



Sommaire / Contents / Resumen

PRÆFATIO

Paolo Archiati, OMI, <i>A New Heart: Life in Apostolic Community</i> / <i>Un cœur nouveau : vie en communauté apostolique</i> / <i>Un corazón nuevo: Vida en comunidad apostólica</i>	3
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HISTORIA

Paweł Zajac, OMI, <i>Between Observance and Fraternity. Ideas of the Oblate Religious Community, 1926-1972</i>	17
--	----

VITA ET MISSIO

Gregorio Iriarte, OMI, <i>¿Cómo formar comunidad?</i>	60
Guillermo Steckling, OMI, <i>La comunidad de distrito, historia de la fórmula, oportunidades y riesgos</i>	67
Enzo Abbatinali, OMI, <i>Le choix communautaire de la Delegation oblate du Senegal</i>	77
Pat McGee, OMI, <i>The Forgotten Portion: A Brother's Reflection on Community</i>	87

FAMILIA OBLATA

Esmeralda Volpintesta, <i>Notas de una música. La comunidad de laicos oblatos en Mesina</i>	95
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Team Komsos, <i>Un seul cœur et une seule âme pour annoncer la bonne nouvelle. Oblats et laïcs de Cengkareng</i>	105
--	-----

DOCUMENTA

Jacques Jeancard, « <i>The community of Aix was really a family</i> ». <i>Introduction</i> by Fabio Ciardi, OMI	111
--	-----

David Power, OMI, <i>My Intellectual Itinerary. Annotated Bibliography</i>	124
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Miguel Fritz, OMI, <i>Las referencias a Dios y Jesús en nuestras CCRR</i>	135
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Notes de lecture / Book Reviews / Recensiones.....	142
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Præfatio

A NEW HEART: LIFE IN APOSTOLIC COMMUNITY

PAOLO ARCHIATI, OMI

In 1816, according to tradition, on 25 January, the young priest, Eugene de Mazenod, gathered around himself his first companions in order to begin a small society that would later become the religious Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. We are approaching, therefore, the 200th year since that event, and to prepare for it and celebrate it, we thought it fitting to live these three years till that date, focused on some particular themes tied to our spirituality and our life.

And so there surfaced the idea of a Triennium, not only of preparation but also of celebration and thanksgiving to God for the gift we have received in Eugene, whose holiness the Church recognized almost twenty years ago, as well as for the gift of the Oblate vocation which we share in different ways. Within this movement there is included what has now commonly come to be called the great “Mazenodian Family” – made up of all who recognize in Saint Eugene de Mazenod the inspiration for their lives and their missionary activity, or who in some way join themselves to him and to the charism given him by the Spirit for the Church.

The first year of this “Oblate Triennium,” begun on 8 December 2013 and to conclude on 8 December 2014, is dedicated to a reflection on the theme of community. The second, 8 December 2014 – 7 December 2015, will be dedicated to the theme of formation, seen as a fundamental dimension in which the Oblate is involved until the very end of his life; finally, the third year will go from the feast of the Im-

maculate Conception in 2015 until 25 January 2017. It will be a year of celebration, with the theme of the mission. During each of these three years, we will have available some guides for community meetings and personal reflection. **Oblatio** is also following and accompanying this journey, and this first issue of 2014 offers some contributions on the theme of the first year. Each year is linked to part of the slogan of our last General Chapter – a new heart; a new spirit; a new mission – and to one of the three vows: chastity for the first year; poverty for the second; and obedience for the third.

We would like to keep the fundamental goal of the Triennium free of useless triumphalism and to live it in a commitment to a true renewal of our lives and in thanksgiving for our vocation. It is meant to rekindle in the heart of every Oblate the fire of life and mission. To achieve this goal, two tasks have been proposed: the sharing of our faith through regular community meetings and concrete actions that express the conversion we have been working on since the last Chapter.

The year 2016 will also be the year of our next General Chapter for which we began remote preparation during the interchapter meeting in Bangkok last year.

Now a word about community, the theme of the first year.

It is superfluous to repeat how important the reality of community was in the inspiration of our Founder and what role it had in our first missions. Inspired by that which gave life to the first Christian communities, Eugene liked to repeat, as an invitation to “his” Oblates, the importance of having among themselves “one heart and one mind,” with all the nuances of that expression which we find with remarkable frequency in his many letters. The other community which he systematically had in mind when he thought of the Oblate communities being established was that of the apostles around Jesus their Master. These are constitutive characteristics of Oblate community.

Since the time of the Founder, numerous studies have been conducted on this issue, dealing with it in its entirety or from various angles. In more recent times these studies have multiplied and diversified, extending to aspects of common life not previously considered. In a 1956 article published in “Etudes Oblates” that same year, Father Cosentino studied the common life in the foreign missions according to the thought of the Founder (*La vie commune dans les mission*

étrangères selon notre Fondateur, 15 [1956], p. 275-280). It is surprising to note, in the light of this study and considering the reality of today, not only how much we have strayed from the directives but also from the thinking of Eugene.

Since that far off 1956, studies on Oblate community, besides multiplying, have also highlighted very different characteristics. Recent Superiors General and the documents of recent Chapters devoted considerable space to this theme, a sign of how current this reality is. In several of his contributions, Father Jetté focuses on some of the issues that make community life a real challenge for our time. Father Zago emphasizes the apostolic dimension of the Oblate community and its intimate relationship with the mission, dedicating to this theme a letter to Oblates in first formation (1990). Father Steckling, on 24 March 2008, writes an important letter to the Congregation on the apostolic community. When he was Assistant General, he had prepared a series of guides for community animation in the entire Congregation. The reality of community pervades the text and spirit of the Constitutions and Rules of 1982, approved after the long period of experimentation after 1966. They were recently re-edited with the changes from the General Chapters of 2004 and 2010. The third section of the first part is dedicated to the apostolic community.

The General Chapter of 1972 asked the new Superior General, the first to be elected to a “term,” to send a message to the Congregation to underline our commitment to revive apostolic communities. This text is analyzed in the recent issue of “OMI Information” (No. 542 - March 2014). The document of the General Chapter of 1986, *Missionaries in Today's World*, dedicates Chapter VI to the theme of community life as an essential dimension of our vocation. Practically the entire document of the next General Chapter, in 1992, will be devoted to the same theme: Witnessing as Apostolic Community. The document of the Chapter of 1998, *Evangelizing the Poor at the Dawn of the Third Millennium*, considers the Oblate community as a subject of evangelization – the Oblate response to the needs of the world and especially the poor – and as a call to continue, in the light of the previous Chapter document, the study of life in community. The document of the Chapter of 2004 – Witnessing to Hope – dedicates Number 2 to the theme of Oblate community, linked to that of religious life as the characteristic element of Oblate

life; it commits every Oblate community to a renewal in the various areas of its life. Finally, the document of the recent General Chapter – *Conversion* – identified in the community and community life: the first area in which we are all called to commit ourselves to a “profound conversion,” not only communal but also personal. In this first call to conversion, there are listed nine specific points on which we are called to challenge and convert ourselves.

It would be interesting if an Oblate were to take the initiative to do a comprehensive study, historical, spiritual and experiential, on this topic, from the time of the Founder to the present, through the various stages of our history and the history of the Oblate mission. This is an invitation for readers of **Oblatio**...

After this short and summary “digression” into our history, especially the more recent, from the perspective of the community, there comes the need to take stock of the situation, to ask ourselves where we are on this journey, how we have done so far and how we are responding in our present life to all these principles. The statistics, especially those that indicate how many Oblates live alone and how many communities are composed of only two Oblates, do not seem encouraging.

Returning to the article of Father Consentino mentioned above, it would be a grave and culpable omission to retreat today from a serious examination of conscience on this topic, especially while we are preparing to celebrate a “year of grace in the Lord,” namely the second centenary of our history. I wonder if the time has arrived to consider seriously and through a series of courageous decisions that which the Founder has left us. The texts cited by Father Consentino in his article are most eloquent and they provide us not only with a way of seeing things which we can either accept or refuse; they provide us with a precious part of the “charism” received from him through the Church and particularly through his “family.”

Living together, in community, as brothers joined by the most sacred bonds of charity and animated by the presence of the Master, is the first witness that we, as Oblates, are called to offer to those to whom we are sent and in the midst of whom we live; it is the first form of evangelization which precedes every other preaching or discourse. But this also has repercussions on the life of every single Oblate, on his consecration to God through the vows, on a specific way of living his belong-

ing to God, his oblation, the gift of his life for the mission. Are we ready for this step? We live in a complex world and in at time in which we try hard to manage our own personalities; sometimes, the community is seen as a “refuge” for those who are afraid to face a world with its problems, its challenges, its bogeymen; at times it can be experienced as an obstacle to the growth and development of one’s own personality. At times, it is a subject we prefer not to face for fear of discovering that we are vulnerable and incapable of true friendship and authentic human relationships. It is a theme that calls into play persons, works, relationships and other aspects of our lives as consecrated persons and as missionaries.

From this point of view, the bicentennial of our foundation offers us an opportunity that we cannot let fade away or ignore. Perhaps from here, there could be born a new enthusiasm for our missionary life, a witnessing that could motivate other men to respond generously to the project of Saint Eugene. It’s a real occasion: it would be a sin to waste it!

UN CŒUR NOUVEAU : VIE EN COMMUNAUTÉ APOSTOLIQUE

En 1816, le 25 janvier selon la tradition, le jeune prêtre Eugène de Mazenod rassemblait autour de lui ses premiers compagnons, afin de donner vie à une petite société qui deviendra plus tard la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée. Nous nous approchons donc des 200 ans de cet événement. Pour le préparer et le célébrer, nous avons pensé vivre les trois années qui viennent à la lumière de thèmes particuliers, liés à notre spiritualité et à notre vie.

C’est ainsi qu’est née l’idée d’un Triennium, non seulement de préparation mais aussi de célébration et d’action de grâce à Dieu, pour le don que nous avons reçu en Eugène, dont l’Eglise a reconnu la sainteté, il y a presque vingt ans, et pour le don de la vocation oblate que nous partageons selon des modalités diverses. Ce mouvement touche tous ceux qui forment ce que, désormais, nous appelons communément la grande “famille mazenodienne” – tous ceux qui reconnaissent en saint Eugène de Mazenod l’inspirateur de leur vie ou de leur activité missionnaire ou qui, en quelque sorte, se rattachent à lui et au charisme qui lui a été donné par l’Esprit Saint, pour l’Eglise.

La première année de ce “triennium oblat”, commencée le 8 décembre 2013 pour se conclure le 7 décembre 2014, est consacrée à une réflexion sur le thème de la communauté. L’année suivante – du 8 décembre 2014 au 7 décembre 2015 – sera consacrée au thème de la formation, vue comme dimension fondamentale dans laquelle tout Oblat est plongé jusqu’à la fin de son existence. La troisième année, enfin qui va de la fête de l’Immaculée de 2015 au 25 janvier 2017, verra les célébrations du bicentenaire et aura pour thème la mission. Pendant chacune des trois années nous serons accompagnés par des documents de travail, pour aider les rencontres de communauté et la réflexion personnelle. **Oblatio** veut pour sa part suivre et accompagner ce chemin. C’est pourquoi ce premier numéro de 2014 présente quelques contributions au thème de la première année. A chaque année est également associé un aspect du slogan de notre dernier Chapitre général : ‘un cœur nouveau, un esprit nouveau, une nouvelle mission’, ainsi que l’un des trois vœux: la chasteté pour la première année, la pauvreté pour la deuxième et l’obéissance, pour la troisième.

L’objectif fondamental de ce triennium, que nous voudrions libre d’inutiles triomphalismes, vécu par l’engagement à un véritable renouveau de notre vie et l’action de grâce pour la vocation reçue, est de raviver dans le cœur de chaque Oblat, la flamme de la vie et de la mission. Pour atteindre cet objectif, deux propositions nous sont faites : le partage de foi lors de rencontres communautaires régulières et des gestes concrets qui expriment la conversion à laquelle nous nous sommes engagés depuis le dernier Chapitre.

L’année 2016 sera aussi l’année du prochain Chapitre général, chapitre dont nous avons commencé la préparation éloignée, durant la réunion intercapitulaire de Bangkok, l’an dernier.

Quelques mots maintenant sur la communauté, thème de la première année.

Il est superflu de répéter le rôle si important de la communauté dans l’inspiration du Fondateur et dans nos premières missions. S’inspirant de ce qui animait les premières communautés chrétiennes, Eugène aimait répéter, comme invitation à “ses” Oblats, l’importance d’avoir entre eux “un seul cœur et une seule âme”, avec toutes les nuances de cette expression que nous trouvons avec une fréquence impressionnante dans ses nombreuses lettres. L’autre communauté qu’il avait systéma-

tiquement devant les yeux, quand il pensait aux communautés oblates en formation, était celle des apôtres autour de Jésus, leur maître. Ces références sont à mettre parmi les caractéristiques constitutives de la communauté oblate.

Depuis les temps du Fondateur, de nombreuses études ont été consacrées à ce thème, envisagé dans son ensemble ou bien sous des angles particuliers. Récemment ces études se sont multipliées et diversifiées, s'étendant à des aspects de la vie commune qui, jusqu'à présent, n'avaient pas été pris en compte. Dans un article de 1956, publié dans "Etudes Oblates" de la même année, le P. Cosentino a étudié la vie commune dans les missions étrangères, dans la pensée du Fondateur (*La vie commune dans les missions étrangères selon notre Fondateur*, 15 [1956], p. 275-280). Il est surprenant de noter, à la lumière de cette étude et considérant la réalité actuelle, combien nous nous sommes éloignés, non seulement des directives, mais également de la pensée d'Eugène. Depuis cette lointaine année 1956, les études sur la communauté oblate se sont multipliées et ont en outre mis en évidence les caractéristiques les plus diverses. Les derniers Supérieurs généraux et les documents des derniers Chapitres ont réservé à ce thème un espace considérable, eu égard à ce que cette réalité est actuellement. Dans ses diverses interventions, le P. Jetté s'arrête à quelques problématiques qui font de la vie commune un authentique défi pour notre temps ; le P. Zago souligne la dimension apostolique de la communauté oblate et son rapport intime à la mission, consacrant à ce thème une lettre aux Oblats en formation première (1990) ; le P. Steckling écrit, le 24 mars 2008, une importante lettre à la Congrégation sur la communauté apostolique. Quand il était Assistant général, il avait préparé, sur ce thème, une série de fiches de travail pour l'animation communautaire dans toute la Congrégation.

La réalité de la communauté imprègne le texte et l'esprit des Constitutions et Règles de 1982, approuvées après la longue période *ad experimentum* de celles de 1966, et récemment rééditées avec les modifications apportées par les Chapitres généraux de 2004 et de 2010. Dans ces Constitutions et Règles, la troisième section de la première partie est consacrée à la communauté.

Le Chapitre général de 1972 a demandé au nouveau Supérieur général, le premier à être élu "*pour un temps*", d'envoyer à la Congrégation un message, pour souligner son engagement à raviver les com-

munautés apostoliques. Ce texte est analysé dans le numéro récent d’«Information OMI» (n.542 – mars 2014). Le document du Chapitre général de 1986 *Missionnaires dans l’aujourd’hui du monde*, consacre au thème de la vie communautaire, comme dimension essentielle de notre vocation, le chapitre VI ; le document du Chapitre général suivant *Témoins en communauté apostolique*, de 1992 traitera pratiquement en entier de ce même thème. Le document du Chapitre de 1998 *Évangéliser les pauvres à l’aube du troisième millénaire* traite de la communauté oblate comme sujet de l’évangélisation – réponse oblate aux nécessités du monde et surtout des pauvres – et comme appel à poursuivre sur la lancée du document du Chapitre précédent, l’approfondissement de la vie en communauté. Le document du Chapitre de 2004 *Témoins de l’Espérance*, consacre son numéro 2 à la communauté oblate, en lien avec la vie religieuse, comme élément caractéristique de la vocation oblate ; il y engage chaque communauté oblate à un renouvellement dans les divers domaines de sa vie. Enfin, le document du récent Chapitre général intitulé *La conversion* désigne la communauté et la vie communautaire comme le premier domaine dans lequel nous sommes tous appelés à nous engager, par une « profonde conversion », non seulement communautaire, mais également personnelle. Dans ce premier appel à la conversion, le texte du Chapitre indique neuf points concrets avec lesquels nous confronter et sur lesquels nous convertir.

Il serait intéressant qu’un Oblat prenne l’initiative de faire une étude complète, historique, spirituelle et expérimentale, sur cet aspect, depuis le temps du Fondateur jusqu’à aujourd’hui, en parcourant les diverses étapes de notre histoire et de l’histoire de la mission oblate. C’est une invitation aux lecteurs d’**Oblatio**...

Après ce bref et sommaire « excursus » dans notre histoire, surtout la plus récente, sous l’angle de la communauté, naît le besoin de faire le point de la situation, de nous demander où nous sommes rendus sur ce chemin, comment nous avons répondu jusqu’à présent et comment nous répondons à toutes ces indications dans l’aujourd’hui de notre vie. Les statistiques, surtout celles qui indiquent combien d’Oblats vivent seuls et combien de communautés ne comptent que deux Oblats, ces statistiques ne sont guère encourageantes. Revenant à l’article du P. Cosentino cité ci-dessus, ce serait un manque grave et coupable de

nous dispenser aujourd'hui d'un sérieux examen de conscience sur cet aspect, surtout alors que nous nous préparons à célébrer une « année de grâce du Seigneur » en ce deuxième centenaire de notre histoire. Je me demande si le moment n'est pas arrivé de considérer sérieusement et à travers une série de décisions courageuses, ce que le Fondateur nous a laissé. Les textes cités par le P. Cosentino dans son article, sont très éloquents et nous transmettent non seulement une façon de voir les choses que nous pourrions accepter ou refuser, mais une composante précieuse du « Charisme » qu'Eugène a reçu pour l'Eglise et en particulier, pour sa « famille ».

Vivre ensemble, en communauté, comme des frères, unis par les liens sacrés de la charité et animés par la présence du Maître, c'est le premier témoignage que, comme Oblats, nous sommes appelés à offrir à ceux auxquels nous sommes envoyés et au milieu desquels nous vivons, première forme d'évangélisation qui précède toute espèce de prédication ou de discours. Cela comporte également des répercussions sur la vie de chaque Oblat, en particulier sur sa consécration à Dieu par les vœux, sur une façon spécifique de vivre son appartenance à Dieu, son oblation, le don de sa vie pour la mission. Sommes-nous prêts à faire ce pas ? Nous vivons dans un monde complexe et en des temps dans lesquels nous nous fatiguons à gérer nos personnalités ; parfois la communauté est vue alors comme un « refuge » pour ceux qui ont peur d'affronter le monde et ses problèmes, ses défis, ses épouvantails ; parfois elle peut être vécue comme un obstacle à l'épanouissement et au développement de la personnalité propre de chacun. Voilà une problématique que parfois nous préférons ne pas affronter par crainte de nous découvrir vulnérables ou incapables de vrais rapports et de relations humaines authentiques. C'est un thème qui met en jeu les personnes, les œuvres, les relations et d'autres aspects de notre vie de consacrés et de missionnaires.

Vu sous cet angle, le bicentenaire de notre fondation nous offre une occasion que nous ne pouvons pas laisser tomber ou ignorer. Peut-être va-t-il faire naître un nouvel élan pour notre vie missionnaire, faire naître un témoignage qui puisse motiver d'autres hommes à répondre avec générosité à la proposition de saint Eugène. Une vraie occasion... ce serait dommage de passer à côté !

UN CORAZÓN NUEVO: VIDA EN COMUNIDAD APOSTÓLICA

En 1816, tradicionalmente el 25 de enero, el joven sacerdote Eugenio de Mazenod reunía a su alrededor a sus primeros compañeros para dar vida a una pequeña sociedad que, más tarde, se convertiría en la Congregación religiosa de los Misioneros Oblatos de María Inmaculada. Nos estamos acercando, por tanto, a los 200 años de ese acontecimiento, y para prepararlo y celebrarlo hemos pensado en vivir los tres años que nos separan del mismo, en torno a temas particulares relacionados con nuestra espiritualidad y vida.

Así surgió la idea de un trienio, no sólo de preparación sino también de celebración y acción de gracias a Dios por el don que hemos recibido en Eugenio, cuya santidad ha sido reconocida por la Iglesia durante casi veinte años, y por el don de la vocación oblata que estamos compartiendo de diferentes maneras. En este movimiento se encuentra involucrado todo lo que últimamente se ha denominado comúnmente la gran “familia mazedoniana” – formada por aquellos que reconocen a San Eugenio de Mazenod como el inspirador de su vida o de su actividad misionera, o aquellos que, de alguna manera, se relacionan con él y con el carisma que el Espíritu de la Iglesia le ha donado.

El primer año de este “trienio oblato”, que comenzó el 8 de diciembre de 2013, finalizará el 7 de diciembre de 2014 y está dedicado a la reflexión sobre el tema de la comunidad. El segundo, del 8 de diciembre de 2014 al 5 de diciembre de 2015, estará dedicado al tema de la formación, vista como una dimensión fundamental que vive el oblato hasta el final de su existencia; el tercero, por último, desde la fiesta de la Inmaculada de 2015 hasta el 25 de enero de 2017, será el año de la celebración y tendrá como tema la misión. Durante cada uno de estos tres años dispondremos de material que nos acompañará y ayudará en las reuniones comunitarias y en la reflexión personal. También **Oblatio** sigue y nos acompaña en este camino, y este primer número de 2014 ofrece algunas contribuciones sobre el tema del primer año. Cada año del trienio tendrá además asociada una parte del lema de nuestro último Capítulo General – un corazón nuevo, un espíritu nuevo, una nueva misión – y uno de los tres votos: la castidad para el primer año, la pobreza para el segundo y la obediencia para el tercero.

El objetivo fundamental de este trienio, que queremos libre de todo inútil triunfalismo y que sea vivido desde el compromiso por una verdadera renovación de nuestra vida y desde la acción de gracias por la vocación recibida, es reavivar la llama de la vida y de la misión en el corazón de cada Oblato. Para alcanzar este objetivo se proponen dos compromisos: compartir nuestra fe a través de encuentros comunitarios regulares y gestos concretos que expresen la conversión a la que nos hemos comprometidos desde el último Capítulo.

2016 será también el año del próximo Capítulo General, para el que hemos comenzado la preparación remota durante la sesión intercapitular de Bangkok realizada el año pasado.

Unas breves palabras, ahora, sobre la comunidad, el tema del primer año.

No es necesario repetir la importancia que tuvo la comunidad en la inspiración de nuestro Fundador y el papel que la misma ha desempeñado en nuestras primeras misiones. Inspirándose en lo que animaba a las primeras comunidades cristianas, a Eugenio le encantaba repetir, como invitación a “sus” Oblatos, la importancia de contar con *un solo corazón y una sola alma*, con todos los matices que esta expresión podía ofrecer, y que encontramos con increíble frecuencia en su numerosa correspondencia. La otra comunidad, que tenía sistemáticamente ante sus ojos cuando pensaba a las comunidades oblatas que se estaban formando, era la de los apóstoles en torno a Jesús, su Maestro. Son características constitutivas de la comunidad oblata.

Desde la época del Fundador se han realizado numerosos estudios sobre este tema, abordándolo en su conjunto o desde perspectivas particulares. En los últimos tiempos, estos estudios se han multiplicado o diversificado, extendiéndose a aspectos de la vida comunitaria que no habían sido considerados con anterioridad. En un artículo de 1956, que fue publicado en “Études Oblates” en ese mismo año, el Padre Cosentino estudió la vida comunitaria en las misiones extranjeras según el pensamiento del Fundador (*La vie commune dans les missions étrangères selon notre Fondateur*, 15 [1956], p. 275-280). Es sorprendente ver, a la luz de este estudio y teniendo en cuenta la realidad de hoy en día, cuánto nos hemos desviado no sólo de las normas sino también del pensamiento de Eugenio. Desde aquel lejano 1956 los estudios sobre la comunidad oblata, además de multiplicarse, han puesto en relieve

sus muchas diferentes características. Los últimos Superiores Generales y los documentos de los últimos Capítulos han reservado un espacio considerable para este tema, como prueba de la gran actualidad de esta realidad. En varios de sus discursos el Padre Jetté se centra en algunos de los aspectos que hacen que la vida comunitaria sea un auténtico desafío para nuestros tiempos; el Padre Zago hace hincapié en la dimensión apostólica de la comunidad oblata y en su íntima conexión con la misión, dedicando a este tema una carta a los Oblatos en formación primera (1990); el Padre Steckling escribía el 24 de marzo de 2008 una importante carta a la Congregación sobre la comunidad apostólica. Sobre este tema había preparado, cuando era Asistente General, una serie de fichas-guía para la animación comunitaria en toda la Congregación. La realidad de la comunidad se difunde en el texto y en el espíritu de las Constituciones y Reglas de 1982, aprobadas tras el largo período *ad experimentum* de las de 1966 y recientemente reeditado con las modificaciones realizadas en los Capítulos Generales de 2004 y 2010. La tercera sección de la primera parte está dedicada por completo a la comunidad apostólica.

