only after having submitted the project and alternative plans to a scrutiny by superiors.<sup>69</sup>

From the 1904 Chapter, the following brief admonition is worthy of note: "The Chapter recommends the spirit of poverty, especially with regard to our use of things that are not absolutely necessary and of useless expenses".<sup>70</sup> Among those useless expenses, the Chapters often list money spent on tobacco. Even though at times smoking was strictly forbidden, exceptions were made and subsequently the rule was relaxed to the point of simply stating that one should have the provincial's

permission to smoke.<sup>71</sup> Another question which was raised time and again from 1920 on was the question of automobiles. The permission of the provincial and his council was required to purchase an automobile and they were to see that it not be too expensive and not in keeping with religious.<sup>72</sup>

From the capitular acts as a whole, we are left with a two-fold impression: a) that a certain number of missionaries had habitually practiced poverty according the full rigor of the Rule; b) that, in general, abuses in this area were neither serious nor very widespread. Nonetheless, we must mention the deplorably imprudent financial transactions conducted by the members of the General Administration between 1902 and 1905. Since the resources of the General Administration seemed inadequate to respond to their needs, "they sought [...] to develop richer revenues. With this intention, coupled with an unfortunate lack of experience, they plunged into speculation on a grand scale, an initiative which in their estimation would lead to financial prosperity, but it, in fact, led to ruin".<sup>73</sup>

We cannot forget the fact that poverty in its most concrete reality and under the most radical forms was the common lot of hundreds of Oblates living in all climates: amid polar ice, under the burning sun of the tropics or in the green hell of the Paraguayan Chaco. These missionaries not only kept alive the flame of the Oblate charism in the Church, but by the witness of their lives they were also a source of inspiration for all their brothers throughout the Congregation.

I want to quote two such witnesses here. In 1898, Bishop Émile Grouard wrote this about his mission of Athabaska-Mackenzie: "All kinds of work is thrust upon the fathers as well

as the brothers. The educating of our Indians and the study of languages in order to do this, producing books that must be printed and bound, hearing confessions, visiting the sick sometimes at considerable distances away, either in winter or in summer, teaching school wherever possible – there you have as pretty well everywhere in this territory the work of the northern missionary. But they are also obliged to become engaged in many other activities to eke out a meager living or to shelter themselves from the cold. As a result, they help the brothers with fishing, building, chopping wood, etc., and gardening. [...]. The fact is that the concerns of physical existence, the struggle to stay alive, engage a very considerable part of our activity, and it should be pointed out that it is not just a matter of ensuring ourselves a certain standard of living or a more or less comfortable life style – that would not even be worth mentioning – but it is really a case of not dying of cold and hunger. Consequently, anyone who wants to live in our missions cannot consider himself exempt from manual labor”.<sup>74</sup>

We move to the mission of Pilcomayo in South America. In 1929, Brother Joseph Isenberg wrote in his diary: “Construction work is going forward; we are also doing some farming. We are also preparing the soil for a large kitchen-garden to grow vegetables since at present we live largely from hunting and fishing. In our free time and on Sundays we find ourselves obliged to wash and mend our clothes. But, in spite of everything, we maintain our optimism”.<sup>75</sup>

Work, deprivation, poverty and optimism such are the elements constantly found together in the missionary’s spiritual baggage. Many Oblates can bear witness to this fact.

## VI. OBLATE POVERTY IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF VATICAN II.

The Second Vatican Council was a sign and expression of a profound renewal stirred up the Holy Spirit in the heart of the Church, especially in the years which followed the Second World War. On the other hand, this same Council confirmed, permitted and channeled the renewal which touched all areas of Christian life from dogma to pastoral practice, to the spirituality of the laity and religious. Evangelical poverty is one of those areas that benefited from the impact of the renewal.

New socio-cultural factors led to the discovery of new dimensions of poverty in our world and brought to the fore a new awareness of the poor, often the victims of unjust, oppressive structures. At the same time, a new vision of the Church as a community – open to the world and involved in the history of people and nations – and a more insightful Scriptural exegesis, led to an important enrichment of the spirituality of poverty as an evangelical counsel.

In the constitution *Lumen Gentium* (44-46) and the decree *Perfectae Caritatis* (1, 2, 5, and 13) Vatican II presented the evangelical counsels as a significant expression of the will to follow Christ. This following of Christ which is rooted in baptism and is the duty and norm for all Christian life takes concrete form in a special way in the institutes of consecrated life. For all the faithful, they should be brilliant signs of “wonderful spousal union established by God”<sup>76</sup> in the Church and the presence of the heavenly realities of the Kingdom of God in this world.<sup>77</sup>

The relationship established between the will to follow Christ and the character of being sign of the Kingdom, already present and still to come, pre-

sented evangelical poverty in a new light. Its aspect of personal asceticism, an aspect which the entire spiritual tradition had stressed, was not abolished nor were the juridical requirements of dependency concerning the use of worldly goods. What was stressed was the mystical motivation of sharing Christ's emptying of himself, and the requirement for a straightforward authentic conduct which would be a clearly discernible sign for our contemporaries, and for the poor in particular. The section of *Perfectae Caritatis* which treats of poverty begins with this eloquent recommendation: "Voluntary poverty, in Christ's footsteps, is a symbol of Christ which is much esteemed, especially nowadays. Religious should cultivate it diligently and, if needs be, express it in new forms".<sup>78</sup> *Gospel witness* of the consecrated life cannot be restricted merely to a spiritual or juridical poverty. It must entail a real concrete poverty and express a genuine solidarity with the poor of our world. It is only in this way that we become "sharers in the poverty of Christ". That is why "religious should be poor in fact and in spirit"; they should submit themselves to "the common law of labor", sharing their goods "for the support of the poor"; "they should avoid any semblance of luxury, excessive wealth and accumulation of property", which would constitute a clear counter-witness.<sup>79</sup>

Oblate spirituality has very clearly committed itself to this new orientation of the Council. Subsequently, Paul VI treated this in depth in a masterly way in his exhortation *Evangelica Testificatio*, which starts out with an invitation extended to religious to allow themselves to be challenged by the dramatic cry of the poor.<sup>80</sup> The 1966 Constitu-

tions and Rules are a clear expression of this. They present poverty as "a suitable means of union with Christ and with the poor",<sup>81</sup> a means of opposing the spirit of greed which is the source of so many evils in the Church and hinders evangelization,<sup>82</sup> and as a form of fraternal sharing which expresses and fosters community life.<sup>83</sup> This ideal demands of us a "corporate witness to evangelical poverty".<sup>84</sup> It also requires of us submission "to the common law of labor, each for his own part contributing to the support and to the apostolate of the community"<sup>85</sup> and calls us moreover to accept to "share the lot of those who do not always have at their disposition the comforts and the conveniences which might be desired".<sup>86</sup> All of that compels us to adopt "a mode of life akin to that of the ordinary people of modest means among whom they live"<sup>87</sup> and to remember that in the use of material things, these goods are "as it were the patrimony of the poor".<sup>88</sup>

This new orientation and these norms are fully in harmony with the spirit of the Founder and the tradition of our Institute, giving concrete form to and utilizing the basic energies of the Mazenodian charism. For example, sharing, which is one of the values which finds resonance with the new generations, is already present in the first Rule. This is what it prescribed: "The Society must underwrite all the costs of preaching parish missions and it will never be allowed that these expenses be borne by communities or individuals".<sup>89</sup> The corporate witness expected today of all religious was understood in a certain fashion as the rejection of and a challenge leveled against greed as the source of ills within the human race and in the Church and as a desire to repair the damage caused by this vice.<sup>90</sup> What is truly new here is the

directive to submit oneself to the common law of labor, even if, in fact, many missionaries are fully involved in doing this, seeing themselves compelled to do hard manual labor to make their own living and to maintain the mission. Some European Oblates have followed in the footsteps of the "worker priests" to forge a closer link with the working man's world. Also new is the attention Rule 58 focuses on social justice: "Under the direction of Superiors, the members will take part in social organizations, and even strive to improve the condition of the underprivileged masses by working for social justice".<sup>91</sup>

On this point, *Evangelica Testificatio* would offer some valuable clarification: "[...] the cry of the poor [...] obliges [religious] to create awareness as to the phenomenon of poverty and the demands of social justice of the Gospel and of the Church. It leads some people [...] to join the poor in their conditions of poverty, to share their wrenching state of worry. It calls [a number of institutes] to critically review and reorganize some of their works to focus on the needs of the poor [...]"<sup>92</sup>

The thirst for justice, felt strongly in Latin America and other countries of the Third World has found a profound resonance in the heart of a number of Oblates and among the decision-making bodies of the Congregation. That is what the 1972 chapter documents have captured, especially *Missionary Outlook*. In the light of a Gospel vision of the world, a world with a burning desire for liberation, "Our Oblate brothers ask themselves how they can best contribute to the true and total liberation in Christ of the Latin American continent".<sup>93</sup> "[...] the mission seems to demand a presence more clearly responsive to injustices and to economic and social aspirations. Sometimes, too, the

mission demands that we emphasize quite explicitly our solidarity with the poor".<sup>94</sup> The Chapter points out three concrete "lines of action": a) Preference for the poor; b) Solidarity with the men of our time; c) Greater creativity. The first line of action describes various forms or situations of poverty: the illiterate, victims of alcohol or drugs, the marginal masses... without forgetting to mention "that the worst form of poverty [...] is not to know Christ". It calls us to cooperate in an integral development to transform oppressive structures and to involve ourselves in "the movement towards authentic liberation".<sup>95</sup> The second line of action requires: "to be part of the world of the poor – by listening to their voices, by coming to understand them, by allowing ourselves to be enriched by them, by working not just for them but with them [...]"<sup>96</sup> The Chapter gives its stamp of approval to "those Oblates who have the particular charism to identify themselves completely with the poor by taking on their social, cultural and economic conditions".<sup>97</sup> In the third line of action, the document calls upon us to encourage and support our confreres who feel called to take part in social struggles and to take a public stance in favor of the oppressed. Finally, it calls us not to quench their prophetic voice, an attitude that presupposes appropriate discernment.<sup>98</sup>

The Constitutions and Rules, rewritten in 1980 and approved in 1982, reassume the substance of the Oblate spiritual tradition. At the same time, they speak of the appeals made by the contemporary world, or more precisely "the call of Jesus Christ heard within the Church through people's need for salvation" (C 1). From the very first chapter which treats of mission, Constitution 9 reminds us that we must

“bear witness to God’s holiness and justice”, by announcing “the liberating presence of Jesus Christ” by hearing and making heard “the clamor of the voiceless”. With regard to the work of justice, Rule 9a defines more precisely how “Responding to the call of the Spirit, some Oblates identify themselves with the poor, sharing their life and commitment to justice [...]” and how it should lead us all to cooperate “by every means compatible with the Gospel, in changing all that is a cause of oppression and poverty. They thereby helped to create a society based on the dignity of the human person [...].”

In dealing with the evangelical counsel of poverty, Constitution 19 puts it in the context of our walking in the footsteps of Christ who invites us to leave everything to go with him and who awaits our free response. “In answer to his call, we choose evangelical poverty”. Constitution 20 spells out the motivation for this choice: “Our choice of poverty compels us to enter into a closer communion with Jesus and the poor”. It is this fundamental value which gives our poverty a profoundly mystical as well as an apostolic meaning. From here flow other values such as the witness which challenges the abuse of power and riches, accompanied by the proclamation of a new world freed from selfishness. Simultaneously, there is born in the missionary a humble attitude of listening and apprenticeship which allows him to be evangelized by the poor.<sup>99</sup> This is followed by an availability for fraternal sharing according to the example of the first Christian community and the seeking for a simple and generous life style which will stand in open opposition to the allurements of our consumer society and will lead us to joyfully accept the lack of certain conveniences.<sup>100</sup>

Our choice of evangelical poverty is not absolute. We seek it as a means of more fully living love and to better express this love according to the demands of our apostolic charism. Our mission demands that we make use of and administer “as it were, the patrimony of the poor”; it comes from the poor and is destined for the poor.<sup>101</sup> The community itself is expressly invited to share its modest means with the poor: “The community, however, placing its trust in divine Providence, will not hesitate to make use of what it has, even of what is necessary for its sustenance, to benefit God’s poor”.<sup>102</sup>

Naturally, the problem will often arise as to how to coordinate the demands of an effective apostolate which calls for the use of adequate material means and the demands of evangelical witnessing where self-denial and the folly of the Cross bring their victorious logic to bear. As Father Fernand Jetté wrote: “Difficulties will often come from the milieu in which we live and from the requirements of the apostolate. Can one be a missionary today without an automobile? Can one be a professor or a treasurer today without computer equipment? Can we be close to our people without watching certain programs on TV?”<sup>103</sup> The existence of such a problem should prompt us to maintain an attitude of vigilance and constant communitarian and personal discernment, to avoid being seduced by the attraction of the consumer society. It must also be an attitude to be openly receptive to the abilities and personal charisms of each individual, and to a certain pluralism in the choices people make in order to offer each other mutual support and the complementarity of our gifts.<sup>104</sup>

Constitutions 22 and 23 define the scope of the vow as such, a vow which

obliges us "to lead a life of voluntary poverty", giving up the right of using and freely disposing of any object of material value and any property acquired by personal industry or under any other title, except property acquired by inheritance. The Oblate keeps the inherited property he had when he entered the Congregation and any subsequent property gained by inheritance later on. Before making his first profession, he is required to relinquish the administration of his goods and hand over their use and usufruct in order to remain free from the worries connected with material things.<sup>105</sup> Before his perpetual profession, through a will, he will hand over his actual inherited property and the goods that he could acquire through inheritance. In addition, Constitution 23 specifies that "with the permission of the Major Superior in council, a perpetually professed Oblate may divest himself of his present and future possessions".

When the vow is lived with all its implications, it entails profound renunciation. As Father Jetté states: "What this says is that the Oblate, as a person, is poor, even quite poor: he possesses nothing or almost nothing and cannot make use of anything except in and through obedience. Humanly speaking, his situation is one of complete dependence, the situation of a "minor". This is the radical gift of himself that he makes to God. He makes it freely, out of love for Christ and for his brothers and sisters here below. The sincerity and depth of his gift will be manifest in the simplicity and renunciation evident in his life".<sup>106</sup>

At the 1986 Chapter, the first among the appeals that the Oblates perceived as urgent in order to be "missionaries in today's world" was precisely that of poverty linked to justice. The first sec-

tion of the chapter document bore the title, *Mission, poverty and justice*. It described contemporary poverty and the new forms it took, especially "a grave form of poverty: ignorance of the Gospel and the loss of all religious hope". It showed that in many cases poverty results from unjust structures that have been created and maintained by selfishness and greed. The document then states that the Oblates, as heralds sent to evangelize the poor, sense the challenge this situation poses and are resolved to draw near to the poor, to share with them and to allow themselves to be evangelized by them, to support them in their struggle for justice and to stand in solidarity with their activities. In the light of this appeal, it urges Oblates to change their life style and to seek to become a part of the milieu of the poor, to share their goods with the poor, to offer their support to endeavors like the Justice and Peace Network and the North-South dialogue.<sup>107</sup> What a vast and demanding program our mission spreads before us, a program to which our charism commits us!

These directives of the Church and of the Congregation called forth by a new social awareness of the contemporary world, especially the world of the young, have pointed the way to the adoption of a new style of Oblate life. In them, poverty is not presented as pure ascetical detachment and even less as a juridical dependency, but rather it is presented as an attitude of simplicity and welcoming, an attitude of concrete affective association with the humble, and genuine communion with the poor. We share not only our material resources, but also our personal possessions of knowledge, friendship and faith. That is the ideal being pursued by the Latin American religious communities implanted in the lived context of the

common people (CRIMO) among whom are found a number of Oblate communities.

Puebla already pointed the way as "the most outstanding tendency of Latin-American religious life [...] the option for the poor". This choice "led to the critical review and reorganization of traditional works in order to more effectively respond to the demands of evangelization. As a result, their relationship with the poor was clarified, a phenomenon which presupposed not only interior detachment and a communitarian austerity, but also actual solidarity with the poor, and in certain cases, living with them in their homes".<sup>108</sup> Indeed, a number of religious established themselves in rundown suburbs. It was with joy that Father Jetté acknowledged this spirit and this orientation among the Oblates of South America: "This option already exists among you and is a testimony to all Oblates. You go everywhere to the poor and you work for and with them. "Your brothers, your dear brothers, your worthy brothers", as the Founder once said, are the Indians, the *campesinos*, the miners, the sub-proletarians of shantytowns, the Hmong refugees of French Guyana... You live with them, you are Christ's presence to them, you are – it is often repeated – their voice, "the voice of the voiceless", and you help them – with your limitations, sufferings and difficulties – in their efforts to achieve full liberation".<sup>109</sup> Houses of formation situated in poor neighborhoods which make themselves accessible to the people and live a simple life style are the expression and the result of our option for the poor and a life of poverty. Contact with the poor has taught us the value of our Gospel poverty and of the happiness concealed in it.

I believe that the same attitude ex-

ists in a considerable number of our Oblate communities in the Third World. At the end of the 1980 General Chapter, Father Jetté stated: "Present-day Oblates hear the appeals of the poor in our day, of those who are far away, of the most abandoned, and they want to respond to them. As we have experienced it throughout the entire Chapter in every region of the world, their eyes are wide open to the needs of people. There is no lack in generosity".<sup>110</sup>

## VII. SYNTHESIS: POVERTY IN OBLATE SPIRITUALITY

In the context of the entire range of Christian spirituality, evangelical poverty links up with self-denial, austerity, temperance, mortification, humility and meekness. In conjunction with them, it is an essential condition to follow Christ and to establish his Kingdom. Its specific function is to bring freedom to hearts and instill in them the ability to overcome the desire for acquisition that hinders our communion with God and our brothers. That is what Saint Ignatius states in his brilliant meditation on the two standards: just as the enemy urges men to seek the acquisition of material goods, leading the individual on to pride of heart, and from there, on to all the other vices, in the same way, Jesus leads his friends to seek spiritual poverty which brings in its wake humility and all the other virtues.<sup>111</sup> By destroying the bonds linking us to material things, poverty renders the heart more amenable to the demands of Christian love.

In the spirituality of the religious life, poverty is bound by an unbreakable link to chastity and obedience. The three dovetail in an intimate way to reflect a life dedicated to the Absolute, an

undivided love of Christ and the living presence of his Kingdom in this world. A life characterized by the three evangelical counsels gives witness in a special way to the living reality of the beatitudes and Christ's transforming action in the heart of humanity to renew it.

Oblate spirituality contains all that and, in addition to that, an apostolic missionary outlook. Working in union with chastity and obedience, poverty for us is the expression of a complete availability for the work of the Kingdom. We are poor in order to devote ourselves entirely to evangelizing the poor, of being their companions and co-workers of Christ the Savior, by working with him and like him and by "striving solely for the glory of God, the good of the Church and the growth and salvation of souls".<sup>112</sup>

In order for our Oblate poverty to be what it should be, we have to avoid the kind of vision that is inadequate and too narrow, a vision which impoverishes the idea of evangelical poverty and can give rise to conflict and tension in actual practice.

1. Our poverty should clearly show its *theological roots*. In unequivocal fashion, it must be "a poverty for the sake of the Kingdom", a poverty which draws us closer to God and puts us in communion with him. More concretely, it means:

a) a poverty flowing from a *faith vision* where God stands as the Only Necessity, the heart's only treasure. Something that led Saint Francis to exclaim: "My God and my All". And Teresa of Jesus to say: "Whoever possesses God lacks for nothing. God alone is sufficient".

b) a poverty accompanied and supported by a *filial confidence* in a God who is goodness itself, who provides

for the welfare of all his creatures and remains attentive to all the cries of the poor rising up to him. Such was the attitude of the "poor of Yahweh" who sought refuge in God, who approached him with confidence and accepted in humility and love the purpose of his will as those coming from the heart of a father.... The Founder's Rule specifies "It will never be allowed to beg for alms; Divine Providence must be looked to for assistance".<sup>113</sup> "The community, however, placing its trust in divine Providence will not hesitate to make use of what it has, even of what is necessary for its sustenance, to benefit God's poor".<sup>114</sup>

c) a poverty whose inspiration is the *love of God*, for whose sake we leave everything and for the *love of our brothers*, to the service of whom we wish to totally devote our lives. Without this love as its inspiration, poverty would cease being a Christian virtue or a Gospel attitude. It would shrink to mere sterile legalism or to a simple socio-economic dimension with human implications of a dubious humanitarian quality.

The theological inspiration for poverty brings with it a contemplative attitude which fosters the actual application of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, especially the gift of piety. The Holy Spirit provides the individual with a joy-filled intimate experience of divine sonship and of one's common humanity such as experienced by Francis of Assisi, Therese of the Child Jesus and Charles de Foucauld. This inspiration and theological permeation also frees the practice of poverty from possible tensions between juridical and Gospel demands, between personal austerity and communitarian sharing, between the use of effective apostolic means and the witness of Christian renunciation, between pro-

claiming the Gospel and the promotion of social justice.

2. Our poverty must be manifestly *Christocentric*. It must introduce us into the *kenosis* of Christ who became poor to enrich us and save us through the radical divesting of the Cross (see 2 Corinthians 8:9 and Philippians 2:7). Our Oblate vocation calls us "to leave everything to be disciples of Jesus Christ" (C 2). This following of Christ entails a profound knowledge and experience of the Master, an identification with him and the will to let him live in us in order to be able to cooperate with him in his work of salvation (see *ibidem*). Such is the fundamental norm of our life: motivated by love, to follow Jesus in a concrete way so that through us he can further his mission. In an ascetic effort to imitate him, we have to renounce any attitude of selfish possession and self-sufficiency. And at the same time, we have to seek personal communion and a loving openness to the action of his Spirit to enter into the mystery of his poverty and his saving *kenosis*. It is communion with Christ, the poor man, which demands and inspires our communion with the poor and which guarantees its authenticity, endowing it with his saving power.

3. Our poverty bears a specifically *Marian* stamp. Mary was the example par excellence of "the poor and humble of the Lord who confidently hoped for and receive salvation from him".<sup>115</sup> She is also the one who lived, in the deepest and most unique communion, the mystery of the Savior's self-effacement. In her, the happiness promised to the poor reached its climax because the Lord looked upon the lowliness of his servant. That is why all generations will call her blessed. "Mother of the poor, the humble and the simple", it is she who should inspire our attitude of com-

passionate "maternal" association with the poor of our world.<sup>116</sup> We must implant in their hearts hope in a liberating God.

4. Our poverty is characterized by an *apostolic* outreach. It must make us totally available for the tasks of the Kingdom and equipped to be spokesmen and witnesses for Jesus Christ and Gospel values. "The evangelizing Church becomes worthy of credence when, through the poverty of its members, the surpassing values she preaches show forth".<sup>117</sup> In itself, evangelization involves an attitude of sincere and friendly dialogue with people of all social or cultural levels and this demands a profound personal detachment. Only the person who is truly poor can make a total gift of himself, sacrificing his time, his individual tastes, his comfort, his human resources and his very life for the Gospel. Only he can reproduce the attitudes of Jesus, the one who was "meek and humble of heart", evangelization personified. And only he, based on the experience of his limitations and his frailty, can freely and boldly proclaim with apostolic courage, relying on the message of salvation which gives him strength.

It is true that the mission requires material means and resources and that God asks us to place our riches and technical talents at the service of the Kingdom. Apostolic poverty, then, consists in the *evangelical use* of such goods, so that the message of the Gospel is not distorted and that in the life of the missionary and the evangelizing community it is clearly manifest that the one treasure sought is Christ and the benefits of salvation he brought mankind. We must also clearly keep in mind the fact that the effectiveness of the Gospel does not come from the powers in this world such as economic

resources, social standing, political power, etc., but from the sovereign action of the Spirit. This presents us with a definite challenge: how can we maintain a *life style* which is simple, poor in fact, and close to the people while making use of a considerable amount of riches for purposes of evangelization and how can we give pride of place to *frugal means* which are more in harmony with the message we are proclaiming and which often manifest a great deal of evangelical power.<sup>118</sup>

5. Finally, our poverty must be the distinguishing mark of the *missionaries of the poor* we actually are. If, in order to be "Christian", all evangelization must bear the stamp of evangelical poverty, it is obvious that this is above all true of evangelization which by its very calling is directed to the poor, "the powerless, [...] those bereft of hope and deprived of their rights".<sup>119</sup> To accomplish this mission our poverty must have the following characteristics:

a) to give a *witness of being close to the people*. As the 1986 Chapter states: "We want to be close to them so as to share what they have and what we have, in order that we might learn to see the Church and the world from their perspective and to see them through the eyes of the crucified Savior (C 4). Thus we are evangelized by them and we become for them better witnesses to the presence of Jesus, who became poor to liberate the human person and the whole of creation".<sup>120</sup> This closeness to people and this communion with them leads us to reevaluate our life style to take up residence in the poorer quarters, to share our resources with the poor and even their kind of life.<sup>121</sup> Some Oblates in Latin America are putting this into practice. One day, Dom Helder Camara stated: "The poor know Dom Helder Camara, but those who know the poor

well are the Missionary Oblates who share their life".

b) bring a *liberating presence and support* by supporting the poor's struggle for justice. "Oblates will collaborate, according to their vocation and by every means compatible with the Gospel, in changing all that is a cause of oppression and poverty"<sup>122</sup> in order to build a new society based on brotherhood where they will see their rights recognized.

c) respect *the culture of the poor*. The people of the Third World generally have a hierarchy of values rather different from those currently recognized in western society. In their estimation, economic factors and the value of time do not rank very high against the value of the person and the fundamental demands of communion, family, friendship, hospitality... Inculturation of religious poverty into developing countries constitutes a great challenge for superiors and educators, as Father Alexander Motanyane has pointed out.<sup>123</sup> But it must be faced with resolve and patience through a serene evangelical dialogue.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

We have seen how the ideal of evangelical poverty, perceived and lived by Eugene de Mazenod and shared by his first followers, was incarnated in the life of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate in the context of the spiritual movements of the time. We have seen how this ideal was enriched by the new theological, spiritual and pastoral perspectives of Vatican Council II and the aftermath of the Council. New times opened the way to new ways of living in personal, communitarian and apostolic life. But it is

the same Christian life force, in its two-fold aspects of ascetic demands and the mystical thrust, which gives us an explanation for the vital dynamism which harks back to the beginnings of the Institute. Eugene de Mazenod wished to create a society to evangelize the poor and he laid as the living foundation stone a close union with Christ, the great poor man and great liberator from all the forms of poverty which encroach upon on man's existence. These poor appear with distinctive and many varied faces. Oblate poverty, too, takes on various forms and shapes while always retaining the vigorous thrust of the original charisma. Today, as yesterday, the Oblates make an option for poverty in order to "enter into a closer communion with Jesus and with the poor".<sup>124</sup> And because they live this two-fold communion, they cannot cease to enthusiastically love and live evangelical poverty.

OLEGARIO DOMINGUEZ

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See LEFLON, I, p. 37. Also Eugene de Mazenod, *Spiritual Writings*, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, p. 67.

<sup>2</sup> LEFLON, I, p. 152.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 245.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 258.

<sup>5</sup> Letter to Madame de Mazenod, June 29, 1808 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, no. 27, p. 56. LEFLON, I, p. 287-288.

<sup>6</sup> LEFLON, I, p. 303-304. Retreat resolutions of October 1808 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, no. 28, p. 62.

<sup>7</sup> LEFLON, I, p. 304-305.

<sup>8</sup> Letter to his mother, February 28, 1809, in *Leflon, I*, p. 304.

<sup>9</sup> Letter to his mother May 29, 1809 in *LEFLON, I*, p. 306. Also, *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 14, no. 55, p. 124.

<sup>10</sup> LEFLON, I, p. 308.

<sup>11</sup> *Imitation of Christ*, Book II, chap. 12, § 7.

<sup>12</sup> Rule drawn up during his retreat of December 1812 in Aix in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 15, no. 109, p. 16.

<sup>13</sup> Letter to Abbé Fortuné de Mazenod in Palermo, November 17, 1817 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 15, no. 143, p. 140.

<sup>14</sup> LEFLON, IV, p. 319-320.

<sup>15</sup> 1818 Constitutions and Rules, Part One, Chapter One, § 1 in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 45.

<sup>16</sup> See letter to Father Tempier, January 28, 1826 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 7, no. 221, p. 21 & 22.

<sup>17</sup> See letters to Father Tempier, March 30 and June 10, 1826, *ibidem*, no. 233, p. 72 and no. 248, p. 113-114 and his Diary of March 12, 1826 in *Missions*, 10 (1872), p. 346. He was delighted with the hospitality offered by the pilgrim Trinity Center and he would have liked to get personally involved in this work, but in order to do that, he would have had to formally join the society. He was invited to do so, but he declined to accept the offer through love of poverty: "The fear of doing something that would be against poverty held me back, poverty which is a virtue to which my duty obliges me to sacrifice everything that I might find

pleasing or of secondary merit". (Diary, *ibidem*.)

<sup>18</sup> July 1, 1825 letter in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 190, p. 180.

<sup>19</sup> "... in this matter, God has given me the fulness of grace..", letter to his mother, May 29, 1809 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 14, no. 55, p. 124. "I thank God for giving me this spirit of detachment; I despise money, I make no use of it for myself". Retreat notes of 1821, *ibidem*, vol. 15, no. 155, p. 169.

<sup>20</sup> Letter to Abbé Tempier, October 9, 1815 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 4, p. 7.

<sup>21</sup> *Mélanges historiques*, p. 30-32, quoted in COSENTINO, Georges, *Histoire de nos Règles*, Ottawa, Oblate Studies Edition, 1955, vol. 1, p. 36.

<sup>22</sup> In *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 8, no. 383, p. 11.

<sup>23</sup> Letter to the Founder, November 16, 1819 in *François de Paule Henry Tempier... Selected Letters - Various writings*, Collection Oblate Writings, II, vol. 2, p. 41-42.

<sup>24</sup> Letter to Father Tempier, November 16, 1819 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 47, p. 62.

<sup>25</sup> See COSENTINO, Georges, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 30.

<sup>26</sup> "Constitutions and Rules of the Society of the Missionaries of Provence", 1818, Second Part, Chapter One, § 1 in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 45.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 49.

<sup>28</sup> See COSENTINO, Georges, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 186-189.

<sup>29</sup> Constitutions and Rules of 1818, Second Part, Chapter One, § 1, in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 44-45. See COSENTINO, Georges, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 187.

<sup>30</sup> Constitutions and Rules of 1818..., p. 44.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 45-47. Two things stand out. A vow is mentioned while in point of fact no vow was taken. No doubt this was due to the fact that the Founder had before him the rule of Saint Alphonsus; and ecclesiastical honors and benefices (obviously ecclesiastical benefices) are treated in the context of poverty. We can be certain that it is a case of the material advantages that these honors usually entailed and which could put the

spirit of poverty in jeopardy. See COSENTINO, Georges, *op. cit.* vol. I, p. 220.

<sup>32</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 87-90. We omit the question of furnishings and clothing as well as the juridical norms governing property which the religious keeps with the possibility of handing them over to his parents or the Society which, however, would not accept legacies from members whose parents were poor. We also omit that which has to do with revenues coming to a house; they were to be limited to 6000 francs, etc.

<sup>33</sup> Constitutions and Rules of 1818..., p. 49. See COSENTINO, Georges, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 90.

<sup>34</sup> Constitutions and Rules of 1818, Part One, Chapter Two, § 2, in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 30.

<sup>35</sup> "On ordinary days, in the refectory, we will fast on dry bread. [...] It is to be hoped that we were content to sleep on cots as is fitting for men who preach penance to others". Constitutions and Rules of 1818, Second Part, Chapter Two, § 2 in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 65.

<sup>36</sup> "[...] I saw the life of religious perfection, the observance of the evangelical counsels free from the difficulties I had hitherto found in them. I asked myself why, to the vows of chastity and obedience that I have made up to now I did not add that of poverty, and running through my mind the various obligations that evangelical poverty would entail, there are none that make me draw back". Retreat of May 1818 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 15, no. 145, p. 145. We are ignorant of the date upon which the Founder pronounced this vow. See COSENTINO, Georges, *op. cit.*, II, p. 29.

<sup>37</sup> Father Tempier's November 23, 1820 letter to Father de Mazenod is very revealing concerning his own attitude and that of the other Oblates at Laus: "During our retreat, the good Lord gave me such great grace to appreciate this virtue, that I would have really had to do violence to myself not to take the vow. I also wanted to offer God some compensation... I assure you that if I had had your approval, I would not have been the only one who wanted to taste this hundred-fold that Our Lord promised to those who leave everything for love of him;

I would have had as many imitators as you have sons at Notre-Dame du Laus, so much so that without having taken this vow yet, they all want to dispossess themselves of what they own and put everything in common". in *Oblate Writings* II, vol. 2, no. 24, p. 45 & 46.

<sup>38</sup> "Omnia erunt in Societate communia quoad usum vitae"; see COSENTINO, Georges, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 105.

<sup>39</sup> "Paupertatis, quam profitentur, incommoda et privationes animo demissio ac hilari susteneant: qui status, utpote conformior spiritui mortificationis quo evangelicus operius moveri debet, vitae commodis est antefereendus". Constitutiones, Regulae et Instituta Societatis..., pars II, cap. 3, § 5, art. 7.

<sup>40</sup> C et R 1853 pars II, cap. 2 § 3, art. V.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*, art. VII.

<sup>42</sup> See PIELORZ, Józef, *Les Chapitres généraux au temps du Fondateur*, Ottawa, Oblate Studies Edition, 1968, vol. I, p. 105, 128, 156, 189, and 202.

<sup>43</sup> Constitutions and Rules, *Preface*.

<sup>44</sup> Constitutions and Rules of 1853, Third Part, Chapter Three, § 1, art. 19. The text of the 1853 edition makes some improvement on the 1826 text.

<sup>45</sup> Letter to the Founder, November 16, 1819 in *Oblate Writings* II, vol. 2, p. 41-42.

<sup>46</sup> In *Oblate Writings* II, vol. I, p. 224.

<sup>47</sup> DRAGO, Gaetano, *L'apostolo della Corsica*, P. Carlo D. Albini, *missionario oblato di Maria Immacolata*, Rome, Istituto Grafico Tireno, 1942, p. 253-254.

<sup>48</sup> As far as he is concerned, home visiting in the villages "is the most important work: It is there that we throw out the net. One never visits villages too often. It must be admitted also that it is a difficult task, under our sun without ever a tree for protection, at all times and in every seasons, to run like that around the country from village to village, and by what roads!" 1908 report quoted in BEAUDOIN, Yvon, *Blessed Joseph Gérard, O.M.I., Apostle to the Basotho (1831-1914)*, Rome, General Postulation, 1988, Collection Oblate Writings, II, vol. 3, p. 144.

<sup>49</sup> Canonical visit of January 8, 1889, *ibidem*, p. 96.

<sup>50</sup> Letter to Father Étienne Semeria, August 17, 1848 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 4, no. 4, p. 16.

<sup>51</sup> Letter to Father Toussaint Dassy, February 12, 1848 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 10, no. 966, p. 211.

<sup>52</sup> Letter to members of the Central Council of the Propagation of the Faith, April 17, 1852, *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 5, no. 135, p. 251.

<sup>53</sup> Letter to Bishop Ignatius Bourget, April 13, 1842 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 1, no. 11, p. 22; see letter to Father Bruno Guigues, September 25, 1844, *ibidem*, no. 47, p. 106-107.

<sup>54</sup> Letter to Father Honorat, January 16, 1829 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 7, no. 322, p. 173-174. The Founder complains about expenses incurred by the house in Nîmes with regard to food, the furnishings, books, the hairstylist and alms.

<sup>55</sup> Letter of August 18, 1843 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 1, no. 24, p. 58.

<sup>56</sup> Letter of December 16, 1857 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 2, no. 243, p. 168.

<sup>57</sup> Letter of January 20, 1847, *ibidem*, no. 227, p. 136.

<sup>58</sup> Letter of February 11, 1826 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 7, no. 223, p. 29.

<sup>59</sup> Letter to Father Tempier, October 24, 1830, *ibidem*, no. 367, p. 218-219.

<sup>60</sup> Circular letter no. 1, August 2, 1853 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 12, p. 203-205.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 207.

<sup>62</sup> See PIELORZ, Józef, *Les Chapitres généraux au temps du Fondateur*, Ottawa, Oblate Studies Edition, 1968, II, p. 48 and 73.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 81. A directive from the Superior General establishing the clothes with which each missionary was to be outfitted accompanied the circular letter; see *ibidem*, p. 104-105.

<sup>64</sup> Circular letter no. 2 of February 2, 1857 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 12, p. 210-216; see PIELORZ, Józef, *op. cit.* p. 95-96.

<sup>65</sup> See the acts of the 1867 Chapter, no. 2 and 1920 Chapter no. 8 in COSENTINO, Georges, *Nos Chapitres généraux*, Ottawa, Oblate Studies Edition, 1957, p. 80 and 190.

<sup>66</sup> See the 1879 Chapter declaration V and that of 1887 declaration VI, *ibidem*, p. 114 and 123.

<sup>67</sup> Article 213.

<sup>68</sup> Paragraph *De voto paupertatis*, art. XL, XLI and XLII in COSENTINO, Georges, *op. cit.*, p. 82. See Constitutions and Rules of 1928, art. 190-192.

<sup>69</sup> Acts of the 1873 Chapter, admonition II in COSENTINO, Georges, *op. cit.*, p. 106. The same observation resurfaces in 1898, no. 42, in 1920, no. 28, in 1932, no. 23 and in 1947, no. 27, *ibidem*, p. 148 193, 222 and 249.

<sup>70</sup> Observation 2, *ibidem*, p. 174. We find a similar admonition in 1947, no. 21: "Monet praeterea [Capitulum] omnes ut vere more pauperum agant et vivant", *ibidem*, p. 248.

<sup>71</sup> From 1873 on, six Chapters focused their attention on the usage of smoking tobacco (not snuff). In the 1873 Chapter, the request was made that the use of tobacco not be introduced without sufficient grounds for doing so and that it not be done without permission (observation III, *ibidem*, p. 106). The following Chapter, the Chapter of 1879, took a more radical stance. It strictly forbade any use of tobacco; but it added that those who felt constrained to use it could request and receive from their provincial a dispensation from this rule and could only smoke when alone (decree III, *ibidem*, p. 113). The 1898 Chapter adopted the same rule (no. 31, *ibidem*, p. 147). The 1920 Chapter softened the restriction by saying that no one could smoke without the provincial's permission or that of the Vicar of Missions and then only when alone, except in special circumstances (no. 22, *ibidem*, p. 192). In 1932, the specification that smoking must be done only when alone was dropped (no. 26, *ibidem*, p. 222) and the situation was left unchanged in 1947 (no. 30, *ibidem*, p. 249).

<sup>72</sup> See the 1920, 1926, 1932 and 1947 Chapters, *ibidem*, p. 193, 212, 222 and 249.

<sup>73</sup> LAVILLARDIERE, August, circular letter no. 92 of April 21, 1907 in *Circ. adm.*, III (1901-1921), p. 205. See LEVASSEUR, Donat, *Histoire des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, vol. II, 1898-1985, Montreal, Provincial House, 1986, p. 14-16.

<sup>74</sup> "Rapport du vicariat d'Athabaska-Mackenzie", May 4, 1898 in *Missions*, 36 (1898), p. 180-181.

<sup>75</sup> Quoted in *50 años de los Oblatos de María Immaculada en el Chaco*, 1975, p. 24. A few pages further on, the author makes reference to the time of the Second World War: "Poverty, want, misery everywhere. A fact not mentioned in any letter or news item [...] but a sad reality nevertheless is that more than once the missionary begged of the same Indian the alms of a fish, a vegetable [...] that more than one missionary made himself a shirt out of flour bags and many other things of the same nature". (*ibidem*, p. 48)

<sup>76</sup> Code of Canon Law, canon 607, § 1.

<sup>77</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, no. 44, § 3.

<sup>78</sup> *Perfectae caritatis*, no. 13, § 1.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibidem*, see Code of Canon Law, canon 600: "The evangelical counsel of poverty in imitation of Christ, who for our sake was made poor when he was rich, entails a life which is poor in reality and in spirit, sober and industrious, and a stranger to earthly riches. It also involves dependence and limitation in the use and the disposition of goods [...]"

<sup>80</sup> *Evangelica Testificatio*, no. 17: "More urgently than ever, you hear welling up from their personal anguish and collective misery "the clamor of the poor" [...] In a world in full evolution, this persistence of the masses and individuals, this wretched persistence is a pressing call to "a conversion of mentalities and attitudes" most especially for you who follow "more closely" the Christ in his earthly condition of self-effacing poverty".

<sup>81</sup> Constitutions and Rules of 1966, C 25, p. 13.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibidem*, C 26, p. 13.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibidem*, C 28, p. 13.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibidem*, C 26, p. 13.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibidem*, C 30, p. 14.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibidem*, C 30, p. 14.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibidem*, C 29, p. 14.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibidem*, C 31, p. 14.

<sup>89</sup> Constitutions and Rules of 1818, Part One, Chapter Two, § 1, art. 2 in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 20.

<sup>90</sup> Constitutions and Rules of 1818, Part Two, Chapter One, § 1, in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 45.

<sup>91</sup> Constitutions and Rules of 1966, R 58, p. 76.

<sup>92</sup> No. 18.

<sup>93</sup> *Missionary Outlook*, no. 5, p. 7.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibidem*, no. 9, p. 11.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibidem*, no. 15, p. 16-19.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibidem*, no. 16, p. 20.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibidem*, no. 17, p. 24.

<sup>99</sup> "We can learn from the poor, especially making our own their patience, hope and solidarity". C 20; see Rule 8a.

<sup>100</sup> "[...] we gladly accept the fact of not having at our disposal the comforts we might like". C 21.

<sup>101</sup> Rule 22a.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>103</sup> JETTÉ, Fernand, *O.M.I., The Apostolic Man: A Commentary on the 1982 Edition of the Oblate Constitutions and Rules*, General House, Rome, 1992, p. 157.

<sup>104</sup> This pluralism of attitude is explicitly sanctioned in Rule 9a: "Responding to the call of the Spirit, some Oblates identify themselves with the poor sharing their life and commitment to justice; others are present where decisions affecting the future of the poor are being made". It would be a pity if such attitudes became diametrically opposed and no longer were seen as being complementary.

<sup>105</sup> He will take the same course of action when, after he has taken vows, he will receive property through inheritance. See Rule 23a and b.

<sup>106</sup> JETTÉ, Fernand, *O.M.I., The Apostolic Man...*, p. 158-159.

<sup>107</sup> See *Missionaries in Today's World*, no. 10-30. The North-South dialogue among Oblates of the Americas is already under way and promises to bear good fruit.

<sup>108</sup> "Building a civilization of love, Puebla 1979, final document of the general conference of the Latin-American episcopacy on the present and future of evangelization", Paris, Le Centurion, 1980, nos. 733 and 734, p. 161.

<sup>109</sup> "To the members of the Oblate Conference of Latin-America", September 15, 1979 in *Letters to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate*, General House, Rome, 1984, no. 26, p. 198-199.

<sup>110</sup> "The 1980 General Chapter", December 8, 1980, *ibidem*, no. 11, p. 84-85.

<sup>111</sup> *Spiritual Exercises*, second week, fourth day, part one, third point; second part, point three, nos. 142 and 146.

<sup>112</sup> *Preface*; the linking of these three ideas together appears often in the writings of Eugene de Mazenod.

<sup>113</sup> Constitutions and Rules of 1818, Part Two, Chapter One, § 1 in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 48. This text, taken from Saint Alphonsus, was adopted in all editions of the Constitutions and Rules up until 1928. The 1966 Constitutions and Rules state: "With filial trust in Divine Providence and really detached from material things, they will put aside all excessive concern for the morrow...". (C 31)

<sup>114</sup> Rule 22a.

<sup>115</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, no. 55.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibidem*, no. 65: "In her life the Virgin was a model of that motherly love with which all who join in the church's apostolic mission for the regeneration of humanity should be animated".

<sup>117</sup> GALILEA, S. *Espiritualidad de la evangelización según las bienaventuranzas*, Clar, Bogotá, 1982, p. 45.

<sup>118</sup> "We cannot proclaim the beatitudes in credible fashion with means and resources which give them the lie; we cannot approach the poor with a style and methods which are foreign to them and which put us in the category of "the world of the rich", *ibidem*, p. 48. See *Missionaries in Today's World*, no. 18: "We cannot preach a God who has made himself poor unless we truly follow him in our way of living".

<sup>119</sup> *Acts of the 1992 Chapter*, no. 2.

<sup>120</sup> *Missionaries in Today's World*, no. 16.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibidem*, nos. 24-25.

<sup>122</sup> Rule 9a; see *Missionaries in Today's World*, nos. 19-20, 27-29.

<sup>123</sup> "On inculturation of religious life in Africa" in *Documentation OMI*, No. 191, March 1993, 23 p.

<sup>124</sup> C 20. In the 1966 Constitutions and Rules, the expression used was that Oblates find in voluntary poverty a "means of union with Christ and with the poor". C 25.

## PRAYER-ORAISON

*Summary: I. Prayer/oraison in the Bible and in the history of spirituality up to the time of Saint Eugene de Mazenod. II. Oraison in the life and writings of the Founder: 1. Eugene de Mazenod's early experience of l'oraison. 2. The Founder's Règlement de vie of 1812. 3. The CC and RR of the Missionaries of Provence (1818). 4. Mental prayer/l'oraison for the rest of the Founder's life. III. Mental prayer/l'oraison in the Congregation from 1861 to 1982. IV. Mental prayer/l'oraison in our 1982 CC and RR. 1. Some thoughts on the English text; 2. A theology of "mental prayer": a. Teresa of Avila's understanding of mental prayer; b. Teresa's ways or degrees of mental prayer. Conclusion.*

To adequately treat all forms of prayer from the time of the Founder to the present in this brief article would be too vast an undertaking. Therefore, I limit my presentation to a single usage of the term – to “the prolonged silent prayer we make each day” (CC and RR, 1982, C 33). That is, I focus on the hour of “mental prayer” – or, as the French text puts it: *l'oraison* – to which we devote ourselves daily.

### I. PRAYER/ORAISON IN THE BIBLE AND IN THE HISTORY OF SPIRITUALITY UP TO THE TIME OF SAINT EUGENE DE MAZENOD

The Hebrews did not have a single generic term for what we call prayer. They rather used a multitude of expressions to convey the many ways that a person addresses God – for example: thanksgiving, lamenting, singing, dancing, praising, bowing down, lifting up, listening.

The New Testament authors also use a variety of words, but they tend to return to *proseuché* when referring to prayer in general. That is, for example, Luke's term to describe the scene in the Upper Room after the ascension: “They all joined steadfastly in prayer

with Mary the mother of Jesus” (Acts 1:14). Paul, while retaining a certain generic quality, distinguishes *proseuché* – “prayers” – from “petitions, intercessions and thanksgivings”<sup>1</sup>. The synoptics consistently use *proseuché*, or its verb form, to highlight the solitary personal prayer of Jesus<sup>2</sup>. They, furthermore, employ the term to refer to the Christian's general attitude in prayer (Mt 5:44; Lk 18:1) as well as to designate his/her “prayer in secret” (Mt 6:5-8).

*Proseuché* also refers to the place where prayers are offered, hence: oratory<sup>3</sup>.

During the Patristic era, the Greek Fathers continued to use *proseuché*. The Latin Fathers, for their part, captured its basic meaning in *oratio*, whence come *oraison* and “oratory”. Both the Eastern and the Western church understood its respective word for prayer mainly in terms of request. Thus, for all practical purposes “prayer” meant “prayer of petition”. Yet, St. Augustine (+ 410), among others, was careful to note that true prayer consists more in turning one's heart to God – *affectus cordis* and *desiderium* – than formulating a long series of specific intercessions.<sup>4</sup>

In the Middle Ages, we find several

distinctions related to *oratio*. For example, the singular usage was differentiated from the plural: prayer/prayers. In the singular, *oratio* denoted the lifting up of one's inner self to God in any manner that seemed appropriate. *Orationes*, on the other hand, referred to the specific petitions that one might address to the Lord. Another example differentiated between meditative prayer and contemplative prayer. Meditation consisted in a laborious application of intellect and imagination to the things of God as they relate to the human condition. The purpose of that exercise was compunction and increased purity of intention. Contemplative prayer, by contrast, was considered a more quiet and affective beholding of the Lord. The verb *orare* covered the ensemble of different forms of praying from the Divine office to contemplation.<sup>5</sup>

From the sixteenth century to the time of Eugene de Mazenod, we see much insistence on *oratio* as a well defined spiritual exercise. Different masters – for instance: St. Ignatius of Loyola (+ 1556), St. Teresa of Jesus (+ 1582), St. Francis de Sales (+ 1622), the French School of spirituality with Pierre de Bérulle (+ 1629) and Jean-Jacques Olier (+ 1657) – proposed various methods of prayer or enhanced our understanding of degrees of prayer.

During those centuries, *oratio* was still employed in a generic sense – any form of prayer. Yet, increasingly the term came to designate a specific way of praying. In French, *prière* ordinarily referred to prayer in general. *Oraison*, or more precisely *l'oraison* (with the definite article), was often reserved for methods or degrees of personal solitary prayer. Thus, one spoke of the Ignatian method, the Salesian method, the Bérullian method of *l'oraison*. One

also spoke of different degrees or modes of *l'oraison*: mental prayer, affective prayer, prayer of the heart, prayer of quiet, prayer of union etc.<sup>6</sup>

## II. ORAISON IN THE LIFE AND WRITINGS OF THE FOUNDER

When Eugene de Mazenod (1782-1861) entered the picture, all the above ways of understanding “prayer” and *oraison* were in vogue. In a 9 October 1815 letter to Tempier, the Founder specifies the sources of the rule for community living he proposes to initiate. They are: St. Ignatius, St. Charles, St. Philip Neri, St. Vincent de Paul and St. Alphonsus Liguori.<sup>7</sup> Yet, we know that our spiritual genealogy is much more complex than that.<sup>8</sup> The degree to which the Constitutions and Rules of the Society of the Missionaries of Provence depended on those sources – especially St. Alphonsus – is well documented. That dependence was not only general, but also includes the exact wording of many texts. What then about the sections on prayer? Where did Eugene de Mazenod get his ideas and practice of *oraison*?

At the foundation of the Congregation, the backbone of our spiritual exercises resulted from the networking of many sources. The daily schedule of those days bespoke a distinct Liguorian mold. Yet, the actual formula of many of the prayers used in those early years came out of the French School. Some examples are: Morning Prayers, the act of spiritual communion *O Jesu vivens in Maria* [O Jesus, living in Mary] which concluded morning meditation, and the Marian consecration *O Domina mea* [My Sovereign Lady] that crowned Particular Examen.

## 1. EUGENE DE MAZENOD'S EARLY EXPERIENCE OF *L'ORAISON*

No doubt, the Founder like most of us learned his "prayers" – the Our Father, the Hail Mary, etc. – on the lap of his mother, aunt or grandmother. Yet, at a very early age he also found himself absorbed in moments of personal prayer – something approaching what he would later call *l'oraison*. This is what he reminisced as he prepared for his priestly ordination: "God had placed in me a certain innate propensity to love him. At an age when my ability to reason was not yet developed, I was happy to remain in his presence, lifting up my tiny hands toward him and listening in silence to his word as though I understood it. Although I was by nature lively and high-spirited, I had only to be brought in full view of an altar to make me become docile and still. I was utterly entranced even then by the wondrousness of God".<sup>9</sup>

Thus, as far back as he could remember, Eugene would find himself at times listening to God in silence. Nonetheless, his introduction into personal prayer as a structured spiritual exercise probably came through his mentor Don Bartolo Zinelli during his exile in Venice (1794-1797). Don Bartolo was a member of the Society of the Faith of Jesus [Paccanarians], a group of priests aspiring to become Jesuits when the Society would be canonically reestablished. The young teenager lived quite a regimented life during those years, and he practiced regularly something akin to Ignatian meditation.

After his return from Palermo, while still in his early twenties, Eugene came under the direction of a former Jesuit, Père Magy. Even though forced to live as a diocesan priest because of the suppression of the Society at that time,

Magy held firmly to his Ignatian roots and practices. In August 1805, Eugene – still a layman – participated in an extended retreat offered by the former Jesuit. During those spiritual exercises, he daily engaged in three or four hour-long periods of *l'oraison*, each followed by a fifteen minute written review. Those prayer periods were performed "in common". That is, all the retreatants remained together in the same room – presumably an oratory, a chapel or a church – although the *oraison* of each participant was personal and meditative following the Ignatian method.<sup>10</sup>

From 1808 to 1812, Eugene – both as a seminarian and as a director at Saint-Sulpice in Paris – imbibed deeply from the French School of Spirituality. A few weeks after his return to Aix, Father de Mazenod wrote for himself an important document in two sections. One section contained a general Rule of Life. The other section expressed a more concise "rule" to order the hours of the day. Eugene composed this document during a personal retreat in December 1812. That retreat served as part of his immediate preparation before launching into full-time ministry.

## 2. THE FOUNDER'S *RÈGLEMENT DE VIE* OF 1812

Lest anyone be tempted to think that the attitudes and resolutions expressed in that document were meant only as a preparation for ministry rather than for lifelong full-time service, Father de Mazenod begins with the following paragraph: "This is the rule which I prescribe for myself and which I intend to observe for the rest of my life, with God's help. Naturally, I will have to make modifications as unforeseen circumstances arise. But those changes

will affect only the order and arrangement of the different exercises, [not their substance]”<sup>11</sup>

The general Rule of Life, which is about ten printed pages long, can be subdivided into three segments: (1) an introduction which takes up the issues of fidelity, earnestness and perseverance; (2) a long segment called “duties toward God;” and (3) another entitled “exercises of piety”. Interestingly, the Founder addresses prayer (*prière*) in the second segment and *l’oraison* in the third. Under “prayer”, he includes the Mass and the Divine Office. Under “exercises of piety”, he discusses: the practice of the presence of God, *l’oraison*, spiritual reading, and visits to the Blessed Sacrament. Concerning *l’oraison* specifically, he comments: “What could I possibly add about *l’oraison* that hasn’t already been [convincingly] stressed [by so many before me] ... I know only too well how important it is... Experience has proven that there is no good priest without *l’oraison*... It remains his true daily bread. There, he finds energy, light and solace in all the sufferings that come his way. There, God communicating himself to the priest in intimate union... bestows on him everything necessary to carry out his ministry and to render it profitable both for his own soul and for that of those to whom he is sent”<sup>12</sup>

To that general Rule of Life, Father de Mazenod added a more concise *règlement* which would order the use of each hour of the day. This shorter rule, however, in addition to being an horarium is also an explanation of the meaning underlying the way the Founder intended to spend his time. On the subject of personal prayer, he observes: “After getting dressed, I will go to my oratory for *l’oraison* which I shall begin

with the vocal prayer taken from the works of [Jean-Jacques] Olier.

Convinced that a priest cannot be sanctified except by *l’oraison* and that the fruit of my ministry depends on it, I intend to spend at least an hour each day in this holy exercise.

If circumstances do not permit a full hour in the morning, I will faithfully make it up in the course of the day. I will try, moreover to make *l’oraison* immediately before Mass...”<sup>13</sup>

As to how the Founder – then thirty years old – spent that hour of prayer, he gives us a few indications. First, he would begin his *oraison* with a formula from M. Olier. Then, he would read several chapters from the Bible, presumably meditatively. Finally, he would conclude the exercise with certain resolutions.<sup>14</sup> The unfolding of that prayer period suggests a certain personal adaptation and integration of possibly three methods of *l’oraison*: Ignatian, Sulpician and Liguorian.

In December 1814, Father de Mazenod made a private eight-day retreat based on the Ignatian Exercises. He used a book by François Nepveu, S.J., entitled *A Retreat for Clerics according to the Spirit and the Method of St. Ignatius*.<sup>15</sup> The context of that retreat was a veritable crisis of vocation: whether to enter a monastic order or launch himself full throttle into the apostolic life. The retreat itself did not produce a definitive response to the dilemma. That decision would come a few months later.<sup>16</sup> Yet, the retreat did prepare the ground for resolving the crisis by impressing upon him the conviction that it was indeed possible to integrate a vigorous interior life with a zealous apostolic life. The key to that integration would be fidelity to *l’oraison* – a full hour of mental prayer each day.

The above truth is borne out in a couple of remarks which the Founder offers during a personal retreat in 1816. He may have been thinking of Jesus' reaction to Martha in Luke 10:38-42: "A little more *oraison*, and a lot less worrying and running around. I resolve to arrange my day so as to have more time for *oraison* than I have thus far. In this way, I should be better able to take care of my own business and that of our community".<sup>17</sup>

During the same retreat, Father de Mazenod describes what might be considered his basic interior attitude during *l'oraison* as well as the core of his spirit of recollection. He may have been alluding to John 15:5. The following observation is the first of four resolutions: "[I intend] to live a vigorous interior life [*vivre dans la retraite*]. By that, I mean to live completely centered on the Spouse of my soul who has deigned to make his permanent home in me".<sup>18</sup>

### 3. THE CC AND RR OF THE MISSIONARIES OF PROVENCE (1818)

In the first edition of the Constitutions and Rules of our infant Congregation – hand-written by the Eugene de Mazenod at Saint-Laurent du Verdon during August-September 1818 – we find *oraison* specifically mentioned in several different contexts.

The Founder also uses related terms such as "silence", "prayer", "meditation", "recollection" and "contemplation". The following are five passages which contain the word *oraison*:

(1) [In the context of Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament during which the missionaries are sent forth to preach:] "Everyone chants together the prayer for the missioning of clerics. The responses are said by the choristers and the *oraisons* by the one who officiates".<sup>19</sup>

(2) [In the context of the formal beginning of the mission:] "Once we have arrived at the church [in procession] and exposed the Blessed Sacrament, one [of the missionaries] will chant the *Veni Creator*, the *verset* and the *oraison*"<sup>20</sup>.

(3) [In the context of the missionaries' daily schedule while on mission:] "They will rise at 4:00 a.m. and not take more than fifteen minutes to dress. Together, they will spend half an hour in *l'oraison*... If for some reason they are not able to make *l'oraison* in the [early] morning, they shall never be dispensed from making it before Particular Examen [which would have been at noon]"<sup>21</sup>.

(4) [In the context of an Oblate's daily schedule while in his local community:] "We shall make *l'oraison mentale* [mental prayer] in common twice a day: in the morning for three quarters of an hour following morning prayers, and in the evening around the altar by way of a visit to the Blessed Sacrament for half an hour. We will meditate especially on the theological virtues as well as on the life and virtues of Our Lord Jesus Christ whom the members of this Society must earnestly strive to imitate"<sup>22</sup>.

(5) [In the context of the opening sentences related to silence and recollection:] "The entire life of the members of this Society ought to be one of continual recollection. To achieve this, they will first practice faithfully the exercise of the presence of God by frequently making short but fervent *oraisons jaculatoires* [ejaculatory prayers]"<sup>23</sup>.

Analyzing the above five instances in our primitive Rule, we see that the Founder uses *oraison* in three different senses: (1) In the first and second examples, he speaks of pre-formulated

vocal prayers – what we might call “orations”. (2) In the third and fourth examples, he addresses prolonged personal prayer, presumably meditation according to some method. That is basically what our 1982 CC and RR refers to as “mental prayer” (see C 33). (3) In the fifth example, he is suggesting ejaculatory prayers, whether terse traditional formulas or spontaneous one-liners.

Concerning # 4 above – *l'oraison mentale* – we note the following: First, it is prescribed twice a day, not just once. Second, the morning period in effect was an hour long if we add the fifteen minutes of “morning prayers” which were to precede the forty-five minutes of *l'oraison* proper.<sup>24</sup> Third, the evening period was to be made specifically before the Blessed Sacrament – exposed or not – in a different attitude than the morning period. The evening *oraison* was to be approached as a “visit” with an intimate friend: Jesus. It could be meditative or quiet, discursive or contemplative. It could be conversation or adoration – whatever suited the moment and the spontaneity of the *orans*.

No particular form or method is prescribed for either period. That fact is remarkable when we consider the extreme detail which the Founder required in other situations, for example: the opening and closing ceremonies of a mission.<sup>25</sup>

By this time in his life, Father de Mazenod had imbibed and practiced at least three renowned methods of *l'oraison*: Ignatian, Sulpician and Liguorian. The Ignatian methods are familiar to most people of prayer and can be found in the *Spiritual Exercises*.<sup>26</sup> The Sulpician method known to the Founder was taught him by his spiritual director in the seminary. That approach

proposed to complete the method of M. Olier with elements from St. Ignatius, Pierre de Bérulle and St. Francis de Sales. It consisted basically of three parts: adoration, communion and cooperation.<sup>27</sup> The method of St. Alphonsus of Liguori is fundamentally a meditative reading of scripture with pauses for personal reflections and resolutions as warranted.<sup>28</sup>

Eugene de Mazenod, although a lover of rules and regulations, was far too free a spirit to be tied down by a single method of prayer. His natural independence would not allow him to be restricted to one school of thought or of procedure. Thus, he took from one and borrowed from another, always adapting it to his personality, mood and the exigencies of the moment. He had no scruple about using material from diverse sources as long as it served his purposes. He was creatively eclectic and was constantly integrating converging elements as he matured. History and temperament seem to have placed the Founder at the crossroads of several great movements of spirituality. He benefited from them all, without becoming a partisan of any.<sup>29</sup>

Therefore, if the Founder moved freely within several approaches to prayer, it stands to reason that he would allow his brother Oblates to do the same. He did not impose or prescribe a specific method or form of *l'oraison*. He spelled out the time of day and the length of each period, but not its specific content or procedure.

In the CC and RR for the Missionaries of Provence, Father de Mazenod did, however, indicate a certain focus which he deemed significant. In all likelihood, he practiced *l'oraison* this way himself at the time. The focus concerns a difference of internal attitude with regard to the morning and the eve-

ning periods. The first would usually be more formal and meditative, while the second would generally be more intimate and affective. With respect to the meditative dimension of the morning *oraison*, the whole exercise – fifteen minutes morning prayers, plus forty-five minutes of mental prayer – would last a full hour. The morning prayers were formulated so as to establish an atmosphere of Trinitarian adoration, thanksgiving, contrition and oblation.<sup>30</sup> It was further suggested that the thrust of the meditations be twofold: (1) Trinitarian – that is, accentuating the theological virtues of faith, hope and love as manifestations of the indwelling Trinity; (2) Christocentric – that is, stressing the life and virtues of Jesus as well as our earnest imitation of him.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, there has never been an Oblate method of *l'oraison* as such. We are to approach our daily mental prayer in whatever way best suits us at that moment of our transformation in Christ. Yet, there has always been a certain tone, an accent, a focus both in terms of theological content and of interior disposition.

#### 4. MENTAL PRAYER/L'ORAISON FOR THE REST OF THE FOUNDER'S LIFE

As far as *l'oraison* – understood as “mental prayer” – is concerned, the text of our CC and RR approved by Leo XII in 1826 is simply a literal Latin translation of Father de Mazenod's French original of 1818.<sup>32</sup> The 1853 revision of the CC and RR did not change one letter of a single word in that article.

In the General Archives in Rome, there exists a manuscript in the handwriting of Eugene de Mazenod entitled *No. 2. Retreat for Oblates*.<sup>33</sup> The manuscript is undated. However, if we compare its contents with the retreat notes

of Casimir Aubert (+ 1860) and Charles Albini (+ 1839), it seems to have been used as early as 1824 and again in 1832, 1833 and 1834.<sup>34</sup> The retreat is one of nine days, with four one-hour “meditations” daily. The subject of each period of mental prayer is specified, and clearly follows the Ignatian Exercises. The retreatant is expected to rise at 4:00 a.m. and be in bed by 9:00 p.m. The schedule calls for an hour's *oraison* followed by a written review, at 4:30 a.m., 9:00 a.m., 3:00 p.m. and 5:30 p.m. We do not know how extensively that retreat was used by Oblates, nor for how long.

No matter how busy or stressed out, Bishop de Mazenod remained faithful to *l'oraison* each day. As the years wore on, his prime time for mental prayer was sometime late in the evening, although there is no indication that he ever abandoned his early morning quiet time before Mass. Those late evening visits with Jesus were, however, increasingly meaningful to himself in relation to the ever expanding Congregation. The following are typical observations: “[Together with Tempier and Honorat in the church of Notre-Dame de Lumières] we remained for half an hour in silent prayer. Those were precious moments... all alone in our divine Master's presence... We placed ourselves, our society, its ministry, its undertakings and the house we had just taken possession of, under his powerful protection. We asked him to reign over us in unique fashion, to be our Father, our all. We called down his blessings on us and on our Congregation [...]”.<sup>35</sup>

Each morning at Mass and every evening during *l'oraison*, the Founder was able to hold “a rendez-vous [with Oblates scattered around the globe] within [his] divine Savior's most lovable heart”.<sup>36</sup>

To a missionary in Canada, he wrote: "I have only one way of drawing near to [our men on the Red River], and that is in front of the Blessed Sacrament where I seem to see you and to touch you. And you for your part must often be in his presence. It is thus that we meet one another within this living center which is our means of communication".<sup>37</sup>

Eugene de Mazenod deeply believed that the Eucharist was not only the Sacrament of the physical body and blood of the Lord, but also the Sacrament of the Mystical Body of Christ. His fellow Oblates were in Christ as he was. Thus, it was in Christ that they commune. Visiting with the Eucharistic presence was a spiritual, but symbolically tangible, way to encounter his brother Oblates anywhere in the world. He could visit with some by direct conversation. He could visit with others by correspondence. He could visit with everyone through the Eucharist.

In English, we frequently refer to the evening time before the Blessed Sacrament as "adoration". That term has its foundation in the Founder's own way of describing *l'oraison du soir*. On a particular occasion while in Paris, he had apparently been attending to business all day. When night came, he started looking around for an open church so that he could make his *adoration accoutumée* – his "customary adoration".<sup>38</sup> As luck or providence would have it, he indeed found a church open: Saint-Sulpice.

### III. MENTAL PRAYER/L'ORAISON IN THE CONGREGATION FROM 1861 TO 1982

With regard to the article on *l'oraison*, the 1928 revision of our CC

and RR left unaltered the text of 1826 and 1853. The only change that occurred was the numeration. In 1928, it became article # 254.

The 1966 revision of our CC and RR, however, effected major changes in virtually every article of the text. Not only were they rethought in the light of Vatican II, but also many were completely reworded and re-presented. Moreover, the 1966 CC and RR were divided into "constitutions" – prescriptions which only the Holy See could change – and "rules" which could be altered by a General Chapter. Thus, following the Founder's Preface, we find 215 Constitutions. They in turn are succeeded by 237 Rules. Each of the two divisions has its own numeration.

The article on *l'oraison* which had remained unaltered for almost a hundred and fifty years was completely revised. Furthermore, it was divided into one Constitution (C 59) and one Rule (R 110): "In daily and prolonged mental prayer, he [the Oblate] will allow himself to be molded by the Lord, in order to conform to his inspirations, and fulfill the life-giving requirements of the Kingdom. Cooperating with the Savior, he will find in him, in all things and everywhere, the inspiration of his behavior" (C 59).

"Each of the members will devote at least one hour daily to prayer. The time and place will be determined by the Superior, after consulting the Provincial. This arrangement should be such that where possible the evening prayer will be made in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament" (R 110).

The French text for C 59 uses *la prière silencieuse et prolongée* for "prolonged mental prayer", and in R 110 *une heure au moins par jour à l'oraison* for "at least one hour daily to prayer".

In comparison with the 1818, 1826, 1853 and 1928 editions, there are several changes: What was an hour and a quarter is now "at least one hour". Gone is the specification of part in the morning and part in the evening. Gone also is explicit mention of "morning prayers" and of the theological virtues. The Christological dimension – the *sequela Christi* – receives a little more emphasis. Greater flexibility regarding time and place is evident. The relationship of this prayer to the animation of the Oblate's ministry is noted.

The changes reflect many elements in the evolution of spirituality since the time of the Founder. The spirit of his initial convictions is, however, preserved.

Each General Administration since the death of Bishop de Mazenod in 1861 has insisted on the importance of *l'oraison* for every Oblate and his apostolate. There is no need to refer to those documents here. I would, however, like to close this section with a résumé of how some of the rank and file in the Congregation have viewed daily mental prayer.