El Capítulo General de 1972 solicitó al nuevo Superior General, el primero en ser elegido “a tempo”, que enviara un mensaje a la Congregación para poner en relieve su compromiso de revitalizar las comunidades apostólicas. El presente texto se analiza en el reciente número de “Información OMI” (n. 542 – marzo de 2014). El documento del Capítulo General de 1986, *Misioneros en el Hoy del Mundo*, dedica el capítulo VI al tema de la vida comunitaria como dimensión esencial de nuestra vocación; al mismo tema se dedicará prácticamente todo el documento del sucesivo Capítulo General de 1992, *Testigos en Comunidad Apostólica*. El documento del Capítulo de 1998, *Evangelizar a los Pobres en el umbral del tercer Milenio*, habla de la comunidad oblata como sujeto de la evangelización – la respuesta oblata a las necesidades del mundo y, en especial, de los pobres – y como una solicitud a seguir, en la estela del documento del Capítulo anterior, profundizando en la vida de comunidad. Al tema de la comunidad oblata, vinculada con el de la vida religiosa como característica de la vocación oblata, el documento del Capítulo de 2004 – *Testigos de la Esperanza* – dedica el número 2 y solicita a cada comunidad oblata que se comprometa a renovarse en los diversos ámbitos de su vida. Por último, el documento

del reciente Capítulo General – *La conversión* – identifica en la comunidad y en la vida comunitaria la primera área en donde todos somos llamados a comprometernos en aras de una “profunda conversión”, no sólo comunitaria sino también personal. En esta primera llamada a la conversión se enumeran nueve puntos específicos a los que debemos enfrentarnos y convertirnos.

Sería interesante que un Oblato tomara la iniciativa de realizar un estudio completo, histórico, espiritual y experiencial, sobre este aspecto, desde la época del Fundador hasta el día de hoy, pasando por las diferentes etapas de nuestra historia y de la historia de la misión oblata. Ahí queda esta invitación para los lectores de **Oblatio**...

Después de este breve y sintético “*excursus*” sobre nuestra historia, sobre todo la más reciente, desde la perspectiva de la comunidad, surge la necesidad de hacer un balance de la situación, preguntarnos en qué punto estamos en este camino, cómo hemos respondido hasta ahora y cómo estamos respondiendo en nuestra vida presente a todas estas indicaciones. Las estadísticas, sobre todo aquellas que indican el número de Oblatos que viven solos y la cantidad de comunidades compuestas por sólo dos Oblatos, no son alentadoras. Por supuesto, si volvemos al artículo del Padre Cosentino anteriormente citado, escapar hoy a un serio examen de consciencia sobre este aspecto, especialmente ahora que nos estamos preparando para celebrar un “año de gracia del Señor” con el segundo centenario de nuestra historia, sería un incumplimiento grave y culpable. Me pregunto si no ha llegado el momento de considerar seriamente cuanto nos ha dejado el Fundador por medio de una serie de decisiones audaces. Los textos citados por el Padre Cosentino en su artículo son muy reveladores y no nos comunican únicamente una forma de ver las cosas que podemos aceptar o rechazar: nos transmiten una parte valiosa del “carisma” que el Fundador recibió para la Iglesia y, en especial, para su “familia”.

Vivir juntos, en comunidad, como hermanos unidos por los vínculos más sagrados de la caridad y animados por la presencia del Maestro es el primer testimonio que, como Oblatos, estamos llamados a ofrecer a aquellos a quienes somos enviados y en medio de los cuales vivimos, la primera forma de evangelización, que precede a cualquier predicación o discurso. Pero esto también tiene repercusiones en la vida de cada uno de los Oblatos, en su consagración a Dios a través de los

votos, en el modo específico de vivir su pertenencia a Dios, en su oblación, en el don de su vida para la misión. ¿Estamos dispuestos a dar este paso? Vivimos en un mundo complejo y en tiempos en que nos cuesta manejar nuestra personalidad; a veces la comunidad es vivida como un “refugio” por los que tienen miedo de enfrentarse al mundo con sus problemas, sus retos, sus terrores; a veces puede ser vivida como un obstáculo para crecer o desarrollar la propia personalidad. Es un tema al que a veces preferimos no enfrentarnos por miedo a descubrir que somos vulnerables o incapaces de sobrellevar relaciones verdaderas y auténticamente humanas. Es un tema que pone en juego a la persona, al trabajo, a las relaciones y a otros aspectos que tiene que ver con nuestro ser consagrados y misioneros.

Desde este punto de vista el bicentenario de nuestra fundación es una oportunidad que no podemos rechazar ni ignorar. Quizás pueda surgir así un nuevo impulso para nuestra vida misionera, un testimonio que pueda incentivar a otros hombres a responder generosamente a la propuesta de San Eugenio. Una verdadera oportunidad: ¡sería una pena desaprovecharla!

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Historia

BETWEEN OBSERVANCE AND FRATERNITY IDEAS OF THE OBLATE RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY, 1926-1972

PAWEŁ ZAJĄC, OMI

In 1926 and 1966 the Oblates celebrated two important anniversaries: 100 years since the official approval of the Constitutions and Rules by Pope Leo XII (1826-1926) and the 150th anniversary of the Foundation of the first Oblate community (1816-1966). The two dates were also notable because of the significant revisions of the Constitutions and Rules undertaken on both occasions. The amendments discussed at the General Chapter of 1926 were approved by the Vatican in 1928 and served the Congregation over the next 50 years. The 1966 version of the Constitutions and Rules was approved first *ad experimentum* and led to yet another significant revision, accepted finally in 1982. Moreover, the second above-mentioned anniversary has become a true turning point in the Oblate history also for other reasons. The proceedings of the General Chapter of 1966 confirm a noteworthy effort aimed at the improvement of community life within the Congregation. The following six years were marked by an increasing interest in the theological and spiritual reflection on religious community, which culminated at the General Chapter of 1972. One of the first documents signed by the newly elected general administration was entirely dedicated to the theme of community.

In this paper I would like to examine some aspects of the Oblate understanding of religious community in the period between 1926 and 1972. Appropriate reflections could be found in diverse sources, from

the official documents of the general administration to the personal comments of individual Oblates. The sources are in fact quite abundant, thus a selection was necessary – their exhaustive analysis would require a much broader study, worthy of a doctoral thesis or even a post-doctoral research program. It is to be hoped that the present article will inspire a continuation of the investigation of the history and traditions of Oblate community life. This article will abound in quotations from official documents of the Congregation and other sources, given their importance in the evolution of the Oblate understanding of community.

In the first half of the 20th century the general administration continued the well established tradition of strengthening the unity and the missionary zeal of Oblates across the world through a series of canonical visitations. A canonical visitation was considered for centuries to be an essential tool in the process of the ongoing reform of the Church¹. In 1947 the vicar general, Fr Hilaire Balmès, in the report to the General Chapter stated that “c’est par les *Visites des Provinces et Vicariats*, faites par l’Administration Générale, que se maintiennent surtout la vie religieuse, les traditions de la Famille et la survivance de la Règle”².

In the Oblate tradition the questionnaires prepared in view of such visitations were always closely related to the Constitutions and Rules and were meant to ensure or demand their faithful observance. The Third part, *chapter I, §VII* (pars tertia, caput I, §VII), numbers 494-507 of the Constitutions and Rules in their version of 1926 contained an explanation of the importance and the meaning of a canonical visitation (highlights are mine):

494. Since it is impossible for the Superior General to visit in person every six years all the Provinces, Vicariates, and houses of the Congregation, he will delegate others, of mature age, wisdom, and proved worth, to carry out this *highly important duty in his stead*. (...)

496. In virtue of these powers, they will make the regulations best calculated *to maintain order and religious observation*. (...)

498. It will be their duty to inspect the account of the Province and of each house, namely, the books containing the record of receipts of daily and extraordinary expenses, and the register of Masses. They will inspect the churches, sacristies, vestments and altar linen. In a word, they will examine all the concerns of the Provinces and houses which they visit, with a view to correcting abuses, rebuking negli-

gence and restoring the strictest observance in accordance with the spirit of our Constitutions. (...)

503. In virtue of holy obedience, he will command all the members of the community to make known to him, in the course of the visitation, *any abuses which have crept into the house, and in fact everything which appears to them opposed to the interests of the Congregation as a whole or of the local community, or of its individual members*; and also to answer truthfully all the questions which concern the visitation. (...)

505. The Visitor, besides giving suitable admonitions and exhortations, will promulgate the regulations or *decrees which he judges necessary for the good of the community*. The said decrees, which are to be written down in the book of the Acts of Visitation and signed by the Visitor, must be publicly read from time to time, as will be prescribed in their own text, and must be faithfully obeyed by all the members of the community³.

The most detailed questionnaires preserved at the General Archives in Rome (the section *Visites canoniques*) can be dated back to the first half of the 20th century. They contain between 180 and 200 questions, usually divided in several sections (Institution, Personnel, Religious life, Studies, Government and administration, Missionary Works, Parochial Works)⁴. There was no section dedicated directly to the community, but the visitor was unavoidably interested in many aspects of community life, e.g. “attachment to the Congregation”, “devotedness to the works”, “brotherhood in charity”, “discipline in submission”, “religiousness in regularity”⁵. The community was scrutinized according to its regularity in fulfilling the vows and respecting religious observances, and again the questionnaire was quite detailed on all these topics. The following quotation gives an exact example of such a set of questions:

III. The religious life

(...)

2. The regularity of community in keeping with:

a) vows

aa) of poverty

* living standard

24. House building

25. House furnishings: common

26. House furnishings: private room

27. Food
28. Dress
29. Travel
30. Car (automobile)
31. Recreation expenses: tobacco etc.
32. Private room
- Discipline of poverty:
 - ** personal possessions:
33. Testament
34. Administration deeds and fruits
 - ** common use
35. Asking permissions
- bb) vows of chastity
36. Individual relationship with women
 - * building arrangement
37. The parlor
38. The domestic
- cc) vows of obedience
 - * effective:
39. Readiness
 - * affective:
40. Criticism
- b) religious observances:
 - * daily observances
 - ** Exercises: common regulation:
41. Morning arising
42. Morning prayer
43. Morning meditation
44. Mass celb. or assist.
45. Thanksgiving
46. Breakfast: silence
47. Noon particular examen.
48. Noon diner
49. Reading at meals
50. Reading: Holy Scripture and Imitation
51. Reading of Necrologium
52. Prayers at meals
53. Divine office
54. Evening adoration
55. Supper: reading

- 56. Night prayer
- 57. Curfew
- 58. Ringing of the bell
- ** Exercises: private regulation:
- 59. Private exercises
- * silence:
- 60. Great silence
- 61. Regular places
- * garb:
- 62. Inside House
- 63. Outside house
- * cloister
- 64. Passive cloister
- ** active:
- 65. Permission
- 66. Family attachment
- 67. Family visits
- 68. Theatre
- * monthly observances
- 69. Monthly retreat
- 70. Bi-monthly coulpe
- * yearly observances
- 71. Annual retreat
- 72. Public reading of constitutions
- c) piety:
- 73. In attending prayers (haste, attitude)
- 74. Mass celebration
- 75. Thanksgiving
- d) urbanity
- 76. Table
- 77. Visitors
- 78. With each other⁶

This typewritten formulary served as a basic reference tool. Hand-written additions and comments of a visitor have made selected questions even more specific. Most of such detailed instructions abound in quotations from the Constitutions and Rules (version of 1926) which makes it clear that they could have been written in the last few years of superior general Augustin Dontenwill (d. 1931) or in the early years of superior general Fr Théodore Labouré (1932-1944). The first precisely

dated formulary which is preserved in the aforementioned archival fund was written in 1942. It already has a little more general structure, leaving some space to the individual approach of a visitor in his evaluation of Oblate communities. In reference to the values pertaining to community life the visitor was supposed to verify the “community spirit” (attachment to the congregation, religiousness, brotherhood and discipline), “regularity” in keeping the vows (they are simply named, without specific questions), “regularity” in keeping the observances (daily, monthly, yearly, silence, religious garb), “regularity” in keeping the cloister (passive and active, travelling standards and discipline, permissions) “piety” and “urbanity”⁷.

The questionnaires used by the officially appointed visitors prove that in the first half of the 20th century the question of “community” was not the center of investigation during a visitation and was emerging only in the context of a broader reality of religious observance and regularity. Community life was based on a set of clear principles which were possible to verify in an objective way. Community spirit was based on the individual faithfulness of each Oblate and on his respect for the Constitutions and Rules.

Such an approach was still common at the time of superior general Leo Deschâtelets, when the extension of the Oblate Congregation had reached its maximum in its whole 200-years history. A questionnaire dated as late as June 30th 1955, containing 130 questions, speaks directly about community life only in the 5th section, entitled “Religious Discipline” (*Discipline religieuse*). Question number 71 is the only one referring directly to the “Oblate and community spirit” (*Esprit Oblat et communautaire*)⁸. Thus there is a sense of continuity between the questions asked in the year 1955 and the earlier questionnaires, even those printed probably at the very beginning of the 20th century, with their interesting explanation of the purpose of canonical visitation:

Le présent formulaire n’est que pour faciliter l’accomplissement de la Règle et rendre la visite plus fructueuse; il ne faut donc pas qu’un sujet se croie dispensé de signaler un abus, par la raison que ni le questionnaire ni le Visiteur n’appelleraient son attention sur le point particulier où cet abus se produit. Ce n’est pas le questionnaire qui fait l’obligation; il la suppose⁹.

While the form sheet were meant to facilitate the accomplishment of the visitation, the official acts of visitations were frequently published and distributed among the Oblates, serving almost as a specific commentary to the Constitutions and Rules. It was hoped that such a “commentary” would be very valuable in the process of the formation of Oblate identity because it referred to the concrete examples of religious life and named necessary improvements. The visitor usually praised the fidelity and zeal and at the same time criticized the abuses contrasting with the Oblate spirit. Let’s look at some examples.

Father Johannes Pietsch conducted in October and December of 1936 a canonical visitation of the Province of Poland. In the official act of visitation he spoke at length on the issue of community, underlining that the words apply not only to the just visited province but to the whole Congregation:

Parmi les vertus religieuses que vous avez à pratiquer, j’en recommande spécialement une : c’est la charité, l’union. C’est qu’il faut dans toute la Congrégation, ce qu’il faut particulièrement dans votre province, c’est cet esprit de Congrégation qui consiste dans la forte cohésion de tous ses membres et dans l’application de tous à subordonner le concours individuel à l’effort de l’ensemble et à la direction commune émané de la Règle et des Supérieurs. Cet esprit-là suppose et résume la discipline religieuse, la piété, le lien cordialement fraternel, l’abnégation de soi, la confiance aux Supérieurs. Et il exclut personnelisme, l’attache déréglée à ses propres idées, l’indépendance de tout lien religieux. Dans les litanies après l’examen particulier, notre Fondateur nous fait prier : *ut ardeamus igne Dei*, et il nous fait ajouter aussitôt : *ut simus in Christo cor unum et anima una*, et sur son lit de mort, il nous a recommandé une dernière fois les deux grandes vertus caractéristique de l’Oblat : zèle des âmes au dehors, charité fraternelle au sein de nos communautés, et j’y ajoute dans toute la province. Vous savez qu’il y a eu des déficiences sur ce point parmi vous. Mettons-le sur le compte, non de la mauvaise volonté, mais de la diversité naturelle des caractères et de la fragilité humaine. Mais travaillons tous, Supérieurs et sujets à les éliminer. Ne rappelons plus les choses douloureuses du passé, mais tenons-nous en au présent, à ce que chacun est et fait actuellement. Rien ne doit vous tenir plus au cœur que le développement de votre province ; sa force sera dans son unité, tandis que les dissensions seraient le plus grand obstacle à son épanouisse-

ment. Demandez donc souvent à Dieu et à notre Mère Immaculée ut simus in Christo cor unum et anima una et que chacun fasse tous ses efforts pour établir cette union des esprits et des cœurs¹⁰.

In June and August 1937 Fr Pietsch was also responsible for the canonical visitation of the province of Italy¹¹. Speaking about the formation process the visitor urged the formators to be in every way exemplary and zealous priests and religious. This comment was in no way innovative – such words could have been transcribed for the benefit of every major seminary, religious or diocesan. When it came to the Oblate aspect of formation Fr Pietsch wrote though:

Finalmente voi educate i futuri Oblati. Fate loro dunque conoscere la nostra famiglia religiosa, il nostro santo Fondatore, gli anziani della Congregazione, la sua storia gloriosa, le sue meravigliose missioni. Vi sono certi giorni dell'anno in cui non farete torto all'insegnamento se per alcuni minuti vi tratterrete su certi ricordi storici, idonei a far meglio conoscere ed amare la Congregazione ed a confermare i vostri alunni nella loro vocazione. Questo deve farsi soprattutto nella scuola apostolica affinché gli apostolini capiscano che non si trovano in un collegio qualunque, ma in un seminario di futuri religiosi ed apostoli¹².

In this passage one might notice a significant silence on the issue of “Oblate community”. Specific Oblate formation according to the visitor meant the admiration of Oblate history and missions. Community life was probably considered something so obvious, spontaneous and natural that it was not mentioned in the official document as an aspect of a specifically Oblate formation. In fact, a little further, in the section entitled “Religious life” (*Vita religiosa*), one reads:

Ma generalmente tutti, Superiori e sudditi collaborano lealmente e unitamente al progresso della provincia. La preghiera dell'esame particolare: *Ut simus in Christo cor unum et anima una*, non è per loro una vana parola. Quando dopo lunghe e faticose campagne apostoliche ritornate nelle vostre case, dovete potervi ristabilire in questo spirito di famiglia che costituisce il segno caratteristico delle nostre comunità e che sono stato felice d'incontrar tra di voi. *Custodi hanc voluntatem, Deus Israel!*¹³

These words were placed in a context of a general exhortation to be faithful to their religious vows and prayer. The visitor has also reminded them of the necessity to maintain the spirit of charity between Oblate Fathers and Brothers, who form one community¹⁴.

One of the most striking reflections on community expressed in the 1930s was included in the acts of visitation of the Oblate missions of the Canadian North-West by superior general Théodore Labouré. Despite the obvious difference in the context of the missionary work in Northern Canada, the following remarks seem to be contrary to the general notion of the priority of community life in the Oblate tradition. Fr Labouré seems to suggest that in some cases the priority should be given to missionary zeal, even at the cost of community life:

Il y a quinze ou vingt ans, paraît-il, l'Administration Générale, voyant que la régularité et la vie religieuse étaient bien exposées dans les petites résidences et les stations, donna comme directive de rappeler nos Pères dispersés sur les réserves indiennes et de les grouper dans des maisons où ils jouiraient des avantages de la vie commune et d'où ils sortiraient de temps à autre pour visiter leurs missions respectives.

Nous savons, soit dit en passant, que cette méthode a été et est encore en vigueur chez d'autres Congrégations. Mais elle n'a jamais été, que nous sachions, une méthode Oblate, et ce n'est certainement pas à elle que nous devons nos belles missions, pas plus que le titre dont nous sommes si fiers de « spécialistes des missions difficiles »

La mesure prise substituait au ministère indien, consacré par des années d'expérience, le ministère employé chez les Blancs, et cela sans faire attention au caractère de nos gens, ni aux circonstances spéciales de leur vie et de leur coutumes.

Loin de ses Indiens la plupart du temps, se contentant d'aller un jour ou deux visiter à tour de rôle l'une ou l'autre de ses missions, le Père ne pouvait plus avoir l'influence et l'autorité qu'il exerçait autrefois car, en pays indien, plus que partout ailleurs, il faut que le missionnaire soit en contact fréquent ou continu avec ses ouailles, qu'il connaisse individuellement et, pour ainsi dire, qu'il vive de leur vie ; (...).

Qu'avons-nous donc gagné en abandonnant notre vie sur les réserves indiennes ? Du confort matériel : oui. Car dans une maison de ville ou dans une belle école du Gouvernement où rien ne manque depuis l'eau courante jusqu'à l'électricité et le chauffage central la vie est

bien plus agréable que sur une réserve indienne où le missionnaire, seul avec ses ouailles, doit se contenter de leur dénuement et partager leur pauvreté et leur misère.

Nous avons ensuite gagné des loisirs. – Mais qu'en faisons-nous ? – Que l'on veuille bien se rappeler le temps perdu en visites inutiles et souvent dangereuses, dans la lecture de deux, trois ou quatre journaux quotidiens et Dieu sait combien d'autres revues, dans des parties de cartes qui non seulement occupent innocemment les instants de nos récréations mais encore durent des heures entières et parfois se prolongent pendant la nuit durant le grand silence devenue lettre morte, ou bien se jouent chez des « amis » !

Il est certain que le bon exemple de ses frères et l'appui d'une vie commune pieuse et régulière sont d'un grand secours à l'Oblat missionnaire pour le rendre plus fidèle à la Règle et à Dieu, et pour le préserver de la négligence qui l'entraînerait à l'abandon de ces pratiques de piété dont il a plus besoin que les autres et qui doivent faire sa force et son soutien. – Mais encore une fois cette vie de communauté à laquelle on a sacrifié l'intérêt de nos missions a-t-elle été ce qu'elle devait être ? A-t-elle amené une amélioration notable dans notre vie spirituelle ? Somme-nous meilleurs et plus stricts religieux que nos anciens qui ont passé leur vie à parcourir nos plaines ? Ou bien encore sommes-nous meilleurs que nous ne l'étions nous-mêmes il y a quinze ou vingt ans ?

Ensuite est-il bien vrai que l'isolement de nos anciens missionnaires au milieu de leurs Indiens ait nuit soit à la régularité de leur vie religieuse soit à l'avancement de leur âme ? Qui pourra soutenir que les Taché, les Faraud, les Grandin, les Clut, les Grouard et tant d'autres ne furent pas des hommes de Dieu et des religieux modèles ? – Et sans aller si loin, combien en avons-nous rencontrés durant notre voyage qui, perdus au fond de nos Vicariats, seuls ou avec un Frère convers, joignent à une régularité des novices le zèle le plus ardent pour les âmes ? (...)

Non, non, Révérend et bien chers Pères, nous ne pouvons croire que notre ministère compris comme autrefois soit un obstacle à l'observance de nos Saintes Règles. Nul ne fut plus Oblat que notre Vénéré Fondateur, et nul ne tint plus que lui à la vie religieuse de ses fils ; et pourtant il accepta les Missions Indiennes avec leur petits postes, et toute sa vie leur porta un amour de prédilection. Il savait que le caractère du ministère indien, les distances, le manque de personnel ne permettait pas aux Pères de vivre en communauté ; mais il savait

aussi que ses fils, animés d'un vrai zèle pour leur propre sanctification, se faisaient un devoir de conscience d'être fidèles à leur Règles jusque dans les moindres détails (...).

L'expérience de presque un siècle a démontré au delà de toute évidence que pour l'Oblat, religieux et missionnaire, la vie passée au milieu des Indiens peut fort bien s'harmoniser avec les obligations de la vie religieuse. Mais il faut le vouloir. (...) ¹⁵.

Fr Labouré suggested that over the past fifteen or twenty years the Oblates may have taken the wrong direction in their choice to place community life above missionary zeal and urged them to return to the practice of a zealous missionary life, even at the cost of religious regularity, which wasn't always an expression of faithfulness to the Constitutions and Rules ¹⁶.

These are obviously only a few chosen examples of the numerous canonical visitations and the documentation the visitors had produced. The visitations continued even despite the difficult years of the World War II ¹⁷. Among other missions visit was paid again to the Canadian Great North. In 1942 Fr Anthime Desnoyers visited the Vicariate of Mackenzie and in his acts of visitation he returned to the question of the difficult relation between religious observance (including community life and religious regularity) and missionary zeal ¹⁸. This document is quite peculiar, because after a generally positive evaluation of the Vicariate the author added to it an *Appendice à l'acte de visite du Maxkenzie sous forme de circulaire aux missionnaires des Esquimaux* in which he declared his will to be more sincere and straightforward in decrying some abuses concerning especially religious regularity and community life. The appendix-letter was addressed to the most northern missionaries, those serving the Inuit. Fr Desnoyers underlined the heroism and dedication of the Oblates, but also the prudence of the early generation of missionaries, which had ceded recently to an excessive zeal ¹⁹. The quantity of latest travels and foundations had resulted in serious physical and spiritual difficulties for some Oblates. They had become taken by an external ministry, with detriment to a faithful religious and priestly life: "in some missions none of the spiritual exercises is performed in common" ²⁰. Missionaries had begun to deceive themselves with apparently justified reasoning:

*Nous sommes ici pour les Esquimaux, et non pour nous ; nous devons donc tout sacrifier pour eux – Même le salut ou la perfection de votre âme, pensez-vous ?... Les exercices ne sont pas essentiels ; nos voyages, nos travaux manuels, notre vie elle-même consacrée aux missions, sont une prière et la glorification de Dieu ! – Oui, à la condition que ces entreprises soient absolument nécessaires au jugement des supérieurs et qu'on sauvegarde au moins la substance des observances religieuses et sacerdotales. (...) Cet étrange et triste état d'âme m'impressionna péniblement dès mon arrivée sur la côte et mes premiers contacts avec vous. (...) Ces premières impressions se changèrent bientôt en convictions objectives quand je reçus des aveux aussi pénibles que ceux-ci : Chez moi, il n'y a plus rien de religieux, plus rien des principes et des pratiques qu'on m'a inculqués au noviciat et au scolasticat. – Nous nous sommes égarés : le missionnaire chez nous a tué ou absorbé le religieux*²¹.

The successor of Fr Labouré was elected during the General Chapter of 1947. The last superior general elected “for life”, Fr Leo Deschâtelets, during 25 years of his ministry visited personally almost every community in the Congregation²². Fr Drouart has underlined that from the beginning of his mandate as superior general Fr Deschâtelets desired to be the animator of the Congregation and not its administrator. With this purpose in mind he wrote hundreds of pages of circulars and thousands of personal letters. During his travels across the Oblate world he focused on “fatherly visits” (*visites paternelles*), leaving to the other appointed representatives of the general administration the official canonical visitations²³. The latter were still numerous and were conducted in a traditional fashion, especially in the 1950s²⁴. Let's quote a few examples.

Between October of 1950 and April of 1951 Fr Michael O’Ryan conducted a canonical visitation of St. Mary’s Province²⁵. “In according with the requirements of our holy Rule, Art. 507” he sent to the province a detailed report of the visitation signed in November of 1951. In the Introduction he underlined once more the importance of visitation:

In the eyes of some religious, a canonical visitation may appear to be a very routine affair, a matter of no great importance, whose advantages, usually are quite negligible; something that need not be taken seriously. An attitude such as this is pregnant with danger, and likely

to bring upon such as reason along these lines, and act accordingly, consequences, which may well prove to be everlastingly irreparable. I ask you therefore my dear Fathers and Brothers, to accept this act of visitation in a spirit of faith and humility. Its sole purpose is to help promote your personal holiness of life and to beget within you greater zeal for the sanctification of the souls committed to your care²⁶.

While the visitor praised the spirit of community which he had experienced at St. Charles Scholasticate²⁷ and in many other houses of the Province, he had to express also this warning:

There are some religious, however, who once the Superior happens to be absent, imagine that they may, with impunity, abandon all their religious exercises, and play fast and loose, with their inviolable moral obligations, in matters connected with their Rule, and even in regard to their vows. This precisely is, as I see things, the one great danger which confronts those who are constrained to lead a solitary life, and who, in practice, have fallen away from their first fervour. To such as these, (if any there be), I would say, put yourself this question, '*quo vado? Whither am I going?*'. This singular mode of life, wherein one enjoys such a measure of freedom from restraint, such personal autonomy and independence; a life, the goodness or viciousness of which depends so much upon the good-will of the individual, is fraught with difficulties and dangers, so serious, that only the grace of God within the soul, is capable of preserving His priest from the most lamentable excess.

One sometimes hears it said (as if connoting accurately, how far certain religious have fallen away from the spirit of their calling) that '*they are just secular priests*'. I deny the accuracy of this statement. The proper connotation is, that they are either good or bad religious – faithful or faithless, and not, that they are just good Seculars. A Secular priest has not contracted the special obligations of the religious life and, consequently, he is not bound by them²⁸.

Slowly the theme of community life began to emerge as an independent issue, although still in a strict relation with the broader context of religious observance. The third section of the act of visitation of the first Province of France, written by Fr Paul Pérone in 1952, was dedicated to the religious life²⁹, analogous to many other similar documents

already quoted. It begins with reflection on the faithfulness in fulfilling religious vows, with precious practical advises. Then there appears a second subtitle, “Community life” (*Vie communautaire*). What is the content of that passage? The author states first that the vows can be practiced only within the context of religious observance, piety and ascetics:

Ces observances sont minutieusement détaillées dans la deuxième partie de nos saintes Règles, aux chapitres deuxième et troisième. Par amour pour sa Congrégation, pour l'honneur de la Province à laquelle il est attaché, par respect de sa parole d'honneur, qui n'est point chiffon de papier, un religieux doit s'accrocher de toute son âme à ces diverses observances garantes de son salut éternel. Il montre ainsi la trempe de son caractère, le sérieux de l'amour qu'il prétend donner à Dieu³⁰.

Thus the missionary should give priority to his spiritual life over various pastoral activities (this statement is corroborated by a quotation from the writings of St. John of the Cross)³¹. An Oblate returning to the community after an apostolic engagement should pay attention to use well the time for spiritual reinforcement, and those permanently living with the community should not forget the importance of regularity and scrupulously fulfill all the spiritual exercises prescribed by the Constitutions and Rules³². These are among others the morning rising at 5:25 a.m., the observance of silence, spiritual reading, etc. Such was the general idea of the essence of community life according to the act of visitation of the first Province of France in 1951. It was completed by a short reflection on fraternal charity:

Charité Fraternelle – elle est l'un des charmes de vos communautés et, sans hésitation l'on peut affirmer que vous avez jalousement observé la consigne de notre vénéré Fondateur. Il ne faudrait cependant pas confondre charité et camaraderie. Il convient de se souvenir qu'il ne peut y avoir de vraie et profonde charité sans respect mutuel. Or l'usage du « tutoiement », même de Père à Frère et réciproquement, paraît s'opposer à cette surnaturelle charité. L'impression des étrangers doit être assez pénible surtout quand les sujets se permettent cette liberté vis à vis de leur Supérieur. Soyez extrêmement sévères sur ce point, bien chers Pères et Frères. Croyez-moi, la réputation de votre maison est ici en jeu³³.

The two areas constantly emerging among many aspects of canonical visits were the properly “Oblate” formation at the scholasticates and the relation between missionary zeal and religious observance. The first concern could be illustrated by the documentation of the visitation conducted between November 8th and December 5th of 1957 by Fr Daniel Albers at the Roman Scholasticate, considered to be especially blessed by the vicinity of the superior general and the general administration³⁴. Surprisingly, the acts of this visitation are focused predominantly on intellectual and spiritual formation and again the community is mentioned only casually: “Les scolastiques semblent jouir de plus de liberté qu’autrefois. A eux d’en profiter pour se former! Ils doivent profiter de tout ce que la communauté présente: exercices, conseils, circonstances actuelles, pour former en eux le prêtre et le religieux”³⁵.

The question of priorities – “mission” or “regularity” – emerged again during the visitation of the Vicariate of Missions of Gouard in 1963³⁶. Fr Leo Deschâtelets had described briefly in the introductory letter the gravity of the situation: the decline of vocations and its consequences for missionary initiatives of the Oblates. The superior general had also suggested that the Oblates need to deserve new vocations through their more precise fidelity to the Constitutions and Rules, missionary zeal and evangelical radicalism³⁷.

Fr Servel, who had conducted this visitation, on many pages of his report praised the missionary heroism of the Oblates who established the missions in northern Canada. Through conversations and personal observation he wanted also to understand better the reality of “renewal” or “aggiornamento”, which were the key-words among the Oblates of that time. His counsels were grounded on the well-established tradition: the fertile apostolate must be based on divine grace³⁸. The Oblates do not have to invent ways of obtaining such grace – the ways are described by the tradition of the Church and the Constitutions and Rules. The spiritual exercises in common have the benefit of the supervision and vigilance of a superior over the members of his community. While this ministry should be performed in the spirit of charity, there is no escape from the twists and turns of human nature, which needs a certain degree of authority over its personal choices, in order to ensure spiritual progress. The current Oblate reality in Grouard was however different: the common spiritual exercises had almost entirely disappeared³⁹. Some defended

this situation speaking about the priority of missionary action over the religious regularity lived within a community. Others have pointed out that the missionaries are often overworked and exhausted, thus the regular rhythm of prayer constitutes one more burden and does not help in the concrete pastoral situation. To these objections the visitor responded using traditional argumentation concerning the real fruitfulness of the ministry – it does not depend on the quantity of actions but their quality and the latter is always founded on a serious interior life⁴⁰.

There was however one more argument which preoccupied the visitor greatly: some Oblates hearing that a revision of the Constitutions and Rules was in progress had begun to consider the old text of the Constitutions irrelevant, including their regulations of the spiritual and community life, all aimed at religious regularity⁴¹. The response of the visitor is worthy of a quotation:

Oui, une telle adaptation est nécessaire, et l'Eglise elle-même le demande, comme il a été assez dit au cours de ces pages. A cette adaptation, des spécialistes travaillent. Mais qu'on ne se fasse pas illusion sur le résultat final de leurs travaux. Si, avant le Concile, on eut pu parfois rencontrer chez nous quelque tendance à une certaine mitigation de la Règle, après le Concile qui pousse impétueusement l'Eglise vers la pureté de ses origines évangéliques, pour mieux s'adapter précisément aux temps modernes, cette attitude devient impensable. La révision de nos Règles, après le Concile, ne pourra déboucher que sur une réforme, c'est-à-dire un retour à la forme première ; réforme qui nous permettra d'assimiler les splendides possibilités qu'offre le monde moderne, alors qu'une triste mitigation nous condamnerait à subir les tares dont il souffre.

En tout cas, l'Eglise ne permettra jamais que, par un relâchement dans leur vie de piété, des missionnaires jusqu'ici magnifiques, soient coupés de la grâce prévenante et adjuvante qui a fait leur force et assuré leur succès⁴².

This text proves that the Congregation – despite the effort of visitors who struggled to maintain the unity and observance of the Rule – was undergoing a profound evolution. The evolution was based on individual choices of many Oblates who deliberately turned away from the traditional norms which so far were the essence of the religious

community, as understood over the past decades. As a consequence the whole edifice of community life had begun to tumble, at least in considerable areas of the Congregation.

As mentioned above, Fr Deschâtelets was the last superior general who had been chosen to exercise his ministry in the Oblate Congregation “for life”. The general chapter in 1972 for the first time in Oblate history had elected a new general for a specific period of time⁴³. It must be remembered however that the process which led to this decision was launched already in 1959 when the Chapter of that year called for a post-capitular commission with the task of a revision of the Constitutions and Rules⁴⁴. The next Chapter dedicated a considerable amount of time to the discussion of the proposed revised version of the Rule. After further amendments and corrections, added by the capitulants and yet another post-capitular commission, the new version of the Constitutions and Rules was accepted *ad experimendum* by the Congregation for Religious by the decree of July 29th 1966⁴⁵ and announced as such by the superior general on August 2nd of the same year⁴⁶. Constitution 132 of the year 1966 stated, that “the superior general is elected by the General Chapter for a period of twelve years, and may be re-elected once for a further six years”⁴⁷. This constitution was modified again and the successor of Fr. Deschâtelets, Fr. Richard Hanley, was elected in 1972 for a six-year term.

This longer digression was meant to underline the symbolic importance of the evolution of Oblate structures which took place during the last years of the generalate of Fr. Deschâtelets. The Chapter of 1966 was compared to other major turning points in the history of the Congregation, e.g. the Chapter of 1850 which had divided the Congregation into provinces, or to the Chapter of 1861, which had elected the Founder⁴⁸. Notably it dedicated also considerable time to the reflection on the Oblate community.

The Chapter was convoked by the circular letter of Fr Deschâtelets signed on January 25th 1965⁴⁹. At the beginning of March in another circular letter the superior general announced the outline of the report to be submitted from the provinces and vicariates of the Congregation. The second part of the outline was dedicated to the “life of the members of the province” and its first section aimed at the description of the community life:

I. – Esteem of Religious Community Life (Charity)

1. General attitude to problems arising from the religious life.

2. – Religious community life in the Province.

1*) Community prayers; suggestions for a new Vade–mecum or Manual of Prayers and Oblate Ritual.

2*) Recitation in common of the Holy Office; Fathers and Brothers.

3*) Daily mass: individual, community; concelebration.

4*) Reading during meals.

5*) Retreats, annual and monthly.

6*) Community gatherings: coulpe conferences: spiritual, pedagogical, pastoral.

7*) Devotion to the Blessed Eucharist, to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, to the Blessed Virgin.

3. – Attachment to the Congregation, to its ideal, to its spiritual and apostolic progress, to its recruitment. On this latter point, please indicate any progress or regression as to personnel and means of insuring its recruiting. Kindly give serious attention to this subject as, generally speaking, we are at a stand-still if not in a perilous position⁵⁰.

The traditional equity between community life and religious regularity was maintained in the proposed scheme; and the two volumes of *Missions* of 1966 provide a rich source for the panorama of the life of the Oblate communities across the world⁵¹. The general picture is that of the growing diversity of experiences. Only a few examples will be quoted here. In the province of France Midi none of the communities practiced the traditional rhythm of daily religious routine⁵². In the Province of France Nord the Oblates suggested that religious life should not be confused with a nearly monastic observance. Instead, for many Oblates it was essentially a fraternal life in a community open to all people⁵³. However, despite those quite radical views, the Oblates of the third French province, France-Est, were quite content with the traditional notion of an observant and regular religious community⁵⁴ and the provincial of the Anglo-Irish province stated: “In general, all the members of the Province are anxious to harmonize the obligations of their Religious Life and the demands of the active ministry. (...) The prescribed daily spiritual exercises are faithfully and regularly observed in all the Houses of the Province”⁵⁵. The Oblates of the German Province noticed an increasing consciousness of personal responsibility for

the quality of the religious and community life⁵⁶. In Belgium there was a noticeable difference between the attitudes of the older and younger Oblates towards community: for the older ones community life meant participation in common spiritual exercises; the younger Oblates desired more personal sharing and exchange of the pastoral experiences, they were much more liberal towards the idea of regular prayer and religious obedience⁵⁷. Others insisted on relaxing the strict rules concerning the rhythm of daily prayer and expected a renewal of the Oblate ceremonies, including the formula of oblation, so that they could be placed closer to the daily experiences of the people and less rigidly liturgical⁵⁸. Once more time they repeated:

Il y a certainement un progrès en esprit communautaire. Celui-ci ne consiste pas seulement dans une préoccupation d'être ensemble pour les exercices (à ce point de vue il y a peut-être moins de régularité qu'autrefois), mais bien dans un désir sincère de s'entraider spirituellement et apostoliquement, de montrer de l'intérêt pour le travail des autres et pour la situation de ses confrères, de recherche en commun pour la solution des problèmes spirituels humains et apostoliques⁵⁹.

The provincial of the Italian Province noticed among the Italian Oblates some consequences of the universal crisis of supernatural values (*so-prannaturale*). The strict rules of the religious life were considered already an old-fashioned formalism. More value was attached to the profound and personal experiences of religious ideal⁶⁰. In Spain the Oblates faced certain tension as the changes brought by the Council and the planned revision of the Oblate Constitutions and Rules had not yet matured⁶¹. In Holland, while relations in the communities were cordial, the announced revision of the Oblate way of life was expected with a hope that it would result in a renewed appreciation of the value of the religious life⁶². In Austria some Fathers were facing a crisis of values in the context of the contemporary critical attitude towards some aspects of religious vocation⁶³.

More or less the same ideas were expressed in the reports of the Canadian provinces – the need to simplify the Oblate life, to share pastoral experiences and to work as a team⁶⁴, to adapt to the new ideals proposed by the Council and to be close with the youth especially affected by contemporary turmoil of values⁶⁵. A separate issue was that of missionaries living alone in the distant northern missions. Loneliness

was experienced painfully by some of them⁶⁶. Those working in a parish were unable to maintain fully the regularity prescribed by the old rule, as pastoral duties required more and more active participation and presence among the people⁶⁷.

These are just brief examples of some concerns shared by some superiors during the Chapter of 1966. Not all the Provinces faced the same crisis of the traditional forms of community life. The theme of community was however emerging more and more as an issue which deserved a thorough reflection. In his statement concluding the General Chapter of 1966 Fr Deschâtelets stated:

Prêchons aussi la vie communautaire: c'est l'orientation du Chapitre général. Prêchons la vie d'union entre nous; union pour la prière, union par la prière, autour du saint sacrifice de la Messe; union pour l'apostolat, union dans la vie de communauté. Que notre vie de prière personnelle se fonde dans la vie communautaire, qu'elle aide à la vie communautaire, qu'elle l'appuie, qu'elle la soulève. Il faut même donner au concept de la vie communautaire sa signification la plus haute et la plus surnaturelle: sans cela, combien de nôtres auraient l'impression d'être toujours seuls. Cependant, s'ils veulent bien y penser, ils ne sont jamais seuls. Ils son unis à tous les membres de la Congrégation. Il y a là tout de même, au point de vue réaliste, un problème très sérieux parce que nos communautés plus grandes ne sont pas si nombreuses que cela. Il y a là toute une mystique à développer, car nous vivons seuls à tant d'endroits⁶⁸.

Between the Chapters of 1966 and 1972 the theme of community was one of the key issues discussed among Oblates, often in the context of the revised text of the Constitutions and Rules. An article dedicated to this subject appeared in almost every issue of the review "Etudes Oblates" of that period. Already in 1966 Fr Maurice Gilbert published a long study on the new text of the Constitutions and Rules⁶⁹. The fifth section was dedicated to apostolic community, beginning with the original idea of the Founder, and summarizing also an evolution of this ideal along the centuries in the universal Church. In correspondence with the impulses flowing from the Council Vatican II, the new text of the Oblate Constitutions was suggesting a more intensified community life, uniting Oblates not only at the level of an external practice of piety, but also in a more personal way, leading them to the community of apostolic action⁷⁰.

“Etudes Oblats” of 1967 offered interestingly a voice in the discussion on the Founder’s “love of solitude”⁷¹. However, already in 1968 two new articles advocated the reinforcement of the bonds of community, which was considered crucial for the future of the Congregation. Francesco Trusso suggested that the old Oblate Rule had ceased a long time ago to influence the daily life of the Congregation. The authority of the new Constitutions accepted *ad experimentum* was still too limited and was unable to inspire a positive renewal of Oblate communities. Such a situation demanded a spontaneous dedication of all individuals for the sake of stronger community life. It was a necessary condition permitting the Oblates to fulfill faithfully the demands of their vocation in time of transition. Fr Trusso underlined some of the most important aspects of community life, namely the collective prayer, dialogue, regularity of life⁷².

Henri du Halgouët offered some insights on the theme of community based on his recent experiences with the ecumenical community of Taizé and the Anglican community of Lee Abbey⁷³. The basic experience was that of a refreshing simplicity in both institutions, apparently contrary to the heavy tradition of Oblate legislation which was preoccupied exclusively with the preservation and strengthening of structures. Fr Halgouët has reminded that the crucial role in community life belongs to the Holy Spirit and a charismatic renewal. In this context the new Constitutions and Rules were disappointing and one of his comments suggests that there was indeed a polarity of opinions within the Congregation concerning the direction of the desired renewal:

Que ceux d’entre nous qui ont milité pendant toute leur vie d’Oblats pour des communautés authentiques ne soient pas trop déçus de voir nos Constitutions encore loin de l’idéal entrevu. Ne retournons pas inconsciemment au légalisme. Le dialogue, la communication, l’amitié ne seront jamais le résultat d’une loi. D’autre part, les exigences de l’apostolat donneront toujours à nos équipes et à nos rencontres un caractère provisoire : avec Taizé il faut redécouvrir cette valeur. Mais il s’en faut de beaucoup que ces valeurs soient comprises et acceptées par la majorité des Oblats. Certains parmi les anciens, qui furent au premier plan et qui se sont acquis l’estime de tous, craignent que ce nouveau style ne fasse trop bon marché de l’ascèse traditionnelle, du silence, du recueillement, de l’obéissance, de la charité en-

vers tous. Leur vie témoigne qu'ils ont su communiquer et se faire des amis, dans le cadre ancien. (...) Mais il en est beaucoup d'autres (plus nombreuses sans doute que les deux autres groupes réunis) qui sont réticents à s'engager dans le dialogue communautaire ou même s'y refusent carrément, simplement parce qu'ils en soupçonnent toutes les exigences pour leur individualisme. Ceux-là sont appelés tout spécialement à la conversion intérieure, à ce retournement de leur perspectives et de leur attitudes, sans laquelle il n'y a pas de renouveau possible, et pas même de survie pour la Congrégation⁷⁴.

It is an interesting observation indeed. According to the author, most Oblates were interested neither in a radical renewal nor in preserving the tradition, they simply wanted to protect their tranquility and continue an individualistic lifestyle.

The year 1969 brought a selection of sources on fraternal charity among the Oblates – the passages were chosen from circular letters of superiors generals, beginning with Eugene de Mazenod, up to the times of Théodore Labouré⁷⁵. John O'Regan in the same issue of "Etudes Oblates" of 1969 expressed a sort of frustration with the subject matter: "Writing about community today has become something of a literary industry and it is practically impossible to keep abreast of all that is being said on the topic. It would be safe to say that never before has mankind had such a longing for community and never has its fulfillment been so frustratingly thwarted"⁷⁶. His outlook was more psychological, related to a general knowledge of interpersonal relations. He also gave an interesting portrait of the current situation of the Oblates:

Right now there is much questioning as to whether we have anything or anything much to say to the world. There is a frantic searching about for new forms of community expressions that will give better and more graphic manifestation to the world of the ideals we stand for. This searching is not a hobby for the dedicated few nor the preoccupation of a coterie. It is a Church-wide search that must engage the minds and hearts of all religious. Some maverick renewal is being suggested and it seems that some communities are living without the sense of history. Wildcat experimentation cannot claim the name of renewal but at least it commends itself in that something is being done. The greatest sin of all would be to do nothing⁷⁷.

Fr O'Regan reminded us that the Oblates had a very good starting

point in this struggle. Despite all the deficiencies the family spirit was a reality in the Congregation – the ideal “to feel at home” in every house in one’s Province or even in the whole Oblate world was practiced long before the new Constitutions and Rules had made it explicit and mandatory. He referred also to the previous year’s article of Fr du Halgouët, enthusiastic about the ecumenical experiences of Taizé and Lee Abbey. Without criticizing the author he underlined the need to realize that many aspects of community life longed for in the quest for renewal were already present in the Oblate tradition: “(...) it does appear to me that we have not explored the full richness of our own home and heart. Our old Rule made ample provisions for community dialogue, yet, as Father Gilbert wryly notes in ‘Oblate Life’, we did not implement its directives”. And he added: “We have much to learn from Taizé, it is true, and the spirit of Prior Schutz and his brethren has much to commend itself to us. On the other hand, we should not look lightly on our own Congregation’s talents, nor should we sell ourselves short in the role that we Oblates have to play in the Church and in the world”⁷⁸.

In 1970 the editors of “Etudes Oblates” decided to publish a conference given the previous year by Fr Fernand Jetté to the superiors of the St. Joseph Province in Montreal⁷⁹. Fr Jetté began with a phenomenological description of the current crisis of the community life and then suggested some solutions for a future renewal – on the level of the local community (courage to live the Gospel in true fraternal spirit), on the personal level (conversion of every member of the community towards the values of the Gospel), and finally on the level of the whole province, with respect for the plurality of experiences and patience in front of inevitable “faux pas”⁸⁰.

In the next two issues of “Etudes Oblates” it was Fr Marcello Zago who offered his contribution to the debate on the topic of community⁸¹. His point of departure was also a description of a crisis faced by many Oblate communities. In this context he spoke about the Oblate charism and spirituality of evangelization and their relation to community life. In his opinion, the link between those realities determined Oblate identity – the Oblates do not evangelize as separate individuals but as a community, a team, and all the Oblate structures should bear this communitarian mark⁸². Even if many great Oblate missionaries have not lived in communities, they may have been able to participate in the

community life of the whole Congregation on a more profound level, embracing the human, missionary and Christian dimension. According to Fr Zago, the regularity and participation in the common spiritual exercises does not describe all the possibilities of the fruitful and kerygmatic communitarian lifestyle⁸³. Father Zago insisted also in his second article on the key-role of the community in the renewal of the Congregation⁸⁴. This latter reflection was based on the recent teaching of Pope Paul VI, on the new Oblate Constitutions and Rules and on some observations of the Oblate reality. The old, traditional style of community life, with its regularity and uniformity, belonged completely to the past. The contemporary successful experiences of a new way of practicing community life were based on the following principles: common missionary identity and dedication to the evangelization of the poor; simple and brotherly interpersonal relations; common vision of faith; dynamic growth and mutual inspiration by the values of Christ; readiness to be at the service of each person; capacity to be a prophetic sign to the world⁸⁵. Fr Zago was conscious that it is easier to write an article on community or on a desired renewal than to really experience one. But he felt it his duty to call the reader's attention to the true purpose of the institutional and legislative renewal of the Congregation – it should serve community life, without which the structures, even perfected, would be in the long run completely ineffective⁸⁶.

In the meantime, the ongoing debate and sharing of ideas on the new style of living in a religious community⁸⁷ was extended to the entire Congregation; and it became part of the preparation for the General Chapter of 1972. The Pre-chapter commission had prepared a preliminary questionnaire and one of its sections was dedicated to questions on “apostolic religious community”:

During the last few years various factors, both internal and external, have contributed to modifications, and even complete changes, in the form of Community Life. There is a tendency to develop the gospel values within the community, as well as deeper and truer interpersonal relations. The apostolic community also tries to be open to the world and to become more incorporated within the human community. With reference to Community Life one may wonder why there exists a lowering in the feeling of belonging to the Congregation. Is there a veritable disaffection? Let it be noted that some members

may be strongly attached to their community for mere personal reasons, while living in it in a most individualistic way; on the other hand others will express their attachment to the Congregation by way of a total commitment to the religious life, conceived as a value in itself and a support for fulfilling their apostolic mission⁸⁸.

A number of questions followed this short introduction:

19. What has been done in your Province to better adapt the communities to the rhythm of the present day and the up-dated apostolate?

20. a. In your Province, are there new forms of Community Life?

b. What factors have led to the determination of these communities?

c. How are they composed

– sharing of the faith; desire of a more evangelical life; intercommunication and charity?

– human relations; attention to persons?

– apostolic undertakings, etc.?

d. Do you have priorities among these elements? How did they evolve?

e. Do your communities bear a specific Oblate character? Name it.

21. What is your opinion about the ‘multifunctional’ community, the community with many commitments?

a. About its necessity? What gives rise to the necessity?

b. About its spiritual animation?

c. About its rhythm of life? Interpersonal relations?

d. About its witnessing?

e. What influence does it have on the broader community? On recruitment? On the youth?

22. How and to what extent are your communities open to the world?

a. Incorporated in the milieu and participating with the natural community?

b. By adopting cooperators for the apostolate, and eventually getting them inserted within your community?

c. In what way can the Oblate community be a sign to the world?

23. a. Does the rhythm of life of your Oblate Communities, in their religious and apostolic dimension, give you satisfaction, even allowing for some weaknesses?

b. Do you feel that one may be attracted to a community which is not exclusively Oblate and why?

c. How does the Oblate community, in its religious and apostolic dimensions, fit with the Province and the Congregation as a whole?

d. In a practical way how does one show the attachment to the Province and Congregation?