We can find such testimony in many places. Because of its conciseness and universality, I have chosen a 1951 report on the novitiates of the Congregation prepared by Daniel Albers, then Director General of Studies.<sup>39</sup> That report contains the attitudes and practices of a large percentage of our membership. Even though it is written in the mid-twentieth century, it reflects what had been handed down for over a hundred years. Although it focuses on novitiates, that is where our first formation received its impetus. For what concerns us presently, the report distinguishes "morning meditation" and "evening *oraison*".

*Morning meditation.* Many of the

novices of the Congregation were being taught a simplified version of the Sulpician method of meditation. On the other hand, a significant number of novitiates were exposing their novices to Ignatian methods in such a way as to encourage them to choose whichever approach they preferred. In either case – Sulpician or Ignatian – the novices were urged to personalize their prayer.<sup>40</sup> Methods as such were seen as examples that could be imitated, borrowed from or otherwise changed to suit their individual needs and preferences. The meditation books which in use were a list of the classics: Plus, Marmion, Francis de Sales, Saudreau, Rodriguez, Philips, Leen, etc. The novices were generally encouraged to meditate on the New Testament, the Missal, the *Imitation of Christ*, insights derived from their courses on spirituality, and, after a few months, the CC and RR.

*Evening oraison.* With rare exceptions (e.g. long walks in the woods) evening mental prayer was made in chapel. Frequently, there would be Benediction at the same time. Even so, there would always be at least fifteen minutes of silent adoration. As to "method", *l'oraison* tended to be more affective and free from structure than the morning meditation. Some approached the evening mental prayer in the form of a colloquy with Jesus – talking things over friend-to-friend. Some novitiates discouraged the use of books during this prayer period. Others permitted them, but counseled against reading too much.<sup>41</sup>

*Difference between meditation and l'oraison.* A few novitiates reported that they could see little usefulness in trying to distinguish between the two. Most, however, agreed in principle that meditation should lead to *oraison*; that is, to a life of more intimate and simple

union with Christ, and through him with the Trinity. Thus, *l'oraison* was seen as more friendly and loving than the didactic and methodical meditation.

One novitiate looked at the distinction in this vein: Meditation at the outset of the day should furnish the Oblate with proper motives for life and action. Enlightened by the Holy Spirit, our mind should find in meditation reasons to impel us to know and to love more. That enlightenment and motivation should in turn lead the person to a firm resolution for the day. The evening *oraison*, on the other hand, is more a heart-to-heart encounter with the Lord.<sup>42</sup> Its format would be more simple and intimate, less analytical and discursive. Coming toward the end of the day, it invites the Oblate to place before Christ in a simple act of abandonment the joys and frustrations of ministry and community.

Most of the novitiates perceived the distinction like this: in meditation, we strive to improve our life; in *l'oraison*, we contemplate God. The one focuses on mental and imaginative considerations; the other centers on love without too many thoughts. Meditation is generally more discursive and methodical. *L'oraison* tends to be more affective, Christocentric and Eucharistic. The one attempts to analyze a precise subject in order to uncover practical means for personal improvement. The other is a freewheeling conversation with God in which the day is laid bare.<sup>43</sup>

#### IV. MENTAL PRAYER/L'ORAIISON IN OUR 1982 CC AND RR

Reaching back to the Founder's expressions of 1818 and 1826 as well as to the Congregation's prescriptions of 1853, 1928 and 1966, the General

Chapter of 1980 took the articles related to mental prayer and *l'oraison* in our CC and RR, digested the spirit which they contain and produced a more succinct, but nonetheless powerful, formulation: "In the prolonged silent prayer we make each day, we let ourselves be molded by the Lord and find in him the inspiration of our conduct. Following our tradition, we devote an hour each day to mental prayer, part of which is spent together in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament" (C 33).

In terms of the official language of our CC and RR, the 1818 edition was French, whereas the 1826, 1853, 1928 and 1966 editions were Latin. The General Chapter of 1980, however, prescribed two official languages: French and English. Neither text, therefore, is a translation of the other. The key words in the French edition are: "Dans la prière silencieuse et prolongée de chaque jour... ils [les Oblats] consacrent une heure par jour à l'oraison et vivent ensemble une partie de ce temps en présence du Saint-Sacrement" (C 33).

Comparing the two texts, three interesting differences emerge: (1) The English wording is couched in the first person plural - "we" - while the French uses the third person plural - "ils" ("they"). (2) The English edition speaks of "mental prayer", whereas the French has simply *l'oraison*. (3) The English phrasing has "part of [that prayer] is spent together in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament", while the French (literally translated) reads "and they live together a part of this time in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament".

Those differences, however, do not affect the substance of the message. At least for English-speaking people, "we" is more personal and warm than "they".

“Mental prayer” and *l’oraison* are very close equivalents. We do notice, however, that the French redactors chose *l’oraison* rather than *l’oraison mentale*.

The Founder used both expressions in the CC and RR of 1818.<sup>44</sup> So, one expression is not more Oblate, so to speak, than the other. Regarding the third difference, the French text introduces a more vivacious tone than the English with the phrase “vivent ensemble” (“they live together”) in place of “is spent together”. Perhaps the hoped-for nuance is this: that we do not merely pass that time together in the same room, but rather that there be a life-giving communion among those present – and with those absent in the silent loving heart-to-heart with the Lord.

#### 1. SOME THOUGHTS ON THE ENGLISH TEXT

CC 33-36 speak of the nine principal spiritual resources which we Oblates have at our disposal. In the order in which they appear, the resources are: (C 33) the Eucharist, the Word of God, Liturgy of the Hours, mental prayer, examination of conscience, the Sacrament of Reconciliation; (C 34) ascetical practices; (C 35) times of personal and communal renewal; (C 36) Marian devotion. The general context in which those Constitutions appear is Chapter Two: Apostolic Religious Life. The immediate context in which C 33 is situated is Section Two: *Living in Faith* (Section One being: *The Evangelical Counsels* and Section Three being: *Apostolic Community*).

C 33 (paragraph 4) begins: “In the prolonged silent prayer we make each day...”. It says, “each day” – not “once in a while”, not “once a week”, not “when we feel like it” – but “each day”.

Furthermore, the text asserts: “we make” an hour of mental prayer each day. The text does not moralize: “we should make it” or “we ought to make it”. Nor does the text command: “we must make it” or “we have to make it”. It simply says: “we [do] make [an hour of mental prayer] each day”. In other words, if we are truly Oblate, that is what we do.

“We let ourselves be molded by the Lord...”. Note the insistence on the passive voice: “let... be”. The invitation here is towards a more listening mode of prayer – a more effectively receptive stance – whatever our individual method or approach in praying. We let the prayer come forth from within – whatever is appropriate for the moment – rather than impose some formula or framework. We let Father, Son and Spirit who are dwelling within our inmost being well up (see Jn 4:14) into consciousness from those depths. We “experience that Jesus Christ is really in [us]” (2 Co 13:4).

“[We] find in [the Lord] the inspiration of our conduct”. That phraseology generally bespeaks meditation in the traditional sense. For those Oblates in a more discursive mode, any form of meditation is appropriate. For those in a more contemplative mode, some form of quiet affective prayer may be more meaningful.

“Following our tradition, we devote an hour each day to mental prayer...”. In effect, an hour and a quarter, divided between a morning and an evening period, was prescribed until 1965. Our 1966 CC and RR urged “at least an hour”. Since 1982, we say simply “an hour”. To the purist, that may seem like a whittling down. In reality, however, it captures the spirit of what has been from the beginning (1818).

Most persons well versed in prayer agree that a full uninterrupted hour is both more demanding and more spiritually beneficial than two half hours (or, one forty-five minute period and another thirty, as the case may be). Nobody wants to make a fetish out of sixty minutes. Yet, Carmelites, Jesuits, Cistercians – even Buddhists – concur that for a person to pray regularly, s/he needs an hour. Jesus himself asked: “Can you not watch one hour with me?” (Mk 14:37; Mt 26:40).

For a person in a full-time apostolate, more than an hour a day of mental prayer is not practical. Yet, one hour of solitary prayer is also a minimum. No one can explain in strictly rational terms why an hour. Yet, since there exists such universal agreement – among both Christians and non-Christians – there must be something fundamentally in accord with the human psyche to spending a full uninterrupted hour in *l'oraison* each day.

Also “following our tradition... part of [that daily hour of mental prayer] is spent [or “lived”] together in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament”. This prolonged visit with the Eucharistic Christ was insisted upon not only by the Founder, but also by all the first fathers and brothers of the Congregation. The theology of the Eucharist for most Oblates today is vastly different from that of the nineteenth century. Our 1982 CC and RR do not mandate this visit. They rather recall the meaningfulness of the tradition and affirm simply that we do it. I believe personally that we still have much to learn from the substance of that tradition even if our theologies differ. The mystery of the Eucharist – or, the Eucharist as mystery – is perennial. Moreover, the Eucharist is still full of potential for the person who will take the time to be receptive to it.

## 2. A THEOLOGY OF “MENTAL PRAYER”

For me, the phrase “mental prayer” evokes the name of St. Teresa of Jesus (1515-1582). The phrase does not, however, originate with her. It finds its foundation in a statement of St. Paul: “When I pray in tongues, my spirit [*pneuma*] prays, but my mind [*nous*] remains blank. How should I resolve that [predicament]? I shall pray not only with my spirit, but also with my mind. I shall sing [God’s] praises not with my spirit alone, but with my mind as well” (1 Cor 14:14-15).

Paul is obviously making an appeal for understanding of what we vocalize in prayer. Yet, the focus of Paul’s insistence transcends mere intelligence (for *nous* in Greek means much more than “mind” in English). He is emphasizing that prayer is holistic and that it springs from what is deepest in the *orans*. Thus, in its pristine sense, mental prayer does not designate a particular form or manner of praying, but rather something essential to all prayer – that it be of the whole person and that it proceed from the deepest recesses of that individual.

### *a. Teresa of Avila’s Understanding of Mental Prayer*

St. Teresa picks up on the above meaning and presents mental prayer in a way that any person of faith can appreciate. First of all, she accepts that “mental prayer” designates a universal condition for praying. Then, for her purposes, she narrows its supposition to the solitary personal prayer of anyone at any stage of prayer development.

Chronologically, the first time that she takes up the subject of mental prayer is in the book of her *Life* from Chapters 8-22. Her most succinct description is this: “Mental prayer is es-

entially a communing of friends [*tratar de amistad*] which takes place mostly in the solitary interchange with him whom we know loves us [*estando muchas veces tratando a solas con quien sabemos nos ama*]” (8,5).

By “prayer”, Teresa means addressing God. But since we can address the Lord in a multitude of ways – orally, liturgically, communally, etc. – she qualifies the word with the term “mental”.

“Mental”, however, can cause some unintended associations in English. We spontaneously relate mental with our cognitive, intellectual, thinking activities and processes. Teresa, and others before her, seems to be following the Augustinian tradition in their understanding of the word. They use the term to accentuate the inmost yearnings of the human person. Hence, St. Augustine would be describing the Latin *mens* in his Confessions when he writes: “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you” (1, 1).

Thus, mental prayer means addressing God out of the depths of our being. There may be some thinking, analyzing, intellectualizing in prayer. But prayer as such springs forth from the irrepressible yearning of the soul. It is an explicit affective movement of the whole person toward union with God. That is the sense of “a communing of friends”. Prayer is not just: creature to Creator, sinner to Judge, needy to Provider. It is friend to Friend (and in its ultimate stages: lover to Beloved). On a first level, *tratar de* means to discuss, to have a friendly chat.

On a deeper level, however, it means to commune. *Amistad* is literally friendship. Therefore, mental prayer denotes the communing which takes place between friends – in this case:

between the soul and the Lord, between my self and my God. Friends talk. They converse. They discourse. But most of all, they are together – they commune.

Now, we can commune with God friend to Friend in many contexts. Teresa, therefore, narrows the focus of mental prayer to communing in solitude – being alone with God as friend to Friend. Thus, mental prayer in this more refined sense is distinguished from vocal prayer, liturgical prayer, shared prayer, etc. Even when done “in common” – that is, several people in the same room at the same time, as has been the Oblate practice before the Blessed Sacrament – mental prayer is personal and solitary.

“With him whom we know loves us” is Teresa’s way of recalling 1 John 4:10: “This is the love I mean, not our love for God, but his love for us”. It is also Teresa’s way to insure that we understand that the interchange is mainly one of loving rather than merely talking.

#### *b. Teresa’s Ways or Degrees of Mental Prayer*

St. Teresa used a very simple analogy to describe four basic ways that mental prayer transpires. These are also called degrees of prayer because they correspond to the gradual taking over the soul by God in love. The analogy is that of “watering a garden”<sup>48</sup>.

The first entails drawing water from a well, carrying it by bucket and pouring it where required. That takes a great deal of labor. This way is compared to meditation (or to the “contemplations” of the Ignatian Exercises) where the mind, the imagination and the memory work hard at analyzing a subject or text so as to apply it to the life of the *orans*<sup>49</sup>.

The second involves using a water-wheel and conduit to get the water

where the gardener needs it. This is not nearly as laborious as the first. Teresa calls it "prayer of quiet"<sup>50</sup>. There is still some work, some conversation, but a basic threshold has been crossed which St. John of the Cross terms the beginning of contemplation.<sup>51</sup> From this moment on we become increasingly receptive to God's loving initiative in prayer as well as in all of life. Moreover, we are aware of the intensifying dominance of God's activity within us and all around us.

The third watering is set up by stream and irrigation ditch. This saturates the ground much more thoroughly and requires hardly any labor at all<sup>52</sup>. The fourth watering occurs during a heavy rain in which the Lord soaks the ground directly without any work on our part<sup>53</sup>. These last two degrees correspond to the advanced stages of contemplation wherein God becomes not only the prime initiator, but also ultimately the sole agent in prayer. At this final stage, we no longer pray as such – we are prayed.

Comparing Teresa's *Life* with her later more developed work the *Interior Castle* (or *Las Moradas*), we see that the first watering corresponds to Mansions I, II and III. The second and third waterings are discussed in Mansions IV. The fourth watering, which admits of a broad range of prayer of union, is taken up in Mansions V, VI and VII.

Thus, the single phrase "mental prayer" can be said of the most elementary and laborious meditation of a beginner – a novice, for example – as well as of the deeply contemplative prayer of an octogenarian missionary who spends most of his day in solitude. The English redactors of C 33 in our 1982 CC and RR probably chose the phrase mental prayer for basically the same reasons that St. Teresa did: Men-

tal prayer can encompass all the different degrees of prayer. It can refer to the prayer attitude of any person at any stage of spiritual genesis.

#### CONCLUSION: LOOKING TOWARD THE FUTURE

In view of the changes which have taken place since the inception of the Congregation concerning oraison, we might ask ourselves: What form will our oraison take in the next century?

Since these transformations have had to do with purifying the gaze and of developing simplicity of expression, I believe that all things being equal and perhaps more so than at any other period of our history, a greater number of Oblates will spontaneously seek and create the conditions to do one whole hour of oraison a day. They will need it....

Why will they need it? Not primarily because a rule will demand it of them. Nor even because a superior will remind them of their duty in this regard. Not even necessarily because it is their good pleasure to do so. None of the above! It will be a need they feel.

Why will they have a need for prolonged silent prayer? And why will this need become ever more acute? A number of reasons come to mind:

In order to survive, faced as they are with an ever overwhelming workload and in view of the declining number of Oblates, in order to fulfill their mission, more and more a large number of them will be forced to look to the quality of their work rather than the quantity. Now, the key to the qualitative aspect of their ministry is fundamentally found in "the prolonged silent prayer we make each day" (C 33).

Our materialistic society finally ends

up being disgusted with itself. The pace of life is too fast, too complicated, too secularized, and at times is alive in word only. In their efforts to maintain their balance, a growing number of Oblates will inevitably be led to concentrate more consciously on the spiritual. Now, the crucial issue with regard to their openness to the spiritual rests in their faithfulness in allowing themselves to "be moulded by the Lord and find in him the inspiration of our conduct" (C 33).

The amount of dependence on drugs and alcohol and the widespread "co-dependency", so much a part of our culture, is a desperate cry protesting the disintegration inherent in our world, a disintegration people can no longer stand. According to the experts, in the United States, for example, eighty to ninety-five percent of the population is subject to a pathological mania of some kind; either they use drugs or they are "co-dependent". The achieving of a state of wellness will necessitate the adoption of radical measures which entail recognizing that people are not in control of themselves; it will demand handing one's life over to "a Higher Power", and undertake a serious reform of one's life. More and more, Oblates will undoubtedly see that the spiritual thrust of these persons can be maintained only by a heart rendered docile to God's Spirit by "an hour each day [devoted] to mental prayer" (C 33).

Nevertheless, a considerable number of us will feel the need to deepen our silent prolonged prayer and to work at it intensely simply because we will need it to nourish our own lives... We will have an ardent desire to spend time with our Savior, our Friend, our Beloved. We will be on fire to gain a deeper knowledge of "who Jesus Christ is" (Preface) in himself. Instinctively, we

will experience our intolerable emptiness, even if it is only for those blessed moments lived in a loving dialogue. As a result, we will experience the need, not only to be men of prayer – liturgical and community prayer is presupposed here – but also men of oraison: one hour each day (C 33).

In conclusion, I would like to express as my own the convictions stated by Fernand Jetté, Superior General, when on November 13, 1984, he addressed the Oblate Conference of the United States:

[After quoting C 33 with regard to the daily hour of oraison, he concluded] "How many Oblates are there in your region – and in the Congregation – who are faithful to this practice? It is my personal conviction that a province, a region, a religious family who seriously undertakes such a practice and dedicates themselves to it heart and soul can only progress mightily and carry out a very effective apostolate. If I had a challenge to leave with you in this regard, I would tell you: "Be faithful, scrupulously faithful, to your hour of mental prayer each day and all the rest will follow'." (French text: *Documentation*: 131/85, p. 10)

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See 1 Timothy 2:1.

<sup>2</sup> See Mark 1: 35; Luke 5:16; 6:12; 9:28; 11:1; 22:41; etc.

<sup>3</sup> See "Oraison", in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, Paris, Beauchesne, 1982, vol. 11, col. 831-832. "Prière", *ibidem*, vol. 12, col. 2196-2347.

<sup>4</sup> See letter to Paulinus of Nola, no. 149: 2, 14-16; letter to Probus, no. 130: 7, 17 to 9, 18.

<sup>5</sup> See "Oraison", in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, Paris, Beauchesne, 1982, vol. 11, col. 832-834; "Prière", vol. 12, 2271-2288.

<sup>6</sup> See "France", in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, Paris, Beauchesne, 1982, vol. 5, col. 891-997; "Oraison", *ibidem*, vol. 11, col. 834-846; "Prière", *ibidem*, vol. 12, col. 2295-2317; BREMOND, Henri, *Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux en France*, Paris, Bloud and Gay, 1921, vol. III.

<sup>7</sup> October 9, 1815 letter to Abbé Tempier in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, no. 4, p. 6. REY I, p. 181.

<sup>8</sup> See MEUNIER, Ovila-A., "Aux sources de notre spiritualité", in *Etudes oblates*, I (1942), p. 28-41.

<sup>9</sup> Retreat notes, Amiens, December 1811, General Archives, DM IV, 1., A.D., p. 36.

<sup>10</sup> See REY I, p. 61-62; *Missions*, 70 (1936), p. 302; 80 (1953), p. 739-742.

<sup>11</sup> See RAMBERT I p. 106.

<sup>12</sup> See RAMBERT I p. 114.

<sup>13</sup> See RAMBERT I p. 117.

<sup>14</sup> See RAMBERT I p. 117-118.

<sup>15</sup> See JETTÉ, Fernand, "La vie spirituelle d'Eugène de Mazenod", in *Etudes oblates*, 20 (1961), p. 89.

<sup>16</sup> October 23, 1815 letter to Charles de Forbin-Janson in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 5, p. 8-10.

<sup>17</sup> July 1816 retreat notes at Bonnevaive, General Archives, M IV, 2; A.D. p. 74. Quoted in JETTE, Fernand, "La vie spirituelle d'Eugène de Mazenod", in *Etudes oblates*, 20 (1961) p. 89.

<sup>18</sup> July 1816 retreat notes, *Méditation sur la communion fréquente*, quoted in "La relation personnelle avec Jésus eucharistique selon le bienheureux de Mazenod", in *Etudes oblates*, 37 (1978), p. 238.

<sup>19</sup> CC and RR of 1818, Part One, Chapter Two, par. 2 in *Missions*, 78 (1951), lines 128-133, p. 25.

<sup>20</sup> CC and RR of 1818, Part One, Chapter Two, par. 2 in *Missions*, 78 (1951), lines 248-250, p. 28.

<sup>21</sup> CC and RR of 1818, Part One, Chapter Two, par. 2 in *Missions*, 78 (1951), lines 328-330, 343-346, p. 31.

<sup>22</sup> CC and RR of 1818, Part Two, Chapter One, par. 5 in *Missions*, 78 (1951), lines 566-574, p. 61.

<sup>23</sup> CC and RR of 1818, Part Two, Chapter Two, par. 1 in *Missions*, 78 (1951), lines 6-11, p. 63.

<sup>24</sup> This morning prayer is not the one we recite today at Lauds; it is rather a special oral prayer coming from the Sulpician tradition. Their Trinitarian formula expressed well what was for the Founder the essence of our Oblate vocation: to live as true sons of the Father, imitating Jesus Christ and working under the inspiration of his Holy Spirit. See *Oblate Prayer*, Rome, 1986, p. 12-16; GILBERT, Maurice, "Note sur notre prière du matin", in *Etudes oblates*, 5 (1946), p. 116-119.

<sup>25</sup> See "Constitutions et Règles de la Société des Missionnaires de Provence, première partie, chapitre deuxième, par. 2, Règlement particulier pour les missions", in *Missions*, 78 (1951), 23-34.

<sup>26</sup> The experience the Founder had of the Ignatian approach came to him mainly through the French Jesuits influenced by the French School of Spirituality. As a result, the Spiritual Exercises he followed were imbued with elements borrowed from Pierre de Bérulle, Jean-Jacques Olier and Charles de Condren. In its turn, the French School itself was greatly influenced by Ignatian spirituality. See BREMOND, Henri, *Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux en France*, Paris, Bloud and Gay, 1921, vol. III, p. 223-242.

<sup>27</sup> See the 112 page document conserved in the General Archives among the writings of the Founder and bearing the title *Méthode de l'oraison mentale expliqué par M. Duclaux, sulpicien*. This copy bears the date October 25, 1812 and was written by one of Eugene's friends, a seminarian named F.-D. Parabère.

<sup>28</sup> See *Oblate Prayer*, p. 21.

<sup>29</sup> See MEUNIER, Ovila-A., "Aux sources de notre spiritualité", in *Etudes oblates*, I (1942), p. 28-41; MEUNIER, Ovila-A., "L'attitude du Fondateur en présence des méthodes d'oraison", in *Etudes oblates*, 1 (1942), p. 235-239.

<sup>30</sup> See *Oblate Prayer*, p. 16-19.

<sup>31</sup> See "Constitutions et Règles de la Société des Missionnaires de Provence", Part Two, Chapter One, par. 5, Prayers and exercises of piety in *Missions* 78 (1951), p. 61.

<sup>32</sup> *Constitutiones et Regulae*, 1826, pars II, capitulum 2, par. 2, art. 1.

<sup>33</sup> We know nothing of the nature of the text designated as no. 1. Perhaps it was a retreat for non-Oblates. See *Missions*, 70 (1936), p. 302-319.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 307.

<sup>35</sup> MAZENOD, Eugene de, *Diary*, June 2, 1837; see CIARDI, Fabio, "The Eucharist in the Life and Thoughts of Eugene de Mazenod", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 38 (1979), p. 218.

<sup>36</sup> January 4, 1856 letter to Charles Baret in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 12, no. 1304, p. 1.

<sup>37</sup> March 6, 1857 letter to Father Albert Lacombe in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 2, no. 229, p. 140.

<sup>38</sup> *Diary*, March 13, 1859; see CIARDI, Fabio "L'Eucharistie dans l'action pastorale

du bienheureux de Mazenod", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 38 (1979), p. 50.

<sup>39</sup> See ALBERS, Daniel, "Compte rendu des rapports sur les noviciats de la Congrégation", in *Etudes oblates*, 10 (1951) p. 153-248; "Oraison du soir", p. 194-196.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*, "Méditation du matin", p. 192-194.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 194-195.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 196.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 196-197.

<sup>44</sup> See "Constitutions et Règles de la Société des Missionnaires de Provence", Part Two, Chapter One, par. 5, Prayers and exercises of piety in *Missions* 78 (1951), p. 61.

<sup>45</sup> See John 4:14.

<sup>46</sup> *Libro de la vida*, 8,5. The references to

St. Teresa's writings are to *Libro de la vida*, i.e., Teresa's autobiography, in *Obras completas*, 3a edición, EDE, Madrid, 1984. My translation of the text is very free. The first number of the references is to the chapter, the second is to the paragraph according to the Spanish edition.

<sup>47</sup> St. Augustine, Book I, 1.

<sup>48</sup> *Libro de la vida*, 11, 7.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibidem*, chapters 11 to 13.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem*, chapters 14 and 15.

<sup>51</sup> See NEMECK, Francis Kelly and COOMBS, Marie Theresa, *The Spiritual Journey: Critical Threshold and Stages of Adult Spiritual Genesis*, Wilmington, Michael Glazier Inc., 1987, p. 75-124.

<sup>52</sup> *Libro de la vida*, chapters 16 and 17.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibidem*, chapters 18 to 21.

## PREFACE OF THE RULE

*Summary: I. Origins. II. Sources. III. The Overall Significance of the Preface. IV. Organization and titles of the Preface: 1. Joseph Reslé. 2. Fernand Jetté. 3. Gérard Blanchard. V. A Commentary on each Paragraph. VI. The Superiors General. VII. Conclusion. – Appendix: Sources for the Preface. Comparative chart of the 1818 and 1826 texts.*

Some dozen Oblates have commented on our Constitutions and Rules<sup>1</sup>. Among them some referred only briefly to the *Preface*, offering comments which were historical or spiritual in nature. It is not my intent to fill this gap; my intention is simply to take a reading on the state of the question: what has been written on the historical question, the sources, the import of the *Preface* of our Constitutions and Rules?

### I. ORIGINS

In its present form, the *Preface* was drawn up in 1825, not long before the Rule was presented in Rome for approval<sup>2</sup>. In the original manuscript of the 1818 Rule, it was found in quite another form. Indeed, it is the outcome of the fusion of the *Nota bene* which came immediately after chapter one of the first part with the foreword of the 1818 text<sup>3</sup>.

With a few modifications, this foreword gave us the content of paragraphs 8, 9, and 10 of the present *Preface*, whereas we find a good portion of the *Nota bene* in the seven first paragraphs.

1818 Rule	<i>Preface</i> of 1826
Foreword	Paragraphs 8-10
<i>Nota bene</i>	Paragraphs 1-7

The foreword states that certain rules of life were required to ensure the unity of spirit and action among priests whom the Lord inspired to “to come together in community to work more effectively for the salvation of souls and for their own sanctification”.

The *Nota bene* followed the chapter which laid out the ends of the Institute. It explained the third end of the Institute by giving an analysis of the critical situation of the Church and of its causes namely, the “main”, “root” cause of the others being “the laziness, indifference and corruption of the priests”. Consequently, in order to respond to the most urgent needs there was a requirement to find genuinely apostolic men who, among other things, would work to reform the clergy.

In the process of transforming the *Nota bene* into the *Preface*<sup>4</sup>, the Founder dropped the first paragraph, even though it was very important. He removed “certain expressions, too stern or rhetorical in character”<sup>5</sup> and everything that was too negative and directed against bad priests in order to give the *Preface* a broader, more positive perspective.

During his stay in Rome, some sentences of the text were also changed by the Founder and Bishop Marchetti as a result of the observations made by Cardinal Pedicini<sup>6</sup>. Thus, the first paragraph sentence, “the Church [...] bears

him almost nothing other than monsters" was changed into, "This beloved Spouse, weeping over the shameful defection of the children she brought forth", since the Church does not bring forth monsters. In the same paragraph, the Latin expression absent from the French text: *criminum suorum mensuram implevere* was transformed into *irritavere justitiam divinam sceleribus suis* since one cannot put any limits on God's justice. The beginning of paragraph two was badly translated by the phrase: *Divinis rebus ita flebiliter compositis*; they made a literal translation of it from the French: *in hoc miserrimo rerum statu*.

In all successive editions of the Rules, this text subsequently remained identical with a few minor corrections. Originally written in French, the *Preface* was published in Latin in all editions from 1827 to 1966. From 1966 on, it was published in the various languages of the different editions of the Constitutions and Rules.

Contrary to contemporary Roman jurisprudence, in 1826 the *Preface* was accepted as forming an integral part of the Rule; it is still such today<sup>7</sup>.

## II. SOURCES

Commentators on the Rules agree that the *Preface* was drawn up by Father de Mazenod and is the fruit of his thought and of his life. They do, however, acknowledge a variety of influences.

In 1955, Father Georges Cosentino wrote: "Although it can be presented as an original work of our Founder, the *Preface* of our Rules [contains] a number of Sulpician traces. For example, we find some ideas which are also found in the writings of Tronson and Olier; the ideas

in question deal with the priesthood and the ecclesiastical spirit instilled into the seminarians at Saint-Sulpice. As for the rest, in confirmation of this, in the conference for ordination day, delivered by the Founder on December 23, 1809 at the seminary, we find a number of ideas of the *Preface*. These were ideas taught to him while he was at the seminary"<sup>8</sup>.

In 1956, Father Leo Deschâtelets compared the text of several of Eugene's lectures and letters from the period 1808 to 1818 with the *Preface*. He wrote: "One would think that it would be easy to find in the *Preface* traces of previous writings. What is certain is that they reveal to us the most intimate thoughts of the Founder, the thoughts that were most fully integrated as part of his life."<sup>9</sup>

Father Deschâtelets' observation confirms what Father Cosentino said. As a seminarian, Eugene read and became permeated with the writings of Tronson, Olier, etc., on the priesthood. From 1808 on, his writings reflect this thinking in as much as he assimilated them. He makes them his own and they surface in the paragraphs of the *Preface* when he deals with bad priests and the need to unite the strengths of good priests who are striving for perfection and wish to sacrifice their life for the salvation of the world (paragraphs 2, 3, 4, 6 and 8).

In 1967, Father John Drouart made a brief study of the Rules, especially of the expression "apostolic men" as found in paragraph 4 of the *Preface*. In this expression, he perceived the influence of Saint Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians which, it seems, Father de Mazenod knew well. Later on, we will examine Father Drouart's commentary on that subject, which is one of the best we have<sup>10</sup>.

Finally, in his commentary on the Constitutions and Rules, Father Jetté stated this: "There can be no doubt that it [the *Preface* ] is original to Eugene de Mazenod. He it is who wrote it, while striving to live it; and he wrote it in the light of his own experience. A number of Christian persons at that time were pained at the evils that afflicted the Church and were searching for possible ways of helping her."<sup>11</sup>

At this point, Father Jetté copied several pages of Félicité de Lamennais' work entitled, *Réflexions sur l'état de l'Eglise en France pendant le dix-huitième siècle et sa situation actuelle*. Printed in 1809, the book was confiscated by order of Napoleon and was only published in 1814. However, Félicité de Lamennais had sent it to M. Emery already in 1809. No doubt, Eugene knew about it from that time on. During the summer vacations of 1809, M. Emery met with J.-M. de Lamennais and others, one of whom was Eugene. The object of the meeting was to enable a sharing of views on the situation of the Church and on this book<sup>12</sup>.

Father de Mazenod clearly seems to have drawn inspiration from this book, especially for the first paragraphs of the *Preface* on the state of society and the situation of the Church and the clergy. (See the appendix with the comparative chart.)

Félicité de Lamennais' thinking was broader in scope and more developed with regard to certain issues. It made more distinctions with regard to the state of the clergy. But in the *Preface*, we find the same tone, several of the same ideas and sometimes the same expressions: the shameful falling away from the faith of Christians, the reprehensible conduct of the clergy the need for truly apostolic men, the power of faith, Gospel simplicity, the importance of the cross, etc.

Félicité de Lamennais stressed the religious ignorance of the country people and the importance of parish missions. The Founder gave this form of apostolate a privileged place in his priorities and those were the people he chose to evangelize, but he speaks of this especially in the articles on the main end of the Institute and on the missions. Here in the *Preface*, he does not mention the countryside and he mentions the missions only once, that is in paragraph 10, even if this reality is the foundation upon which he develops everything else. The content of the *Preface* points to its origin in that it was originally a reflection which followed the articles on the reform of the clergy – a secondary end of the Congregation.

### III. THE OVERALL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PREFACE

Father Jetté finishes off the section where he speaks of the influence of Lamennais by saying the following: "The *Preface* of our *Constitutions* in its own way and according to our Founder's experience takes up these same elements which the Founder had lived and pondered. He had been in contact with the Church's misery, he had seen the Church abandoned and betrayed by her own people, had known the weaknesses and scandals among the clergy, had witnessed the ignorance of the faith and the degradation of Christians in the countryside. All these things he had experienced and he deeply felt the necessity of forming a good clergy [...] In the depths of his heart he had heard the Church's call and he wanted to answer it by giving her his life. This is what the *Preface* to our *Constitutions* tells us; and at the same time, it rejoices that 'the sight of these evils has so touched the hearts of certain priests,

zealous for the glory of God, men with an ardent love for the Church that they are willing to give their lives, if need be, for the salvation of souls'. This *Preface* is a text that is meant to be read again and again, one we ought to make thoroughly our own, for it gives us the true meaning of our *Constitutions*."<sup>13</sup>

All the commentators of the Rules have stressed the importance of the *Preface* for the Oblates and its overall significance. In 1883, Father Toussaint Rambert had this comment to make about the Rules as a whole: "The Rules of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate are Father de Mazenod's main work. Better than all his other works, they enable us to get to know him. There we find his spirit, his will, his heart, his deep interior life, his whole soul. It was there, as is the case for every founder, that he poured forth all the treasures of his experience, his wisdom, his virtue as well as all the tenderness and sensitivities of his fatherly love [...]"<sup>14</sup>

In 1903, in his commentary on the Rules, Father Alfred Yenveux wrote: "The *Preface* is an answer to this question: What were the interventions of Providence and the motivating factors for the founding of the Congregation? Among all the writings of the Founder, none are more worthy of admiration than these pages where Bishop de Mazenod laid out the lofty goal he had in mind when he founded the Congregation, the very fine project he had conceived and the high standard of perfection he set for his spiritual sons. One cannot achieve perfect understanding of such teachings unless one studies them on one's knees before the holy Tabernacle [...]"<sup>15</sup>

Fathers Jean-Marie Rodrigue Vileuneuve and Joseph Reslé have this to add in 1929 and 1958 respectively: "In

this *Preface* one can find the spirit of our venerated Founder and in some way we can also find the basic characteristics of his spirituality as they are subsequently laid out in the various articles [...]"<sup>16</sup>

"*Quamvis nullam contineat praescriptionem disciplinarem, est tamen pro nobis maximi momenti: revelat spiritum et cor Patris Fundatoris, formam sive ideale viri vere apostolici seu Oblati, prout illud ipse concepit. [Although it contains no disciplinary directives, for us, it is of the greatest importance: it unveils for us the spirit and heart of our Founding Father, the model or the ideal of the genuinely apostolic man or the Oblate as he perceived him.]"*<sup>17</sup>

#### IV. ORGANIZATION AND TITLES OF THE PREFACE

In only three of the various works that deal with the *Preface* is an analysis of the organizational structure set forth: Father Reslé proposes a logical scheme; Father Jetté<sup>18</sup> outlines a practical scheme; Father Gérard Blanchard<sup>19</sup> draws up a very philosophical scheme. The three schemes are drawn up below in a comparative chart.

##### 1. JOSEPH RESLÉ

The apostolic life of the Founder and his Oblates is set forth in the *Preface*.

a) In its origins (proximate cause, motivating factor)

§ 1. State of the Church

§ 2. Aggravating factor (clergy)

§ 3. Understanding of the situation, generous willingness on the part of a few priests.

b) In its goal (the work to be achieved)

§ 4. A work that can be accomplished, optimism

c) In its divine model

§ 5. Jesus Christ

d) In its main means

§ 6. Personal sanctification

§ 7. Priestly and apostolic action

§ 8. In community

§ 9. and 10. Living under a rule with a common discipline.

## 2. FERNAND JETTÉ

a. Vision of the Church's condition

b. Appeal from the Church

c. What did our Lord Jesus Christ do?

d. What will we do?

e. The fruits of salvation.

f. Need for certain rules

## 3. GÉRARD BLANCHARD

In an article published in *Etudes oblates* in 1947, Father Blanchard made a study of the structure of the *Preface* of the Rules from a philosophic point of view. He divided it into three parts.

a) *An sit?* (§ 1-3)

b) *Quid sit?*

definition of the Oblate: an apostolic man (§ 4)

explanation of the definition:

through the exemplary cause: Jesus Christ (§ 5)

through the intrinsic causes

genus: virtuous men, etc., (§ 6)

specific difference: zealous men, etc., (§ 7)

c) *Quale sit?*

Qualities which give the definition concreteness. (§8-10)

Father Blanchard's article is a philosophic and spiritual reflection. It is very substantial and, along with the contributions made by Fathers Jean Drouart and Fernand Jetté, it is one of the best.

## V. A COMMENTARY ON EACH PARAGRAPH

Even though the authors of commentaries on the Rules all emphasize how important the *Preface* is to help us understand the thinking of the Founder and the spirit which permeates a great many of the articles of the 1818 and 1825-1826 Rule, they did not produce a commentary on each paragraph.

It would seem that Father Jetté was the first to speak explicitly of the meaning of the *Preface* and to offer us some considerations on its four main ideas: to love the Church, to form the apostolic man, to place oneself in the school of Christ, to give oneself a rule of life and of the apostolate.

Prior to him, Father Drouart wrote a number of pages on the topic of the "apostolic man" of paragraph four, which were profound in their insight. This is a notion which he explains by using the text of the first paragraph of the *Nota bene* of 1818: "They are called to be the Saviour's co-workers, the co-redeemers of mankind". Oddly enough, this expression was dropped in the course of the modifications made in 1825 and has not resurfaced anywhere else in the Rules.

It can be said that there is only one commentary on the entire body of the *Preface* and of each of its parts. We find it under the form of twenty meditations in a long article authored by Father Paul-Emil Charland who comments on the paragraphs using the references to the

New Testament and the articles of the 1827 Rule as found in the 1928 Rule.<sup>20</sup>

We now offer a brief commentary on each of the paragraphs.

## 1. PARAGRAPH 1

### *The Church's condition*

Father Jetté wrote: "The Church, the mystery of the Church, is at the heart of the Preface. Eugene de Mazenod established the Congregation for the Church"<sup>21</sup>. Even if Félicité de Lamennais did exercise some influence on Father de Mazenod, we can rest assured that on this specific point of interest, his concern and his love existed long before he read Lamennais' book. It harks back to Venice and to the meetings held by French and Italian churchmen at the Zinelli residence. The subject of discussion was precisely the Church<sup>22</sup>.

On the other hand, Eugene's father and his uncles had a profound influence on him and it was their view that the condition of French society and the Church in France was a disaster and without hope<sup>23</sup>.

We can see that, from 1805 on, Eugene shudders when he sees the religious ignorance and barbarism which reigns "even more wicked than that which prevailed in the sixth century" (see the comparative chart).

The condition of the Church was one of the main motivating factors which prompted his decision to enter the seminary and to become a priest. In the period from 1808 to 1812, he often speaks to his mother about it, telling her that priests are few in number because the Church is poor, that few vocations are to be found among the nobility<sup>24</sup>, that apostasy reigns and that everyone has abandoned the Church<sup>25</sup>, there is danger of schism, persecution is imminent<sup>26</sup>, etc.

The first paragraph adopts words and expressions often used by Eugene. What he wrote here is what he felt and had lived for a long time: he suffered with the Church in her suffering after the Revolution.

As can be seen in the comparative chart, the final text of the first paragraph is longer than that of 1818, but less negative and provocative.

## 2. PARAGRAPH 2

### *The Church's condition is aggravated by the actions of bad priests – Appeal from the Church*

When we compare this paragraph with the preceding one, we find here two new ideas: the appeal made by the Church and the sad state of the clergy. Even if we see here the possibility that Father de Mazenod was influenced by Félicité de Lamennais, the predominant influence is that of Saint-Sulpice. But here, just as he did in the first paragraph, he summarizes ideas which he had previously made his own and realities which he had profoundly experienced.

Already on December 23, 1809 he was speaking of the appeal of the Church<sup>27</sup>. In the period from 1812 to 1818 he had a lot to say about the scarcity of clergy and about bad priests. Few priests judged as harshly the condition of the clergy as Father de Mazenod did in his three articles on the reformation of the clergy in the 1818 Rule and in the *Nota bene* which follows. What sad experience had he undergone to produce such a radical reaction? It is possible that in Sicily and Aix he had met priests lacking in zeal, but nothing in his writings would allow us to say that he had encountered priests who were depraved and sources of scandal.

He did, however, clearly know that during the Revolution many priests had married and had taken the oath of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. In Paris, the Sulpicians strongly stressed the need for the formation of holy priests and no doubt must have made reference to the weaknesses of a certain section of the clergy of the previous century as well as mentioning some of the harsh judgments Saint Vincent de Paul had made of the clergy of his day<sup>28</sup>. As a result, Eugene's reaction must have been a vigorous one leading M. Duclaux to tell him one day that he had the temperament of a reformer. On November 22, 1812, he wrote to Eugene advising him to avoid playing the role of reformer when he arrived in Aix<sup>29</sup>.

What is certain is the fact that in the fall of 1815, while he was making preparations to found the Congregation, he already had in mind the preaching of parish missions as well as the reform of the clergy. He discussed it with M. Duclaux. We still possess M. Duclaux's response, dated October 2, 1815: "As far as I am concerned, I can only thank my good Master for all the pious sentiments he is inspiring in you. Continue working with all your strength for the restoration of religion. Preach, teach, enlighten your fellow Frenchmen as to the cause of the evils that afflict them. Let your voice be heard everywhere in Provence. God is only waiting for our conversion to shower his graces upon us. But especially, foster the spirit of the Church among the priests. Your efforts will produce very little good as long as you do not have good priests at the head of the parishes. Encourage all the clergy to become saints. Let them read the lives of Saint Charles and Saint Vincent de Paul; that will show them whether or not a pastor of souls can live

a lukewarm life lacking in zeal. I assure you that I constantly think of you and I continually thank God for the courage he is bestowing upon you. I have hopes that you will accomplish a great deal because you have a sincere love of God and the Church [...]"<sup>30</sup>

But the ever-sensitive Eugene, especially between 1816 and 1818 when he was working too hard and suffering from a variety of indispositions<sup>31</sup>, must have felt deeply the criticism and the pitfalls prepared by the parish priests of Aix, in particular with regard to his apostolate among the youth<sup>32</sup>. His trenchant judgments directed against bad priests are no doubt largely a generalization and an exaggeration of what he felt with regard to the conduct of the parish priests of Aix. The proof of this is found in some letters addressed to Father Henry Tempier in 1817. For example, on the 12th of August, he wrote: "Dissolute or bad priests are the great plague of the Church. Let us wholly exert ourselves to mitigate this cancerous growth by keeping ourselves aloof both in conversation and conduct [...]" On November 24, he wrote: "Is it possible that our patience has failed to soften the anger of these worthy parish priests? The only thing that afflicts me in all this is that these people, with dispositions so contrary to charity, do not refrain from ascending to the altar [...]. I pity them with all my heart [...]"<sup>33</sup> In these letters, we recognize some expressions that will resurface in the articles of the Rules and in the paragraphs of the *Preface* dealing with reform of the clergy.

### 3. PARAGRAPH 3

#### *Generous willingness of some priests*

In one sentence, paragraph 3 sets forth for us that which is most charac-

teristic of the Founder: his state of mind, his heart, he who lived “only following his heart”<sup>34</sup> and from which the Congregation “in some manner totally emerged”<sup>35</sup>. In three lines, we find three words which express this aspect of his personality: “has touched the heart”, “to whom the glory of God is precious”, “who love the Church”. But already in 1809 and 1816, the condition of the Church in her abandonment had “touched” and “moved” his compassion. Félicité de Lamennais himself was “deeply touched by the evils afflicting this tender mother”. This is when romanticism held sway and it was always given to excess in expressing its sentiments.

The trilogy: the glory of God, love of the Church and the salvation of souls found, with a few variations, three times in the *Preface* has been present in the writings of Bishop de Mazenod from 1808 onwards. It remains present in his writings to the day he died. This trilogy is also found in the writings of the Sulpicians<sup>36</sup>.

#### 4. PARAGRAPH 4

##### *The work that can be accomplished*

In paragraph four, Father Reslé stresses optimism in a special way: “They have become convinced...”, “we could nourish the hope of soon leading back to their duties these people who have strayed”.<sup>37</sup>

What is the reason behind this optimism? It is found because of the power of the attraction and of the good example of virtuous and apostolic men as opposed to the vices of the bad priests; and because of the power of the Word of God (see I Thessalonians 4:16).

The details concerning the virtues and zeal of apostolic men appear in

paragraph 6. Nonetheless, the commentators dwell here on a few more significant expressions. Father Leonard Leyendecker<sup>38</sup> comments especially on the fact that detachment (in Latin: *non turpis lucri cupidi*) is a virtue often mentioned by Saint Paul<sup>39</sup>. Father Reslé<sup>40</sup> comments on the words “solidly grounded in virtue” by using a quotation from Blessed Antony Chevrier (1826-1879), founder of the Prado in Lyon: “Install a holy priest in a wooden church with the wind whistling through every crack and he will draw to himself and convert more people than a priest in a church made of gold. [...] And yet, today we work much harder to build beautiful churches and rectories than we do to create saints. The reason is that it is easier to build a beautiful church than it is to create one saint. [...] Let us not concentrate on the accidental while ignoring the essential, that is, favoring stones over virtue, beautiful vestments over holiness [...]”.<sup>41</sup>

But the expression that Father Drouart considers basic here is that of “apostolic men”, an expression that is not found in the corresponding paragraph of the 1818 Rule. Jean-Jacques Olier, Félicité de Lamennais and the Founder himself previous to 1825 used this expression. (See the comparative chart).

Father Drouart explains this expression using the very fine text at the beginning of the 1818 *Nota bene*, omitted from the 1825-1826 text, and which is rescued in this manner. I quote a few excerpts of his text: “One sentence contained in the first edition of the 1818 Rule seems to me to synthesize the entire spiritual thinking of the Founder at the moment of founding the Congregation: ‘What more sublime purpose than that of their Institute? Their founder is Jesus Christ, the very Son of God; their

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

"There we find the definition of the apostolic man in the context of the mystery of salvation: his personal relationship with Christ is like that of the Apostles and above and beyond the area where he carries out his mission, his relationship to the world and to the Church."

"The Founder saw the Apostles as 'our first Fathers' (CC and RR of 1928, art. 287), our 'models' (art. 288). He defines them in the *Preface* as men chosen by Christ, formed by him, filled by him with his Spirit and sent by him to proclaim salvation to the whole world."

"At the centre of everything, the Founder sees the mystery of salvation which is continued in the Church [...] It can be said that his apostolic spirituality springs from the first chapters of the First Epistle to the Corinthians where St. Paul – as he also does in the Second Epistle to the Corinthians – puts the apostolic vocation in the context of the continuation of the mystery of the cross [...]."

"Co-operation with the Savior, that is where we find the source of all the demands of the apostolic vocation. To preach like the Apostle Christum, et hunc crucifixum, non in sublimitate sermonis, sed in ostensione spiritus (I Corinthians 2:1,2,4) cannot be limited to simply talking about it, but demands to be profoundly penetrated by it and to live it (art. 98). The Oblate's minis-

try is truly fruitful only in the measure that he bears in his body the sufferings of the death of Jesus (II Corinthians 4:10). That is why he glories in his weakness, in flagrant insults, persecutions, anxiety borne for Christ's sake (II Corinthians 12:10). The entire content of article 263 is there; that is to say that this cooperation does not remain only on the level of activity, but engages the individual in the depths of his entire being [...]."<sup>42</sup>

For his part, Father Jetté wrote: "In the Founder's mind, the apostolic man or missionary is a priest animated with the spirit of Jesus Christ more specifically with the spirit of the Apostles, who walks in their footsteps. After he has heard the call of Jesus he leaves everything behind in order to follow him to be his companion to share and live his life, and to be sent out by him into the world – he is not meant to be a sedentary person – to proclaim the Good News of salvation. In the apostolic man we always find two elements that are inseparable from each other: spiritual fervor and missionary zeal. The second one alone is not enough, the first is also necessary. In the *Preface* in the case of the Oblates as individual persons and as a Society, both are present [...]."<sup>43</sup>

## 5. PARAGRAPH 5

### *Jesus Christ*

Father Jean-Marie Rodrigue Ville-neuve wrote in 1929: "We can see that, in keeping with doctrine, Christ is above all the object [of the Founder's thought]; Christ, our Savior and the Church which is the noble heritage acquired at the price of his blood"<sup>44</sup>.

With regard to Christ, Father Jetté offered the following reflection: "A society of apostolic men cannot live

without rules [...]. For us, the first rule is Jesus Christ [...]."<sup>45</sup>

But here again it is especially Father Drouart who plumbs the depths of paragraphs 5 and 6, commenting on them in the light of various articles of the Rules. He points out: "At this point, we reach the heart of the Founder's apostolic spirituality. The living person of Christ the Savior himself whose genuine cooperators we will only be in the measure that we imitate him in all things (CC and RR of 1928, art. 287), as much as human weakness will allow, walking in his footsteps. The end of the Congregation is to preach the Gospel to the poor by imitating assiduously the virtues and examples of Christ the Savior (art. 1) [...]. From this we can conclude that in this context it was not for the Founder a case of merely imitating Jesus in his visible activity; it was not a matter of 'mimicking', but rather a profound interior transformation of the self. Priestly formation consists in 'forming Christ' in us (art. 62); in short, the *sequela Christi* stressed by the decree *Perfectae Caritatis*."

"And for the Founder – to me this seems of capital importance – this interior transformation does not consist in a contemplation divorced from action, but everything takes place at the same time both in contemplation and in action. Certainly, the goal of contemplation of the Savior is to lead us 'to reproduce his virtues in us in living form' (art. 254). But it is not a question of a contemplation divorced from action and even less opposed to action. This is manifest in the entire body of the Rule, but was stated explicitly in article 290 which made a synthesis of the parts of one and the same life, parts which are not in opposition to each other. 'But within their houses [...] as well as when preaching missions, [...] their main concern will

be to become other Jesus Christs.'<sup>46</sup> In other words, apostolic ministry, if it is an authentic 'collaboration with the Savior' unites us to him and identifies us to him [...]."<sup>47</sup>

## 6. PARAGRAPH 6

### *What must we do? Become saints*

At this point, the Founder describes the apostolic man. We should point out in passing that religious life is not even mentioned once explicitly in the *Preface*.

The paragraph begins by a listing of personal dispositions and virtues according to three degrees: 1. working seriously at becoming saints; 2. total self-renunciation; 3. ongoing renewal of self.

M. Olier speaks about almost the same conditions: self abasement or detachment and renewal (see the comparative chart).

To this, the Founder adds a long list of virtues, going from the least important to the most important: humility and gentleness much as we find in M. Tronson's writings (see comparative chart), virtues of the state of religion and finally love of God and neighbor.

The paragraph continues and concludes with zeal, which entails a total gift of self, and with confidence in God. Father Yenveux wrote: "It is only after having dressed his missionaries from head to foot in this solid armor of virtue that Bishop de Mazenod allows himself to say to them: then, full of confidence [...]."<sup>48</sup> Therefore, confidence in the power of God, but after having cooperated nobly, fought to the death, sacrificed goods, talents, ease and ones very person for the love of Jesus Christ, the service of the Church and the salvation of ones neighbor.

In his writings, M. Tronson has a text similar to this one (see the comparative chart). The Founder prizes highly this total gift of self. Through its adverbs and the adjectives that follow, paragraph 6 expresses in a manner unsurpassed this requirement of an absolute gift of self: "to work seriously [...] to walk courageously [...] to totally renounce [...] to have in view only the glory of God [...] to renew oneself constantly [...] by working without respite [...] ready to sacrifice everything [...] to fight to the death". Already in paragraph 3, we read: "who would sacrifice themselves, if need be for the salvation of souls".

Father Villeneuve concludes this part with the words: "Here is our mystique: to contemplate Christ; here is our asceticism: to reproduce his virtues; and in this way to fulfill our priestly and apostolic role: the salvation of souls."<sup>49</sup>

## 7. PARAGRAPH 7

### *Priestly and apostolic action*

Father Yenveux wrote: "This paragraph describes in gripping terms the immense field open before the zeal of the missionaries"<sup>50</sup>. Father Blanchard, philosopher though he might be, here turned poet as well. He expressed himself as follows: "What an immense field lies open before them! What a grand and holy undertaking! These words echo the sentiment exclaimed by the mountain climber as his eyes search the depths of the panorama spread before him as he looks down from the peak he has just conquered. Is it not generally from the peak of perfection that he has just attained that the Oblate turns his gaze upon the plain he left and which he looks upon as the field for his future apostolate? As he gazes from the elevation he has attained, the task which previously fright-

ened him now takes on its true proportions, whose dimensions while they are for all that immense, are no longer exaggerated. The first image which leaps to his gaze is that of the most shameful ignorance [...]"<sup>51</sup>

The Oblate must combat ignorance in the matter of religion by teaching who Christ is; he must combat the corruption of morals by honoring and promoting the practice of all kinds of virtues. Finally, he must "leave no stone unturned" to replace the empire of the devil with the empire of Christ. This work must be carried out in stages: first make of people reasoning human beings, then Christians and finally, saints.

In this sense, this paragraph partially takes up once again what was said about the condition of the Church and the importance of proclaiming the Word of God. These ideas are found in the writings of Jean-Jacques Olier, Félicité de Lamennais and Eugene de Mazenod previous to 1818. (See the comparative chart).

## 8. PARAGRAPH 8

### *As a society (in community)*

The Oblates carry out this priestly apostolic action *viribus unitis*, that is, as a community. Much could be said about this. In the report of his canonical visit to Zaire, Father Drouart devoted a few pages to this<sup>52</sup>. The acts of the congress of the Association of Oblate Studies and Research held in Ottawa in August of 1989 dealing with *Mission in Apostolic Community* were published in *Vie Oblate Life* in 1990. Father Domenico Arena, a missionary in Senegal, wrote an important thesis in missiology entitled *Unity and Mission*. For all intents and purposes, it is a wide ranging commentary on *viribus unitis*. We also find several

articles on Oblate community in *Vie Oblate Life*, especially those by Fathers Marcello Zago and Fabio Ciardi<sup>53</sup>.

## 9. PARAGRAPHS 9 AND 10

### *The Rules*

In conclusion, paragraphs 9 and 10 show that the apostolic action of the Oblates is carried out under a common rule and a common discipline. Hundreds of times in his correspondence the Founder exhorted his Oblates to live a regular life; it reached such a point that, especially from Father Joseph Fabre on, there existed within the Congregation a kind of divorce between "regular" religious life and the apostolic life. Father Reslé and especially Father Drouart devoted some pages of their commentaries to explaining how this dichotomy did not exist in the thinking of the Founder and in the text of the Rule<sup>54</sup>.

## VI. THE SUPERIORS GENERAL

All of the Superiors General made reference to the *Preface* of the Rules in their circular letters<sup>55</sup>. Generally, it was the case of using a brief quotation from the *Preface* as a springboard to remind their confreres of the meaning and binding force of some articles of the Rule. Some examples of this are: with reference to the Church, personal sanctification and the virtues, religious life, Jesus Christ, zeal, urgent needs, community, etc.

It was however Father Leo Deschâtelets, Superior General from 1947 to 1972, who most often spoke of the Rule, and the *Preface* in particular<sup>56</sup>. He characterized it as "a synthesis of the Rule with brilliant features like the facets of a diamond"<sup>57</sup>; or yet again: "the

act of giving birth to our Institute: it situates it in the Church. In words of fire, it paints the picture of the Oblate, above all an apostolic man, destined according to his modest means to relieve the distress of the Church, the well-beloved spouse of Christ, the Savior of the world.<sup>58</sup>" In the first few pages of his August 15, 1951 circular letter, *Our Vocation and our Life in Intimate Union with Mary Immaculate*<sup>59</sup>, he comments on the majority of the paragraphs of the *Preface*, in particular those on the Oblate priest, religious, missionary, on fire with the love of Jesus, etc.

In the commentary we have given here on each of the paragraphs of the *Preface*, we have not quoted from this letter of Father Deschâtelets because the entire letter deserves to be studied and read, not just a few quotes from it. He possessed the same fiery temperament as the Founder; he knew the Founder's writings very well and was able to communicate his thinking and his charisma with the same fiery enthusiasm.

## VII. CONCLUSION

I bring these few reflections to a conclusion by quoting from the last lines of Father Jetté's commentary on the Rule: the *Preface* is a good introduction to the Constitutions and Rules, "but it is above all an invitation to the absolute, radical character of the gift of oneself to Jesus Christ and to the Church. The Oblate can become a man of prayer, a man for others, a poor man according to the Gospel, a witness of the faith...; but to be such, he must commit himself totally. No one will ever be such without first being a man of Jesus Christ and the Church. Our vocation contains everything. That is the main lesson taught by the *Preface*."<sup>60</sup>

YVON BEAUDOIN

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See the bibliography.

<sup>2</sup> In the General House archives (Mazenod Collection DM XI) we possess four French manuscripts of the Rule: the first is that of 1818, manuscripts 2 and 3 bear no date and the fourth is the definitive French text of 1825 from which the Latin translation was made. In manuscripts 2 and 3, reappear the *Foreword* and the *Nota bene* more or less as they appear in the 1818 manuscript. Only a few words have been changed. The 1825 text which fuses together what was the *Foreword* and the *Nota bene*, maintains the title *Foreword*. At the end of this study, there is a comparison of the 1818, 1825 and 1826 texts (French translation of the Latin text approved by Rome).

<sup>3</sup> The 1818 manuscript will always be quoted according to the edition prepared by Paul-Emil Duval which appeared in *Missions*, 78 (1951): *Foreword* and *Nota bene*, printed separately, p. 11-12 and 15-19.

<sup>4</sup> In manuscript II, drawn up and corrected by successive retouching between 1821 and 1825, the Founder wrote: "This *Nota bene* must be placed at the beginning and it must be fused with the foreword". He did this in his 1825 edition. See COSENTINO, Georges, *Histoire de nos Règles*, II. *Perfectionnement et approbation... 1819-1827*, Ottawa, Oblate Studies Edition, 1955, p. 26 and 36.

<sup>5</sup> Letter to Hippolyte Courtès, January 18, 1825 in *Letters to the Oblates of France, 1814-1825*, Oblate Writings I, vol. 6, p. 161.

<sup>6</sup> "*Osservazioni del cardinale Pedicini*" January 10, 1826 in *Missions*, 79 (1952), printed separately, p. 90-91. See also COSENTINO, Georges, *Histoire de nos Règles*, II. *Perfectionnement* [...], p. 103-104. Cardinal Pallotta would have liked to have changed this expression from paragraph 2: "But alas! Few there are who respond to this invitation...". He based his reasoning on the text from Saint Paul: "Nolite tangere Christos meos". The Founder ignored as well another of Cardinal Pallotta's remarks which, in paragraph 7, would have liked to drop the expression "angustam vitam deducere". In the present *Preface*, this

Latin text remained untranslated. What is simply said is: "indicate to them the road to heaven". See *Missions*, 79 (1952), p. 109.

<sup>7</sup> RESLÉ, Joseph, *Commentarium privatum Constitutionum et Regularum...*, prima pars, Ottawa, Oblate Studies Edition, 1958, p. 11, typewritten. SCRIS, March 25, 1982.

<sup>8</sup> COSENTINO, Georges, *Histoire de nos Règles...*, vol. 1, *Rédaction...*, p. 193.

<sup>9</sup> DESCHATELETS, Leo, "La Préface de nos Règles et les premiers écrits de notre vénéré Fondateur" in *Etudes oblates*, 15 (1956), p. 193.

<sup>10</sup> DROUART, Jean, [Réflexions sur les Constitutions et Règles de 1828 et 1966] in *Acte de visite canonique du Zaïre*, 1966-1967, p. 21, typewritten.

<sup>11</sup> JETTÉ, Fernand, *O.M.I. The Apostolic Man: A commentary on the 1982 edition of the Oblate Constitutions and Rules*, Rome, General House, 1992, p. 18.

<sup>12</sup> See LEFLON, I, p. 364.

<sup>13</sup> JETTÉ, Fernand, *op. cit.*, 23 and 24.

<sup>14</sup> RAMBERT I, p. 458; *idem* in REY I, p. 397.

<sup>15</sup> YENVEUX, Alfred, *Les saintes Règles de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée d'après les écrits, les leçons et l'esprit de Mgr. C.-J.-E. de Mazenod*, Paris, 1903, vol. 1, p. 14.

<sup>16</sup> VILLENEUVE, Jean-Marie-Rodrigue, *Etude analytico-synthétique de nos saintes Règles... avec comparaison des diverses éditions et rapprochements des décisions capitulaires, actes de visite et tradition de famille en guise de commentaire*, Ottawa, (1929) vol. 1, p. 105, typewritten.

<sup>17</sup> RESLÉ, Joseph, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 11-13; JETTÉ, Fernand, *op. cit.*, p. 24-28.

<sup>19</sup> "La structure philosophique de la Préface de nos saintes Règles", in *Etudes oblates* 6 (1947), p. 264-283.

<sup>20</sup> CHARLAND, Paul-Emil, "Une retraite oblate selon la méthode des Exercices spirituels de saint Ignace", in *Etudes oblates*, 18 (1959), p. 5-84.

<sup>21</sup> JETTÉ, Fernand, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

<sup>22</sup> "Souvenirs de famille", in *Missions*, 1866, p. 139-140; PIELORZ, Józef, *The Spiritual Life of Bishop de Mazenod, 1782-1812*, Ottawa, Oblate Studies Edition, 1956, p. 59.

<sup>23</sup> This surfaces particularly in the correspondence exchanged between Fortuné de Mazenod and the Founder's father during the period 1818 to 1820. Oblate General Archives. Boisgelin Section, V, 1-7.

<sup>24</sup> See RAMBERT I, p. 47 and 161; also Eugene's letter to his mother, Mrs. de Mazenod, October 11, 1809 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 14, no. 61, p. 139 and a December 7, 1814 letter to his father in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 15, no. 129, p. 76.

<sup>25</sup> Eugene's letters to his mother, June 29, 1808 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 14, no. 27, p. 56 and February 28, 1809 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 14, no. 46, p. 102 & 103 and to his father, December 7, 1814 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 15, no. 129, p. 76.

<sup>26</sup> See RAMBERT I, p. 47 and 162; MORABITO, Joseph, *Je serai prêtre*, Ottawa, 1954, p. 110-112; December 7, 1814 letter of Eugene to his father in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 15, no. 129, p. 76.

<sup>27</sup> See December 23, 1809 conference in the comparative chart; appeal from the Church.

<sup>28</sup> See DEVILLE, R., *L'école française de spiritualité*, Paris, 1987, p. 18.

<sup>29</sup> November 22, 1812 letter from M. Duclaux to Eugene de Mazenod in REY I, p. 143; June 4, 1835 letter from Eugene de Mazenod to Father Hippolyte Courtès in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 8, no. 517, p. 162.

<sup>30</sup> In YENVEUX, Alfred, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 48.

<sup>31</sup> See BEAUDOIN, Yvon, "Le retour d'exil des Mazenod en 1818" in *Vie Oblate Life*, 45 (1986), p. 411-422.

<sup>32</sup> PIELORZ, Józef, "Le père de Mazenod et les curés d'Aix" in *Etudes oblates*, 19 (1960), p. 147-171, 328-367; 20 (1961), p. 39-60, 109-117.

<sup>33</sup> Letters to Father Tempier, August 12 and November 24, 1817 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 20, p. 32 and no. 30, p. 46.

<sup>34</sup> Letters to Father Ambrose Vincens, November 9, 1853 in *Oblate Writings* I, no. 1187, p. 175 and to Father Francis Bermond, May 26, 1854 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 2, no. 192, p. 74.

<sup>35</sup> Circular letter no. 2, February 2 1857 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 12, p. 210.

<sup>36</sup> See LESAGE, Germain, "Thèmes fon-

damentaux de notre spiritualité", in *Etudes oblates*, 4 (1945), p. 9-12, 21-23; CHARLAND, Paul-Emil, "Retraite oblate...", in *Etudes oblates*, 18 (1959), p. 18-21, 34-41; PETRIN, Jean, "Le souci de la gloire de dieu dans la spiritualité de l'Oblat", in *Etudes oblates*, 16 (1957), p. 3-19.

<sup>37</sup> RESLÉ, Joseph, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

<sup>38</sup> LEYENDECKER, Leonard, *Commentarium historicum-canonicum-asceticum Regularum et Constitutionum Congr. Miss. Oblatorum ss. et imm. Virginis Mariae...*, vol. 1, p. 70, typewritten.

<sup>39</sup> I Timothy 3:4 and 8; 6:6 and 17; Titus 1:7, etc.

<sup>40</sup> RESLÉ, Joseph, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

<sup>41</sup> CHEVRIER, Anthony, *Véritable disciple*, Lyon p. 264.

<sup>42</sup> DROUART, Jean, *op. cit.*, p. 21-22. He seems to have revisited and developed what Father Blanchard had written, "La structure philosophique de la Préface de nos saintes Règles", in *Etudes oblates*, 6 (1947), p. 269-270.

<sup>43</sup> JETTÉ, Fernand, *op. cit.*, p. 33 & 34.

<sup>44</sup> VILLENEUVE, J.-M.-R., *op. cit.*, p. 105.

<sup>45</sup> JETTÉ, Fernand, *op. cit.*, p. 34 & 35.

<sup>46</sup> 1818 Constitutions and Rules in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 55.

<sup>47</sup> DROUART, Jean, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

<sup>48</sup> YENVEUX, Alfred, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 17; with regard to Oblate virtues see *ibidem*, p. 38-39. The Founder enumerated many virtues in the Rule; Father Yenveux lists eighteen of them.

<sup>49</sup> VILLENEUVE, J.-M.-R., *op. cit.*, p. 106.

<sup>50</sup> YENVEUX, Alfred, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 17.

<sup>51</sup> BLANCHARD, Gerard, *op. cit.*, p. 275.

<sup>52</sup> DROUART, Jean, [Réflexions sur les Constitutions et Règles de 1828 et 1966] in *Acte de visite canonique du Zaïre*, 1966-1967, p. 28-35.

<sup>53</sup> ZAGO, Marcello, "Dimension missionnaire de la communauté oblate" in *Vie Oblate Life*, 30 (1971), p. 9-16; "Evaluation et perspective de la communauté oblate", *ibidem*, 31 (1972), p. 67-80; CIARDI, Fabio, "Quelques traits de la communauté à la lumière de la vie apostolique", *ibidem*, 36 (1977), p. 203-224; "Renouveau communautaire et renaissance des vocations", *ibidem*, 44 (1977), p. 105-120.

<sup>54</sup> RESLÉ, Joseph, *op. cit.*, p. 14; DROUART, Jean, *op. cit.*, p. 35-37.

<sup>55</sup> FABRE, Joseph, circular letters nos. 13 and 15; SOULLIER, Louis, circular letter no. 59; AUGIER, Cassian, circular letter no. 70; DONTENWILL, Augustine, circular letter no. 130; HANLEY, Richard, circular letters nos. 248 and 250; JETTÉ, Fernand, circular letters nos. 261 and 268 and the 1980 report to the General Chapter; ZAGO, Marcello, circular letters nos. 306, 307 and 317.

<sup>56</sup> See circular letters nos. 175, 191, 201, 202, 208, 215, 222, 226, 227, 236, 240, 245, 247.

<sup>57</sup> Circular letter no. 201: report to the 1953 General Chapter in *Circ. adm.*, VI, p. 34.

<sup>58</sup> Circular letter no. 227, April 12, 1966 in *Circ. adm.*, VII, p. 354.

<sup>59</sup> Circular letter no. 191 in *Circ. adm.*, V, p. 298-385.

<sup>60</sup> JETTÉ, Fernand, *op. cit.*, p. 36.



## APPENDIX

### SOURCES OF THE PREFACE COMPARATIVE CHART OF THE 1818 AND 1826 TEXTS

In this section, we present in four columns, first, excerpts from the writings of M. Olier, M. Tronson and M. Lamennais or the writings of Eugene from the period between 1805 and 1817 which influenced the writing of the Preface. Secondly, we cite excerpts from the Foreword and *Nota bene* of the 1818 Rules and the Preface of the Rules approved by Rome in 1826.