24. a. How do you consider the role of a Superior in the community?

– a fraternal bond and spiritual animator?

– does he need to be the head of the pastoral group?

b. At the Provincial level, what is being done for the formation of Superiors, heads of groups, district superiors, district animators?

25. a. What are the various forms of community prayer in current use in your Province?

b. Do your communities insert their community prayer into the liturgical life of the Church? How?

c. If yes to above, then how do they value it?

26.a. To what extent do the isolated Oblates share in community life?

b. Have you experienced bringing isolated Oblates together? What binds such a group? How does it manifest itself? To what level and in what matters?

c. Does your Province have isolated missionaries?

– is it the usual situation of the Province or is it exceptional?

– how do they live community life?

d. During recent years, was there any attempt to provide community life for these isolated missionaries?

– What success did it have?

– What difficulties did you encounter?⁸⁹

It would be interesting to analyze all the responses of the Provinces, but it would require an additional and thorough study. Let it suffice now to remark, that before the General Chapter of 1972 closed its proceedings, the participants mandated the new general administration to work on a message on the theme of Oblate community⁹⁰. The general council responded promptly and the message was ready before the end of the same year. On the first page of the document the new superior general, Fr Richard Hanley, and other members of the council confessed their belief that “confidence in Oblate community” must be

“restored”⁹¹. They spoke about the essential place of community in the Oblate perception of religious lifestyle and the need for new experiments in community living. The first paragraph of that document continues to describe the painful contemporary situation:

For a good number of Oblates the present situation is one of insecurity and even agony. Many of the former elements of our lifestyle are no longer present: a daily schedule, including set times for prayer; the physical presence of many Oblates under the same roof; a large measure of separation from the world; an accent on the vertical relations of the individual toward the Superior, the regulations, the rule. The disappearance of these elements has brought confusion and suffering to older Oblates who greatly valued such structures because they found them beneficial. Many of our younger Oblates seek a style of community built around a more intimate degree of inter-personal sharing. They value spontaneity and shared spiritual experiences more than external order and conformity to the rule. They also suffer much from what appears to them as artificiality, impersonalism and a tendency to subordinate the person to the system⁹².

The general council was aware that one letter would not solve the problem⁹³, as community life goes through the same painful transformations as human society and the Church in general. Every Oblate was expected to look carefully at the signs of times in the light of the gospel. The negative aspects of the contemporary situation which the Oblates perceived were:

- superficial and casual contacts between people,
- a feeling of powerlessness in front of the forces of money and power which control the world,
- the consumer society marginalizing and oppressing the poor,
- people’s alienation, isolation and collective neurosis,
- lack of security and identity,
- desire of material possessions and a false social prestige

On the positive side there was a desire of expressing one’s own identity and unique personality, which needs fulfillment and acceptance in its uniqueness. There was a need to share and be co-responsible, to be integrated within a new group identity. Such realization of the modern

condition of men corresponded to the experience of the gospel in which Jesus Christ called people to a new community, based upon the reality of salvation. Thus the Oblates could discover a new meaning of their being in community:

- to offer the world “the sign of discipleship” and unity coming from the experience of Christ,
- to contest false values of the world by poverty and availability to others,
- to have an apostolic orientation as a community, based on the example of the first Christian community,
- to refuse senseless complaining and live in the present time with confidence and joy,
- to live in a communion of persons, in an atmosphere of personal growth and self-realization,
- “any type of community structure which sacrifices the individual person to something external to himself is not a genuine community, for ‘man is the end of institutions’ (Gaudium et Spes, n. 25)”
- to respect one’s uniqueness and personal charism,
- to create a web of positive relationships (as opposite to relations which are cold, distant, intermittent, questioning and criticizing),
- to accept the richness and variety of forms of community life, “according to missionary need and the desires of the persons involved”,
- to have a simple lifestyle, without the burden of the over-institutionalization,
- to share the resources with the poor and the needy,
- to pray in common and to be open to the variety of the experiences of prayer, in correspondence to the uniqueness of the community,

In the last section of the letter the issue under discussion was the future of the Oblate community and the whole Congregation. While many experiments of the new style of life as the religious community were in progress (unfortunately they are not described in the letter) there was a need to ensure that the community retains its Oblate identity through the practice of vows of poverty, chastity and obedience as well as maintaining the focus on priestly ministry and vocation. The Oblates were encouraged to welcome younger members and respect their sometimes radical viewpoints; but the latter were advised also to learn from the experience of the older generations. Thus the magnificent heritage of the Oblate tradition was expected to incite the wonderful development of

the missionary communities in the future, based on true fraternity and renewed apostolic missionary communities⁹⁴.

The evolution of the Congregation between 1926 and 1972 could be summarized in these two images – increasing crisis of the traditional ideal of religious observance and a slow departure from the historically supported criteria of Oblate identity. While this is just a general impression, based on the official documentation of the Congregation as well as on some reflections published by the Oblates in “*Etudes Oblates*”, one should also notice a growing diversity of experiences, both on an individual and provincial level. The growing difficulty concerning the question of community confirms the phenomenon of a decreasing unity of the Congregation in the 1950s and 1960s, a process which probably began exactly when the Congregation reached its maximum extension. Since the 1960s it became more and more difficult to address every Oblate with the same guide lines, as in the scheme of a canonical visitation, and this diversity was accepted and even appreciated as a sign of the times. The sense of insecurity caused by this shift of values was also persisting, causing suffering and a loss of Oblate identity among many individuals. To evaluate properly each of those experiences a more precise analysis of diverse immediate contexts would be required. Simplistic generalizations should be avoided. The decades between 1926 and 1966 cannot be dismissed as a period of simply external observance, as there are indications that true Oblate family atmosphere, based on evangelical experience, was a common factor in many communities. At the same time the search for deeper personal sharing and fraternity after 1966 had not resulted immediately in an improvement of Oblate communities. What should be appreciated however is the genuine effort of many Oblates to strengthen the bonds of unity among themselves in a difficult period of transition, faced not only by the Congregation, but by the universal Church and western society.

This article was aimed at providing an historical overview of some struggles related to the theme of community within the Oblate Congregation between 1926 and 1972. It was not meant to become a spiritual or theological reflection on the subject with all its richness which remains yet to be properly explored and evaluated. Especially interesting would be the question of the diverse understanding of community life in non-European cultures. The experiences which were most discussed

and which have influenced most the Congregation's legislation were those of the western and northern hemispheres (Western Europe, North America). As such they were clearly limited and could not be equated with the viewpoint of the whole Congregation. While it seems that only in the late 1960s the idea of a more fraternal community has emerged among the Oblates, it may be interesting perhaps to conclude this article with a reflection on "the Oblate family life", written by superior general Fr Louis Soullier after the canonical visitation of the British Province in 1893. The old-fashioned style should not prevent the readers from retrieving interesting insights and from asking a question about continuity of the Oblate tradition and the importance to struggle for the unity of the Congregation, despite obvious and positive diversity.

General Act of Visitation of the British Province
by the Very Rev. Father Louis Soullier,
Superior General of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate
from 24 July to 24 August 1893
[Paris, Rue St-Pétersbourg 26, 1894]
(...)

§. V. On the Family Life

The words which I have just quoted, my very dear Fathers and Brothers, contain a thought on which I desire to dwell in closing this Act of Visitation, in which I have endeavored to describe your duties and to point out the faults to which you are exposed.

The Rule makes it a pleasant duty to restore and increase in the bosom of the community – dans la vie de la famille – our used-up spiritual and bodily strength. It is in truth that such restoration and increase are effected.

Family life, as we ought to understand it, is nothing else than the supernatural life of souls pouring itself abroad, and, in this outpouring, becoming the common possession of all the members of a community, a Province, a Congregation: it means community of graces, community of ideas and of endeavors, community of joys and of sorrows, community of good works and of merits.

I have already said that we are organized in a hierarchical order, and I have compared such order with that which exists in an army, because we have a great deal to learn from military men. But what a difference there is in the bonds which unite us and in the mutual relations in which we stand towards each other! Amongst us the chiefs of every rank are Fathers, and all the more Fathers in proportion

to their elevation, because they are brought nearer to Him Who is Father of all, and from whom all paternity is derived. As the words themselves show, authority bespeaks an author. Where an Author is, there is authority, and wherever there is authority it is easy to find the Author. Now every author is a Father, in the same sense and measure as he is an Author. Hence it rigorously follows that in the nature of things, authority is synonymous with Paternity. Amongst us, fact is in agreement with logic; others have borrowed our terminology, we alone have kept the thing; others are able to command the material act of an outward submission; we are able to count upon the interior acts of a voluntary submission which goes even so far as subjection of the soul: with us, if authority is paternal, obedience is filial, if the commander is a father, the subordinate is a son; the subjects are brothers one to the other, and that nothing may be wanting, the domestic charities and loving counsels which preside over the government of the Society are called "Our Mother the Congregation".

A Father, a Mother, Sons and Brethren, sharing in common the outward manifestations of their life hidden in God: that is Congregation in its entirety, that is the Family life: one mind, one heart, one soul, communion of thoughts and desires, community of action and mutual examples of devotedness and piety.

What strength shall we not derive from this Family life! The brother who is helped by his brother is like an impregnable fortress according to the Book of Proverbs. What rugged ways are made smooth, when all the members of a Family have the same will! And what a charm there is in living under the same roof, breaking the same bread, bearing each other's burdens, mutually moving each other to the kindest acts of fraternal charity, encouraging each other in good works, edifying each other by holy conversation which fills the house with an atmosphere impregnated with the good odor of Jesus Christ! This is what S. Paul calls the peace of God surpassing all understanding. Wherefore, my very dear Fathers and Brothers, I earnestly entreat you to preserve this family spirit amongst you.

Love one another. Fraternal charity is the inheritance bequeathed to us by our Father in God, by his written testament, by our holy Rule, and by the spoken expression of his dying wish. "Charity, charity, charity". Long before it was the legacy of Jesus Christ to His disciples. "Mandatum novum do vobis, ut diligatis invicem sicut dilexi vos".

This precept in its broad outlines is kept by the Christian World. But this is not enough to perpetuate the Saviour's charity in its outward

manifestations. The Christian world itself is much divided. Already in his own day our Lord had foreseen that the charity of many would grow cold, and He asked Himself, for the instruction of His apostles, if the day would not come when a trace of charity would hardly be found upon earth.

Egotism, in a more or less subtle form, is universal, only in religious houses must one look for perfect charity, true family life. Therein is preserved the spirit of the primitive Church, in which all things were held in common, and the faithful had but one heart and one soul. Of Religious, as of the first Christians, the astonished world is forced to say: "See how they love one another, and are ready to die for one another". "Vide ut se invicem diligant et ut pro alterutro mori sint parati". How indeed should it be otherwise? Having been called to be the same and following after the same end, we observe the same Rule, we dwell under the same roof, we wear the same habit, we pray the same prayers, and we ascend the same altar. How then can we help having the same mind, the same heart, the same language? And how painful it is when many live in one place with different tastes and opposite inclinations! Better, assuredly, a thousand times would it be to live far apart from each other, but far better still to be in all respects united. *Loco unum esse et animo non esse, poena est*: it is torture; *animo et non loco, bonitas est*: it is at least an endurable privation, an opportunity for practising virtue and acquiring merit; *loco et animo felicitas est*: to dwell together in unity of spirit, that indeed is true happiness.

Allow me then once more to say to you with St. Paul: "Dearly beloved brethren, I beseech you by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that you all speak the same thing and that there be no divisions among you: but that you be perfect in the same mind, and in the same judgment"; and, to crown our joy, have the same tastes, the same loves, one only soul, one only life, being jealously careful above all things to preserve unity "in the bond of peace".

I will not describe in detail the elementary conditions of this unity, such as they are laid down by spiritual writers. Let it suffice for me to point out, on the one hand, the principal of those conditions, and, on the other hand, the principal obstacle to unity.

Faith is the root of all the virtues, and above all of Charity. It was from Faith that spring the respect, esteem and consideration which we ought to have one for another. It is not in himself or in ourselves that we ought to see our neighbour, but in God. In himself he is

full of imperfections, in us personal interests distort our judgment; in God alone does he appear as he is in reality, and it is only Faith which can see him in that light.

God made man to his own image and likeness, and He was pleased with the work of his hands: “*Viditque Deus cuncta quae fecerat et erant valde bona*”. God has called man to a share in His own Kingdom, and he has put in [him] power to become a saint: “*qui vocavit nos in aeternam gloriam suam*”. For man the Son of God took human nature, suffered and died: “*propter nos homines et propter nostram salutem descendit de coelis*”. In man He takes up His abode, in him he lives, thinks, loves, wishes, and acts: “*Ad eum veniemus et apud eum mansionem faciemus*”. It is man who He has made His delegate, His other self, to fill up whatever is wanting to his Passion, and to continue in all the world His work of Redemption: “*Sicut misit me Pater et ego mitto vos*”. And shall this privileged being whom God treats with so much consideration esteem and respect, be treated by us with disregard and disdain?

Too often, in fact, my dear Fathers and Brothers, people imagine that the family spirit means unrestrained freedom for all natural impulses, all flights of fancy and temper. To let things be, to take no trouble, to be unceremonious: such is in some minds, the ideal of family life. What a perverse ideal!

The family spirit is, on the contrary, the perfection of love. And love is essentially the communication of one's self to another, the denial of one's self in favour of the neighbour. Unceremoniousness therefore is in reality the great adversary, the mortal enemy, of fraternal charity. Being destructive of all respect, esteem and consideration for others, it is nothing else than a particular form of egotism or selfishness: the egotism which accounts for those rash judgments based upon doubtful facts or unknown intentions: for those underhand plotting against our neighbour's merit, as if it were incompatible with our own. What a fatal error! Union ought to be above, and not below, union ought to be accomplished through self-restraint, and not through informality. Since God is the centre of unity, to ascend is to become united; to be free and easy, as on a downward path is to be very near war or a dishonourable peace. Most of two things must happen: either the want of politeness will wound feelings that are most worthy of all respect, and so will cause discord, or it will be made welcome, and thus vulgarity will become universal. God preserve us from such a misfortune!

Love your community. It is your family according to the spirit of God. The family according to the flesh has its rights undoubtedly. It has a right to your affection, your good advice, our prayers and sometimes to your material assistance; in this case the Congregation, according to the measure of its resources, undertakes to do what you yourself have not the power to do. But here your duties end: here those other duties begin which you have taken upon yourselves in regard of another family by giving yourself to God.

Love therefore the house of God more than the house of your father. “In his quae Patris mei sunt oportet me esse... Egredere de terra tua et de cognatione tua, et de domo patris tui... Et omnis qui reliquerit domum, vel fratres aut sorores, aut patrem aut matrem... propter nomen meum, centuplum accipiet et vitam aeternam possidebit”. When you conclude your missionary labours, return with joy to the quietness of your cell, in order to refresh your wearied soul, and to renew your stock of provisions for the campaign.

Love your Province. After a whole year of continuous heavy work in the ministry, take advantage of the spiritual rest of the Retreat, and if, in the Provincial’s judgment, it be needful, seek a change of air and occupation in one of our own houses, but let there be no talk of one’s right to vacation, least of all to vacation spent with one’s family in the world. By God’s grace we have houses in every clime, it would be very surprising if a Religious could not find in any of them whatever is required for a health-restoring time of leisure. What more can be found, or what better, under the paternal roof? If a Religious is not quite weary after three days spent with his relations (and I say this without making any admission), it must be because of his permitting himself distractions which are not in keeping with his state.

Love your Congregation. We are always saying: amongst us there are neither French nor English, nor Canadians nor Irish. In like manner it is our desire that there shall be no frontiers between us. On the part of the General Administration visits shall be more frequent and, although we are still obliged to take distances into account, at all events we shall pay no attention to political boundaries when the interest of the Congregation or of its members is in question. Measures have been taken to ensure that communication between the centre and the circumference shall be easy, rapid and continuous and our letters will be paternal on the one side, filial on the other. You will not, I hope, be satisfied with writing once a year to the Superior General, as the Rule prescribes, you will rather follow your heart’s dictates, and satisfy

your soul's needs: of that my visit has given me full assurance. All, without exception, you have shown yourselves to be sons devoted to the Congregation, and devoted to myself. In presence of your noble works my heart rejoiced, and in my relations with you I could not but feel that I was a Father. Let us remain closely united by a family spirit, and we shall find everything easy and even delightful. They say in the army that to win a battle you must feel each other's elbows. In the moral order one needs to feel that one is loved. Let us then love one another and we shall be invincible, and through life's trials we shall pass doing good; we shall realize the Ideal of a flourishing Province, the Ideal of the Interior life, of the Religious life, of discipline, of "esprit de corps", of pastoral office, of apostolic ministry, and over all this Family Life will spread wide its charms and will make our present life a foretaste of everlasting bliss.

Given at Paris, the 25th January 1894, the 78th anniversary of the Foundation.

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¹ One thinks for example about the importance of the canonical visitations of the dioceses after the Council of Trent with St. Charles Borromeus as the finest example of the pastoral zeal in this respect.

² H. BALMÈS, *Rapport du Très Révérend Père Hilaire Balmès, Vicaire Général, aux membres du Chapitre général de 1947*, « Missions » 74 (1947), p. 10.

³ *The Constitutions and Rules of the Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of the Most Holy and Immaculate Virgin Mary*. First approved, along with the Institute, by Pope Pius XII, February 17, 1926, and after the promulgation of the Code of Canon Law, confirmed in specific form by Pope Pius XI, May 21, 1928, Rome 1945, p. 136-141.

⁴ Canonical visitation. Subjects to investigate in the different houses and to refer in the act of visitation, AGR, GA XI / 4 [Visites canoniques, Enquetes, Cong. Gen.], s.f.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Particular act of visitation. Act of the Canonical Visitation. Rev. Fr Joseph Rousseau OMI, Procurator General to the Holy See, Visitor 1942, December 7th to 15th, AGR, GA XI / 4 [Visites canoniques, Enquetes, Cong. Gen.], s.f.

⁸ *Visite canonique (questionnaire provincial)*, Rome, 30 juin 1955, AGR, GA XI / 4 [Visites canoniques, Questionnaire personnel], p. 4.

⁹ *Questionnaire administratif*, AGR, GA XI / 4 [Visites canoniques, Questionnaire administratif], s.f.; *Questionnaire personnel*, AGR, GA XI / 4 [Visites canoniques, Questionnaire personnel], s.f.

¹⁰ J. PIETSCH, *Acte général de visite de la Province de Pologne par le R.P. Jean Pietsch OMI, Assistant général, Octobre-Décembre 1936*, Maison Générale, Rome [1936], mps AGR, p. 19-20.

¹¹ G. PIETSCH, *Atto generale della visita canonica della Provincia d'Italia*, Casa Generalizia, Roma [1937], mps AGR.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 7-8. Exactly the same words were used in the acts of visitation of the Province of Poland the previous year. See J. PIETSCH, *Acte général de visite de la Province de Pologne*, p. 12: « Vous formez les futurs Oblats. Faites-leur donc connaître notre famille religieuse, son saint Fondateur, les anciens Pères de la Congrégation, sa glorieuse histoire, ses admirables missions. Il y a certains jour de l'année où vous ne ferez pas tort à l'enseignement si pendant quelques minutes vous évoquez ces souvenirs historiques qui feront mieux connaître et aimer notre Congrégation et affermiront vos élèves dans leur vocation. Faites cela déjà au juniorat pour qu'ils comprennent bien que ce n'est pas un collège quelconque, mais un séminaire de religieux et d'apôtres ».

¹³ G. PIETSCH, *Atto generale della visita canonica della Provincia d'Italia*, p. 14.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 16. The visitor referred in this context to the teachings of Frs Soullier and Dontenwill, and the Chapter of 1920. Again, similar passages are found also in the act of visit of the Province of Poland.

¹⁵ TH. LABOURÉ, *Acte général de visite des Missions Indiennes du Nord-Ouest Canadien. Juin 1935-Février 1936*, Maison Général, Rome 1936, p. 36-39.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

¹⁷ H. BALMÈS, *Rapport du Très Révérend Père Hilaire Balmès, Vicaire Général, aux membres du Chapitre général de 1947*, « Missions » 74 (1947), p. 10-11.

¹⁸ A. DESNOYERS, *Acte Général de la visite du Vicariat du Mackenzie*, Montréal 1942.

¹⁹ A. DESNOYERS, *Appendice à l'acte de visite du Maxkenzie sous forme de circulaire aux missionnaires des Esquimaux*, [Montréal 1942], p. 5.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 7-9.

²² J. DROUART, *Voyages et visites paternelles du T.R.P. Général (1947-1969)*, « Études Oblates » 28 (1969), p. 140-160.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

²⁴ The basic information and references to the "Missions" are to be found in the *Missions de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée. Tables Analytiques Générales*, vol. IV, 1947-1961, p. 935-936. This category disappears in *Tables Analytiques Générales*, vol. V, 1962-1972, p. 610.

²⁵ M. O'RYAN, *Report of the Canonical Visitation of St. Mary's Province*, [Rome 1951].

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

²⁷ "So far as my visit to St. Charles' Scholasticate is concerned, I have nothing but praise for all those who form this happy Oblate community. Rarely, if ever, have

I come across a religious body more genuinely united in the true fraternal friendship. All seemed to be animated by the spirit of “bearing one another’s burdens” and bound together for the sublime purpose of contributing, each in his own way, towards the common good, by hard work and fervent prayer”. Ibid., p. 9.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 17-18.

²⁹ P. PÉRON, *Acte général de visite de la première Province de France*, [Rome 1952], AGR, RP-III/2, Visite Canonique Adm. gén. 1952, France-MIDI.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 19.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., p. 20.

³³ Ibid., p. 21.

³⁴ D. ALBERS, *Rapport de la visite canonique faite au scolasticat de Rome*, Rome [1957], mps AGR.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 16.

³⁶ E. SERVEL, *Vicariat des Missions de Grouard. Visite canonique 11 Novembre – 25 Décembre 1963*, Rome [1964], mps. AGR.

³⁷ « Il nous faut mériter un nombre plus élevé de vocations par une fidélité plus grande à nos saintes Règles, par un plus grand attachement aux fins essentiellement missionnaires de l’Institut, par notre volonté de nous refaire spirituellement en un retour à la vie du saint Evangile. La ferveur est signe de vie et de fécondité ». L. DESCHÂTELETS, *A nos chers Oblats du Vicariat de Grouard*, Ibid.

³⁸ E. SERVEL, *Vicariat des Missions de Grouard*, p. 74. « L’apostolat s’appuie totalement sur la nécessité de la grâce prévenante qui ouvre le cœur et les oreilles de ceux qui entendent ; de la grâce adjuvante, sans laquelle personne ne peut faire œuvre bonne, conduisant au salut, ni persévérer dans le bien ». A quotation comes directly from Pius XII (11.02.1958) and it is completed by a motto from John XXIII (28.01.1960): “The lips of a priest must constantly pronounce a prayer”.

³⁹ « Les exercices en commun sont presque inexistant sauf, souvent, la visite au St. Sacrement et e chapelet ». « Les exercices de piété en commun ont presque disparu ». Ibid., p. 75.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 76-77.

⁴¹ « Enfin, la grande tentation. Elle est présentée de la façon suivante par l’un de vous : ‘Ayant appris qu’une révision de la Règle est en cours, certains considèrent déjà comme caduc le texte actuellement en vigueur ; et, attendant une Règle nouvelle, qu’ils espèrent moins austère, se libèrent de celle qu’ils ont vouée usque ad mortem’. Telle est la mentalité que reflètent des réflexions comme celle-ci : ‘La Règle doit être adaptée au 20^e siècle’ – ou encore – ‘une adaptation à un temps moderne est nécessaire’. Ibid., p. 77.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ *Le charisme oblat dans le monde d’aujourd’hui*, « Études Oblates » 31 (1972), p. 250.

⁴⁴ L. DESCHÂTELETS, Circulaire 220, Rome, 15.08.1965, in: *Circulaires administratives*, vol. 7, 1965-1966, [s.d.s.l], p. 169.

⁴⁵ CARD. I. ANTONIUTTI to L. DESCHÂTELETS, Romae, 29.07.1966, in: L. DESCHÂTELETS, *Circulaire* 233, Rome, 8.09.1965, in: *Circulaires administratives*, vol. 7, p. 429.

⁴⁶ D. LEVASSEUR, *Histoire des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée. Essay de synthèse*, vol. 2, Rome 1986, p. 289.

⁴⁷ L. DESCHÂTELETS, *Circulaire* 227, Rome, 12.04.1965, in: *Circulaires administratives*, vol. 7, p. 371. *Constitutiones et Regulae Congregationis Missionariorum Oblatorum Sanctissimae et Immaculatae Virginis Mariae a Capitulo Generali XXVII exaratae*, Romae 1966, [Constitution 132], p. 38.

⁴⁸ *Le charisme oblat dans le monde d'aujourd'hui*, p. 249-250.

⁴⁹ L. DESCHÂTELETS, *Circulaire* 214, Rome, 25.01.1965, in: *Administrative Circulaires*, vol. 7, p. 1-3.

⁵⁰ L. DESCHÂTELETS, *Circulaire* 218, Rome, 7.03.1965, in: *Administrative Circulaires*, vol. 7, p. 117.

⁵¹ « Missions ». *Tables Analytiques Générales*, vol. V, 1962-1972, p. 610. See the heading “*Vie religieuse communautaire*”.

⁵² “*Missions*” 93 (1966), p. 20.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 70-72.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 112-113.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 158-159.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 207-208.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 245-246 (Province de l’Immaculée Conception).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 305-306 (Province Regina Mundi)

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 307.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 365.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 389.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 411.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 430.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 513 (Province St. Joseph).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 627-629 (Province Notre-Dame de Rosaire).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 667 (Vicariat Saint-François-Xavier, Baie James et Labrador)

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 700 (St. Peters).

⁶⁸ L. DESCHÂTELETS, *Circulaire* 225, Rome, 23.03.1966, in: *Circulaires administratives*, vol. 7, p. 335-336.

⁶⁹ M. GILBERT, *Réflexions sur la vie oblate à la lumière des nouvelles Constitutions*, « *Études Oblates* » 25 (1966), p. 273-353.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 309-316.

⁷¹ H. VERKIN, *Note supplémentaire sur l’amour de la solitude du Fondateur*, « *Études Oblates* » 26 (1967), p. 383-388.

⁷² F. TRUSSO, *Le renforcement de la vie communautaire. Condition du renouveau religieux et apostolique*, « *Études Oblates* » 27 (1968), p. 273-282.

⁷³ H. DU HALGOUËT, *Le dialogue communautaire et l’avenir de la Congrégation*, « *Études Oblates* » 27 (1968), p. 341-349.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 348-349.

⁷⁵ *La charité fraternelle chez les Oblats d'après les « Circulaires administratives des Supérieurs Généraux »*. Textes choisis, « Études Oblates » 28 (1969), p. 60-79.

⁷⁶ J. O'REGAN, *Religious Community: group or association – or What?*, « Études Oblates » 28 (1969), p. 230.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 232.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 237-238.

⁷⁹ F. JETTÉ, *Problématique de la vie communautaire évangélique*, « Études Oblates » 29 (1970), p. 3-15.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 13-14.

⁸¹ M. ZAGO, *Dimension missionnaire de la communauté oblate*, « Études Oblates » 30 (1971), p. 9-16; idem, *Evaluation et perspectives de la communauté oblate*, « Études Oblates » 31 (1972), p. 67-80.

⁸² M. ZAGO, *Dimension missionnaire de la communauté oblate*, p. 12.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 15-16.

⁸⁴ « Je pense que dans les efforts pour le renouveau de la Congrégation on a donné trop peu d'importance à la communauté, à sa nature, à son rôle, à son dynamisme. Et pourtant le renouveau authentique passe par la communauté et se réalise par la communauté ». M. Zago, *Evaluation et perspectives de la communauté oblate*, p. 67.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 76-79.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 79-80.

⁸⁷ See for example the articles: B. MASON, *We have tried to build community*, "Missio" 98 (1971), p. 38-43; *Religious Community Life*, "Missio" 98 (1971), p. 363-373.

⁸⁸ *Preliminary. Questionnaire of Circular 246*, "Missio" [Supplement] 98 (1971), p. X-XI.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. XI-XIII.

⁹⁰ General Administration, *Community*, Rome 1972. Fr Hanley has written in the introduction to that document: "The General Chapter of 1972 issued a mandate to me to send a message to all Oblates underscoring «our renewed determination to give high priority to revitalizing our communities». The following letter, written by your General Council team, is our humble attempt to fulfill that mandate. It is my hope that it will promote the renewal of our apostolic communities in our service of the Kingdom of God". Signed in Rome, on October 12th 1972.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 4.

⁹² Ibid., p. 5-6.

⁹³ The following reflections correspond to the pages 6-20 of the analyzed document (General Administration, *Community*, Rome 1972).

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 20-27.

SUMMARY: *This article offers an overview of reflections concerning community, discussed among Oblates between 1926 and 1972. The year 1926 was celebrated as the 100th anniversary of the approval of the Constitutions and Rules, and the year of their substantial revision. In 1966 the Oblates celebrated the 150th anniversary of their Foundation, and once undertook a substantial revision of their fundamental text. Between those two dates – 1926 and 1966 – a significant change in perceiving community life was noticed among the Oblates. According to the early questionnaires of the canonical visitations and the acts of such visits, community life was based principally on religious observance and fidelity to detailed prescriptions of the Rule. Since 1950 there was growing dissatisfaction with this notion. The Oblates started to express their wishes for a more fraternal and straightforward collaboration in the apostolic initiatives and a sharing of faith and values within a community. The General Chapters of 1966 and 1972, as well as articles published by the Oblates during those years prove, that the Congregation faced a period of transition and looked for a deeper experience of community life as the foundation of an expected renewal. This attitude also fostered a growing decentralization of Oblate life and a move from a unified Congregation towards more diversified experiences, which were valued and appreciated. However, despite the high ideals and ambitious expectations the atmosphere of confusion and insecurity persisted and the search for a true Oblate community, adapted to the contemporary world and at the same time meaningful as the religious experience, continued. A text written by Fr Soullier in 1894 serves as the counterpoint to those deliberations and a thought provoking invitation to reconsider the historical continuity of Oblate experiences, beyond rigid chronological boundaries.*

RÉSUMÉ : *Cet article offre une vue d'ensemble des réflexions concernant la communauté, débattues par les Oblats entre 1926 et 1972. L'année 1926 a été témoin des célébrations du 100^e anniversaire de l'approbation des Constitutions et Règles ainsi que de leur substantielle révision. En 1966, les Oblats ont célébré le 150^e anniversaire de leur Fondation et ont entrepris à nouveau une révision substantielle de leur texte fondamental. Entre ces deux dates, 1926 et 1966, on observe chez les Oblats, un changement considérable dans la façon de percevoir la vie de communauté. D'après les premiers questionnaires des visites canoniques et les actes de telles visites, la vie de communauté consistait principalement dans les observances religieuses et la fidélité aux prescriptions détaillées de la Règle. À partir de 1950, se fait jour un malaise croissant avec cette conception.*

Les Oblats ont commencé à exprimer leurs souhaits d'une collaboration plus fraternelle et plus directe dans les initiatives apostoliques, le partage de foi et les valeurs vécues à l'intérieur d'une communauté. Les Chapitres généraux de 1966 et 1972, ainsi que les articles publiés par les Oblats pendant ces années, prouvent que la Congrégation traversait une période de transition et cherchait une expérience plus profonde de vie de communauté, comme fondement d'un renouveau attendu. Cette attitude favorisait également une décentralisation croissante de la vie oblate et le passage d'une Congrégation unifiée vers des expériences plus diversifiées, qu'on valorisait et appréciait. Cependant, en dépit des idéaux élevés et des attentes ambitieuses, l'atmosphère de confusion et d'insécurité persistait et continuait aussi la recherche d'une communauté oblate vraie, adaptée au monde contemporain et en même temps significative comme expérience religieuse. Un texte du P. Soullier de 1894 sert de contrepoint à ces délibérations et représente une invitation provocante à reconsidérer la continuité historique des expériences oblates, au-delà des cadres chronologiques rigides.

SUMARIO: Este artículo ofrece una visión de conjunto de las reflexiones que hicieron los Oblatos entre 1926 y 1972 sobre la comunidad. En 1926 se celebró el 100º aniversario de la aprobación de las Constituciones y Reglas. Ese mismo año se realizó también una substancial revisión de las mismas. Más tarde, en 1966, los Oblatos celebraron el 150 aniversario de su Fundación y, una vez más, se acometió una revisión substancial de su texto fundamental. Entre estas dos fechas – 1926 y 1966 – se dio un cambio significativo en cómo los Oblatos percibían la vida de comunidad. A la luz de los cuestionarios más antiguos y de las actas de las visitas canónicas, la vida de comunidad estaba fundamentalmente basada en la observancia religiosa y en la fidelidad a las prescripciones bien detalladas de la Regla. A partir de 1950 creció entre los oblatos la insatisfacción con esta concepción. Los Oblatos empezaron entonces a expresar sus deseos de una colaboración más fraterna y directa en las iniciativas apostólicas, en el compartir de la fe y en los valores dentro de la comunidad. Los Capítulos Generales de 1966 y 1972, así como otros artículos publicados por los Oblatos durante esos años prueban que la Congregación atravesaba entonces un período de transición y que buscaba una experiencia más profunda de vida de comunidad como la piedra angular de una deseada renovación. Esta actitud condujo a una descentralización cada vez mayor de la vida oblate, y se pasó también de ser una congregación unificada a caminar hacia experiencias mucho más diversificadas, experiencias que fueron valoradas y apreciadas. Sin embargo, a pesar de los altos ideales

y de las ambiguas expectativas, persistió la atmósfera de confusión e inseguridad, y prosiguió la búsqueda de una auténtica comunidad oblata, adaptada al mundo contemporáneo pero al mismo tiempo significativa para la experiencia religiosa. Un texto escrito por el P. Soullier en 1894 nos sirve de contrapunto a esas deliberaciones y nos invita a reconsiderar la continuidad de las experiencias de los oblatos en la historia, más allá de las rígidas barreras cronológicas.

Vita et missio

Oblatio
Oblatio

¿CÓMO FORMAR COMUNIDAD?

GREGORIO IRIARTE, OMI

Analizaremos los rasgos de una verdadera comunidad deteniéndonos, principalmente, en las características del “Encuentro Comunitario” o “Reunión de Comunidad” ya que en ella está la clave para llegar a una auténtica vivencia comunitaria.

– Donde no hay “Reunión de Comunidad” puede haber “vida en común”, pero no existirá una verdadera comunidad. Donde la “Reunión de Comunitaria” es débil e improvisada, el espíritu comunitario será también frágil y deficiente.

– Siempre ha sido necesaria la reunión de la comunidad pero actualmente lo es más necesaria que nunca ya que vivimos en una época donde lo que impera es el individualismo. La cultura posmoderna con la televisión, la computadora, el teléfono móvil, las telenovelas, la autonomía personal, la crisis de la autoridad y de la obediencia... todo está orientado hacia el debilitamiento del espíritu comunitario.

– Es necesario humanizar la Vida Religiosa y humanizar también el “Encuentro Comunitario”. Para ello nos serviremos no solo de los aportes teológicos y pastorales que se han desarrollado con tanta frecuencia y profundidad, así como las orientaciones del P. Desmond O Donnell OMI en su libro *¿Cómo Formar Comunidad?* sino también de la psicología, sobre todo en el área de *las relaciones humanas*.

NECESIDAD DE LA COMUNIDAD

Estamos hechos *a imagen y semejanza de Dios* que es “Comunidad Trinitaria” por eso, para todos y cada uno de nosotros, *existir*, en realidad, es *co-existir* y *comunicarnos*, es desarrollarnos y liberarnos, tanto en área de los valores humanos como, principalmente, en los aspectos de nuestra vivencia religiosa.

Los religiosos/as somos cada vez más conscientes de la necesidad de profundizar nuestra vida comunitaria en una relación auténticamente fraterna que irradie estímulo, calor y nueva vida en una sociedad cada vez más hundida en individualismo, en el pragmatismo y en el consumismo.

Nada más importante para llegar a una mayor solidaridad que la unión de corazones con la recíproca aceptación de todos y de cada uno de nuestros hermanos/as. Nada anhelamos tanto todos como el *ser aceptados*, el *ser queridos* y *tenidos en cuenta* por los demás. De ahí que el “encuentro comunitario” deba constituirse para nosotros en una verdadera prioridad espiritual y humana.

En realidad, lo mejor de cada uno de nosotros es lo que hemos recibido de aquellas personas que nos han amado. Cuanto más somos amados, más libres nos volvemos para aceptarnos a nosotros mismos y a los demás. Cuando nos sentimos amados, crecemos. Cuando no nos sentimos amados nos entristecemos y tendemos a cerrarnos sobre nosotros mismos.

LAS DIFICULTADES PARA UN VERDADERO “ENCUENTRO COMUNITARIO”

En efecto, no es nada fácil el vivir las exigencias de un auténtico grupo comunitario. Con demasiada frecuencia usamos máscaras y disfraces que ocultan nuestra verdadera identidad.

Las tensiones y conflictos son inevitables pero ello no debe ser óbice para lograr un verdadero crecimiento comunitario. Lo que importa es saber cómo enfrentarlos y superarlos.

Procedemos de ambientes socio-culturales diversos y esto hace que cada uno tengamos una manera distinta de ver nuestra realidad personal y social. No es nada fácil llegar a conciliar criterios y actitudes. Muchas veces lo que una parte del grupo desea no se adecua con las aspiraciones o proyectos de otros miembros.

¿Cómo ser uno mismo y, sin embargo, vivir plenamente integrado a la comunidad? ¿Cómo vivir los valores de la comunidad sin caer en actitudes despersonalizadas y gregarias...?

Lo que pretendemos en este artículo es dar una respuesta al siguiente interrogante: ¿cómo podemos formar una auténtica comunidad religiosa siendo conscientes de la presencia continua de tensiones y de conflictos...?

Creemos que el factor más importante y dinámico para vivir el espíritu comunitario es la de ser fieles a la “Reunión de la Comunidad” y a sus exigencias espirituales y psicológicas.

Veamos cuales son las características más importantes de una auténtica “Reunión Comunitaria” y cuales son sus principales obstáculos. Debemos encontrar las razones del porqué tantos religiosos/as formando parte de la vida religiosa, sin embargo, viven tan solos y encerrados sobre sí mismos.

CARACTERÍSTICAS DE UNA AUTÉNTICA “REUNIÓN DE COMUNIDAD”

1. Una autentica reunión comunitaria debe partir de un principio básico: *todos queremos ser aceptados y todos debemos aceptar a los demás*. Cada uno de los miembros debe ser aceptado *tal y como es*, en su total identidad personal.

La comunidad no se reúne para lograr que se cambien las actitudes de los miembros, ni para mejorar el carácter, ni para corregir defectos, ni para llamar la atención o hacer observaciones a la conducta de sus miembros.... Se reúne para incentivar *una intercomunicación franca y fraternal*. Busca *lograr que nos conozcan y que conozcamos a los demás, que aceptamos a los otros/as integrantes del grupo comenzando por aceptarnos plenamente a nosotros mismos*.

2. Todas las personas somos únicas, originales *e irrepetibles*. Dios nos ha hecho a todos diferentes y quiere que lo sigamos siendo. La comunidad debe ayudar a cada uno sea “*él mismo*”. Cada miembro de la comunidad debe ser aceptado *por lo que es*, no tanto por lo que *sabe* o por lo que *hace*.

Por lo tanto, es un error, cuando el responsable de una comunidad o el grupo pretende imponer la uniformidad, buscando que todos sean iguales en el pensamiento y en la acción.

3. Aceptar a las personas y quererlas no quiere decir que no percibamos sus *defectos y limitaciones*. Las personas deben ser aceptas y estimadas plenamente, con sus propios defectos. El verdadero amor tiene como ideal de perfección al *amor de Dios*. Dios nos ama a cada uno tal y como somos, con nuestros propios defectos, caídas y pecados.

La comunidad, por lo tanto, no es para corregir defectos, ni para plantear discusiones o para sermonear a sus integrantes.... Acepta a

sus miembros con sus cualidades y defectos y no busca, directamente, el cambio de cada uno, sino una *comunicación profunda*. Solo cuando la comunidad se vuelve acogedora y comprensiva, pone los condicionamientos para que cada uno de sus miembros vaya creciendo interiormente.

4. *Los sentimientos* son lo más profundo y original de cada persona. En cierto sentido, los *sentimientos somos nosotros*. Ellos son siempre *lo más nuestro* y *lo que más queremos*. Los sentimientos forman parte de nuestra experiencia de vida de ahí que los queramos más que a nuestros propios pensamientos.

Para compartir en profundidad es necesario que nos refiramos a *nuestros sentimientos*. Puedes expresarte ante el grupo diciendo “me siento...” “o me he sentido...” seguido de un adjetivo o de un adverbio. Si lo expresas así, seguramente, que se trata de un sentimiento genuino que responde a una experiencia real. Sin embargo, cuando dices : “yo pienso...” te refieres a un juicio y no a un sentimiento. Si dices “siento que...” probablemente no es más que una simple opinión personal.

Por lo tanto, un problema muy frecuente que hay que evitar es *cuestionar o desautorizar los sentimientos* de nuestros hermanos. *Siempre deben ser respetados*. Cuando alguien comparte los sentimientos, comparte algo que es muy profundo en él. Cuando comunico mis sentimientos ofrezco al grupo algo de mí mismo.

Por otro lado, siempre debemos tener muy presente que cada persona tiene el derecho a reservarse algunos aspectos de su vida que no desea que se conozcan.

5. Compartir el “yo profundo” es lo más importante. La comunidad debe sentirse totalmente libre en su nivel de comunicación pero *el ideal es lograr un compartir en profundidad*. Es fácil compartir temas superficiales sobre el trabajo, sobre nuestra pastoral, sobre la política, sobre el tiempo.... Pero compartir en profundidad no es tan fácil. Lleva tiempo y exige mutua confianza.

La necesidad más profunda de cada uno de nosotros es *amar y ser amados*. *Es ser aceptados y ser comprendidos*. Ese es el gran ideal de toda verdadera comunidad evangélica: Dios quiere que seamos una verdadera comunidad, que “*seamos uno como El es Uno*”. “Uno”, sobre todo, en la comprensión y en el amor recíproco. *El amor profundo y auténtico hacia una persona se expresa cuando yo la acepto y la estimo tal y como es*.

Cuando los demás me comprenden y me permiten que yo los comprenda, cuando soy estimado y estimo a mi vez, entonces estoy creciendo como persona, como religioso/a y como discípulo de Jesús. Solo así soy libre para aceptarme y amarme a mí mismo. Mis heridas, mis aprensiones y sospechas se irán curando al calor de la comunicación y la comprensión. En esa atmósfera acepto mis fallas y trato de superarlas y puedo percibir que mis temores y resentimientos van desapareciendo gradualmente. Estoy mejorando interiormente porque la aceptación y la amistad que me dan nuevas energías para el cambio personal.

Compartir lo más profundo quiere decir comunicar nuestras luchas, nuestros problemas, nuestros éxitos, nuestras ilusiones, nuestras frustraciones, nuestros fracasos, nuestros logros..... Quiere decir, comunicar nuestras esperanzas, nuestros desánimos, nuestros actos de valentía, nuestros miedos, nuestras penas, nuestras desilusiones....

6. Estamos llamados todos a la *complementariedad*. La mayoría de nosotros *tenemos miedo a no ser aceptados y a no ser amados* realmente. Por esa razón, muchos de nosotros no somos plenamente felices; llevamos la soledad dentro de nosotros mismos. Generalmente, tratamos de disimularlo hablando de nuestros trabajos, de nuestros pequeños éxitos pastorales, de lo que hemos visto en la TV, o lo que hemos leído en el periódico.... La charla se vuelve insustancial y la vida comunitaria algo meramente funcional. Si nos analizamos con objetividad veremos que vivimos *al lado* de los otros, *cerca* de ellos, pero no *para* ellos y *con* ellos

Sin embargo, constatamos que la verdadera unidad “de mente y de corazones” se construye desde *las diferencias*, desde nuestras *diversidades*. Percibimos que estamos llamados a la *complementariedad*. Lo podemos comprobar en nuestra propia experiencia personal: en la medida en que los otros nos van comprendiendo y aceptando, lo mejor de nosotros se afianza y comienza a crecer en nuestro interior. (Desmond O Donnell OMI, *Cómo Formar Comunidad*)

San Pablo nos ofrece un hermoso lema cuando nos pide que seamos “*sinceros en la caridad*” (Ef. 4,15)

No se trata de estar o no estar de acuerdo con lo que piensan nuestros hermanos de comunidad. Simplemente debemos avanzar en la práctica de gran ideal que nos propone Jesús:

Yo les pido “que se amen los unos a los otros como los he amado” (Jn 13,34)

Para que logremos profundizar en la necesidad que tenemos de vivir plenamente la *complementariedad* relatamos a continuación un cuento titulado:

Asamblea en una humilde carpintería

Era urgente y necesario el elegir una nueva directiva para el normal desarrollo de las actividades en aquella humilde carpintería.

El martillo, muy seguro de sí mismo, se presentó como candidato por ser presidente pero muy pronto se comenzaron a oír voces y hasta gritos en desacuerdo con esa candidatura: “No queremos al martillo como presidente. Es un tipo vulgar que no sabe más que golpear. No sabe de razones y siempre se quiere imponer en base a golpe tras golpe ¡Que se retire..., que se vaya...!”.

Y el pobre *martillo*, todo confundido y humillado, se retiró hasta un rincón de la carpintería.

Inmediatamente, como movido por un resorte, se levantó de su asiento el *tornillo* y se presentó, muy suelto de cuerpo, como candidato a la presidencia, pero, no bien había pronunciado sus palabras de saludo, cuando un sordo murmullo la dejó paralizado y confundido: “Este no sirve para nada. No sabe más que dar vueltas y más vueltas sobre sí mismo. Está centrado siempre en él y para él. No tiene otro objetivo... Que se vaya a su casa...”.

Y el vanidoso *tornillo* se retiró todo avergonzado.

Sorpresivamente se presentó a candidatear una señorita: la *lija*, todo aseada y elegante, con ínfulas de ser elegida, pero le dijeron en su propia cara, que era una señorita engañosa y áspera y que tenía continuas fricciones con medio mundo...y no tuvo más remedio que retirarse resentida y enojada.

Ante la gran dificultad de elegir a las autoridades algunos optaron por proponer al *metro* como candidato de consenso, pero se equivocaron de medio a medio. Inmediatamente, ante ese nuevo aspirante se levantaron voces airadas diciendo que el *metro* era el peor de los candidatos. Él siempre quiere hacer las cosas a su gusto y a su medida. Pretende ser él como la norma de conducta de todos los miembros de la carpintería y el pobre *metro* no tuvo más remedio que retirarse todo decepcionado ante esas críticas tan duras.

Se hizo un gran silencio en la carpintería. Todos se sentían frustra-

dos al ver que fracasaba la asamblea electoral sin lograr elegir democráticamente a sus autoridades. Todos comenzaron a pensar que esto les llevaría a un verdadero empantanamiento. Sin tener autoridades, cada uno se iría por su lado con el peligro de hacer fracasar a la cooperativa.

Pero en ese mismo momento hizo su entrada en la carpintería un humilde carpintero. Se puso el delantal de trabajo y, silenciosamente, comenzó a trabajar.

La tosca madera que tenía entre sus manos fue tomando las formas de un elegante mueble y para lograrlo se sirvió del *martillo* que golpea, del *tornillo* que une y da consistencia, del *metro* que indica las medidas exactas y de la *lija* que pule y hermosea.

Cuando el carpintero terminó su trabajo todos en la carpintería se quedaron mudos de admiración. Entonces se levantó el *serrucho* y tomando la palabra dijo así con profunda emoción: “Hermanos miembros de esta ilustre y prestigiosa cooperativa, el señor carpintero nos ha dado una magnífica lección: se ha servido de nuestras cualidades y de nuestras limitaciones para fabricar este hermoso mueble. Nosotros, en nuestra asamblea no hemos hecho otra cosa que criticarnos y resaltar nuestros defectos y limitaciones... El carpintero se ha servido de nuestras mejores cualidades para realizar este hermoso sillón, tan práctico y tan elegante.... Desde ahora en adelante yo les pido que seamos más positivos, más humanos, más comprensivos y que veamos, sobre todo, las cualidades de nuestros hermanos y no solo sus defectos”.

Todos se sintieron muy felices y comenzaron a abrazarse mientras comentaban entre sí: “Este humilde carpintero nos ha dado una magnífica lección. Desde ahora seremos una verdadera comunidad de hermanos que se estiman y que reconocen la cualidades de cada uno”.

Aplicación del relato a nuestras Comunidades Religiosas

Analiza las actitudes y las primeras reacciones del grupo de la carpintería ante los posibles candidatos electorales.

Comenta el comportamiento del carpintero.

Analiza el discurso del *serrucho* y señala las ideas principales de su discurso y las reacciones del grupo ante el trabajo del carpintero

Aplica el relato a nuestras reuniones de comunidad:

Aceptamos a los demás tal y como son.

Vemos sus defectos más que sus cualidades.

Qué tendríamos que hacer para ser siempre más positivos.

CONCLUSIONES

1. La aceptación mutua y la complementariedad son de absoluta necesidad en toda comunidad.

2. La “reunión comunitaria” no es para juzgar o para corregir algunos errores del grupo o de las personas que lo integran, sino para *comunicarnos en profundidad* y lograr con ello *conocernos mejor, aceptarnos y construir entre todos una verdadera fraternidad*.

3. Uno de los errores más graves en los que se ha caído con demasiada frecuencia es hacer del “encuentro comunitario” una práctica de “corrección fraterna”, con la idea de superar algunos problemas de conducta personal o comunitaria. La verdadera comunidad se construye desde la aceptación de todos y cada uno de sus miembros con todas sus limitaciones personales, psicológicas y espirituales, y no desde el autoritarismo o de la corrección, por buenas que sean sus intenciones.

4. La “corrección fraterna” solo puede ser positiva en una segunda instancia posterior. Tiene que nacer desde la aceptación del otro, pero nunca desde una exigencia de cambio impuesta o exigida.

5. Es muy probable que algún miembro de la comunidad quiera comunicarse en privado con mayor profundidad y desear que le señalen sus defectos o errores. Es muy posible que una *auténtica reunión comunitaria* desemboque en este diálogo personal franco y constructivo, pero la reunión en sí no es un sistema de coacción o de corrección.

6. Nunca podrá ser efectivo un *encuentro comunitario* si no parte de la verdadera aceptación y estima de todos sus integrantes. Esta es la razón del fracaso de lo que antiguamente se llamaba “Capítulo de culpas”. No partía del verdadero *amor fraternal* ni de los más elementales *principios de la psicología*.

El gran ideal comunitario lo tenemos expresado en el comportamiento y en las actitudes de las primeras comunidades cristianas: “La multitud de creyentes no tenía sino un solo corazón y una sola alma” (*Hch.* 4,32).