## 1. Condition of the Church

Olier – Tronson – Lamennais

Lamennais, Félicité de, *Réflexions sur l'état de l'Eglise en France pendant le XVIIIe siècle, et sur sa situation actuelle, 1809, 1814.*

The world is ill.

From the time of the overthrow of paganism, history offers no example of degeneracy so widespread and thorough as to equal that of our times. Never in past history has the human race been so deeply mired in the decadence of the senses; never has it so lost the sense of its own greatness and the innate awareness of its lofty destiny (p. 105).

Day by day, piety as well as charity is growing colder. Within the last ten years, the number of the people receiving the sacraments has diminished by half [...] (p. 111).

As for me, when I consider such astounding apathy, this profound obliviousness with regard to every moral law, and every Christian duty, I shudder as I ask myself if we are not living in those times foretold by Jesus when he said: "But when the Son of Man comes, will he find any faith on earth?" (p. 144).

Writings of Eugene de Mazenod (1805-1817)

*May 24, 1805 – to his father.*

I shudder at the very thought that we will one day be whittled down to our own perverse generation which has imbibed nothing other than the poison of every vice and has no understanding of virtue, which stagnates in such a depth of ignorance that there is every reason to fear that we will fall again into a state of barbarism even more wicked than that which prevailed in the sixth century, since, at least in those unhappy times, people did believe in God, while today there is an open profession of an appalling atheism.

*June 29, 1808 – to his mother*

What he [the Lord] wants of me is that I renounce a world where it is almost impossible to find salvation since such is the power of apostasy there; that I devote myself especially to his service and try to reawaken the faith that is becoming extinct amongst the poor; in a word, that I make myself available to carry out any orders he may wish to give me for his glory and the salvation of souls he has redeemed by his precious blood.

*February 28, 1809 – to his mother*

[...] at a time when the Church is abandoned by everyone [...].

*October 11, 1809 – to his mother*

The Spouse of Jesus Christ which this divine Master formed by the shedding of all his blood [...].

## 1. Condition of the Church

### Constitutions and Rules of 1818

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#### Beginning of the *Nota bene*

What more sublime purpose than that of their Institute? Their founder is Jesus Christ, the very Son of God; their first fathers are the Apostles. They are called to be the Saviour's co-workers, the co-redeemers of mankind; and even though, because of their present small number and the more urgent needs of the people around them, they have to limit the scope of their zeal, for the time being to the poor of our countryside and others, their ambition should, in its holy aspirations, embrace the vast expanse of the whole earth.

The Church, that glorious inheritance purchased by the Saviour at the cost of all his blood, has in our days been cruelly ravaged. This beloved Spouse of the Son of God bears him almost nothing other than monsters. The ingratitude of men is at its peak; apostasy will soon be the norm. And except for the sacred deposit of faith which will always remain intact to the end of time, there remains of Christianity only traces of what it was, with the result that it can be truly said that, due to the malice and corruption of the Christians of our day, their condition is worse than that of the pagans before the cross overthrew their idols.

### Constitutions and Rules of 1826

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Translation of the Latin text approved by Rome

The Church, that glorious inheritance purchased by the Saviour at the cost of his blood, has in our days been cruelly ravaged. This beloved Spouse of the Son of God, weeping over the shameful defection of the children she brought forth, is a prey to terror. Apostate Christians totally oblivious to the blessings of God have provoked divine Justice by their crimes, and if we were not aware that the sacred deposit of faith would remain intact to the end of the ages, we could with difficulty perceive the religion of Christ through the traces that remain of what she was. As a result, it can be truly said that due to the malice and corruption of the Christians of our day, the state of the majority among them is worst than that of paganism before the Cross overthrew their idols.

The 1825 text (manuscript 4) differs from those of 1818 and 1826.

## 2. Appeal from the Church

Olier - Tronson – Lamennais

Lamennais, Félicité, *Réflexions...*

This has had an impact on the clergy.

Would to God that the clergy, at least, had secured their immunity to this contagion! Would to God that with one voice they had protested through their example the lessening of zeal and that the suffering Church had found among its ministers the comfort and help she has the right to expect of them! No doubt she still counts in her ranks a significant number of apostolic men; a life blood of faith still flows through some branches of this sacred stem. That is the very thing which will stand in judgment, condemning so many apathetic and listless priests who are, in the words of the Apostle, neither hot nor cold, [...] who seek in the idleness of the urban centres a genteel, languid life while at the same time there is this or that rural county where we can hardly find one pastor for four parishes [...] (p. 112-113).

TRONSON, Louis, *Entretiens ecclésiastiques*, complete works, Migne, 1857, I, p. 561-563.

Nothing is more deadly for the Church than bad priests [...] A holy priest gives us a holy people, but a corrupt priest will not fail to corrupt it. [...] Since all good and all evil flow from the temple [...] from churchmen and priests in particular [...] that is where we must concentrate our efforts in applying a remedy.

Eugene de Mazenod's writings (1805-1817)

*December 23, 1809 - Conference*

The Church in despair cries aloud to her children for help in her distress, and does no one respond?

*August 1812 - Retreat at Issy*

The Church has all too much to lament in the numerous priests who bring down harm on her by their lack of awareness of the evils she suffers, priests who are themselves in a state of torpor and dampen down all the flames of divine love which they should be enkindling among the faithful, for whom they are the Lord's agents and instruments of his mercy. Is it my purpose to increase their number? God preserve me [...].

*1813 – First Rule of the Association of Christian Youths of Aix*

The main goal of this association is to form in the city a corps of very pious young people who, through their example, the advice they offer and their prayers, will be a restraining force on the general movement of apostasy which is daily making such rapid and frightening progress [...].

*October 9, 1815 - to Father Henry Tempier*

Dwell deeply on the plight of our country people, their religious situation, the apostasy that daily spreads wider with dreadfully ravaging effects.

## 2. Appeal from the Church

### Constitutions and Rules of 1818

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*Nota bene*

In this lamentable state, the Church calls for help to her ministers, those to whom she has entrusted the most precious interests of her Divine Spouse and it is the majority of those very ministers who by their reprehensible conduct aggravate even further the ills from which she suffers.

The real purpose of our Institute is to remedy all these evils, as much as possible to restore order in all this confusion.

To achieve some measure of success in this holy endeavor, we must first of all seek out the causes of the depravity which is presently making men slaves of their passions.

We can synthesis them under three headings:

1. The weakening, if not the total loss, of faith.
2. Ignorance among the people.
3. Laziness, indifference and corruption among the priests.

This third cause must be considered as the main one and the root of the other two.

The truth of the matter is that for a century already, through devilish tactics, an effort has been made to undermine the foundations of religion in the hearts and minds of the people. It is truer still that the French Revolution has made an extraordinary contribution to the advancement of this iniquitous work. Nevertheless, if the clergy had remained firmly that which they should never have ceased being, religion would

have sustained the blow and not only would it have withstood this terrible shock, but it would have triumphed over all these attacks and would have emerged from the conflict even more beautiful and glorious.

### Constitutions and Rules of 1826

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Faced with such a deplorable situation, the Church earnestly appeals to the ministers whom she herself enrolled in the cause of her divine Spouse, to do all in their power, by word and example, to rekindle the flame of faith that has all but died in the hearts of so many of her children. Alas, few heed this urgent plea. Indeed, many even aggravate things by their own disgraceful conduct and far from even thinking<sup>a</sup> of leading people back to the paths of justice, they themselves have need of being recalled to the practice of their duties.

The 1825 text (manuscript 4) is identical to that of 1826 with the following exception:

- a. from conceiving.

### 3. The generous willingness of some priests

**Olier - Tronson - Lamennais**

**Eugene de Mazenod's writings (1805-1817)**

LAMENNAIS, Félicité, *Réflexions...*

*23 December 1809 - Conference*

As a child of the Church, one deeply moved by the evils which afflict this loving mother, I have outlined them with Christian frankness [...] We have arrived at these deplorable times of trial and danger when, in the words of a holy Pope, the faith calls upon its soldiers and summons to her defense all of those animated by zeal (p. 116-117).

How could we not be moved with compassion for the condition of abandonment the Church finds herself in [...] No, no, these deeds that rend our Mother have penetrated deep into our souls [...] No, no, dear and tender Mother, not all your children desert you in the day of your affliction; a group, small it is true, but most worthy because of the motives that inspire its activity, draws close around you and wipes away the tears that the ingratitude of men wrings from you in the bitterness of your sorrow.

*January 25, 1816 - letter to the Vicars General of Aix*

The undersigned priests, deeply moved by the deplorable situation of the small towns and villages of Provence that have almost completely lost the faith; etc.

### 3. The generous willingness of some priests

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#### Constitutions and Rules of 1818

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#### Constitutions and Rules of 1826

The sight of these evils has touched the hearts of certain priests, zealous for the glory of God, men who love the Church, and would give their lives, if need be, for the salvation of souls.

The French text of 1825 (manuscript 4) is identical to that of 1826.

#### 4. The work that can be accomplished – Optimism

Olier - Tronson – Lamennais

Eugene de Mazenod's writings (1805-1817)

TRONSON, Louis, *Entretiens...*

*October 11, 1809 - to his mother*

Since all good and evil flow from the temple, [...] churchmen and priests in particular [...] that is where one must especially work to apply the remedy.

And what reason could you possibly have for wanting me to delay any longer from committing myself, and devoting to the Spouse of Jesus Christ, which this divine Master formed by the shedding of all his blood, every moment of a life I received only to use for God's greater glory. [...]

OLIER, Jean-Jacques, *Maximes sur le sacerdoce*, Complete works, Migne, 1856, p. 1166-1172.

*October 9, 1815 - to Father Henry Tempier*

It is devoutly to be wished that the Church should nourish within her ranks a good number of holy priests who for the purpose of clergy renewal would publicly proclaim their total dedication of themselves and renunciation of the goods of this world in order to devote themselves exclusively to the service of God and his people [...].

We wish to choose men who have the will and the courage to walk in the footsteps of the apostles. [...] It is not so easy to come across men who are dedicated and wish to devote themselves to the glory of God and the salvation of souls with no more reward on earth than much sorrow and all else that the Saviour announced to his true disciples [...]

Within the seminary, three apostolic men imbued with humility, gentleness, patience, zeal and charity [...] would be enough to renew the clergy and subsequently the entire flock.

*December 13, 1815 - to Father Henry Tempier*

Were it a question of going out to preach more or less well the word of God [...] without taking much trouble to be men of interior life, truly apostolic men, I think it would not be difficult to replace you [...].

#### 4. The work that can be accomplished – Optimism

##### Constitutions and Rules of 1818

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*Nota bene*

Once these causes have become known, it becomes easier to apply remedies to them.

The achieving of this end will require the forming of apostles, who, after having become convinced of the necessity of their own reform: *attende tibi*, should work with all their strength to convert others: *attende tibi et doctrinae, insta in illis: hoc enim faciens, et te ipsum salvum facies, et eos qui te audiunt* (I Timothy 4:16). And as we have seen that the real source of the evil is the indifference, the avarice and corruption of the priests, once these abuses will have been reformed, the others will cease as well. See to it that you have zealous, altruistic and solidly virtuous priests and soon you will bring back to the fold the people who have wandered away from their duties. In a word, put into practice the same means our Saviour employed when he wanted to convert the world; you will achieve the same results.

##### Constitutions and Rules of 1826

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They are convinced that if zealous priests could be formed, priests not given to their own interests, solidly grounded in virtue – in a word, apostolic men deeply conscious of the need to reform themselves, who would labor with all the resources at their command to convert others – then there would be ample reason to believe that, in a short while, people who had gone astray might be brought back to their long-unrecognized responsibilities. “Take great care about what you do and what you teach”, was Paul’s charge to Timothy, “always do this, and thus you will save both yourself and those who listen to you” (I Timothy 4:16).

## 5. Jesus Christ

Olier - Tronson - Lamennais

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TRONSON, Louis, *Entretiens...*

We have no other end in view than that intended by the Son of God [...].

That is what the Son of God teaches us by his conduct. [...] What did he do? [...] From the time of his initial preaching, he began [...] to rail against the priests; he spent a good portion of his life instructing them [...].

Eugene de Mazenod's writings (1805-1817)

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*March 19, 1809 - Conference*

I see the model I must imitate, the living example whom I must follow [...] I see him reminding the princes of the priests, the Scribes, and the Pharisees of all the circumstances of his innocent life, the heroic deeds of his tender charity for mankind [...].

*August 22, 1817 - to Father Henry Tempier*

We are put on earth, and particularly in our house, to sanctify ourselves while helping each other by our example, our words and our prayers. Our Lord Jesus Christ has left to us the task of continuing the great work of the redemption of mankind.

## 6. Personal sanctification

Olier - Tronson - Lamennais

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cf. following page

Eugene de Mazenod's writings (1805-1817)

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*October 11, 1809 - to his mother*

So do not grudge, my dear and good mama, do not grudge this poor Church [...] the homage that two or three individuals out of the whole of France (a small number I count myself happy to be one of) wish to pay her of their liberty and life.

## 5. Jesus Christ

### Constitutions and Rules of 1818

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*Nota bene*

What did Our Lord Jesus Christ do? He chose a certain number of apostles and disciples whom He formed in piety and filled with His spirit; and after having trained them in his school and the practice of all virtues, He sent them forth to conquer the world which they soon brought under the rule of his holy laws.

### Constitutions and Rules of 1826

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What did Our Lord Jesus Christ do, when He undertook to convert the world? He chose a certain number of apostles and disciples, whom He formed in piety, and filled with his own spirit; and after having trained them in his own school, He sent them forth to conquer the world which they soon brought under the rule of his holy laws.

## 6. Personal sanctification

### 1818 Constitutions and Rules

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cf. the following page.

### 1826 Constitutions and Rules

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cf. the following page.

## 6. Personal sanctification

Olier - Tronson - Lamennais

OLIER, Jean-Jacques, *Maximes sur le sacerdoce...*

To prepare his apostles, the Son of God [...] kept them in his company for three years [...]; the main dispositions he demanded of them were the complete renunciation of their own will and that they totally divest themselves of material goods [...]. The practice of ridding oneself of external goods is inseparable from the spirit of renunciation. It would be fitting, therefore, that the seminary directors should renew [...] the renouncement they have declared.

TRONSON, Louis, *Examens particulier*, Complete works, Migne, 1857, II, p. 588-589.

Do we possess perfect religion, angelic purity, a burning zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, a great love for the Church [...]?

Have we experienced the sharing in the spirit of Jesus, supreme priest? That is, have we been ready to sacrifice ourselves without ceasing and of offering, like he did, our sweat, our blood, our life for the glory of God and the salvation of the world?

Eugene de Mazenod's writings (1805-1817)

*December 13, 1815 - to Father Henry Tempier*

We must be truly saints ourselves. [...] Now are there many priests who thus wish to be saints? Only by not knowing them could we believe that they do. I myself know the contrary. Most wish to go to heaven by a road other than that of abnegation, renunciation, self effacement, poverty, fatigue, etc. [...].

*December 23, 1809 - Conference*

[...] we will have the courage to combat your numerous enemies by ourselves, to brave all dangers, face every peril, to form with our bodies an impenetrable barrier to your cruellest persecutors, to die, yes to die if needs be, to preserve you intact.

*February 19, 1813 - to Charles de Forbin-Janson*

There will perhaps come a time when I will indeed say to you: "Come, let us die now, we are no longer good for anything else. Let us press on to death!"

*August 22, 1817 - to Father Tempier*

We are, or we ought to be, holy priests who consider themselves happy, very happy to devote their fortune, their health, their life in the service and for the glory of our God.

## 6. Personal sanctification

### Constitutions and Rules of 1818

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#### *Nota bene*

What must we, in turn, do to succeed in winning back for Jesus Christ so many souls who have cast off his yoke? We must work seriously to become saints, walk courageously in the footsteps of so many apostles who have left us such fine examples of virtue in the exercise of a ministry to which, like them, we are called; renounce ourselves totally, maintain in view exclusively the glory of God, the building of the Church, the salvation of souls; renew ourselves constantly in the spirit of our vocation; live in a habitual state of self-denial and in an unremitting determination to achieve perfection, working unstintingly to become humble, gentle, obedient, lovers of poverty, repentant, mortified, detached from the world and our families, brimming with zeal, ready to sacrifice our goods, our talents, our rest, our persons and our lives for the love of Jesus Christ, the service of the Church and the sanctification of our neighbor. Then, filled with confidence in God, we must enter the lists and fight unto death for the greater glory of God.

### Constitutions and Rules of 1826

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What must those who desire to walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, their Divine Master, do in their turn to win back for him so many souls who have thrown off his yoke? They must work seriously to become saints; walk courageously along the same paths as so many evangelical labourers, who have left us such fine examples of virtue in the exercise of a ministry to which they, like them, feel called; renounce themselves totally, maintain in view exclusively the glory of God, the good of the Church and the edification and salvation of souls; renew themselves constantly in the spirit of their vocation; live in a habitual state of self-denial and in an unremitting determination to achieve perfection by working unstintingly to become humble, meek, obedient lovers of poverty, repentant, mortified, detached from the world and their families, brimming with zeal, ready to sacrifice their goods, talents, rest, their person and their life for the love of Jesus Christ, the service of the Church, and the sanctification of their neighbour. Then, filled with confidence in God, they can enter the lists and fight unto death, for the greater glory of His most holy and tremendous Name.

## 7. Priestly and apostolic action

### Olier - Tronson - Lamennais

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LAMENNAIS, Félicité de, *Réflexions...*

If something could reawaken this, alas, so listless faith in hearts, it would no doubt be parish missions. What a great deal of good would they not achieve in our countrysides and even in our cities! What a field ready for the plow! What a harvest to gather in! One has had to see with one's own eyes the fruit of sanctification that a few genuinely apostolic men can produce in order to understand how powerful this means is and what one can expect of it in the present circumstances. [...] And what is needed to work these wonders? Great talent? No, but a great faith rather [...].

OLIER, Jean-Jacques, *Maximes...*

For the lack of well educated, virtuous priests, the people receive almost nothing more than a smattering of the Christian life. You no longer see them instructed of the obligation to resemble Jesus Christ. They no longer know him; the fact that he died for them does not induce them to honor or love him more. [...] From this ignorance and forgetfulness with regard to Jesus Christ [...].

LAMENNAIS, Félicité de, *Réflexions...*

Barbarism threatens our countrysides. This plague overtakes the countryside threatened by barbarism [...] by unheard of licentiousness, customs to be wondered at invade the thatched cottages: spirits, hearts, everything is deteriorating [...].

Religion alone makes them human by instilling in them moral ideas, by arousing conscience in them, by giving them a guide, a mentor, a model and by establishing in some way in their midst a school of civilization. Take away these restraints, deprive them of this assistance and they become fierce animals or brute beasts [...] (p. 135-136).

OLIER, Jean-Jacques, *Maximes...*

Such priests are rare; for the entire Church Our Lord only chose twelve [...].

Few will be found in the Church who would be willing to commit themselves to this kind of an obscure, hidden life [...].

### Eugene de Mazenod's writings (1805-1817)

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*April 4, 1813 - Instruction*

In our preceding lecture, we explained to you that all the disorders that reigned in Christianity were to be attributed mainly to the state of people living in crass ignorance of the first principles of the faith [...].

*January 25, 1816 - to the Vicars General of Aix*

The undersigned priests: deeply moved by the deplorable situation of the small towns and villages of Provence that have almost completely lost the faith; [...] convinced that missions are the only means by which these people who have gone astray can be brought out of their degradation [...].

## 7. Priestly and apostolic action

### Constitutions and Rules of 1818

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#### *Nota bene*

How vast the field that lies before them! How worthy an undertaking! The people are wallowing in crass ignorance of all that pertains to their salvation. The consequence of this ignorance has been a weakening, if not a total obliteration of the faith and the corruption of morals. It is therefore urgent to bring back the multitude of those sheep who have strayed from the fold, to teach these degenerate Christians who Jesus Christ is, to snatch them from the slavery of the demon and to show them the way to heaven, to extend the Savior's empire, to destroy the reign of hell, to prevent millions of mortal sins, to hold virtues in honor and to see to it that they are practiced in all their varied forms, to lead men to act as creatures of reason, then as Christians, and finally to help them become saints.

We have to penetrate even more deeply - to the very heart of the sanctuary, to sweep away so much refuse collected at its entryway, its interior to the very steps of the altar where the Sacred Victim is sacrificed, to rekindle the sacred fire of pure love which is nurtured only by a small number of holy ministers who carefully guard the final sparks which will soon become extinguished with their passing, if we do not hasten to step forward to gather round them and there, acting in concert with them, to offer to the living God in reparation for so many crimes, the most thorough and total homage and devotion, the sacrifice of one's entire being to the glory of the Savior and to the service of his Church.

### Constitutions and Rules of 1826

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How vast the field that lies before them! How worthy and holy an undertaking! The people are wallowing in crass ignorance of all that pertains to their salvation; the consequence of this ignorance has been a weakening of the faith and a corruption of morals with all the disorders which are inseparable from this. Thus, it is supremely important, it is urgent to bring back the multitude of those sheep who have strayed from the fold, to teach these degenerate Christians who Jesus Christ is, to snatch them from the inheritance of the demon and show them the way to heaven. All possible steps must be taken to extend the Saviour's empire, to destroy that of hell, to prevent thousands of crimes, to hold virtues in honor and to see to it that they are practiced in all their varied forms, to lead men to act as creatures of reason, then as Christians, and finally to help them become saints.

## 8. In association with others (In community)

Olier - Tronson - Lamennais

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TRONSON, Louis, *Entretiens...*

The conversations that we are launching [...] to communicate to those people involved [...] in this profession, the excellence and obligations of this godly state.

Writings of Eugene de Mazenod  
(1805-1817)

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*October 9, 1815 - To Father Henry Tempier*

They will ceaselessly engage in destroying the empire of the demon, while providing the example of a life worthy of a cleric in the community which they will form [...].

## 9 and 10. Under a common Rule and discipline

Writings of Eugene de Mazenod  
(1805-1817)

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*December 1812 - Program*

It has always been recognized in the Church, and by people wishing to reach perfection that if one would reach and maintain oneself in it, one must submit to a fixed and invariable rule which, in its ceaseless subjugation of the disorders of the senses and the inconstancy that is native to the human will, was like a strict and rigorous pedagogue who in his unbending strictness never permits his disciple to depart on frivolous pretexts from the rules that an enlightened wisdom has dictated to him.

*1816 - Summary of the Association for Christian Youth's rule*

Experience proves that one runs the risk of not persevering for long in the practice of virtue, if one does not make the will captive under a uniform rule for every day of one's life [...].

## 8. In association with others (In community)

### Constitutions and Rules of 1818

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#### Preface

If the priests to whom the Lord has granted the desire to come together in community to work more effectively for the salvation of souls and for their own sanctification wish to achieve some good in the Church, they should first of all profoundly imbue themselves with the end of the Institute which they have adopted, the lofty nature of the ministry to which they are called and the untold fruits of salvation which their work can produce if they acquit themselves of their duties in a worthy manner.

### Constitutions and Rules of 1826

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Such are the untold fruits of salvation that can be produced by the efforts of priests whom God has inspired with the desire to form themselves into a Society in order to work more effectively for the salvation of souls and for their own sanctification, if they if they acquit themselves of their duties in a worthy manner and carry out their splendid vocation like saints.

## 9 and 10. Under a common Rule and discipline

### Constitutions and Rules of 1818

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#### Preface

To attain this so desirable an objective, they must apply themselves as well with the greatest care to adopt the most appropriate means to lead them to the goal they have set before themselves and to never depart from these prescribed rules to ensure the success of their holy undertaking and to maintain themselves in the holiness of their vocation.

The example of the saints and the reason itself offer sufficient proof that to ensure the good order of a society what is called for is to set certain rules of conduct which bind together all the members of the group in a uniform practice and a common spirit. That is what gives groups their strength, maintains their fervor and ensures their continued existence...

### Constitutions and Rules of 1826

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But it would not be enough for them to have a lively sense and conviction of the sublime nature of the ministry to which they are called. The example of the saints and reason itself offer sufficient proof that, to assure the success of such a holy undertaking and to ensure the good order of a society, certain rules of conduct are indispensable, to bind together all the members of the group in a uniform practice and a common spirit. That is what gives groups their strength, maintains their fervor and ensures their continued existence.

Thus, while devoting themselves to all the good works which priestly zeal and charity can devise and above all to the work of the holy missions, which are the principal end of their coming together, these priests purpose to submit themselves to a Rule and Constitutions...

## PRIESTHOOD

*Summary: I. Eugene de Mazenod. II. Joseph Fabre. III. Louis Soullier. IV. Cassien Augier. V. Augustin Dontenwill. VI. Theodore Labouré. VII. Leo Deschâtelets. VIII. Fernand Jetté. IX. 1982 Constitutions and Rules. X. Priests and brothers. XI. General Norms of Oblate Formation. XII. Marcello Zago.*

One should not be surprised to find that de Mazenod, his successors, and the General Chapters rarely spoke explicitly of the priesthood in the Congregation. The explanation for this is quite simple – the priesthood is so much a part of the Congregation and its ministry as revealed in its Constitutions, living traditions, and life, that they saw no need to expressly state it. In similar fashion neither de Mazenod nor his successors thought it necessary to go out of their way to state that the members of the Congregation were Catholics, since it was implicitly affirmed by everything in their lives, ministry, etc.

If anything the problem was that the pressure of priestly work could easily occasion the neglect of the religious elements of their lives – spiritual exercises and observance. Consequently they often spoke of the requirements of religious life and observance as the absolutely necessary means if they were to be faithful to their vocation as missionary priests. It is here that are found the elements of priestly spirituality. For the Oblates, priesthood, missionary and religious life cannot be separated. Their lives were and are to be one whole, with different aspects.

All the first members of the Congregation were priests or aspirants to the priesthood. Most of those who joined later, if they were not already priests, joined to become priests, spent many years in the spiritual and intel-

lectual formation required for ordination, and then worked the rest of their lives as priests.

It would seem that it was only after the 1966 General Chapter that some Oblates began to question the priestly nature of the Congregation<sup>1</sup>. Vatican II expanded the concept of “missionary” to include the non-ordained<sup>2</sup>. However, the essential element of being sent by a hierarchical superior to preach and exercise other apostolic work in order to bring persons to Jesus Christ and into full communion with the Church through the celebration of the sacraments remains intact. The role of the ministerial priesthood has not been diminished or downgraded, rather the role of the common priesthood of the faithful has been brought into its proper position. De Mazenod founded a society of priests to be missionaries and associated laymen in this priestly work.

An elimination of the primary role of the ministerial priesthood in the Congregation would substantially change and consequently destroy the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate as founded by Saint Eugene de Mazenod.

### I. EUGENE DE MAZENOD

As a young priest Eugene de Mazenod was pulled in opposite directions as to the future of his ministry. By nature he was not one to make quick decisions in important matters. In a letter of Oc-

tober 28, 1814 he confided his dilemma to his friend Forbin-Janson, who had first wanted to go to China as a missionary, but had helped found the Missionaries of France in response to the injunction of Pius VII:

"I still do not know what God wants of me but am so resolved to do His will as soon as it is known to me... I am hesitating between two plans: either to go off and bury myself in some well regulated community of an Order that I have always loved; or do in my diocese exactly what you have done successfully in Paris... The second plan, however, seems to me more useful, given the dreadful plight to which the people have been reduced"<sup>3</sup>.

The following December, his annual retreat meditations on the Kingdom of Jesus Christ, the standards, and apostolic service according to the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius Loyola affirmed the apostolic orientation of his ministry. By September 1815, the exact form of his ministry had become clear to him and he began the necessary steps to implement it.

"Since the Head of the Church is persuaded that, given the wretched state in which France finds herself, only missions can bring the people back to the Faith which they have practically abandoned, good priests (*ecclésiastiques*) from different dioceses are banding together in response to the views of our supreme Pastor. We likewise feel that it is utterly necessary to employ the same remedy in our regions and, full of confidence in the goodness of Providence, have laid the foundations of an establishment which will steadily furnish our countryside with fervent missionaries... One part of the year will be devoted to the conversions of souls, the other to seclusion, study and our individual sanctification"<sup>4</sup>.

For a real understanding of de Mazenod's intention, the religious situation of France at that moment must be kept in mind. All religious communities of men and women in the France had been suppressed during the Revolution (1789-1799), their houses and churches were destroyed or used for secular purposes, the secular clergy was persecuted – murdered, imprisoned, driven into exile and hiding – and all seminaries were closed for many years. The effects of this continued to be felt long after the end of overt persecution. Thus the number of active priests between 1809 and 1815 dropped from 31,870 to 25,874.

De Mazenod saw that the Church was not answering the needs of all the people. It was barely reaching out to those that remained faithful. It was not that the clergy lacked zeal, but their number was greatly reduced and they were getting old. The pastoral situation had changed; special methods were needed. With the abdication of Napoleon in 1815, there was throughout France a revival of a method of spiritual renewal that had a long and glorious history in that country – parish missions and de Mazenod played a key role in this pastoral renewal. In 1818, he wrote what later became the *Preface* of the Constitutions. It is there that he expressed clearly his intention as founder of a society of priests. Having mentioned the evils besetting the Church and the scarcity of those answering her call, he continued:

"The sight of these evils has so touched the hearts of certain priests, zealous for the glory of God, men with an urgent love of the Church, that they are willing to give their lives, if need be, for the salvation of souls.

They are convinced that if priests could be formed, afire with zeal for

men's salvation, priests not given to their own interests, solidly grounded in virtue – in a word, apostolic men deeply conscious of the need to reform themselves, who would continue to labour with all the resources at their command to convert others – then there would be ample reason to believe that in a short while people who had gone astray might be brought back to their long-unrecognized responsibilities...

How, indeed did our Lord Jesus Christ proceed when he undertook to convert the world? He chose a number of apostles and disciples whom he himself trained in piety, and filled them with his Spirit. These men he sent forth...

And how should men who want to follow in the footsteps of their divine Master Jesus Christ conduct themselves if they, in their turn, are to win back the many souls who have thrown off his yoke? They must strive to become saints... They must wholly renounce themselves, striving solely for the glory of God the good of the Church, and the growth and salvation of souls...

Such are the great works of salvation that can crown the efforts of priests whom God has inspired with the desire to form themselves into a Society in order to work more effectively for the salvation of souls and for their own sanctification.

... while pledging themselves to all the works of zeal which priestly charity can inspire – above all the work of the missions, which is the reason for their union these priests, joined together in a society, resolve to obey the following Constitutions and Rules..”.

The essential elements of the *Preface* are condensed as in a capsule in the first article of the Constitutions written by de Mazenod and approved by the Holy See in 1826:

“The end of his humble society of the Missionary Oblates of the Most Holy and Immaculate Virgin Mary... is that secular priests, living together as brothers in community may devote themselves principally to the preaching the Gospel to the poor by diligently striving to imitate the virtues and example of our Savior Jesus Christ”.

After a retreat in 1831 de Mazenod wrote a short commentary on the Constitutions in which he quoted this article and added:

“The means which we use to attain this end, partake of the excellence of the end itself. They are, unquestionably, the most perfect means, for they are the very means used by our divine Savior and by his Apostles and Disciples. And these means are – the exact observance of the evangelical counsels, preaching and prayer – a happy combination of the active and contemplative life. The example has been given us by Jesus Christ and his Apostles, and by that very fact, it is the summit of perfection, this way of life which, by God's favor, we have embraced: and our Rules are but the development of it”<sup>5</sup>.

An example of how it is developed in the Constitutions can be seen in part two, third chapter *Other Principal Observances*:

“It has already been said that, the missionaries ought, as far as human nature allows, to imitate in everything the example of Christ the Lord, the chief founder of the Society, and that of his Apostles, our first Fathers.

§ 1. Imitating these illustrious models, the missionaries will give one portion of their life to prayer, recollection and contemplation, while living together in the seclusion of God's house.

§ 2. The other portion of their life they will zealously devote to the works of the ministry, such as namely, to mis-

sions, preaching, the hearing of confessions, teaching catechism, directing the young, visiting the sick and prisoners, giving spiritual retreats and other works of this kind.

§ 3. Whether out on the missions or at home, their chief concern will always be to make progress in the way of religious perfection. They will cultivate especially the virtues of humility, poverty, self-denial, interior mortification and faith, purity of intention, etc. In a word, they will try to become another Jesus Christ, spreading abroad the fragrance of his amiable virtues"<sup>6</sup>.

Having after a long struggle achieved unity of priestly activity and contemplation in his own life, de Mazenod prescribed a similar unity of purpose and life for his Congregation – a society of missionaries, i.e. of priests dedicated to the imitation of Jesus Christ and walking in the traces of the Apostles by the practice of the same virtues and the preaching of the Gospel to the poor.

This unity of life can be seen further on in the chapter just quoted in the insistence that de Mazenod placed on humility and the reasons that he gave:

"... They will become well versed in the virtue of humility, a virtue that they will not cease to implore from God, since it is absolutely necessary for the perilous ministry in which they are engaged. So rich, indeed, are the fruits of this ministry, that it is to be feared that such marvelous achievements, due to grace alone and whose glory consequently belongs only to God, might prove a dangerous snare for an imperfect missionary, who has not sufficiently cultivated this fundamental and indispensable virtue"<sup>7</sup>.

De Mazenod's use of the word "missionary" presents a hermeneutical problem to the modern reader since it

has a more restricted sense than our current meaning. This can be seen in the first part of the Constitutions where he consistently used the word "missionary", in conformity with the usage begun by de Bérulle in 1613 and Vincent de Paul in 1617, to mean the priest members of the Congregation<sup>8</sup>. It was only later that he also spoke of priests in the foreign missions as missionaries. Thus, when de Mazenod gave his society the name Missionaries of Provence and later Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, he was saying that it was a society of missionary priests.

In a word, de Mazenod used the word "missionary" according to the meanings that had come into use during the preceding two centuries. Consequently in the first article of the section on the Brothers, he spoke of them as men who join the Congregation not as missionaries but to save their own souls. It was only with Vatican II and the theological development in understanding of the apostolate of the baptized members of the Church, that ecclesiastical documents began to speak of lay persons as missionaries.

The various ministries of the members of the Congregation were listed in the first part of the Constitutions – the Missions, preaching the Word of God, administration of the sacrament of penance, direction of youth, assisting the sick, dying, and those in prison, common recitation of divine office and the public exercises in the Congregation's churches. All of these, with the exception of the Divine Office, were at that time ministries reserved to the clergy. Since the Office was in Latin, the brothers did not recite the Office. So, all the ministries enumerated were those of the clerics.

What about other apostolic works? The 1824 General Chapter agreed that

the acceptance of seminaries for the formation of the secular clergy "would be contrary to the letter rather than the spirit of our Constitutions and unanimsly requested the Superior General" to make such a change. This addition was not included in the Constitutions until the edition published in 1853.

"After the missions, the most important work of our Congregation is undoubtedly the direction of seminaries, in which clerics receive their own special training... 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"<sup>9</sup>.

The 1853 edition of the Constitutions modified the absolute prohibition to minister to religious women, to preach a course of Lenten sermons, and to take charge of parishes. Although the foreign missions had assumed from 1841 an important role in the life and ministry of the Congregation, it was not until the Constitutions published in 1910 that there was an explicit mention of them in an article. This lacuna was filled by de Mazenod's *Instruction* on the foreign missions which was published as an appendix to the Constitutions in 1853 and in all subsequent editions through to 1910. It was only with the 1928 Constitutions that a whole section, which contained the main points of the 1853 *Instruction*, was included in the Constitutions.

The *Instruction* was clearly written for an institute of priests, whose ministry was to convert and bring people by preaching and catechizing to the sacraments of baptism penance, and eucharist and in this way to full communion in the Church. In a word, the foreign

missionaries were, in so far as possible, to perform the same ministries that were prescribed by the Constitutions for France. The Brothers were mentioned only twice – as companions to the missionary priest and as teachers of the mechanical arts.

That de Mazenod considered the evangelization of the poor incomplete if it did not culminate in the reception of the sacraments of penance and the eucharist, and that consequently the ministerial priesthood is essential to missionary activity can be seen first of all in the section of the Constitutions on the administration of the sacrament of penance:

"§ 1 [...] It is beyond all doubt that the hearing of confessions is to be preferred to preaching, when there is room for choice, because the private direction and admonition given in the tribunal of penance may in a measure supply the place of instruction and preaching, whereas preaching can never take the place of the sacrament of penance, which was instituted by Christ our Lord for restoring men to the friendship of God.

§ 2. A missionary will, therefore, never refuse the request of those who seek to go to confession, whether during the time of missions, or outside it"<sup>10</sup>.

That he held that the sacramental ministry is necessary for evangelization is also revealed in an incident related by Bishop Grandin. Because of the customs of polygamy and divorce among the North American Indians, the missionaries were allowing only a few of the old converts to receive communion:

"I heard Archbishop Taché say that when he was with our Venerated Founder, the latter asked him this question: "Have you many communicants among your Christians?" "Monseigneur", an-

swered the young bishop (he was 28 at the time), "so far we have not dared to give Communion except to a few old people". "What are you saying", the Superior General of the Oblates retorted with astonishment, "you have not dared give Communion except to a few old people, and you think you can christianize those people! Don't count on it without the Holy Eucharist..."<sup>11</sup>.

Eugene de Mazenod founded a Congregation of priests to be missionaries, i.e. to preach the Gospel in rural Provence to bring the poor and spiritually neglected people back to Jesus Christ and religious practice; he sent his missionaries to England, North America, Asia, and Africa for the same purpose and also to care for people without priests, to unite to the Church non-Catholic Christians and convert those who had never heard the Gospel. The Oblates according to de Mazenod were to be more than just ordinary priests; their vocation was to be missionaries. To be missionaries they had, however, to be priests. To live up to their missionary vocation they had to be exemplary priests. To be exemplary priests, they were religious. All three – priest, missionary, religious – are essential to the Congregation and to the individual Oblate, the non-ordained as well as the ordained.

## II. JOSEPH FABRE

Joseph Fabre, de Mazenod's immediate successor, saw that his main task was faithfulness to the Founder by demanding exact observance of the Constitutions. No doubt acting out of his own religious and pastoral experience, which was limited to formation and education in France, without in anyway denying the missionary dimension of

Oblate life, he insisted emphatically on the "religious" element. The basis for this emphasis is seen in his circular of March 21, 1862:

"My dear Brothers, to what are we called? To become saints, in order to work efficaciously for the sanctification of the most neglected souls. That is our vocation. Let us not lose sight of it and let us first of all make the effort to really understand it. We must work actively, generously on our own sanctification, i.e. meditate every day seriously and with ever greater depth on the duties of our state of life, to know ever better the virtues that God requires of us, in order that by means of behavior that is always more religious, we practice our holy obligations. We are priests, we are religious; these two qualities impose obligations which we must never be mistaken about, and which we must never forget. Work for the sanctification of others by exterior ministry is a very beautiful mission, but is only a part of our holy vocation; it presupposes the first as its principle and as the source of fruitfulness. In fact, could we effectively and supernaturally correspond adequately to the grace of the ministry of souls, if we do not have a deep understanding of the necessity of our sanctification?<sup>12</sup>"

## III. LOUIS SOULLIER

On December 8, 1896 Louis Soullier, the third Superior General, sent a 127 page circular *Studies of the Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate* to "all the religious, priests or aspirants to the priesthood in the Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate". As Fabre, his predecessor, had addressed in depth the question of the religious life, Soullier directed his

attention to the intellectual life of the Congregation. He explained the purpose of the letter in this way:

“As we wrote these pages, we were preoccupied by this thought, that holiness and learning are truly the two essential conditions, and, as it were, the two foundations of preaching, and also by the fear that, fully convinced of the necessity of holiness for apostolic ministry, you might not be so convinced of the necessity of learning. It was this thought and this fear that gave us the inspiration to expose for you the question of the learning and study which we believe to be the spirit of our vocation.

In order to know this spirit, it is necessary for us to contemplate ourselves under four aspects, that of religious, that of priests, that of apostles, and that of Oblates...

Together let us recollect ourselves and ask the Holy Spirit, who was given to us on the day of our oblation and of our priestly ordination, to better understand these three things: the necessity of study, the object of our studies, and the supernatural character that we must give to our studies”<sup>13</sup>.

#### IV. CASSIEN AUGIER

De Mazenod’s insistence on the importance of the Divine Office as a work of the Congregation in replacing the Orders suppressed by the French Revolution is too well known to need special consideration. At the same time, however, he did not hesitate to request from Leo XII a dispensation for the missionaries during the missions. Cassien Augier, de Mazenod’s third successor, upon receiving such a dispensation wrote:

“We do admit that it is not without hesitation that we have let the indult

have its full extension. If we did not fear to be the occasion of scruples, we would have restricted the general dispensation which it permits us to grant. But we have full confidence that you will do spontaneously out of piety, that which we have not done with our authority. Without taking back the latitude which the indult grants, we cannot adequately exhort you not to dispense yourselves from the recitation of the Divine Office, except in the case when in conscience, before God and man, you will have serious motives.

In addressing you this urgent exhortation, we believe that we are responding to the mind of the Church. She holds that the public and official prayer of her priests as one of the principal elements of sanctification of their souls and a condition of fruitfulness for their ministry...

We believe that we are faithful to the spirit of our Venerable Founder. You know the devotion that he had for the divine Office and the importance that he attached to its recitation...

Finally, think of the interest of our souls. Let us fear that by diminishing too easily prayer, to diminish the graces that we need so much...”<sup>14</sup>.

#### V. AUGUSTIN DONTENWILL

After visiting the Oblates and their missions in Southern Africa in 1922, Archbishop Dontenwill addressed a circular to the whole Congregation:

“Yes, one is proud to be an Oblate – when one can touch with our own finger, as we have done, so many proofs of the continuation of the apostolic spirit among our men; when one has seen them united as brothers, joyful and active, working happily – in poverty and privations, in self-denial and with no

thought of themselves, and doing honor to their obligations as Oblates (insofar as their isolation permits).

And when the people evangelized by them repeatedly in many ways spoke their appreciation for "their Fathers", our heart swelled with legitimate pride and thanked the Lord for having kept them so faithful to their holy vocation. These words of the Preface of our Constitutions came to mind: "Such are the great works of salvation that can crown the efforts of priests whom God has inspired with the desire to form themselves into a Society... if they carry out their duty worthily, faithfully, fulfilling their splendid vocation"<sup>15</sup>.

## VI. THÉODORE LABOURÉ

Although de Mazenod had accepted seven parishes, including five in France, the question of administering parishes in non-mission countries has been the frequent subject of controversy among Oblates. No Superior General spoke more strongly about the foreign missions than Théodore Labouré, yet he did not hesitate to praise and approve the pastoral work of the Oblates in England. To commemorate the centenary of the foundation of the Congregation, in the British Isles in 1941 he addressed a circular to the Anglo-Irish province:

"...The city parishes such as Liverpool, Leeds, Leith, London, etc., have progressed and their number has grown specially during the past twenty years... In establishing a Congregation of missionaries, Mgr. de Mazenod had in mind the poor of Jesus Christ. In his burning zeal for souls it was in the evangelizing of the poorest and most abandoned that he sought to spend himself and be spent. "Evangelizare pauperibus misit me". Does it not then seem providential

that the Oblates of Mary Immaculate were in the end to establish lasting foundations in populous cities rather than those rural districts where they first began their missionary efforts? In Liverpool, Leeds, London and Leith, the work of the Fathers was, especially in the pioneer days of these missions, to minister in the crowded districts of dire poverty. I need not recall to you, my dear Fathers and Brothers, the heroic labours of the Oblates in the slum quarters of your many parishes. You know how generously the Fathers devoted themselves to alleviating the spiritual and material distress of their flocks. Urged on by the charity of Christ they loved and laboured for the poor, realizing to the letter the words of our Divine Lord, "Pauperes evangelizantur". The poor are still with you and you continue this noble ministry of priestly zeal among them. It is an apostolate of which your Province may be proud"<sup>16</sup>.

Placing his letter in the context of the horrors of World War II, Labouré concluded his circular by exhorting the members of the province to greater heights by following the inspirations of de Mazenod:

"And then looking to the future should we not turn to the Almighty in these days of anxiety and sorrow begging for still greater strength. No doubt you accept with humble resignation the privations, dangers and misfortunes that may come upon your houses, your churches. The important thing is to implore from God not so much a miraculous saving of our material possessions but rather the preservation and deepening of what matters far more, our religious spirit, in constant fidelity to our Rule and in the cultivation with greater intensity of those virtues which our Venerated Founder always wishes to

find in all his Oblates. The salvation of those souls confided to your care and their advancement in Christian virtues will ever be the subject of your petitions. Then finally as a helpful means of realising that end, the preservation of the establishments you have built up. Pray often and ask the prayers of your flocks in your churches and missions, but especially in your own spiritual life ever strive after that ideal of priestly and religious perfection so beautifully portrayed in the Preface and on every page of our Holy Rule"<sup>17</sup>.

## VII. LÉO DESCHÂTELETS

The practice of writing circular letters by the Superior General that were veritable encyclicals was restored by Léo Deschâtelets. On August 15, 1951, he sent to the Congregation *Our Vocation and Our Life of Intimate Union with Mary Immaculate*. This 92 page letter was meant to be a basic document of Oblate spiritual life. He states that the "type of spiritual and apostolic man described by the Rule" comprises eight characteristics or elements and continues:

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

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 judgement, it is undeniable that this point is established in our very foundation...

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...

Let us remark, in passing, that this shows that 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...

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 upon 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 extent that the Oblate who would subordinate sacerdotal grade 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. (Note) Let us remark in passing, that this shows that our Oblate 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"<sup>18</sup>.

### VIII. FERNAND JETTÉ

Fernand Jetté encouraged the vocation of the Brothers in the Congregation; he insisted that their varied services – whether technical, professional or pastoral, whether within our houses or without – be respected. He also sought to promote their human and spiritual formation, but he always reaffirmed the priestly or clerical nature of the Congregation.

As Vicar General in his November 14 report to the 1974 General Chapter, Jetté pointed out the evolution taking place within the Congregation:

"... Major elements are changing little by little in an imperceptible way, without our taking the time necessary to take a hard look at them and to consider them under all aspects.

I will mention two points to illustrate my meaning: the priestly character of the Institute, which tends to disappear under pressure from the missionary character, and the role of the Brothers in the Institute, which tends to change substantially, impelled by the tendency to promote the human status of the Brother.

Perhaps we should go along in that direction? But then we should face up squarely to the questions, bearing in mind all considerations, particularly the mind of the Founder..."<sup>19</sup>.

The following year, in a conference on the Oblate charism, he called to mind the intention of the Founder:

"An important point should be noted: an Institute's charism cannot simply be reduced to its spirit or mission. It also includes its way of life in its essential elements. Priests – who can be joined by Brothers – Missionaries, Religious, that is how the Founder finally wanted the Oblates to be"<sup>20</sup>.

During the International Congress of Brothers, on August 27, 1985, he again took up this question and placed it in its proper theological context:

"In some places during the 60's and 70's, there was a tendency to remove the sacerdotal character from the definition of the Oblate. Some wanted to define the Oblate as "a religious missionary" and no more. There was also a tendency to give priority to secular and professional training in the formation of future Oblates, even of priests.

I remember, the remark of Fr. Deschâtelets, who was then Superior General, during a visit to Montreal: "If somebody wants to change the nature of the Congregation he can ask the Holy See for permission to do so, but let it not be said that this is what the Founder wanted".

A year later, on December 4, 1974, Pope Paul VI gave a similar reminder to the Jesuits: "You are religious... You are also apostles... Besides, you are *priests*: there you have one of the essential characteristics of the Company. We must not, of course, forget the ancient and legitimate tradition of those worthy Brothers, who were not in sacred orders, and who have always played an effective and honored role in the Company. But "priesthood" was formally required by the Founder for all (solemnly) professed religious, and with very good reason, because priesthood is

necessary to the Order he founded with the principal aim of sanctifying one by work and sacrament. The priestly character is effectively required because you consecrate your energies to the apostolic life, *pleno sensu* I repeat: from the charism of the Order of priesthood, which conforms us to Christ as sent by the Father, is born mainly the apostolicity of the mission on which, as Jesuits, you are sent"<sup>21</sup>.

What these words amounted to was: the apostolic purpose *pleno sensu* of your Institute – “the sanctification of men by word and sacrament” – requires the ministerial priesthood. This is equally true for us Oblates and this is the reason why, before approving the Constitutions and Rules, in 1982, the Congregation for Religious asked that the text say so explicitly by adding a sentence to Article 1: “We are a clerical Congregation of pontifical right”. It is a requirement which is inherent in our purpose as expressed, for example in Article 7 of our Constitutions”<sup>22</sup>.

## IX. 1982 CONSTITUTIONS AND RULES

Paul VI in the “*Motu Proprio*” *Eccllesiae Sanctae* on August 6, 1966 issued special norms for the implementation of the decisions of Vatican II and set the ground rules for the renewal of the constitutions of religious institutes:

“13. A combination of both elements, the spiritual and the juridical, is necessary, so as to ensure that the principal codes of each institute will have a solid foundation and be permeated by a spirit which is authentic and a law which is alive. Care must be taken not to produce a text either purely juridical or merely hortatory”<sup>23</sup>.

The first article of the Constitutions

of a religious institute is of particular importance because of the practice of its stating the nature of the institute both as to its end or purpose and its juridical position in, the Church.

Consequently the first article of the Constitutions written by de Mazenod and approved by Leo XII in 1826 stated that the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate were “*sacerdotes saeculares*”, secular priests. This is, of course, to be understood in light of the canon law of that time which considered members of congregations with simple vows to be seculars and not religious.

The Constitutions published in 1853 added the expression “*Religionis votis obligati*”, bound by religious vows, to the words “*sacerdotes saeculares*”. Following the 1917 Code of Canon Law which recognized members of religious institutes with simple vows to be religious, the 1928 Constitutions dropped the word “*saeculares*”. These were the last Constitutions to be submitted to the Holy See for approval prior to those prepared by the 1980 General Chapter.

A religious institute approved by the Church is either of pontifical right or of diocesan right – depending on whether it was approved by the Holy See or by a diocesan bishop. The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate became a religious congregation and one of pontifical right with the approval by Leo XII. This latter was not stated in the Constitutions, but it was clear from the various papal documents of approval of the Constitutions and of subsequent changes in them.

Every Oblate is familiar with the exuberant joy that de Mazenod expressed in his letter to Tempier on February 18, 1826.<sup>24</sup> This same joy was expressed again in a letter addressed to all Oblates on March 25 of that year:

“Rejoice with me and congratulate yourselves, my beloved for it has pleased the Lord to grant us great favors; our Holy Father the Pope, Leo XII, gloriously reigning from the chair of St. Peter, has sanctioned with his apostolic approbation, on March 21 of this current year, our Institute, our Constitutions and Rules. See then to our little flock, the Father of the family has kindly wished to open wide the field of the holy Church, given a place in the hierarchic order, associated with the venerable Congregations which have spread throughout the Church...”<sup>25</sup>

The Congregation of Religious and Secular Institutes insisted that the first article of the Constitutions submitted for approval contain the expression “clerical Congregation of pontifical right” Although this canonical terminology was not found in the previous Constitutions, the concept is nothing new and was implicitly contained in all previously approved Constitutions – since the first article of all previous texts spoke of the Oblates as a community of priests and the various papal briefs of approval were contained in all the printed editions of the Constitutions thus indicating that Congregation was of pontifical right.

De Mazenod founded a congregation of priests to do priestly ministry as missionaries. Because of this priestly or sacerdotal purpose of the Congregation it is, to use canonical terminology, a clerical institute:

“Can. 588, §2. A clerical institute is one, which by reason of the end or purpose intended by the founder, or by reason of lawful tradition... presupposes the exercise of sacred orders, and is recognized as such by ecclesiastical authority”.

In his commentary on the first article of the 1982 Constitutions, Fr. Jetté

wrote: “After recalling the Congregation’s clerical and universal character (“of pontifical right”), the second paragraph states that the Congregation is made up of priests and brothers who live in apostolic communities, who bind themselves to God by the vows of religion and share in the same mission: “cooperating with the Saviour and imitating his example, we commit ourselves principally to evangelizing the poor”. This tells us that all Oblates, the brothers as well as the priests, are equally religious and evangelizers of the poor. Because some have been ordained to the ministerial priesthood, however, the evangelization activities are complementary and in part different: this will be spelled out in article 7 and in Rule 3 [R 7c in the CRR 2000].”

“A brief historical review can help us to understand better this distinction in the Oblate life. In the beginning, Eugene de Mazenod wanted to establish a Society of priests who would dedicate their lives to evangelizing the poor, especially by the preaching of missions and the celebration of the sacraments (Reconciliation and the Eucharist). These men were called “missionaries” or “apostolic men”. Lay persons soon came to join them: they wanted to consecrate themselves to God in the Oblate religious life and to cooperate, according to their preparation and talents, with the missionary activity of these “apostolic men”. The Founder welcomed them with joy and asked that they be looked upon “not as domestic servants”, but rather “as brothers” who share our life and work (cf. *Selected Texts...*, nos. 10, 17, 18, 190.)”

“Since then until today our terminology has changed: the terms “missionary” and “apostolic men” are now equally applied to the brothers and to the priests.”<sup>26</sup>

## X. PRIESTS AND BROTHERS

Membership of laymen or brothers in clerical religious institutes is an ancient tradition in the Church and poses, of itself, no anomaly. However, the question does arise as to the relationship of the non-ordained to the priestly element in the Oblate vocation, spirituality, and vocation. How do the brothers share in this essential element of the Congregation?

In preparing for the 1966 General Chapter the brothers of Bolivia meeting in a congress responded in this way:

“The brothers are unanimous in saying that they joined the Congregation of the O.M.I.’s because they saw the possibility of working directly with the Oblate priests to replace the priest in temporal tasks, so that he could be one hundred percent pastor of souls; to be a real companion, a support, a confidant of the Oblate priest. Because of this close relationship with the priesthood, the Oblate brother has truly a priestly vocation, which the teaching and nursing brothers do not have.<sup>27</sup>”

## XI. GENERAL NORMS OF OBLATE FORMATION

The *General Norms of Oblate Formation* published in 1984 by the General Administration responded to this question in a positive way by indicating that priesthood is not a divisive element in the life of the Congregation, but through complementarity, a source of apostolic and fraternal unity of the priests and brothers in the common priestly mission of the Congregation:

“In fidelity to the Founder’s charism, the priesthood remains an essential element of the Congregation, since the principal goal of its mission is full

evangelization: witness, proclamation of God’s Word, implanting and building up of the Church, celebration of the sacraments, especially of Reconciliation and of the Eucharist. As priests and Brothers, Oblates have complementary responsibilities and roles in evangelizing – cf. C 7 and RR 3 and 7 [RR 7c and 7e in the CCRR 2000]. The Oblate religious missionary life and the mission of both priests and Brothers are inseparably linked to the ministerial priesthood (nos. 7-8).

They [the Brothers] also share, by reason of belonging to a Congregation whose identity is marked by priestly ministry, in a particular relationship to the ordained priesthood.

With the riches proper to their vocation, the Oblate Brothers share actively in the community life and works of the Province. Their vocation does not separate them from their fellow Oblates either in their living or working situations. The tasks assumed by the Brothers in service of the mission depend on the life and options taken by each Province; the range of these tasks is very broad and should always remain open” (no. 72).

## XII. MARCELLO ZAGO

On January 25, 1992 in preparing for the XXXII General Chapter, Father Marcello Zago, wrote the Oblates in first formation a letter on “The Priestly Character of the Congregation.” In this letter, he wrote: “The Oblate charism is a gift which the Spirit communicated to us through a concrete individual, Eugene de Mazenod. The Lord prepared this gift through the personal experience of the Founder who bore the stamp of the priestly vocation. [...] The mission of the Church takes on a great multi-

plicity of forms and ways as John Paul II's missionary encyclical reminds us<sup>30</sup>. All Christians share the responsibility of the mission and make their contribution according to the state in life and charism proper to each one.<sup>31</sup> The missionary priority entrusted to our Congregation is priestly, specifically because it is focused on the proclamation of the Good News and on the establishing of Christian communities. The Oblates' specific contribution – their first, though not their exclusive priority – to the Church's mission is "principally [...] evangelizing the poor" (C 1).<sup>32</sup>

WILLIAM H. WOESTMAN

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See DESCHATELETS, Leo, O.M.I., "Report on the State of the Congregation, April 11, 1972", in *Circ. adm.*, VIII, p. 381.

<sup>2</sup> Code of Canon Law, canon 784, no. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Letter to Abbé Charles de Forbin-Janson, October 28, 1814 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, p. 2-3.

<sup>4</sup> Letter to Father Henry Tempier, October 9, 1815, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, p. 6-7.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in *Circ. adm.*, no. 14, May 20, 1864, vol. 1, p. 123.

<sup>6</sup> "Constitutions et Règles de 1818" in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 54-55.

<sup>7</sup> "Constitutions et Règles de 1827" pars. II, cap. III, art. 5, in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 400.

<sup>8</sup> See SEUMOIS, André, O.M.I., *Théologie missionnaire*, vol. 1, p. 8-15.

<sup>9</sup> "Constitutions et Règles de 1853," pars I, cap. III, par. I, art. 1.

<sup>10</sup> "Constitutions et Règles de 1853," Part One, Chapter Three, par. 2, in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 37-38.

<sup>11</sup> GRANDIN, Vital, O.M.I., *Quelques notes sur Monseigneur Taché, O.M.I.*, manuscript, vol. 5, no pagination, quoted in BENOIT, P.,

*Vie de Mgr Taché*, Beauchemin Editions, Montreal, 1904, p. 333-334.

<sup>12</sup> Circular Letter no. 11, in *Circ. adm.*, vol. 1, p. 2-3.

<sup>13</sup> Circular Letter no. 61, in *Circ. adm.*, vol. 2, p. 1-2.

<sup>14</sup> Circular Letter no. 71, October 17, 1899, in *Circ. adm.*, vol. 2, p. 421-423.

<sup>15</sup> Circular Letter no. 130, January 6, 1923, in *Circ. adm.*, vol. 4, p. 9-10.

<sup>16</sup> Circular Letter no. 169, April 15, 1941, in *Circ. adm.*, vol. 4, p. 10-11.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15-16.

<sup>18</sup> Circular Letter no. 191, in *Circ. adm.*, vol. 5, p. 8-20.

<sup>19</sup> *Acta Administrationis Generalis O.M.I.*, vol. 2, prima pars, 1974 p. 125.

<sup>20</sup> JETTÉ, Fernand, *The Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate: Addresses and written texts, 1975-1985*, General House, Rome, 1985, p. 59.

<sup>21</sup> AAS 66 (1974) 717.

<sup>22</sup> JETTÉ, Fernand, O.M.I., "La vocation du Frère oblat hier et aujourd'hui", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 45 (1986), p. 156-157; *OMI Documentation*, 139/86, p. 4-5.

<sup>23</sup> See Code of Canon Law, canon 587.

<sup>24</sup> *Letters to the Oblates of France, 1826-1830*, Oblate Writings I, vol. 7, p. 38-42.

<sup>25</sup> *Letters to the Oblates of France, 1826-1830*, Oblate Writings I, vol. 7, p. 68.

<sup>26</sup> JETTÉ, Fernand, O.M.I., *O.M.I., The Apostolic Man: A commentary on the 1982 edition of the Oblate Constitutions and Rules*, p. 47 & 48.

<sup>27</sup> *Congrès des Frères Oblats de Marie Immaculée, Bolivie, les 4 et 5 juin, 1965*, Bolivia, Coadjutor Brothers, Archives of the General House, Rome.

<sup>28</sup> Chapter I, 2, p. 6.

<sup>29</sup> Chapter IV, Section IV, 1, B, p. 52.

<sup>30</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptoris missio*, December 7, 1990 in AAS, 83 (1991), pp. 249-340, nn. 41-60.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, nn. 61-86.

<sup>32</sup> ZAGO, Marcello, O.M.I., "Le caractère sacerdotal de la Congrégation" in *Documentation O.M.I.*, no. 185 (April 1992), pp. 2, 4-5.

## RELIGIOUS LIFE

*Summary: I. Religious life in the writings of Eugene de Mazenod. II. After Eugene de Mazenod's death.*

Eugene de Mazenod did not have two vocations: one to the priesthood and the other to the religious life – he had one vocation exclusively, that of *becoming fully an apostolic man*. The priesthood and the religious life were contained within that vocation. *Priesthood*: to be a priest who teaches, who proclaims the Word of God, who administers God's pardon, who celebrates the Eucharist, and who gathers the Christian community around Christ. *Religious life*: to be a consecrated apostolic man who gives all, who refuses nothing to God, who is interiorly free, a man who is detached, zealous for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, in a word, inclined to follow and practice the evangelical counsels.

Eugene de Mazenod used to say: "If we wish to achieve the same results as the Apostles and the first followers of the Gospel we must use the same means as they and, this all the more because we do not have the power to perform miracles and so we must bring back those who have gone astray by the splendor of our virtues".<sup>1</sup> That is why he felt it was so important to have Father Henry Tempier as a member of his group. "Be sure that I regard it as most important for God's work that you be one of us. I count on you more than on myself for the regularity of a house which, *in my mind and my hopes*, must reproduce the perfection of the first disciples of the apostles. I base my hopes on that much more than on eloquent discourses. Have they ever converted

anyone? Oh! how well will you do what must be done!"<sup>2</sup>

We can say that, after his "conversion" during the years 1805-1807 and in spite of his faults,<sup>3</sup> the will to make a total gift of himself to God was always present in his heart. Once he had experienced Christ's love for him, and how Christ offered his blood to save him, Eugene de Mazenod wanted to live only for him and for the salvation of all.

In this article, we will explicate what religious life is for the Oblates: its birth with Eugene de Mazenod, and more briefly, its evolution and present state. Some studies do exist on this subject; they can be found especially in *Etudes oblates (Vie Oblate Life)*<sup>4</sup> and in some recent works.<sup>5</sup>

### I. RELIGIOUS LIFE IN THE WRITINGS OF EUGENE DE MAZENOD

In the third part of the article on Eugene de Mazenod: "The Spirituality of the Oblate of Mary Immaculate" in this Dictionary, we touched upon this question and laid out the context in which it is necessary to treat it.<sup>6</sup>

Eugene's attraction towards the religious life revealed itself step by step and in various ways. When he was 13 or 14 years of age in Venice, the life and attitudes of his spiritual teacher, Don Bartolo Zinelli had a strong impact on him. The same can be said for his reading of *Lettres édifiantes sur les missions étrangères écrites par les missionnaires de la Compagnie de Jésus*

(Edifying Letters on the Foreign Missions Written by the Missionaries of the Company of Jesus). He would later write: "My vocation to the ecclesiastical state dates from there [Venice] and perhaps also to a more perfect state."<sup>7</sup> At this point, it was not a question of religious life, but that the impact of the conduct and regularity of Don Bartolo's life was not lost on him. It would seem that in Naples and Palermo he did not give this matter much thought; and the same can be said of his first years back in France (1802-1805). Nevertheless, he did notice that the people were spiritually deprived, especially the poor; he noted as well the small number of priests and lack of religious to help them. He himself set to work caring for the prisoners of Aix.

On a Good Friday, probably in 1807 – he was 25 years old at the time – God's grace became more manifest and changed his life. The sight of the cross of Christ touched him to the depths of his soul. "[...] despite my grief, or rather through my grief, my soul took wings for its last end, towards God its only good whose loss it felt so keenly".<sup>8</sup> The following year, "a strong impulse from without", a genuine action of the Holy Spirit, fixed his resolve to become a priest.<sup>9</sup>

The four years spent at Saint-Sulpice seminary increased his awareness of the needs of the Church. Those years brought him a more strongly structured spiritual life: exercises of piety, participation in the sacraments, a method for prayer, examination of conscience, a rule of life... He admired the Sulpicians and his knowledge of the religious life increased. Already cool towards his idea of entering the priesthood, his mother became even more worried when she saw him beginning to associate with "the Brothers". In a letter

of March 23, 1809 to her, Eugene addressed this issue: "I could not help smiling when I read your plea not to get too involved with these good Brothers [the Grey Brothers] and to remember that our mission must be different. I thought I detected in this maternal solicitude a certain anxiety lest I become attracted to the way of life of these good Brothers as I had veneration for their virtues. I must not keep you on tenterhooks before reassuring you about this. I have never for a single moment thought of taking a step so much beyond my strength and so little to my taste. It would take a quite different kind of virtue than I have to embrace the highest level of evangelical perfection and God has never inspired me with the least attraction to the Retreat [that is to say the Priests of the Christian Retreat?] and an over-large degree of dependence. If one day I can do something for this establishment, I will do it with all my heart, as I am convinced they do an enormous amount of good, but that is as far as it goes..."<sup>10</sup>

In 1811 towards the end of his seminary training, Eugene had need of a house servant. His choice fell upon a former religious, a Trappist Camaldolese called Brother Maur. In 1812, Brother Maur remained in Eugene's employ and accompanied him to Aix. In 1814, the Trappists were re-established in France. When Eugene consulted M. Duclaux about it, he responded in a letter which read in part: "I have the clear sense that you are right in feeling the loss of Brother Maur. It will be difficult for you to find someone to replace him. You have made significant sacrifices to retain him, but at the time you chose him, you were aware that in his heart he was a Trappist as well as being a vowed member of that society and that he had made an irrevocable com-

mitment binding himself to a greater Master... From the moment that a Trappist house will have been firmly re-established, he will have an obligation in conscience to withdraw to it; this is a sacrifice you owe to God and to religion which is well served by these good Trappist Fathers."<sup>11</sup>

This brother was a fervent religious who, while living in the world, had maintained the holy practices of his state as a religious. At Aix, Eugene had given him the task of "rebuking him for his faults at oraison in the morning".<sup>12</sup> On September 17, 1814, Father de Mazenod received him officially as a member of his Christian Youth Group. "[...] When he was received, the Director [...] did not forget to point out to the brother's new confreres, the youthful members of the group, all the advantages that would accrue to them from the bond of prayer and merit henceforth established between them and this holy religious who from the depths of his solitude, even in the stillness of the night, would in some way watch over them [...]"<sup>13</sup> The next day, Brother Maur left Aix and withdrew to the Trappist Monastery. Father John Mary Larose wrote: "It is our impression that it was from this humble Camaldolese brother that our Founder learned the profound richness of the religious life. We would almost say: he made his novitiate as a religious".<sup>14</sup>

That may be so, but in the meantime Father de Mazenod had reflected on the religious life; he had made retreats which drew their inspiration from Jesuit authors, among others that of Father François Nepveu.<sup>15</sup> He had had contact with the Redemptorists, the Lazarists, the Sulpicians; he had mused about the ancient Orders and mourned their disappearance from France. In 1811, he wrote to his sister, Eugenie: "According

to what time it is, take yourself off in spirit and keep company with saintly people praising and blessing the holy Name of God, to the Carmelites between 9 and 11, between 11 and 2 the Religious who in various places still have the happiness of being able to sing the Lord's praises at the hours prescribed by their rule; from 2 to 4 to the Trappists [...] When one has faith and even a tiny modicum of love of God it is easy to find ways of not losing sight for too long of one's well-beloved."<sup>16</sup>

In 1814, Eugene shared his own search and his availability with Charles de Forbin-Janson: "I still do not know what God wants of me but am so resolved to do his will that as soon as it is known to me I will leave tomorrow for the moon, if I have to. I keep nothing secret from you. So I will tell you without ado that I am hesitating between two plans: either to go off and bury myself in some well regulated community of an Order that I have always loved; or do in my diocese exactly what you have done successfully at Paris. ... I was feeling more inclined to the first plan because, to tell the truth, I was quite sick of living solely for others. ... The second plan, however, seems to me more useful, given the dreadful plight to which the people have been reduced. ... I also have in mind some rules to propose for I insist that we live in a completely regular manner. ... May God be glorified, may souls be saved – that is what matters. I see no further than that."<sup>17</sup> It is the apostolic orientation which holds sway, but with the desire "that we live in a completely regular manner".