Gregorio Iriarte, OMI (+ 2013)
Cochabamba, Agosto del 2011

LA COMUNIDAD DE DISTRITO HISTORIA DE LA FÓRMULA OPORTUNIDADES Y RIESGOS

GUILLERMO STECKLING, OMI

En la Regla del 1826, la que fue aprobada por el Papa como texto fundante de nuestra congregación, no existía aún una sección sobre la comunidad. Ciertamente, de los casi 800 artículos unos 120 la mencionan de algún modo¹ pero parece que no nos hacía falta desarrollar el tema explícitamente; se sobreentendía lo que era la vida comunitaria. Desde la Regla de 1966, esta sección existe, y hasta hoy seguimos conversando mucho sobre la comunidad porque ya no es tan evidente qué forma tendría que tomar la vida fraterna en una congregación como la nuestra. Tan es así que el primer año del actual trienio que celebra los 200 años de nuestra fundación se dedica a la comunidad apostólica.

¿Qué nos dice esta reflexión constante sobre la comunidad, cada vez más presente en los últimos 50 años de nuestra historia de dos siglos? Con seguridad ahí se refleja el ambiente eclesial; en la Iglesia se ha tomado más conciencia de la dimensión comunitaria de la fe. El énfasis ha pasado del “salva tu alma” al “venga a nosotros tu Reino”. Pero también se puede sospechar que, cuando reflexionamos mucho sobre una realidad, eso pueda indicar una carencia que sentimos; hablamos mucho de comunidad porque sabemos que aún estamos lejos de vivirla como quisiéramos.

Como contribución al primer año del trienio se me ha pedido escribir algo sobre una forma específica de la comunidad local, la comunidad de distrito (C.77). Debo decir que me interesa el tema porque parece que estamos tocando aquí un punto neurálgico. Es a nivel de la comunidad local donde se juega la realidad de nuestra vida apostólica según el carisma oblato y a este nivel el concepto y la vivencia de la comunidad de distrito puede ser crucial. Voy a hablar ante todo basándome en mi experiencia personal, tanto en mi provincia – el Paraguay – como durante los 18 años que he pasado en el gobierno central. He

podido leer también el material que se menciona más abajo en una pequeña bibliografía.

LA COMUNIDAD DE DISTRITO: ¿QUÉ ES Y CÓMO SE VIVE?

Nuestras Constituciones y Reglas actuales (del 2012) equiparan casas, distritos y excepcionalmente residencias autónomas, como maneras legítimas de vivir la comunidad local. Específicamente se dice sobre los distritos que

- pueden agrupar pequeñas residencias, donde hay vida en común, y también Oblatos que viven solos (R.77^a);

- tanto casas como distritos y residencias tienen sus superiores locales (C.77 R.77^a);

- los distritos necesitan estatutos aprobados por el superior mayor, los cuales reglamentan el derecho a la propiedad (R.92b R.151^a).

¿Cómo se vive la comunidad de distrito en el mundo oblato? Pienso que se pueden distinguir esquemáticamente tres situaciones.

1. *Prevalencia de comunidades de casa.* Hay sectores de la Congregación donde la estructura del distrito casi no se utiliza; la vida de la comunidad local pasa por comunidades de casa o residencia más o menos numerosas, y si hay oblatos que viven solos pertenecen a una de las casas.

2. *Prevalencia de comunidades de distrito.* En el lado opuesto existen Unidades² donde para gran parte de los oblatos en ministerio pastoral, los distritos constituyen la única forma de comunidad local ya que muchos viven solos.

3. *Combinación entre casas y distritos.* En el medio se ubican las Unidades donde la gran mayoría de los oblatos viven en residencias y casas oblatas, pero todas estas comunidades residenciales son agrupadas en distritos; si los hay se incluyen también los oblatos que viven solos.

INTENTO DE UN ANÁLISIS

No me es posible evaluar en profundidad la vivencia de las comunidades de distrito a nivel de toda la Congregación. Si se quisiera evaluar bien habría que hacer una encuesta tanto sobre las comunidades residenciales como las de distrito, considerar los diferentes tipos de comunidad en cuanto a número y organización, y luego averiguar cómo

se vive la comunidad en las distintas situaciones. Habría que ver cómo casas y distritos resultan eficaces a corto y a largo plazo en cuanto a la misión y la vida religiosa; habría que apreciar su integración con los laicos – especialmente los asociados – y su capacidad de atracción para las vocaciones.

Ya que no disponemos de un estudio de este tipo solo quiero ofrecer algunas consideraciones e impresiones, partiendo de experiencias personales que serán menos objetivas. Espero que estas observaciones personales estimulen el diálogo sobre la comunidad.

Dos realidades a tener en cuenta

Cuando hablamos de vida comunitaria, una primera realidad a tener en cuenta es el menor o mayor número de oblatos en una comunidad. Hay muchas unidades donde las residencias en su mayoría no agrupan más que a dos oblatos. La Regla dice que estas pequeñas comunidades pueden ser autónomas sólo en circunstancias excepcionales y parece sugerir que formen parte de un distrito o que estén adscritas a una casa (R.77b). Para una comunidad completa se requieren por lo menos tres Oblatos (C.92).

Otra realidad a tener en cuenta es el menor o mayor número de Oblatos que viven solos. La Regla es bastante clara al respecto: vivir solo se permite únicamente a causa de la misión y de manera temporal.

– Se dice, en R.92c, que el superior mayor puede permitirle a un Oblato vivir solo “por exigencias de la misión”, y que “la situación de un Oblato que vive solo debe considerarse siempre temporal”.

– Los Oblatos que viven solos son adscritos a una comunidad de distrito o a una casa (C.77)³.

En 2010 se hizo un estudio sobre la proporción de oblatos que han terminado ya su formación inicial y están viviendo solos. En toda la Congregación, 634 Oblatos viven de esta manera, lo que corresponde a un porcentaje del 18% de los miembros fuera de la formación inicial. En casi la mitad de nuestras aproximadamente 60 Unidades el porcentaje es pequeño, inferior al 10%; se trata entonces de situaciones excepcionales. Sin embargo, en 11 unidades la cifra supera el 30%. En estos casos, si uno considera que muchos oblatos retirados viven juntos en casas de ancianos, y además se tienen en cuenta las varias casas de formación y de administración, se puede concluir que en estas Unidades la mayoría de los oblatos en ministerio pastoral viven solos⁴.

Para intentar un análisis, aplico en esquema F.O.D.A. enumerando algunas fortalezas, debilidades, oportunidades y amenazas que observamos en la experiencia de las comunidades de distrito.

Distritos: Fortalezas y oportunidades

Las comunidades de distrito, como las demás formas de comunidad, son fuertes cuando en sus miembros se pone mucho interés en la vida fraterna y hay creatividad de parte de sus superiores. Cuando los miembros tienen conciencia de que la misión pasa por la comunidad, y lamentan que a causa de la misión muchas veces se encuentran dispersos a pares o excepcionalmente solos, el encuentro del distrito es como un oasis que se anhela alcanzar tras largos días de marcha en el desierto. ¡Por fin uno goza de estar en familia, descansa y puede compartir sus experiencias con los demás; por fin se reza juntos, se reflexiona y estudia, y se participa en la vida de la Provincia y de la Congregación! Hay distritos que se reúnen por varios días varias veces al año y siguen un programa bien preparado, y cada vez el encuentro es como un retiro y una fiesta. También cabe mencionar que la inclusión del aspecto económico es muy importante para la vida comunitaria; así se rinden cuentas, se comparte, se piden permisos para proyectos y hay animación mutua para un estilo de vida sencillo.

La comunidad de distrito nos brinda grandes oportunidades especialmente cuando la realidad de la comunidad de casa es muy reducida o algunos deben vivir solos. Como “hombres apostólicos” necesitamos el intercambio a un nivel más amplio, hay que oxigenarse. Incluso en provincias que tienen comunidades de casa más numerosas muchas veces se forman agrupaciones similares a los distritos, como sectores o áreas, para permitir intercambios más ricos.

Distritos: Debilidades y amenazas

La comunidad de distrito se vuelve débil cuando a varios les falta la motivación de participar y el superior con su consejo tampoco insisten en encuentros regulares y bien preparados. En este caso el distrito se reduce a un club social que se reúne para ciertos aniversarios, pero no hay tiempo para tratar ciertos temas o para la formación permanente. Muchas veces se llega tarde y se parte temprano. No se tocan en comunidad los asuntos económicos, los cuales se arreglan solo con el

superior mayor; no hay costumbre de presentarlos y discutirlos entre hermanos en el distrito. Hay que admitir también que, de hecho, la estructura de la comunidad de distrito no se presta mucho para el compartir de bienes, ya que a nivel de distrito normalmente no se comparten casas, vehículos o los ingresos y gastos de pastoral; esto se da más bien en las comunidades residenciales.

Entre las amenazas quiero resaltar una en particular que nos puede venir de esta estructura de las comunidades distritales: los distritos pueden hacernos perder de vista que para un oblato vivir solo no es normal.

Se podría objetar: pero si en algunos sectores de la Congregación la evolución histórica nos ha llevado a ministerios individuales, ¿no sería mejor aceptarlo? ¿Acaso se puede deshacer la historia?

Esta pregunta tiene que ver con la realidad y la interpretación del carisma oblato. Ciertamente, un carisma evoluciona y cambia en ciertos aspectos pero yo creo que debe quedar siempre fiel a sí mismo y mantener su propia personalidad. Podemos decir que nuestro carisma crece con la vida misionera oblata cuya expresión auténtica se da en cada Capítulo General. Es ahí donde debemos buscar los reajustes de la vivencia de nuestro carisma a la realidad de cada época, pero también las llamadas a la conversión.

Antes de llegar a conclusiones, echemos una mirada a la historia de la fórmula “comunidad de distrito”.

HISTORIA DE LA FÓRMULA

Desde la Regla de 1928 el distrito forma parte de nuestras Constituciones y Reglas. En la Regla de 1928, que básicamente tendrá vigencia hasta 1966, el distrito es una unidad local de gobierno para entrelazar residencias, cuando éstas no pueden ser adscritas a una casa (R.516). Los distritos se equiparan a casas y cuentan con su “superior de distrito” y consejo. Se establecen con el permiso del Superior General en consejo y están bajo la autoridad del provincial, el cual les proveerá de estatutos particulares. Así por ejemplo en el *Personnel* de 1939 encontramos distritos en Uruguay (Salto), en EEUU en varias provincias, en el sur del Canadá (a veces combinando una casa con una residencia como en Winnipeg y Regina), y en el norte de Canadá donde hay un buen número de ellos. Hay distritos en Sri Lanka, África del Sur y en

Lesoto. Sin embargo, no todas las provincias y vicariatos de misión hacen uso de esta estructura.

En la Regla de 1966 los distritos se mencionan en C.170 en el mismo sentido que en 1928, pero se hace mención explícita de “estaciones donde Oblatos se encuentran aislados a causa del ministerio”, que pueden ser acopladas a un distrito.

Como ya mencionamos arriba, desde 1982 nuestras Reglas equiparan casas, residencias y distritos como maneras de participar en la vida de comunidad local (C.77). El distrito ya no tiene carácter excepcional.

En 1989 la administración general publica los resultados de una encuesta en 15 Unidades oblatas sobre las comunidades de distrito⁵. El documento intitulado “comunidades de distrito” se expresa así:

Cuando consideramos el hecho de que el 24,1% de los Oblatos vivir solos en su misión o su lugar de residencia podemos entender mejor la importancia de las comunidades de distrito, que son para estos Oblatos la única manera de vivir la vida de comunidad tan altamente apreciada por Monseñor de Mazenod.

La conclusión de esta encuesta presenta como una imagen ideal del distrito: “la principal actividad del distrito consiste en reuniones periódicas, reuniones que son cálidas y bien organizadas, reuniones donde se viven momentos de oración, junto al compartir a nivel de fe y en el plano pastoral. En ocasiones especiales, otras reuniones refuerzan estos lazos de comunidad. El Superior/animador es el alma del distrito y tiene la responsabilidad de mantener contacto personal con cada oblato en su comunidad, para organizar las reuniones y para asegurar un contacto regular con la Administración Provincial. Dos asistentes le ayudan con sus consejos y toman junto con él las decisiones administrativas. Un distrito organizado de esta manera experimenta una renovación de la vida comunitaria con intensas experiencias de oración y de intercambio de experiencias. Cada oblata siente que es valorado y comprendido por sus hermanos. El mismo distrito puede emprender proyectos misioneros y contar con la participación de todos. Los Oblatos proyectan una imagen de un grupo dinámico, un grupo que está estrechamente unido y enteramente al servicio de la misión.”

El Capítulo del 1992 elige como tema la comunidad. Su documento, *Testigos en comunidad apostólica*, pide, entre otras cosas, una evaluación de la vida de la comunidad local (nº 20), recomienda la inclu-

sión de laicos en esta tarea (ib.), llama a los oblatos a preguntarse sobre su sentido de pertenencia a la comunidad y pide dar cuenta del uso del dinero ante ella (nº 23). En el nº 23,5 menciona explícitamente la comunidad de distrito, la reafirma, le exige un proyecto comunitario y el compartir financiero, y advierte que no hay que “estancarse en formas rutinarias y mediocres que tienen de la comunidad de distrito sólo el nombre”.

Los Capítulos siguientes se concentran en otros temas pero nunca dejan de hablar de la comunidad. El documento capitular de 1998 afirma, por ejemplo, de forma bastante tajante que “la evangelización no es la obra de francotiradores sino de toda la comunidad...” (nº 12). Un poco más abajo, ofrece una consideración teológica: “Nuestra vida fraterna vivida en comunidad es prueba de que la vida de comunión es posible. Dios es Trinidad, es amor: esta Buena Noticia que anunciamos es creíble.” (nº 30).

En el 2008, durante mi tiempo de superior general, escribí una carta a la congregación sobre la comunidad apostólica. Me parecía un tema de primera importancia. Hablaba entonces de la “crisis y lento retorno a vivir en comunidad en nuestra historia Oblata reciente”; recordaba que “el Fundador insiste en varias ocasiones en que un Oblato no debe vivir solo, al decir cosas como ‘Vivir en comunidad es esencial a su estilo de vida’ y ‘Es esencial que sigan exigiendo permanecer en pares’”. Y sobre el tema que nos ocupa aquí decía: “Las comunidades de distrito no deben tener la intención de ocupar el lugar de las casas comunitarias; su propósito es enriquecer la vida comunitaria cuando las casas o residencias son más bien pequeñas y algunos de los Oblatos viven solos. En respeto a nuestro carisma, debemos evitar a toda costa que los jóvenes Oblatos comiencen y se acostumbren a vivir solos”.

En el Capítulo del 2010, en el informe sobre el estado de la Congregación decía algo más siguiendo la misma línea:

Considerando que, según nuestras Constituciones, una comunidad debería estar constituida por tres miembros, algunas unidades han de dar pasos significativos para reorganizarse en comunidades de un mínimo de tres o más. Sin embargo, en muchas situaciones encontramos sólo dos oblatos en una comunidad o que los misioneros que viven solos se juntan entre una vez a la semana y tres veces al año. Los distritos, zonas y otras agrupaciones desempeñan un papel

importante de animación en tales casos, pero a largo plazo no pueden sustituir la vida común de hecho.

Para hacer sentir con más fuerza la urgencia de un cambio estructural favorable a la vida en común, la administración general saliente intentó hacer aprobar un cambio en nuestras Reglas que reservaría el término “comunidad” a las comunidades de casa o residencia, y definiría los distritos como estructuras de animación, semejantes a los “sectores” o las “áreas” en algunas Unidades. Pero faltaban dos votos para la requerida mayoría de dos tercios y así la estructura “comunidad de distrito” quedó sin modificarse, igual que muchos otros cambios de estructura que no fueron aprobados por el Capítulo. Más que exigirnos cambios de estructura el Capítulo 2010 nos llamó a la conversión, y el primer campo de conversión mencionado es “nuestra comunidad”.

OPINIÓN PERSONAL Y CONCLUSIÓN

Según mi entender, la comunidad de distrito ha surgido en la Congregación como respuesta a situaciones misioneras que nos condujeron a tener comunidades muy reducidas o puestos solitarios. Era consecuencia de nuestra opción por las misiones más difíciles con los más pobres y en lugares muy apartados, y también se explica porque en varias partes del mundo fuimos fundadores de iglesias locales – como en partes del Canadá, del Sur de África, de Sri Lanka, el Paraguay etc. A veces el clero de estas iglesias locales constaba casi exclusivamente de Oblatos, y al querer cubrir el territorio nuestras comunidades residenciales se reducían a su expresión mínima o desaparecían. En estas situaciones, los distritos aportaban un gran alivio a la soledad del misionero; a ciertos intervalos, podían ofrecer a los hermanos dispersos el calor de la fraternidad y mantener los lazos con la Congregación.

¿Tiene que ser irreversible esta evolución? Yo creo que no. Pensemos en el Beato José Gerard. En sus primeros años de misión con los Zulúes se reunía sólo de vez en cuando con su comunidad a fuerza de largos viajes, pero más tarde en su vida pudo gozar de la vida en común gracias a las casas oblatas de la floreciente misión de Lesoto. Según mi opinión el aislamiento de pequeños grupos y sobre todo los puestos solitarios no se deberían tolerar por largo tiempo; nos pueden hacer

mucho daño. Así lo percibí en mis primeros años de misionero en mi provincia del Paraguay. Puedo decir que aquí ya hemos dado la vuelta y retornamos a la vida en común, con contadas excepciones.

Los distritos ofrecen un gran enriquecimiento a nuestra vida comunitaria porque permiten intercambios más ricos, con más oblatos presentes. Los distritos ayudan mucho a hacer puente cuando la misión exige algunos años de aislamiento pero ellos deberían mantenerse siempre cuando las comunidades de casa resultan demasiado reducidas. Solo veo un peligro en esta estructura de distritos cuando se llega a pensar que ésta puede simplemente sustituir la vida fraterna bajo un techo común, cuando un oblato llega a decir: “vivo solo desde hace mucho tiempo, pero siempre he vivido en comunidad ya que participo en el distrito”. El mismo Capítulo 2010, que decidió no modificar la Regla en cuanto a los distritos, nos ha recordado: “Que los oblatos que vivan fuera de la comunidad a causa de la misión lo hagan a modo de excepción y únicamente con el apoyo de la comunidad” (La Conversión, pag. 23). Como decía San Basilio sobre la belleza de la vida en común: “Si tú vives solo, ¿a quién le puedes lavar los pies? ¿A quién puedes cuidar?”.⁶

Es cierto que a veces nos cuesta llevar la vida en común, especialmente cuando ella es intercultural. Cuando la fraternidad se vive a partir de la fe ella constituye un testimonio elocuente del amor cristiano y se hace profecía de un futuro vivido en comunión, se convierte en una bendición tanto para la Iglesia como para el mundo entero. El trabajar separadamente nos puede parecer más fácil y más eficaz, pero la evangelización tiene otros parámetros. Vivir en comunidad ya es misión: ésta es una convicción que ha crecido bastante entre los Oblatos en los últimos años⁷ y nos conecta con el carisma de San Eugenio que se hizo visible 200 años atrás cuando él fundaba su primera comunidad de misioneros.

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¹ *Comunidad*, in *Diccionario de los Valores Oblatos*, art.

² “Unidad” se refiere aquí a provincias, delegaciones o misiones.

³ C.77. “Aquellos que, a causa de la misión, viven solos, normalmente están adscritos a una comunidad de distrito o a una casa.”

⁴ La siguiente tabla presenta un resumen de estadísticas del 2010:

Región	viven solos	notas
África-Madagascar	15% = 86 OMIs	en dos provincias son 35%
América Latina	19% = 69	en dos unidades son 38% y 57%
Asia-Oceanía	21% = 112	en una provincia son 34%
Canadá-EEUU	19% = 169	en dos unidades son 55% y 51%
Europa	19% = 198	en 27 unidades menos del 10%,
Congregación	18% = 634	en 11 unidades más del 30%

⁵ F. SANTUCCI, “Vie Oblate Life” 53 (1994).

⁶ <http://www.focolare.org/es/news/2013/08/23/don-antonio-gilberto/>

⁷ “La vida comunitaria ... para nosotros Oblatos, no solamente es necesaria a la misión, sino es misión, y en el mismo tiempo un signo cualificado de la misión de Iglesia.” (Capítulo 1986)

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LE CHOIX COMMUNAUTAIRE DE LA DELEGATION OBLATE DU SENEGAL

ENZO ABBATINALI, OMI

Il est question d'évoquer une page de l'histoire de la mission oblate en Afrique occidentale, précisément au Sénégal.

Pour connaître le contenu de cette page, la revue **Oblatio** s'adresse au témoin encore sur le terrain que je suis, car Dieu a voulu que je sois « un » des neuf oblats envoyés au Sénégal par le P. Fernand Jetté en juin 1976, en réponse à la demande des Evêques Card. Hyacinthe Thiandoum de Dakar et Mgr Théodore Adrien Sarr de Kaolack au mois de mars de la même année.

Invité donc à évoquer non seulement une page de l'histoire, mais surtout l'inspiration reçue qui a guidé nos premiers pas, me revient à l'esprit ce que je retrouve dans mes notes personnelles :

« N'évoquer que le passé endort, ne se projeter que dans l'avenir fait rêver, vivre le présent engage. Fais-moi vivre, Seigneur, mon aujourd'hui. Le vivant avec Toi, il deviendra aussi ton aujourd'hui ».

Le sujet qu'on m'a proposé demande nécessairement de relire un chapitre de l'histoire de la Délégation oblate au Sénégal et les acteurs de cette histoire que sont les neuf Oblats italiens envoyés pour cette mission, après une première expérience missionnaire en Indochine entre 1959 et 1975.

En vérité « Vie Oblate Life » (61 [2002], p. 407-430) a déjà publié l'article titré *Les Oblats au Sénégal : l'expérience des six premières années*, que j'avais moi-même rédigé et que je chercherai à synthétiser 14 ans après, à l'aube du Triennium Oblat qui nous prépare au 200^{ème} anniversaire de la fondation de notre famille religieuse et missionnaire.

En service missionnaire dans le Vicariat apostolique de Louang Prabang, auquel étaient rattachés deux districts : Sayaboury à l'ouest, Houei Say au nord, les 30 Oblats de Marie Immaculée italiens s'occupaient de la première évangélisation auprès d'une dizaine d'ethnies environ, dispersées dans la forêt dense, au bord des rivières et sur la

montagne. Chacune d'elles pratiquaient sa propre religion selon la culture et la tradition ancestrale. Les Oblats envoyés par les Vicaires apostoliques, Mgr Lionello Berti, décédé en 1978, et son successeur Mgr Alessandro Staccioli, s'occupaient chacun d'un village, après avoir appris la langue des gens à évangéliser. Dans ce village perdu dans la forêt, le missionnaire s'occupait aussi de la santé physique des gens, qui venaient chaque jour se faire soigner par le blanc. Les moyens de communication étaient limités : pas de téléphone, pas de radio, pas de voitures, mais simplement des motos qui pouvaient aider à franchir les distances en empruntant des pistes en pente et glissantes. Chacun vivait donc seul au village, en partageant la vie simple et austère des gens à ouvrir au message de l'Évangile. Chaque poste de mission était rattaché au centre du district où se trouvait le supérieur, qui était aussi directeur d'une école catholique fréquentée surtout par des élèves de religion bouddhiste. C'est justement à ce centre que les Oblats, obligés à vivre seuls à cause de l'Évangile, pouvaient se retrouver, habituellement le dimanche soir, pour vivre le lendemain une journée de vie communautaire et fraternelle. Cela représentait simplement une parenthèse dans le déroulement d'une vie missionnaire vécue pratiquement en cavalier seul si bien que, parfois, on se demandait quelle différence il y avait-il entre nous et un prêtre diocésain. Et pourtant cela permettait à l'Oblat de se donner aux pauvres gens de la montagne, en s'occupant de l'instruction, de la santé, du secours matériel et de l'initiation à la vie chrétienne pour ceux qui le demandaient. C'était pratiquer le zèle pour les âmes dont parle Saint Eugène dans son testament. Toutefois, le premier élément du binôme, qui devait motiver le zèle apostolique et en constituer le moteur, c'est-à-dire « la charité, la charité, la charité ! » vécue en communauté de consacrés, n'était pas toujours l'âme de l'apostolat oblat... et c'est ce qu'on essayait de relancer au moins une fois par semaine au centre des districts de Louang Prabang, Sayaboury et Houei Say.

Au niveau du Vicariat apostolique à ses débuts, lorsque le Vicaire faisait fonction de Provincial et le Vicariat de Province oblate à partir de 1973, les oblats se retrouvaient une ou deux fois par an, à l'occasion de la retraite annuelle pendant la saison des pluies ou d'une sorte de presbyterium au début ou à la fin de l'année pastorale. Trop peu pour dire que la communauté oblate était un fait, qui te suivait pour le reste

de l'année ! À noter aussi que seul l'avion pouvait nous permettre les déplacements d'un district à l'autre, ceci à cause de la situation politique et militaire évidemment dangereuse, étant dans un contexte de guérilla permanente qui infestait tout le nord du pays. De plus, en vue d'une animation personnelle ou communautaire, on ne disposait pas de documents venant de la Province d'Italie ou de l'Administration générale. Tout d'abord parce qu'en ce temps-là il n'y avait pas grande chose, ensuite, même avec la poste par avion, la communication était vraiment limitée.

Un premier constat donc s'impose à la suite du tableau présenté ci-dessus : les Oblats vivaient en majorité seuls et pouvaient goûter aux bienfaits de la communauté au centre du district une fois par semaine. Pratiquement, chacun gérait la mission que l'Évêque lui avait confiée comme il lui semblait bon, en suivant les inspirations d'en-haut s'il soignait sa vie spirituelle, en répondant aux impératifs de la conscience si la crainte de Dieu l'habitait, en pratiquant le zèle apostolique si la passion pour Dieu et pour l'homme le motivait.

Il convient de noter que le Concile Vatican II avec son ouverture au monde - *Gaudium et spes* et le décret sur le renouveau de la vie religieuse *Perfectae caritatis*, ainsi que les directives sur l'activité missionnaire dans *Ad gentes* - était encore en bas-âge. Il essayait de faire ses premiers pas et devait encore franchir les frontières des quatre continents...en quelques mots, il faut reconnaître qu'au Laos, au plan des informations, on était plutôt coupé de l'Église pour ne pas dire du monde.

Je me permets aussi de souligner que nous avions tous reçu une formation à la vie commune, qui consistait à manger à la même table, à prier dans la même chapelle, à obéir au son de la même cloche, à sortir de la maison une fois par semaine le même jour et à la même heure. Non, nous n'avions pas connu une vie où le partage de ce qu'on vit, de ce qu'on fait, de ce qu'on souffre, était l'âme de la vie communautaire. Formé à une vie centrée sur soi même, on pouvait se débrouiller tout seul en mission, là où la règle de vie était justement de se tirer d'affaire en faisant preuve d'ingéniosité. Si j'exagère, qu'on me pardonne, mais je revois les choses à quarante années de distance, après avoir goûté au bonheur de la vie partagée en communauté apostolique depuis l'ouverture de notre Délégation au service de l'Église du Sénégal.

Et voilà que 1975 arrive. Le climat général en Indochine est lourd et incertain. Les Vietminh au Viêt-Nam, les Khmers Rouge au Cambodge, les Pathets Lao au Laos, chacun de son côté a des ambitions : libérer ces pays de l'impérialisme américain, rendre aux citoyens le droit à se gouverner et à se gérer à tous les niveaux. Pour se faire, il faut se libérer des gouvernants corrompus à la solde de l'étranger et de leurs adeptes au niveau de la religion considérée comme l'opium des peuples.

L'histoire que je viens de brosser est nécessaire pour comprendre pourquoi, appelés à repartir en mission, nous nous sommes dit qu'on ne pouvait le faire qu'à la seule condition de partir en Oblats, prêts à vivre en frères comme Eugène l'a demandé depuis toujours à ses fils.

Ainsi, avec l'expulsion survenue au mois d'août 1975, mais à laquelle on s'était préparé depuis le mois de janvier-février, les trente Oblats italiens se sont retrouvés à Rome pour la béatification d'Eugène de Mazenod le 19 octobre de la même année. Cela n'avait pas été prévu, mais c'est ce qui nous énormément aidé énormément à considérer le fait d'être obligés de quitter les gens qu'on avait aimés et les œuvres qu'on avait montées pour leur promotion humaine et sociale, comme une grâce à saisir et à vivre. C'est là que nous nous sommes redécouverts comme Oblats de Marie Immaculée, et dans un certain sens, heureux et fiers d'avoir connu l'épreuve de l'expulsion à cause de l'Évangile. D'ailleurs, de l'échec humain imposé quelque chose de beau était en train de naître : les trois Délégations de l'Indonésie, de l'Uruguay et du Sénégal.

De novembre 1975 à novembre 1976, la Province-mère d'Italie avec le P. Remigio Salzillo et celle du Laos avec le P. Walter Verzeletti a tout fait pour nous préparer à répondre aux appels qui nous venaient des Églises dans le besoin de main d'œuvre missionnaire.

Au mois de février 1976, le P. Marcello Zago de l'Administration générale et les deux Provinciaux d'Italie et du Laos sont partis en voyage d'exploration en Afrique, visitant le Cameroun, le Gabon et le Sénégal où ils ont pu rencontrer les deux évêques de Dakar et de Kaolack qui avaient sollicité depuis un an la venue des missionnaires italiens expulsés du Laos.

Ainsi, invités à s'exprimer sur l'orientation à donner pour la suite de notre vie missionnaire, neuf oblats se sont proposés pour le Sénégal, sachant bien que le passage de l'Asie à l'Afrique, bien que riche, pourrait s'avérer difficile : du bouddhisme à l'islam, de la forêt à la savane,

du riz au mil, de la richesse en eau à la sécheresse, et enfin de la langue lao au wolof.

Le 7 juin 1976, le P. Fernand Jetté, Supérieur général, donne la lettre d'obédience pour le Sénégal aux frères Donato Cianciullo et Antonio D'Amico, aux pères Enzo Abbatinali, Guglielmo Crespan, Giancarlo Todesco, Amadio Vitali, Danilo Ceccato, Beppino Cò et Massimo Kratter en ces termes : « Avec la présente je te communique ton appartenance officielle à la Province d'Italie pour le Sénégal, auquel tu sauras apporter ta collaboration, soit par une insertion dans la vie communautaire, soit par une participation généreuse à sa mission d'évangéliser les pauvres ».

Et d'ajouter les CC 42 et 45, qui affirment que : « Les membres de la Congrégation sont religieux missionnaires dans la communauté et par la communauté à laquelle ils appartiennent. Ils témoigneront aux hommes que Jésus vit au milieu d'eux, lui qui les a réunis pour annoncer son Royaume ».

Ainsi, sans se concerter au préalable, le groupe se découvre, riche de la même expérience missionnaire au Laos et béni par la même épreuve de l'expulsion, projeté vers un avenir ouvert à la surprise d'un Dieu qui ne cesse de nous surprendre à la mesure de la confiance qu'on met en Lui...Fr. Donato âgé de 45 ans et P. Massimo de 30 ans, quelle audace nous a-t-elle pris pour accepter un nouveau départ vers un pays qu'on dit sec, aride, chaud et à majorité musulmane !

Mais comment partir vers l'inconnu, comment repartir après une expérience missionnaire si exaltante connue en Indochine ?

Le texte de la lettre d'obédience du Supérieur Général était venu confirmer les sentiments qui habitaient chacun de nous : on ne partira pas pour continuer à vivre et à travailler en cavalier seul.

Nous choisissons alors de repartir à condition de pouvoir vivre en communauté et par la communauté nous consacrer à l'évangélisation des gens, là où les Évêques de Dakar et de Kaolack vont nous envoyer.

Mais comment nous préparer à un projet si ambitieux et audacieux qui murissait en nous au fur et à mesure qu'on faisait une relecture de notre expérience missionnaire au Laos ?

Dans notre province, nous avions tous connu un maître en la matière pour l'avoir eu comme formateur et conseiller spirituel. Nous avons donc sollicité le P. Marino Merlo pour nous aider durant toute

une semaine à relire notre expérience missionnaire au Laos, en tenant compte des points faibles connus, pour les corriger, et nous entraîner à une vie communautaire selon les exigences de la mission souhaitées par le Concile Vatican II et surtout par nos CC-RR.

C'est à partir de deux textes évangéliques classiques : « A ceci tous reconnaîtront que vous êtes mes disciples, si vous avez de l'amour les uns pour les autres » (Jn 13, 35) et « Comme toi, Père, tu es en moi et moi en toi, qu'eux aussi soient en nous, afin que le monde croit que tu m'as envoyé » (Jn 17, 21), que le P. Marino nous a aidé à comprendre que le témoignage de la charité évangélique et de l'unité fraternelle souhaitées et voulues par Jésus lui-même, dès le début, constitue l'âme de l'évangélisation. On peut bien sûr s'investir sans elle intellectuellement et physiquement dans la formation et la promotion humaine car les gens ont besoin de pain et d'instruction. Mais ce dont ils ont encore plus besoin, c'est de la Parole de Dieu ! Et en s'appuyant sur le texte des Actes 4, 32 : « La multitude des croyants n'avait qu'un cœur et qu'une âme », que Saint Eugène aimait rappeler souvent aux premiers Oblats, et que les CCRR de 1982 formulent ainsi dans C 37 : « À mesure que grandit entre eux la communion d'esprit et de cœur, les Oblats témoignent aux yeux des hommes que Jésus vit au milieu eux et fait leur unité pour les envoyer annoncer son Royaume », le P. Marino ouvrait nos esprits à l'accueil de la grâce d'un nouvel envoi en mission comme communauté.

Il ajoutait avec conviction que, de la vie vécue sous le même toit et autour de la même table, le Seigneur nous ouvrait à une vie vécue dans le partage de ce que nous sommes et de ce que nous avons. Et c'était justement ce que l'Église demandait aux consacrés avec l'enseignement du Concile Vatican II, enrichis de celui de Paul VI avec *Evangelica testificatio* de 1971 et *Evangelii nuntiandi* de 1975.

Arrivés en avion à Dakar le 19 novembre 1976 pour les deux premiers et en bateau le 23 pour les sept autres, nous fûmes accueillis par l'Église locale comme un don de Dieu : neuf missionnaires en une seule fois ! On nous permit ensuite de visiter les trois postes de mission qui nous étaient destinés : Nguéniène-Djilas pour le diocèse de Dakar et Kaffrine-Koungueul pour le diocèse de Kaolack.

À la suite de cette première visite, accompagnés jusqu'à Kaolack par le P. Eugène Galon des Missionnaires du St Esprit au nom du Cardi-

nal Thiandoum, ensuite par Mgr Théodore Adrien Sarr jusqu'à Koungheul, nous nous sommes retrouvés à la procure de Kaolack pour partager nos impressions et exprimer nos sentiments. Puis, dans un climat de prière et d'écoute, nous nous sommes situés dans le concret de la mission que nous venions de découvrir et de toucher de nos propres mains.

Ce partage communautaire fut axé sur deux questions fondamentales : « Où te vois-tu ? Où vois-tu ton frère ? ». Et à partir des réponses données par chacun et reçues par le conseil de la Délégation qui avait été défini par le Provincial d'Italie le 8 octobre au théologat oblat de Vermicino, ce même conseil a pu donner une première configuration à la délégation oblate au Sénégal.

Certains se proposaient pour servir la mission là où c'était plus difficile : chaleur, aridité, pauvreté, éloignement, distances à franchir, d'autres optaient pour le milieu musulman avec une sorte d'ambition d'en ouvrir certains à la lumière de l'Évangile, d'autres encore pour l'urgence de la première évangélisation auprès de ceux qui étaient en état de choisir car ils pratiquaient encore la religion traditionnelle. Dans une véritable ouverture et spontanéité, la première équipe a su exercer la capacité d'interpréter la volonté de Dieu sur chaque confrère appelé à implanter ensemble la Délégation en terre sénégalaise. Cela a orienté de façon pratique l'option pour la communauté comme pierre d'angle à l'édifice qu'on peut, d'une certaine manière, admirer aujourd'hui enrichi par la présence des jeunes Oblats issus du terroir et en chemin vers une appropriation personnelle et communautaire du Charisme de Saint Eugène. De cette expérience connue et vécue avec mes frères, je n'ai jamais cessé de rendre grâce à Dieu car elle porte le sceau de la présence de Jésus au milieu des siens.

Nous avons communiqué aux évêques concernés la composition des trois communautés, à savoir : à Nguéniène-Djilas, le Fr. Donato et les PP. Massimo, Giancarlo et Enzo ; à Kaffrine, le Fr. Antonio et les PP. Danilo et Guglielmo ; à Koungueul, les PP. Beppino et Amadio. À la suite de quoi, nous avons obtenu de passer une semaine en communauté oblate à Ngasobil sur le terrain du petit séminaire interdiocésain. Là, nous avons partagé dans la prière et la concertation sur ce que nos Evêques nous proposaient comme service missionnaire et pastoral à rendre. Le tout confronté à ce que nous ressentions après la visite effectuée sur les lieux, ce qui nous avait permis de vivre cette expérience et nous concertant encore sur la composition de nos communautés.

Une semaine bien riche, une sorte de vie fraternelle menée au cénacle dans l'attente de l'Esprit Saint, comme au temps de la première communauté des Apôtres avec la Vierge Marie et quelques disciples. Une semaine qui nous a d'ailleurs préparé à célébrer pour la première fois la solennité de notre patronne, l'Immaculée, en terre sénégalaise, avec l'équipe des formateurs du séminaire et une centaine de séminaristes.

Le lendemain, c'est le moment de nous quitter pour rejoindre la mission qui nous a été confiée. Avant de prendre la route, prévoyant les distances assez considérables entre les trois postes de mission - Nguéniène-Kaffrine 130 Km ; Kaffrine-Koungueul 95 Km ; Nguéniène-Koungueul 225 Km -, et tenant compte de la difficulté des communications, j'ai essayé de sonder les cœurs de mes frères, en leur demandant dans combien de temps on pourrait se retrouver et la réponse unanime fut : « dans un mois pour célébrer ensemble Noël et le nouvel an 1977 en communauté oblate » !

Ainsi est né dans la conscience de chacun le désir de nous revoir chaque mois, tant qu'on serait en stage d'insertion dans le pays et d'initiation à la culture et à la langue des gens, au moins durant six mois, avant de prendre officiellement en charge la communauté chrétienne. Et ceci s'est concrétisé dans l'effort de chaque communauté à prendre la route dans la soirée du dernier dimanche du mois pour rejoindre les confrères à tour de rôle dans leur poste de mission.

Cela n'a pas manqué d'étonner les autres missionnaires et d'édifier les évêques et les quelques prêtres diocésains qui se demandaient : « d'où viennent ces rescapés du Laos ? qui sont-ils ces Oblats qui arrivent chez nous à neuf d'un seul coup et, bien que divisés en trois groupes, désirent soigner et cultiver la vie communautaire, bien qu'ils soient engagés dans un service pastoral nouveau, urgent et exigeant ? ».

Le premier à exprimer son admiration a été l'évêque de Kaolack lui-même. Il nous a invité à une concélébration eucharistique à la cathédrale pour nous présenter aux fidèles au cours de la célébration dominicale. Le visage des fidèles exprimait l'émerveillement et la reconnaissance, en voyant leur évêque à l'autel, entouré de sept prêtres encore jeunes en ce temps-là. Ensuite, c'est la Mère Prieure du monastère bénédictin de Keur Guilaye, d'obédience de Solesmes, qui nous a invités à une concélébration d'action de grâce pour le don à l'Eglise du Sénégal

d'une équipe d'agents pastoraux venus de loin. Et pour le dimanche de Pentecôte 1977, la famille du Foyer de Charité de Cap des Biches s'est déplacée pour venir voir et connaître ces missionnaires qui lançaient un défi à l'Église, « mystère, communion et mission » selon Vatican II, mais décidés eux-mêmes à en payer le prix et porter ce souffle d'Évangile à l'Église du Sénégal minoritaire au sein d'une masse de croyants musulmans.

Chaque groupe de prêtres et de consacrés déjà présent et œuvrant dans le pays, chacun à sa manière se demandait comment avions-nous pu accepter non seulement de repartir après l'échec de l'expulsion et répondre ainsi à l'appel de l'Église locale, mais encore de le faire en communauté ?

En conclusion de l'article publié en « Vie Oblate Life », cité plus haut, j'écrivais : « Tout d'abord, je dois rendre grâce à chacun de vous, pères et frères, qui, dans la fidélité à l'aujourd'hui de Dieu, m'avez aidé à écrire une belle page d'histoire de notre Congrégation missionnaire ». Et j'ajoutais avec conviction que le rapport présenté à cette occasion n'était que la synthèse de cette histoire que Dieu a écrite, ayant comme instruments chacun de nous. Nous devons savoir que là où Dieu écrit, il ne peut que se dire lui-même : « Qui donc est Dieu, pour nous aimer ainsi, fils de la terre ? » Qui donc est l'homme, pour qu'il soit capable de réponse à l'amour de Dieu ?

Pour prendre conscience de notre capacité de répondre à l'amour de Dieu et grandir dans la capacité de le faire connaître aux autres, depuis ces premiers temps, la Délégation a ressenti le besoin de se retrouver, de se rencontrer, de s'exprimer chaque mois, en se donnant rendez-vous chez les confrères à tour de rôle, tant que les distances l'ont permis. J'espère et je souhaite qu'en nous retrouvant tous, dans les conditions actuelles, seulement trois fois par an, le choix de la communauté fait en 1976 puisse continuer à porter des fruits en vue de la mission à poursuivre dans l'Église du Sénégal et de la Guinée Bissau, avec la grâce de Dieu.

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THE FORGOTTEN PORTION A BROTHER'S REFLECTION ON COMMUNITY

PAT MCGEE, OMI

I owe my life to community. That is no exaggeration. Yet, on a cold Saturday morning in December, as the snow was falling, I opened an email and found an invitation to write a personal reflection on Oblate community life. It gave me pause! If I put my thoughts to paper, and set them before my brothers, I would open myself to that wide variety of reactions we read in the “letters to the editor” in our newspapers and magazines. Yet, so be it! I set out in the spirit of the lovely personal reflection of Brother Bernard Wirth under the title “Letting my heart speak” (General Website entry of January 10, 2014)

In St. Eugene’s 1818 manuscript of the Rule, he speaks of the two portions of our Oblate life: community and mission.¹ The founder never went so far as to specify a fifty-fifty or sixty-forty arrangement to help us balance the two portions of our lives. But he did betray his deep wishes that equal diligence, care, attention and presence be dedicated to the work of community living and missionary zeal. I write and share with you my reflection out of my personal experience of Oblate life spanning 46 years; it is not a scholarly article, but more a memoir. The ebbs and flows of my own Oblate life portray one thing: our call to live as brothers in community is an invitation to a lifetime of conversion, and, as Bernard Lonergan often mused, we achieve authenticity in our lives by small steps away from inauthenticity!²

TWO ANECDOTES

During my first year on the formation team in a pre-novitiate house, we were seeking to establish community meetings as a setting where all the members could openly share their feelings and hopes³; we sought to avoid the pitfalls in which “no one could really say what they thought for fear of recrimination.” Whatever tension was present in the house,

I do not recall. What I do remember is the image of one brave young man finally unable to contain himself, blurting out “community sucks!” (This colorful idiom is hard to translate, but connotes the weight, pressure, seriousness and hard work of making community!)

More recently, at a regional gathering of Oblates, a senior member, too, could not contain himself (as the conversation focused on “community”), and spoke up saying more or less: “I joined the Oblates to be a missionary. We are missionaries. I didn’t come to live in community.”⁴ This man had done good work in and for the missions, and was of the fearless, rugged, lone missionary type.

MY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

My own convictions about and valuing of community life owe to positive and enriching experiences in community during the formative years of my early Oblate life. The years leading up to and shortly after perpetual vows taught me how to live a fraternal common life, to pray together and share faith and life, to develop and share “the riches of the heart,” how to support one another in difficult times and to enjoy both renewal and recreational times as brothers. Not idyllic nor idealistic, Oblate community life became for me the locus in which I discovered myself as lovable and capable of loving others as a brother; this, then, spilled over into the realm of mission as we naturally reached out to the people we were sent to serve. I learned, through my own practical and day-to-day experience, that it is possible to build community as a place of trust and honesty; it becomes a font of mutuality “keeping us interdependent in our lives and missionary activity.”⁵

When I was invited into the ministry of formation, my already rooted value of the common life was strengthened and focused by study of the theoretical and theological writings on community life found in church and congregational documents.⁶ Many good years of living and working in formation communities afforded me the experience of immersion in the world of Founder, Charism, and Constitutions and Rules, and the developing understanding of our history as an apostolic community of men. I remember facing my own naïveté at finding myself “shocked” that others didn’t really “pray with their Constitutions and Rules,” as people would joke about not knowing where they might have left their copy!

As I grew in my own appreciation of the fraternal aspect of our Oblate life in community, I developed a certain confidence in my vocation as Brother. This went hand in hand with developing a “thick skin” – though this was often betrayed by a red face whenever my “blood boiled”. On one occasion in a conversation with a fellow Oblate, he confessed to me that he couldn’t understand why anyone would want to be a Brother. At another time, at a Congress of Oblate Brothers in Rome in 1985, reference was made to Fr. Deschatelets’ observation that “the priesthood is essential to the Congregation,” and Fr. René Motte commented that this is an unfortunate expression if taken out of context. On a different occasion, at a province jubilee celebration, I was seated across the table from a prominent senior priest of the province. During the course of the meal, he said to me, “Brother McGee, you and I are very different. To me, the priesthood is everything!” “Yes, father, we are,” I replied quietly.

The community of Jesus and his Apostles serves as model and calls us to build communities that don’t sharpen but rather soften the distinctions among priests and brothers; we are all called to live as brothers together.⁷

CALLED TO LIVE AS OTHER CHRISTS

Community calls us to take up our cross daily and live as Jesus lived. Brotherhood and community, for us, are primarily evangelical and spiritual calls, and then secondarily practical anthropological and sociological works. It seems to me that the essential element which makes community possible is the grace which remakes us into icons of the *kenotic Christ*. I have always bristled when I hear Oblates banter with the clichéd expression, “we need less Good Friday, and more Easter Sunday.” Oftentimes, I have found myself forced back “to my cell” – the chapel for personal prayer, or my room – where I ask “for the grace to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”⁸

The long haul of this journey contains many ups and downs: temptations to flee the cost of the common life, as well as the the eros of the

unquenchable wick of our desire for *cor unum et anima una*. Today, the language of renunciation is less helpful than the language of love in expressing the cost of community living: *love without calculation*.⁹ We don't take to this *kenosis* naturally, but we grow to internalize it through a life a prayer and community.¹⁰ The antidote to the highly individualized and private character of western culture is to be found in the grace of *kenosis*. For us as Oblates, it is not primarily *my* life, but *ours*, and it is never *my* mission or ministry, but *ours*. An important and challenging area of our missionary life where we need to apply this principle is our preaching. Too much attention is often focused on “*my*” homily or *my* creativity, which draws the attention back to *ME*. It strikes me that implicit in St. Eugene's vision for his Oblates is the communal preparation for our preaching. The practices of faith sharing and *Lectio Divina* in community would greatly enhance this. Clearly, this would go against the trend to focus upon the charisma of the lone priest in the pulpit. This is what Walter Brueggemann called “the alternative to the dominant imagination”.¹¹ And this alternative is prophetic.

Thanks to the grace of living in formation communities for nearly 18 years, I grew to comprehend Oblate community life through this spiritual lens of *kenosis*. In the life of St. Eugene, the personal encounter with the redeeming love of the Crucified Savior was the key. Impassioned by this encounter, the founder desired a similar transforming encounter to be the touchstone for each of his sons, the Oblates who come after him. From this *conversion experience* all of our life and ministry flow, if we are Oblates in the pattern of Eugene. Then the thrust of our missionary lives becomes one of bringing people to this encounter with the love of God in Christ the Savior.

A KENOTIC PEDAGOGY

Our *Constitutions and Rules* along with the *General Norms for Oblate Formation* point toward a type of kenotic pedagogy. This pedagogy and this living begin in initial formation, and continue through the rest of our lives. In the words of Fr. Jetté, “as soon as possible, bring the candidates face to face with Christ the Savior.”¹² Clearly, this is not a one-time prayer exercise that once completed remains forever as a journal entry in our diary. Over the course of a lifetime, I have been shaped and re-shaped, confronted and broken down, ground and re-fired by this

personal encounter with the Crucified Savior. Earlier in life, pride and arrogance had the upper hand, and I got duped into thinking that my own intelligence and creative attempts at preaching were enough; they were simply temptations to believe that “it was all about me!”

Oblate life is a journey, and community living is a fire which little by little burns away the barriers of ego, pride and arrogance, until I am fit enough to proclaim, “there is the Lamb of God, not me,” like John the Baptist. Little by little I become capable of living this life of ours as a brother among brothers, not relying on or reacting to hierarchy or title or distinction. Ultimately it is living as a brother, imitating Jesus who was comfortable living as a brother to all he met. Over thirty years ago, I came across a booklet, produced by a national association of brothers, with the title “To brother as Jesus did,” employing the word *brother* as a verb. I still find that challenging!¹³

COMMUNITY SAVED MY LIFE

I experienced a time when I pretty much hid from community. I was really a mess, but had grown quite professional at playing the game of “I’m just fine, thanks!” My parents had died, my spiritual director had died, and I had become psychologically and spiritually unmoored. But I got up, got dressed, and went to work every day. What bothered me, though, was the awareness that I was jittery and irritable, and was more and more quick to lose my patience and temper around others. What was really going on was that my drinking was out of control. I had taken refuge in alcohol, and little by little pushed others away.

Sometimes God works wonders in this kind of scenario; this was my experience. When enough was enough, when sin abounded, grace abounded even more: my Oblate brothers and some of my co-workers stepped in to remind me that I was better than this, and that I should deal with my drinking. Treatment for alcoholism was the graced experience that taught me what conversion really was – a lesson which I claimed, proudly, to have learned some thirty years prior in a theology classroom!

NEVER TOO LATE!

Sometimes I get distracted and wonder, “why did God wait so long with me?” What I do know today is that Oblate life is a *life* – a journey, a process, a purification. Our life in community is a cruciform life¹⁴, rooted in the Paschal Mystery, nourished by the Eucharist and the Word – a life that is fraternal according to the rhythms of dying and rising with our Crucified Savior. However long it takes to learn the lesson, all is grace! I find that a certain primary focus for my life now, at this stage, is simpler, less busy, and more unitary: I want to be brother to my brother Oblates¹⁵, and try to witness to the crucial and fundamental importance of our life in community. It is from here that we, together, witness and bring others to the encounter with God’s love in Christ the Savior.