In 1813, Eugene founded the Youth Congregation of Aix and endowed it with a serious rule of life which he held to be very important.<sup>18</sup> In 1815, he was looking for candidates to establish the

mission of Provence. He knew that he was unable to succeed by himself. His letters to Father Tempier are specific and clear: he wants to have a group of "fervent missionaries", who "will live together in the same house" and "live under a rule which they will adopt with common accord". He wants "men who have the will and the courage to walk in the footsteps of the Apostles". He wants to see that "the greatest regularity be established" in this house. "And it is precisely for that reason that you are necessary to me because I know you to be capable of embracing an exemplary rule of life and of persevering in it."<sup>19</sup>

A few weeks later, on December 13, 1814, he reiterates to Father Tempier: "Be as humble as you wish but know, just the same, that you are necessary for this mission work. I speak to you before God and openly from my heart. Were it a question of going out to preach more or less well the Word of God, mingled with much alloy of self, of going far and wide for the purpose, if you wish, of winning souls for God without taking much trouble to be men of interior life, truly apostolic men, I think it would not be difficult to replace you. But can you believe I want merchandise of that sort? We must be truly saints ourselves. In saying that, we include all that can possibly be said. Now are there many priests who thus wish to be saints? Only by not knowing them could we believe that they do. I myself know the contrary. Most wish to go to heaven by a road other than that of abnegation, renunciation, forgetfulness of self, poverty, fatigue, etc. Perhaps they are not obliged to do more or otherwise than they do but at least they should not be so obstructive if some, believing that more is demanded by the needs of people, want to try to be more devoted in order to save them."<sup>20</sup>

In his January 25, 1816 letter of petition to the Vicars General of Aix, Eugene restated his direction and goal: he wants to found "a regular community of missionaries [...] in an effort to be useful to the diocese, while at the same time working at their own sanctification, in conformity with their own vocation".<sup>21</sup> He even specifies: "[The community wants] to provide its members with the means necessary to practise the religious virtues to which they are so strongly attracted that the greater number of them would consecrate themselves for life to their observance in some religious Order, did they not nurture the hope of finding in the missionaries' community more or less the same advantages as in the religious state to which they wanted to pledge themselves".<sup>22</sup>

In a letter of November 4, 1817 to Father Tempier, who at that time was in charge of the formation of young Oblates, he stressed: "As the number of young people who belong to the house has increased, exactness and regularity must grow in proportion. This is the time to form the spirit of the house which I have discussed with you in another letter. You have to beware of frivolity, of self-sufficiency, lack of discipline, independence... I quite insist that all give a good example at the seminary ... They ought not to forget that we are a Congregation of regular clerics, that we ought in consequence to be more fervent than simple seminarians, that we are called to replace in the Church the piety and all the virtues of the religious Orders, that all their actions ought to be done with the dispositions in which the apostles were when they were in the Cenacle waiting for the Holy Spirit to come and enflame them with his love and give them the signal to go forth swiftly and conquer the world."<sup>23</sup>

Already Eugene viewed his society as “a Congregation of regular clerics”! We were not “religious”, but as far as the Founder was concerned we should have the spirit of religious and live their regularity. Father Georges Cosentino observes: “In the January 25, 1816 Rule, even though vows are not mentioned, it is still explicitly stated: ‘Upon entering the Society, the Missionaries must resolve to persevere in it their whole life through. [...] Each individual member makes the commitment toward the Society to live in obedience to his superiors and the observation of the statutes and rules’.”<sup>24</sup>

On Holy Thursday, April 11, 1816, Father de Mazenod and Father Tempier made a mutual vow of obedience. The Founder wrote: “My intention in dedicating myself to the ministry of the missions to work especially for the instruction and conversion of the most abandoned souls, was to follow the example of the Apostles in their life of devotedness and self-denial. I became convinced that, in order to obtain the same results from our preaching, we had to walk in their footsteps and as far as we could, practice the same virtues. Hence I considered choosing the evangelical counsels, to which they had been so faithful, as indispensable, lest our words be no more than what I have noticed about the words of those who proclaim the same truths, namely sounding brass and tinkling cymbals. My consistent thought has even been that our little family should consecrate itself to God and to the service of the Church through the vows of religion... Briefly put, Father Tempier and I felt that we should not delay any longer, and on Holy Thursday ... we pronounced our vows with an indescribable joy.”<sup>25</sup> In Father Tempier’s death notice, Father Joseph Fabre would say: “We can consider this

act as the initial step toward religious life, a consecration they would most joyfully make one day”<sup>26</sup>

The founding of a house at Notre-Dame du Laus beyond the limits of the diocese of Aix, in January 8, 1819, compelled them to take a further step. Eugene had grasped the fact that by expanding beyond the borders of a single diocese his group needed some Constitutions. In the period of August-September 1818, he withdrew to Saint-Laurent du Verdon and compiled the text, drawing much inspiration from Blessed Alphonsus Liguori.

Father de Mazenod discussed the problem of religious vows with the members of the Institute during the first General Chapter in 1818, and since the priests were not all in agreement, he brought the scholastics into the voting process – the Constitutions with their commitment to vows were thus accepted. There were seven priests involved (Eugene de Mazenod, Henry Tempier, Pierre-Nolasque Mie, Noël François Moreau, Jean-François Deblieu, Emmanuel Maunier and Marius Aubert) and three scholastics (Hippolyte Courtès, Marius Suzanne and Alexandre Dupuy). Six opted for the acceptance of vows. On November 1, 1818 the first profession of obedience, chastity and perseverance took place in the chapel at Aix, at the close of the retreat. Two members, Fathers Deblieu and Aubert, chose to wait.<sup>27</sup>

The Founder was motivated by a number of factors with regard to the vow of perseverance. First among these was the fact that Alphonsus de Liguori had written this into his Rules. Then there was a compelling historic reason as well, that is, that at that time the bishops could, or thought they could, dispense individuals from vows emitted in Congregations with simple vows.

As for the vow of poverty, Eugene de Mazenod did not judge that his Institute was ready to accept it. He himself desired to take this vow; and he encouraged his companions to "absorb well the spirit of [poverty]".<sup>28</sup> Subsequent Chapters would see to it that this was accomplished. Indeed, the second General Chapter held on October 21, 1821 introduced it into the Constitutions. So it was that in 1825 when Rome was petitioned to approve the Institute, the Constitutions contained the four vows.

These vows, rooted in a solid community life, based upon a profound love of Jesus Christ, on the will to "work earnestly to become saints, [to] follow courageously in the footsteps of the Apostles... [to] renounce [oneself] entirely... [to be] ready to sacrifice [one's] goods, [one's] talents, [one's] rest, [one's] very person and [one's] life for the love of Jesus Christ, the service of the Church and the sanctification of one's neighbor..." and to reach out to others "to fight to the death" to teach them "who Jesus Christ is" and "extend the empire of the Savior",<sup>29</sup> that is what the description of an Oblate is in 1826!

The Founder also asked his members to live under the patronage of Mary Immaculate, to be very good-hearted to people, especially the poor, and to be faithful to the life of prayer: two half hours every day; faithful to recollection: "The entire life of the members of the Society should be one of continued recollection"; faithful to the practice of mortification: "Gospel workers should also hold in the highest esteem the practice of Christian mortification if they truly wish their work to bear abundant fruit. Consequently, all the members of the Society will apply themselves mainly to mortifying their internal inclinations, to mastering their pas-

sions, to bringing their wills into complete subjection in every respect, to striving to imitate the Apostle in taking pleasure in the sufferings, rejections and humiliations of Jesus Christ."<sup>30</sup> In addition to that he added: "In all the houses wherever practical and feasible, the members will recite the canonical hours of the breviary in choir with great recollection."<sup>31</sup>

One paragraph of these Constitutions, which remained part of the official text right up to 1966, is the one which mentions the Oblate's life as being divided into two parts: one part devoted to prayer and the other to external activities. "It has already been said that the missionaries ought, as far as the weakness of human nature allows, to imitate in everything the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, the chief Founder of the Society and of the Apostles, our first fathers. In imitation of these great models, one portion of their life will be given over to prayer, interior recollection and contemplation in the privacy of God's house, wherein they will dwell together in common. The other portion will be entirely consecrated to outside works requiring the most active zeal such as missions, preaching, confessions, catechizing, directing young people, visiting the sick and prisoners, giving spiritual retreats and other similar exercises." The Rule ends thus: "However, their chief concern will be, as much when out on missions as when in the house, to make progress in the paths of ecclesiastical and religious perfection; they will especially cultivate the virtues of humility, obedience, poverty, self-denial, the spirit of mortification, the spirit of faith, purity of intention and others; in a word, they will strive to become other Jesus Christs, radiating everywhere the fragrance of his lovable virtues".<sup>32</sup>

Subsequently, in his visits and in his letters to the end of his life, the Founder strongly stressed the kind of regularity necessary to live as an Oblate. For example, at the age of 74, he addressed the Congregation in the following words: "Thanks be to God, the majority of you have understood this well. Yet, I say this in sorrow, too many still leave much to be desired in this matter. One would say that our Rules and Constitutions are for them a sealed book ... What are they doing during oraison...? Of what use to them are the two examinations of conscience... Do they find no food for their soul in the Holy Office... in the Holy Sacrifice...? And what about this day of retreat each month and the spiritual exercises which each year precede the renewal of vows? Or confession at least once a week, and direction conferences of the couple. In short, this ensemble of a life of perfection which is quite adequate to form great saints in the God's Church? Flens dico, it is precisely the abuse of so many graces which constitutes unfaithfulness ... and which explains the distressing apostasies that embarrass us."<sup>33</sup>

As Bishop of Marseilles (1837-1861), Eugene de Mazenod was pleased to welcome several religious congregations into his diocese.<sup>34</sup> As Superior General of the Oblates, his main task was the deepening of the missionary and religious commitment of his Society.<sup>35</sup> The nine General Chapters at which he presided would bring the necessary clarifications called for with regard to the development and the life of the Institute: for example, the sending of members to the foreign missions (1831), the adopting of the moral theology of Blessed Alphonsus Liguori (1837), knowing how "to bring our Rules more in tune with the needs of the Society and also with regard to the

broader horizons opening up to us" (1843), establishing provinces in the Congregation (1850), launching the cause of beatification of Father Dominic Albini (1856)... And even affirming in 1850 that which is truly characteristic of Eugene: the necessity to "be perfect religious in order to be good missionaries".<sup>36</sup>

## II. AFTER EUGENE DE MAZENOD'S DEATH

After the death of the Founder, how did religious life evolve among the Oblates and what is its state today?

On the whole and right up until after the Second World War (1939-1945), the Congregation grew and its religious life proved itself faithful and solidly grounded. Geographic expansion was intense: in 1861 the Oblates numbered 414 members, while in 1995, they numbered 5,000 in more than 60 countries. The Constitutions and Rules have remained substantially the same; with a serious transformation in form only in 1966.<sup>37</sup> The Superiors General and the Chapters endeavoured to respond to the needs of the Church and the world of the poor: they adapted the Congregation to the changing times; they founded new missions; they strengthened the family bonds among Oblates; they sought the best means to obtain financial resources for the Institute; they founded the review Missions O.M.I. in 1862; they fostered collaboration with Christian lay people by establishing the Missionary Association of Mary Immaculate (1893)... Religious life as such, in its form and content, was not touched; it was a part of our being. It was lived, it was studied in depth and it was adapted to new canonical requirements (1908, 1926), to external circum-

stances such as the two World Wars, to the appeals of the Church (for example, involvement in Catholic Action, and the development of missions in Latin America). A good deal of insistence was placed on the community and family spirit, on devotion to Mary, the need to formulate the Oblate spirituality,<sup>38</sup> to have the Oblate saints glorified (Eugene de Mazenod, Dominique Albini, Vital Grandin, Joseph Gérard, Ovide Charlebois, Brother Anthony Kowalczyk...)

For the hundredth anniversary of the Congregation, Bishop Augustin Donatenwill solidly affirmed the religious character of the Institute: "In the name of God, that of his Vicar on earth and our venerated Founder, I affirm that in our Congregation we are religious before being missionaries, religious in order to be supernatural missionaries, religious to persevere unto death in apostolic work. The day we cease to be religious, even if we will still bear the title of missionary, even if we will carry out apostolic functions, even if we could be men who convert souls, we will nevertheless cease being in our vocation... It was our venerated Founder's will that in his youthful missionary society, religious life should precede, prepare and shape the apostolic life."<sup>39</sup>

At the beginning of his term as General in 1947, Father Leo Deschâtelets still benefited from this atmosphere. In his *Memoires*, he made the following observation: "At that time, we had to come up with solutions to so many problems! Never did we feel that the solutions we offered were not accepted or that those who took our advice regretted it. Quite the contrary was true. There were no problems about accepting authority or being obedient at that time. The Rule decided everything. We had only to appeal to it in all circumstances."<sup>40</sup>

Little by little, with the technological progress and social changes which followed the Second World War, there were changes in the world and in people's mentality. It was a whole new world; it demanded major changes. The Church herself felt the need for such a change and Pope John XXIII convoked the Second Vatican Council. He stated: "The Church [...] is witnessing a grave crisis in human society, a crisis which is leading to some important changes. While the human race is at the crossroads of a new era, enormous tasks await the Church, just as was the case in every difficult era. What is being asked of her at this moment is to inject the eternal, life-giving and divine energies of the Gospel into the veins of the modern world; this world which is proud of its most recent technical and scientific conquests, but which is experiencing the effects of a temporal order which some people have wanted to reorganize without any reference to God."<sup>41</sup> He spoke of his "total disagreement with those prophets of doom who constantly announce catastrophes as if the world were near its end"<sup>42</sup>. It was his wish that the Church "would direct its attention to the present times which bring with them new situations, new forms of life and open up new avenues of opportunity for Catholic apostolic work".<sup>43</sup> "We must joyfully and fearlessly address the work our era calls for by pursuing the road the Church has followed for almost two thousand years."<sup>44</sup>

This willingness to seek up-dating and serious renewal was asked of the Church in general and at the same time of religious life. The Council stated: "The up-to-date renewal of the religious life comprises both a constant return to the sources of Christian life in general and to the original inspiration of the In-

stitutes and their adaptation to the changed conditions of our time. [...] For this reason, the Constitutions, the "directories", the books of customs, the prayer books, should be suitably revised [...] Effective renewal and authentic adaptation cannot be achieved save with the cooperation of all the members of the Institute."<sup>45</sup>

Indeed, the world has become a new world, a world more dominated by industry and technology, a world of specialization and efficiency, a world imbued with a democratic mentality. This world has turned its back on the monolithic society with its hierarchic structure to adopt a pluralist liberal mentality. It has gone from being an aristocratic society to an egalitarian society. It no longer accepts a single belief, a faith which strives to compel recognition. And in like manner, it does not easily accept authority exercised in an autocratic fashion; it demands that authority be exercised in a collegial manner. Present-day society has become fluid. It has become a society subject to change and demands that institutions undergo revision, work in a collaborative fashion, and move forward.

At the same time, within religious life and according to geographic regions, individualism and the emphasis on personal fulfillment have become more pervasive. People became more critical; the demand was for the kind of evangelization work that is genuinely effective, which truly touches the lives of contemporary people, which stands in defence of justice and peace. In the West this modern culture became more pervasive and vocations to the religious life, especially the apostolic life, have greatly diminished. They seem to no longer respond to people's needs and not to be effective in the work of evan-

gelization. There is a problem of faith here, but in addition and primarily there is a human problem.

Among the Oblates, this crisis of religious life had its impact. In 1953, they asked for a new edition of the Constitutions and Rules. A post-capitular commission was established to deal with this issue. It was to present a working text to be revised by the following Chapter. The 1959 Chapter which lasted almost two months spent a long time studying the revised text, but felt unable to bring to completion the task entrusted to it. It asked that a new commission be established which would prepare a second revised edition. This second text was submitted to the 1966 Chapter. At that point, the Congregation took on a new direction: the Chapter made a clear option for an in-depth adaptation to the contemporary world. It discreetly put aside the revised text, a text still greatly influenced by the 1928 Constitutions, and drew up an entirely new text, using the language and perspectives adopted from the documents of the Second Vatican Council. The 1972 Chapter adopted the same orientation by giving its vote of approval to two documents: *Missionary Outlook and Administrative Structures*.

The step was taken. Oblate religious life made its entry into the present-day world and made the decision to face the challenges this world presented. The new text of the 1966 Constitutions was not flawless. Perhaps it depended too much on the Council and did not sufficiently reflect the character proper to the Oblates. Some balance had to be found. Working in close collaboration with the Congregation as a whole, this came about gradually and would produce the 1982 text, a more succinct, modern text in which the presence of Eugene de Mazenod is very apparent.

In the course of these years, our numbers fell considerably. In 1966, the Institute claimed a membership of more than 7,000; in 1995, it had 5,000 members. This decline in numbers was the common experience of religious families. But, above and beyond that, criticisms against our Oblate religious life were leveled from the inside. It was said that it was too "monastic"; it stressed too much the separation between prayer and external works; it lacked unity; it failed to take into account the diversity and increasing number of external works... And it even happened that some, strongly influenced by the changes going on in our contemporary world questioned their own commitment as religious. Here is an extreme example: "Three vows, three negations, ... a real demolishing of the human world... If the three vows separate us from the world, the world of human beings, of concrete and historic humanity, how can we draw any other conclusion than that they are dehumanizing factors? ... In the new cultural context (post Vatican II), religious life finds itself literally in a precarious position. Religious life, whose aim it was to separate people from the world in order to make them better Christians, is faced with the fact that a reassessment of the contemporary world indicates that the world is a necessary element, not only to achieve full humanization, but it is a necessary requirement for Christian salvation and salvation of the Church. From this it follows that the dehumanization inherent in the practice of the three vows no longer appears to be the reverse side of divinization ... [the vows] prove to be the would-be assassins of Christian life itself..."

People could still see the need for the missionary life, but some could no longer see any need for the religious

life. In 1974, the question was asked. The response from the Congregation was simple: in the thought of the Founder and in the history of the Congregation, the Oblate (priest or brother)<sup>46</sup> is an apostle-religious, a man entirely devoted to evangelizing the poor and in order to do this he is consecrated to God through the religious vows. So as to affirm this character even more strongly, the General Chapter of 1980 voted to approve the concept that the two realities of the mission and religious life form the first part of the Constitutions under the single heading: "The Oblate Charism". In the past, these realities constituted two distinct elements. "This is an important change. It clearly indicates that the Oblate charism includes the Oblate's way of religious life as much as it does his apostolic mission within the Church. The Oblate vocation is more than a missionary commitment in favour of the poor; it is first of all a state of consecration to God in which our missionary service is rooted."<sup>47</sup>

The 1982 Constitutions remained faithful to Eugene de Mazenod's ideal. They tried to achieve a full understanding of the religious life he wanted, to give stronger unity to our being and to adapt our missionary response to contemporary needs. For the Oblates as for the Church, stepping into this new world meant entering a difficult period. From 1947 on, great strides had been made. The Congregation achieved a greater appreciation of its past history; it grew in awareness of its fundamental values. Today it is determined to maintain these values and to live them in the heart of the contemporary world.

On August 26, 1850 Bishop de Mazenod reminded the capitulars that every Oblate had to be convinced of the necessity to "be perfect religious in or-

der to be good missionaries".<sup>48</sup> These realities are still true today. With the priesthood and the communitarian support of the brothers, they make up the essential component of the Oblate, "the apostolic man".

FERNAND JETTÉ

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Mr. Arbaud, January 1, 1819 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 13, no. 22, p. 30.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Abbé Henry Tempier, November 15, 1815 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 6, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> See BEAUDOIN, Yvon, "Le retour d'exil des Mazenod en 1818" in *Vie Oblate Life*, 45 (1986), p. 423-425.

<sup>4</sup> See for example, the following articles: THIEL, Joseph, "Relations du Fondateur avec le P. Lanteri" in *Etudes oblates*, 5 (1946), p. 129-142; COSENTINO, Georges, "Existence juridique de notre Congrégation pendant ses dix premières années (1816-1826)", *ibidem*, 12 (1953), p. 3-24; *idem*, "L'introduction des vœux dans notre Congrégation", *ibidem*, 13 (1954), p. 287-308; CIANCIULLI, F.-X., "Aspirations au cloître dans l'âme du Fondateur", *ibidem*, 13 (1954) p. 228-231; GILBERT, Maurice, "Sur les traces de Apôtres", *ibidem*, 16 (1957), p. 293-301; LAMIRANDE, Emilien, "Les Oblats et la suppléance des anciens ordres d'après Mgr de Mazenod", in *Etudes oblates*, 19, (1960), p. 185-195; *idem*, "Les deux parts dans la vie de l'homme apostolique d'après Mgr de Mazenod", *ibidem*, 25 (1966), p. 177-204; VERKIN, Henri, "Mgr de Mazenod et la vie religieuse", *ibidem*, 26 (1967), p. 343-382; DROUART, Jean, "The Oblate Apostolic Life", *ibidem*, 31 (1972), p. 29-46; *idem*, "From an Apostolic Community to a Religious Congregation", *ibidem*, 31 (1972), p. 205-224; *Idem*, "Notre propre forme de consécration à Dieu pour le service de l'Eglise", *ibidem*, 27 (1968), p. 3-40; ZAGO, Marcello, "Notre identité religieuse et la mission", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 33 (1974), p. 241-251.

<sup>5</sup> For example, JETTÉ, Fernand, *The Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate*, General House, Rome, 1985, p. 72-96; *idem*, *O.M.I., The Apostolic Man: A Commentary on the 1982 edition of the Oblate Constitutions and Rules*, General House, Rome, 1992; co-author of *The Congregation Renewed: A Reading Guide for the Constitutions and Rules [1966]. Introduction and commentary*, General House, Rome, 1968.

<sup>6</sup> See also the articles on chastity, community, obedience, oblation, poverty and perseverance.

<sup>7</sup> "Journal d'émigration en Italie" in *Ecrits oblates* I, vol. 16, p. 41.

<sup>8</sup> December 1814 retreat in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 15, no. 130, p. 81.

<sup>9</sup> Letter to Abbé Charles de Forbin-Janson, October 23, 1815 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 5, p. 8.

<sup>10</sup> Letter to his mother, March 23, 1809 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 14, no. 49, p. 112-113. The "Grey Brothers" were the Fathers of the Christian Retreat.

<sup>11</sup> REY I, p. 176.

<sup>12</sup> RAMBERT I, p. 156. See also PIELORZ, Józef, "A propos du F. Maur" in *Etudes oblates*, 13 (1954), p. 248-249.

<sup>13</sup> In *Ecrits oblates* I, vol. 16, p. 173.

<sup>14</sup> LAROSE, Jean-Marie, "Etude sur l'origine des frères convers chez les Oblats" in *Etudes oblates*, 12 (1953), p. 68.

<sup>15</sup> See *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 15, no. 130, p. 77-108. The retreat took place in December of 1814. The book bore the title: *Retraite selon l'esprit et la méthode de saint Ignace pour les ecclésiastiques*, 1749 edition.

<sup>16</sup> Letter to Mrs. Boisgelin, February 9, 1811 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 14, no. 78, p. 177.

<sup>17</sup> Letter to Charles de Forbin-Janson, October 28, 1814 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 2, p. 2-4.

<sup>18</sup> See "Journal de la Congrégation de la Jeunesse d'Aix, 1813-1821" in *Ecrits oblates* I, vol. 16, p. 125-215.

<sup>19</sup> Letter to Abbé Tempier, October 9, 1815 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 4, p. 6-7.

<sup>20</sup> Letter of December 13, 1815 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 7, p. 12-13.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted by VERKIN, Henri, "Monseigneur de Mazenod et la vie religieuse" in *Etudes Oblates*, 26 (1967), p. 346. *Selected Texts Related to the O.M.I. Constitutions and Rules*, Rome, 1984, p. 24.

<sup>22</sup> *Selected Texts, ibidem.*

<sup>23</sup> Letter to Father Tempier, November 4, 1817 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6 no. 29, p. 45. See also letter to the same, August 12, 1817, *ibidem*, no. 20, p. 31-34.

<sup>24</sup> COSENTINO, Georges, "L'introduction des voeux dans notre Congrégation" in *Etudes Oblates*, 13 (1954), p. 292.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 293-294.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 297.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 301-305.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 307.

<sup>29</sup> We are quoting from the first French manuscript: *Constitutions et Règles de la Société des Missionnaires de Provence*, (1818), published in Rome in 1951, p. 18-19. To see the official Latin editions of 1826, 1853, 1928, 1966, one can consult Father Irénée Tourigny's work, *Synopsis Constitutionum et Regularum Missionariorum Oblatorum Sanctissimae et Immaculatae Virginis Mariae*, Rome, 1970.

<sup>30</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 61-64.

<sup>31</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 60.

<sup>32</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 54-55.

<sup>33</sup> Circular letter of February 2, 1857 in *Circ. adm.*, I (1850-1885) p. 114-115.

<sup>34</sup> See PIETSCH, Jean "Notre Fondateur et les communautés religieuses de Marseille" in *Etudes Oblates*, 6 (1947), p. 157-182 and 7 (1948), p. 211-228, 263-286.

<sup>35</sup> See his circular letters to the Oblates in *Circ. adm.*, I (1850-1885), p. 108-130. Worthy of note as well is the reason why joining forces with the Institute of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood of our Lord was impossible in 1826. Our Founder considered it important to maintain religious vows whereas the other Institute, since it was an association of diocesan priests, could not accept them. See CIARDI, Fabio "Un projet de fusion avec les Missionnaires du Précieux Sang" in *Vie Oblate Life*, 37 (1978), p. 65-71.

<sup>36</sup> See PIELORZ, Józef, "Le rôle du Fondateur dans les six premiers Chapitres généraux" in *Etudes Oblates*, 24 (1965), p.

267-288; "L'action du Fondateur dans les Chapitres de 1843, 1850 et 1856", *ibidem*, p. 342-367.

<sup>37</sup> The text of the 1966 Constitutions and Rules is in Father Tourigny's work from which we quoted, *Synopsis...* Rome, 1970. See also the Latin-French text, Rome, 1966.

<sup>38</sup> See for example Father Deschâtelets' circular letter no. 191, August 15, 1951. "Our Vocation and Our Life of Intimate Union with Mary Immaculate" in *Circ. adm.*, (1947-1952), p. 298-386.

<sup>39</sup> Circular letter of December 25, 1915 in *Circ. adm.*, III (1901-1921), p. 277-278.

<sup>40</sup> *Memoires*, unpublished manuscript, chapter 5, p. 33.

<sup>41</sup> Apostolic constitution, *Humanae Salutis*, December 25, 1961, (Painful observations) in *Vatican II. Les seize documents conciliaires*, Montreal-Paris, Fides, 1966, p. 574.

<sup>42</sup> Opening speech to the Council, October 11, 1962. (Prophets of doom). *ibidem*, p. 584.

<sup>43</sup> Opening speech... The main task of the Council, (Technical progress), *ibidem*, p. 586.

<sup>44</sup> Speech on the occasion of the opening of the Council... How to teach doctrine to our age, *ibidem*, p. 587.

<sup>45</sup> Decree *Perfectae caritatis*, nos. 2-4 in *The Basic Sixteen Documents: Vatican Council II. Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations: A Completely Revised Translation in Inclusive Language*, General Editor, Austin Flannery, Costello Publishing Company, Northport, New York, 1996, p. 386-388.

<sup>46</sup> "The Congregation is not complete if it lacks brothers. Our history reminds us of this in eloquent fashion and our Constitutions clearly indicate it: "We come together in apostolic communities of priests and Brothers [...]" (C 1); "As priests and Brothers, we have complementary responsibilities in evangelizing..." (C 7); "Oblate Brothers share in the common priesthood of Christ. They are called to cooperate in their own way in reconciling all things in him (cf. Col 1: 20)... Brothers have an important missionary role to play in building up the Church everywhere [...]" (R 3) [R 7c in

CCRR 2000] “Obedience and charity bind us together, priests and Brothers keeping us interdependent in our lives and missionary activity [...]” (C 38) JETTÉ, Fernand, “La vocation du frère oblat hier et aujourd’hui” in *Vie Oblate Life*, 45 (1986) p. 159.

<sup>47</sup> JETTÉ, Fernand, *O.M.I. The Apostolic*

*Man. A Commentary on the 1982 edition of the Oblate Constitutions and Rules*, General House Rome, 1992, p. 37-38.

<sup>47</sup> Quoted in PIELORZ, Józef, “L’action du Fondateur dans les Chapitres de 1843, 1850 et 1856” in *Etudes oblates*, 24 (1965), p. 350.

## SACRED HEART

*Summary: I. Eugene de Mazenod's devotion to the Sacred Heart. II. How this devotion should be understood; 1. To adhere to Jesus Christ; 2. To love with Christ; 3. To conform one's life to that of Christ. III. The Oblate tradition; 1. The expression of the devotion; 2. Theological reflection; 3. Apostolate of the Oblates; 4. Consecration and the scapular; 5. Apostolate through means of the written word. Conclusion.*

The present article lays no claim to giving a full explanation of the Church's teaching on the Sacred Heart. Rather, it is a study of how our Founder lived his devotion to the Sacred Heart; what this devotion meant to him and what significance it had for the Oblates. Pope Paul VI noted that Eugene de Mazenod was "an individual passionately devoted to Jesus Christ". Consequently, we should consider his devotion to the Sacred Heart as one aspect of his devotion to the person of Jesus. For the rest we should refer to the basic article on Jesus Christ in this Dictionary.

### I. EUGENE DE MAZENOD'S DEVOTION TO THE SACRED HEART

There is no document extant from Eugene's childhood to tell us how he was introduced to devotion to the Sacred Heart. On the other hand, we know that this devotion found an important place in his life under the influence of Don Bartolo Zinelli in Venice. With regard to the spiritual exercises suggested by his spiritual mentor, we read the following: "I will unite my insignificant acts of adoration with those of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, of the Angels and the Saints... I will respectfully kiss my crucifix in the area of the Wounded Heart" (we will return to the theme of this intimate gesture later on).

Father Magy, who became his confidant when he was discerning his vocation, was involved in leading a group of pious individuals in Marseilles which was a center for devotion to and apostolate of the Sacred Heart.<sup>1</sup>

At the Seminary of Saint Sulpice, under the influence of the French School of spirituality, his devotion to the Sacred Heart deepened. Pierre de Bérulle stressed what he called the "interior" Jesus, that is, the most profound attitudes and sentiments of Christ. As a result, Eugene de Mazenod learned to enter into the depth of the mysteries of Jesus to find in the heart of Jesus the intimate life of the man-God in its entirety.

From the beginning of his ministry he revived devotion to the Sacred Heart, a devotion that was very much alive in Aix in pre-Revolutionary days. Indeed, in 1721, in the wake of the plague that had ravaged Marseilles, the Archbishop of Aix, following the example of Bishop de Belzunce, decreed that the feast of the Sacred Heart would be celebrated in the diocese the first Friday following the Octave of the Blessed Sacrament. Before this, Father Timothée de Raynier, a member of the Congregation of the Minimes of Aix, had published in 1662, *L'homme intérieur ou l'idée du parfait chrétien*, in which he wrote: "What happiness to be united to Jesus Christ in his Sacred Heart which was ever united to God,

not only by the hypostatic union, but also by the union of the acts of his love".<sup>2</sup> Consequently, it was a long-standing tradition in Eugene de Mazenod's native city, a tradition to which Eugene had an affinity and into which he infused new life.

In 1819, the Pious Union of the Sacred Heart of Jesus was set up in Aix in the Oblate church known as "of the Mission".<sup>3</sup> In 1822, Father de Mazenod published a pamphlet under the title *Exercice à l'honneur du Sacré-Coeur qui se fait par les agrégés tous les premiers vendredis de chaque mois dans l'église du Sacré-Coeur, dite de la Mission, à Aix*. It is in the Oblate chapel as well that the annual feast of the Sacred Heart is celebrated each year. The celebrations consisted of a solemn High Mass and a procession through the Cours to the mission cross. After Father de Mazenod's departure for Marseilles, the Oblates maintained this tradition – as we can see from reports given in the *Codex* of the house and in the local press. For example, there was a long article published in the June 9, 1853 issue of *La Provence*, describing the solemn Mass celebrated by the Archbishop, the procession following the traditional route with participation by the civil authorities and the military. Meanwhile in Marseilles, Father de Mazenod remained spiritually united to the ceremonies celebrated at Aix in honor of the Sacred Heart. So it was that in a letter to Father Hippolyte Courtès he expressed his regret at not having received a detailed report about the feast of the Sacred Heart: "On that day, I was with you in spirit, and twenty times, I would even say a hundred times, I uttered some pious exclamation in your direction [...]"<sup>4</sup>

A perusal of the letters he wrote

after his departure from Aix in 1823 yields only a few references to the Sacred Heart, but they are significant. For example, in a letter to Father Henry Tempier he spoke approvingly of an initiative seeking favors through the intercession of Marguerite Mary Alacoque, the servant of God: "The Jesuits [...] are bringing to the tomb of the Lord's servant two of their desperately ill members in the hope they will be cured. I would wish this with all my heart for the sake of the most holy devotion to the Sacred Heart".<sup>5</sup> Writing to Father Tempier, who was in Rome at the time, he described the ceremonies in honor of the Sacred Heart at Marseilles: "You know how things went here but you could never get any idea from the papers of the beauty, emotion and divine quality of our celebration of the Feast of the Sacred Heart [...] It was a magnificent evening".<sup>6</sup> Even if he hardly mentions it in his letters, Father de Mazenod left his Oblates the example of a deep devotion to the Sacred Heart as these few words from Father Joseph Gérard bear witness: "I have just learnt that your Lordship has fallen seriously ill [...] We remember with edification your great devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and we are going to appeal to this Sacred Heart with the most ardent confidence".<sup>7</sup>

## II. HOW THIS DEVOTION SHOULD BE UNDERSTOOD

Eugene de Mazenod never composed any treatise on this or on any other subject. Consequently, we must search through his letters and his reflections on his ministry to find out how he lived this devotion. The following characteristics stand out clearly.

### 1. TO ADHERE TO JESUS CHRIST

If we want to understand Eugene's devotion to the Heart of Jesus, we must not focus exclusively on his explicit references to it. Indeed, we repeat that his attachment to the person of Christ is for him something basic which he expresses in ways that are very different. It is in this vein that he speaks to Father Joseph-Marie Timon-David: "There is no need for me to recommend to you to develop in your young people a thorough understanding that in adoring Our Lord's Sacred Heart, they should not so much focus their attention on this sacred object of their love as they should extend it to the living person of Jesus Christ who is present".<sup>8</sup>

### 2. TO LOVE WITH CHRIST

He wrote to his mother: "To give honor to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is to drink in the love of God at its very fountainhead".<sup>9</sup> In the seminary, he expressed it as "the feast of Jesus Christ's love for man".<sup>10</sup> As a result, he wishes to love others with the intensity of the love of Christ.

### 3. TO CONFORM ONE'S LIFE TO THAT OF CHRIST

As for himself, he wants "to be a priest according to his Heart, for everything is contained in that one word".<sup>11</sup> As he states in his diary, the Heart of Jesus is "the prototype for our hearts".<sup>12</sup> We should deepen our understanding of everything that flows from the loving Heart of Jesus Christ, not only for all people, but in particular for his apostles and disciples".<sup>13</sup>

In a special way to follow Christ as the *witness of the fatherly mercy* of God, even for the greatest sinners, is the

attitude that Father de Mazenod adopted in his ministry with the prisoners and subsequently in his preaching of parish missions. This was the perspective that guided him when he introduced the moral theology of Saint Alphonsus into France. In *Histoire des catholiques en France*, we read that the movement inspired by the thought of Saint Alphonsus which was "a major event in the pastoral field, [...] spread throughout southern France where Mazenod and his Oblates promoted it".<sup>14</sup> We may not find a specific text in which Father de Mazenod explicitly associates the Sacred Heart with Saint Alphonsus' theology. Nonetheless, it is evident that in his missionary praxis the two harmonized perfectly. He is a witness of mercy as a result of his contemplation of the love without measure in the Heart of Jesus.

The same spiritual attitude is found in the pamphlet of prayer drawn up by Father de Mazenod for the exercises of the First Friday of the month. A large place is given to "the crown in honor of the Sacred Heart of Jesus". It is a collection of prayers to which one adds "an Our Father and five *Gloria Patri* in honor of the five wounds of our Lord Jesus Christ and of his Sacred Heart". The heart and the five wounds are the external signs of the *love of Christ* for all. Thus Father de Mazenod wants the love of Christ contemplated and praised through these exercises. Considering the five wounds along with the heart harks back to an ancient tradition. "In the initial stages, devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus was associated with the devotion to his five wounds and his passion; the separation between the two took place gradually".<sup>15</sup> As we have seen earlier in this article, this tradition came to Eugene through Don Zinelli.

Foremost in these prayers in honor

of the Heart of Jesus is a *contemplation which admires*. Each invocation begins with an act of faith filled with wonder. "O my Jesus, I admire your Heart so patient" (p. 6). "Let them sing, O Jesus, the praises of your generous Heart" (p. 6). When he contemplates the unbounded love of Christ, the individual Christian becomes aware of his own wretchedness; he then asks forgiveness for his sins by expressing his abhorrence of being found so different from Christ (p. 6). All that he can do is to beg for the grace of an interior renewal to "render love for love" (p. 5). The request for the gift of love reappears several times: "pour into my heart a keen steadfast love" (p. 6). This brings to mind the prayer written by Eugene during his retreat in preparation for his priestly ordination.<sup>16</sup>

One does not find a debate about devotion to the Sacred Heart in the writings of the Founder. But what is found is the witness of an apostle who has discovered the immensity of the love of Christ, and who wants to fathom it ever more deeply and introduce the faithful to whom he ministers to this same experience.

### III. THE OBLATE TRADITION

In faithfulness to our Founder, devotion to the Sacred Heart is one of our spiritual riches.

#### 1. THE EXPRESSION OF THE DEVOTION

Oblates speak of their confidence in the Heart of Jesus very simply in the letters or reports coming from the missions. I point out a few examples. In his diary, Bishop Vital Grandin mentioned his trials and difficulties: the fire at Red River, insults heaped upon him by a

Protestant minister, health problems, travel, "Finally, sufficiently recovered, I arrived at the mission of the Sacred Heart, Fort Simpson. The Heart of Jesus strengthened mine."<sup>17</sup> Father Florimond Gendre recalls his missionary voyages: "You will be happy in the new scholasticate of the Sacred Heart. And how indeed could one not be happy in the proximity of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary?"<sup>18</sup> The editor of *Missions* reminds us of the importance of devotion to the Sacred Heart: "The Sacred Heart has deemed it appropriate to cast a favoring glance on our modest Congregation and associated it with his plans, [...] the Oblates everywhere are apostles of this devotion of love and reparation".<sup>19</sup> The Oblates were pleased to spread this devotion, as Father Prosper Légeard, missionary at Ile-à-la-Crosse: "One thing which pleases me greatly is the fact that they are beginning to have a strong devotion to the Sacred Heart. All of them have in their possession the holy pictures that we made for them, which they keep and treasure".<sup>20</sup> Bishop Arsène Turquetil wrote: "It goes without saying that it was with great gratitude to the Sacred Heart that I read the letter of our two missionaries".<sup>21</sup> We could multiply quotations of this type. A perusal of *Missions* would provide us with an abundant supply of them.

#### 2. THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

To facilitate a sober reflection on devotion to the Sacred Heart the editor of *Missions* published notes found among the papers of Father Ambrose Vincens, who was Assistant General from 1850.<sup>22</sup> These notes give us some grasp of how the Oblates understood devotion to the Sacred Heart. At the outset, he focuses on what is most es-

sential: "God is love; whence springs an image that captures for us, all the more effectively, the God who portrays this charity in most vivid fashion".<sup>23</sup> To illustrate the appropriateness of this devotion, Father Vincens reminds us that long before our Lord appeared to Saint Marguerite Mary, spiritual masters such as Origen and Saint Augustine had recommended recourse to the merciful love of the Savior. As a true son of Father de Mazenod, Father Vincens is aware of the missionary character of devotion to the Sacred Heart. He sees in it a manifestation of God's mercy as opposed to the rigorism of Jansenism that he calls "a heresy without compassion".<sup>24</sup> He sees in it a call to dedicate ourselves to the poor: "[Devotion to the Sacred Heart] will look with compassion on the indigent individual, the orphan, the widow, the abandoned child, on all the ostracized of the earth. It will wear itself out and spend itself entirely for all these unfortunate people, even on behalf of its enemies – and you claim it does not flow from the heart!"<sup>25</sup> He sees in it a source of strength in the face of trials. During the Revolution, the Heart of Jesus was "a refuge for those who gave witness to the faith ... source of consolation".<sup>26</sup>

From this presentation, he draws some practical conclusions. The concrete attitude of Oblates must be to respond to the love of God – especially in the celebration and adoration of the Eucharist – and in fraternal charity. These reflections on the part of Father Vincens restate the convictions of our Founder on behalf of all Oblates.

### 3. APOSTOLATE OF THE OBLATES

In order to propagate devotion to the Sacred Heart among Christians, the Oblates were given the responsibility of

staffing some important shrines, the first of which was Montmartre. The is narrated in Paguelle de Follenay's biography of Cardinal Hippolyte Guibert.<sup>27</sup> The project originated with two laymen, M. Legentil and M. Rohault de Fleury, with others joining them later. Their objective was to "to erect a religious monument destined to ward off from their city the retribution of divine wrath".<sup>28</sup> Bishop Guibert, Archbishop of Tours at the time, was approached to be the patron of this project. At the outset, he was understandably hesitant since, in the wake of the destruction wrought by the war of 1870-1871, all Catholic works needed to be rebuilt. He possibly also sensed the ambivalence inherent in this project. Indeed, the political climate of this period was characterized by an ever-widening rift between the majority of Catholics and the stalwart supporters of the French Republic. The *Histoire des catholiques en France*, quoted above, speaks of "the state of French Catholicism between 1870 and 1880 at a time when it came in political conflict with the appearance of the Third Republic."<sup>29</sup> Those who were promoting the project of a Basilica in honor of the Sacred Heart considered the Republic as the source of all the evils that had befallen France. By entrusting themselves to the Sacred Heart, they wanted to see the royal government restored in Paris and the authority of Pius IX re-asserted over the Papal States.<sup>30</sup>

Despite the ambiguous motivation behind this project, we Oblates need have no doubts as to Cardinal Guibert's sincerity in his fidelity to Eugene de Mazenod's spiritual heritage. For him, devotion to the Sacred Heart was a basic value. Against the advice of many, he chose Montmartre as the site of the future basilica because it was the Mount

of the Martyrs, the spot where the first missionaries of the Ile-de-France shed their blood for the Gospel. Another motivating factor for the Cardinal's choice was that, at this time, Montmartre was a poor residential quarter of the city and, in order to remain faithful to the Oblate motto, the Cardinal wanted first and foremost to evangelize these people through prayer. Unfortunately, by choosing the spot that gave rise to the revolt of the "Commune", he was not aware that he would provoke protest from the faction opposed to the Church. We can, however, affirm that his goal in building the basilica was strictly a religious one: "To make reparation to God for past faults and to pledge future fidelity through the Heart of Jesus".<sup>31</sup> Wanting to give this monument the symbolic value of "a national vow", he solicited the support of Julian Simon, Minister of Public Worship, asking him to obtain the approval of the Chamber for this project, by recognizing it as being a public utility. The law was passed in July of 1873.

Before the basilica was completed he had built a temporary chapel which he entrusted to the Oblates on March 3, 1876. The Oblates' apostolate at Montmartre had a powerful impact on the Congregation as a whole, something we should never forget. We will highlight the most important traits that still carry a significance for us today. Since the Oblates were already in charge of a number of shrines (Lumières, Bonsecours, Cléry, etc.), they already knew from experience how to organize a pilgrimage center.

Their first objective was to make of Montmartre a *place for prayer*. It would be prayer of praise and thanksgiving, as well as reparation for past sins according to the direction given by Cardinal Guibert. Consequently, each day sev-

eral Masses were celebrated, and prayers were organized at different moments of the day. Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament exposed was the type of prayer which was to take on more and more importance. Initially it was done on certain days, then a night vigil provided the presence of worshipers and, finally, perpetual adoration was established. Volunteers for adoration during the night were recruited from the whole of France. At the end of a twenty-year period, the tally showed four thousand men adorers and six thousand women. In his report written on the occasion of the twenty-five years of presence of the Oblates at Montmartre, Father Edmund Thiriet was able to write: "The wonder of Montmartre at present is its program of perpetual adoration".<sup>32</sup>

They aimed to help Christians *deepen their faith*. With this goal in mind, the Oblates preached every day to instruct the faithful – they sometimes preached up to four times a day, including weekdays. They organized Christians in different associations, according to their professions or in groups under a variety of titles, as for example, the "Sacred Heart Circle" for young people who committed themselves to live their Christian life to the full and to spread their faith. They established a "choir school" to embellish liturgical celebrations. Indeed, the choir school was also a milieu in which some young people discovered their vocation to become Oblates and others a calling to the diocesan priesthood.

The spread of Montmartre's influence was also due to the work of the Oblates. They published a newsletter that quickly spread to every corner of France. They sought and obtained from Rome approval for an Arch-confraternity of the Sacred Heart, richly endowed with indulgences. They invited

the local churches to become associated with their program of perpetual adoration. This "universal adoration" in union with Montmartre once numbered up to ten thousand churches and chapels in its membership. Montmartre chaplains crisscrossed the country fostering devotion to the Sacred Heart. Father Jean-Baptiste Lémus, in particular, built up a reputation as a talented preacher. Two works are worthy of special mention.

Firstly, the association of *Priest-apostles of the Sacred Heart*. It began with prayer for priests; then ceremonies for young priests who came to entrust their priestly life to Jesus Christ, and then it became a spiritual association of priests with the objective of honoring the priesthood of Jesus Christ and to pray for vocations.<sup>33</sup> What is especially worthy of note for us Oblates is that this movement counted Saint John the Apostle among its patrons. We can see here a development of the thinking of our Founder who commits us to walking in the footsteps of the Apostles, our elders in our adherence to Christ. By spreading devotion to the Sacred Heart, the Oblates often made reference to Saint John. During that same period, and as a fruit of the same kind of thinking, a statue of Saint John was installed in the church of Aix-en-Provence (1873). Among the Apostles that the Oblates acknowledge as their "first fathers", Saint John holds a special place because he was a trusted intimate of the Heart of Jesus and he received the mother of Jesus into his house.

Secondly, the *Work for the Poor* was founded in 1894 by Father Jean-Baptiste Lémus. It resulted from his conviction that it was not enough to simply preach the good news; but one had to help the poor in a concrete way. At the time, this objective was achieve

by charitable works. Every Sunday he would gather many poor people, celebrate Mass for them, instruct them and offer them a half-kilo portion of bread. Three times a week he would organize a session for religious instruction and distribute hot soup. He set up a clinic, a place to distribute clothing and, of capital importance, a juridical consulting service to defend poor people against injustices. Father Lémus was a talented enough orator to arouse the voluntary help needed for his works and to collect generous gifts.

In surveying the Oblates' twenty-seven years of apostolate at Montmartre, we can echo the praise expressed by François Veillot in the March 29, 1903 edition of *l'Univers*: "Fiery apostles, persevering individuals, devoted and enthralling preachers, reliable and wise organizers, leaders of the masses and founders of works".<sup>34</sup>

Among other shrines dedicated to the Sacred Heart and entrusted to Oblate zeal, the most renowned is that of Brussels. The initiative to build a basilica in honor of the Sacred Heart as a religious endeavor and national project was due to Leopold II, King of Belgium. The temporary chapel where the Oblates began their work was blessed April 11, 1905. Just as in Montmartre, all sorts of projects were started.<sup>35</sup> Superior General Bishop Augustine Donatenwill's visit was the occasion for a grand feast for the Oblates residing in Belgium.<sup>36</sup> With the years, the works developed, while the house also served as a center for groups of preachers preaching parish missions, even in France.<sup>37</sup> A great thanksgiving celebration was held after the war, on June 29, 1919, with consecration to the Sacred Heart in both French and Flemish.<sup>38</sup> Some time later, Cardinal Mercier asked the Superior General to withdraw

the Oblates to make way for the diocesan clergy. In his report to the General Chapter of 1920, the provincial reported, "For us it meant collapse", and he added, "it was dictated by a political agenda".<sup>39</sup>

Apostolate of the Sacred Heart saw tremendous success in Quebec with Victor Lelièvre as its driving force. He launched the movement by organizing a day of adoration in the church of Saint Sauveur in Quebec City on the first Friday of November 1904. One hour in the evening was set aside for the workers in order to help them to pray, to strengthen their faith and to become involved in a Christian way in their workplace.<sup>40</sup> In order to increase the effectiveness of his apostolate, he founded the "Committee of the Sacred Heart" and in 1923 opened the doors of the retreat house "Jésus Ouvrier", which even today exercises an enormous influence. Father Lelièvre carried out this apostolate throughout his life. The pages of *Missions* provide numerous examples of this right up to the last years which preceded his death in 1956. He knew how to speak the people's language: "He talks like we do", stated one of the workers who was exposed to Father Lelièvre's ministry. At the General Chapter of 1947, the Provincial of Canada-East presented the house of Jésus Ouvrier in this way: "Father Victor Lelièvre has created here an extraordinary center for conversion and spiritual restoration".<sup>41</sup> Like many other Oblates, Father Lelièvre has illustrated that devotion to the Sacred Heart – this passionate devotion to God who loves us in his Son – is the source of unbounded zeal for the missionary.

The majority of Oblate provinces and missions have directed and continue to direct prayer centers consecrated to the Sacred Heart. We could of-

fer them their share of praise, but it would be impossible to deal with each example.

#### 4. CONSECRATION AND SCAPULAR

The *consecration* of the Christian to God as a concrete expression of his baptismal commitment is traditional.<sup>42</sup> "With the appearance of the French School of spirituality [...] the idea of a total and radical gift of self stands revealed in full light".<sup>43</sup> Pierre de Bérulle readily uses terms like "I consecrate myself", "I dedicate myself", as expressions of the radical character of what he calls the "oblation" which he makes "to honor the oblation and gift which Jesus Christ made of himself to God his Father".<sup>44</sup> Saint Marguerite-Marie and Father Claude de la Colombière both consecrated themselves explicitly to the Sacred Heart.

Following in their Founder's footsteps, the Oblates spontaneously chose to become part of this movement. Their "oblation" was not only an individual offering through the vows; it was also offering up each community and the entire Oblate family. In addition to that, from the very first years on, the consecration composed by the Venerable Anne-Madeleine Rémuzat – which Father de Mazenod had copied on page 8 in the "Exercice à l'honneur du Sacré Coeur de Jésus" quoted above – and which was reprinted in our prayer manuals until 1958, was recited in community.

The active involvement of the Oblates at Montmartre strengthened still more their resolve to consecrate themselves to the Heart of Jesus. That is what motivated the General Chapter of 1873 to consecrate the Congregation to the Heart of Jesus.<sup>45</sup> On the last day of the chapter, all the Oblates who were

able to do so gathered in the scholastic chapel at Autun. Father Joseph Fabre, the Superior General, recited on their behalf, the consecration composed by Father Jean-Baptiste Honorat. The prayer is characteristically Oblate, richly imbued with Scriptural spirituality. It was carried in our prayer manuals until 1958.<sup>46</sup> According to the directives of the 1898 General Chapter, this consecration is to be renewed at the end of the retreat.<sup>47</sup>

The *scapular* is a special exterior sign of this consecration; it does in fact boast a long history. The custom of wearing a sign of Christ on one's chest is a way of fulfilling Our Lord's wish that his friends should bear his image on their hearts, according to a March 2, 1685 letter of Saint Marguerite-Marie. There are some fraternities whose members wear a scapular as a sign of their link to a Religious Order, for example, the Trinitarians, Servites of Mary, etc.<sup>48</sup> The scapular specific to the Sacred Heart derives from the apparitions at Notre-Dame-de-Pellevoisin.<sup>49</sup> Our Lord showed it to the lady seer, and Father Jean-Baptiste Lémus at Montmartre fostered devotion to it. Through Father Cassien Augier, Father Lémus requested permission from the Holy See to spread devotion to this image in honor of the hearts of Jesus and the Blessed Virgin. In response to this request, Pope Leo XIII – by an April 2, 1900 decree – approved the making of this scapular and entrusted it to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate by a decree of May 19 of the same year.<sup>50</sup>

The Oblates proved faithful in spreading devotion to the scapular of the Sacred Heart as we can see from the witness of a missionary in Mackenzie who requested three hundred copies of the scapular to distribute to the faithful in his charge. "They will be proud to

bear on their persons the sign of God's love and the splendid image of the Mother of Mercy".<sup>51</sup> To remind the Oblates that "we have been officially commissioned to spread devotion to the Sacred Heart in scapular form", in 1929, the editor of *Missions* reissued the Holy See's documents with regard to this subject which had been published for the first time in the 1900 edition of *Missions*. On June 24 1949, Father Leo Deschâtelets, Superior General, asked the Congregation to "remain faithful to this apostolic mission of spreading devotion to the scapular of the Sacred Heart".<sup>52</sup> From that time on, pastoral practice in this regard has seen some profound changes, but the essential element has remained constant in line with what Father Deschâtelets stated at the end of his circular: "Our vocation as missionaries makes of us preachers of the mystery of God's love for men".<sup>53</sup> And at the appropriate time, our predecessors knew how to come up with the kind of image which touched the religious sensitivity of people.<sup>54</sup>

##### 5. APOSTOLATE THROUGH MEANS OF THE WRITTEN WORD

The books on doctrine and devotion to the Heart of Christ was an area of apostolate in which the Oblates were involved for some time. Through these means the chaplains at Montmartre, in particular, were able to extend their efforts and exercise a more lasting influence on those who came to pray at the shrine. Father Alfred Jean-Baptiste Yenveux, stationed at Montmartre from the beginning of 1876 until 1903 published a five-volume study on the teachings of Blessed Marguerite-Marie as found in her writings and her life. This study bears the title *Le Règne du Coeur de Jésus*. It develops a whole

spiritual program and commitment for Christians. This same priest also wrote a two-volume collection of prayers entitled *Aux pieds de Jésus*. Father John Baptist Lémieux wrote a few books to make Montmartre better known, to give brief teachings and to stimulate devotion to the Sacred Heart. A number of others also worked in this field, but it is not opportune to quote them all.

The Oblate who wrote the most books on the Sacred Heart is without question Father Félix Anizan. In the well over a dozen books written by him there are doctrinal studies such as *Qui est le Sacré-Coeur*, devotional books the most famous of which is *Vers Lui – élévations au Sacré-Coeur*, which saw a printing of twenty-five thousand copies. There was even *Gethsémani*, a long poem published in 1910. It is a series of graphic scenes portraying the agony of Jesus. They are not lacking in literary merit. What surfaces from the example of these Oblates is the fact that they wanted to become involved in various areas in order to foster devotion to the Sacred Heart.

## CONCLUSION

This article is thus not a theological treatise, but rather an overview of the example of our Founder and our Oblate confreres, our predecessors in the Congregation. Today, there has been a rapid evolution in mentality, and there are certain forms of devotions which we deem as no longer being in tune with contemporary religious feeling. It is up to us to rediscover the values lived by our predecessors to be faithful to them in order to integrate them into our own lives in the present context. Let us restate the essential elements basing ourselves on the New Testament.

1. Devotion to the Sacred Heart is first and foremost a contemplation of the love of God. "Yes, God loved the world so much" (John 3:16). "This is the love I mean... God's love for us when he sent his Son" (1 John 4:10).

2. The total assurance of this love is assumed as an essential component of revelation. "We ourselves have known and put our faith in God's love toward ourselves" (1 John 4:16).

3. The revelation of love unleashes a fiery power which gives rise to apostolic zeal. "And this is because the love of Christ overwhelms us when we reflect that if one man has died for all, then all men should be dead" (2 Corinthians 5:14). "I am perfectly willing to spend what I have ... in the interest of your souls" (2 Corinthians 12:15).

4. In conclusion, to succeed in life is "to give love for love", but this very success is a gift. "I have made your name known to them and will continue to make it known, so that the love with which you loved me may be in them" (John 17:26).

RENE MOTTE

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See BERNAD, Marcel, "Mgr de Mazenod – sa dévotion au Sacré Coeur", in *Missions*, 62 (1928), p. 13-23.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by BREMOND, Henry, in *Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux en France*, vol. III, "La conquête mystique, l'Ecole française", Paris, Bloud and Gay, 1921, p. 661.

<sup>3</sup> *Codex historique de la maison d'Aix*, p. 25.

<sup>4</sup> Letter to Father Hippolyte Courtès, June 24, 1825 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 6, no. 187, p. 177.

<sup>5</sup> Letter to Father Tempier, July 26, 1830 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 7, no. 349, p. 201.

<sup>6</sup> Letter to Father Tempier, July 9, 1832 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 8, no. 427, p. 65.

<sup>7</sup> Letter from Father Joseph Gerard to Bishop de Mazenod, April 12, 1861 in *Blessed Joseph Gerard, O.M.I., Apostle to the Basotho (1831-1914) Letters to the Superiors General and other Oblates, Oblate Writings* II, vol. 4, no. 5, p. 39.

<sup>8</sup> August 4, 1854 in articles written by the Postulator, 1927, art. 121.

<sup>9</sup> May 1, 1810 letter to his mother quoted in BOUTIN, Louis Napoleon, *La spiritualité de Mgr de Mazenod*, Montreal, Rayonnement, 1970, p. 59.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 58.

<sup>11</sup> Rule of life – Aix 1812 in RAMBERT I, p. 111.

<sup>12</sup> BOUTIN, Louis Napoleon, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>14</sup> *Histoire des catholiques en France*, under the direction of F. Lebrun, Privat, 1980, p. 340.

<sup>15</sup> HAMON, August, "Coeur (Sacré)" in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, vol. 2, col. 1030.

<sup>16</sup> *Oblate Prayer*, Rome 1986, p. 124.

<sup>17</sup> Bishop Vital Grandin's diary, August 26, 1861 in *Missions*, (1864), p. 225.

<sup>18</sup> *Missions du Pacifique*, February 16, 1863 in *Missions*, 4 (1865), p. 253.

<sup>19</sup> *Missions*, 17 (1879), 243.

<sup>20</sup> Excerpt from a letter of Father Prosper Légeard to Father Aimé Martinet in *Missions*, 15 (1877), p. 311.

<sup>21</sup> Taken from the *Devoir* of December 30, 1930 in *Missions*, 65 (1931), p. 104.

<sup>22</sup> *Missions*, 15 (1877), p. 234-243.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 234.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 239.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 240.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>27</sup> PAGUELLE DE FOLLENAY, J., *Vie du Cardinal Guibert*, Paris, Poussielgue Edition 1896, vol. 2, p. 589-614.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 589.

<sup>29</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 338.

<sup>30</sup> See PIERRARD, P., *L'Eglise et la Révolution*, Paris, 1988, p. 218-222. A brief overview of these problems can be found in

the article by VALIN, Pierre: "Le Sacré Coeur dans la culture politique française", in *Christus*, No. 139, (1988) p. 362-372.

<sup>31</sup> May 30, 1875 pastoral letter by Cardinal Guibert.

<sup>32</sup> "Vingt-cinq ans à Montmartre", in *Missions*, 39 (1901), p. 343.

<sup>33</sup> BAFFIE, Eugene, *Le bon père Laurent-Achille Rey*, Paris, Saint Paul Bookstore, 1912, p. 216-221.

<sup>34</sup> Quoted in *Missions*, 54 (1920), p. 85.

<sup>35</sup> See *Missions*, 47 (1909), p. 40-48.

<sup>36</sup> See *Missions*, 48 (1910), p. 306-311.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem* p. 400-407.

<sup>38</sup> See *Missions*, 53 (1919), p. 245 ff.

<sup>39</sup> *Missions*, 54 (1920), p. 263-264.

<sup>40</sup> "L'heure d'adoration des ouvriers à l'église Saint-Sauveur de Québec", in *Missions*, 47 (1909), p. 316-319.

<sup>41</sup> *Missions*, 74 (1947), p. 464.

<sup>42</sup> See Romans 12:1.

<sup>43</sup> FINANCE, Joseph de, "Consécration" in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, vol. 2, col. 1581 ff.

<sup>44</sup> BERULLE, Pierre de, *Oeuvres de piété*, no. 162; see "Consécration".

<sup>45</sup> Decree IX in *Missions*, 11 (1873), p. 253-257.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>47</sup> "Acta capitulorum generalium, 1898", no. 56 in *Circ. adm.*, II (1886-1890), p. 12 [394]; COSENTINO, Georges, *Nos Chapitres généraux*, Ottawa, Oblate Studies Edition, 1957, p. 149.

<sup>48</sup> See "Scapulaire", in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, vol. 15, col. 390-391.

<sup>49</sup> Diocese of Bourges, France.

<sup>50</sup> *Missions*, 38 (1900), September supplement, p. 25-38.

<sup>51</sup> "Extrait de la lettre d'un missionnaire du Mackenzie à un ancien condisciple de Liège", in *Missions*, 45 (1907), p. 76-77.

<sup>52</sup> Circular letter no. 185 in *Circ. adm.*, V (1947-1952), p. 247.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 254.

<sup>54</sup> See ARBOUR, Romeo, "Notre scapulaire du Sacré Coeur", in *Etudes oblates*, 6 (1947), p. 117-127.

## SACRED SCRIPTURE

*Summary: I. Scripture reading according to Father de Mazenod: 1. In his youth; 2. In the seminary; 3. The personal attitude of Father de Mazenod: a. Learning to act like Jesus Christ; b. Understanding the spirit of the text; c. Expressing the true meaning of Scripture. 4. Father de Mazenod's rules of conduct: a. In the first Rule, 1818 text; b. In the text approved by the Holy Father in 1826; c. In the letters to Oblates. II. Selected texts. III. Witness of faith. 1. Faith in the Word of God; 2. Confidence in the power of the Word; 3. Praises offered to the Lord. IV. The Word of God received by the Oblates: 1. A few Oblates as examples; 2. After the time of the Founder. Conclusion.*

A person's degree of familiarity with the Bible is an indication of his spiritual identity. It is in this perspective that we are going to study Eugene de Mazenod's fidelity to daily reading of the Bible, the impact of some important texts on his spiritual life and his apostolate, his faith in the power of the Word of God and the fidelity of Oblates to this example set by their Founder.

### I. SCRIPTURE READING ACCORDING TO FATHER DE MAZENOD

The Word of God was the ordinary sustenance for his life. "Handed on to his Apostles by Jesus, this word has lost none of its power in the course of the ages. We have experienced the fact that because it issued from the mouth of him who is himself eternal life, it is always spirit and life."<sup>1</sup>

#### 1. IN HIS YOUTH

This conviction was rooted in Eugene de Mazenod's heart thanks to the religious formation he received in Venice from Don Bartolo Zinelli. We do not know in detail what Don Bartolo had him study. He simply says in his *Diary*, "This was the priest [...] who

taught me about religion and inspired in me the sentiments of piety which were the salvation of my youth [...]"<sup>2</sup> Judging by the reactions of the young Eugene, this teaching must have included an introduction to the Bible in order to find the nourishment he needed for his life. A few years later when he returned to Aix as a lay person, he sought answers to the concrete problems of human existence in the Sacred Scripture. We have an outstanding example of this in a letter he wrote to a young French army officer, Emmanuel Gaultier de Claubry, with whom he became friends during a trip to Paris in September 1805. Eugene offered his friend a series of scriptural passages as an encouragement in the difficulties of witnessing to his faith. This was accompanied by the following words of commentary: "[...] I have gathered together below some words of consolation that I have been careful to draw from the pure wellspring, in the Book of Life, that admirable code where all needs are foreseen, and remedies are provided. So it is by no means Eugene, it is Jesus Christ, it is Peter, Paul, John, etc., who send you this wholesome food which when received with that spirit of faith of which you are capable will certainly not be without effect."<sup>3</sup> After

having quoted from this letter, Father Achilles Rey added: "We know of no listing so complete and gripping in terms of texts proper to stirring up a Christian's courage to make him invincible".<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, Father Rey does not quote any of the texts used by Eugene de Mazenod. This letter shows that already at this time, at the end of 1805, the Bible was for him the word of life. This letter also reveals a genuine familiarity with Sacred Scripture.

## 2. IN THE SEMINARY

Father Joseph Morabito made a careful study of the teaching that went on at the Seminary of St. Sulpice.<sup>5</sup> The Oblate General Archives have Eugene's theology notebooks. Among them, there are two dedicated to Sacred Scripture: 1. "Notes on the life of Jesus until his Passion"; 2. "The four first chapters of Genesis and various notes". When one speaks of the formation given in Scripture in the seminaries of the 1800's one must make a distinction between teaching about the Bible and a meditative reading of the Bible. Despite the intellectual endowments of the professors, Jean Leflon stresses the insufficiency of this teaching because they were too preoccupied with apologetics.<sup>6</sup> One point to which historians do not give enough attention, and which is of prime importance, is that the priests and seminarians of that time devoted at least a half hour to Scripture reading every day – something which shaped their thinking. They were faithful to the *Lectio Divina*. Even if the seminarians wasted their time calculating the measurements of Noah's Ark to determine its capacity to contain every species of animal during the flood, they treated the Bible in a much more living manner by using it as nourishment for their daily

reflections. This would be the reaction of Eugene de Mazenod and his companions throughout their lives.

## 3. THE PERSONAL ATTITUDE OF FATHER DE MAZENOD

### a. *Learning to act like Jesus Christ*

In the program he drew up for himself upon his return to Aix in October 1812, Eugene made the resolution that, after Prime and the Martyrology, he would "read Holy Scripture for half-an-hour".<sup>7</sup> His manner of speaking and acting show that for him the principal part of Holy Scripture was the Gospel. To confirm this, one need only see with what frequency he refers to Jesus Christ as a model. Here are some examples. In the preparatory notes for his first Lenten sermons in 1813: "[...] The Gospel must be taught to all and it must be taught in such a way as to be understood. The poor, a precious portion of the Christian family, cannot be abandoned in their ignorance. Our Divine Savior attached such importance to this that he took on himself the responsibility of instructing them and he cited as proof of the divinity of his mission the fact that the poor were being evangelized, *pauperes evangelizantur*."<sup>8</sup> From the outset, it was in order to act in the same way as Christ did that he concerned himself with the poor. The same attitude to Jesus is manifested when He is considered as the light of life: "How [...] did our Lord Jesus Christ proceed?" Voiced in the *Preface*, this is a question to which Father de Mazenod refers constantly in all circumstances of life. His concern is to be familiar with Christ's way of acting and thinking, in order to act as He would act. It is to acquire this attitude that the ordinary

content of his prayer would be “the life and the virtues of Our Lord Jesus Christ which the members of the Society should intensely reproduce in themselves”.<sup>9</sup> As a result, the reading of Holy Scripture consists above all in reading the Gospels, which will teach the Oblate how to become like Christ and to live with Him. While preparing himself for episcopal ordination, he would be able to say: “This book of the Gospels is confided to me so that in conformity with my vocation or rather with the mission given me, I go out and preach the good news of salvation to the people entrusted to me”.<sup>10</sup>

Father de Mazenod was so intent to be faithful to the resolution he had made in 1812 to read the Holy Scriptures every day, that he imposed a small penance on himself every time he failed to keep his resolution. In his retreat notes of December 1813, we find: “I will impose a penance on myself for each inexcusable failure to keep the articles of my rule [...] if it is the reading of Holy Scripture, two hour’s hair shirt the next day”.<sup>11</sup> He took advantage of his annual retreats to renew the same resolution in 1817, 1818 and 1824.<sup>12</sup> On the occasion of his taking possession of the See of Marseilles in May of 1837, he could thank the Lord because, remaining faithful to this resolution, he had been enlightened through the Bible: “I give you thanks, O Lord, for having made shine forth this light from the sacred deposit of your Holy Scriptures. As you show me the way I should follow, and give me the desire to follow it, you will also give me the powerful help of your grace [...]”.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore it was his intention to pursue this same policy in order to be a pastor according to the heart of Christ, “to nourish the love of God and all the virtues that flow from it by the daily offering of the holy

Sacrifice, by oraison, by prayer, by reading Holy Scripture, the holy Fathers, by good ascetic works, by the lives of the saints.”<sup>14</sup> The program that he sets for himself as Bishop of Marseilles provides for one hour of daily Scripture reading.<sup>15</sup> A brief reflection reveals that he also took advantage of his spare moments to read Scripture: “[...] I will wait for someone to bring me up my coffee while occupying myself with the reading of Holy Scripture”.<sup>16</sup> We note that in his resolutions the Founder usually says “reading” of Sacred Scripture and not “study”, for it was his intention to remain faithful to the tradition of the *Lectio Divina* which is a slow reading during which the heart allows itself to be molded by the Word of God.

#### *b. Understanding the spirit of the text.*

“It is more important [...] to reflect on a passage to ascertain the author’s intention [...] so as not to fall into the mistake St. Paul warns us about of following more the letter that kills than the spirit that gives life.”<sup>17</sup> To grasp the spirit of a text because it is a question of a message aimed not only at the intelligence, but at the whole person. The individual responds to this message through his behavior. For Father de Mazenod, the Gospel spirit was first of all the simplicity of the genuine missionary who makes himself available to the most humble in the flock, as he said in one of his sermons at the Madeleine: “[...] in imitation of the Apostle we have not come to announce the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the elevated discourses of a human eloquence and wisdom [...] but the simple Word of God stripped of every ornament, placed so far as in us lay within the grasp of the simplest”.<sup>18</sup> Father de Mazenod had

seen too many of those brilliant preachers, very knowledgeable about the Scriptures, but preaching so as to draw attention to themselves. "Let our words be more than what I have often noticed about the words of those who proclaim the same truths, namely sounding brass and tinkling cymbals."<sup>19</sup>

*c. Expressing the true meaning of Scripture*

To achieve this would be a fruit of understanding the spirit of the text. We have a significant example of this in the paragraph devoted to confession in the Rule of 1818. This is a text original to the Founder, even if it begins by speaking about Saint Ignatius and Saint Philip Neri. "We have no idea where the Founder found all this material."<sup>20</sup> "Our Founder perhaps drew his inspiration from some texts of the Rule of Saint Ignatius to write the paragraph on confession."<sup>21</sup> But the spiritual thoughts come from the Founder himself. It is interesting to note that he calls the ministry of confession the talent Christ bestowed on his disciples. This way of interpreting the parable fully respects its teaching (see Matthew 25:14-30). The Lord entrusts "his fortune" to his servants. It is salvation in its entirety that is entrusted to his servants so that they can render it fruitful. And this treasure contains the ministry of reconciliation. In this way, Father de Mazenod brought out the true meaning of the parable much more effectively than a certain number of French-speaking preachers who saw in these talents only the personal gifts of the disciples. On the contrary, in it, he shows us all the riches of the grace that the Lord asks us to make fruitful. During his retreat of 1814, this is how he understood this same parable by applying it to the "extraordinary

graces" of the priestly life: "[...] that was the talent that must not be buried [...]"<sup>22</sup>

4. FATHER DE MAZENOD'S RULES OF CONDUCT

*a. In the first Rule, 1818 text*

To write the texts concerning the vows, the Founder drew heavily on the Rule of Saint Alphonsus. After the articles treating of perseverance, however, there appears an article on recollection and silence. Father Georges Cosentino found no text similar to this in the other religious Rules used by Father de Mazenod. In this text, our Founder repeats the call to imitate our Lord Jesus Christ and the Apostles, our first Fathers. "In imitation of these great models, one part of their lives will be spent in prayer, interior recollection and contemplation in the seclusion of the house of God which will be their common dwelling." A little later he specifies: "When the missionaries will not be out preaching missions, they will joyfully return to the seclusion of their holy home where they will spend their time in renewing themselves in the spirit of their vocation, meditating on the law of the Lord, studying Sacred Scripture, the holy Fathers [...]" We find again the appeal of Father de Mazenod here: to imitate the Apostles in their most active zeal and in their deep attachment to the person of Jesus Christ, two attributes which cannot be separated since one calls for the other. Silence is necessary, silence to listen to Jesus Christ who speaks in the Bible. Silent listening is generous, since it flows from a deep love. That is what the Oblates are called upon to experience "in joy", says the Founder. They are happy to be in inti-

mate union with Christ, enjoying his word. Thus the mouth will speak from the abundance of the heart (see Matthew 12:34). Consequently, the reading of Scripture is not limited to study; it must be seen in the context of an encounter with Christ. It is thus a listening to his word received as a personal message.

*b. In the text approved by the Holy See in 1826*

In the same context of silence and intimacy with Christ, the directive has been kept: "Every member of the Institute is enjoined to study Sacred Scripture daily".<sup>23</sup> I have no idea what clerical error in the Rule of 1926 restricted this study to priests and scholastics. Whatever the case may be, all editions of the Rule from 1826 to 1928 have always placed this text after the paragraph on oraison.

*c. In the letters to Oblates*

From the very beginning of their formation, young Oblates must develop an intimate familiarity with Bible reading. To Father Henry Tempier, master of novices at Notre-Dame du Laus, Father de Mazenod wrote: "Continue to have them learn by heart several verses of the New Testament every day [...]".<sup>24</sup> The Rule's directive seemed important enough to Father John Baptist Berne, professor at the Major Seminary at Fréjus for him to ask the Superior General to dispense him from the obligation of reading the Bible every day. Bishop de Mazenod answers him with regard to spiritual reading and then Bible reading: "[...] I gladly give you my consent that you reduce to twenty minutes instead of half-an-hour the time you spend on it. The same goes for the Scripture read-

ing, as the kind of studies you are engaged in oblige you to delve often in this very fruitful mine."<sup>25</sup> This example clearly demonstrates what our Founder and the Oblates of that time understood as "Scripture reading." Father Berne was teaching at the Major Seminary; in order to prepare his classes it was necessary that he study the Bible; that was not enough; he also needed to engage in a continuous reading of the Holy Book. In this way, the Oblates, imitating their Founder, wished to be faithful to the tradition of the *Lectio Divina*.

## II. SELECTED TEXTS

Some founders of Orders were struck in a providential way by a passage of Scripture that radically changed their way of life. We can give as an example the case of Saint Anthony, founder of the cenobitic life, who was overwhelmed by the Gospel text: "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell all you own and give it to the poor". There was no dramatic change due to a Gospel text in the life of Eugene de Mazenod, though there certainly were Scripture texts that profoundly marked his existence.<sup>26</sup> There is no doubt that the most basic impact was not that of one or two verses of Scripture which recurred in his writings, but rather the Passion narrative as a whole. It was in reliving the Passion of Christ as it appeared in the prayer of the Church that he was touched by Christ's boundless love and that he wanted to make of his life a generous response to this love. The grace of Good Friday of 1807 is clearly the most obvious example of this. One can add to it reflections like these: "Like the Apostle to preach Jesus Christ, and him crucified [...] not in loftiness of speech, but in the showing

of the Spirit".<sup>27</sup> "One must, if one wishes to live the life of Jesus Christ, following the advice of the Apostle, carry always about oneself the mortification of Jesus Christ [...] 'so that he may make up in his body the things that are lacking in the passion of Christ' (Colossians 1:24)".<sup>28</sup> "General resolution to be wholly God's [...] to seek only the cross of Jesus Christ and the penance due to my sins [...]"<sup>29</sup>

During the Holy Week liturgies, we hear in the Lamentations of Jeremiah the groaning of an abandoned and persecuted Jerusalem; liturgical tradition has seen in this the cries of the Church weeping over the defection of her children. From his seminary days, Eugene de Mazenod felt the challenge issuing from this traditional reading of the Lamentations — as this conference for the ordination to the sub-diaconate gives witness: "[...] These deeds that rend our Mother have penetrated deep into our souls, and we cried out in accents of sorrow: *Facta est quasi vidua Domina gentium* [...] No, no tender dear Mother, not all your children desert you in the days of your affliction; a group, small it is true, but precious for the feelings that move it, draws close around you and wipes away the tears that men's ingratitude provokes in the bitterness of your sorrow [...]"<sup>30</sup> In a rather more sober style in the *Preface* of the Rule, Father de Mazenod repeated his decision to respond to the call of a Church in desperate straits. That makes me think that the section of Scripture that stirred the Founder most profoundly was the Passion narrative. This narrative made evident to him the personal love of Christ for him, the value of every soul redeemed by the blood of Christ, the love of Jesus Christ for the people of the whole universe. For him, love for Christ was inseparable from

love of the Church since she was "that glorious inheritance purchased by Christ the Savior at the cost of his own blood".<sup>31</sup> "How is it possible to separate our love of Jesus Christ from the love we owe to his Church? These two kinds of love merge: to love the Church is to love Jesus Christ, and vice-versa."<sup>32</sup> So when he meditates on the Passion of Christ, it is especially the love of Jesus Christ that he discovers and with which he permeates himself.<sup>33</sup>

Among the most significant texts quoted by our Founder, what especially captures my attention are the miracles of Pentecost and the beginning of the life of the Church as narrated in the Acts of the Apostles. The Oblates are apostles because of the gift of the Holy Spirit. "Your destiny is to be apostles, and so tend within your hearts the sacred fire that the Holy Spirit lights there [...]"<sup>34</sup> Concerning the missionaries in Ceylon, he wrote to Cardinal Fransoni: "I am convinced that they have been gifted with a certain participation in the miracle of Pentecost. How could it otherwise be possible to explain that in such a short time, they have been able to know enough of those difficult languages to instruct and confess the natives of that country?"<sup>35</sup> It was by the power of the Spirit that the Oblates accomplished miracles as marvelous as those which occurred in the early days of the Church. That is what the Founder states in this letter to Father Henry Faraud: "I have just read, all at once and with lively interest [...] the admirable account of the La Nativité Mission that you sent me [...]. How can I express to you all the feelings that it awoke in my soul? [...] One has to go back to the first preaching of Saint Peter to find anything similar. An apostle like him, sent to proclaim the Good News to those savage nations, the first man to

speak to them of God, to bring them knowledge of Jesus the Savior [...] One can only prostrate oneself before you, so privileged are you among your brothers in the Church of God by reason of the choice that he has made of you to work these miracles.”<sup>36</sup> Here again we see the impact of the *Lectio Divina*. The text of the Bible does not merely call up an event of history, it is a message for us today as well. Because his heart is so filled with admiration for the marvels accomplished by the Apostles, our Founder grasps the enormous value of the apostolate of the Oblates today. In the letters which tell of their apostolic excursions, it is the Lord himself who reveals to them his marvels just like he displayed them in the Acts of the Apostles. Such an act of faith interprets a calling, as he wrote to Father Mouchette to pass on to the scholastics: “They have to realize that their ministry is the continuation of the apostolic ministry, and that it is a question of going to the length of performing miracles. The news that reaches us from the foreign missions is proof of this.”<sup>37</sup>

Jesus’ apostolic plan of action (see Luke 4:18-19), even if it is not often quoted by Saint Eugene — at least explicitly — is of primary importance to grasp his missionary spirit. When he quotes this text or makes allusion to it, it is to express his happiness at being called like Christ was and his intention to act as He did. Like Christ, he allows himself to be led by the Spirit; he speaks of “a scrupulous fidelity to the least movements of the Holy Spirit”.<sup>38</sup> In the letter that he sent to Father Tempier a few days before his episcopal ordination, he spoke of Christ’s prayer for us and he added: “It is precisely on this point that the power of the Holy Spirit draws me to dwell and in it the fruit that I want and hope for from

my retreat. In other words, in this last phase of my life I think I can say that I am firmly resolved, through the overflowing abundance of graces that I will receive to try, by assiduous application, to conform myself to God’s will that not a single fiber of my being will knowingly swerve from it.”<sup>39</sup> If, like Christ, he allows himself to be guided by the Spirit, his apostolate would no longer be his work, but that of God.

Led by the Spirit, with and in the manner of Christ, he dedicates himself generously to the evangelization of the poor. To illustrate this statement, one would have to go through the entire life of the Founder. We limit ourselves to quoting here a few notes from his 1831 retreat: “Will we ever have an adequate understanding of this sublime vocation! For that one would have to understand the excellence of our Institute’s end, beyond argument the most perfect one could propose to oneself in this world, since the end of our Institute is the self-same end that the Son of God had in mind when he came down on earth. The glory of his heavenly Father and the salvation of souls [...] He was sent especially to evangelize the poor [...] The means [...] are unquestionably the most perfect since they are precisely those same means used by our divine Savior [...] a happy blend of the active and contemplative life of which Jesus Christ and the Apostles have set us an example.”<sup>40</sup> We find here the essential element Saint Eugene focused on: to be like Christ and to be with him.

Always very affectionate toward the Oblates, the Founder often quoted the words of Saint Paul to the Philippians (1:3-9), especially verse 8: “You have a permanent place in my heart [...] loving you as Christ Jesus loves you”. This text was obviously at the basis of his relationships with the Oblates. Since he

quotes the complete text in his letter of obedience for the first missionary Oblates sent to Canada, we know the French text he was using.<sup>41</sup> We will go through this text showing its impact on Eugene de Mazenod's way of thinking.

"As for me, I give thanks to God each time I think of you, in all my prayers." To give thanks is to be aware that God is the first one to take the initiative in the apostolate and to thank Him for this. "I have also received some very good letters from Father Ricard. He tells me of all that our Fathers in the Oregon are seeking to do to evangelize and convert the people among whom they find themselves. May God be blessed for all the good that is being performed through our dear Oblates [...]"<sup>42</sup> To Fathers Charles F. Gondrand and Charles Baret: "I am grateful to God for the success he has bestowed on your preaching [...]"<sup>43</sup> He exhorts these two young priests to avoid vain glory since all success must be attributed to God.

— "Every time I pray for all of you, I pray with joy." "With joy." Bishop de Mazenod is happy to learn how fruitful the apostolate of the Oblates is. "[...] I will have the consolation of leaving behind me a phalanx of good missionaries who spend their lives in extending the kingdom of Jesus Christ and weaving a crown for themselves to wear in glory. You would not believe the joy that this thought gives me."<sup>44</sup> The missionaries felt the same joy: "I am not surprised that the consolations that the Lord allows you to taste in the exercise of your sublime ministry fill your souls with joy and make all pains seem light to you. The story alone which you have told me fills me with thankfulness to God [...]"<sup>45</sup>

— "With regard to your communion in the Gospel." The mission is confided

to the community and this is what gives solidarity to the Oblates in their apostolate. They are companions because of grace, because to participate in the mission of the Son of God is an extraordinary grace. Adopting the wording of Saint Paul, the Founder speaks of them having "communion in the Gospel". That is why in as much as he possibly could he communicates to his correspondents news from other missions. For example, in a letter to Father Faraud, he says this: "I think these details about the family, together with those I have sent to Father Bremond, will give you pleasure. Do as much, I ask you again, on your part. You know that we should all say in the broadest sense *omnia mea tua sunt* since we are all but *cor unum et anima una* as long as we are in Heaven and on earth — that is our strength and consolation."<sup>46</sup>

— "I am quite certain that the One who began this good work in you will see that it is finished when the Day of Christ Jesus comes. It is only natural that I should feel like this toward you all, since [...] you have a permanent place in my heart [...] loving you as Christ Jesus loves you." The Founder loves the Oblates with the tenderness of Christ. Many of his letters give witness to this. To Father Faraud, he wrote: "There is a father beyond the great lake whom you must not forget; know that you are always present to him, whatever the distance which separates you from him [...]. You know me little if you do not know how much I love you."<sup>47</sup> To Father Louis Toussaint Dassy, he wrote: "I do not know how my heart is equal to the affection which it nourishes for you all. It is a prodigy which is something of an attribute of God. [...] No one among you could be loved more than I love him."<sup>48</sup> He can say in all truth: "You have a permanent place in

my heart [...] loving you as Christ Jesus loves you" (Philippians 1:8), as he tells Father Mouchette: "It seems to me, dearly beloved son, that the more I love someone like yourself, the more I love God who is the source and bond of our mutual affection."<sup>49</sup>

— "*My prayer is that your love for each other may increase more and more and never stop improving your knowledge and deepening your perception through Christ Jesus.*" The best way for the Founder to show his affection was to pray for his Oblates. "[...] If I but told you how much I concern myself with you before the good Lord!"<sup>50</sup> Oraison in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament was the ideal moment for the Founder to meet with all his Oblates in the love of Christ. "I must say that it happens sometimes when I find myself in the presence of Jesus Christ that I experience a kind of illusion. It seems to me that you are adoring Him and praying at the same time as I and with Him being as present to you as to me, we feel as if we were very close to one another although not able to see each other."<sup>51</sup>

Saint Paul's statement leads to another reflection, which is the thought that discernment is the fruit of charity. This is clearly expressed in the verse that follows the passage quoted by Bishop de Mazenod. "My prayer is that your love for each other may increase more and more and never stop improving your knowledge and deepening your perception so that you can always recognize what is best" (Philippians 1:9). Even if our Founder does not refer explicitly to this thought of Saint Paul, his way of acting is an illustration of it. It was always in an atmosphere of charity towards his Oblates that he made his decisions. It is because he loves them that he requires they report in detail on

their mission so that he could know what was going on and act in a way that was for their best interests. As an example, let us take his relations with the first Oblates sent to Canada. "You are the object of my most tender solicitude, you are constantly in my mind; my heart could not love you more considering the fidelity of your response to your vocation."<sup>52</sup> "You will realize at the distance we are from each other that the smallest items are bound to please."<sup>53</sup> He reminds the superior of this group that decisions should be taken in an atmosphere of mutual confidence: "[...] Cease taking upon yourself alone a responsibility which necessarily has to be shared by others [...] It is thus, by giving others marks of confidence, by showing them deference, by knowing how to modify one's own ideas and to adopt those of others that one gains their sympathy, their help and their affection."<sup>54</sup> The Founder, for his part, applied this rule to himself by inviting the self-same Father Jean-Baptiste Honorat to speak to him frankly: "You must not be afraid to query me when you believe I have given a decision which presents some problems. It will probably be because I have not been sufficiently informed."<sup>55</sup>

These concrete examples illustrate the principle stated by Saint Paul that discernment is the fruit of charity.

To these verses the Founder adds the last part of verse 11 of the same chapter: "for the glory and praise of God".

Following the example of Jesus who sought only the glory of his Father, Saint Eugene enthusiastically shares the same aspiration: "What more glorious occupation than to act in everything and for everything only for God, to love him above all else [...] That is the true way to glorify him as he wants."<sup>56</sup> One

often finds statements of this kind in his writings: "Having always above all and solely in view the great glory of God and the salvation of souls". Also writing to his father: "Provided that God is glorified and good gets done, that is all we can desire. That is the only reason we are here."<sup>57</sup>

This text of Saint Paul, frequently quoted by the Founder, is very expressive for missionary spirituality: thanksgiving, joy, common sharing in the Gospel, fraternal affection, prayers for one another, discernment, the fruit of charity, for the glory of God. Thanks to a faithful reading of the Word of God, these Pauline themes shaped the soul of the Founder. The message is always relevant.

### III. WITNESS OF FAITH

Reflections on the Pastoral Letter of Lent 1844.<sup>58</sup>

When they were preaching parish missions, Father de Mazenod and his Oblate companions experienced the power of the Word of God, but they did not take the time to discuss it. Bishop de Mazenod had the opportunity of doing this in 1844 when Father Loewenbrück was preaching a series of parish retreats in several different churches in Marseilles. The Bishop took a lively interest in those missions and took part in a number of the mission exercises, which brought to mind those happy times when he himself was dedicated to this ministry.<sup>59</sup> This experience led him to choose parish missions as the theme for his Lenten Pastoral Letter. Even if Bishop de Mazenod had other people help him write this letter, as he had done for other pastoral letters, it is obvious that this letter is based on his own personal experience. Consequently, for

us, it is the witness given by a missionary who proclaimed the Word of God and felt the living power it possessed. He made use of biblical texts to express his convictions throughout his letter.

#### 1. FAITH IN THE WORD OF GOD

He believed in the efficacious impact of the holy Word. "It has lost none of its effectiveness throughout the ages; we have experienced the fact that, having issued forth from the mouth of the one who is himself life eternal, it continues to be spirit and life." Because it is "spirit and life" (John 6:52), the Word of God gives life. It is the power of life that the Founder admires among those faithful who welcome this word. Here, he is paraphrasing the text in order to bring out what he considers to be its spirit. The Word of God was like "a blazing fire which conveyed to them [in the souls] a divine warmth and led them to love the law of the Lord" (Psalm 119 (118), v.140). "It is the Lord who has let shine the brilliance of his face on his servants and they have learnt to follow his ways" (Psalm 119/118: 135). "The Gospel has given strength to their faith" (Romans 1:16). "They have received the words of the Lord; they devoured them and have discovered the joy and delight of a heart returned to God" (Jeremiah 15:16). As we see, in comparing these texts with the Bible text, Eugene de Mazenod does not hesitate to rework the sacred texts to bring out the message he sees in them. In this personal interpretation, he does not lapse into the danger of fantasy because he is an assiduous reader of the Bible and he is imbued with its spirit. This method was already used in the targum of Israel and is the method followed by the majority of the Fathers of the Church.

When he received news of missions being preached in his diocese, he would greet the dawning of salvation like Zachariah in the *Benedictus*: “the indescribable visits, dawning from the heavens, which the Lord bestows on his people, from the heart of his mercy, so as to give them the knowledge of salvation and the remission of sins” (Luke 1:77-78). We find here the self-same attitude of faith: Today, the Word of God is being realized among you.

In faith, he sees Jesus Christ Himself in the missionaries. The missionaries break the spiritual bread “in place of Jesus Christ himself” (2 Corinthians 5:20), and just as in the case of Jesus, “the Spirit of God rests upon them to lead them to evangelize the poor” (Isaiah 61:1 and Luke 4:18).

## 2. CONFIDENCE IN THE POWER OF THE WORD

He has confidence because God is acting even before the preachers began to preach. “Behold, there shall come days when I will send famine upon the land, not a hunger for bread which nourishes the body, nor a thirst which water satisfies, but the hunger and thirst to hear the Word of God” (Amos 8:11). The commentary on this text is based on Father de Mazenod’s own experience and it is always relevant. “Often the action of grace precedes the preaching of the Gospel and when hearts are touched by the first words of this marvelous preaching, they feel the need to open themselves [...] to receive the divine seed.”

Even if some fruits of the mission take their time to appear, his confidence in the Word remains firm because he is sure of the power of this Word and it is still the Bible which sustains his confidence. “The word does not return empty

to the one from which it issued” (Isaiah 55:10). “Alive and active, it cuts like any double-edged sword but more finely; it can slip through the place where the soul is divided from the spirit, or joints from the marrow; it can judge the secret emotions and thoughts” (Hebrews 4:12). “It is this light-filled expression of God’s words which gives understanding even to children” (Psalm 119/118, v. 130). In the enthusiasm of his confidence, Father de Mazenod intensifies the text of the Psalm, just like he strengthens the following passage from James: “It is the divine teaching which penetrates and imprints<sup>60</sup> itself deeply in souls and which has the power to save” (James 1:21). We see how the text can be intensified in the way Eugene did when he quoted it, but he consistently does this to express his certainty that the Word of God is strong enough to overcome all resistance.

## 3. PRAISES OFFERED TO THE LORD

Even if a long personal experience of parish missions gave Saint Eugene the opportunity to admire the workings of grace, he still remained just as enthusiastic as he was at the outset and the took the time to write to the faithful of his diocese, especially giving a description of sinners flocking to the confessional. He then gives thanks to God: “Would this not lead you to believe that the mercies of the Lord, which the Prophet-King wanted to sing eternally (Psalm 89/88, v.1) are worthy of being praised with all the magnificence of his inspired language?” It is the working of the mercy of God and it is truly a marvelous thing in our eyes (Psalm 118/117, v.23).

The action of God is so powerful that it pushes people to holiness; it is “an almost irresistible movement which

pushes souls toward God who leads them through [...] the various degrees of justification, ascending through all the mysterious stages which raise them right up to him who is the source of all justice." Then, sinners "create in themselves a new heart and a new spirit." (Ez 18:31) This conversion is a victory of light over darkness and the heavens rejoice. "There is more joy in heaven over one single sinner who comes to conversion than for the ninety-nine just ones who have no need of conversion" (Luke 15:7). He becomes more specific about the joy in heaven: "The heavenly Father has regained his children that he had lost; the Son encounters others for whom he gave his life; and the Holy Spirit finds hearts renewed in which he takes up his abode; brothers have been presented to the angels and to the saints who are in glory".

In bringing his Pastoral Letter to a close, Bishop de Mazenod expressed his happiness at having "experienced the power of the Word of God in his ministry in parish missions. He is pleased that God gave him 'a holy family and a spiritual issue of Gospel workers destined for the same ministry'." Using an expression of Saint Paul's, he calls them "his crown and his joy" (Philippians 4:7). It is now up to the Oblates to live that same faith in the Word of God.

#### IV. THE WORD OF GOD RECEIVED BY THE OBLATES

##### 1. A FEW OBLATES AS EXAMPLES

The case of Father Berne, referred to above, is an example of faithfulness to the *Lectio Divina*. To express the thinking of a few Oblates who were the

Founder's contemporaries, I will use almost exclusively texts published by Father Yvon Beaudoin in the second series of *Oblate Writings*.

##### a) *Father Tempier*

On the flyleaf of his New Testament kept at Aix-en-Provence, Father Tempier had written in calligraphy this Latin passage from the Book of Joshua: "Have the book of this Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may carefully keep everything that is written in it. Then you will prosper in your dealings, then you will have success" (Joshua 1:8). It is his faith in the Word of God which dictated his conduct as superior of the Major Seminary of Marseilles. While, according to the historians, Sacred Scripture was neglected in the seminaries of that period, in Marseilles it was given a place of prominence. "Father Tempier's rule, which first recalled that 'Holy Scripture is absolutely necessary and indispensable for clerical students', obliged every student to attend conferences which were given once a week, every Thursday morning (Art. 19). Over a period of four or five years, they covered a good introduction to each of the books of the two Testaments as well as an exegesis of the main passages."<sup>61</sup> Father Tempier exhorted Father Dassy not to do too much archeology "to the detriment of the study of Sacred Scripture".<sup>62</sup>

##### b. *Blessed Joseph Gérard*

According to Father Gérard, it was the Gospel which sheds light on his method of apostolate. To the questions he asked himself on this topic, "The answer is found on every page of the Gospel, one must love them, love them

in spite of everything, love them always".<sup>63</sup> If, in his retreat notes, he reproached himself for "frequent missing of [...] Sacred Scripture",<sup>64</sup> it was because it is important.

### c. Father Casimir Aubert

His retreat notes for the year 1828 are worthy of being quoted in their entirety: "I will do the reading of Scripture with the same care and still more with much greater respect. I will always stand up with my head uncovered for this exercise. Until I have more time than I have at the moment, I will seek in the Scriptures alone a topic of edification, while at the same time being mindful of acquiring in this respect a degree of knowledge and learning essential for a person dedicated to the service of souls. But I must not remain satisfied with this rather meager knowledge, and as soon as times permits, I must give myself over to a serious study of this portion so essential for ecclesiastical knowledge and for that I will apply myself to studying each portion extensively and in detail, using the best available commentaries and especially having an assiduous recourse to prayer. I will do this reading as if it was God who was speaking to me through the sacred author and as if what I was reading was a letter the Lord has sent me from heaven, my true homeland."<sup>65</sup> This final phrase encompasses everything the Church understands by the *Lectio Divina*.

## 2. AFTER THE TIME OF THE FOUNDER

Father Joseph Fabre (1861-1892) refers above all to the Constitutions and Rules. Speaking of the means to ensure our fidelity to our vocation, he says: "Study of Sacred Scripture and spiritual

reading still offer each day an abundant sustenance drawn from the best sources to maintain our piety".<sup>66</sup> In his report to the General Chapter in August of 1867, he reminded his hearers of the necessity of study, even for the eldest among them, and asks them all this question: "Where are we in relation to our studies of Sacred Scripture and theology?"<sup>67</sup> The message we gather from the circular letters of Father Fabre is that the Constitutions teach us how to live in fidelity and it is enough to put them into practice.

With Father Fabre's authorization, Father Alexander Audruger was given the task of drawing up the *Directoire pour les missions*. He did not sign it as its author, but he received a letter of commendation from Cardinal Hippolyte Guibert who had preached parish missions under the Founder's direction and who recognized in the *Directoire* a faithful following of Father de Mazenod's method. In treating of the preparation required for preaching missions, the *Directoire* used these terms to express itself: "But what we must above all know and in view of this study are the Sacred Scriptures and theology. Holy Scripture is the *liber sacerdotalis* par excellence, as Saint Jerome tells us; in addition, he calls it *substantia sacerdotii nostri*. It is the rich store-house and the powerful arsenal upon which the holy Fathers and Doctors have drawn. It is the book one must devour: "*Comede volumen istud, et vadens loquere ad filios Israel* [Eat this scroll, then go and speak to the House of Israel.]" (Ezekiel 3:1) "*Accipe librum et devora illum*. [Take it and eat it.]" (Apocalypse 10:9) It is the Book of God. It contains everything: teaching of the truth, refutation of errors, condemnation of vice, doctrine of perfection." The text adds a quotation from 2 Timothy 3:16.68

From the circular letters of Father Louis Soullier (1893-1897), we can point to two of them in which he speaks more at length about Sacred Scripture. On July 31, 1894, the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, on the order of Pope Leo XIII, published a letter on preaching. Father Soullier was not satisfied with communicating it to the Oblates; he also commented on it at length especially by using the Constitutions and Holy Scripture. Having recourse to the Word of God is of primordial importance, he said. For example, when the issue at stake is a simplicity adapted to the needs of people, the Superior General said: "Let us go draw abundantly at the living source of Sacred Scriptures". And the following paragraph begins as follows: "In a word, let us be missionaries". He reminds them of the example of the Founder: "He had only one goal: to convert souls through knowledge and love of Jesus Christ".<sup>69</sup>

In the circular letter entitled, *Des études du Missionnaire Oblate de Marie*, from the beginning, he stresses the principle: "The study of Sacred Scripture is our primary study". To develop his thought the Superior General had available to him a document which had a decisive impact on Scripture study in the Catholic Church, the encyclical letter, *Providentissimus Deus*. Father Soullier stated: "In it, Leo XIII shows us how, in fact, Sacred Scripture is, taken as a whole, the great power of the apostolate and the most effective tool for personal sanctification".<sup>70</sup>

Father Cassien Augier (1898-1906) was Superior General at a very painful time for the Congregation. In France, it was the time of persecutions with the expulsion of the religious in 1903. Since many Oblates were of French origin at that time, it was the majority

of the Congregation which sustained the blow. In speaking of these trials, Father Augier referred to the Bible, to the Lamentations of the Old Testament: "Tribulations and anguish." (Psalm 116 (114-115) v.9), the destruction of communities (Psalm 132, 133), being stripped of our possessions Joel 26, 38 ff. He refers especially to the Passion of Jesus, Gethsemane (Matthew 20:38) with its acceptance of the Father's will (Luke 22:42). The Oblates carry the cross with Christ (Matthew 10:38); they are reliving the lot of the first Christians, the persecuted Apostles (Acts 5:41), the scattered Christians. (Hebrews 11:38) He proclaimed to the Oblates the promise of Jesus: "your sorrow will be turned into joy" (John 16:20), "happy are those who are persecuted in the cause of right." (Matthew 5:10) Sustained by the word of Christ, the Oblates will be faithful to the end. (Apocalypse 2:10) Their great strength is fraternal unity as recommended by Christ. (John 17:22)<sup>71</sup> In this way, the Word of God enlightens their faith and sustains the courage of the Oblates in a painful moment of their history.

For Father August Lavillardière (1906-1908) the problems were very different. At the beginning of the 20th century, problems of exegesis were passionately debated. In his circular letter of April 21, 1907, after reporting on the General Chapter of September 1906, while treating of the situation of the scholasticates, the Superior General cited several influential authors like Strauss, Baur, Harnack, and Renan. He promulgated the decree of the Chapter condemning Losy and forbade the teaching of his theses.<sup>72</sup> Just at the time when the Modernist crisis was spreading intellectual confusion, Father Joseph Lemius collaborated in the writing of the encyclical letter *Pascendi* which

would appear on September 8, 1907. As for study of the Bible, the reaction of the Superior General and the Chapter was to comply with the Holy Father's directives.

In the circular letters of Bishop Augustine Dontenwill (1908-1931) and Father Theodore Labouré (1932-1944), there is no special mention made of Bible study. Here and there a quote illustrates the Superior General's thinking. We simply point out the Gospel allusions in the circular letter of Christmas 1915 which announced the celebrations for the first centenary of the Congregation. At its inception, the Congregation was nothing more than a mustard seed and it grew. What fostered its growth was the Oblates' zeal for the poor. In this way, the Institute grew to be a powerful tree at the river's edge. (Psalm 1:3) Some of Jesus' words characterize the attitude of the Oblates: "I feel sorry for all these people" (Mark 8:2); "Come to me all you who labor and are overburdened" (Matthew 11:28); "To bring good news to the poor" (Luke 4:18); That is the mission that Jesus entrusted to his disciples: "As the Father sent me..." (John 20:21)<sup>73</sup>

Father Leo Deschâtelets (1947-1972) did much work to strengthen studies. In his report to the Chapter of 1953, he called for "a return to the spiritual sources which should slake our thirst and encourage us: the Holy Bible, the Holy Rule, spiritual teaching of all the saints, the teaching of Holy Mother, the Church."<sup>74</sup> In presenting the Chapter deliberations, he said: "Let the professors at the scholasticate become specialists in the subjects they are teaching, as much as possible, taking a degree in that field... especially in Sacred Scripture [...] to spend a period of time in the Holy Land."<sup>75</sup> A majority of the provinces responded to this call as Father

Daniel Albers pointed out in his report to the Chapter of 1959: "As for academic preparation, it is good and getting better due to the effort being made everywhere these last few years."<sup>76</sup>

At the Chapter of 1959, Father Deschâtelets emphasized: "We still notice in our midst an emerging movement; a more in-depth study of the Bible considered as sustenance for the spiritual life [...] We notice a hunger for Holy Scripture, a thirst for this living water that in the past did not appear in such a well defined way. In this way, Article 255, written into the Rule in 1818, rediscovers the integral dynamism it contains for the present generation of Oblates, more desirous than others were perhaps of a return to the more authentic, more living sources of spirituality."<sup>77</sup>

He broaches this topic once again in his report to the 1966 Chapter. He wants to stress a point he has alluded to several times before: "[...] one point which deals with the actual movement of Biblical theology. As Oblates and as missionaries, we cannot ignore this return to Sacred Scripture. We should be specialists of the Word of God. We should cherish this duty all the more so since it reflects the thinking of the Sovereign Pontiffs and that of the Church in Council."<sup>78</sup>

In this movement of renewal of Bible studies, the Constitutions and Rules drawn up by the 1966 Chapter contain a paragraph entitled *A Lively Faith Enlightened by the Word of God*. Articles 54 to 58 treat explicitly of the role of the Word of God in our apostolate.

The statements of Father Fernand Jetté (1974-1986) make up an outstanding message of unity to sustain the Oblates in fidelity to their vocation. He puts them in context already in his first letter, by quoting article 137 from the

1966 Constitutions: "love of the Gospel" which is love of Jesus Christ, to be lived completely and without reservation "in the midst of men", especially the poorest, and in an "apostolic community", that is to say, like the Twelve who had left everything to be with Jesus and to go and preach (cf. Mark 3:14).<sup>79</sup>

It is in the perspective of the Oblate vocation, then, that Father Jetté quotes the Bible, especially the New Testament. And, in a broader context, the example and teaching of Jesus Christ and the mind of the Apostles, as it was revealed in the Gospel, underlie his writings. Here are a few examples:

— *Love of Jesus Christ*

Father de Mazenod "in his own life [...] had encountered Christ and had come to know experientially the value of Christ's blood".<sup>80</sup> After referring to the grace of Good Friday, 1807, Father Jetté adds: "The overriding fact here is his personal experience of the redemptive mystery, his personal encounter with Christ the Savior".<sup>81</sup> To live with Christ, the Oblates commit themselves by vow, more specifically "the vow of obedience likewise takes its inspiration from the attitude of Christ who voluntarily became obedient to the Father's will, even to death on the cross (John 4:34; 5:30; Philippians 2:8; Hebrews 10:7) and by such suffering learned what it meant to be obedient (Hebrews 5:8). [...] In people's eyes this vow gives special witness to the mystery of the world's salvation accomplished by the sacrifice of the cross."<sup>82</sup> A few pages before, Father Jetté could say: "For me the authentic Oblate is one who has truly left all to follow Jesus Christ".<sup>83</sup>

— *To love the world*

"God so loved the world that He gave up his only begotten Son, not to reject the world but so that the world

might find salvation through him. The Oblate will ever be mindful that it is this same love which consecrates him and gives him his mission."<sup>84</sup> Here we find the origins of this typical phrase inspired by a reflection on the Oblate vocation in the light of the Gospel: "The Gospel is love for man to the point of giving one's life for him, but it is also the love for God, the Creator and Father of all men."<sup>85</sup>

— *Sent to the poor*

"Being capable of hearing the appeals of the poor of today [...]. An appeal for justice and for sharing, an appeal for an existence that is more human and less stifling, an appeal to go beyond oneself and for love, an appeal for salvation and fullness of life in Jesus Christ. "I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly", Jesus said (John 10:10)."<sup>86</sup>

— *Like the Twelve*

Fidelity to the grace received. For us, it is the grace handed on to us by the Founder that we must revive. "Such was Paul's advice to Timothy: to fan into flame the gift that God had given him by the Apostle's hand (cf. 2 Timothy 1:6)."<sup>87</sup>

Fidelity to the mission. "Saint Paul says that the only thing required of a servant of Christ, of a steward of God's mysteries "is that he be found trustworthy" (1 Corinthians 4:1-2)."<sup>88</sup>

Apostolic daring. Giving the example of a missionary ready to give his life: "When I read these lines, the words of St. Paul came to mind: "You did not receive a spirit of slavery leading you back into fear... (Romans 8:15)."<sup>89</sup> With the courage to proclaim Jesus Christ: "For we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard", Peter and John affirmed before the Sanhedrin. (Acts 4:20)<sup>90</sup>

Servant. To illustrate this theme,

Father Jetté refers to texts quoted by the Founder on several occasions. "Let us not forget those beautiful words of St. Paul: *Nos autem servos vestros per Jesum*. With such an attitude, we can put up with every nuisance and endure all difficulties. (Diary, September 8, 1838)." "Whatever we may be, we are useless servants in the Father's family household. (Letter to Father Mille, May 30, 1832)."<sup>91</sup>

These are only a few examples which bring out the richness of a reflection on the Oblate life in the light of the Gospel and the example of the Apostles. We can reap an abundant harvest of quotations from the body of Father Jetté's texts quoted above.

The Chapter of 1980 characterized the Word of God as one of the spiritual resources that nourished Oblate life.<sup>92</sup>

In his commentary, Father Jetté highlights the two-fold fruit of the Word of God: "The Word of God is at one and the same time nourishment for our spiritual life and our apostolate". He stresses a basic point: "It [...] well states what is the Oblate's first interest, namely, a deeper understanding of the Word of God as Savior. He learns to read scripture with his heart, 'a listening heart' [...]"<sup>93</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Biblical studies have seen great development since the time of the Founder. It is by taking the best possible advantage of the progress made in contemporary research that we can welcome the Word of God. Our holy Founder, along with the first Oblates, remains for us a model of faith and attachment to the message Jesus spoke to us. We can always make our own the resolution of Father Casimir Aubert: "I

will do this reading as if it was God who was speaking to me through the sacred author and as if what I was reading was a letter the Lord has sent me from heaven, my true homeland."

RENE MOTTE

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Instruction pastorale sur les missions*, 1844, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> "Diary (1791-1821), III – Venice (1794-1797)", in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 16, p. 38.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of November 1805, in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 14, no. 13, p. 25.

<sup>4</sup> REY I, p. 70.

<sup>5</sup> See "Je serai prêtre, Eugène de Mazenod, de Venise à Saint-Sulpice, 1794-1811", in *Etudes oblates*, 13 (1954), p. 136-138.

<sup>6</sup> LEFLON I, p. 334.

<sup>7</sup> In *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 15, no. 107, p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> In *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 15, no. 114, p. 35.

<sup>9</sup> "Constitutions et Règles de la Société des Missionnaires de Provence", Second Part, Chapter one, par. 5, in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 61.

<sup>10</sup> Retreat in preparation for episcopal ordination, October 7 to 14, 1832, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 15, no. 166, p. 207.

<sup>11</sup> In *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 15, no. 121, p. 58. The "haire" is a coarse hair shirt worn next to the skin for purposes of mortification.

<sup>12</sup> See *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 15, no. 144, p. 141 & 142; no. 146, p. 154; no. 156, p. 174.

<sup>13</sup> Retreat in preparation for the taking possession of the See of Marseilles, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 15, no. 185, p. 238.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 239.

<sup>15</sup> Daily program, *ibidem*, no. 186, p. 242 and "Daily spiritual exercises", *ibidem*, no. 189, p. 246.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, no. 189, p. 247.

<sup>17</sup> Evangelical poverty, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 15, no. 150, p. 160.

<sup>18</sup> Instruction of March 28, 1813, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 15, no. 115, p. 40.

<sup>19</sup> "Memoirs of the Founder, circa 1845", in *Selected Texts*, no. 16, p. 39; see also *Constitutions and Rules of 1982*, p. 16.

<sup>20</sup> COSENTINO, Georges, *Histoire de nos Règles*, Ottawa, Oblate Studies Edition, 1954, vol. 1, p. 84.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 137.

<sup>22</sup> Retreat of December 1814, Third day, Eighth meditation, *Oblate Writings*, I vol. 15, no. 130, p. 89.

<sup>23</sup> *Constitutions and Rules of 1826*, Second Part, Chapter two, par. 2., art. 2.

<sup>24</sup> Letter of June 18, 1821, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 6, no. 68, p. 80.

<sup>25</sup> Letter of September 8, 1852, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 11, no. 1119, p. 101.

<sup>26</sup> See MOTTE, René, "Textes bibliques utilisé par le Bx Eugène de Mazenod dans ses lettres et mandements", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 1989, p. 335-404.

<sup>27</sup> *Constitutions and Rules of 1826*, reproduced in the 1982 edition, p. 16.

<sup>28</sup> "Concerning mortification", in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 15, no. 111, p. 29. The last words of this sentence are in Latin; it shows the missionary orientation of sharing in the Passion of Christ.

<sup>29</sup> General resolution. [Notes on predestination, end of December, 1811], in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 14, no. 101, p. 231.

<sup>30</sup> "Conference for ordination day [subdiaconate]", in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 14, no. 65, p. 149 & 150. See DUCHARME, Sylvio, "Essai sur les sources scripturaires de nos saintes Règles", in *Etudes oblates*, 2 (1945), p. 139.

<sup>31</sup> First sentence from the Preface, free translation of Acts 20:28.

<sup>32</sup> "Lenten Pastoral Letter", February 16, 1860, in *Selected Texts*, no. 51, p. 73.

<sup>33</sup> See D'ADDIO, Angelo, *Cristo crocifisso e la Chiesa abbandonata*, Frascati, 1978, and LUBOWICKI, Kazimierz, *Mystère et dynamique de l'amour dans la vie du bienheureux Eugène de Mazenod*, Rome, 1990.

<sup>34</sup> Letter to the Oblates of the Vicariate of Colombo, November 17, 1851, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 4, no. 25, p. 85.

<sup>35</sup> Letter of March 1, 1853, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 5, no. 27, p. 65.

<sup>36</sup> Letter of May 28, 1857, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 2, no. 234, p. 146.

<sup>37</sup> Letter of December 2, 1854, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 11, no. 1256, p. 253.

<sup>38</sup> Resolutions as director at the seminary of St. Sulpice, January 1812, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 15, no. 103, p. 2.

<sup>39</sup> Letter of October 10, 1832, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 8, no. 436, p. 75.

<sup>40</sup> Notes of annual retreat, October 1831, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 15, no. 163, p. 184-185.

<sup>41</sup> In *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 1, no. 8, p. 14.

<sup>42</sup> Journal, December 6, 1854, quoted in *Missions*, 11 (1873), p. 42 ff.

<sup>43</sup> Letter of April 16, 1850, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 11, no. 1041, p. 9.

<sup>44</sup> Letter to the Oblates of the diocese of Saint Boniface, May 26, 1854, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 2, no. 193, p. 75.

<sup>45</sup> Letter to the Fathers of Red River, June 28, 1855, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 2, no. 211, p. 103.

<sup>46</sup> Letter of May 10, 1848, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 1, no. 95, p. 193.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 192.

<sup>48</sup> Letter of January 10, 1852, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 11, no. 1095, p. 69.

<sup>49</sup> Letter of March 22, 1857, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 12, no. 1345, p. 49.

<sup>50</sup> Letter to Father Francis Guinet, March 28, 1855, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 11, no. 1263, p. 261.

<sup>51</sup> Letter to Father Peter Aubert, February 3, 1847, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 1, no. 81, p. 162. See other examples in *Selected Texts*, nos. 263, 265-268.

<sup>52</sup> Letter to Father John Baptist Honorat, October 9, 1841, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 1, no. 9, p. 16.

<sup>53</sup> Letter to the same, March 26, 1842, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 1, no. 10, p. 19.

<sup>54</sup> Letter to the same, January 10, 1843, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 1, no. 14, p. 30.

<sup>55</sup> Letter of January 17, 1843, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 1, no. 15a, p. 34.

<sup>56</sup> Retreat made in the Aix seminary, December 1814, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 15, no. 130, p. 81.

<sup>57</sup> Letter of July 8, 1816, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 15, no. 137, p. 126.

<sup>58</sup> The text will be quoted from the first edition, Marius Olive, Marseilles, 1844.

- <sup>59</sup> See REY II, p. 173-174.
- <sup>60</sup> The verb "empriendre [to imprint]", rarely used today, obviously means "to leave the impression of one's stamp."
- <sup>61</sup> BEAUDOIN, Yvon, François de Paule, Henry Tempier, *Oblate Writings II*, vol. 1, p. 148.
- <sup>62</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 155.
- <sup>63</sup> GERARD, Joseph, Annual retreat, summer of 1886, Spiritual Writings, in *Oblate Writings II*, vol. 4, no. 16, p. 228; also in BEAUDOIN, Yvon, Le bienheureux Joseph Gérard, *Oblate Writings II*, vol. 3, p. 137.
- <sup>64</sup> Monthly retreat, August 8, 1870, Spiritual Writings, in *Oblate Writings II*, vol. 4, no. 6, p. 204.
- <sup>65</sup> AUBERT, Casmir, "Conduite à suivre dans mes divers exercices particuliers, 1828", *Ecrits spirituels*, in *Ecrits oblats II*, vol. 5, no. 3, p. 150.
- <sup>66</sup> Circular letter no. 13, November 21, 1863, in *Circ. adm.*, I (1850-1885), p. (18) 100.
- <sup>67</sup> Circular letter no. 22, August 1, 1871, in *Circ. adm.*, I (1850-1885), p. (9) 207.
- <sup>68</sup> *Directoire pour les missions à l'usage des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, Tours, Mame and Sons, 1881, p. 12.
- <sup>69</sup> Circular letter no. 59, February 17, 1895, in *Circ. adm.*, II (1886-1900), p. 40-41.
- <sup>70</sup> Circular letter no. 61, December 8, 1896, in *Circ. adm.*, II (1886-1900), p. 61 ff. See also, the article, *Formation*, in this dictionary.
- <sup>71</sup> Circular letter no. 76, May 3, 1903, in *Circ. adm.*, III (1901-1921), p. 11-26.
- <sup>72</sup> Circular letter no. 92, April 21, 1907, in *Circ. adm.*, III (1901-1921), p. (51 ff) 190 ff.
- <sup>73</sup> Circular letter no. 113, December 25, 1915, in *Circ. adm.*, III (1901-1921), p. 267 ff.
- <sup>74</sup> Circular letter no. 201, May 1-27, 1953, in *Circ. adm.*, VI (1953-1960), p. (45) 75.
- <sup>75</sup> Circular letter no. 203, December 8, 1953, in *Circ. adm.*, VI (1953-1960), p. (31) 137.
- <sup>76</sup> Circular letter no. 212, December 22, 1959, in *Circ. adm.*, VI (1953-1960), p. (38) 430
- <sup>77</sup> Circular letter no. 208, September 1, 1959, in *Circ. adm.*, VI (1953-1960), p. (58) 277.
- <sup>78</sup> Circular letter no. 220, August 15, 1965, in *Circ. adm.*, VII (1965-1966), p. (13) 181.
- <sup>79</sup> "The direction of the years ahead", January 12, 1975, in *Letters to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate*, Rome, 1984, p. 12.
- <sup>80</sup> "The Oblate charism", in *The Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate*, General House, Rome, 1985, p. 49.
- <sup>81</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 50.
- <sup>82</sup> "An apostolic man and a religious", in *The Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate*, p. 90 & 91.
- <sup>83</sup> "The Oblate charism", in *The Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate*, p. 65.
- <sup>84</sup> Constitutions and Rules of 1966, C 9, quoted in *Letters to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate*, p. 39.
- <sup>85</sup> "To the members of the Oblate conference of Latin America", September 15, 1979, in *Letters to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate*, p. 199.
- <sup>86</sup> "An apostolic man and a religious", in *The Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate*, p. 77 & 78.
- <sup>87</sup> "The direction of the years ahead", in *Letters to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate*, Rome, 1984, p. 13-14.
- <sup>88</sup> "The Oblate: Servant of God's people", in *Letters to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate*, p. 125.
- <sup>89</sup> "Catechesis and evangelization", October 30, 1977, in *Letters to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate*, p. 57-58.
- <sup>90</sup> "Evangelizing the Secularized World" and "An apostolic man and a religious", in *The Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate*, p. 81 & 200; also, "To the members of the Oblate Conference of Europe", May 5, 1979, in *Letters to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate*, p. 164.
- <sup>91</sup> In "The Oblate: Servant of God's people", in *Letters to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate*, p. 123.
- <sup>92</sup> See Constitutions and Rules of 1982, C 33, par. 2.
- <sup>93</sup> *O.M.I., the Apostolic Man: A Commentary on the 1982 edition of the Oblate Constitutions and Rules*, General House, Rome, 1992, p. 197 & 198.

## SOURCES AND STUDIES ON OBLATE VALUES

*Summary:* *I. The Founder:* 1. The Writings; 2. Biographies; 3. Monographs; 4. Father Henry Tempier, the Founder's alter ego; *II. The Constitutions and Rules:* 1. The Texts; 2. Commentaries. *III. General Chapters:* 1. Chapter Minutes; 2. Commentaries. *IV. Circular letters of the Superiors General:* 1. Administrative Circulars of the Superiors General, 8 vols.; 2. Acta Administrationis Generalis. *V. Oblate writings;* 1. General Bibliography; 2. General History; 3. Local History; 4. Reviews; 5. Collections: a. Oblate Historical Archives; b. Oblate Library; c. Quaderni di Vermicino; d. Oblate heritage; e. Selección de Estudios oblatos; f. Selected Oblate Studies and Texts; g. Oblate Writings; 6. Spiritual Writings. *VI. The Spiritual Life of Well-known Oblates:* 1. *Oblates Known for their Holiness of Life:* a. Blessed Joseph Gerard (1831-1914); b. Charles Dominic Albini (1790-1839); c. Vital Grandin (1829-1902); d. Ovide Charlebois (1862-1933); e. Antoni Kowalczyk (1866-1947); f. Cebula, Józef; 2. Other Well-known Oblates.

Our Oblate spirituality emanates from two sources: the experience of the interior and apostolic life of the Founder and those of his spiritual sons, especially the most renowned. Even if a profound harmony necessarily exists between the characteristic traits of the two experiences, they are not necessarily identical. In contemporary language we would say that the charism of the Founder and that of his spiritual sons, both in their concordance and in their differences, constitute the sources of Oblate spirituality.

We can find these sources in the life and writings of the Founder, the constant evolution of the Rule, the General Chapters, the circular letters of the Superiors General, in Oblate writings and the life of a number of well-known Oblates.

### I. THE FOUNDER

Anyone interested in getting to know the spirituality and the charism of a religious congregation should first of all study the life and writings of its

Founder. This is, in fact, the case with Eugene de Mazenod, Founder of the Oblates. Indeed, in his Circular Letter of February 2, 1857, he wrote: "[The Oblate Congregation] has in some way sprung from my heart". We can then say that the spiritual life and the charism of the Founder constitute the primary and most important source of the spiritual life of a religious congregation.<sup>1</sup>

#### 1. THE WRITINGS

We know the Founder especially through his writings. Even though, with the passing of the years, some of them were lost, we still possess a significant portion of them today. These writings, either in the original manuscripts, in reproduction or transcriptions more or less complete, have been copied and arranged in chronological order. They are contained in thirty-two imposing volumes conserved in the General Archives of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate in Rome. Certainly, at the head of the list in terms of importance are his spiritual writings and

letters to his Oblates. Consultation of these works has been greatly facilitated by a complete card index of names and subjects prepared by Fathers Yvon Beaudoin and Mathias Menger.

In spite of different attempts to do so, to date a complete edition of these subjects and names has not been drawn up. From 1977 on, Father Beaudoin has undertaken, little by little, but with a remarkable tenacity, the task of publishing the most important ones. By 1999, he had published 19 volumes of letters, spiritual writings and the Diary of the Founder.

## 2. BIOGRAPHIES

Next in line to the personal writings, come the numerous biographies. We point out only the most important ones from the point of view of documentation and spiritual content and present them in chronological order.

COOKE, Robert, O.M.I. *Sketches of the Life of Mgr. de Mazenod Bishop of Marseilles and Founder of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate*, London, Burns and Oates, 1879, 1882, 2 vols., 400 and 419 pages respectively.

This is the first of the biographies of the Founder. The author makes no pretence of writing a scientific work. He simply wants to tell what he knew about the Founder, whether it was firsthand knowledge or things he had learned from his Oblate confreres. Another edition of this work, abridged and re-edited by Father Dawson Thomas, was published in Dublin in 1914 (245 pp).

RAMBERT, Toussaint, *Vie de Monseigneur Charles-Joseph-Eugène de Mazenod, évêque de Marseille, fondateur de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, Tours, Mame, 1883, 2 vols., 800 and 720 pages respectively.

This is the first extensive biography of the Founder aimed at an Oblate readership. From the critical point of view, it leaves a lot to be desired. Nevertheless, it has real value because it reproduces a number of the Founder's writings which today cannot be found and were probably destroyed.

REY, Achille, *Histoire de Monseigneur Charles-Joseph-Eugène de Mazenod, évêque de Marseille, fondateur de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*. vol. I, Rome, General House, 1928; vol. 2, Marseilles, Marseilles Printers, 1928.

The author died in 1911, leaving his second volume unfinished. Later on, the work was hurriedly finished and published in 1928 in two volumes, 758 and 912 pages respectively. This is a substantial biography prepared in view of the beatification of Bishop de Mazenod. It is as richly documented as that of Father Rambert, but is somewhat more critically written.

RICARD, Mgr Antoine, *Monseigneur de Mazenod, évêque de Marseille, fondateur de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée, 1782-1861*, Paris, Delhomme and Briguet, 1892, 474 p.

This is the first biography written by a non-Oblate and targeting the general public as readership. Bishop Ricard knew the Founder personally and had a good grasp of the distinguishing features of his personality.

LEFLON, Jean, *Eugène de Mazenod, évêque de Marseille, fondateur des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée, 1782-1861*, Paris, Plon, 1957-1965, 3 vols., 492, 670 and 861 pages respectively.

Monsignor Jean Leflon is well known in France for his work as a historian. The Oblates gave him the

task of giving an accurate portrayal of the Founder since certain French historians had called into question the way Bishop de Mazenod had been portrayed up until then. His portrayal of Bishop de Mazenod's genuine character was meant to offer further support for his beatification. This is by far the most extensive and the most critically written biography of Eugene de Mazenod from the historical point of view, but it does treat his spiritual life with the same thoroughness. (It has been translated into English and Spanish.)<sup>2</sup>

### 3. MONOGRAPHS

JEANCARD, Mgr Jacques, *Mélanges historiques sur la Congrégation des Oblats de Marie Immaculée à l'occasion de la vie et la mort du R. P. Suzanne*, Tours, Mame, 1872, 400 p.

Bishop Jeancard was a close friend of the Founder. Jeancard is a very fine writer and does a good job sketching the spiritual silhouette of the Founder against the background of the Oblate community.

BAFFIE, Eugène, *Esprit et vertus du missionnaire des pauvres Charles-Joseph-Eugène de Mazenod*, Paris-Lyon, 1894, 633 p.

In this work, the author presents the virtues of the Founder in a schematic and rather uncritical fashion.

MORABITO, Joseph, *Je serai prêtre, Eugène de Mazenod de Venise à Saint-Sulpice, 1794-1811*, Ottawa, Oblate Studies Edition, 1954, 200 p.

This is the first attempt to make a critical study of the spiritual journey of the Founder from his childhood to the priesthood inclusively.

PIELORZ, Józef, *La vie spirituelle de Mgr de Mazenod, 1782-1812, étude critique*, Ottawa, éditions des *Études oblates*, t.14, 1956, 318 p.

This is the first critical work on the spiritual journey of the Founder covering the period from his birth to the beginning of his apostolate in Aix-en-Provence. It is a thesis presented at the Gregorian University in Rome as requirement for a doctorate in theology. In the preface, the then-Superior General, Leo Deschâtelets has this to say about it: "This work, so critical in its approach, is one of the most serious and original on the Founder. Whoever wishes to know the soul of Bishop de Mazenod and understand the spirit of our Congregation cannot avoid reading it". Father Pielorz, relying on the first letters of the Founder (1799-1818) which he discovered on June 19, 1953, differs considerably from Father Morabito in the presentation of the spiritual journey of the Founder. In the wake of this work, each school has had its protagonists and its opponents. (This work has been translated into English).

TACHÉ, Alexander, *La vie spirituelle d'Eugène de Mazenod, 1812-1818. Etude historico-doctrinale*, Rome, 1960, typewritten, 455 p. He published: *Excerpta ex dissertatione ad Lauream in Facultate theologica P.U.G.*, Rome, 1963, 102 p.

It was a follow-up to the preceding study. In this work, Father Taché gives a very good account of the spiritual life of the Founder, covering his apostolate in Aix, the stresses involved in founding the Congregation up to the writing of the first Rule in 1818. Unfortunately, only one part of this study has been published.

MOOSBRUGGER, Robert, *The Spirituality of Blessed Eugene de Mazenod from 1818 until 1837*, Rome, 1981, 153 p.

This author continues the study of the Founder's spiritual journey from 1818 until 1837 when he was appointed Bishop of Marseilles. One portion yet

remains to be treated, the last period of his life, 1837 to 1861.

LUBOWICKI, Kazimierz, *Mystère et dynamique de l'amour dans la vie du Bx Eugène de Mazenod*, Rome, 1990, 426, p.

In this thesis presented for a doctorate in spiritual theology at the Teresianum in Rome, the author focuses on the love of Christ in the life of the Founder. Transformed by it, he developed into "a kind of living icon" of this love.

ARENA, Domenico, *Unità et missione nelle lettere del beato Eugenio de Mazenod fondatore dei Missionari Oblati di Maria Immacolata (1782-1861). Excepta ex dissertatione ad doctoratum in Facultate Missiologiae Pontificiae Universitatis Gregorianaе*, Rome, 1991, 76, p.

The author addresses the vast topic of unity in community life and the Oblate mission. He draws the conclusion "unity is what is most dear to de Mazenod's heart".

BX EUGENE DE MAZENOD, *Selected Texts Related to the O.M.I. Constitutions and Rules*, Rome, 1983, 587 p. (Texts chosen by Father Paul Sion. Translated into several languages.)

Other biographies and monographs of lesser importance can be found in BEAUDOIN, Yvon, *Essai de bibliographie sur la Congrégation des Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, Rome, A.G., 39 photocopied pages.

#### 4. FATHER HENRY TEMPIER, THE FOUNDER'S ALTER EGO

Father Francis de Paul Henry Tempier, the first associate and co-worker of Eugene de Mazenod, was his very close friend and his spiritual director; he is inseparable from him, his alter ego. Father Beaudoin makes the very insightful observation that he is

truly "the second father for the Oblates".<sup>3</sup> Consequently, we can consider his life and his writings as an integral part of those of the Founder.

## II. THE CONSTITUTIONS AND RULES

According to the Founder, the Rule must give a singular and specific inspiration and communicate the same spirit to all the members of the Congregation as an essential condition of its stability, its continued existence and the fervor of all its members.<sup>4</sup> In his circular letter of August 2, 1853, speaking as one who is basing his conclusions on long experience, he urges: "Read and meditate your holy Rules. There you will find the secret of your perfection; they include everything that is to lead you to God. ... Read, meditate and observe your Rules, and you will become true saints, you will build up the Church, you will honor your vocation and you will attract graces of conversion on the souls you will evangelize as well as every kind of blessings on the Congregation, your mother, and on its members who are your brothers."<sup>5</sup>

The Rule developed organically with the life of the Congregation. Already in the Founder's lifetime, it was modified. This natural trend would continue after his death right up to our day when a total refashioning of the Rule took place – while at the same time holding firm to its original charism. We can say that the Rule, understood in the context of its continual evolution and in its total recasting, constitutes the second source of our spirituality and our charism.

### 1. THE TEXTS

The original text of the Rule was written in French by the Founder at

Saint-Laurent-du-Verdon in 1818.<sup>6</sup> In view of obtaining Pontifical approbation, the text was translated into Latin. With some slight modifications made by the Congregation of Religious and Bishops, the text was approved by Leo XII on February 17, 1826 and published in Galliopolis (Villefranche-sur-Mer) bearing the title *Constitutiones et Regulae Missionariorum Oblatorum Sanctissimae et Immaculatae Virginis Mariae*. The three subsequent editions of 1884, 1910 and 1928 were issued in response to the need of integrating into the Rule the new norms of the Holy See, especially those of the Code of Canon Law promulgated in 1917.

In the wake of Vatican Council II, modifications and up-dating proved insufficient. The need was felt to rewrite the Rule completely, both as regards content and form while conserving as much as possible the original charism of the Founder.

The first attempt in this direction was made by the General Chapter of 1966. Approved *ad experimentum* by the Holy See, the new Rule was published that same year. Defended by some, attacked by others, it was reworked in the period between 1967-1980. The final product was a kind of happy synthesis of the two tendencies. It was no surprise then that it was approved almost unanimously by the 1980 Chapter. Approved by the Holy See with only slight modifications, it was published in 1982. The official text was not in Latin but in French under the title, *Constitutions et Règles de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, Rome, 1982.

## 2. COMMENTARIES

Among the numerous commentaries on the Rule, the following seem to be the most important:

YENVEUX, Alfred, *Les Saintes Règles de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, Paris, Oblate Procure in Paris, 1903, 2 vols.

Nine other volumes written from 1878 to 1903 have remained in manuscript form. They are conserved in the Oblate General Archives in Rome. Father Yenveux comments on the articles of the Rule with abundant quotations taken from the letters and commentaries of the Founder. Many of these letters are lost to us today.

COSENTINO, Georges, *Histoire de nos Règles*, Ottawa, Oblate Studies Edition, 1955, 6 vols.

This is a historical-doctrinal study of our Rules.

RESLE, Joseph, *Commentarium privatum Constitutionum et Regularum*, Ottawa, Oblate Studies Edition, 1956-1963, 5 vols.

In the traditional spirit, Father Reslé comments the Rule and opposes any in depth changes.

JETTÉ, Fernand, *O.M.I. The Apostolic Man: A Commentary on the 1982 Edition of the Oblate Constitutions and Rules*, General House, Rome, 1992, 541 p.

## III. GENERAL CHAPTERS

General Chapters, in their role of governing in the spirit of the Rule or in recommending modifications of the Rule to the Holy See and by their constant concern to deal with abuses, promote in an effective way the spiritual and apostolic life according to the charism specific to the Congregation. They stand at crucial stages of development and important turning points, both with regard to personnel as well as with regard to works. Consequently, they constitute another important source of our spirituality.

## 1. CHAPTER MINUTES

From its inception until 1992, the Congregation has held thirty-three chapters. The first was held in 1818 and the thirty-third was held in 1998. Reports of these Chapters are kept in the General Archives in Rome. All told, they amount to several handwritten or typewritten volumes. We list them below, giving their contents:

Volume 1: Chapters of 1818, 1821, 1824, 1826, 1831, 1837, 1843, 1850, 1856.

Volume 2: Chapters of 1861, 1867, 1873, 1879, 1887.

Volume 3: Chapters of 1893, 1898.

Volume 4: Chapters of 1904, 1906, 1908, 1920, 1926, 1932.

Volume 5: Chapters of 1938 and 1947.

Volume 6: Chapter of 1953.

Volume 7: Chapter of 1959.

Volume 8-9: Chapter of 1966.

Volume 10-11: Chapter of 1972.

Volume 12-14: Chapter of 1974.

Volume 15: Chapter of 1980.

Volume 16: Chapter of 1986.

Acts of the 1992 Chapter.

Several extracts of the proceedings have been published in *Missions*.

## 2. COMMENTARIES

There are only two critical historical works which have been written on the General Chapters.

COSENTINO, Georges, *Nos Chapitres généraux*, Ottawa, Oblate Studies Edition, 1957, 330 p.

This is a general work on the twenty-five first General Chapters. The author limits himself to reproducing the proceedings of the Chapters.

PIELORZ, Józef, *Les Chapitres généraux au temps du fondateur, 1818-1861*, Ottawa, Oblate Studies Edition,

1968, 2 vols., 321 and 278 pages respectively.

This work is a historical critical documentation of the first ten General Chapters reproducing the entire text of the proceedings.

"The characteristic feature of these Chapters from 1818 to 1861 is the awe-inspiring presence of the Founder who presided over the sessions. He directed them and led them with undisputed authority. This presence explains everything. Was it not he who was inspired by the Holy Spirit to found this institute, to endow it with the holy law for its spiritual and apostolic life? Did he not continue to exercise his charism as founder? If what was needed was to modify some point in the Rule, he was at hand to say how it should be done. If there was need to solve some difficulty, if people were undecided or upset about an issue, the Chapter would turn to him, the father of the Oblate family, and in the light of God, the Founder would answer with wisdom, serenity and charity. His presence cast light on problems, reformed, corrected and inspired. [...] These General Chapters] give us a picture of the Congregation during this period of time when the Founder steadfastly occupied its center of gravity. He stood at its center as an ardent soul and an inspiration for the Congregation as a whole as well as for each one of its members."

"Father Pielorz did not limit himself to merely reproducing the texts of the Chapters' proceedings. He complemented them with many meticulous monographs which are genuine revelations. He made faithful use of all previously published works, but at the same time continued to forge ahead in scientific research. This research led him to discover a body of unpublished documents. Guided by his marvelous instinct

as a historian, he proceeded to carefully inventory these documents, rescuing them from the oblivion of dusty archives. Indeed, his work has painted a new portrait of the Congregation according to each stage delineated by these Chapters. He has quoted figures enumerating personnel and done so with such accuracy that he has overlooked virtually no one; he has listed our houses and works. Future historians will be forever in his debt for having provided for them the results of his research, his working hypotheses which led him to pursue paths that have provided rich and surprising discoveries.”<sup>8</sup>

Unfortunately, no one has ever continued this work. The same author published in *Vie Oblate Life*, a résumé of the entire thirty-one General Chapters, giving the dates, the length of the Chapter, the place it was held, the number of capitulants and Oblates as well as the most significant happenings of these Chapters.

#### IV. CIRCULAR LETTERS OF THE SUPERIORS GENERAL

Another important source for our Oblate spirituality comes from the letters written by the Superiors General and addressed to all the members of the Congregation. It was through these circular letters that the Superiors General prepared for or carried out the decisions of the General Chapters, announcing revisions and new editions of the Rule, curbing abuses, exhorting their confreres to observe the Rule and passing once again in review the Oblate ideal, sometimes by writing doctrinal treatises about it.

These letters are conserved in two distinct collections:

#### 1. ADMINISTRATIVE CIRCULARS OF THE SUPERIORS GENERAL, 8 VOLS.

The first circular letter is that of March 19, 1850, written by the Founder, and the last is that of Father Leo Deschâtelets, April 11, 1972.

#### 2. ACTA ADMINISTRATIONIS GENERALIS

From 1972 on, the circular letters of the Superiors General have been published in the collection *Acta Administrationis generalis*.

#### V. OBLATE WRITINGS

In dealing with the Founder, the Rule, General Chapters and the letters of Superiors General, we have quoted from a number of publications which treat of these matters. But these books or articles make up only a small part of Oblate writing on the subject. As a source which enriches Oblate spirituality at any given period, it grows richer and richer year by year. From this immense multi-colored garden, we have selected a few flowers.

#### 1. GENERAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

BERNAD, Marcel, *Bibliographie des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, Ecrits des Missionnaires Oblates: 1816-1915, Liège, H. Dessain 1922, 147 p.

This is the first attempt at drawing up an Oblate bibliography. In it, not only do we find listed the books and pamphlets that have been published, but also a number of Oblate manuscripts. It goes up to the year 1915.

BEAUDOIN, Yvon, *Essai de bibliographie sur la Congrégation des Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, Oblate General Archives, 1985, 39 p. photocopied.

This list contains only the works in the General Archives and in the Oblate library in the General House in Rome. With its thousand titles, this bibliography is the most important one with regard to the history of the Congregation in general and its spirituality in particular.

SMEENK, Karl, B., *Bibliographie der OMI Schriften in Deutsche Sprache*, 1990, 66 p.

IDEM, *A Preliminary List of Publications Written in English by Oblates of Mary Immaculate or by Others about Oblate Congregation*, Viborg, Denmark, 1992, 114 p.

## 2. GENERAL HISTORY

ORTOLAN, Theophile, *Les Oblats de Marie Immaculée durant le premier siècle de leur existence (1816-1914)*, Paris, 1914-1932, 4 vols.

Father Ortolan died in 1937 before he could finish his work. The fifth volume on the United States, Mexico, Ceylon and South Africa (1861-1892) remains unfinished in manuscript form. This is the first general history of the Congregation. As a piece of writing, it is wordy and leaves something to be desired from the critical point of view.

SCHARSCH, Phillip, *Geschichte der Kongregation de Heiligen und Unbeflechten Jungfrau Maria 1816-1897*, manuscript form, Engelpport, 1952, 6 vols.

This is the second general history of the Congregation. It is more detailed and more critical than the one mentioned above.

LEVASSEUR, Donat, *Histoire des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, Montreal, 1983, 1986, 2 vols., 308 and 485 pages respectively.

This is a work of synthesis, enriched with statistics on personnel in the Con-

gregation and an index of place names and names of persons. Less bulky than the two mentioned above, it nevertheless encompasses the entire history of the Congregation from its inception to 1985.

## 3. LOCAL HISTORIES

The designation "local history" covers the works or pamphlets on the regions, provinces, vice-provinces, vicariates, delegations, houses, parishes, our Oblate works. Almost every province or vice-province presently has written its own history, either in printed, photocopied or simply typewritten form. We give below a selection of works chosen arbitrarily:

CARRIERE, Gaston, *Histoire documentaire de la Congrégation des Oblats de Marie Immaculée dans l'Est du Canada*, Ottawa, 1957-1975, 12 vols.

This is the first extensive work done on the Oblates of Eastern Canada from 1841 to 1900.

MORICE, Adrian, Gabriel, *Histoire de l'Eglise catholique dans l'Ouest canadien du lac Supérieur au Pacifique, 1659-1915*, Saint Boniface, 1921-1923, 4 vols.

DOYON, Bernard, *The Cavalry of Christ on the Rio Grande, 1849-1883*, Milwaukee, Bruce, 1956, 252 p.

This is a history of the terribly difficult Texas missions.

GABEN, Victor, *Histoire de la mission du Calvaire*, Marseilles, 426 pages, typewritten.

DRAGO, Gaetano, *La provincia d'Italia dei Missionari Oblati di Maria Immacolata*, Rome, 1970, 461 p.

PIELORZ, Józef, *Les Oblats polonais dans le monde, 1920-1970*, Rome, 1971, 254 p.

DENNY, Vincent, *History of the Anglo-Irish Province of the Missionary*

*Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Part I: 1841-1921*, Dublin, Ireland, 1991, 160 p.

GAUDET, Valerian, *Histoire des débuts de la mission oblate de Bolivie*, 1990, 170 p.

Other monographs are listed in Father Yvon Beaudoin's above-mentioned bibliography.

An ambitious and extensive project, *Histoire des Oblats dans l'Ouest canadien* is presently being conducted. The acts of three of its symposiums have already been published in 1990, 1992 and 1994 under the title *Etudes oblates de l'Ouest*. Only one work has appeared so far under the umbrella of this project: LEVASSEUR, Donat, *Les Oblats de Marie Immaculée dans l'Ouest et le Nord du Canada, 1845-1967*, Western Canadian Publishers, 1995, 345 p.

#### 4. REVIEWS

Book publishing faces problems difficult to overcome, both in the area of administration and finances. That is why a large number of Oblate works, even those of a certain historic and spiritual value lie covered in archival dust without hope of being published and communicated to the public at large. On the other hand, it is easier to have an article published in an Oblate review, either as the result of one's research on a specific subject or as an expression of one's opinion on a timely topic for discussion. There are reviews of a general character for the entire Congregation and some reviews dedicated more specifically to individual provinces. All of these reviews are bound and organized in chronological order and according to their place of origin in the Oblate General Archives in Rome. Here we will treat only of the reviews of a more general character.

*Missions de la Congrégation des*

*Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, quarterly review first published in 1862. In 1971, it changed its title to the Latin form *Missio*, but the following year, ceased publication.

The general analytical indexes of *Missions* 1862-1961 were drawn up by Father Henry Verkin and published in four volumes from 1974 to 1987. The fifth volume covering the years 1962-1972 was prepared by Father Maurice Gilbert and published in 1989.

In 1972, the review *Missions* was replaced by three different reviews published more or less frequently.

A.R.O.M.I. *Agence romaine des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, Rome, 1928-1966.

*Acta Administrationis generalis O.M.I.*, one volume per year from 1972 on.

*Documentation O.M.I.*, monthly newsletter published from 1968 on with articles or documents on the life of the Congregation.

*Communiqué O.M.I.*, published from 1972 on. It is the official organ carrying the deliberations and the decisions of the Superior General in council during the plenary sessions. It appears three or four times a year.

*Information O.M.I.*, monthly newsletter photocopied from 1967 on. It has taken the place of AROMI (Agence romaine des Oblats de Marie Immaculée), published from 1928 to 1966, thirty-three volumes in all.

The review, *Missions*, and the publications that have replaced it are real treasure troves for the study of Oblate history and spirituality.

*Etudes oblates*, a quarterly review published from 1942 on, first by the Eastern Canadian Province and then by St. Joseph's. In 1974, the title took on a French-English wording: *Vie Oblate Life*. This review, publishes in French

and English articles on the history and spirituality of the Congregation with special focus on the Founder. This is the most important review with regard to Oblate spirituality. Consequently, it is an essential source for the study of Oblate spirituality and our charism. From among the many articles, here are a few examples:

LESAGE, Germain, "Notre littérature spirituelle" in *Etudes oblates*, 3 (1944), p. 50-61 and 116-132. This article treats of the sources of our Oblate spirituality.

"Actes du congrès sur le charisme du Fondateur aujourd'hui" Rome, April 26-May 14, 1976 in *Vie Oblate Life*, 36 (1977), p. 2-300.

"Actes du congrès sur les Oblats et l'évangélisation" Rome, August 29-September 14, 1983 in *Vie Oblate Life*, 42 (1983), p. 99-394.

"La mission oblate par la communauté apostolique", Acts of the first congress of the Association of Oblate Studies and Research, Ottawa, August 7-11, 1989 in *Vie Oblate Life*, 49 (1990), p. 111-373.

## 5. COLLECTIONS

Among the collections, we cannot fail to mention the *Oblate Historical Archives*, the *Oblate Library*, the *Quaderni di Vermicino* and *Oblate Writings*.

### a. Oblate Historical Archives

This collection is made up of twenty-four volumes published from 1954 to 1968 under the direction of Fathers Maurice Gilbert and Gaston Carrière. Most of these works have already been cited in the preceding pages. Here, we add three more:

*La retraite de Mazenod à Rome, 3 octobre 1954-10 avril 1955. Notes et documents*, vol. 11, 1956, 194 p.

COSENTINO, Georges, *Exercices de piété de l'Oblat*, vol. 19, 1962, 466 p.

BEAUDOIN, Yvon, *Grand séminaire de Marseille et scolasticat oblat sous la direction des Oblats de Marie Immaculée, 1827-1862*, vol. 21, 1967, 282 p.

### b. Oblate Library

The Oblate Library is a collection similar to the Oblate Historical Archives with the difference that the material in the Oblate Historical Archives is photocopied whereas the works in the Oblate Library are printed. Launched in 1954, they contain fifteen volumes all told. The most important works would seem to be the following:

MORABITO, Joseph, *Je serai prêtre, Eugène de Mazenod de Venise à Saint-Sulpice, 1794-1811*, 1954, 200 p.

GILBERT, Maurice, *Réflexions sur la vie oblate à la lumière des nouvelles Constitutions*, vol. 14, 1966, 100 p.

### c. Quaderni di Vermicino

These are booklets photocopied by the scholasticate of the Province of Italy at Vermicino near Rome.

In them, one finds articles or treatises on the Congregation in general and on the Founder in particular. Launched in 1975, this collection has grown by one or two volumes per year. We give a few examples here:

CIARDI, Fabio, *Fisionomia e natura della comunità oblate nel periodo di fondazione 1815-1816*, 2 (1976), 166 p.

D'ADDIO, Angelo, *Cristo Crocifisso e la Chiesa abbandonata. Eugenio de Mazenod, un appassionato di Cristo e della Chiesa*, 4 (1978), 218 p.

MAMMANA, Giuseppe, *La Chiesa nella vita et nel pensiero del beato Eugenio de Mazenod*, 7 (1979), 145 p.

BEAUDOIN, Yvon, *L'itinerario spiri-*

tuale del beato Eugenio de Mazenod, 18 (1988).

ZAGO, Marcello, *Il beato Giuseppe Gérard ci parla*, 24 (1989), 54 p.

GIORGIANNI, Maurizio, *Il martirio, "carisma" della missione in Eugenio de Mazenod e nella sua famiglia religiosa*, 28 (1994), 132 p.

#### d. Oblate heritage

At the urging of the most recent General Chapters, the Postulation has begun to publish short biographies on Oblates renowned for the sanctity of their lives. They target the general public as their readership.

#### e. Selección de Estudios oblatos

A review published three times a year from 1980 on under the direction of Father Laurent Roy. At the beginning, it contained only articles from *Etudes oblates* and *Vie Oblate Life* translated into Spanish. In recent years, it has carried articles written in Spanish expressly for publication in this review.

#### f. Selected Oblate Studies and Texts

In this collection, certain articles, especially from *Vie Oblate Life*, translated into English have appeared. The first volume appeared in 1986, Rome, The General House, 1986, 506 p.

#### g. Oblate writings

This is a collection of writings of the Founder and of the better known Oblates. Launched in 1977, on the average, one volume per year is added to the collection. Father Yvon Beaudoin has already published thirteen volumes of letters of the Founder (*Oblate Writings I*, vols. 1-13), two volumes of his spiritual writings (vol. 14-15), four volumes on the *Diary* (vol. 16-19), one bi-

ography and the writings of Father Francis de Paul Henry Tempier (*Oblate Writings II*, vol. 1-2), of Blessed Joseph Gerard (II, vol. 3-4) and of Father Casimir Aubert (II, vol. 5). These writings have also been translated into English and some of them into Italian, Spanish, German and Polish.

#### 6. SPIRITUAL WRITINGS

Individual Oblates have published many meditations, instructions, retreats and treatises on spiritual topics. These publications are as well sources for our spirituality and our charism. Here are a few examples:

BOISRAME, Prosper, *Méditations pour tous les jours de l'année à l'usage de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, Tours, Mame, 1887, 3 vols., 540, 615 and 572 pages respectively.

This work had a strong impact on the Congregation for some fifty years. Since this work reflects the spirituality current during the author's lifetime, it fell into disuse after Vatican Council II.

FABRE, Joseph, *Instructions pour les retraites annuelles*, Rome, 1917, 555 p.

A collection of retreats preached by Father Joseph Fabre, Superior General, to the sisters of the Holy Family of Bordeaux..

KASSIEPE, Max, *Die katholische Volksmission in der neuen Zeit*, Paderborn, 1934, 200 p.

A treatise on parish missions in Germany.

CIARDI, Fabio, *I Fondatori uomini dello Spirito. Per una teologia del carisma di fondatore*. Rome, Città Nuova, 1982, 408 p.

A study of the charism of several founders of orders and religious congregations; among them is Eugene de Mazenod.

SANTOLINI, Giovanni, *Evangelizzazione e prassi missionaria in Eugenio de Mazenod*, Bologna, 1984, 220 p.

JETTÉ, Fernand, *The Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate: Addresses and Written Texts, 1975-1985*, General House, Rome, 1985, 354 p.

This work contains addresses and conferences given by Father Fernand Jetté, Superior General. In them, he shares with us his thinking on subjects like charism, mission, the religious life, ministry and formation.

IDEM, *Letters to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate*, General House, Rome, 1984, 238 p.

IDEM, *Lettres et homélies*, Rome, 1993.

*Oblate Prayer*, General House, Rome, 1986.

This work is meant to be something more than a prayer manual. It wants to stand as well as a witness to our tradition, a guide and inspiration for our prayer life today. It is a kind of spiritual directory which strives to establish links between our prayer life, our Constitutions, the thinking of the Founder and Oblate customs.

## VI. THE SPIRITUAL LIFE OF WELL-KNOWN OBLATES

If the life of Eugene de Mazenod is a powerful source upon which Oblates can draw for their own spiritual life, the same can be said, due allowance being made, for the lives of those who have achieved renown.

### 1. OBLATES KNOWN FOR THEIR HOLINESS OF LIFE

Among the Oblates renowned for the sanctity of their lives, we must cite, first and foremost, those who have al-

ready been beatified by the Church and those whose cause for beatification is currently in process. Their writings can be found in the Oblate General Archives in Rome. Our Founder, Eugene de Mazenod was beatified October 19, 1975 and canonized, December 3, 1995. We have already presented him as the main source for Oblate spirituality. We will list here six other Oblates renowned for their holiness of life.

#### a. Blessed Joseph Gérard (1831-1914)

Father Joseph Gérard, Apostle of the Basotho, was beatified in Lesotho by Pope John Paul II, September 15, 1988. Among the numerous biographies written about him we list the following:

ROCHE, Aimé, *Clartés australes. Joseph Gérard, O.M.I., "le prêtre bien-aimé des Basotho"*, Lyon, Chalet, 1951, 400 p.

BEAUDOIN, Yvon, *Blessed Joseph Gérard, O.M.I., Apostle to the Basotho (1831-1914), biography, testimonies, letters and spiritual writings*, Rome, General Postulation O.M.I., 1988, 2 vols., 181 and 269 pages respectively.

#### b. Charles Dominic Albini (1790-1839)

This was the first Oblate whose cause was promoted for beatification by the Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

DRAGO, Gaetano, *L'apostolo della Corsica, P. Carlo Albini, O.M.I.* Rome, 1942, 290 p.

DELARUE, Louis, *Prêtre, rien que ça. Le père Charles Dominique Albini, O.M.I.*, Paris, Latin Editions, 1970, 285 p.

#### c. Vital Grandin (1829-1902)

Bishop Vital Grandin was one of the greatest missionary bishops of the Canadian Northwest.

JONQUET, Emil, *Mgr Grandin, O.M.I., premier évêque de Saint-Albert*, Montreal, 1903, 532 p.

BRETON, Paul-Emil, *Vital Grandin*, Paris-Montreal, 1960, 366 p.

*d. Ovide Charlebois (1862-1933)*

This is another of the heroic bishops of Northwestern Canada.

LAJEUNESSE, Bishop Martin, *Vertus de Mgr Charlebois*, Le Pas, Manitoba, 1951, 306 p.

CARRIERE, Gaston, *Le Père du Keewatin, Mgr Ovide Charlebois*, Montreal, Rayonnement, 1962, 240 p.

*e. Antoni Kowalczyk, (1866-1947)*

Brother Anthony came from Poland to work as a missionary in the Canadian Northwest. He was known for his ardent Marian piety.

BRETON, Paul-Emil, *Forgeron de Dieu, frère Antoine Kowalczyk, O.M.I.*, Edmonton, Hermitage Editions, 1953, 224 p.

SAJEWICZ, Jan, *Nasz Brat. Zycie i dzialalnosc Polskiego emigranta i misjonarza Slugi Bozego Antoniego Kowalczyka, O.M.I.*, (Our Brother. The life and activity of an emigrant Pole and missionary, servant of God, Anthony Kowalczyk), Toronto, 1972 40 p.

Both authors knew Brother Kowalczyk very well; he was nicknamed, Brother *Ave Maria*.

[FERRARA, Nicola], *Positio super vita et virtutibus S.D. Antonii Kowalczyk*, Romae, 1993, 2 vols.

*f. Cebula, Józef,*

Superior of the juniorate of Lubliniec and subsequently Master of Novices at Markowice, this priest was known for his sanctity of life. Deported by the S.S.

to the Mauthausen death camp, he was murdered *in odium fidei*. Following the diocesan process, his cause for beatification was introduced in Rome along with ninety-seven Polish priests and religious executed by the Nazis between 1939 and 1945. They were beatified by Pope John Paul II in Warsaw on 13 June 1999.

2. OTHER WELL-KNOWN OBLATES

There are many Oblates who made their mark in the Congregation, either by the heroism of their missionary life or by their outstanding qualities of mind and heart. Biographies, some better documented than others, have been written about some of them. Some have been written up only in very brief obituary notices. Among the wealth of examples we note the following:

PAGUELLE DE FOLLENAY, J., *Vie du Cardinal Guibert*, Paris, Poussielgue Editions, 1896, 2 vols.

Hippolyte Guibert, Cardinal Archbishop of Paris, was the most illustrious Oblate contemporary of the Founder.

BENOIT, Dom Paul, c.r.i.c., *Vie de Mgr Taché, archévêque de Saint-Boniface*, Montreal, Beauchemin, 1904, 2 vols., 610 and 935 pages respectively.

DUCHAUSOIS, Pierre, *Aux glaces polaires. Indiens et Esquimaux*, Lyon, 1921, 476 p.

This epic paints a marvelous picture of the heroic life led by Oblate missionaries in the Canadian North.

DUCHAUSOIS, Pierre, *Sous les feux de Ceylan, chez les Cinghalais et les Tamouls*, Paris, Grasset, 1929, 380 p.

Similar to the above, this work gives a description of the heroic life led by the Oblate missionaries in Ceylon (Sri Lanka).

DUCHAUSOIS, Pierre, *Apôtres inconnus. Nos coadjuteurs dans l'éta-*

*blissement de l'Evangile*, Paris, 1924, 252 p.

Father Duchaussois' works have been translated into a number of languages and have been republished a number of times.

BREYNAT, Bishop Gabriel, first vicar apostolic of the Mackenzie. *Cinquante ans au pays des neiges*, Montreal, Fides, 1945-1948, 3 vols., 348, 372 and 400 pages respectively.

These are his memoirs of the extremely hard life of missionaries in the Canadian Far North

BULIARD, Roger, *Inuk "Au dos de la terre"*, Paris, Saint-Germain, 1949, 355 p.

This book describes the Oblate missions among the Inuit. It was translated into several languages and won an award from l'Académie française.

BONHOMME, Bishop Joseph, vicar apostolic of Basutoland, *Noir or. Le Basutoland, mission noire, moisson d'or*, Montreal, 1934, 280 p.

The story of the extremely difficult Oblate missions of Basutoland (Lesotho).

BORZAGA, Mario, *Diario di un uomo felice. Un'esperienza missionaria nel Laos*, Rome, Città Nuova, 1985, 300 p.

The diary of Father Borzaga, missionary in Laos from 1957 to 1959. He was murdered by the Communists in 1960.

PARENT, Louis-Marie, *Victor Le-lièvre un homme branché sur le Sacré-Coeur, 1876-1956*, Three Rivers Collection, Voluntas Dei, 1993, 393 p.

CHOQUE, Charles, *Mikilar, Lionel Ducharme, O.M.I., apôtre des Inuits*, Churchill, Manitoba, Episcopal Corporation, 1994, 230 p.

*Notices nécrologiques des membres de la Congrégation*, 8 volumes of 500 to 600 pages each, Paris-Rome, 1884-1939.

These are the obituary notices of various lengths of several hundred Oblates.

FRANCOEUR, Athanase, *Notices nécrologiques de la Province du Canada-*

*Est, 1849-1957*, Ottawa, Oblate Library, nos. 8-11, 1957, 4 vols.

The rivulets that sprang from Oblate sources ran together to form a mighty river which bears the name Oblate spirituality or Oblate charism. We have attempted to map out these various rivulets and sources and to assess their importance with regard to the contribution each has made to our Oblate spirituality.

JÓZEF PIELORZ

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See Pius XI, *Unigenitus Dei Filius*, an Apostolic Letter to Superiors General of Orders and other Religious Societies, March 19, 1924 in A.A.S., 1924, p. 135-136.

<sup>2</sup> The most complete list of biographies on Bishop de Mazenod can be found in Father Angelo Mitri's work, *Le bx Eugène de Mazenod*, Rome, 1975, pp. 206-214. It has been brought up to date to 1995 by the article, "Eugene de Mazenod" in this *Dictionary of Oblate Values*.

<sup>3</sup> See BEAUDOIN, Yvon, *François de Paule Henry Tempier (1788-1870), second père des Oblats de Marie Immaculée, biographie, témoignages de contemporains et écrits divers*, Rome, General Postulation, O.M.I., 1987, Oblate Writings II, 2 vols., 246 and 210 pages respectively.

<sup>4</sup> See *Preface of the Constitutions and Rules*.

<sup>5</sup> Circular letter no. 1, in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 12, p. 205-206.

<sup>6</sup> See *Missions* 78 (1951), p. 1-94.

<sup>7</sup> On this topic we can find a complete bibliography at the end of the article "Constitutions and Rules" in this *Dictionary of Oblate Values*.

<sup>8</sup> DESCHATELETS, Leo, "Preface" in PIELORZ, Józef, *Les Chapitres généraux au temps du Fondateur, 1818-1861*, Ottawa, Oblate Studies Edition, 1968.

<sup>9</sup> PIELORZ, Józef, "Les Chapitres généraux de 1818 à 1986" in *Vie Oblate Life*, 46 (1987), p. 169-200.

## SPIRITUAL TESTAMENT OF EUGENE DE MAZENOD

*Summary: I. The text of the testament and the circumstances surrounding it. II. These words "sum up his life" and "are a synopsis of our Holy Rules": 1. "Among yourselves practice charity, charity, charity"; 2. "And, outside, zeal for the salvation of souls". III. The impact this testament has had in the Congregation's history: 1. Oblate fraternal charity; 2. Oblate zeal. IV. Conclusion.*

### I THE TEXT OF THE TESTAMENT AND THE CIRCUMSTANCES SURROUNDING IT

In the Congregation's tradition, the Founder's testament is considered to consist of the words he spoke on the eve of his death, Pentecost Monday, May 20, 1861.

Father Joseph Fabre's circular letter of the following May 26 is the primary source for the narration of this event.

In the afternoon of May 20, Father Henry Tempier told Eugene de Mazenod that "all hope was lost". The Bishop offered his life in sacrifice and asked for his Oblate cross and his rosary. They recited the prayers for the dying and the rosary. The priests from the seminary arrived after the *Regina cæli*. The sick man renewed his vows and then blessed the Oblates and the Sisters of the Holy Family of Bordeaux. Father Fabre, superior of the seminary, then asked him: "Please express to us the final desires of your heart". The Founder replied: "Among yourselves practice charity, charity, charity – and, outside, zeal for the salvation of souls".<sup>1</sup>

Father Fabre added that shortly thereafter, upon the arrival of Father Ambroise Vincens and the community from Calvaire, the sick man "wanted to repeat... everything he had already said. Such is the treasured testament that this beloved Father left us; such are his final thoughts, sentiments and desires".<sup>2</sup>

The Founder's legal will bears the date of August 1, 1854.<sup>3</sup> It contains in particular a long list of bequests to the seminary and the parishes of Marseilles. In the introduction, Bishop de Mazenod expressed once again the affection he felt, especially for the clergy of his diocese. In the eulogy at the Bishop's funeral on July 4, 1861, Bishop Jacques Jeancard wrote: "In his will, written by his own hand, he expressed his feelings toward his priests. The content of this will is a genuine testament of love for his diocese. Subsequently, the notary public [Gavot] called it a *hymn to charity*".<sup>4</sup>

In the introduction to the will, Bishop de Mazenod's only mention of the Oblates occurred in the context of his relying upon the powerful prayers of the clergy, the religious men and women "as well as on the members of the religious family of which I am more especially the father and whose praises a proper reserve prevents me from singing".<sup>5</sup>

The Founder's last written exhortations to his Oblates were published when he promulgated the second edition of the Rules in his circular letter of August 2, 1853. The period 1850-1856 was marked by a number of deaths and departures from the Congregation. With a great deal of humility, their spiritual father spoke to his too-active sons, absorbed by their labors, and stressed exclusively the striving for sanctity and

the practice of fraternal charity. He wrote: "My well-beloved sons, I conclude this long letter by recommending myself more urgently than ever to the prayers of each one of you, so that from God's goodness I may obtain pardon for all the faults I may have committed in governing this dear family he has committed to me and to which I have dedicated my existence; and that he grant me now when my days are declining to see it grow in virtue and holiness, just as he has given me to see it increase in number and extension".

"I sum up all my recommendations and wishes with these words of the Apostle Paul to the Corinthians: "Finally, brethren, rejoice; strive to be perfect; help one another; be united; live in peace, and the God of love and of peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen."<sup>6</sup>

In a letter of January 29, 1861 to the Congregation, Father Tempier gave us the first formulation of Bishop de Mazenod's oral testament to the Oblates. On January 28, 1861 at ten o'clock in the morning, Bishop Hippolyte Guibert wanted to bring the sick man Viaticum with all due solemnity. Clergy from the city and the Oblates from Marseilles, more than seventy in number, took part in the procession.

Father Tempier wrote: "Before receiving Holy Communion our venerated Father wanted to reveal to us the full beauty and quality of his heart. Since he could not speak himself, he had asked Archbishop Guibert to tell us two things on his behalf: that he had always loved us and would always love us, and that he wanted us, for our part, to love each other as brothers; that this

mutual affection would make us happy, holy and strong to do good. God will surely grant us the grace to hear this loving and saintly voice in our midst for a long time yet; but let us never forget the words that our Father spoke on this solemn occasion. They are a summary of his life; they are the core of the holy Rules that he gave us [...]"<sup>7</sup>

## II. THESE WORDS "SUM UP HIS LIFE" AND "ARE A SYNOPSIS OF OUR HOLY RULES"

No one was better equipped than Father Tempier, the intimate friend and faithful co-worker of Bishop de Mazenod from 1816 to 1861, to weigh judiciously the words the Founder spoke on January 29 and above all those of May 20, 1861, words which summed up his life and were "a synopsis of our Holy Rule" and, we can add, are a synthesis of all the exhortations he addressed to his Oblates throughout his whole life.

In Bishop de Mazenod's writings, the texts are few where the two terms charity and zeal are used in the same sentence.

The first, however, is worth its weight in gold since it deals with the matter of the first article of the 1825-1826 Rule: the end or object of this humble Congregation is that "diocesan priests, united and living together as brothers (Psalm 132) may devote themselves, above all things, to the preaching of the Gospel to the poor".<sup>8</sup> In an August 12, 1817 letter to Father Tempier, Father de Mazenod wrote in the same vein: "For the love of God never cease to inculcate and preach humility, abnegation, forgetfulness of self, disdain for worldly esteem. May these be ever the foundations of our little Society which, combined with a truly dis-

interested zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, and the most tender, affectionate and sincere charity amongst ourselves, will make of our house an earthly paradise and will establish it in more solid a manner than all possible orders and laws".<sup>9</sup>

Another most important text, was written in a moment of sadness after learning that the members of the community of Notre-Dame du Laus were living a lifestyle far removed from the ideal dreamed of by their Founder and set forth in the Rules. In a July 29, 1830 letter to Father Guibert, he wrote: "Charity is the pivot on which our whole existence turns. That which we ought to have for God makes us renounce the world and has vowed us to his glory by all manner of sacrifice, were it even to be our lives. It is in order to be worthy of this God to whom we are consecrated that we have vowed to renounce ourselves by obedience, riches by poverty, pleasures by chastity. [...] Charity for our neighbour is again an essential part of our spirit. We practice it first amongst us by loving each other as brothers, by considering our Society only as the most united family which exists on the earth, by rejoicing over the virtues, the talents and other qualities that our brothers possess just as much as if we possessed them ourselves, in bearing with mildness the little faults that some have not yet overcome, covering them over with the mantle of the most sincere charity, etc.; and as for the rest of mankind, in considering ourselves only as the servants of the Father of the family commanded to succour, to aid, to bring back his children by working to the utmost, in the midst of tribulations, of persecutions of every kind, without claiming any reward other than that which the Lord has promised to faithful servants

who have worthily fulfilled their mission".<sup>10</sup>

Even if it is true that in the Founder's writings we find few texts where he mentions both together, the fact remains that he spoke about zeal often and of fraternal charity even more frequently. Above all, he lived these two realities in an intense fashion.

#### 1. "AMONG YOURSELVES PRACTICE CHARITY, CHARITY, CHARITY"

It has often been said that Father de Mazenod did not give charity a high profile in the first edition of the Rule. Nonetheless, we still find in the Rule some fifteen references to charity with an additional fourteen allusions to it.<sup>11</sup> The strongest text reads as follows: "They will all be united by the closest bonds of charity and in perfect submission to superiors".<sup>12</sup>

During the course of his life, it was especially through his exhortations that Bishop de Mazenod stressed the importance of fraternal charity among his Oblates. Hundreds of times in his letters he spoke of charity, either to declare how necessary it was or to point out failings in this area or to rejoice in the way it was being faithfully lived.<sup>13</sup>

Two expressions reappear with great frequency in his writings: Among ourselves we should have "but one heart and soul"<sup>14</sup> or again: Fraternal charity constitutes the "distinguishing characteristic" of the Congregation.<sup>15</sup> We limit ourselves to quoting the most important of these texts, a letter written from the Quirinal in Rome, on December 2, 1854: "I would want all the scholastic brothers to be imbued with the family spirit which ought to exist among us. I have seen many religious orders, I am in very intimate relations with those that are most regular. Well, apart from

their virtues I also give them credit for a great *esprit de corps*; however, this more than paternal love that the head has for the members of the family, this cordial affinity of the members for their head which establishes between them a relationship springing from the heart and which forms true family ties between us – father to son, son to father – this, I have not come across anywhere else. I have always thanked God for it as a particular gift which he has deigned to grant me; for it is the temper of heart that he has given me, this expansive love which is my own gift and which pours itself out on each one of them without taking anything from the others, just like, I make bold to say, God's love for men. I am saying that it is this sentiment, which I know comes from Him who is the source of all charity, which has evoked in the hearts of my children this reciprocity of love which forms the distinctive character of our beloved family. May this help us mutually to appreciate the beauty of our vocation and may it all be attributed to God for his greater glory. This is the most ardent wish of my heart".<sup>16</sup>

But, as Father Tempier told us, first and foremost, Bishop de Mazenod lived what he preached. One day he wrote: "My life is to follow my heart".<sup>17</sup> It was his will that his sons should live and work in community, but in a fraternal community united by the bonds of charity.<sup>18</sup> He himself could feel fully alive only where there reigned affection and mutual understanding. J. Paguella de Follenay compared the Bishop of Marseilles to Saint Francis of Sales and wrote: "The symphony of their moral qualities shared the same dominant theme: They were men of the heart. That is, they possessed goodness, compassion and an effusive tenderness. Nothing was more contrary to their

spiritual temperament than a cold rigidity and a legalistic regularity. For them, everything sprang from love and flowed back to love".<sup>19</sup>

The Founder had a deep love for his Oblate sons and often gave his love verbal expression.<sup>20</sup> The expressions he used, so strong and varied in the forms they adopted, certainly contained nothing of false posturing or domination, but sprang from a sincere heart and a genuinely deep friendship. He truly rejoiced with those who rejoiced and shared the pain of those who suffered. Once again, let a couple of quotes suffice. Before leaving for Rome on January 17, 1851, he wrote to Father Charles Baret: "You are aware, my very dear son, that my big failing is to love with a real passion the children God in his goodness has given me. No mother's love comes close to it. Perfection would lie in being indifferent to the greater or lesser extent that this maternal affection were reciprocated. That is where I fall down. I make an effort, without success, and even while I do love those who set no value on my love, which is an effect of the grace of state of my position, I humbly confess that I do experience an inexpressible consolation and a kind of heightened tenderness towards those who understand my heart's feelings and give me something in return for what I am for them".<sup>21</sup>

In a similar vein, he wrote to Father Toussaint Dassy on January 10, 1852: "I do not know how my heart is equal to the affection which it nourishes for you all. [...] No, there is not on this earth a creature to whom God has accorded the favour of loving so tenderly, so strongly, so constantly so great a number of persons. Here it is not simply a question of charity; no, it is a maternal sentiment which refers to each of you, without prejudice for the others. No one

among you could be loved more than I love him. I love each one fully as if he were the only beloved and I experience this really exquisite feeling for each one. It is wonderful!"<sup>22</sup>

In his spiritual testament, the Founder repeated the word charity three times and mentions zeal only once. This would seem to be an accurate reflection of the relative percentage of these exhortations. He spoke more often of charity than of zeal because in regard to the latter, more often than not, the Oblates needed to be told to exercise restraint.

## 2. "AND, OUTSIDE, ZEAL FOR THE SALVATION OF SOULS"

The fact that the Congregation was founded to evangelize the poor because of love of one's neighbor, an ardent consuming love, makes itself obvious in all the pages of the Rules of 1818 and 1825-1826. It is enough to mention article one and the *Nota bene* of the first chapter of the 1818 Rule where we read: "They are called to be the Saviour's co-workers, the co-redeemers of mankind; and even though, because of their present small number and the more urgent needs of the people around them they have to limit the scope of their zeal, for the time being to the poor of our countryside and others, their ambition should, in its holy aspirations, embrace the vast expanse of the whole earth [...]"<sup>23</sup> "Consequently, it is urgent [that we do everything in our power] to bring back to the fold the sheep who have strayed, to teach these decadent Christians who Jesus Christ is and to snatch them from the bondage of the devil [...]"<sup>24</sup>

On October 8, 1831, commenting on the Rule, the Founder wrote: "Will we ever attain to an accurate appreciation of this exalted vocation? In order to

achieve this, we would have to grasp the excellence of the end of our Institute, indisputably the most perfect that we could set for ourselves in this world since the end of our Institute is the same as the end the Son of God had in mind when he came to earth: the glory of his heavenly Father and the salvation of souls. [...] He was especially sent to evangelize the poor [...] and we were founded precisely to work for the conversion of souls and especially to evangelize the poor".<sup>25</sup>

These few reflections do not arise from a passing fit of fervor; they are an authentic expression of the Founder's thought and life. His thought is clearly expressed in many of the letters written during the period stretching from his seminary days to the day of his death. On June 29, 1808, he wrote his mother telling her about his plans to enter the seminary. At that time already he wrote: "As the Lord is my witness, what he wants of me is that I renounce a world where it is almost impossible to find salvation, such is the power of apostasy there; that I devote myself especially to his service and try to reawaken the faith that is becoming extinct amongst the poor; in a word, that I make myself available to carry out any orders he may wish to give me for his glory and the salvation of the souls he has redeemed by his precious blood. [...]"<sup>26</sup>

On October 11, 1809, he stated further: "Dear mother, if you really grasped a great truth, that souls ransomed by the Man-God's blood are so precious that, even if every human being, past, present, and to come, were to spend, to save just one single one, every thing they have by way of talents, wealth and life, it would still be time well, nay admirably well spent [...]"<sup>27</sup>

In his first letters to Father Tempier, the same consuming zeal shows itself.

In an October 9, 1815 letter, he wrote: "Dwell deeply on the plight of our country people, their religious situation, the apostasy that daily spreads wider with dreadfully ravaging effects. Look at the feebleness of the means employed to date to oppose this flood of evil. [...] Full of confidence in the goodness of Providence, [we] have laid the foundations of an establishment which will steadily furnish our countryside with fervent missionaries. These will ceaselessly engage in destroying the empire of the demon, at the same time as providing the example of a life worthy of the Church in the community which they will form [...]."28

Then, on August 22, 1817, he added: "But who are we indeed that the good God should listen to our pleas? We are, or ought to be, holy priests who consider themselves happy and very happy to devote their fortune, their health, their life in the service and for the glory of our God. We are put on earth, particularly those of our house, to sanctify ourselves while helping each other by our example, our words and our prayers. Our Lord Jesus Christ has left to us the task of continuing the great work of the redemption of mankind. It is towards this unique end that all our efforts must tend; as long as we will not have spent our whole life and given all our blood to achieve this, we have nothing to say; especially when as yet we have given only a few drops of sweat and a few spells of fatigue. This spirit of being wholly devoted to the glory of God, the service of the Church and the salvation of souls, is the spirit that is proper to our Congregation, a small one, to be sure, but which will always be powerful as long as she is holy. Our novices must steep themselves in these thoughts, which must sink deep in them and be often medi-

tated. Each Society in the Church has a spirit which is its own; which is inspired by God according to the circumstances and needs of the times wherein it pleases God to raise these supporting bodies or rather it would be better to say these elite bodies which precede the main army on the march, which excel it in bravery and which thus obtains the more brilliant victories".29

Therefore, "being wholly devoted to the glory of God" is the *spirit specific* to our Congregation just like the family spirit and fraternal charity "constitute its distinctive character".

In letters to his Oblates, the Founder often spoke of zeal, sometimes to encourage those Oblates which were more timid or more concerned with living their religious life rather than for the salvation of souls,<sup>30</sup> but most often he did it to check excesses of zeal at the expense of the interior life.<sup>31</sup> No one needed to urge the Oblates to be zealous; it was enough for them to recognize the forceful language their Rule used in speaking of this topic,<sup>32</sup> to learn with what dedication their spiritual father had labored as a young priest ministering to prisoners, the youth and the abandoned souls of Aix, then of having seen him at work in Marseilles in the course of their years there in the novitiate or the scholasticate.<sup>33</sup> In 1864, Mr. Cailhol, Canon of Marseilles, said the Bishop of Marseilles had been "consumed with the zeal that filled the Apostles"<sup>34</sup> and Bishop Jeancard wrote: "Zeal for the salvation of souls was his most outstanding virtue [...]"<sup>35</sup>

This love of souls and this eagerness to see them achieve salvation possessed him to such a degree that several times in the course of his life he declared himself ready to die a martyr's death<sup>36</sup> and he offered<sup>37</sup> and risked<sup>38</sup> his life to save them.

### III. THE IMPACT THIS TESTAMENT HAS HAD IN THE CONGREGATION'S HISTORY

The Oblates have never forgotten this spiritual testament, this summary of his exhortations and his life, left to them by their Founder. To track down all the allusions to it in Oblate literature and all the applications made of it in the life of the Congregation would be an arduous task. Nevertheless, in this regard, we should call to mind some writings, especially writings of the Superiors General and let us remind ourselves of some events where it seems that the Oblates attempted to live according to the dying wishes of Bishop de Mazenod.

Among the Superiors General, Father Joseph Fabre was the one who referred most often to this testament. In an implicit or explicit fashion, he referred to it in at least nine circular letters. Fathers Louis Soullier, Cassien Augier, Théodore Labouré referred to it in two circular letters each; Bishop Augustin Dontenwill alludes to it<sup>39</sup> in four circular letters; Father Léo Deschâtelets alludes to it in eight<sup>40</sup> of his circular letters; Father Richard Hanley makes one allusion<sup>41</sup> to it and Father Fernand Jetté alludes to it twice.<sup>42</sup>

We notice that the Superiors General,<sup>43</sup> like the Founder,<sup>44</sup> speak more often of charity than they do of zeal. Following the Founder's example, all of them stress several times that fraternal charity is, or ought to be, the distinguishing sign for Oblates and all of them repeat several times,<sup>45</sup> once again following the example of the Founder,<sup>46</sup> that among ourselves we should have "only one heart and one soul".

Without doubt the teachings of the Founder have penetrated deeply into the

souls of his spiritual sons. The two favorite expressions mentioned above are often found in Oblate writings<sup>47</sup> as well as the evoking of his spiritual testament.<sup>48</sup> During Bishop de Mazenod's lifetime as well as after his death, his sons have striven to practice this charity among themselves and have always been urged on by a bold zeal.

#### 1. OBLATE FRATERNAL CHARITY

We know how Bishop Jeancard, grateful for what he had witnessed, praised the charity which reigned among the fathers and brothers of the first community at Aix. For example, he wrote: "The *cor unum et anima una* which the Founder enjoined upon his Oblates in his Rules as one of the distinguishing features of the Society was truly the distinguishing trait of this small community".<sup>49</sup> And Father Tempier added: "It is the rule of charity in its most captivating form. Ah! if worldlings could read what is going on in our hearts, they would fret and fume that they were so far removed from true happiness".<sup>50</sup>

Among our documentation, we find letters from novices and scholastics of the Notre-Dame du Laus community, the second house of the Congregation, where it seems the spirit of one heart and one soul reigned as well.<sup>51</sup> For his part, Toussaint Dassy, a seminarian in Marseilles in 1829, states that he was drawn to join the Congregation when he witnessed the unity and charity which reigned among the seminary directors.<sup>52</sup> In the same period of time, at least three Oblates requested the Founder's permission to offer their life to God in the place of Father Marius Suzanne since they considered him more important than themselves.<sup>53</sup> The same atmosphere of charity existed at Notre-Dame

de Lumières in 1840. In his October 10 acts of visitation, Father de Mazenod wrote: "We have just spent five wonderful days among this portion of our dear family. How sweet were the exchanges we had with each member of this house! We observed that in this place individuals are serving God to the best of their ability, that community members love each other as brothers, that all hearts are so closely united that never is there even the slightest discord [...]."

Either during his studies at Marseilles or in the course of his trip in 1859, Bishop Vital Grandin was particularly struck by the attention lavished upon him by the Founder. In 1859, he wrote: "During the time I spent with him, he watched over me like a loving mother, seeing to it that I lacked nothing at table".<sup>54</sup>

In 1861, Father Joseph-Marie Clos stated that, in Texas, the diocesan clergy admired the fraternal charity which reigned among the Oblates. One priest even said that he had never seen such charity in any other community.<sup>55</sup>

All of those who had occasion to live at the seminary in Marseilles, visited it, or the scholasticate of Montolivet between 1854 and 1862 were impressed by the climate of charity that reigned there.<sup>56</sup> Bishop Louis d'Herbomez echoes these same sentiments in a letter to Father Tempier of April 17, 1863: "Ah! What a fine thing it is, and how sweet to live together as brothers having only one heart and one soul".

In his work written for youth with the title *Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, Father Yves Guéguen wrote in 1947: "This family spirit consisting of mutual sincere affection, thoughtful attention and heartfelt simplicity has been faithfully maintained among the

sons of Bishop de Mazenod. With the tender love of Mary Immaculate which is its pure source, it constitutes in a visible way the treasured heritage of their Institute. It constitutes the delight of their daily life; it constitutes the joy and consolation of their celebrations and family reunions; it gives their humble hospitality a special flavor of cordiality; finally, it predisposes them to act with gentleness, affability and in an obliging manner with regard to the faithful they are called to evangelize".<sup>57</sup>

Faithful to this Oblate tradition, the Constitutions and Rules of 1982 several times evoke the spiritual testament, especially in Constitution 37 where it is stated: "The Founder left us a testament: "Among yourselves practice charity, charity, charity – and, outside, zeal for the salvation of souls".<sup>58</sup>

In spite of an obvious tension involved in following this ideal, we should not delude ourselves thinking that this charity was lived in a perfect way in the Oblate communities of the Founder's lifetime and after his death.<sup>59</sup> If references to charity occurred so frequently in the writings of the Superiors General, it was no doubt because they tried to stress the wonderful way it was usually lived, but also to point out weaknesses in this area and to urge Oblates to be still more faithful to this essential point of the Rules and the wishes of Bishop de Mazenod.

## 2. OBLATE ZEAL

Bishop de Mazenod, as well as the Superiors General, spoke of the missionary activity of the Oblates and their zeal, but almost never to complain or to encourage them in this regard. The Founder in particular had words of admiration and praise for the successes obtained in parish missions and for the

courage of missionaries working among the heathen.<sup>60</sup> His astonishment at seeing how, under his leadership, in the matter of a few years his sons were working in the entire North American continent from the Pacific to the Arctic oceans was quite justified. Later on, one writer called this expansion the great white epic.<sup>61</sup> At the same time, they were working in missions in Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and crisscrossing South Africa establishing missions among several tribes.<sup>62</sup>

The tradition was maintained to the point that in 1932 Pope Pius XI called the Oblates the specialists of difficult missions. Indeed, speaking to the members of the General Chapter, he said: "Once again we have seen how you hold to your fine, glorious and holy specialty which is that of dedicating your resources, your talents and your lives to the souls of the most abandoned in the most difficult missions. [...] A very fine and noble thing that assures for you in a way unique and unequalled, the blessing of God and the complete fullness of the missionary spirit. Moreover, you give witness to it in point of fact: This spirit is the spirit of your soul!"<sup>63</sup>

The Superiors General often expressed themselves in the same vein as the Founder, especially in their reports on the state of the Congregation at the beginning of each General Chapter. At the 1947 General Chapter as well as at the centenary celebration of the provinces of France in 1951, Father Léo Deschâtelets stressed the important role played by the French missionaries throughout the years in fostering the missionary spirit, the "sacred fire" which inspired and urged on the Oblates everywhere.<sup>64</sup> Again at the 1953 General Chapter, he wrote: "Our mission Vicariates maintain for the Institute

its momentum and its apostolic dynamism. They are at the cutting edge of the apostolate for the conversion of souls and we are proud of that. Never will we be able to say enough concerning with what genuinely missionary spirit our Oblates devote themselves to the task of converting the pagans, maintaining in the way of salvation those rescued from error and the devil in the three Archdioceses, five Dioceses and thirteen Vicariates Apostolic entrusted to our care. Whereas in some of the older mission Vicariates, our fathers, faithful to the tradition of their predecessors struggle ceaselessly to extend and to assure the continued existence of the Kingdom of Christ, in the newer Vicariates, Garoua for example, the situation is one of intoxication with the wave of first converts, the numerous conversions, first settlements in the heart of the jungle. There we see recurring the missionary epic of the first days of our apostolate in foreign countries. In my estimation, the Church can find nothing to criticize among us since we are doing everything in our power to respond to her expectations of us when she entrusted to the Congregation the responsibility and honor of evangelizing these territories".<sup>65</sup>

At the 1986 Chapter, it was Pope John Paul II who praised the zeal of the Oblates in the past and invited the present-day Oblates to remain faithful to this tradition: "For over 160 years the Oblates of Mary Immaculate have for their part written a marvelous chapter in the missionary history of the present-day Church, from the Far North to the Equator. You will permit me to hold up as examples the very great figure of Bishop Vital Grandin in the past, and in our day that of the President of South Africa's Episcopal Conference, Archbishop Hurley. I give thanks to God for

sensing that at the present time a good number of Oblates, desirous of involving all their brothers, want to grasp firmly the ideal which swept along their Blessed Founder into a Gospel missionary adventure whose astonishing development he did not dare imagine, given the thousands of obstacles that arose in his path. [...]"

"Sons of Eugene de Mazenod, whose zeal to proclaim the Gospel has been compared to the Mistral wind, heirs of a lineage nearly two centuries old of Oblates impassioned for Jesus Christ, let yourselves be drawn more than ever by the vast and poor masses of Third World regions as also by the Fourth World of the West, stagnating in misery and often in the ignorance of God!"<sup>66</sup>

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Before his departure from this earth, Jesus Christ left his disciples this commandment: "Love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12) and he publicly proclaimed his final command: "Go out to the whole world; proclaim the Good News to all creation" (Mark 16:15). Before he died, it was a natural thing for Bishop de Mazenod to leave his sons the same motto or spiritual testament: "Among yourselves practice charity, charity, charity – and, outside, zeal for the salvation of souls". In consequence, should they not strive to become other Jesus Christs<sup>67</sup> and walk in the footsteps of the Apostles whom they considered as their first fathers?<sup>68</sup>

The Constitutions of 1982 express themselves in the same vein: "We are men "set apart for the Gospel" (Romans 1:1), men ready to leave everything to be disciples of Jesus. The desire to cooperate with him draws us to know him

more deeply, to identify with him, to let him live in us. We strive to reproduce in ourselves the pattern of his life. [...]" (C 2).

"Jesus personally formed the disciples he had chosen, initiating them into 'the mystery of the Kingdom of God' (Mark 4:11). As a preparation for their mission he had them share in his ministry; to confirm their zeal he sent them his Spirit".

"This same Spirit forms Christ in those who endeavour to follow in the Apostles' footsteps. As they enter more deeply into the mystery of the Saviour and his Church, he moves them to dedicate themselves to the evangelization of the poor" (C 45).

In 1894, Father Baffie wrote that, echoing the last accents of his dying voice, this spiritual testament of Bishop de Mazenod's is "the full and complete revelation of the noble aspirations which provided our venerable Founder with an ongoing reason to keep his heart beating. Above and beyond that, it is a complete program for the achieving of perfection".<sup>69</sup> We could add that it gives us the description of what a son of Bishop de Mazenod should be. It is by measuring himself against this model that the individual member of the Congregation will find out whether he is faithful or not to his vocation as an Oblate of Mary Immaculate.<sup>70</sup>

YVON BEAUDOIN

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> FABRE, Joseph, circular letter no. 9, May 26, 1861, in *Circ. adm.*, I (1850-1885), p. 63; Fathers Achilles Rey (REY II, p. 855) and Toussaint Rambert (RAMBERT II, p. 707) both give a long account of the Founder's last moments. They follow closely Father Fabre's account, but since they too were eye-witnesses of this event, they add a number of details and quote from an account given by Father Anthony Mouchette. Father Rey specifies that it was Father Fabre who asked the Founder to "share the final desire of his heart".

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 10 (58).

<sup>3</sup> The text was published in *Missions*, 17 (1879), p. 136-145.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 128-130. The text of the funeral oration can be found on pages 112-135.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 139.

<sup>6</sup> (2 Corinthians 13), circular letter no. 1, August 2, 1853 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 12, p. 208-209, *Circ. adm.*, I (1850-1885), p. 2 (16).

<sup>7</sup> In *François de Paule Henry Tempier, Oblate Writings* II, vol. 2, p. 192; *Circ. adm.*, I (1850-1885), p. 23-25.

<sup>8</sup> The first article of the 1818 Rule stated simply: "to form a group of diocesan priests who would live together"; see *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 13.

<sup>9</sup> In *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 20, p. 31 & 32; see also the letter to Father André Sumien and the Oblates at Aix, March 18, 1823, *ibidem*, no. 96, p. 105.

<sup>10</sup> In *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 7, no. 350, p. 202-203. At the time, the Founder was convalescing and was on his way to Switzerland to rest. He was not yet aware of the events which had taken place in Paris, namely, the July Revolution. See also the October 15, 1848 letter to Father Eugene Dorey in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 10, no. 990, p. 237.

<sup>11</sup> See GILBERT, Maurice, "Les *Novissima verba* du Fondateur", in *Etudes oblates*, 28 (1969), p. 48-49.

<sup>12</sup> The 1818 Constitutions and Rules, Second Part, "Of the other principal observances", in *Missions*, 78 (1951) p. 55, lines 380-383.

<sup>13</sup> Many references can be found in the subject index of the series *Oblate Writings* I, vols. 1 to 13 and also in BEAUDOIN, Yvon, "Communauté et mission d'après Mgr de Mazenod et chez les premières générations d'Oblats en Europe", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 49 (1990), p. 185-193, footnotes 26-32, 47-50, 56, 58.

<sup>14</sup> Acts 4: 32; see letters to Father Tempier, October 9, 1815 and February 24, 1816 to Father Hippolyte Courtès, November 8, 1821, to Father Flavien Durocher, January 17, 1851; to Father Jean Viala, November 2, 1853; Acts of the Canonical Visitation of Notre-Dame du Laus, May 28, 1834 in REY I, p. 592; see also p. 408, etc.

<sup>15</sup> Letters to Father Hippolyte Guibert, July 29, 1830, to Father Antoine Mouchette, December 2, 1854; speech to the 1850 General Chapter; circular letter of February 2, 1857, etc.

<sup>16</sup> Letter to Father Antoine Mouchette and to the scholastics, December 2, 1854 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 11, no. 1256, p. 253-254.

<sup>17</sup> Letter to Father Ambrose Vincens, November 9, 1853 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 11, no. 1187, p. 175. There are two studies on the heart, that is, the affective make-up of the Founder: BAFFIE, Eugene, *Esprit et vertus de Mgr C. J. E. de Mazenod*, Paris-Lyon, Delhomme et Briguët, 1894, p. 569-615; LAMIRANDE, Emilien, "Aspects du coeur de Mgr de Mazenod", in *Etudes oblates*, 13 (1954), p. 261-268.

<sup>18</sup> See BEAUDOIN, Yvon, "Communauté et mission d'après Mgr de Mazenod et chez les premières générations d'Oblats en Europe", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 49 (1990), p. 184-187, 191-193.

<sup>19</sup> PAGUELLE DE FOLLENAY, J. *Vie du Cardinal Guibert*, Paris, librairie Ch. Pous-sielgue, 1896, vol. I, p. 66.

<sup>20</sup> See the subject index in each of the volumes of the collection *Oblate Writings* I: *love, love for his Oblates*, especially in volume 11.

<sup>21</sup> In *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 11, no. 1057, p. 30.

<sup>22</sup> In *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 11, no. 1095, p. 69 & 70.

<sup>23</sup> The same thought surfaces in a March

20, 1826 letter to Father Tempier, *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 7, no. 231, p. 65.

<sup>24</sup> In *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 15, 18.

<sup>25</sup> "Our Holy Rules", in circular letter no. 14, *Circ. adm.*, I, (1850-1885), p. 16-17 (122-123).

<sup>26</sup> In *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 14, no. 27, p. 56.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, no. 61, p. 139.

<sup>28</sup> In *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 4, p. 6.

<sup>29</sup> Letter to Father Tempier, August 22, 1817 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 21, p. 35.

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, "Acts of visitation of the province of England" July 22, 1850, *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 3, p. 190; letter to Father Stephen Semeria, January 17, 1850, *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 4, no. 14, p. 48; letter to the Oblates in Ceylon, June 2, 1851, *ibidem*, no. 18, p. 66-67; letter to Father Semeria, January 21, 1852, *ibidem*, no. 26, p. 87-88; letters to Bishop Jean-François Allard, May 30 and November 10, 1857, *ibidem*, nos. 26-27, p. 205-210.

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, letters to Father Ambrose Vincens, July 6, 1838 and to Father Hippolyte Courtès, January 23, 1839 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 9, no. 669, p. 96 and no. 683, p. 114; to Bishop Stephen Semeria, October 10, 1857 and to Father Christopher Bonjean, October 16, 1858 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 4, no. 44, p. 139 and no. 47, p. 142-143; to Father Jean-Baptiste Honorat, April 20, 1844 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 1, no. 33, p. 81-82; to Bishop Norbert Provencher, January 24, 1852 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 2, no. 162, p. 36-37.

<sup>32</sup> In his circular letter no. 191 of August 15, 1951 on *Our Vocation and Life of Intimate Union with Mary Immaculate*, Father Deschâtelets unveiled the full power of the texts of the Rule by writing: "What really establishes us in our vocation, in our mission, is a certain *higher degree of commitment to the service of God and souls*, of a reckless gift of self to the service of God, his glory, his love and his infinite mercy; it is a surge of energy, a special intensity of priestly charity, of zeal for the most difficult of tasks [...]" in *Circ. adm.*, V (1947-1952), p. 322.

<sup>33</sup> Father Eugene Baffie in his work *Esprit*

*et vertus...*, has a fine chapter on the Founder's zeal, p. 440-466.

<sup>34</sup> Speech delivered on the occasion of Father Tempier's 50th anniversary of ordination to the priesthood in *Mission*, 3 (1864), p. 155.

<sup>35</sup> Speech delivered by Bishop Jeancard, January 25, 1866 on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the foundation of the Congregation in *Missions*, 5 (1866), p. 599.

<sup>36</sup> See the retreat notes of December 1811 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 14, no. 95, p. 221 and a number of times in the retreat notes of his first years of priesthood; also letter to Bishop Frezza April 24, 1835 in RAMBERT, I p. 670 and BAFFIE, Eugene, *Esprit et vertus...*, p. 448-450.

<sup>37</sup> Letter to Adrien Chappuis, July 31, 1820 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 13, no. 31, p. 43; Lenten pastoral letter, February 2, 1839, p. 8.

<sup>38</sup> In the prisons of Aix in 1814, see REY I, p. 164-165 and during the cholera epidemics.

<sup>39</sup> See "La charité fraternelle chez les Oblats d'après les circulaires administratives des Supérieurs généraux" in *Etudes oblates*, 29 (1969), p. 60-79.

<sup>40</sup> Circular letter no. 177 in *Circ. adm.*, V (1947-1952), p. 43; circular letter no. 181 in *Circ. adm.*, V (1947-1952), p. 137; circular letter no. 191 in *Circ. adm.*, V (1947-1952), p. 303; circular letter no. 200 in *Circ. adm.*, VI (1953-1960), p. 8; circular letter no. 208 in *Circ. adm.*, VI (1953-1960) p. 223; circular letter no. 214 in *Circ. adm.*, VII (1965-1966), p. 7; circular letter no. 241 in *Circ. adm.*, VIII (1967-1972), p. 189; circular letter no. 247 in *Circ. adm.*, VIII (1967-1972), p. 440.

<sup>41</sup> See circular letter no. 248, June 1, 1972 in A.A.G., 1972, p. 13.

<sup>42</sup> See circular letters no. 271, February 17, 1977 and no. 302, May 21, 1986 in A.A.G., 1977, p. 222-223; 1986, p. 189.

<sup>43</sup> Father Joseph Fabre stated it at least six times, Fathers Louis Soullier, Cassian Augier and Theodore Labouré once each. See "La charité fraternelle chez les Oblats", in *Etudes oblates*, 28 (1969), p. 60-79; Father Deschâtelets stated it twice. See circular letters nos. 187 and 200 in *Circ. adm.*, V, p.

271 and VI, p. 23. Father Jetté stressed fraternal charity. See A.A.G., 1977, p. 232; *The Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate*, General House, Rome, 1985, p. 92, 170, 277-280.

<sup>44</sup> See footnote 15 above.

<sup>45</sup> Father Fabre stated it at least three times, Father Augier twice, Father Soullier, Bishop Dontenwill and Father Labouré once each. See "La charité fraternelle chez les Oblats", in *Etudes oblates*, 28 (1969), p. 60-79. Father Deschâtelets mentions it at least four times; see circular letters nos. 177, 181, 191, 208 in *Circ. adm.*, V, p. 43, 136, 303; VI, p. 316; Father Marcello Zago mentions it once. See circular letter no. 322 in A.A.G., 1991, p. 30.

<sup>46</sup> See note 14 above.

<sup>47</sup> See BEAUDOIN, Yvon, "Communauté et mission d'après Mgr de Mazenod...", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 49 (1990), p. 182, especially footnotes 51-53 where we can find several references to it.

<sup>48</sup> Letter written by Brother Antoine Derbuel to Father Fabre, May 1, 1864 in *Missions*, 4 (1865), p. 141; speech delivered by Father Tempier, December 1861 in *Missions*, 4 (1865) p. 8; Father Achilles Rey on the occasion of the golden anniversary of priesthood of Father Francis Bermond in *Missions*, 25 (1887), p. 268; Pius XI's speech to the capitulars in *Missions*, 66 (1932), p. 675; Yves GUEGUEN, *Missionnaire Oblat de Marie Immaculée*, Ottawa, Oblate Studies Edition, (1947), p. 101, s.l., s.d., p. 86; Paul-Emile BRETON, "Le Fondateur des Oblats d'après les écrits de Monseigneur Grandin", in *Etudes oblates*, 18 (1959), p. 353.

<sup>49</sup> JEANCARD, Mgr Jacques, *Mélanges historiques sur la Congrégation des Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, Tours, Mame et Fils, 1872, p. 26; see also p. 3, 18-19, 22, 29, 33.

<sup>50</sup> See BAFFIE, Eugene, *Esprit et vertus...*, p. 602; concerning charity at Aix, see also RAMBERT I, p. 265, 280, 467, 469.

<sup>51</sup> Letter of scholastic brother Jacques-J. Marcou to seminarian Hippolyte Guibert, May 11, 1822; letters from Abbé Coulin to Miss Martineng, August 14, 1820, to Father de Mazenod November 24 and December 8, 1820; RAMBERT I, p. 301-302.

<sup>52</sup> Letter from Toussaint Dassy to Father Tempier, May 29, 1829. Oblate General Archives.

<sup>53</sup> Letter from John Dupuy to Father de Mazenod, September 10, 1826; RAMBERT I, p. 525.

<sup>54</sup> See various texts written by Bishop Grandin in the article by Father Paul-Emile BRETON, "Le Fondateur des Oblats d'après les écrits de Monseigneur Grandin", in *Etudes oblates*, 18 (1959), p. 353-355.

<sup>55</sup> Letter from Father Joseph Mary Clos to Father Tempier, New Orleans, March 26, 1861. Oblate General Archives.

<sup>56</sup> See BEAUDOIN, Yvon, *Le grand séminaire de Marseille (et le scolasticat oblat) sous la direction des Oblats de Marie Immaculée, 1827-1862*, Ottawa, Oblate Studies Edition, 1966, p. 41-42, 47-48, 83-84; "Le scolasticat de Montolivet, 1854-1862" in *Etudes oblates*, 27 (1968), p. 259-262; *François de Paule Henry Tempier*, Rome, General Postulation O.M.I., 1987, Collection Oblate Writings II, vol. 1, p. 164-167.

<sup>57</sup> P. 101-102.

<sup>58</sup> See especially C 37-39.

<sup>59</sup> In the Founder's lifetime, superiors often complained about the lack of fraternal charity. The rather numerous incidents of people leaving or being cast out of the Congregation find their explanation in this context. See BEAUDOIN, Yvon, "Communauté et mission d'après Mgr de Mazenod...", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 49 (1990) p. 192-193, footnotes 54-59.

<sup>60</sup> BEAUDOIN, Yvon, "Mgr de Mazenod et les Oblats: grandeur d'une vocation missionnaire", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 47 (1988), p. 65-77.

<sup>61</sup> ROUQUETTE, Louis-Frédéric, *L'épopée blanche*, Paris, J. Ferenczi et Fils, 1926, 248 p.

<sup>62</sup> Rather numerous articles and works have been written about these missions. See a list in BEAUDOIN, Yvon, *Bibliographie sur la Congrégation des Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, (1983) polycopied., South Africa and Lesotho, p. 7-9; Sri Lanka, p. 10-11.

<sup>63</sup> Speech by Pius XI to the General Chapter, September 14, 1932 in *Missions*, 66 (1932), p. 675.

<sup>64</sup> Circular letters no. 177, September 8, 1947 and no. 188, May 1, 1951 in *Circ. adm.*, V, p. 28-29, 284.

<sup>65</sup> Circular letter no. 201 in *Circ. adm.*, VI, p. 66-67.

<sup>66</sup> Speech of John Paul II to the capitulars, October 2, 1986 in *A.A.G.*, 9 (1986), p. 12-13.

<sup>67</sup> The 1818 Constitutions and Rules in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 55, lines 377-379; p. 61, lines 570-575; p. 87, lines 174-175. The apostolic character of our Oblate life flows from the desire to imitate the Savior. See LESAGE, Germain, "Thèmes fondamentaux de notre spiritualité", in *Etudes oblates*, 4 (1945), p. 26; GRATTON, Henri, "La dévotion salvatorienne du Fondateur aux premières années de son sacerdoce", in *Etudes oblates*, I (1942), p. 170. The source of this devotion is the love of God. See LAMIRANDE, Émilien, "Esprit d'oblation", in *Etudes oblates*, 15 (1956), p. 353-355.

<sup>68</sup> The 1818 Constitutions and Rules in *Missions*, 78 (1951), P. 54-55, lines 355-

370; *Nota bene* of chapter one, p. 15, lines 70-75.

<sup>69</sup> BAFFIE, Eugene, *Esprit et vertus...* p. 440.

<sup>70</sup> November 8, 1861, Bishop Stephen Semeria wrote to Father Joseph Fabre: "I can testify to the fact that the lofty teachings given by our beloved and venerable Founder on his deathbed concerning fraternal charity and zeal for the salvation of souls have been heeded, understood, meditated and, what is still better, practiced in general by our beloved fathers and brothers in Ceylon." *Missions*, I (1862), p. 192. At the beginning of December of the same year, in his opening address to the Chapter, Father Tempier observed as well that this spirit was very much alive. He expressed his desire that it should always be so: "This spirit of faith, zeal and of dedication, especially of charity and fraternal unity of which he left us a treasured legacy, [...this] spirit is still alive and must always live in the hearts of his children." *Missions*, 25 (1887), p. 8.

## SUPERIORS

*Summary: Introduction. I. The local superior in the thought of Eugene de Mazenod:* 1. The superior: Instrument of God's will; 2. The qualities required in a superior; 3. The duties of the local superior: a. Organize the work of the community; b. Open the Rule book for them; c. Care for those entrusted to him; d. Direct and instruct; e. Represent the Superior General; 4. The conduct of the local superior: a. Have a thorough grasp of the obligations incumbent on him; b. Be a man of prayer who trusts in Divine Providence; c. Be a model for everyone; d. Superiors govern brothers, not subjects; e. Consultation. *II. Interpreting the Founder and the Rule:* 1. Circular letter of Father Fabre; 2. The mission of the superior: a. Internal mission of the superior; b. External mission of the superior. 3. What must the local superior be?: a. Spiritually; b. Temporal administration of the houses. *III. The Constitutions and Rules of 1982:* 1. The spirit of government: At the service of mission and community; 2. A sign of the Lord's loving and guiding presence in our midst; 3. The qualities of the superior; 4. He animates and directs the apostolate; 5. He helps the community to live the Gospel; 6. Consultation. *Conclusion*

### INTRODUCTION

This article is divided into three parts, beginning with a presentation of the thought of the Founder on the local Superior. Although he did not write a comprehensive treatment of the topic, his ideas come out clearly in his writings. In this presentation I let the Founder speak for himself as much as possible by using quotations from his writings with a minimum of comment. I do this in the hope that the local Superiors who read this article will be inspired in their ministry by our Founder himself. For Eugene de Mazenod the Superior was the substitute of God who had full powers. He did, however, have to consult his own Superiors, and his local council before making decisions, and the members of the local community were free to present their own opinions to him. What does emerge clearly in the writings of the Founder is his loving care for his Oblates, a quality which he

wanted all his local Superiors to reflect in their dealings with others.

The second part deals with the circular letter of Father Fabre, which was the first extensive treatment of the topic, and remained a key presentation for Oblates for many decades. He bases himself on the lived experience of the Congregation as it interpreted the spirit of the Founder, remembered by those who knew him. Father Fabre has a sense of the unity of the Congregation: that every Oblate is a part of the whole, and that the Congregation is judged by the individual. Here the Superior has a particular role to play.

The third section is a presentation of the idea of the Oblate local Superior as it appears after Vatican II, within the context of the Congregation unfolding its mission in apostolic religious communities. The Superior has a role to play in both the mission of the community, and in the life of the community itself.

## THE LOCAL SUPERIOR IN THE THOUGHT OF EUGENE DE MAZENOD

### 1. THE SUPERIOR: INSTRUMENT OF GOD'S WILL

In 1817, writing to Tempier, Father de Mazenod outlines his attitude towards the person of a Superior: "Let them give me a Superior and I swear to him in advance to be entirely submitted to him and promise him to act only by his will which will be, in my eyes, that of God whose instrument he will be in regard to me"<sup>1</sup>.

For his subjects the Superior is clearly the instrument of God, and in the words of the 1826 Rule: they are "to see in him who commands our Lord Himself, in whose name orders are given, and for whose sake they are obeyed"<sup>2</sup>.

The Founder remained constant in this understanding throughout his life as is shown when he bemoans the weakness of local Superiors, four years before his death: "They are good men themselves but they do not know how to wield the authority vested in them by the Rules to maintain regularity among their men. They do not sufficiently realize that they have been placed at the head of their community to represent God, in whose name and by virtue of the Rules they are to govern; they are not sufficiently aware that they have a serious obligation of giving an account to the Church and to the Congregation for those entrusted to their care"<sup>3</sup>.

### 2. THE QUALITIES REQUIRED IN A SUPERIOR

In the 1826 Rule the Founder gives a description of the qualities he looks for in appointing a man to be a Superior:

The local Superior should be blameless and upright all his conduct. He should be conspicuous for the virtues of humility and obedience. He should be gifted with prudence and ability, so that he may rule wisely and manage affairs well. He should be well acquainted with the sacred sciences and the humanities. He should be of kind disposition, knowing how to temper the austerity required by the spirit of discipline with an appropriate mildness that is free from weakness.

Above all things, he should be a man of prayer, who, during his intimate prayerful converse, takes care to plead with God not only for his own sanctification, but also for the progress and perfection of all those entrusted to his care<sup>4</sup>.

The ideal to strive for is high, but the realistic Eugene de Mazenod shows in a practical way the main elements he looks for: "When he is punctual and observant of the Rules, has competent knowledge and enjoys the confidence of the Superior General, what more must be asked of him?"<sup>5</sup>. All that is needed is "good enough judgement, solid enough piety and love of order and regularity ample enough"<sup>6</sup>.

### 3. THE DUTIES OF THE LOCAL SUPERIOR

The Rule of 1826 is clear on the duty of the local Superior being understood in terms of the mission: "His principal duty is to exercise careful supervision over those under him, to see that they diligently do the work entrusted to them"<sup>7</sup>.

#### *a. Organize the work of the community*

The overall purpose of being a Superior is to ensure the smooth running of the mission of the Congregation,

hence he summarises this by saying, "For each one you must make the performance of his duties easier"<sup>8</sup>. "Act in all freedom in relation to the members of your community and give each the employment you judge before God should be given to him"<sup>9</sup>. To the Superior was given the responsibility of the running of the house, of supervising the activities and expenditure of the bursar, of organising the work of its members, and of assisting the members with their study and preparation of the instructions for preaching<sup>10</sup>.

In appointing Father Guigues to be the Superior who is to create the first Oblate community at the sanctuary of Notre Dame de l'Osier, Bishop de Mazenod gives him the charge: "you are to build the foundations of the new community, and it is vital that it diffuse abroad the good odour of Jesus Christ"<sup>11</sup>. It is this good odour of Jesus Christ which forms the basis of the activities of all the members of the community, among themselves, and in their preaching and ministry.

### *b. Open the Rule Book for them*

The guide for all behaviour was the Rule, and here the Superior had a special obligation: "it is for you to open the Rule book so that each one may draw his inspirations from it, and knowledge of the style of conduct he must pursue"<sup>12</sup>. The Superior was never to stray from the spirit of the Rule, and was to ensure the most exact observance: "there is a Rule that must be observed, and it is the local Superior who must have a hand in its fulfillment"<sup>13</sup>. The Rule should fill the Superior with a sense of confidence because should anyone question his actions, he need only point out that "you cannot deviate from what the Rule obliges you to do,

and that no one should take it ill or be surprised to see you demand exact regularity and total obedience to the holy Rules"<sup>14</sup>.

### *c. Care for those entrusted to him*

As firm as the Founder is in demanding the obedience of the subjects to the Superior, so too is he insistent that the Superior himself be a loving and caring person towards those entrusted to him. To Father Vincent Mille, who was in charge of the students in Switzerland, and who liked to do pastoral ministry outside, he says, "I have not sent you to Switzerland to exercise the exterior ministry but to direct, instruct and look after the community that is entrusted to you; this has been repeated and explained too often for there to be the least shadow of doubt about the course you must follow in your situation"<sup>15</sup>. Further in the same letter he reminds Mille of his responsibility to care for his community: "like the apple of your eye"<sup>16</sup>.

"The novices must be persuaded that they have in you a father who truly loves them, who is concerned for their health and well-being, who even knows how to diminish the severity of the Rule in view of their needs"<sup>17</sup>, he writes to Father Prosper Boisramé, who demanded excessive mortification from his novices. To Father Jean-Maurice Verdet he insists on the same care: "your manner of government must be gentle and kindly so that peace of soul and contentment may be preserved in all things"<sup>18</sup>.

"Superiors are to watch over the health of their men"<sup>19</sup>, is another theme often referred to by the Founder, a concern which mirrors his own enduring preoccupation for the health of the Oblates.

In their relations with the world outside of the community, it is the duty of the Superior to protect the good name of his community. Bishop de Mazenod chides Father Honorat for being too quick to speak to the local Bishop about the weakness of some Oblates: "It is the duty of the Superior to insist upon the worth of his members, as it is the duty of the members to uphold the worth of the Superior. This concerted charity profits the entire body and facilitates the good that it is called upon to do"<sup>20</sup>.

#### *d. Direct and Instruct*

The careful supervision of the Superior entails that the community entrusted to him be marked by regularity: "If he fails to institute perfect regularity in his community, he will have to answer for it to God and the Society"<sup>21</sup>. The Founder constantly insists on regularity, because without this there can be no religious life and no mission. Central to ensuring regularity is the person of the Superior. Thus, a major function of the Superior is to ensure order in the Congregation, something "which cannot exist where there is no subordination"<sup>22</sup>.

One of the means to be used to direct the community was that of spiritual conferences. "Your spiritual conferences will provide you with the occasion to recall principles and to maintain the exact observance of regular discipline. Without that, we damn ourselves, and all the while we preach conversion to the people. In the Rule you will find the confirmation of all the words that you can draw forth from books which treat of the duties of religious life. It is not enough to read Rodriguez<sup>23</sup> or others; we have to put into practice what they teach"<sup>24</sup>.

Another means of direction is for the Superior to have private conversations with those in his community: "Don't neglect this kind of fraternal and trusting sharing with the others as well, it always has good results and ends up forming a family spirit even amongst those who are not drawn to it at the outset"<sup>25</sup>.

#### *e. Represent the Superior General*

To a newly appointed Superior, he writes that he is the one, "to whom I am confidently imparting a large share in the solicitude that is mine"<sup>26</sup>. Of his own position as Superior, the Founder writes to Father Hippolyte Courtès, "You ought, in your decisions, to make them in conformity with the spirit which guides me in my administration because, as long as I am Superior, it is I who must give the guidance which all must follow, whatever they may think. Otherwise there would be friction in the machinery, there would no longer be unity in government and consequently disorder would be the result"<sup>27</sup>. In 1836, the Founder bemoans, "Acting in accordance with their ideas, local Superiors have just about managed to re-fashion the Congregation. I no longer recognize my spirit in the houses I have just visited, and indeed how could it be found when no one bothers any longer to consult me?... If you had taken pains to follow in our footsteps, you would not have brought in all the abuses that I am having such trouble in rooting out"<sup>28</sup>. To Father Guigues he writes, "I will never consent to the local Superior considering himself the master of the house over which he presides and acting against the spirit and the letter of our Rules independently of the Superior General"<sup>29</sup>. Thus, for the local Superiors "it is not just a matter of steering the

ship properly, you must also show me your chart"<sup>30</sup>.

In Europe, the Founder expected a detailed monthly report from the local Superiors, and from those in the mission territories he expected a letter at least every three months<sup>31</sup>. About these letters he asks that, they "neglect nothing that informs me in a complete manner. You will give me great pleasure by entering for my benefit into the most complete details about everything of interest to the Congregation"<sup>32</sup>.

The Founder's letters show a paternal interest in all that is happening in each Oblate community. Because of his high ideals, he often comes across as being critical of the Superiors and of their weaknesses and mistakes. Of this he states, "Let it be understood that you must never be disquieted or annoyed over the observations that I will sometimes have occasion to make. Be well aware that my intention is never to irritate, even when I happen to speak somewhat severely"<sup>33</sup>.

The Superior's decisions must take into consideration the good of the Congregation as a whole, as expressed by the Superior General. In chiding an Oblate for a decision he took, he says, "I am surprised that you placed your private and temporary convenience before the considerable benefit that must accrue to the Congregation as a whole from the wise and indispensable decision that I took"<sup>34</sup>.

#### 4. THE CONDUCT OF THE LOCAL SUPERIOR

##### *a. Have a thorough grasp of the obligations incumbent upon him*

The Superior must have no doubts as to his role in the community<sup>35</sup>. "A

great responsibility rests on your shoulders and you must not forget that the least imprudence that compromises the community in your charge would be imputed to you"<sup>36</sup>.

"If the Rule is not observed, it is the Superior's fault, and I blame him because his duty is to see that it is observed, and to alert me, if need be, so that I may advise him, I have no Rule to give other than the one that exists, that is the one we have vowed and must faithfully observe. Everything to the contrary is an abuse, which is the duty of the Superior to reform. I would like to examine whose fault it is if we are living in too individualistic a manner... I repeat, with a community such as you have, look nowhere but to yourself if it is not going well"<sup>37</sup>.

The obligations of the Superior are not only to be viewed in the light of correcting failure, but in a positive light: "the place of a Superior is at the head of his community; the graces of God will not be lacking in him when at his post"<sup>38</sup>. To Father Verdet, when he was appointed to be the Superior of the first Oblates going to Texas, the Founder clarifies his obligations: "You are to walk at the head of a colony of apostles, all of them worthy of their vocation by reason of their virtues and their devotion"<sup>39</sup>.

##### *b. Be a man of prayer who trusts in Divine Providence*

To be a Superior is an onerous task, but the Founder counsels: "If you were to bear the burden all alone, I would heartily agree with you, but God is there to help you, for you must not doubt that it is his will that was made manifest to you through your Superiors... In view of that, you will always have to act under the impulse of the

Holy Spirit in God's presence, keeping in mind only the good of the interests entrusted to you and always being in conformity to the spirit and even the letter of the Rule from which you must try never to stray"<sup>40</sup>. "The grace of state will help the Superior to shape, direct and use, according to the need and capacity of each, all the members of the community... if he applies himself to it as an essential duty which he must perform with a supernatural outlook and with means taken from this perspective"<sup>41</sup>.

He insists that the Superior trust in Divine Providence because God directs events<sup>42</sup>. Not only is the Superior to be guided by Divine Providence, but "he has the obligation to represent Divine Providence"<sup>43</sup> to those entrusted to his care. He is expected to make his oraison regularly on the duties of his position<sup>44</sup>, and in the words of the 1826 Rule: "Above all things, let him be a man of prayer, and during his intimate converse with God let him earnestly plead, not only for his own sanctification, but also for the perfection of all those entrusted to his care"<sup>45</sup>.

*c. Be a model for everyone*

"Remember that you must be a model for everyone. Make your oraison often on the subject of the duties of your position; it isn't a small thing; keep a close eye on yourself"<sup>46</sup>. Here is found the crux of how it is through personal example that the Superior leads: "Take care, however, that you yourself give the example of the most exact punctuality in everything prescribed by the Rule pertaining to things or to persons"<sup>47</sup>, and again, "I recommend you to be the first to give an example of the most precise discipline and of fidelity to all the prescriptions of the Rule"<sup>48</sup>.

To be a model, the Founder advises Father Guigues: "it is essential that you form good habits"<sup>49</sup>; or to Father Jean Lagier his advice is: "let us scrupulously avoid giving bad example. That is one of the major duties of someone who is placed in charge of others"<sup>50</sup>.

*d. Superiors govern brothers not subjects*

"I recommend kindness in your governing. Do not tire your people, be charitable and patient. Be firm when you must, but never be hard"<sup>51</sup>. The advice given by the Founder is the attitude which he himself uses as a Superior. Every one of his recommendations to the local Superiors is permeated by the spirit of kindness, even when he has had to be severe in pointing out a fault. His fatherliness is obvious in statements like, "It is much better to inspire confidence than to frighten people"<sup>52</sup>, or again, "change your ways, my dear friend, and you will arrive at your goal by condescension, mildness, thoughtfulness, marks of interest and affection. You know the proverb: more flies can be caught with honey than with vinegar"<sup>53</sup>.

Bishop de Mazenod's advice to his Superiors includes practical suggestions as to how to govern with kindness: "Permit yourself only rarely and for grave reasons to make public remonstrances. They are more apt to exasperate than to correct. Keep your reprimands, if it is suitable to make them, for a private interview and even then, make them with much mildness and care. Do not begin by scolding. On the contrary, begin always by assuring the person of the interest you take in his good and the sorrow you experience in being obliged to bring him to realise that he has conducted himself badly in

such or such a circumstance. The human heart is made this way. God himself does not enter it by force but knocks at the door"<sup>54</sup>.

It is the spirit of belonging to a family which the local Superior must bear in mind in his relationships with those entrusted to his care: "Superiors govern brothers not subjects. They are obliged to have much regard for the men who, even though placed under their governance, belong to the family... Kindness is an indispensable quality for making obedience easy"<sup>55</sup>.

To be a Superior entails being prepared to receive criticisms from the members of the community: "welcome always with mildness and charity all the observations which come from no matter which of your members. No outbursts, no short-temperedness. The result of such reactions is to stifle communication and confidence"<sup>56</sup>. These criticisms and suggestions must be made with proper respect and reserve, but always in the spirit of the Rule, to which all have the duty to conform themselves. "In case of doubt, you should always consult me. All this should be done with a view to the greater good, with all the consideration owed mutually by brothers who are moved by the charity of Jesus Christ and are well brought up. Take care, however, that you yourself ought to give the example of the most exact punctuality in everything prescribed by the Rule pertaining to things or to persons"<sup>57</sup>.

To the same Father Dassy, whose style of government drew so much criticism, the Founder advises: "You are wrong in allowing yourself to be affected by remarks that are addressed to you. What you are experiencing is the inheritance of those who are in charge of others. Through patience, we will overcome everything and the severity of

assessments made of us will keep us on guard against our own weaknesses. Stay quietly at your post, and do not allow to appear that you might feel any resentment against anyone at all. Pleasantness is easily reconciled with the required regularity lived out in practice"<sup>58</sup>.

#### *e. Consultation*

The Superior is not to set himself up as the sole master, who arranges everything, and orders everything as he sees fit, but he must ask the advice of his council<sup>59</sup>. "You cannot leave your brethren outside of your making decisions, on whatever matters. Nobody in the Congregation has the power to act on his own ideas, without taking the advice of those who form his council. It is not always necessary to follow the advice of others, but they must always be suitably consulted; and when one is not in agreement it is suitable, even on matters that fall within the proper competence of a Superior, to consult with the major Superior, for fear of being too full of one's own ideas and deceiving oneself as to what is opportune and suitable"<sup>60</sup>.

"The Superior is bound to consult his council so that he may not be inclined to undertake something foolhardy or follow peculiar ideas. But in council, never let yourself be moved by passion or obstinacy in your own ideas. Discuss peaceably always in view of the greatest good, modifying at need your own opinion as any reasonable man should do when he perceives that he goes too far or is not forthright enough. Afterwards, whenever the case requires, notify me before concluding the matter and keep me fully informed"<sup>61</sup>.

Not only does consultation help the Superior himself, but it also promotes good relationships: "It is thus, by giving

others marks of confidence, by showing them deference, by knowing how to modify one's own ideas and to adopt those of others that one gains their sympathy, their help and their affection"<sup>62</sup>.

## II. INTERPRETING THE FOUNDER AND THE RULE

### 1. CIRCULAR LETTER OF FATHER FABRE

Eugene de Mazenod was succeeded by the 38 year-old Father J. Fabre, who had the formidable task of having to continue to maintain the spirit of the Founder among a group of men who knew the Founder personally and who had their own interpretations of his life and spirit. In his thirty one years as Superior General he concentrated on the Rule as the normative way to be true to the Founder. The most essential duty of the local Superior was thus "to observe the Rule, and to ensure that it is observed by all and in its entirety"<sup>63</sup>. In his constant call to the Oblates to be good religious, to be faithful to the Rule, and to uphold the honour of the Congregation he saw as paramount the role of the local Superiors in this task<sup>64</sup>. Consequently in 1872 he wrote a circular letter to all the Superiors of the Congregation, in which he spelt out the role of the Superior<sup>65</sup>.

Writing eleven years after the death of the Founder, Father Fabre uses the Rule and the thought of the Founder as the foundation of his reflections on the mission and duties of the local Superior. It is a key document on this topic because it was the first time in the existence of the Oblates that this topic was presented systematically. Subsequently no Superior General prior to Vatican II had done the same, thus this circular was important for the life of the Con-

gregation. The ongoing relevance of this document for the Congregation is attested to seventy years later by Father A. Desnoyers, Assistant General, in the context of his canonical visitation of Canada:

"The responsibility of the local Superior and of the director of a residence is the most important from the point of view of the religious and regular life of the subjects of the communities of the Congregation. Our Holy Rule is clear and precise on this point. Moreover all should know the incomparable circular number 24 of Very Reverend Father Fabre, which is like the authentic commentary of the thought of our holy Rule. Superiors should re-read and meditate on it often"<sup>66</sup>.

The Rule remained essentially the same until 1965, so with Father Fabre's insistence on interpreting everything in the light of the Rule, the understanding of a Superior remained fundamentally unchanged until the Vatican Council. For this reason it is important to give an overview of the key elements of this circular. It is a document which can still be read today by local Superiors, with great benefit.

### 2. THE MISSION OF THE SUPERIOR

Father Fabre deals with the mission of the local Superior under two headings: his internal mission to the community, and the mission that he has to those outside of the community. In every section he numbers each point, and I have followed his numbering to give a brief summary of each point below.

#### *a. Internal mission of the Superior*

1. The Superior has the task of maintaining the spirit among the Ob-

lates of being religious, a spirit which Father Fabre interprets as one of renunciation and abnegation.

2. He sustains the family spirit, which has to be that of self sacrifice, because working with the most abandoned is not easy.

3. He inspires in the community a love for their holy vocation and keeps this love alive.

4. He is the guardian of the Rule, and ensures that the members love it always, because it is this which sustains the Congregation.

5. The Superior upholds the unity of the Congregation because he has an authority which is part of the authority of his own major Superiors.

6. He maintains the spirit of charity among the members because he is the link between the members.

7. Despite the Oblates living in different houses, they form part of the same family. The Superior is responsible for ensuring a spirit of openness in the community towards Oblates of other houses. Through his example he teaches the members of his community not to be indifferent to the happenings in other houses.

8. The spirit and the life of the Congregation is in the hands of the Superiors – it will live if they make it live and vice versa. By their efforts Superiors must strengthen the family spirit among the Oblates and nourish a spirit of belonging to the Congregation.

#### *b. External mission of the Superior*

The Superior has to watch over the reputation of the community, which must edify all outside, especially the priest visitors.

1. Priest visitors are to feel welcome in the community, and the Superior must see to it that they are warmly re-

ceived and edified by the local community.

2. All visitors are to find a house which is in effect a religious house. The Superior must watch over and maintain regularity, order and cleanliness. It is the Superior's role to see to it that all the tasks in the house are looked after, and know what each member is doing, and how he is doing it.

3. One of his most essential duties is to see that the men are ready for the exercise of the ministry. This entails knowing how they are fulfilling their ministry, and seeing to it that they are sufficiently prepared.

4. The Superior is the one who decides which works are to be taken on. All requests from outside must be handled through him, and he makes the decision, enlightened by his council, after he has explored all the aspects of the task which is asked and looked into the possible difficulties.

### 3. WHAT MUST THE LOCAL SUPERIOR BE?

#### *a. Spiritually*

1. All the actions which the Superior fulfils must be enlightened by faith. His first duty is to do good to the men entrusted to his care, to help them to live in a state of perfection. All his actions should be for the spiritual good of these Oblates.

2. The Superior has to be a man of prayer because it is before God that he finds all that he needs to fulfil his tasks.

3. Like the Saviour he is to be a man of sacrifice, ready to suffer.

4. It is necessary that he watch over his own behaviour, and the weaknesses of his humanity, and be prepared to accept the advice of the admonitor who has been appointed for him. A member

of his community acts as his moderator, with whom he talks about himself.

5. He who exacts obedience from others, must lead the way in being obedient to his own major Superiors, whom he represents in the community.

6. The Superior is at the head of his community like a shepherd, and he gives the example of a life which is truly religious. He strives to make himself loved in the community and win the confidence of his brothers by being a father who loves, and not a master who commands.

7. He must care not only for the priests, but also for the lay brothers.

8. The Superior does not limit himself to the spiritual welfare of his community, but also to their health, showing particular concern for the sick, visiting them several times a day.

9. The Superior must give to each the latitude necessary for the exercise of his ministry, but he must also be fully aware of what is happening, and everything is to be done under his authority and direction, but without his interfering in everything. He is to be discreet, especially when he reads their letters.

10. He has community tasks to fulfill: presiding at prayers and *coulpe*, give spiritual conferences to his community once a fortnight. He is responsible for sending an annual report to the Secretary General.

#### *b. Temporal administration of the houses.*

The religious spirit and the love for the family are the animating forces for the Superiors in their administration, as with all else.

1. The Superior has a council made up of two assessors which, according to the Rule, must meet twice a month. Minutes of these meetings are to be

taken, and the Superior has to keep the Provincial or vicar informed as to the proceedings. The Superior's responsibility is thus lightened, and he receives counsel and advice which must not be disregarded.

2. Each house can only have one set of funds, which is entrusted to the bursar.

3. All expenses are to go through the local council, and if they exceed a certain amount then written permission must be requested from the Provincial or vicar.

4. In the temporal administration the Superior is not to concentrate only on the needs of his own house, but remember that the house is a part of a province and a Congregation, which also have needs. In helping others, the community supports the family spirit and the unity of spirit and heart.

### III. THE CONSTITUTIONS AND RULES OF 1982

#### 1. THE SPIRIT OF GOVERNMENT: AT THE SERVICE OF MISSION AND COMMUNITY

From the earliest days of the Congregation we have seen that there was a particular stamp in the concept of the local Superior. From 1966 onwards there is a variation in the vocabulary used to describe the same concept. This is clear in the interim version of the Rule of 1966, and in the definitive version of 1982. The innovation is seen in the inclusion of an introductory section entitled, *The Spirit of Government*. In the 1982 Rule this section has four Constitutions (71 to 74) [C 71-74 in CCRR 2000] which give the framework for every form of organisational structure in the Congregation.

Our Congregation exists so "that we can serve the Church and its mis-

sion", and consequently all our organisational structures "are set up in function of that mission"(C 71) [C 72 in CCR 2000]. Every member of the Congregation is co-responsible for the twofold duty of the community's life and apostolate. Within this framework of co-responsibility, some are called to a service which "coordinates and leads our efforts to evangelize the poor", while at the same time, fostering within the community "a way of life based on faith and on a deeply shared love of Christ" (C 73) [C 71 in CCR 2000]. Here are presented the two areas of responsibility of the local Superior: the mission and the life of the local community.

Jesus is shown as the "source and model of authority" (C 73) [C 71 in CCR 2000], thus the Superiors are called to a life of service as stewards of the Lord. In their actions they are accountable to God and to their own higher authorities, as well as to the review of their actions by the members of their own community.

It is in this light that the role of the local Superiors is to be interpreted because it "is their task to lead the community in the spirit of Oblate government, according to the norms of the Constitutions and Rules" (C 80) [C 81 in CCR 2000].

## 2. A SIGN OF THE LORD'S LOVING AND GUIDING PRESENCE IN OUR MIDST

The Constitutions and Rules define the role of the Superior as being a sign of the Lord's loving and guiding presence in our midst (C 80) [C 81 in CCR 2000]. Here is captured the Founder's concept of the Superior as God's instrument and representative, who had to have a loving concern for all those entrusted to his care.

This description focuses as well on

the concept of the Oblate apostolic community which is frequent in the Constitutions and Rules. Constitution 3 presents Jesus and his apostles as the model of our life "to be his companions and to be sent out as his messengers". It is the "call and the presence of the Lord among us" which creates our community and its mission". The Superior is thus the sign of this presence of Jesus. The idea is repeated in Constitution 26, "In the Superior we will see a sign of our unity in Christ Jesus; through faith we accept the authority he has been given".

Father Jetté's commentary on this concept deserves to be quoted in full for the way in which he encapsulates this understanding of the role of the local Superior:

"Only from a faith perspective can one understand his role. The Superior is one of us; like us, he has his strong points and his faults; but he has been chosen from among us to animate and guide us. Within the Congregation, 'in the spirit of Oblate government, according to the norms of the Constitutions and Rules,' he represents God and becomes for us an avenue to God.

I do not obey a man as a man when I obey a Superior, but rather the truth of the mission which is in him; and when I refuse to obey, I am not disobeying a man, but rather God. I am a subject of no man; we are all brothers. But I am a subject to the truth, or to the truth of the spirit that moves him.

Consequently, when I accept to be influenced by a good and truthful man, or by the truth of the mission he has received, I am obeying a legitimate Superior."<sup>67</sup>

## 3. THE QUALITIES OF THE SUPERIOR

Constitution 81 [C 82 in CCR 2000] presents the ideal qualities of a Superior.

As a religious he is to be a man of faith and prayer, who seeks enlightenment from God in humility and true obedience

As a person the Superior needs to have a spirit of discernment and a capacity for making decisions once consultation has been carried out. He is to have a deep love of the Church and the Congregation, and an apostolic spirit which commits him fully evangelization.

In his relations with his brothers he needs to have a sensitivity to persons. In seeking enlightenment from his brothers' counsel he must be open to everyone and respectful of each person's rights. While respecting legitimate diversity his task is to develop a sense of unity.

As a leader he should have an ability to animate a community so that it can share and dialogue in a climate of mutual trust and acceptance. Leadership entails being able to challenge the community to respond to the needs of the mission, and to be able to coordinate their own community activities and to cooperate with others in the apostolate.

The portrayal of the qualities of the Superior is to be used as an ideal to strive for. Consequently R78 [R 83c in CCR 2000] points out the necessity for suitable training to take place through meetings among the Superiors themselves and with resource persons. "This will permit them to exchange experiences, deepen their understanding of their task, help them evaluate their effectiveness and learn appropriate methods for animation and dialogue" (R 78) [R 83c in CCR 2000].

The local Superior is never to feel alone, because it is the role of the Provincial Superior to maintain frequent contact with him, to support him in his

ministry, and to help him to integrate the local community's life and ministry into that of the Province (C 94) [C 99 in CCR 2000].

#### 4. HE ANIMATES AND DIRECTS THE APOSTOLATE

The Superior's role in the mission of the Congregation is that of animating and directing (C 89) [C 93 in CCR 2000] the community to respond to the needs of the mission (C 81) [C 82 in CCR 2000]. It is an open-ended statement, because the shape of the animation and direction varies, depending on the particular apostolate of the local community.

What does not vary is the central responsibility of the Superior to "make decisions, support initiatives and implement policies" (C 80) [C 81 in CCR 2000]. He does not act on his own, but in the context of consultation: "All members are to participate in the planning and orientation of the apostolate for which, however, Superiors bear final responsibility" R 1 [R 7a in CCR 2000]. Before Oblates are entrusted with a particular responsibility the "Superiors will consult those who are to be appointed to new responsibilities, giving them an opportunity to express their own views. While respecting the requirements of the common good, they will take an individual's personal gifts and callings into consideration before a decision is made" (R 19) [R 26b in CCR 2000]. In this process, "Superiors must know how to delegate authority as well as assign responsibility" (C 80) [81].

Once discernment has taken place, the individual Oblates will receive their mission for ministry from the Superior (R 9) [R 9a in CCR 2000], and the work is carried out in dependence on

the Superiors (C 9). The men will also be able to rely on the necessary support which the Superior will provide for their ministry (C 80) [81].

#### 5. HE HELPS THE COMMUNITY TO LIVE THE GOSPEL

“The Congregation’s vitality and effectiveness depend largely on the local community which lives the Gospel and proclaims and reveals it to the world” (C 76). The Superior thus has the task of animating his community to be effectively a living cell of the Congregation, in which exists a climate of mutual trust and acceptance (C 81) [82]. Essential here is a programme of life and prayer whose realisation is entrusted to the vigilance of the Superior (C 38). The Constitutions and Rules also point out that one of the foremost responsibilities of Superiors is to develop in the community a spirit that fosters ongoing formation (C 70).

Within the community, the Superior’s concern is for the individual Oblates, for whom he must ensure that the living conditions favour inner recollection and a rhythm of prayer, for without this there can be no effectiveness in ministry and progress in religious life (C 22). Rule 88 [R 93a in CCR 2000] emphasises the individual Oblate’s needs: “Since the Superior’s charge includes concern for his brothers’ well-being and personal growth, he will be open and available to all and will not hesitate, if need be, to raise questions of a personal nature in an atmosphere of respect and confidence”. An Oblate who feels an injustice has been done to him by a Superior may have recourse to higher authority (C 84) [C 89 in CCR 2000].

It is also the task of the Superior to ensure that there be fraternal contact

between his own community and the other Oblates in the province (C 89) [C 93 in CCR 2000], while showing a special concern for members who are isolated or who live alone for reasons of their ministry (R 88) [R 93a in CCR 2000].

The administration of the temporal aspects of the community is entrusted to the Treasurer under the direction of the Superior and his council (C 83) [C 86 in CCR 2000]. They are to see to it that Oblate goods are administered in a spirit of poverty and in accordance with the laws of the Church and the Congregation (R 124 and R 146) [C 153 and R 158c in CCR 2000].

#### 6. CONSULTATION

In the thought of the Founder and of the Superiors General who succeeded him, the role of the “Holy Rule” is constantly stressed as the guideline for the Superior. From 1966 onwards the focus is on communal discernment of the will of God and consultation, (while not in any way denying the importance of the Rule). Thus Rule 89 [R 94b in CCR 2000] asks that in the appointment of local Superiors, “the Provincial will seek the views of the community concerned regarding the current situation and the qualities needed for leadership in the group. He will invite suggestions about a suitable person for the office and consult the candidate before making the appointment.”

The Superior is to listen to the views of the community and discern with them. From the beginning of the Congregation the Superior has been given a Council whom he is bound to consult, a situation which is still important today as C 83 [C 86 in CCR 2000] attests: “Superiors are assisted by a Council which expresses in its own way the

members' concern for their community and for promoting its common good. Matters to be considered in Council are the ministry and our religious apostolic life, as well as temporal affairs. The Council will be attentive to the needs and desires of each member of the community." The existence of the Council does not exclude the need for the Superior to listen to all the members of his community: "In matters of some importance affecting the entire community, the Superior will seek the opinion of all the members before making a decision with his Council. The community will be kept informed of decisions taken in Council" (R 94) [R 95b in CCR 2000].

#### CONCLUSION

The presentation of the Superior as the sign of the loving and caring presence of the Lord in the community captures the essence of the understanding of the local Superior according to the mind of the Founder, of our Oblate tradition and of the present Constitutions and Rules. Faithful to the mission, charism and history of our Congregation, the local Superior's "service coordinates and leads our efforts to evangelize the poor", while at the same time helping us to "foster a way of life based on faith and on a deeply shared love of Christ" (C 73) [C 71 in CCR 2000].

FRANCIS SANTUCCI

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> November 4, 1817 letter in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 29, p. 45.

<sup>2</sup> CC and RR of 1826, Part Two, Chapter One, par. 3, art. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Circular letter of February 2, 1857 in *Selected Texts*, no. 507, p. 567.

<sup>4</sup> CC and RR of 1826, Part Three, Chapter One, par. 7, art. 5.

<sup>5</sup> May 22, 1848 letter to Joseph Eugene Guigues, *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 1, no. 97, p. 195.

<sup>6</sup> See September 30, 1849 letter of the Founder to Father Jean-Marie Fleury Baudrand in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 1, no. 124, p. 226.

<sup>7</sup> CC and RR of 1826, Part Three, Chapter One, par. 7, art. 5.

<sup>8</sup> March 7, 1848 letter to Father Louis-Toussaint Dassy in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 10, no. 970, p. 217.

<sup>9</sup> August 14, 1847 letter to Father Louis-Toussaint Dassy in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 10, no. 937, p. 170.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, the August 17, 1852 letter to Father Marc de l'Hermitte in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 11, no. 1112, p. 94-95 and March 14, 1821 letter to Father Hippolyte Courtès in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 64, p. 77.

<sup>11</sup> September 3, 1834 letter to Father Guigues in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 8, no. 485, p. 124.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>13</sup> March 3, 1849 letter to Father Courtès in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 10, no. 1001, p. 246.

<sup>14</sup> February 23, 1856 letter to Father l'Hermitte in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 12, no. 1307, p. 6.

<sup>15</sup> April 21, 1832 letter in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 8, no. 420, p. 59.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 58.

<sup>17</sup> September 30, 1858 letter in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 3, no. 90, p. 150.

<sup>18</sup> May 4, 1854 letter in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 2, no. 191, p. 73.

<sup>19</sup> August 9, 1854 letter to Father Aimé Martinet in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 11, no. 1234, p. 228.

<sup>20</sup> October 7, 1843 letter in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 1, no. 27, p. 63.

<sup>21</sup> August 18, 1834 letter to Fathers Guigues and Dassy in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 8, no. 484, p. 122.

<sup>22</sup> November 4, 1817 letter to Father Tempier in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 29, p. 45.

<sup>23</sup> Commenting on the use of the Rodri-

guez manual in a December 19, 1831 letter to Father Mille in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 8, no. 412, p. 49, the Founder said: "My verdict is that all Rodriguez' explanations are applicable to us and that, not knowing anything better in the matter than his various treatises, generally speaking he is to be followed in his decisions".

<sup>24</sup> September 23, 1854 letter to Father Louis Soullier in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 11, no. 1249, p. 246.

<sup>25</sup> June 13, 1836 letter to Father Casimir Aubert in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 8, no. 577, p. 238.

<sup>26</sup> September 3, 1834 letter to Father Guigues in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 8, no. 485, p. 124.

<sup>27</sup> March 14, 1821 letter in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 64, p. 77.

<sup>28</sup> August 23-25, 1836 letter to Father Mille in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 8, no. 579, p. 241.

<sup>29</sup> October 23, 1939 letter in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 9, no. 703, p. 137.

<sup>30</sup> September 26, 1827 letter to Father Courtès in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 7, no. 282, p. 142.

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, the September 26, 1827 letter to Father Courtès, *ibidem*, and the September 30, 1849 letter to Father Baudrand in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 1, no. 124, p. 227.

<sup>32</sup> Letter to Father Baudrand, *ibidem*.

<sup>33</sup> *Idem, ibidem*.

<sup>34</sup> July 17, 1846 letter to Father Courtès in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 10, no. 907, p. 139.

<sup>35</sup> See, for example, the August 18, 1834 letter to Fathers Guigues and Dassy in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 8, no. 484, p. 122.

<sup>36</sup> April 21, 1832 letter to Father Mille in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 8, no. 420, p. 58.

<sup>37</sup> November 25, 1849 letter to Father Jean-Joseph Magnan in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 10, no. 1028, p. 277.

<sup>38</sup> August 9, 1829 letter to Father Honorat in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 7, no. 335, p. 188.

<sup>39</sup> February 11, 1852 letter in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 2, no. 161, p. 35.

<sup>40</sup> October 16, 1855 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 11, no. 1293, p. 286.

<sup>41</sup> September 4, 1839 letter to Father Guigues in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 9, no. 698, p. 133.

<sup>42</sup> See, for example, the August 16, 1824 letter to Father Courtès in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 152, p. 151.

<sup>43</sup> See the July-August 1848 letter to Father Dassy in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 10, no. 983, p. 230.

<sup>44</sup> See the May 2, 1835 letter to Father Mille in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 8, no. 513, p. 155.

<sup>45</sup> CC and RR of 1826, Part Three, Chapter One, par. 7, art. 5.

<sup>46</sup> May 2, 1835 letter to Father Mille in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 8, no. 513, p. 155.

<sup>47</sup> March 7, 1848 letter to Father Dassy in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 10, no. 970, p. 217.

<sup>48</sup> August 24, 1854 letter to Father Verdet in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 2, no. 200, p. 80.

<sup>49</sup> September 3, 1834 letter to Father Guigues in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 8, no. 485, p. 125.

<sup>50</sup> June 16, 1854 letter in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 11, no. 1211, p. 199.

<sup>51</sup> October 14, 1848 letter to Father Dassy in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 10, no. 989, p. 236.

<sup>52</sup> October 16, 1849 letter to Father Dassy in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 10, no. 1025, p. 272.

<sup>53</sup> September 30, 1858 letter to Father Boisramé in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 3, no. 90, p. 150.

<sup>54</sup> *ibidem*, p. 150.

<sup>55</sup> October 16, 1849 letter to Father Dassy in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 10, no. 1025, p. 273.

<sup>56</sup> May 31, 1843 letter to Father Honorat in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 1, no. 19, p. 47.

<sup>57</sup> March 7, 1848 letter in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 10, no. 970, p. 217.

<sup>58</sup> September 20, 1849 letter in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 10, no. 1020, p. 267.

<sup>59</sup> See, for example, the May 18, 1836 letter to Father Casimir Aubert in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 8, no. 572, p. 231-232.

<sup>60</sup> May 4, 1854 letter in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 2, no. 191, p. 72.

<sup>61</sup> January 17, 1843 letter in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 1, no. 15a, p. 34.

<sup>62</sup> January 10, 1843 letter in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 1, no. 14, p. 30.

<sup>63</sup> Circular letter no. 42 of June 29, 1887 in *Circ. adm.*, II (1886-1900), p. 46.

<sup>64</sup> Circular letter no. 32 of June 4, 1880 in *Circ. adm.*, I, (1850-1885), p. 349.

<sup>65</sup> Circular letter no. 24 of March 5, 1872 in *Circ. adm.*, I (1850-1885), p. 239-267.

<sup>66</sup> "Idéal de perfection tracé par nos saintes Règles. Extraits de l'acte général de la

visite de la province du Canada, Montréal, 1942", in *Etudes oblates*, I (1942), p. 187.

<sup>67</sup> *O.M.I. The Apostolic Man: A commentary on the 1982 edition of the Oblate Constitutions and Rules*, General House, Rome, 1992, p. 415-416.

## URGENT NEEDS

*Summary: I. The Founder:* 1. A spiritual urgency; 2. A missionary urgency; 3. Some high demands. *II. The Oblates today:* 1. New trends and developments; 2. Outstanding concerns.

The term “urgent needs” is closely associated with a number of other key concepts in the Oblate tradition and derives much of its richness from these. For example, the term could be explored from the point of view of the Founder’s own sense of “impatience”, as when he chides his missionaries for apparently not focusing their pastoral priority on the conversion of the pagans.<sup>1</sup> The term “zeal”, as understood and used by de Mazenod, also throws light on our subject: when he calls for “men filled with a burning zeal for the salvation of souls”, clearly a sense of urgency is implied.<sup>2</sup> The same can be said of the Founder’s use of the expression “the most abandoned”. In more recent times, one would also have to examine the importance and pride of place that Oblates have given to such key notions as “signs of the times” and “regional priorities”. Both of these translate into a call and a commitment to the urgent needs of the world as recognized by the community of Oblates in the five regions. Both imply a readiness to abandon previously held positions and to travel new paths in order to make Christ a more living reality among the most abandoned. Our main focus in this article will be the way de Mazenod envisaged the “urgent needs” of his day, and how the Oblates of today attempt to discern the urgent needs of our times. It will quickly become apparent that ‘urgency’ is very much one of the characteristics of our Oblate spirituality and mission.

### I. THE FOUNDER

#### 1. A SPIRITUAL URGENCY

Like beauty, the perception of any urgent need lies in the eye of the beholder. It is something subjective, something that one perceives inwardly, at the existential level or what might be called the level of felt-conviction. What may be urgent for one person need not necessarily be so perceived by another. For de Mazenod, there was first and foremost, the urgent need “to make progress in the paths of ecclesiastical and religious perfection”<sup>3</sup> (1818). The compelling nature of this need is everywhere present in the Founder’s writings, especially in his *Preface* to the Rule: “They must become saints”. In the eyes of de Mazenod, no other need will overshadow or take precedence over this call to personal holiness; nor will any require more immediate and more on-going attention – both in season and out of season, or as he himself puts it, “as much out on mission as when in the house”<sup>4</sup> (1818). “Whoever wishes to become one of us must have an ardent desire for his own perfection”.<sup>5</sup> “In the name of God”, he will insist, “let us be saints”.<sup>6</sup> “Let all Oblates be well imbued with what the Church expects of them. Half-measure virtues are not sufficient... Hence they must hasten to become saints, if they are not yet such as they should be”.<sup>7</sup>

What makes this call to holiness so urgent in the eyes of de Mazenod is the

“deplorable situation” in which the Church found itself in his day. It was the dire needs of the Church that gave special urgency to his quest for personal holiness, the missionary task that dictated his spiritual task. In fact, the urgency of the one is never divorced from that of the other; they form the fabric and hue of the same urgent need: to know and love Christ. “The more you are holy”, Bishop de Mazenod would tell his missionaries, “the more will good abound”.<sup>8</sup> De Mazenod clearly perceived the basic unity between personal holiness and missionary endeavor. And it was out of this deeply perceived unity, in fact, that his Institute would come into being and flourish. His sense of spiritual urgency would henceforth be inextricably linked to a sense of missionary urgency.

## 2. A MISSIONARY URGENCY

In the eyes of de Mazenod, the most urgent missionary need existed wherever “the salvation of souls is at stake”.<sup>9</sup> The Founder is very explicit on this point in the *Preface*: “It is supremely important, it is urgently imperative, that we lead the multitude of lost sheep back to the fold, that we teach these degenerate Christians who Jesus Christ is, that we rescue them from Satan’s power and show them the way to eternal life”.<sup>10</sup> A certain theology of the times – that of salvation and damnation, in particular – informs and gives added urgency to the Founder’s outlook. For him and his times, it was a question of rescuing souls from the clutches of the devil and saving them from their own “gross ignorance” of everything pertaining to one’s salvation. Also implied in the Founder’s pressing appeals is the question of God’s salvific will, which becomes truly effective only through the

zealous work of missionaries. For him, it was urgent to reach out to and evangelize those whom today we would call the alienated and the unchurched, those who were in a real danger of losing their faith, or who, for all practical purposes had lost it. In short, those who really did not know Jesus Christ and who had no one to proclaim him to them. Analyzing the reasons for this situation, he wrote: “We can break it down to three main headings: 1. the weakening, not to say the total loss, of faith; 2. the people’s ignorance; 3. the laziness, indifference, and corruption of priests. This third cause must be considered as the main one, the root of the other two”.<sup>11</sup> It was against this background and with this understanding of the “deplorable state of things” that de Mazenod’s sense of urgency was first ignited. Nor was he ever to lose it. The Oblates, he said, “have as their principle mission the conversion of unbelievers and the instruction of those ignorant people who call themselves Christians, but are not so either in principle or in practice”.<sup>12</sup> These were the ‘poor’ and the ‘most abandoned’; these were the ones who were being deprived at the deepest level of their dignity. And it was with these in mind that he would write to the parish priest of Barjols on August 20, 1818: “Our duty is to rush to where there is the most urgent need”.<sup>13</sup>

For de Mazenod, evangelizing the poor was not only an option that he deliberately chose for himself and his Society; it was also a compulsion, something that impelled him from within. As a realist and very much a man of his time, the urgency that he experienced stemmed in part from the objective needs of his time; but as a man of faith, burning with a great love for Jesus Christ crucified, his sense of urgency was also fired from within. In this re-

spect de Mazenod reminds us of St. Paul who described his own apostolic office in terms of being under a divine constraint which he could not escape: "For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; woe is me if I do not preach the gospel" (I Cor. 9:16). The content of this compulsion, this sense of urgency, is that a part of the divine plan of salvation is committed to him, and its seriousness consists in the fact that he cannot evade it if he is not to bring on himself the woe of eternal perdition. How true this was of de Mazenod.

It is in the light of this faith-filled compulsion that many of the expressions from de Mazenod's writings must be understood: for example "Nihil linquendum inausum", "Our duty is to rush to where there is the most urgent need", "[We are] always ready to move quickly at all times and at the least sign to that place where obedience shows us that some good is to be done".<sup>14</sup>

This sense of urgency explains why de Mazenod, even as a young priest, requested that the diocesan authorities not assign him to a parish but allow him the freedom to give himself completely to those who were not being touched by the parish structures. It also explains why the principal target of his first apostolic initiatives were those who remained outside the pastoral life and parish structures of the Church. As Father Jetté pointed out in his address on Blessed Eugene de Mazenod, these included: "the domestic hired help, the artisans, the little people who were, practically speaking, being kept away both because of the time of the religious services and because of the language being used therein [...]; the youth: the parishes had nothing to offer the young [...]; the prisoners: both the great criminals and the petty delinquents

[...]; the sick, the dying, the country people whose religious ignorance was even greater than that which existed in the cities".<sup>15</sup>

Such were the urgent needs in the Church as de Mazenod first saw them. For him, the above list of disparate groups of people had one thing in common: they were all poor because they were deprived of Jesus Christ. And to be deprived of Jesus Christ was, in his eyes, the most urgent need that could possibly exist, whether this need existed in the Church or far beyond its visible boundaries and membership.

Hence it is easy to understand why the Founder never wanted his missionaries to be reduced to "ordinary" parish priests, that is, priests who spent the major portion of their time and energy ministering to those who already knew and loved Jesus Christ, the practicing Christians. "It is okay to help the pastors on a temporary basis", he would write to Fr. Courtès, "but we cannot let our missionaries become pastors".<sup>16</sup> The same missionary sense of urgency was behind his decision to withdraw his missionaries from Algeria: they were not given the work of converting the Arabs, as the Founder had hoped but rather were put in charge of a parish as simple parish priests – parishes, he felt, "where there is practically no good to be done".<sup>17</sup> Even his initial reluctance to send missionaries to the United States was based on this same premise: "I was never in favor of establishing ourselves in the United States because it seemed to me that there were nothing but parishes there and the project of New York seems to be nothing more than that".<sup>18</sup> Here, as elsewhere the Founder's policy was both consistent and clear: to establish, as he put it, "a community of missionaries who could fulfill the duties of their vocation which

are not precisely to be parish priests but real missionaries going from place to place to preach the truths of salvation and bring souls back to God".<sup>19</sup>

### 3. SOME HIGH DEMANDS

In order to fully appreciate the Founder's acute sense of urgency, one should be aware also of the high demands that any urgent need places on an individual. Or, to put it in a slightly different way, what are the personal qualities that enabled de Mazenod to identify and respond to the urgent needs of his day? Any light we can shed on this area will be especially helpful for us today as we endeavor to meet the more urgent missionary needs of our day.

#### *a. A Man of Discernment*

In the concrete circumstances in which we live, there is always considerable room for self-deception, hidden motives, and misguided zeal. The task of assessing the urgency of any real need in the Church is no exception. Hence the need to be vigilant, and to know how to discern properly. If we take a close look at the way de Mazenod exercised the virtue of discernment, three things or elements become immediately apparent.

Firstly, he would always pray for divine guidance before reaching an important decision, especially one that involved an urgent need or request to send and commit his missionaries to a new mission.

A typical example of this is when he was invited to accept a new Vicariate Apostolic in Natal. The need was certainly urgent: "The salvation of souls is at stake", he would write in his Diary.<sup>20</sup> Yet his dilemma was also very real: he

simply did not have the available personnel and manpower to accept this mission. And so he sought "light from above" through prayer. "We must place ourselves in God's presence before we answer", he said. In the same entry of his Diary, he adds: "I have prayed God very much to grant me the grace to know his will and abide by it". His decision to withdraw his missionaries from Algeria and send them to Natal was finally reached, he says, "during the visits we made in the churches on this Holy Thursday".<sup>21</sup> It was a bright idea, an idea that he could now confidently claim to be inspired by God. And so it would be with all his other important decisions: he would pray over them, listening to the voice of God and trying to understand the signs of the presence of God in history.

A second important component in the Founder's method of discernment was his heavy reliance upon and thirst for news and details from his missionaries in the field. De Mazenod never liked to be in the dark about anything. He sought light "from above" through prayer; but he also sought light "from below", that is, from the informative letters and reports which his Oblates in the missions would send him. If the Founder's huge correspondence reveals anything it is certainly his consuming desire to be well informed and constantly in touch with events in an objective way. This insatiable thirst for information was not only de Mazenod's way of sustaining the zeal and renewing the courage of his sons; it was also crucial for his method of discerning the most urgent needs in the missions.

Without sufficient facts and information, he felt vulnerable: "You must not be afraid to query me", he told Fr. Jean-Baptiste Honorat, "when you believe I have given a decision which pre-

sents some problems. It will probably be because I have not been sufficiently informed".<sup>22</sup> Often he would defer making an important decision for the same reason, as with the proposal to send some Oblates to New York and Toronto: "I am not well enough informed to decide the questions", he candidly admits.<sup>23</sup> Hence, also, his ever-recurring complaint: "It is absolutely intolerable that you remain three months without writing to me".<sup>24</sup> To discern well one must be well-informed, and no one knew this better than the Founder.

There was yet a third element in de Mazenod's method of discernment which should not be overlooked, namely the voice of the Church. Among the innumerable urgent needs and requests that came to his attentions those which came from Rome, from the Propaganda, were favored and given special urgency. "It is a matter of preferring a mission", he would say, "which is offered us by the agency of the Head of the Church."<sup>25</sup> The urgency of these calls was all the greater because, for him, they seemed to come more directly from God. In a very real sense, the Founder was saying *vox ecclesiae, vox Dei* [God calling us through the voice of the Church]. In all such instances, the call was clearer and the need more compelling, thus pressing him into more immediate attention and action.<sup>26</sup>

### *b A man of courage*

It is one thing to "flag" or identify an urgent need, it is quite another matter to find within oneself the necessary courage to meet that need. Simply put, de Mazenod was a man of remarkable courage. Once he had clearly discerned an urgent need he left no stones un-

turned to meet and respond to it. He was ready to take risks, make sacrifices and face the future in the confidence that God's plan would somehow work out. It was his extreme daring and courage, in fact, that gained the Oblate Congregation a rapid and very extensive development. Father Jetté sums it up well: "In a period of ten years, we have a whole series of foundations in every direction and, humanly speaking, in the case of nearly all of them, each one more imprudent than the other. Natural wisdom would have suggested establishing oneself and taking solid root in France before sending missionaries abroad. Apostolic daring won out over natural wisdom".<sup>27</sup>

The Founder's courage coincided with his trust in divine guidance. He believed that the future, though unknown, is not strange, not hostile, but is arranged and ordered by God. The Bible speaks of *kairos*, of the present moment, which offers us unrepeatable opportunities to further the Kingdom of God. For de Mazenod, who possessed this openness full of confidence, even difficulties and hardships became a *kairos*, a challenge received, in such a way that he did not permit himself (or his missionaries) hesitation and half-hearted measures. Thus he reprimands Mgr. Jean-Francois Allard for not giving the example and for being too sedentary.<sup>28</sup> Thus he becomes visibly vexed at Fr. Honorat's timidity and hesitation in sending the Oblates to start the mission of Bytown (Ottawa): "This was not something tentative to be tried. You had to go there with the firm resolve to overcome all obstacles, go there to stay, take root there! How could you hesitate? What more beautiful mission than this! Ministry in the lumber camps, missions to the Savages, establishment in a city which is wholly of the future.

But it is the beautiful dream coming true and you would have let it escape! The thought makes me shiver! Take all your courage in your hands once more and establish yourself there properly".<sup>29</sup>

### c. *A Man of Vision*

One of the real dangers in committing oneself wholeheartedly and unrereservedly to an urgent need is the danger of becoming too exclusively absorbed by it. It is possible to become so engrossed, so wrapped up in the immediate urgency of a need that little else is seen or attended to. We see the tree vividly, as it were, while missing the forest. One of the characteristics which escapes no one who is familiar with the Founder's writings and letters is his remarkable sense of, vision and his "sense of possibility". We cannot fail to be struck by the fact that he is fully a part of the real world of his day, while observing also that he is not fully absorbed by it. He is a man of his time yet also very much ahead of it.

Despite the many pressing needs that confronted him and vied for his immediate attention, de Mazenod never lost sight of the bigger picture, the bigger dream. He was forever looking beyond what had thus far been achieved and dreaming about new challenges and new possibilities. With God all things are possible, and de Mazenod took this to mean that any given situation no matter how deplorable or dismal it might first appear, could indeed be changed. He had the vision and the *élan* of a person who seeks greatness in all situations of life, who does not allow himself to be imprisoned by anything or anyone, but always finds a way out. Hence his magnanimity. "I am not a prophet", he would say, "yet I have always been a man of desires".<sup>30</sup>

Even as early as 1818, in the first edition of the Constitutions and Rules, we see that de Mazenod already envisaged the unlimited possibilities that God's love would open up for him and his Society. He wanted men who, like himself, were men of vision and great dreams: "Their ambition should, in its holy aspirations, embrace the vast expanse of the whole world"<sup>31</sup>. De Mazenod's magnanimity can also be seen in the following:

— Although he never left the continent of Europe, through his prayers and mighty correspondence the Founder was always at the side of his missionaries in whatever far reaches of the world they found themselves.

— While he could write in his *Mémoires*: "My own concern was solely centered on the deplorable condition of our degenerate Christians"<sup>32</sup>, he was equally capable of writing to one of his missionaries in Ceylon: "I always thought the idea was to convert the pagans. More than anything else, this is what we are made for".<sup>33</sup>

— Although he lived each day with an intensity that still astounds anyone familiar with his heavy schedule, he still found time to pray, receive visitors, hear confessions and make parish visitations.

— Although he was a Frenchman to the core, he was never caught in the parochial worship of that culture in which he was born. He would insist firmly and repeatedly that his missionaries adapt and learn the languages of the people they served.

In short, de Mazenod had the ability to transcend the narrow limits of his immediate environment and see the bigger picture. And in almost every letter that he wrote to his Missionaries, we find him making a conscious effort to stretch their imaginations, broaden

their vision, and have them come to see, as he did, the unlimited possibilities of God's merciful love. To be ahead of one's time is to suffer a great deal from it. Yet Saint Eugene de Mazenod still preferred to love the Church "with the eyes of those not yet born".

## II. THE OBLATES TODAY

To this day, the sense of urgency remains one of the characteristic elements that define the Oblate missionary outlook. In this area, certainly, there is a loyal recognition of the Founder's profound "sense of urgency" and a genuine attempt to evaluate Oblate works and ministries in the light of what we might call "the criterion of urgent needs". The impulse of this charism is clearly evident, for example, in the official commentary and reading guide for the 1966 Constitutions and Rules. In this document, entitled, *The Congregation Renewed*, we read the following: "If there is any lesson to be drawn from this living history, written by the Spirit of God, perhaps it is the evident duty Oblates have, in virtue of the charism which is theirs, not to settle down comfortably, not to interrupt their forward march, not to copy complacently what was adequate for other times and for other situations, not to retire behind the protective walls of well-secured posts. It is a law of life and of a world in evolution that what seemed urgent and critical in former times, may no longer be so today. Since the charism proper to the Oblates relates them to present events, they must, as is pointed out in Rule 2, "constantly be aware of what is going on in the world and in contemporary society". They must, when all is said and done, continually re-write the Preface with the same accents of actuality:

What are the really important situations today? Which regions are critical now? How can we be present there, leaving to others the enjoyment of ground already secured, posts which from now on require only the ordinary pastoral care of the Church?"<sup>34</sup>

These and similar soul-searching questions were not just a rhetorical ploy; from the mid-1960s to the present day, they have formed the crux and basis of an extensive on-going evaluation of Oblate life and mission in the five regions of the Congregation. They surface in virtually every Province Report of the past twenty years.<sup>35</sup> In all these renewal efforts, the Founder's own sense of missionary urgency is never lost sight of: his charism will mark an intensity of focus in the psychic and faith-filled energies of the entire Congregation. Thus in paragraph 17 of that slender yet powerfully inspired document, *Missionary Outlook*, which the General Chapter of 1972 gave us, we read: "We will seriously re-evaluate our present commitments in the light of the Gospel and of our missionary charism. Have our institutional works maintained their original missionary fervor? Having made this examination at the Provincial level, we will have the courage to make those concrete decisions demanded of us if we are to remain faithful to the Spirit who speaks to us through the most urgent needs of the poor. With the mobility proper to a group of missionaries, we will be ever more free to commit ourselves to the service of the Church and the world. This was our original charism and is still fundamental to our life as a Congregation. It must be maintained at all costs".<sup>36</sup>

Another important event in the renewal of the Congregation was the Congress on "The Charism of the Founder Today" which was held in

Rome from the 26th of April to the 14th of May 1976. Here again the sense of missionary urgency was identified as one of the main elements of the Oblate charism. Not only did the participants of the Congress probe the deeper meaning of this "fundamental Oblate value", but they also tried to understand it in terms of its biblical origins and its borderline implications.<sup>37</sup> In its final declaration the Congress concluded: "We remember that our Founder wanted us to attentively discern the *most urgent* needs of the Church and of the world, without fear of being troubled in undertaking with saintly daring whatever we have recognized, in community and in the Church, to be the immediate call which God makes in favor of his poor".<sup>38</sup>

Since the expression "urgent need" was taking on such importance in the renewal of the Congregation, further study and clarification of this fundamental Oblate value was clearly called for. In fact, several important articles soon appeared in *Vie Oblate Life*, and each in its own way attempted to shed some light on this very topic. One such article was by Marcello Zago, O.M.I., entitled "Appels et nouvelles missions".<sup>39</sup> In this study, the author explains the various steps which led the Congregation, between 1972 and 1979, to accept nine new missions throughout the world, and the reasons why it refused eleven other urgent requests. The article is significant for several reasons: it focuses on the multiple criteria that were invoked by the General Administration in either accepting or refusing new missions; it gives us a good insight into the actual decision-making process of the Congregation and the complexity of the problem of responding to certain urgent requests; and it is an excellent reminder to us that our Oblate charism of urgency belongs to the concrete or-

der of existence and is not of a purely theoretical nature.

Another very significant and insightful article to appear was that of Roger Gauthier, O.M.I., entitled "Les réponses d'Eugène de Mazenod aux appels du Seigneur sur la Congrégation".<sup>40</sup> This is a survey-study of the different motivating factors that actually prompted de Mazenod to accept or refuse new apostolic fields. The author suggests that one of the most important factors that influenced the Founder's decisions was "the necessity of giving priority to those critical situations which were not being attended to".

It is not surprising therefore that by the time our Constitutions and Rules were rewritten and approved in 1982, not only had the term "urgent need" definitely entered into the official language of the Oblate Congregation, but it had now become one of the fundamental categories of our missionary program of action. The term is used explicitly four times in our present Constitutions and Rules:

— "Our mission puts us on constant call to respond to the most urgent needs of the Church through various forms of witness and ministry..." (C 7).

— "Our celibacy allows us to be present where the most urgent needs are to be found..." (C 16).

— We must lose no opportunity to let people see how urgent are the needs of the Church and the world and come to know the way in which our Congregation responds to those needs" (C 52).

— "The living tradition of the Church and the needs of the world today will guide them [Oblate formation personnel] in their work" (R. 35) [R 51a in CCRR 2000].

What is most significant about the above texts is the way in which the term "urgent need" is extended beyond the

statement of our mission (C 7) and is now presented as a further justification of our consecrated celibacy (C 16), a further incentive and means of attracting vocations (C 52), as well as a guiding principle for those in formation ministry (R 35) [R 51a]. In short, we may now speak of urgent needs as a truly fundamental value of the Oblates, that is, one which has direct bearing on every aspect and dimension of our life and mission.

### 1. NEW TRENDS AND DEVELOPMENTS:

It should be clear by now that the notion of "urgent needs" is very much in the vocabulary and the general consciousness of Oblates today. Indeed it has become a real 'working principle' in the discernment of Oblate options and commitments. Yet it should also be noted that several new developments have taken place in recent years that alter the way Oblates perceive and approach urgent needs today. The following is not an exhaustive list of these new developments but an attempt to draw attention to the more obvious ones.

#### *a. Discernment "in community"*

In every Region and Province of the Congregation, considerable effort has been made and continues to be made to evaluate present works and ministries. What makes the present situation so poignant is that in many Provinces, Oblates are becoming older and fewer in number. This decrease in available personnel gives added urgency to the question: "Which apostolic commitment should we retain and which one(s) should we abandon?"

Nevertheless, more and more Oblates today recognize and acknowledge the differences that exist from Region to Region in the types and degrees of

poverty which are prevalent among those whom we serve. In response to the urgent needs of the poor, therefore, each Oblate Region, Province and local district has tried to determine for itself, by a study of its own environment, what the greatest needs are. The result of all this has been an increased *community* discernment. Today, more participative and collaborative structures exist than ever before: seminars for planning and revision, extraordinary Provincial chapters, Provincial congresses, local district meetings, and corporate reflection workshops on the interprovincial as well as interregional level. The fact that more and more Oblates are participating in the planning process of each Province provides a greater experience of community and corporate responsibility.

Thus what we now call "regional priorities" is but another name for "urgent needs" as perceived by a majority of Oblates in a given Region. In matters of apostolic commitments, the "rugged individualism" of earlier pioneering days is giving way to a more common vision and commitment.

This new trend was not only sanctioned but encouraged by the General Administration. Writing to the Oblates on October 19, 1976, Father Jetté said: "It is up to each Region and to each Province to analyse objectively the needs and appeals of the poor in its area; and to see by the light of the Gospel, the Oblate Constitutions and the Founder's spirit, how the Congregation can effectively answer those needs while remaining true to itself. In this matter, each and every Province has a duty to reflect and discern as a community."<sup>41</sup>

#### *b. "Long-term" endeavors*

A second significant trend in the way Oblates today envisage "urgent

needs" is a question of focus, or what we might call the "long-term" perspective. While the needs of the poor are very real and retain all their urgency, the prospects of meeting these needs satisfactorily now appear more complex and therefore more remote, less immediate. A more systematic analysis of the causes and perpetuating factors involved in the poverty that does exist has necessitated this shift in perspective.

Today we are acutely aware that the lives of men and women are controlled by the socioeconomic and political structures of society, some of which are hostile even to the work of evangelization. It has thus become part of the Oblate task of mission to identify, critique and, wherever possible, transform these forces and unjust structures for the benefit of authentic human liberation. There is a recognized and accepted commitment to get at the cause of these social injustices, and not merely attend to their symptoms. Thus when we speak of the "struggle" for peace and justice, the implication is clearly that the obstacles will not easily or quickly be removed. Hence the reason for long-suffering and "long-term" hope.

Along with a more realistic appreciation of the magnitude and the complexity of the problems of poverty and injustices there is also a sober awareness of our own limitations and poverty. To paraphrase Yves Congar, we suddenly have the feeling of being "a small religious community in a large world". This flash of awareness, in turn, has prompted the Oblates to cooperate and collaborate more readily with other groups and communities that also seek to respond to these contemporary needs – whether it be apartheid in South Africa, the conflict against the faith in Poland, or the agrarian reform conflicts in Brazil. There are no quick solutions

to any of these "burning issues" and any group committed to them must be sustained by a "long-term" hope.

This new outlook was again captured by Father Jetté, in the address he gave at the 1984 Inter-Chapter Meeting in Rome: "My own deep conviction in this matter", he said, "is the following. The real apostolic response to the needs of today's world will be made gradually. It will be made by the younger generations, by those who follow us, who are gradually being formed in Africa, Asia, Latin America, Poland, Italy and the Provinces which have vocations".<sup>42</sup> There is nothing short-sighted about this perspective, and once again we can detect in it the Founder's own spirit and forward-looking vision.

### *c. Oblate sharing*

Another dimension of the contemporary Oblate response to "urgent needs" is the significant increase in Oblate sharing. In both the general consciousness of Oblates today as well as in the administrative structures we now have in place, the question of "urgent needs" has become inextricably linked with the idea of genuine sharing. Rarely is the one ever considered independently of the other; they form two sides of the same coin, so to speak, two inter-locking issues.

Perhaps the most telling and direct symbol possible of this new trend was the creation of the Oblate Sharing Fund (OSF), made possible by the sale of the International Scholasticate on Via della Pineta Sacchetti in 1972. Over and above the substantial financial assistance that it provides every year throughout the Congregation, this service structure has a powerful symbolic value. And like all living symbols to which we surrender, the OSF releases

untold hidden potentialities within the Congregation and brings out into the open the deeper resources at our disposal.

The Constitutions and Rules speak at various times of sharing resources and of solidarity.<sup>43</sup> The Founder was also very clear on this subject: "We are all members of one body, let each one strive by every means and by making sacrifices if he must, for the well-being and growth of all its potentialities".<sup>44</sup> Presently the common desire of solidarity and of sharing is made concrete at many different levels – in financial help, in personnel, in services.

Sharing is also evident in the concerted efforts being made throughout the Congregation to promote lay ministry and lay leadership – a call that has been given top priority in several Oblate Regions. Our response to an urgent need today almost invariably seeks to include the laity as co-partners. The Oblate task of mission and the laity's collaboration are so linked and joined together that it is difficult to see how one can stand without the other; together and each in its own way they seek more effectively to meet the particular need in question. Such collaboration with the laity begins – as charity often does with those closest to us: our lay associates, the honorary Oblates, the M.A.M.I. members, and all those with whom we work closely the world over.

## 2. OUTSTANDING CONCERNS:

In conclusion, it may be well to point out two specific outstanding needs that have recently been brought to our attention, needs which have not as yet received a concerted response by the Oblates. Since both of these challenges seem to fall well within the scope and domain proper to the Oblate mission,

one might expect (hope) that more attention and resolve will be given to these in the future.

The first concerns the growing problem of religious indifference, unbelief or atheism. This is the way Father Jetté voiced his concern to the Oblate Provincials on May 10, 1984: "I would say that, in general terms, our ministry taken as a whole responds to the appeal of awakening or reawakening the faith in those to whom we are sent. On the other hand, if we limit the question to the precise problem of religious indifference, unbelief or atheism, we have very few Oblates directly dedicated to this apostolate and few Provinces, if any, oriented in this direction... I often have the impression that we are not sensitive enough to this appeal if it is alone and not linked to a situation of material poverty".<sup>45</sup>

A second outstanding concern, also very complex but a great challenge, is the need to evangelize cultures. Here again, Father Jetté shared his concern: "I have the impression", he said, "that we are moving forward more rapidly in the charity which prompts us to defend man than in the study which would enable us to penetrate new cultures".<sup>46</sup> Pope Paul VI had already raised a prophetic appeal in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*: "The split between Gospel and culture is without a doubt the drama of our time... Therefore, every effort must be made to ensure a full evangelization of culture or, more correctly, of cultures. They have to be regenerated by an encounter with the Gospel".<sup>47</sup>

Why is this so important, so urgent? Because we realize now that if the work of evangelization is to succeed, it must be addressed not only to individual persons, but also to the entire patrimony or culture out of which the person lives.

The dialectic between faith and culture is a very sensitive matter, but one that can no longer be ignored. In this context, evangelization seeks to get to the very heart and core of a culture, the realm of its basic values (whatever they may be), and to bring about a change that will serve as a basis and guarantee of a transformation in the structures and social climate of that culture.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See BOUDENS, Robrecht, "Le travail d'évangélisation des Oblats à Ceylan au 19<sup>e</sup> siècle", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 42 (1983), p. 184-185; also "Connection between Popular Missions and the Charism of the Institute", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 40 (1981), p. 164-167.

<sup>2</sup> GOUDREAU, Henri, "Etre enflammé d'un zèle ardent pour le salut des âmes", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 39 (1980), p. 287-302.

<sup>3</sup> 1818 Rule in *Constitutions and Rules* (1982), p. 40.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 40.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 54.

<sup>6</sup> Letter to the Oblates after the approbation of the Rules, February 18, 1826 in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 7, no. 226, p. 43; also *Selected Texts*, no. 208, p. 235 and *Missions*, 79 (1952), p. 142.

<sup>7</sup> December 2, 1854 letter to Father Anthony Mouchette in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 11, no. 1256, p. 253; also in *Selected Texts*, no. 19, p. 43.

<sup>8</sup> October 9, 1841 letter to Father John Baptist Honorat in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 1, no. 9, p. 16.

<sup>9</sup> *Diary*, March 27 & 28, 1850 in *Selected Texts*, no. 193, p. 217.

<sup>10</sup> C and R of 1982, p. 12.

<sup>11</sup> *Constitutions et Règles de la Société des Missionnaires de Provence*, Part One, Chapter One, par. 3, *Nota bene* in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 16.

<sup>12</sup> April 27, 1852 letter to Bishop Bravi in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 4, no. 29, p. 98.

<sup>13</sup> *Selected Texts*, no. 193, p. 217; YENVEUX I, p. 107.

<sup>14</sup> December 16, 1819 letter to the Archbishop of Aix in *Selected Texts*, no. 194, p. 217.

<sup>15</sup> "Blessed Eugene de Mazenod our Founder", in *The Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate: Addresses and Written Texts, 1975-1985*, Rome, 1985, p. 27-29.

<sup>16</sup> February 26, 1848 letter to Father Hippolyte Courtès at Limoges in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 10, no. 968, p. 203.

<sup>17</sup> *Diary*, March 27 to April 1, 1850, quoted in LEFLON IV, p. 223; REY II, p. 331-332.

<sup>18</sup> January 17, 1843 letter to John Baptist Honorat in *Oblate Writings I*, no. 15a, p. 35; also in *Selected Texts*, no. 169, p. 196-197.

<sup>19</sup> January 17, 1859 letter to Mr. Hope-Scott in Scotland in *Selected Texts*, no. 174, p. 200.

<sup>20</sup> *Diary*, March 27 & 28, 1850 in *Selected Texts*, no. 195, p. 218.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 218-219.

<sup>22</sup> January 17, 1843 letter to Jean-Baptiste Honorat in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 1, no. 15a, p. 34.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 34.

<sup>24</sup> April 27, 1843 letter to Father Jean-Baptiste Honorat in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 1, no. 17, p. 40.

<sup>25</sup> *Diary*, March 27 & 28, 1850 in *Selected Texts*, no. 195, p. 219.

<sup>26</sup> See CIANCIULLI, François-Xavier, "Mgr de Mazenod et le Pape", in *Etudes oblates*, 15 (1956), p. 204-220; also FILIPPINI, Yvon, "Hommes du Pape", in *Etudes oblates*, 20 (1970), p. 161-176.

<sup>27</sup> "Blessed Eugene de Mazenod, our Founder", in *The Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate...*, p. 41.

<sup>28</sup> November 10, 1857 letter to Bishop Jean-François Allard in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 4, no. 27, p. 208.

<sup>29</sup> March 1, 1844 letter to Father John Baptist Honorat in *Oblate Writings I*, vol. 1, no. 32, p. 79.

<sup>30</sup> October 9, 1841 letter to Father Jean-Baptiste Honorat, *ibidem*, no. 9, p. 16. See MITRI, Angelo, "Le bienheureux Eugène de Mazenod, homme de désirs, et l'Oblat", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 41 (1982), p. 213-231.

<sup>31</sup> *Constitutions et Règles de la Société des*

*Missionnaires de Provence*, Part One, Chapter One, par. 3, *Nota bene* in *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 15; quoted in *Selected Texts*, no. 8, p. 30.

<sup>32</sup> RAMBERT I, p. 162.

<sup>33</sup> February 21, 1849 letter to Father Étienne Semeria in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 4, no. 10, p. 32.

<sup>34</sup> In *The Congregation Renewed. A reading guide for the Constitutions and Rules*, General House, Rome, 1968, p. 13.

<sup>35</sup> See, for example, the report of the Interchapter Meeting held in Rome in 1978 in *Vie Oblate Life*, 38 (1978).

<sup>36</sup> *Missionary Outlook*, p. 23-24.

<sup>37</sup> A summary of these discussions can be found in *Vie Oblate Life*, 36 (1977), p. 281-283.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 288.

<sup>39</sup> In *Vie Oblate Life*, 38 (1979), p. 129-145.

<sup>40</sup> "Les réponses d'Eugène de Mazenod aux appels du Seigneur sur la Congrégation", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 40 (1981), p. 45.

<sup>41</sup> "Our response to the Needs of Men", in *Letters to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate*, General House, Rome, 1984, p. 43.

<sup>42</sup> "Reflections on the Congregation's Current Life and Future", in *The Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate...*, p. 326.

<sup>43</sup> See C 20, 122 [C 150 in CCRR 2000]; R 15, 147 [22c, 158a].

<sup>44</sup> October 9, 1841 letter to Father Jean-Baptiste Honorat in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 1, no. 9, p. 16.

<sup>45</sup> "Reflections on the Congregation's Current Life and Future", in *The Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate...*, p. 333.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 336.

<sup>47</sup> *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 20.

## WILL OF GOD

*Summary: I. The will of God in the Oblate tradition: 1. The Founder; 2. The Constitutions and Rules; 3. The Superiors General. II. The will of God in the history of spirituality: 1. Old Testament; 2. New Testament; 3. Some representatives from the history of spirituality; 4. Theological synthesis. III. Conclusion.*

### I. THE WILL OF GOD IN THE OBLATE TRADITION

#### 1. THE FOUNDER

From the moment of his conversion in 1807, when he began a deep personal relationship with God, Eugene de Mazenod considered the will of God as the guiding principle of his life. One of the earliest indications of this can be found at the time he had decided to become a priest. Knowing that his mother would not be too happy with his decision, he asked his sister to gently break the news to her, but nevertheless reminding her clearly that "we are all obliged to submit ourselves to the will of the Master".<sup>1</sup>

This had not been a hasty decision on his part. On the contrary, he had sought the assistance of two of the best spiritual directors in the country, Fr. Duclaux in Paris and Fr. Magy in Marseilles, the latter of which assured him that his vocation was "as luminous as the full noon of a bright summer's day".<sup>2</sup> Such consultation and direction was a normal part of Eugene's process of discerning the will of God.

A few years later, while preparing for his ordination, his basic desire to do God's will was still very alive, as we see in the intentions of his first Mass: "The grace to know (God's) holy will, 1° for the type of ministry which I must undertake; 2° in all my daily activities no matter how insignificant they may

seem, and a constant attention to his inner voice so as to do nothing that is not according to his good pleasure".<sup>3</sup>

Eugene spent the first few years of priesthood in an uncertain condition, waiting for God's will to manifest itself in some way with regard to his form of ministry or state of life. At times he felt strongly attracted to a contemplative life-style, but the missionary calling was even stronger. But even within the active apostolate there were many possibilities which he could pursue. His friend Forbin-Janson made very strong appeals to him to join his Missionaries of France. This was a very attractive proposition from many points of view, and would have satisfied many of his desires. But was it his deepest desire? Was it what God wanted? These were the questions that mattered to Eugene: "I still do not know what God wants of me but am so resolved to do his will that as soon as it is known to me I will leave tomorrow for the moon, if I have to".<sup>4</sup>

He had to wait another year for some clear sign as to the direction he should go. It came in the form of a strong movement of grace which left him in no doubt that he should found a missionary society to minister in the Provence region: "It is the second time in my life that I see myself moved to resolve something of the utmost seriousness as if by a strong impulse from without. When I reflect on it, I am convinced that it so pleased God to put an end to my irresolution".<sup>5</sup>

As he always did in making decisions, Eugene checked out his inspiration with his immediate superior, who was at that time the Vicar-General of the diocese. He agreed that Eugene should begin a missionary society, and, for Eugene, that confirmed God's will for him, because he recognized "the voice of God"<sup>6</sup> in his superior.

The Society that Eugene founded went through many trials, especially in its early days. At times it seemed as if it would never get on a firm foundation, but be subject to the whims of the local bishops. Roman approval was essential for its survival, and yet Eugene wondered if he was being too presumptuous to seek such measures. Only the strong persuasion of his saintly companion, Albini, convinced him that he should at least try. Many times during his stay in Rome he was tempted to give up the idea, because it seemed almost impossible to achieve, but eventually he was able to let go of his worries and fatigue, and accept whatever outcome presented itself: "Abandoning myself confidently to divine Providence who had protected me in a very tangible manner hitherto, I said to M. the Archpriest: 'I leave this matter in your hands; I ask nothing but the fulfillment of the plans of God'."<sup>7</sup>

Seeking God's will meant first of all that he "neglect no means that human prudence can suggest",<sup>8</sup> but then ultimately accepting whatever God sends: "You know that we are guided by Divine Providence; therefore, we must always proceed in the direction it seems to indicate. One who acts with this submission to the Divine Will has no need for self-reproach even though what is lawfully desirable is not attained".<sup>9</sup>

Eugene summed up this dual aspect in an earlier letter to his first companion: "One must remember the saying of Saint Ignatius that in affairs we must act

as if success depended on our skill and to put in God all our confidence as if all our efforts could produce nothing".<sup>10</sup>

In 1832 Eugene was appointed Titular Bishop of Icosia. Among other things, it was a way of affirming the rights of the Holy See to name titular bishops without the consent of the French Government. The implications of such a step were serious from Eugene's point of view. It was likely to put him in a very difficult position in relation to the French authorities, not to mention the burden it would add in terms of ministry. Nevertheless he was able to see beyond all personal complications and discomfort, and welcomed whatever God had in store for him: "All that you have done for me in the course of my life is too vividly present to me. I still feel so strongly today the efforts of it, that I cannot but count on your infinite goodness and throw myself in total abandonment to your paternal care, resolved now and always to do whatever you demand of me, should it cost me my life. I am only too happy to consecrate the few days that remain for me to spend on earth to do your holy will, in adversity as well as prosperity, approved or blamed by the world, in the midst of consolations or weighed down by sorrows. Because I do not know what is in store for me in the new ministry that I am about to begin. In any event, I know that nothing will happen to me that you do not will, and my happiness and my joy will be always to do your will".<sup>11</sup>

Here we see the detachment or "holy indifference" that was to characterize Eugene's life more and more from this time on. Indeed it was not long after his return to Marseilles when he was severely put to the test. The Prefect of the region headed a campaign to denounce Eugene as subversive, por-

traying him as secretly abetting the activities of the former regime, and describing him as "a very dangerous Carlist and Ultramontane"<sup>12</sup> The accusations were bad enough, but much more serious was the fact that the Holy See took them seriously and had Eugene recalled to Rome. However he did not have much difficulty in showing up the falsity of the reports about him, and was able to see how God works even through human error: "There is no need of regrets when one has done one's best. God makes use even of human mistakes to achieve his purpose. I do not know what he expects of me; all I know is that he governs with his wisdom those whose sole purpose is to work for his glory. I am attracted by the thought of peace and quiet. I have good reason to be weary of human injustice. And so I act accordingly, in view of my soul's good, even though I should obtain it for a time only. If God has decided differently, he will direct events and bend the will of his creatures in such a way as to achieve his ends... We who call upon the Lord must find our consolation above all in the thought that we are guided all unseen by his Providence".<sup>13</sup>

On returning to Marseilles it was not long until the slander began again, and this time it led to the drastic step of Eugene's name being struck off the electoral list. And worse still, when he sought to fight this in the courts he received a strong reprimand from Rome, obliging him to withdraw his appeal. A few months previous to this he had reiterated a principle that he had always lived by, that "whenever the Holy Father speaks, I will make it a duty to conform myself to his will, no matter what sacrifice it imposes on me".<sup>14</sup> In the new situation, where the injustices of men were forcing him to lose every-

thing that was dearest to him, including the very favour of the Holy Father himself, could he live those words with conviction? Here is his reply to the Vatican Secretary of State: "Whatever the result, may the will of God be done. All the legal advisors I consulted assured me of complete success. By withdrawing my appeal I am submitting to an iniquitous decision made against me and to the evil consequences that would flow from it; but neither the advantages of which I was assured, nor the disadvantages which I must now fear, could make me hesitate where the will, or even a simple desire of the Head of the Church is concerned".<sup>15</sup>

All human consolation was gone. He was prepared to lose everything and retire simply to the seminary in Marseilles, because nothing had value if it was not God's will. But even as he was adjusting to the situation that was forced on him, God had other plans in motion that would bring about reconciliation. Fr. Guibert diplomatically arranged everything with the French authorities and all that was required of Eugene was that he write a letter to the King to show his good will. But the one thing that Eugene still held on to was his dignity and he refused to cooperate.<sup>16</sup> A few days later Fr. Tempier, to whom he had made a vow of obedience in 1816, reprimanded Eugene, reminding him one more time that God's ways are not always ours: "But why would you not give in to this path that Providence can offer you?"<sup>17</sup> Eugene had to eat his own words, and thereby gave up the last thread of resistance. The struggle was long and hard, but he was finally able to trust completely in God, convinced that "Providence wants us to grow in the midst of tribulations" and that "contradictions must come".<sup>18</sup> Even though he was now laden with

extra responsibilities as Bishop of Marseilles, he was a new man experiencing the freedom of the Spirit: "It is this divine Spirit which from now on must be the absolute Master of my soul, the only mentor of my thoughts, of my desires, of my affections, of my entire will".<sup>19</sup>

From the outset, Eugene had been keen to expand the Congregation beyond the confines of the south-eastern corner of France, and indeed this possibility was recognized in the first Constitutions and Rules.<sup>20</sup> He had already made several attempts at bringing this about, but all were in vain. It seemed that God's time had not yet arrived, but had to wait until the willing horse was tamed and trained to hear only the Master's instructions. In previous attempts to expand, Eugene himself had taken the initiative, and they failed. On one occasion he retracted from a possible opening in Algeria for fear of numbers: "The Lord will manifest his will to us when it pleases him, we will try to aid his plans but I am alarmed at the smallness of our numbers when considering a colony".<sup>21</sup>

Now, eleven years later, he was faced with another possibility of expanding. This time the initiative was not his, but rather that of Bishop Bourget of Montreal who was desperate to have some missionaries to help him. Eugene's heart expanded at this new call; this was the moment he had been waiting for. His impulse, despite the still-ailing numbers, was to say "yes" straight away, but he refrained, recognizing the need to pray, reflect and consult the Congregation on such an important decision. Discernment involved more than Eugene's personal intuition even though that was now undeniably sharp. He used every means at his disposal to check it out and then, satisfied that it was indeed the call of God, he delayed little in

sending out six active men to the new mission fields of Canada. Soon after there followed several other new missions: in England, Ceylon, and Natal. What had evaded him for so long had all of a sudden come in abundance, because it was now "God's good time".<sup>22</sup>

From now on we see a man who was free to follow Divine Providence in all its expressions. In his letters to his missionaries he shared much of what he personally experienced, reminding them time and time again to put their complete trust in God's providential care, despite shortage of men and funds, and in the face of all kinds of trials: "You have nothing to do but let Divine Providence take its course".<sup>23</sup> "Providence will find us the means eventually to give more scope to this mission".<sup>24</sup>

Even when God took some of his men in their prime, he did not hesitate to say, "your holy will be accomplished in us".<sup>25</sup> This did not mean that he was not upset at these sad events. Accepting God's will often involved a lot of pain, as we see in an earlier letter: "However resigned one must be to the decree of Divine Providence, I will not be less miserable for the rest of my sorrowful life, after losing two men such as these".<sup>26</sup>

Abandoning himself to Divine Providence did not mean a carefree reckless approach to life. Rather it meant cooperating with God with due prudence. To Father Cooke he said, "one must no doubt have confidence in Providence, but one must not tempt it".<sup>27</sup> Eugene was well aware that missionary zeal could lead one to throw caution to the wind and overstep the mark: "Let us not underestimate the goodness of God. He will not fail to furnish us the means in proportion to the needs he knows we have. Our desires always run a little too far in ad-

vance of the approach of Divine Providence".<sup>28</sup>

Sometimes it was even necessary to forego the work for the sake of one's health: "One must unhesitatingly desist from work when it cannot be done according to the will of Providence".<sup>29</sup>

To one of his missionaries who was complaining about the nomination of Father Guigues as bishop, Eugene gave one of his longest and clearest lessons on how to live God's will, especially in a situation where one's own judgement is contrary to what is being asked: "In this lowly world, my dear friend, one must not be too exclusive in one's opinions when not knowing how to resign oneself to things that are not going in the direction one wishes. We must recognize that above our feeble conceptions there is a sovereignly wise Providence who conducts all things by ways unperceived and often incomprehensible to the ends He proposes; and when His most holy will is manifested to us by events, it is our duty to submit ourselves without fretting and to abandon entirely our own ideas which then cease to be legitimate and personal. What then must be done? Let us believe we were mistaken and put all our efforts into deriving all possible benefit from the position in which the good God places us. One should then regret having pronounced oneself too strongly in a sense contrary to that which divine Providence has chosen. Instead of murmuring, let each be concerned with his duty and confide himself to the goodness of God who never leaves us in the lurch when we are what we should be. I like to repeat that we must comply with joy, happiness and the most entire surrender to the most holy will of God and cooperate with all our power in the accomplishing of His designs which can only be for the greater glory of his holy

name and our own good, that is, the good of us who are his submissive and devoted children. Let no one draw back from this attitude and henceforth let all misgivings cease, all murmurs, all statements quite contrary to these incontestable principles".<sup>30</sup>

This was no mere theory, but the fruit of lived experience over many years. It was only because of Eugene's fidelity to these "incontestable principles" that the Oblates of Mary Immaculate became established in the Church as a strong body of missionaries. It is not surprising that he insisted on the same disposition in his own men, because otherwise they could not be who they were meant to be. He continued to exhort them along these lines for the rest of his life, and even in his final moments on this earth, in between bouts of unconsciousness or semi-consciousness, he was frequently heard to murmur, "How I would like to see myself die so that I might freely accept the will of God".<sup>31</sup>

## 2. CONSTITUTIONS AND RULES

In the early editions of the Constitutions and Rules, there was no specific mention of the term "will of God" or its equivalent, but rather an indirect reference in the sense of "submitting one's own will to the will of the superior"<sup>32</sup> in the practice of religious obedience. The understanding was that the will of the superior represented the will of God for his subjects.

In the temporary Rule of 1966, we notice a considerable shift in style, and a more explicit reference to the will of God as something we look for together. First of all we see how obedience is presented as a disposition towards our heavenly Father, with Christ as our model: "Following Christ, whose meat it was to do the will of his

Father, who sent him, and who became obedient unto death, the missionaries will be ever attentive to the voice of God, so as to cooperate with his plan of salvation".<sup>33</sup>

The superior was now seen, not so much as being above the others in his community, but rather as the one who unites the members in their common search for the will of God: "A closely-knit group around their superior, they will see in him a sign of their unity in Christ and accept with faith the authority he holds. Together let them strive to discover the will of God and help one another to fulfill it".<sup>34</sup>

Each individual must also share the responsibility of discerning the hand of God in events around him: "Instructed by the Word of God he will contemplate the action of the Lord in the world, discerning the signs of the times and the beckonings of the Spirit in all events".<sup>35</sup>

The 1982 Rule retained and developed this new line of thought. Christ is again proposed as our model. Like him, "we too listen attentively for the Father's voice so that we may spend ourselves without reserve to accomplish his plan of salvation"(C 24).

True freedom is found in doing what God wants of us, and for us Oblates, "religious obedience is our way of making real the freedom of the Gospel, in common submission to God's will (Gal 5:13)" (C. 25).

Discerning the will of God is no longer seen as the prerogative of the superior alone, but rather as the responsibility of each and every member of the community: "As individuals and as a community, we have the responsibility to seek the will of God. Decisions which express this will are best reached after community discernment and prayer" (C. 26).

Finally the 1982 Rule has something to say in relation to the General Chapter. It is described as "a privileged time of community reflection and conversion. Together, in union with the Church, as we discern God's will in the urgent needs of our times, we also thank the Lord for the work of salvation which he accomplishes through us" (C 105) [C 125 in CCRR 2000].

Summing up, we can say that, up to 1966, the Rule reflected the general state of theology and life in the Church at the time, whereby the will of God was found largely in commandments and precepts which had to be obeyed. In religious life it was found in the Rule and in the decisions of superiors, who were seen to represent Christ. The 1966 and 1982 Rule reflected a much more Gospel-based and Christ-centred approach to the Christian life and to religious life. On the basis of a renewed understanding of community life, each person is called and helped to hear the voice of God in his own heart and see His work in events around him. Ultimately a decision may have to be taken by the superiors, but this is the last step in a process of discernment which involves everyone.

### 3. THE SUPERIORS GENERAL

Father Léo Deschâtelets, on the occasion of a General Chapter, gave some central characteristics of Oblate life and spirituality as he experienced it. One of these he entitled "Absolute confidence in Divine Providence", and we hereby give the full text of his elaboration of the theme:

"Oblates do not let themselves be stopped by external circumstances; as long as they see that God, through his Church, calls them to a certain work, a certain apostolate, they give themselves

to it totally. Promptness in obedience characterizes them, because they know they are helped by Providence in all their undertakings. The Rule gives us a beautiful keynote that I always like to recall: 'And thus, filled with unbounded confidence in God, they are ready to enter the combat, to fight, even unto death, for the greater glory of his most holy and sublime name' (Preface). How many times we have taken on works solely on the help of Providence! If one looks at history, it often seemed reckless to accept such and such a work entrusted by the Church. And yet, letting ourselves be guided by our absolute confidence in God, we accepted the apostolate that was offered to us, and often to the surprise of other congregations, we succeeded. The fact that the Congregation sprang in to life so quickly depended not so much on external circumstances which were in its favour, but rather on this total abandonment and confidence in divine Providence. And still today, the works that we direct, we conduct as well as we can, convinced that we will never be lacking God's grace, just as we never lacked it in the past. This is the characteristic of the Oblates, it seems to me, to always forge ahead to work with detachment for the glory of God, the good of the Church, the salvation of souls, knowing that if it is God who has called us to this service and who has entrusted us with a certain concrete apostolate, this same God will give us all necessary help. If God does not wish us to take on a certain apostolate, that's fine; we leave it to others! But if the Church calls us, we throw ourselves into work with all our strength, we forge ahead, proud to work for the Church, and sure that God helps those who help themselves."<sup>36</sup>

General chapters have great significance in the life of the Congregation.

They are privileged moments for reflecting on where we have come and where we are going, on how we are being faithful to the charism in the Church and the world of today. No one was more aware of this than Father Jetté when he was preaching at the Opening Mass of the 1986 Chapter. He highlighted two dispositions that were necessary for a fruitful chapter:

"1° Together, striving to know God's will is the first of these dispositions and the reason for our gathering. What is God's will for us today? In terms of a Gospel response to the salvation needs of the present-day world, what does God expect of us, of the Congregation?"

2° Wanting to know what is right and good and asking God to keep us in the light of truth and understanding is the second of these dispositions."

He carries on, showing the link between the two: "If we really want to accomplish God's will, we need to ask his light, to want the truth: first of all, the truth about who and what we are, about our vocation within the Church, about the spirit our Founder has bequeathed to us, and also the truth about the world of today, its values and shortcomings, about the new mankind that is shaping it".<sup>37</sup>

A few weeks later, in the course of the same chapter, Father Marcello Zago was elected as the new Superior General and his spontaneous comment reflected his acceptance of God's will: "The wishes expressed by the capitulars are for me the will of God, and I accept out of love for the Congregation, the mission, and the Church".<sup>38</sup>

Thus, the very last words of the outgoing Superior General, and the very first words of the new, highlight this fundamental aspect of the spirituality of our Founder and our charism.

## II. TREATMENT OF THE THEME IN THE HISTORY OF SPIRITUALITY <sup>39</sup>

### 1. OLD TESTAMENT

God created man and woman; therefore, as created beings, they are completely dependent on God. However, He created them in his "own image and likeness", as persons who have the capacity of a loving personal relationship with their creator. Genesis shows how God loved them, surrounding them with his benevolence. But they, instead of conforming to God's will, accepting that they were created beings, wanted to assert themselves and become like God, and indeed oppose him. Thus they refused God's call to a right relationship, and sin had taken root in them. God punished them, but did not abandon them. Later he called Abraham who responded positively to the invitation to be the Father of a new people who would follow God's plans. In communicating his name to Moses, God revealed himself as a person; his will was therefore of a personal nature, and not as an outside force impinging on the person. God revealed his will in the covenant on Mount Sinai, but this did not transform Israel into a people totally submitted to the will of God. Written on tablets of stone, the law remained in a certain sense an external condition, incapable of bringing about perfect adhesion between God and man. But God announced a new covenant that would be written in men's hearts (Jer 31:31-34), that would make possible total conformity between God's will and man's.

### 2. NEW TESTAMENT

In the New Testament God sent his Son Jesus to definitively reveal his free and absolute love and will (Jn 1:18;

Heb 1:2), so that man could conform himself to the image of God by being "conformed to the image of his Son" (Rom 8:29). The will of the Father is at the origin of the new creature who is born "of God" (Jn 1:12). Man is no longer tied to the law, but goes beyond it. For a Christian, to do the will of God means living like Jesus, which means living a relationship of love as Jesus did with his Father. Carrying out the will of the Father creates intimate links with Jesus (Mt 12:50) and, in being united with Jesus, the disciples are also united among themselves. The *Ecclesia* thus becomes the privileged place where the will of the Father is communicated, discerned, and carried out.

What precisely is the will of God manifested by Jesus? In announcing that the Kingdom of God is close, Jesus says that we must be converted in order to enter it. Our conversion means leaving everything in order to possess God. A Christian must love God more than his father, wife, and fields, even more than his own life (cf. Mt 19: 29; 6: 33). Jesus invites the person to make a total choice of God, and he shows the way by his own example of giving his life for his friends (see Jn 15: 13). It is the will of God that we love in the same way, but how to do that concretely is something we must gradually discover. One must learn how to look for and discern the will of God (cf. Rom 12:2; Eph 5:81-11, 17). The desire to discern the conduct that is most agreeable to the Father in every circumstance becomes the internal motivation of the disciple (Ph 1: 9ff.; Col 1: 9ff). The will of God is discovered, moment by moment, by listening to the voice of the Spirit within us, by testing it, and by submitting to it (Cf. Gal 5: 16; 1 Th 5: 21). It demands a refinement of one's supernatural sensitivity which is given by the

Spirit, and which develops through the constant practice of prayer and love (Cf. Ph 1: 9-10; 1 Jn 5: 14).

### 3. SOME REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE HISTORY OF SPIRITUALITY

The saints are the people who have lived God's will in their own lives, and so they are the most qualified to speak about it. We now look at the teaching of some of the great saints who helped greatly towards a more complete understanding of the theme.

St. Teresa of Avila states quite clearly that "the highest perfection consist not in interior favours, or in great raptures, or in visions, but in the bringing of our wills into conformity with the will of God".<sup>40</sup> This basic truth is repeated by many of the great saints. Doing God's will means, according to St. Therese of Lisieux, "being that which he want us to be".<sup>41</sup> Alphonsus Liguori distinguishes conformity from uniformity: "Conformity means that we unite our will with God's will; but uniformity implies more: it means that we make only one will out of the divine will and our own, so that we want nothing but what God wants, so that God's will alone is ours".<sup>42</sup> Ascetical practices and sacrifices are all good in their own right, but the sacrifice of our will is what pleases God most, "because in giving him other things [...] we give to God the things that are ours; but in giving him our will, we give him ourselves".<sup>43</sup>

In another place Alphonsus gives very strong views regarding ordinarily good things which are not willed by God: "God is pleased by mortifications, meditations, communions, works of charity for our neighbours, but when? Only when they are according to his will. Whenever they are not according

to the will of God, not only is he not pleased with them, but he detests and punishes them".<sup>44</sup>

St. Vincent de Paul makes the same point in blunt terms: "A good deed is bad if it is done when God does not want it".<sup>45</sup>

Regarding how to find God's will, St. Ignatius of Loyola gives a masterly method in his *Spiritual Exercises*. A key theme is "the end" for which man has been created, namely to praise, reverence, and serve God, our Lord, and by this means to save his soul. All else must be subjected to this end. In this subjection lies the basis of Ignatian indifference, in that one should not prefer health to sickness, riches to poverty, honour to dishonour, a long life to a short life (cf. par. 23). The spiritual exercises are ways of "preparing and disposing the soul to rid itself of all inordinate attachments, and, after their removal, of seeking and finding the will of God in the disposition of our life for the salvation of our soul".<sup>46</sup>

St. Francis de Sales distinguishes two ways in which God's will is manifested in ordinary life: the "signified will", and the "will of good pleasure". The signified will consists of "the commandments of God and the Church, the counsels, the inspirations, and the rules and constitutions".<sup>47</sup> In other word, it is already revealed and written down to some extent, and is a constant guideline for our living. The will of good pleasure, however, is manifested "in every event, in everything that happens to us, in sickness and death, in affliction, in consolation, in things that are favourable or unfavourable".<sup>48</sup> We cannot plan for all that will happen to us, so we must be ready to accept whatever comes, for "nothing is done, besides sin, except by the will of God".<sup>49</sup> This demands great trust and

freedom, to believe, as St Francis of Assisi did, that "all we have to do is to be careful to obey God's will and to please him".<sup>50</sup>

For religious, obedience to the Rule and to the superior are particularly emphasised as part of God's will. St. Elizabeth of the Trinity says that "the Rule is there, from morning to night, in order to express the will of the good God for us instant by instant".<sup>51</sup> Regarding obedience to a superior St. Ignatius says in his Constitutions that "he ought to hold it as certain that by this procedure he is conforming himself with the divine will more than by anything else he could do while following his own will and different judgement".<sup>52</sup>

In short, the saints teach us that doing God's will, moment by moment, in the small things as well as the large, is the only sure way to holiness, and that outside his will, no matter how good it may seem, nothing has value. They all echo the sentiments of Pope John XXIII: "My true greatness lies in doing the will of God totally and perfectly".<sup>53</sup>

#### 4. THEOLOGICAL SYNTHESIS

The fundamental disposition of the Christian is to live God's will in imitation of Jesus who did nothing but his Father's will (Jn 4: 34; Jn 6: 38; Lk 22: 42; Heb 10: 7). This is the only sure way to perfection or holiness (Mt 7:21). It is not an impersonal predetermined blue-print for living that is forced on one by God; it does not mean resigning oneself in a fatalistic way to whatever comes, but rather it is a call to freedom, to discover what one really wants and who one really is.<sup>54</sup> It is discovered moment by moment in the small as well as the big things, by listening to the voice of the Spirit within us, in our own conscience which is a privileged place

for knowing God's will (see L.G. 16; G.S. 16).

Often in the past the will of God was considered in a limited way, associated with a passive acceptance of tragedies and sufferings of any kind. But in fact there is an active as well as a passive attitude in a full understanding of it. Adherence to the so-called signified will of God is manifested by faithfulness to the commandments, docility to the evangelical counsels and to inspirations, and obedience to the Church and to our superiors.<sup>55</sup> Our union with the will of good pleasure is indeed shown by accepting the tribulations that God permits. In both cases, however, one should have a "holy indifference" or complete detachment from the alternatives that are set before one.

Love and prayer are essential conditions for finding God's will, and ecclesial communion is often best expressed and assured by confiding in a spiritual director. Discerning God's will demands a supernatural sensitivity that only develops with practice. Living God's will is ultimately the same as living God, because his will is not distinct in reality from his essence: "God and his will coincide: to proceed in God's will is to proceed in God".<sup>56</sup>

#### III. CONCLUSION

The theme "will of God" has been the specific subject of only a few studies in Oblate spirituality.<sup>57</sup> Perhaps the lack of such studies is precisely because it is such a fundamental theme in every spirituality. As one author expressed, "everything that we could say about Blessed Eugene de Mazenod... in relation to the 'will of God', one could affirm for every other founder, every

other saint"<sup>58</sup>. This does not, however, make it any less important; on the contrary, we have seen how Eugene followed the great tradition from St Ignatius to St. Francis de Sales in orienting his whole life in terms of seeking the will of God in all things. His great biographer Leflon made frequent references to this dimension<sup>59</sup>, and much earlier, Baffie alluded to his great confidence in God: "As soon as he fully understood, by the light of faith, that a certain work was pleasing to the divine will, he immediately applied himself to perform it"<sup>60</sup>. From many of the letters we have seen, it is abundantly clear how much Eugene wanted his Oblate sons to live in the same way.

The reappearance of this theme in recent years would seem to indicate that it does indeed belong to the very heart of Oblate spirituality. The 1982 Constitutions, which make several direct references to it, present the theme in its biblical sense, as a fundamental disposition of Christ, "whose food was to do the will of the one who sent him" (Jn 4: 34) (C 24), and which must be imitated by us. The kind of language and the practice of this have perhaps changed somewhat since the Founder's time, but the reality remains the same. In 1826, as the Congregation was receiving the new name of Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Eugene exclaimed prophetically: "May we understand well what we are!"<sup>61</sup> In every age we continue to grow into who and what we are meant to be insofar as we live the will of God, just as Mary did, our patroness and model (C 10). As Oblates, we are called to a certain identification with Mary,<sup>62</sup> to be united with her in the words, "let it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38).

ANTHONY BISSETT

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> June 21, 1808 letter to his sister in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 14, no. 26, p. 54.

<sup>2</sup> Excerpts from the letters of Fr. Magy, first and second letters, March-August, 1808, Rome, Post., LM Magy.

<sup>3</sup> Notes during retreat at Amiens, Rome, Post. DM IV-1.

<sup>4</sup> October 28, 1814 letter to Charles de Forbin-Janson in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 262, p. 2-3.

<sup>5</sup> October 23, 1815 letter to Forbin-Janson in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 5, p. 8.

<sup>6</sup> *Mémoire justificatif*, no date, RAMBERT I, p. 164.

<sup>7</sup> December 22-25, 1825 letter to Henry Tempier in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 213, p. 221.

<sup>8</sup> January 20, 1826 letter to Henry Tempier in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 7, no. 219, p. 16.

<sup>9</sup> May 28, 1826 letter to Jean-Baptiste Honorat in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 7, no. 244, p. 103.

<sup>10</sup> December 28, 1825 letter to Henry Tempier in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 6, no. 214, p. 225.

<sup>11</sup> Retreat Diary, October 1832 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 15, no. 166, p. 201.

<sup>12</sup> Borély, the Attorney-General, to the Minister of Justice, May 23, 1833, National Archives, Paris, F 19 2478, quoted by LEFLON, II, p. 457.

<sup>13</sup> October 24, 1833 letter to Henry Tempier in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 8, no. 469, p. 108.

<sup>14</sup> To the Secretary of State, January 1, 1834, Rome, Post., *Registre des Lettres administratives*, II, p. 500.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, November 19, 1834 letter in *Registre...*, II, p. 546, no. 90.

<sup>16</sup> August 20, 1835 letter to Henry Tempier in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 8, no. 535, p. 181-182.

<sup>17</sup> August 24, 1835 letter from Henry Tempier to Eugene de Mazenod in *François de Paule Henry Tempier...*, in *Oblate Writings* II, vol. 2, no. 83, p. 118.

<sup>18</sup> June 8, 1836 letter to Hippolyte Courtès in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 8, no. 574, p. 235-236.

<sup>19</sup> Retreat Diary, May 1837 in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 15, no. 185, p. 238; RAMBERT I, p. 749.

<sup>20</sup> See C and R (1818), Part 1, Chapter 1, § 3, no. 60, *Missions*, 78 (1951), p. 15.

<sup>21</sup> July 26, 1830 letter to Henry Tempier in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 7, no. 349, p. 201.

<sup>22</sup> September 25, 1836 letter to Hippolyte Courtès in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 8, no. 589, p. 252.

<sup>23</sup> November 10, 1849 letter to Étienne Semeria in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 4, no. 13, p. 43.

<sup>24</sup> February 15, 1844 letter to Bishop Bourget of Montreal in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 1, no. 31, p. 77.

<sup>25</sup> Diary, January 14, 1837, Rome, Post., JM 1837 in REY I p. 703.

<sup>26</sup> May 10, 1829 letter to Henry Tempier in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 7, no. 328, p. 179.

<sup>27</sup> August 30, 1858 letter to Robert Cooke in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 3, no. 88, p. 146.

<sup>28</sup> June 8, 1846 letter to Bishop Phelan in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 1, no. 65, p. 133.

<sup>29</sup> June 16, 1845 letter to Eugène Guigues in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 1, no. 56, p. 120.

<sup>30</sup> June 8-9, 1847 letter to Jean-François Allard in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 1, no. 85, p. 172.

<sup>31</sup> Quoted in LEFLON, IV, p. 304.

<sup>32</sup> See C and R (1928) Part II, Chapter 1, par. 4, art. 231.

<sup>33</sup> Constitutions and Rules, 1966, part. II, ch. II, par. 1, art. 33, p. 14.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, art. 34, p. 15.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*, Part II, Ch II, par. 4, art 56, p. 19.

<sup>36</sup> "Quelques pensées du père Léo Deschâtelets à l'occasion du Chapitre général", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 39 (1980), pp. 18-19.

<sup>37</sup> Father F. Jetté's homily at the opening, of the 1986 General Chapter, in *Information OMI*, 234/86, pp. 5-6.

<sup>38</sup> *Information OMI*, 236/86, p. 1.

<sup>39</sup> For a fuller treatment of this section, see *Nuovo Dizionario di Spiritualità*, edited by DE FIORES, S. and GOFFI, T., Roma, Edizione Paolini, 1979, "Volontà del Padre", pp. 1707-1722; LUBICH, C., *Man's Yes to God*, London: New City, 1982.

<sup>40</sup> SAINT TERESA, *The Foundations*, V. 10,

in *The Complete Works of Saint Teresa of Jesus*, translated and edited by E. Allison Peers (3 vols.), London: Sheed and Ward, 1950, vol. 3, p. 23.

<sup>41</sup> *The Autobiography of St. Theresa of Lisieux*, New York: Image Books, 1957, p. 113.

<sup>42</sup> ALPHONSUS DE LIGUORI, *Uniformità alla volontà di Dio*, in *Opere Spirituali*, Prato, 1844, vol. 1, p. 272.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 272; ALPHONSUS DE LIGUORI, *Affetti Devoti a Gesù Cristo*, in *Opere spirituali*, Prato, 1844, I, p. 268.

<sup>44</sup> *Uniformità*, in *Opere Spirituali*, I, p. 268.

<sup>45</sup> Letter 3CG8, in *Correspondence, Entretiens, Documents*, ed. Pierre Coste, Paris, 1923, vol. VIII, p. 151.

<sup>46</sup> *Spiritual Exercises*, par. 1, page 1, in the translation by Louis J. Puhl, S.J.

<sup>47</sup> FRANÇOIS DE SALES, *Entretiens Spirituels*, XV, in *Œuvres complètes de Saint François de Sales, évêque et prince de Genève*, Paris: G. Martin, 1845 (5 vols.), vol. I, p. 756.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>49</sup> *Traité de l'amour de Dieu*, vol. IX, ch. 1. *Œuvres complètes*, vol. IV, p. 369.

<sup>50</sup> Rule of St. Francis 1221, ch. 22, in *St. Francis of Assisi, Omnibus of Sources*, ed. by Marian A. Habig, Chicago, Franciscan Herald Press, 1983, p. 47-48.

<sup>51</sup> ELIZABETH OF THE TRINITY, Letter 169, in *J'ai trouvé Dieu*, Paris, 1980, p. 168.

<sup>52</sup> Constitutions, VI, 1.

<sup>53</sup> POPE JOHN XXIII, *Journal of a Soul*. New York, 1965, p. 112.

<sup>54</sup> See HUGHES, G., *God of Surprises*, London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1985, p. 62.

<sup>55</sup> FRANÇOIS DE SALES, *Traité de l'amour de Dieu*, vol. VIII, ch. 3. *Œuvres complètes*, vol. IV, p. 308-310.

<sup>56</sup> LUBICH, C., *May They All be One*, New City, London, 1977, p. 332.

<sup>57</sup> SALGADO, J.-M., "Un représentant de la tradition spirituelle de conformité à la volonté de Dieu: M<sup>fr</sup> Eugène de Mazenod", in *Revue d'Ascétique et de Mystique*, XLII (1966), p. 439-474; BISSETT, A., *An Experience of Conversion to the Will of God: Blessed Eugene de Mazenod, 1832-1837*,

Unpublished License Thesis, Rome Gregorian, 1981; BALBEUR, L., "Le bienheureux Eugène de Mazenod et la volonté de Dieu", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 41 (1982), pp. 29-35.

<sup>58</sup> BALBEUR, L., *Ibidem*, p. 29.

<sup>59</sup> See for example, LEFLON I, p. 387f; III, p. 7-8, 125-126; IV, p. 223.

<sup>60</sup> BAFFIE, E., *Bishop de Mazenod, His Inner Life and Virtues*, trans. by Thomas

Dawson, London: R and T Washbourne, 1909, p. 51.

<sup>61</sup> March 20, 1826 letter to Tempier in *Oblate Writings* I, vol. 7, no. 231, p. 63.

<sup>62</sup> See DESCHÂTELETS, L., Sup. Gen., Circular no. 191, p. 51, and also TOURIGNY, I., "Marie Immaculée et la vie apostolique de l'Oblat", in *Études oblates*, 14 (1955), pp. 105-132.

## ZEAL

*Summary: I. The Founder's constant ideas* 1. A man of great desire and zeal; 2. A man challenged by the Spirit in his mission; 3. A zeal rooted in oblation; 4. A man sent on mission by zeal; 5. Zeal is linked with the spirit of fortitude. *II. Zeal in the Constitutions and Rules:* 1. The Preface; 2. The Constitutions and Rules. *III. Zeal in the writings of the Superiors General:* 1. Father Joseph Fabre, 1861-1892; 2. Father Louis Soullier, 1893-1897; 3. Father Cassien Augier, 1898-1906; 4. Bishop Augustine Dontenwill, 1908-1931; 5. Father Leo Deschâtelets, 1947-1972; 6. Father Fernand Jetté, 1974-1986; 7. Father Marcello Zago, 1986-1998 *IV. Some conclusions.*

In the course of writing this reflection on zeal it became apparent, from the very outset, that this kind of study would be limited by the constraints imposed by the meaning of this term as well as by the availability of sources. We opted for what seemed to be the most evident to us while keeping in mind the ambiguity of the term as it is used in contemporary spirituality. This is what we read in the *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*: "Currently in the French language when it is a case of speaking of human jealousy, the focus of the word is almost exclusively on the aspect of capital sin. Consequently, zeal appears rather linked to fervor." (*Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, vol 5, col. 204-220). But the sense of each term tends to assert its distinct character. This can already be seen in the spiritual writings of the seventeenth century. Both zeal and fervor are respectively defined as "ardor". Fervor is an interior phenomenon coming from the heart, being more a sentiment of the heart, whereas zeal animates the active intelligence, expressing itself in concern, in service and faithfulness.

"This distinction is quite apparent in the writings of Saint Francis de Sales, for example: zeal is an attribute of action, of the 'devout life'. Even if 'zeal is a burning fervor of love', it 'leads one

to the desire to remove, to distance oneself from or steer away from that which is in conflict with the object of one's love'."<sup>1</sup>

This quote enables us to see that Bishop de Mazenod's use of the term as well as the way it is used in the Oblate tradition is akin to what Francis de Sales says. We find this usage in article 37 of the 1982 Constitutions and Rules, contained in the testament of the Founder which Oblate tradition has preserved for us to this day. This text would lead Father Jetté to write in his commentary on the Constitutions and Rules: "[...] the article refers us to our Founder's testament: charity is at the heart of our lives; it is fraternal charity which 'should sustain the zeal of each one'. 'Among yourselves practice charity, charity, charity – and outside, zeal for the salvation of souls.' First and foremost, this is where our basic spirit is found. In the Church, the Oblate is a man of charity, a man whose whole life is filled with love."<sup>2</sup>

### 1. THE FOUNDER'S CONSTANT IDEAS

In the writings of the Founder we must understand the word zeal in the typical meaning attributed to it in the

spirituality of his time. But we will immediately notice that as far as the Founder is concerned, zeal is the expression of charity's fervor and of fraternal love. It was not by accident that the basic text of the Preface situated zeal at the very heart of the Oblate vocation.

From the collection of the letters and spiritual writings of Eugene de Mazenod published to date we can find some expressions which will enable us to describe accurately enough the evolution of the meaning of apostolic zeal for him.

#### 1. A MAN OF GREAT DESIRE AND ZEAL

Eugene de Mazenod nourished in his heart a steadfast desire to do the will of God, to serve the Church. This was at the origin of some passages he wrote that are still an inspiration for us: "The one who would like to become one of us must be on fire with the desire for his own perfection, he should blaze with love for our Lord Jesus Christ and his Church and with a fervent zeal for the salvation of souls."<sup>3</sup>

In the acts of visitation of the Lumières community, the Founder expressed the fullness of his joy at seeing the harmony of Oblate life lived in that community: "We would not have considered it necessary to make a formal act of visitation during our stay at Lumières, if it had not been that it seemed beneficial for us to set down in this book the highest degree of satisfaction that we felt upon seeing this community at whose heart there reigns peace, charity and the most perfect regularity. [...] It is our observation that in that community God is being served to be best of the members' ability, that they love each other mutually as brothers, that all hearts are so intensely united that never

does the least conflict arise, that every individual is living there happy in the meticulous observance of the holy Rules of the Institute, that members of the community have mastered the art of fusing the exercise of zeal required in the missions and the crowds of pilgrims to the sedentary work of study during those periods of solitude whose happiness it is theirs to enjoy here more than in other places, in a word, that the full worth of one's vocation is appreciated here and the community knows how to give God thanks for it."<sup>4</sup>

#### 2. A MAN CHALLENGED BY THE SPIRIT IN HIS MISSION

Rather than theorizing, Eugene de Mazenod responded like a practical man. As far as he was concerned, apostolic fervor consisted solely in the boldness to want to be a saint, first and foremost, so that his zeal could be a reflection of the glory of God.

In his *Mélanges historiques*, Bishop Jacques Jeancard had this to say about the zeal he saw in the life of the Founder: "[...] his only thought was to devote himself unconditionally to the service of the most abandoned souls and especially to the poor; [...] like almost all holy people whom God used as instruments to carry out his designs, the Founder of the Oblates was far from grasping the full scope of his mission when he put his hand to the plow. He did not *a priori* lay out a grand scheme of things worked out in all its details. The plan according to which he worked derived from a source which transcended the dimensions of a purely human design. It was instilled into him and in some way revealed to him gradually as the circumstances opened up new vistas for his zeal. The Lord who led him allowed him to see only

that which he was called to do from moment to moment. And He rewarded his ardent love for the Church and his devotion for the salvation of souls by gradually revealing to him the course that he was called to run – in order to make further progress toward the fulfillment of the task which had been entrusted to him.”<sup>5</sup>

### 3. A ZEAL ROOTED IN OBLATION

In a letter the Founder wrote to Father Jean-Baptiste Honorat we perceive how zeal was an integral part of the life and response of the person who lived the spirit of oblation: “What do I intend by this reflection? It is that you must be worthy of your vocation, truly apostolic men devoted to the service of the Church, fully zealous for the salvation of souls and above all, saintly as regards yourselves and your brothers.”<sup>6</sup>

To Father André-M. Sumien and to the Oblates of Aix, he wrote: “As you know, you are the hope of our Society; so you can gauge my happiness when I contemplate you going forward in the ways of the Lord, full of ardor for good, burning with holy zeal for the salvation of souls, devoted to the Church, scorning and trampling on all that detracts from perfection and compromises salvation.”<sup>7</sup>

### 4. A MAN SENT INTO MISSION BY ZEAL

“Zeal” also contains the meaning of the missionaries being sent, as well as that of the driving force that leads them towards the mission. At the same time the Founder remains concerned about the health of his men and the effort they put into their work.

The zeal of the missionaries of the Red River region needed to be linked with the authority of the local bishop: “I

cannot urge you strongly enough, my beloved sons, to respect the authority of him whom God has put in charge of the spiritual government of the region where you are carrying out your zealous work: you should congratulate yourselves on the fact that he is also your regular superior: you are therefore doubly bound to obey him.”<sup>8</sup>

“I pray to [Jesus Christ] to preserve you in holy humility among the wonders of zeal, of mortification, of charity that your ministry, arduous as it is, so often gives you an opportunity of performing.”<sup>9</sup>

Writing to Father Hippolyte Courtès, he added a note of prudence to temper a too-ardent zeal: “For God’s sake, do not exhaust yourself. How can you do the mission in Rognes if you kill yourself at Istres? You must look after one another. I got the impression that you are doing nothing of the sort. You are taking a great responsibility upon yourself. From here, I can only remind you of your duty. Zeal has merit only when it is moderated by prudence.”<sup>10</sup>

### 5. ZEAL IS LINKED WITH THE SPIRIT OF FORTITUDE.

Speaking to Brother Bernard on the occasion of his ordination to the diaconate, the Founder tells him that apostolic zeal is associated with the spirit of fortitude received on the occasion of his diaconate – for his own personal life and his future ministry: “Let your heart respond in these happy moments, let it be ardent, let it be purified. Zeal is the distinctive characteristic of the deacon for he has received the spirit of fortitude firstly for his own sanctification and perfection of soul, and then to combat the enemies of God and to repulse the demon with that supernatural strength that comes from on high.”<sup>11</sup>

From these quotations we can conclude that for the Founder zeal was rooted in oblation; it was lived in fraternal charity; it was also the spirit which animated missionary life. Everything, however, was to be for the glory of God – of which apostolic zeal was simply the reflection.

## II. ZEAL IN THE CONSTITUTIONS AND RULES

The Constitutions and Rules deal with zeal in a consistent overall context. The *Preface* is the place where we find the Founder's ardent devotion in its fullness, ardent devotion for the Church and the poor. The text of the Constitutions casts further light on this.

“What more exalted end could there be than the end of their Institute! Their founder is Jesus Christ, the very Son of God; their first fathers are the Apostles. They are called to be co-workers with the Savior, co-redeemers of the human race. And although in view of their present small number and the pressing needs of the people that surround them on every side, they are compelled for the present to impose constraints on their zeal for the poor people of our rural areas and so on, in its holy aspirations, their ambition should embrace the whole wide world in its entirety.”<sup>12</sup>

### 1. THE PREFACE

The *Preface* brings to our ears three appeals made in the name of the struggling, devastated Church, that beautiful inheritance of our Savior.

a) “In a word, zealous priests, apostolic men.”

“The *Preface* is written in the ardently emotional style of someone who loves and presses home his point with

vehemence. [...] This vehemence is understandable since we are dealing with a man who has discovered what the love of God is and cannot stand that people do not know about this love. We must not expect him to express himself with the kind of evenhanded judgment that takes into account all the subtleties involved. He is equally as vehement in the call he makes to his companions: ‘zealous priests, detached from self-interest...’ ‘to become saints ... to constantly renew oneself...’ ‘to fight to the death’. ‘Nihil linquendum inausum’: To shrink back before any bold measure. No half measures.”<sup>13</sup>

b) Priests “brimming with zeal, ready to sacrifice all their goods, their talents, their rest, their own persons and their life for the love of Jesus Christ, the service of the Church and the sanctification of one's neighbor.”

In our own day, we have also heard the vibrant call Pope Paul VI issued to religious in his apostolic exhortation on evangelization.<sup>14</sup>

c) “Priests devoting themselves to every work of zeal.”

In the decrees of expulsion from the Congregation, we find statements which reveal the link the Founder made between charity and zeal. We perceive that some subjects were expelled because of difficulties in living community life and others because they lacked zeal: “Total lack of zeal essential for our Congregation”.<sup>15</sup>

### 2. THE CONSTITUTIONS AND RULES

Our reflection will focus on the 1982 Constitutions and Rules in order to discover the scope and the necessity of apostolic zeal in the Congregation. It is in reading through these texts that we will grasp their organic unity in this regard. When the opportunity occurs, we

will make use of Father Fernand Jetté's excellent commentary.

"Our apostolic zeal is sustained by the unreserved gift we make of ourselves in our oblation, an offering constantly renewed by the challenges of our mission" (C 2).

"In this *sequela Christi* or the life of union with Christ characteristic of the Oblate, the article stresses two virtues essential for the missionary and which are distinguishing marks of the spiritual teaching of Eugene de Mazenod: obedience and apostolic zeal. "Thus, we give ourselves to the Father in obedience even unto death and dedicate ourselves to God's people in unselfish love." "Just like Christ, the Oblate will in all things be a man who does God's will, even to the point of sacrificing his very life, and he will be a man of a burning apostolic zeal that is completely detached."<sup>16</sup>

"By participating with their whole being [in the Eucharist], they offer themselves with Christ the Savior; they are renewed in the mystery of their cooperation with him, drawing more closely the bonds of their apostolic community and broadening the horizons of their zeal to embrace the dimensions of the whole world" (C 33).

In the Eucharist, which was the meeting place for the Founder and all his Oblates, was established the principle of Oblate missionary life: to weave together the bonds of community and become men whose zeal extended to the confines of the whole world.

"The Founder left us a legacy: "Among yourselves practice charity, charity, charity – and, outside, zeal for the salvation of souls." In fidelity to that testament, each member's zeal is sustained by the bonds of fraternal charity" (C 37).

With regard to charity and zeal, the Founder's legacy provides the essential

spirit of our vocation. The constant concern to weave the unity of the Oblate life and apostolic community around charity and zeal should be noted. It is obvious that, for us Oblates, zeal should always remain united to charity.

"Jesus personally formed the disciples he had chosen, initiating them into "the mystery of the Kingdom of God" (Mark 4:11). As a preparation for their mission he had them share in his ministry; to confirm their zeal he sent them his Spirit" (C 45).

What is so striking here is, once again, the intention of uniting charity and zeal. At the very heart of formation lies the taking of Jesus himself as our model. He is the one who chooses his disciples, forms them and sends the Spirit to confirm and strengthen their zeal.

"Local communities are normally grouped into Provinces and Vice Provinces which live and carry out their specific apostolic [*zèle apostolique*] in collaboration with the local churches and in close contact with other Provinces, especially those of the same Region" (C 76).

The same dynamic is operative on the level of the local community and there is the added dimension that apostolic zeal takes on a distinctive, easily identifiable coloring from one province to the other. However, the bond of cooperation remains the fundamental element for missionary work.

"The Superior General is the Congregation's living bond of unity. The example of his life, his apostolic zeal and the affection he holds for all of us stir the faith and charity of our communities to ever greater efforts in response to the Church's needs" (C 112) [C 133 in CCRR 2000].

It is once again at the upper echelons of the Congregation that witness is given of charity and zeal. The dominant

characteristic of the Superior General's life is to unite apostolic zeal and affection for everyone. It becomes obvious that it is always the Founder's words charity and apostolic zeal that emerge at crucial moments of the Congregation's life.

In the Constitutions and Rules, the spirit of the Founder in all the Constitutions leaves its stamp on all the intense moments of Oblate life. We find it in the first lines of the charism, at the heart of our life and action as well as the center of our apostolic community, in first formation as in the dynamics which drive the local community and finally in the person of the Superior General.

### III. ZEAL IN THE WRITINGS OF THE SUPERIORS GENERAL

In order to follow the thread of charity and zeal through the writings of the Superiors General, our main sources still remain the administrative circulars and some more fully developed writings especially as found in the works of Fathers Deschâtelets, Jetté and Zago.

#### 1. FATHER JOSEPH FABRE, 1861-1892

One of the outstanding characteristics of Father Fabre's term as General, a term which lasted thirty-one years, was to maintain the spirit of the Founder of whom he was the first successor: "[...] and since we are unable to speak to you with the same authority and zeal with which he himself spoke to you, we will strive at least to instill in you his spirit."<sup>17</sup>

"Outside our communities, let us be zealous and devoted missionaries; within our communities, let us be fervent Oblates, brimming with charity for

each other. Let us judge each other gently, let us love each other with all our hearts; let us truly be brothers in our interaction. Always and everywhere let us be recognized by this sign."<sup>18</sup>

In the writings of Father Fabre, we notice a shift of focus from zeal for external works to zeal within the community. "The zeal that we apply in observing [our holy Rules] with affection and punctilious care will be the measure of the zeal that we expend in seeking our sanctification."<sup>19</sup>

"Let us be united by a holy zeal to maintain among us the religious spirit our venerated Father left us, a spirit which our older fathers knew so well how to receive and maintain."<sup>20</sup>

#### 2. FATHER LOUIS SOULLIER, 1893-1897

We will refer to only a few quotations from this short period. They are not enough to warrant us saying that they indicate a new way of looking at zeal. Father Soullier seems to use the expressions current for his time without drawing too far away from the Founder. The zeal he reflects tends to focus inward on the community: "[...] to respond to the confidence placed in us by the Holy See by doubling the measure of our zeal for the sanctification of souls and the fervor for our own sanctification."<sup>21</sup>

"In our external works, let us redouble our zeal and prudence [...]"<sup>22</sup>

#### 3. FATHER CASSIEN AUGIER, 1898-1906

In Father Augier's writings, we sense the desire to maintain simultaneously apostolic zeal as well as zeal within the community. There seems to be some confusion or at least some hesitation in his statements. On the other hand, he stresses the unlimited

gift of self: zeal may go even to the point of total exhaustion.

"Let us avoid not measuring up to this expectation. In the sight of everyone, let us be not only men of zeal, but also men of prayer. Our activity for souls will be all the more effective in consequence."<sup>23</sup>

"[...] we are sacrificing our exercises to what we term the requirements of the ministry [...] We disguise this under the fine label called zeal, but often, in the depth of our conscience, the voice of God communicates a word to us in terms that are less flattering, but more true: carelessness, spiritual sloth."<sup>24</sup>

"Let your thoughts be high thoughts, your resolutions be of superior quality and your zeal untiring for the glory of God and the spread of his Kingdom."<sup>25</sup>

"There remains, moreover, that always keen and burning flame of a zeal which gives and expends itself without counting the cost, a zeal which sometimes leads to premature exhaustion of one's physical strength."<sup>26</sup>

#### 4. BISHOP AUGUSTINE DONTENWILL, 1908-1931

In the writings of Bishop Dontenwill, zeal rediscovers its true meaning which is that of reaching out to the most abandoned and its deepest root which is found in the religious spirit and fidelity to the Constitutions.

"All this abundance of zeal has been made possible only [...] because the dedication of our beloved missionaries has always drawn its inspiration from the most pure spirit of being religious which is specifically ours and because fidelity to our holy Rules has remained the trademark of Oblate life in Ceylon."<sup>27</sup>

He then makes the link between the zeal in the life of the Oblate and the

zeal of Our Lord in the course of his public ministry. This is already a feature which approaches the idea of Oblate apostolic community.

He quotes from the Founder's circular letter of February 17, 1853: "At our inception, we were small and humble except for the fact that we were motivated by a great compassion for the souls of the most abandoned and with a great zeal to dedicate ourselves, according to the example of Christ, to evangelizing the poor [...]" Bishop Dontenwill continues: "For religious societies, zeal is a life principle which grows without ceasing – allow us to use the term – in universality and immortality."

"The zeal of Father de Mazenod and his disciples should be all the more fruitful and blessed in the measure that it reproduced more intensely the zeal that Our Lord left as an example to his twelve Apostles during his public ministry."<sup>28</sup>

Finally, we find in his writings mention of the Blessed Virgin as cause for missionary expansion. "To these two first causes of progress: zeal for souls and the ministry to the poor, our Founder added a third one: Mary's maternal protection [...]"<sup>29</sup>

#### 5. LEO DESCHÂTELETS, 1947-1972

Father Deschâtelets was a man of zeal as much by his words and his writings as by his actions. His term in office was marked by a constant striving to achieve unity and clarity to what the Oblate vocation really was. In his circular letter on *Our Vocation and Life of Intimate Union with Mary Immaculate*, he displayed a profound knowledge of the Founder and an intention to seek a unity of life which would find its expression in the definition of an Oblate.

Although I limit myself to making reference to only one page which describes the Oblate as the man with apostolic zeal, the entire circular is worth reading because we find in it an inspiration and a zeal present throughout the period from 1952 to 1972.

"The kind of spiritual and apostolic man described by the Rule is:

- a) a priest,
- b) a religious,
- c) a missionary,
- d) an Oblate, that is, one consecrated to the pursuit of holiness and apostolic endeavors in the manner of the Apostles themselves,
- e) an individual burning with love for Jesus, our God and Savior, and for Mary Immaculate, Mother of God and our mother, a love that is constantly nourished in a profound spirit of prayer,
- f) learning there a total detachment from self through obedience, poverty and a sense of purpose which is simple and upright,
- g) accompanied by a most authentic familial and fraternal charity,
- h) drawing from them a heart brimming with unlimited zeal and inexhaustible mercy, especially to hasten towards the poor and most abandoned masses."<sup>30</sup>

It is through these two final traits that Father Deschâtelets completes the spiritual portrait of the Oblate according to the Founder.<sup>31</sup>

#### 6. FATHER FERNAND JETTÉ, 1974-1986

From Father Jetté, we learn the necessity of returning to the basic spirit of the Oblate life, especially in his commentary on Constitution 37. From the writings of Father Jetté, we will refer to *O.M.I. The Apostolic Man: A Commentary on the 1982 Edition of the Oblate Constitutions and Rules* and *The*

*Missionary O.M.I.*, which seem to us to offer the richest sources for the expression apostolic zeal. In these sources, fraternal charity and zeal are always found organically united in a dynamic relationship. In addition to that, spiritual fervor and personal sanctity join them as essential elements of the Oblate life.

"One does not go without the other. The charity among us that would not be open to the world of the poor would not be Oblate charity, and zeal that is not based on real acceptance and mutual love between Oblates would remain empty. Its witnessing would be powerless."<sup>32</sup>

"*Vocations.* On that subject the past few years have seen new hopes arise – vocations now seem to thrive on the South American continent. With all my heart I encourage you in your efforts in favor of vocations. Go forward with faith and perseverance. The Lord can only bless your efforts. Set your hearts on forming men like our Blessed Founder wanted them: 'interior men, truly apostolic men', firm in their faith and filled with zeal for the poorest and the most abandoned."<sup>33</sup>

"In the apostolic man, we always find two elements, inseparable the one from the other: spiritual fervor and missionary zeal. The second does not suffice of itself; we need the first as well."<sup>34</sup>

#### 7. FATHER MARCELLO ZAGO, 1986-1998

At this point, it is too soon to list all the elements of apostolic zeal as found contained in the teachings of Father Zago. However, in his writings, all elements are drawn from the same source, the Founder's spiritual legacy. Zeal becomes a mirror, a witness of the Oblate life. This life draws its nourishment

from the love of Christ the Savior and love for one's neighbor. Suffice it to give a few excerpts from his copious writings.

"[The Founder] wanted us to be zealous missionaries, that is, filled with an energetic, creative love for the souls loved and saved by Christ."<sup>35</sup>

Filled with zeal, the missionary is completely dedicated to his mission, brimming with dynamism and creativity. He is courageous in his apostolate, especially in announcing the Gospel. He burns with the fire of divine love for the human race.

In the *Preface* are found the qualities that describe this kind of zeal: "Men [...] who work with all their might to convert others"; "he sent them to conquer the world"; "they can enter the lists and fight to the death"; "it is urgent to bring back into the fold so many strayed sheep, to teach these debased Christians who Christ is, to snatch them from the devil's prey and point out to them the road to Heaven. We must use every available means to spread the empire of the Savior, to destroy the dominion of the devil, to prevent the commission of thousands of crimes, to hold in highest honor and cause to be practiced every kind of virtue, lead men to become human, then Christians, and finally to help them to become saints".

In this context, zeal takes on the aura of a conquest with broad horizons and objectives; it seems nothing can stand in its way. It reflects the intention of transforming the world, even if, faced with the concrete fact of the tiny band at his disposal at the time, the Founder wrote in this same 1818 Rule: "[...] in its holy yearning, their ambition should embrace the immense scope of the entire earth."<sup>36</sup> Such a zeal springs from God's love and is compelled to

express itself as an unbounded love, as he states in regard to the ministry of reconciliation: "Let the missionaries always welcome sinners with an inexhaustible charity; let them encourage them [...] by showing them a heart of compassion. In a word, they should treat them as they would like to be treated themselves if they were in the unfortunate circumstances in which the sinners find themselves".<sup>37</sup>

In 1826, Father de Mazenod wrote to Father Tempier, who, at the time was working with some other Oblates on a difficult mission: "Recommend that they conduct themselves like saints, like real apostles, joining to their preaching an exterior modesty, a great charity for sinners. Let people be able to perceive from their manner that they are not ordinary preachers, that they are truly animated by a zeal which is proper to their holy vocation. Let them not forget themselves if they wish to be truly useful to others".<sup>38</sup>

"Outside, zeal for the salvation of souls" and "among yourselves practice charity" are an integral part of the Founder's legacy. It is the synthesis of his life and teaching. This zeal is born and nourished by the love of Christ the Savior and love for others. "Our apostolic zeal is sustained by the unreserved gift we make of ourselves in our oblation, an offering constantly renewed by the challenges of our mission." (C 2) It is renewed in the Eucharist (see C 33), sustained by fraternal charity (see C 37), confirmed by the Spirit (see C 45).

#### IV. SOME CONCLUSIONS

The use of the words "zeal" or "zealous" in Oblate literature is always in very close relationship with the community which produces it. As a re-

sult, it loses the pejorative meaning that we find in the French language. Among us, zeal is always seen as a characteristic aspect of charity. As far as the Founder was concerned, the two elements attract each other mutually and are complementary and offer us the authentic community life which becomes apostolic.

At the heart of his charism, a personal encounter with Christ, Bishop de Mazenod was not only a man of zealous action, but one who had grasped the fact that one's entire life does not suffice to repay even in small measure the love God lavished upon it. He was an apostolic man who worked zealously for the salvation of souls. It is Christ who is at the heart of the Founder's vocation and it is Christ again who left the indelible stamp of his zeal on him. Consequently, we must recognize the importance of the Founder's initial grace in order to understand the zeal which motivated him. Otherwise everything appears to be pure and simple activism. The need to encounter Christ led the Founder to stress the necessity of setting time apart to allow oneself to be molded by Christ the Savior.<sup>39</sup>

In the entire life of the Oblate, there is a kind of trilogy that could be expressed in this way: with the Founder, the Oblate is rooted in love for Christ the Savior; this love finds its prolongation in a special love for the Church; finally, it is zeal that carries the Oblate towards the salvation of souls.

Apostolic zeal has always been present in the life of the Congregation. But this legacy of the Founder takes on a particular form in the period we have been living since the 1966 Chapter. One particular focus which is based on the charism specific to the Congregation allows us to perceive the richness of the apostolic zeal desired by the Founder as

expressed in his final words. They are now at the basis of fraternal charity and the zeal of our apostolic community.

Let us conclude with a final text taken from one of Father Zago's letters on fraternal charity. He deals with charity such as the Founder wanted it: "Holding nothing back let us truly be saints."

"Similarly, one can legitimately ask oneself, what constitutes the path of holiness for the Oblate, and his own specific way of sharing in the Paschal Mystery of Christ. It is certainly not through the silence and solitude of the contemplative, nor even the poverty of the Franciscan. Might it not be precisely his ideal of fraternal and apostolic charity? [...] Borrowing a phrase from Thomas Merton, we believe we can say: the Oblate ideal of charity seems to play the same role in the spiritual life as that of silence and solitude in the purely contemplative orders. The legacy in the heart of the Founder gives cogent expression to the soul of our soul."<sup>40</sup> "I am in agreement with this conclusion by adding zeal to charity. The Oblate ideal of charity and zeal is a characteristic of our charism; it our royal road to interior purification and our union with God. It is our road to holiness. It is our way of participating in and sharing with others the Paschal Mystery."<sup>41</sup>

LUCIEN PEPIN

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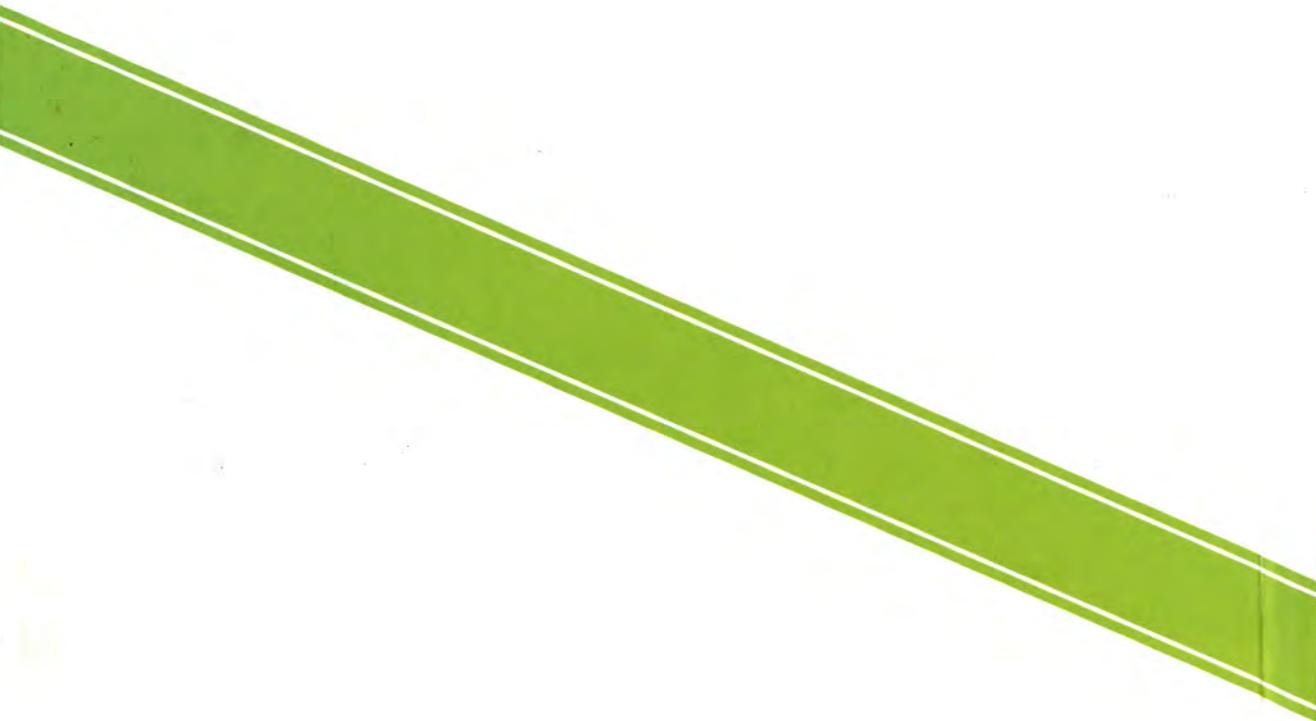


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