ZECHARIAH’S DUMBNESS

I began pondering this reflection in the midst of the Advent-Christmas cycle; the rich narratives in the first chapter of Luke’s Gospel provided a backdrop, and I was tending toward calling this article “Zechariah’s Dumbness,” but that could leave itself open to a broad range of connotations, some not so helpful. Yet, thinking of my life as a brother in Oblate community, I find that speechlessness often characterizes the life of an Oblate Brother. I believe that among the many dimensions of our life as Brothers in a clerical congregation¹⁶, “caretakers of community” should naturally rise to the fore. Brothers enter Oblate life in order to be missionary, religious men according to the charism and spirit of the Oblate Congregation. There is no other objective beyond vowed life in community. Thus fostering the common life, the fraternal life which is central to the life and mission of all Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, is an incarnational priority for the Brothers. Zechariah’s tongue was finally loosed, and he spoke out in praise to God in the *Benedictus* we pray every day. We, too, as brothers to one another, should finally speak up and praise God for the treasure which is our community life. May it not be the forgotten portion!

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¹ See the citation that precedes Section Two “Living in Faith” of our CCCR.

² See, for example, *Method in Theology*, New York, NY, Herder and Herder, 1972, p. 52.

³ There is a rich history of writings on community in the Congregation. See, for example, Fr. Marcello Zago’s circular letter of January 25, 1990 “The Oblate Community,” especially the section “Charity Among Yourselves”.

⁴ The various forms of excuses, variations on the loose claim “but we are not monks,” are simply that, excuses that justify an individualistic form of activism, calling it “missionary zeal”. We are missionaries together.

⁵ Constitution 38. In the previously cited letter of Fr. Zago, among core values he lists are: “the mission is a common task; brotherhood as attention to and openness to fellow Oblates; sharing and communion among members.”

⁶ My life in the Congregation has been lived in the time of renewal flowing from the Second Vatican Council, whose self-reflection on collegiality and communion has fostered a true refounding of religious life in terms of community and co-responsibility. Again, our own Oblate documents from our Chapters since 1966 are rich sources of reflection (not to be relegated to the shelf!).

⁷ See Constitutions 1, 3 & 7.

⁸ The Serenity Prayer, attributed to Reinhold Niebuhr.

⁹ DAVID N. POWER, *Love Without Calculation – A Reflection on Divine Kenosis*, New York, NY, The Crossroad Publishing Co., 2005.

¹⁰ Perhaps the notion of cooperative grace is pertinent to the long process of our submission to being transfigured into icons of the kenotic Christ.

¹¹ WALTER BRUEGGEMANN, *The Prophetic Imagination* (2nd Edition), Minneapolis, MN, Augsburg Fortress, 2001.

¹² FERNAND JETTÉ, “Jesus Christ the first Formator of Oblates” (June 1983) in *The Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate*.

¹³ Often, in our ordinary, daily parlance we bely an incipient clerical view of Jesus, as if he were a Roman Catholic priest; likewise, we may find a pious image of Mary, silent in the home of Nazareth, as a fitting model for brothers. I find all this to be nonsense!

¹⁴ See the fine work of Michael J. Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God – Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul’s Narrative Soteriology*, Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009.

¹⁵ Of course, we all do this imperfectly, and find solace in St. Paul’s words in Rom. 7:15ff, and 2Cor. 4:7ff.

¹⁶ Juridical and canonical language may be useful for precision, but should not overshadow nor subjugate the freer, charismatic language which characterizes our Congregation as communal and brotherly.

Familia Oblata

NOTAS DE UNA MUSICA LA COMUNIDAD DE LAICOS OBLATOS EN MESINA

ESMERALDA VOLPINTESTA

Este artículo ha sido escrito por muchas manos y no tiene el estilo de un autor en particular, aunque releándolo nos parecía que sí que tiene un estilo: el de la familia oblata, el de la gente que tiene predilección por la misión y por Jesús. Recoge las experiencias de algunas personas que quieren ser el símbolo de las de un gran grupo de jóvenes y adultos, que sólo en el Paraíso podremos reunir como flores de la misma planta, alimentada por la misma savia, pero que dan frutos en lugares diferentes. Nuestra historia con los Oblatos es un poco así: alguien sembró, otros hicieron crecer, otros han cosechado, hubo quien lloró, hubo quien gozó; pero todo sucedió en el campo del Señor, en el campo de la misión, en nuestro campo.

Si tenéis la oportunidad de venir a visitarnos a Mesina, no podréis dejar de ver en la comunidad de los Misioneros OMI de Gesso, situada en una aldea en la montaña de nuestra ciudad, en el pasillo adyacente a la sala en la que se realizan todas nuestras actividades, una serie de cuadros, pintados por nuestra Liliana – un miembro de la familia oblata –, que representan los muchos barcos que llevaron a los Misioneros Oblatos de María Inmaculada que han pasado, desde 1978 hasta nuestros días, por nuestra Comunidad de Mesina. ¡Han sido tantos!, algunos incluso regresaron varias veces, cruzando el estrecho. Cada uno con su propio carácter, su influencia particular, su carisma, su personalidad, han ayudado a construir la historia de la Familia Oblata de Mesina, que continúa en la actualidad. Para muchos de nosotros, que hemos conocido tantos de los rostros pintados, cada uno ha representado una gracia, un

don que Dios ha dado a nuestra comunidad, también a nivel personal, ya que nos ha permitido crecer como personas, como cristianos, como santos, para experimentar la alegría de Jesús en medio de nosotros, para garantizar la constancia en el camino, en el que más allá de las limitaciones personales y del simple afecto humano, hemos buscado constantemente la voluntad de Dios, única garantía estable de continuidad.

La experiencia de la Familia Oblata de Mesina comenzó alrededor del año 1978, cuando algunos Oblatos comenzaron a entrar en contacto con la Diócesis, poniéndose a disposición para iniciar una actividad de Nueva Evangelización a través de las Misiones Populares. Muchas parroquias de la ciudad han participado de manera directa en esta tarea de evangelización: S. Luca, S. Giacomo, Gravitelli Superiore ed Inferiore, S. Caterina, Camaro... y, como resultado, muchos de nosotros, miembros de estas parroquias, hemos entrado en contacto con la realidad de la misión.

Todos nosotros, en esta primera fase, fuimos destinatarios de este anuncio de la Palabra, y para muchos, la misión constituyó el momento de encuentro real y verdadero con Dios

Según se iba desarrollando este apostolado y esta evangelización, cada vez más personas, jóvenes, adultos, familias, solicitaron a la comunidad de religiosos OMI, que establecieron su casa en la Parroquia de Santa Caterina de la ciudad, el poder profundizar en la relación con Dios y en la realidad del carisma de San Eugenio.

En los años 80 y siguientes, comenzó la experiencia de la Comunidad de la Misión. Una comunidad de laicos y religiosos que juntos han sacado adelante un proyecto de evangelización y anuncio de la Palabra en el área de la ciudad, sin descuidar la relación con Dios y la relación con los hermanos. Resumido en una frase, realmente se hizo un esfuerzo por vivir la caridad, la caridad, la caridad entre nosotros y fuera, el celo por las almas.

Una experiencia se demuestra verdadera, es profundamente de Dios, cuando Él comienza a pedir el perderla, cuando empiezan las podas, las dificultades, las pequeñas crisis; así, en la segunda mitad de los años 90 la realidad de Mesina experimentó un momento de “transición”. En estos años nació la realidad de la AMMI (Asociación Misionera de María Inmaculada), una asociación de laicos que comparten el carisma de San Eugenio de Mazenod, y el MGC (Movimiento Juvenil “Construi-

re”). Después de los primeros años, acompañados de un gran fervor, se experimentó un momento de estancamiento. Desde hace algún tiempo se había abierto en Gesso, un pequeño pueblo rural del ayuntamiento de Mesina, situado en la cima de una colina de los Montes Peloritanos, el Centro Agape, a donde se trasladó la sede de la Comunidad de los Oblatos de María Inmaculada; pero en ese momento, las cosas parecían ponerse siempre más difíciles. Incluso físicamente, era difícil encontrarse, reunirse, para seguir adelante. Por otra parte, la experiencia de la Parroquia de Santa Catalina, punto de encuentro y de referencia para muchos, se fue transformando poco a poco, hasta ir desapareciendo. Cada uno sentía cada vez más la sensación de estar lejano de todo y de todos, como si el cuerpo estuviese compuesto por muchos miembros, pero no vinculados entre sí.

Puede parecer un panorama sombrío, sin embargo, como un río subterráneo, la vida de la comunidad continuaba fluyendo, tal vez sin la percepción y la visibilidad de los primeros tiempos, pero la vida permanecía oculta bajo tierra, esperando el lugar y momento adecuados para resurgir sobre la superficie.

Y así, el nuevo milenio nos ha visto de nuevo en marcha: hemos reorganizado las actividades apostólicas, se ha reiniciado a colaborar con los Misioneros en sus actividades. El hecho de participar en las nuevas Misiones Populares de la zona nos ha dado la oportunidad de comprometernos por Dios, a través del anuncio de la Palabra que salva. Hemos reiniciado desde Él, metiéndonos de nuevo en la disposición de seguirlo a través de las calles del mundo y Él nos ha llevado de la mano, guiando nuestro camino.

Pero también nos gusta contar algo de nuestra historia, mirando a través de los ojos de María de Nazaret, casi encontrando en los acontecimientos de su vida, semejanzas con nuestra experiencia vivida con los Oblatos de María Inmaculada, en estos casi cuarenta años de camino. Es cierto que tantos ya no están en nuestras asociaciones, en la comunidad de Asociados AMMI o, más en general, en la familia oblata, porque otras opciones que los llevaron a comprometerse en la Iglesia y en la sociedad en otros lugares. Con algunos hemos perdido el contacto, otros, incluso, han tomado opciones religiosas y existenciales diferentes, también no religiosas. Para todos tenemos una certeza: no es posible que una verdadera experiencia de Dios como la nuestra pueda

borrarse sin dejar una marca de por vida. ¡No es posible! Esta certeza nos hace darnos cuenta de que muchas veces tenemos que rediseñar el recinto del redil de la Iglesia, que se extiende hasta los confines soñados por Eugenio: hasta los confines del mundo.

También la Virgen, volviendo a Ella, que es el modelo y guía de nuestra aventura, nunca estará atada a los tiempos, a las situaciones, a la gente, a la nostalgia, para ser la Madre de la humanidad. Con ella, entonces, leamos algunas páginas de nuestra historia.

DIOS ES AMOR

Muchos de nosotros hemos encontrado los Oblatos durante una Misión, otros, todavía jóvenes, los tuvieron como maestros en la escuela, como párrocos, como directores espirituales. A todos se les hizo un anuncio: “Dios es amor y todos somos sus hijos”.

Era una manera sencilla y profunda que, sin darnos cuenta, nos llevó de la Palabra a la Eucaristía, del canto a la oración, de la alegría a profundidad. Nos encontrábamos todos los días para la misa y después cada uno iba a su escuela. A menudo, en el verano, después de la Eucaristía... ¡todos a la playa! Habíamos comprendido que se puede seguir a Jesús en cualquier lugar: sentados en el banco de la escuela, visitando a un enfermo, pintando la casa de un pobre, lavando el pelo a una mujer mendigo sin hogar, recogiendo cartón para un Proyecto de los Oblatos en Senegal. Todo ha marcado nuestras vidas para siempre, y junto a nuestras vidas, también las de nuestras familias, las de nuestros hijos.

GRATITUD

La primera idea que nos vino fue la de compartir el tesoro de nuestra experiencia: “Gratis recibisteis, dad gratis”. Comenzamos a participar en las misiones con los Oblatos, a animar grupos, a escribir nuestras experiencias en la revistilla “Construire”, editada por la comunidad de Marino, un pueblo de la provincia de Roma, donde está el Centro juvenil de los OMI, que recibe varios jóvenes, de diversas procedencias, trayectorias y edades, dispuestos a vivir una experiencia de vida cristiana en comunidad.

Siempre hemos tratado de crecer en el amor mutuo, y un momento importante, vital para todos, entonces como ahora, es comunicar las

experiencias a la luz de la Palabra. Al poner en común nuestros bienes, talentos, nuestras experiencias, hemos crecido incluso cuando las tentaciones y pruebas que se asomaron a nuestras vidas.

UNIDAD Y COMUNIDAD

Siempre los Oblatos nos han hablado y testimoniado la unidad, nos han enseñado a vivir en el amor recíproco, para recibir el don de la presencia de Jesús entre nosotros. Ser familia, estar en unidad, se ha convertido en el clima que nos hizo vivir y nos hace vivir aún hoy. Todos gozamos cuando el Señor está presente en medio de nosotros, todos sufrimos cuando por un acto de soberbia experimentamos su ausencia.

Siempre volvemos a la comunidad de los Oblatos porque allí encontramos a Dios, sin importar quién está, no importan quiénes sean los misioneros que viven en Mesina. En un encuentro de compartir la vida uno de nosotros, con la sencillez y la franqueza que lo distinguen, dijo tranquilamente: “No se ofenda ninguno, pero no estoy en la comunidad por ustedes, sino porque aquí encuentro a Dios”. No es una medida de pata, sino una afirmación profundamente verdadera y que debería ser normal. Se hace hincapié en el valor de la Comunidad, en la responsabilidad, pero también en la libertad que cada uno de nosotros tiene en su construcción: cada uno de nosotros no lo es todo, sin embargo es esencial, ya que es parte integrante de una comunidad viva. Entendemos, pues, que el hecho de encontrarse en comunidad es algo más que el “¡qué bonito es estar juntos!”. Es bonito, sí, pero porque Jesús está entre nosotros por el amor recíproco que se responsabiliza del otro, que lo recibe como es, con lo mucho o poco que pueda dar. Unidad, por tanto. El llamamiento a la unidad siempre ha estado presente, incluso cuando fallamos, y hoy nos sigue empujando y hacernos siempre volver a la fuente, la Eucaristía, que de muchos nos hace uno.

Revivimos así, la experiencia de San Eugenio: “No pueden imaginar cuánto me preocupó ante Dios de nuestros queridos misioneros del Río Colorado. Sólo tengo este medio para estar cerca de ellos. Allí, en la presencia de Jesús en frente al SS. Sacramento, me parece verles, tocarles. A menudo sucede que pienso que puedan estar también ustedes en su presencia. En ese momento nos encontramos en este “centro vital” que nos sirve de comunicación. Y sus sufrimientos y sus trabajos,

tan duros, ¿Creen que no son el tema frecuente de mis conversaciones y de mi admiración?”.

SABER PERDER

Cuando un Oblato nos deja se vive sin duda como una pérdida. Una pérdida sobre todo emocional, pero si el viaje con él era verdadero, en Jesús y por Jesús, la cosa más natural del mundo, además de la emoción (incluso las lágrimas que son una señal de cariño), es unirse, incluso aún más, para hacer fructificar las semillas sembradas juntos. Cada uno de ellos (y pasaron muchos) ha sido un regalo.

En esos momentos, entre nosotros los laicos, están los que se van, los que ya no asisten con constancia, los que se alejan. También esto nos ha ayudado y nos ha hecho comprender que la amistad es importante, porque es un don de Dios, pero la comunidad lo es más aún: es la construcción del Reino de Dios entre nosotros, en nosotros y con los demás.

“He aprendido que la comunidad se vive y se construye con quien está, con quien de hecho comparte la misión. Por esta razón creo en el camino comunitario que se hace juntos, como niños, jóvenes, adultos, ancianos. El camino inter-generacional es fundamental y, tal vez, es la clave de la continuidad: seguimos a Jesús juntos y tenemos que continuar a seguirlo juntos, incluso si alguien se va. Debemos ser una comunidad para todos aquellos que nos encontramos y tenemos que construirla para vivificar nuestra misión si bien es cierto que en ella encontramos a Dios”. (Liliana)

UNA NUEVA MISIÓN

Pasan los años y crecemos, nos renovamos, nos fortalecemos. Ciertamente, hemos pasado de una visión de la misión donde nosotros los laicos seguíamos los Oblatos, a una nueva misión.

“La experiencia me dice que es necesario que los Oblatos no nos ayuden sólo en la formación, sino que “entren” con nosotros en nuestros contextos de trabajo, sociales, incluso si no todos están todavía listos para dar ese paso. La misión se lleva a cabo juntos, y juntos se discierne. Ha sido importante para mí el deseo de comunión vivida con los Oblatos. Han “inventado” una mesa de comunión en torno a la cual

se sentaban todos los involucrados en la pastoral juvenil; han entrado en las escuelas no sólo como “invitados”, sino construyendo proyectos con los docentes. Si, por un lado, se han comprometido a ser uno con nosotros, para trabajar concretamente con nosotros, a “estar”, por otro lado, han abierto frentes eclesiales y diocesanos que han compartido con nosotros y así también nosotros hemos tejido nuevas relaciones y hemos sido reconocidos. Esto asegurará, en mi opinión, una continuidad misionera.

Estoy convencida de que nosotros los laicos tenemos algo que decir, aunque todo se haga en comunión y juntos. También creo que en este camino de comunión, los Oblatos han aprendido algo de nosotros laicos. La misión requiere confianza mutua, conciencia de no ser capaces de dominar todo y tenerlo todo bajo control, valor para compartir el trabajo, arriesgarse. Dejarse... requiere mucha humildad. Y este proceso de continua conversión y humildad permite que sea Dios el que dirige el juego.

Incluso para nosotros los laicos es un trabajo continuo de conversión, porque ninguno de nosotros es autónomo, todo se hace en comunión, con alguien. Es un camino de corresponsabilidad y de reciprocidad en el que cada uno descubre su vocación y su misión propias.

En una comunidad, las partes se mezclan, aunque cada una conserve sus propiedades. Es difícil decir quién hace qué o quién hace más. El trabajo se realiza juntos, donde la individualidad se pierde y permanece el fruto”. (Esmeralda)

“Creo que la colaboración fraterna, el profundo sentido de comunión y corresponsabilidad en la realización de la misión que está creciendo cada vez más entre los laicos y los Misioneros OMI, es una mezcla explosiva, es una novedad que evangeliza, que puede decir y sobretodo testimoniar hoy, en nuestro mundo, que todos estamos llamados a la misión, en virtud de nuestro bautismo, y que Dios se sirve de cada uno de nosotros para llevar adelante su anuncio. Seguramente no somos del mismo status social, pero sentimos que juntos podemos abrir espacios y fronteras que solos nos estarían vedados. La comunión es nuestra fuerza, ser un solo corazón y una sola alma, nuestra certeza; el sentido de pertenencia y la familia, la sencillez de las relaciones y la aceptación de los demás, especialmente de los más pobres, nuestro énfasis misionero”. (Nino)

DIOS EN EL CENTRO DE TODO

Nos gustaría concluir con este resumen en el que estamos reflexionando desde hace algún tiempo. Somos un sistema solar en cuyo centro está sólo Dios. No somos nosotros el centro, ni siquiera nuestras iniciativas, aunque sean hermosas..., sino Dios. Así, de Él dependen todos nuestros compromisos y nuestras iniciativas.

Muchos de nosotros estamos comprometidos en el Centro de Solidaridad F.A.R.O., una Cooperativa de Solidaridad Social, que tiene como objetivo la recuperación de toxicómanos, que funciona en la zona desde 1983. Algunos trabajan en las parroquias, otros con las familias; hay quienes se dedican a los jóvenes, y quienes han hecho voluntariado en las prisiones, o quien se ocupa de las relaciones con la Diócesis.

Finalmente, lo último que nació: algunos de nosotros hemos sentido la necesidad de abrir una brecha, que permita recuperar los valores de una “sociedad que educa” a través de acciones simples y concretas, pero, al mismo tiempo, constantes y duraderas. Por eso, hemos fundado una asociación de promoción social, llamada “Wind of Change”, compuesta por miembros jóvenes y adultos, que trabajan en el campo de la educación y del arte, que trabajan en diferentes campos, tales como la escuela, la comunidad terapéutica para toxico-dependientes y en actividades de prevención de la inadaptación juvenil.

La Asociación tiene como objetivo de modo particular, proponerse como una alternativa a las diversas ofertas asociativas que se presentan hoy a los jóvenes, creando un “nuevo espacio”, donde fomentar el crecimiento de la persona a través del encuentro y el dialogo, donde se contraponen a la cultura del tener y del aparecer, la del ser y de la ayuda mutua, donde en lugar de las actividades que inhiben la conciencia cívica y la creatividad, pueda surgir la pasión por las numerosas expresiones artísticas: música, danza, teatro, artes visuales, cine, literatura, filosofía, para devolver la esperanza en el futuro a las generaciones viejas y nuevas, ampliando nuestros horizontes hacia una nueva civilización, abierta a los demás y capaz de desarrollarse de manera equitativa y sostenible.

TODAVÍA DOS EXPERIENCIAS MÁS

“Mi historia con los Oblatos se inició en 1980, cuando como joven estudiante de secundaria, conocí a un Oblato que era mi profesor de

religión. Por aquel entonces, nunca me hubiera imaginado que mi vida habría sido sellada por la de San Eugenio, sin embargo ¡así ha sido!

La comunidad de aquel tiempo me recibió como un cariñoso padre abraza a su hijo. Me embarqué en un viaje de conocimiento, confianza y amor a Dios, que me hablaba a través de la vida del Fundador y de los Padres que fui encontrando durante los años siguientes. Fueron muchos los Oblatos que pasaron por Mesina, muchos con los que tuve una relación profunda, auténtica y verdadera, muchos con los que trabajé, jugué, oré, compartí las dificultades humanas, para construir el mundo de Dios, en las diversas situaciones donde Él me fue poniendo.

Obviamente, en todos estos años, la marcha de los Misioneros Oblatos que se han ido sucediendo ha llevado a enfrentarse con la separación que, sobre todo para algunos laicos, se ha traducido en un movimiento lento pero constante de alejamiento de la comunidad.

Seguramente no fue fácil, como tampoco lo es hoy, afrontar el camino que Dios ha elegido para la comunidad laical de Mesina, pero siempre he mirado, no a las personas (padres o laicos), sino a mi fidelidad al Señor, continuando sin quedarme en los aspectos humanos que me unen a los demás, sino a la verdadera unidad en Jesús, que nos permite encontrarnos a todos, más allá de cualquier distancia.

Hoy me dedico como el primer día, al plan que Él desea para mí bien y de los otros, junto con mi esposa y mis hijos, y con toda la gran Familia Oblata”. (Umberto)

“Conozco y tengo relación con los Misioneros Oblatos de María Inmaculada desde que tenía 16 años. He visto llegar y marchar a tantos, y todos me han ayudado a crecer, a madurar, y han estado cerca de mí en los momentos de las decisiones más importantes de mi vida, pero lo más importante, me han hecho conocer y amar a Jesús. Algunos muchachos con los que compartíamos la vida en comunidad, han llegado a convertirse ellos mismos en misioneros. A ellos me une un cariño especial.

Lo que me han transmitido ha sido el amor por Jesús y la atención a los más pobres en sus diversos rostros.

Continuando, a una cierta edad, sentí la necesidad de querer compartir el carisma oblato y por lo tanto formar parte de la AMMI.

Esto, para mí, se ha concretado en un compromiso cada vez mayor en la comunidad y en la Asociación, con una relación cada vez más

profunda con los misioneros de la comunidad y otros Oblatos.

El hecho de compartir el carisma me ha llevado a vivir de un modo nuevo también la separación física de los Oblatos que han pasado por la comunidad de Mesina.

Siento muy verdaderas las palabras del P. Mario Borzaga: “los misioneros somos así: partir es normal, marchar una necesidad...”. Nosotros somos laicos y nuestra tarea es vivir en la vida cotidiana nuestro ser cristianos. Para ellos el “partir” y para nosotros el “quedarnos”.

Los Misioneros Oblatos de María Inmaculada son mi familia y me siento profundamente ligada a cada uno de ellos con un profundo cariño, un cariño que no es solo humano, porque surge de compartir un carisma: la conciencia de pertenecer a la “familia oblata” me empuja a seguir adelante, a comprometerme en la comunidad y en la misión” (Cetti)

Damos gracias al Señor por todos los dones durante tantos años ha sido capaz de otorgarnos, sin medida, pidiéndole que nos mantenga a todos en amor y fidelidad, para que el deseo misionero que se encendió en nuestros corazones en diferentes momentos pueda permanecer siempre vivo, sin sucumbir a la tentación de la desconfianza y la desesperanza, con la conciencia de que sólo Él tiene palabras de vida eterna.

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UN SEUL CŒUR ET UNE SEULE ÂME POUR ANNONCER LA BONNE NOUVELLE OBLATS ET LAÏCS DE CENGKARENG

TEAM KOMSOS¹

En novembre 1974, l'Archidiocèse de Jakarta confiait la station de Cengkareng² à la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée pour en faire, à l'avenir, une paroisse. C'est à ce moment-là que commença la tâche apostolique des Oblats dans la capitale indonésienne, Jakarta³. En février 1975, le P. Patrick Moroney est le premier oblat envoyé pour travailler à Cengkareng. Il loue une maison appartenant à Mr Haji⁴ R.A. Nunung Mohammad Yunus pour en faire un presbytère. Le dimanche, le garage est mis à profit pour y célébrer la sainte messe. Le 11 juin 1978 sont installés pour la première fois le Comité paroissial et le Comité pour la gestion d'un fonds social en faveur des plus défavorisés, installation qui signifie aussi l'érection de la station en Paroisse de la Trinité avec le P. Peter John McLaughlin OMI comme responsable. Le P. Peter reste dans la mémoire des paroissiens comme un Oblat soucieux d'enseigner et qui aida à rassembler des fonds pour les activités paroissiales grâce à un élevage de poulets !

JE ME CROYAIS EN PRÉSENCE DE NOTRE SEIGNEUR !

Depuis les 35 ans que dure déjà le pèlerinage des Oblats dans la paroisse Trinité, Cengkareng, un lien fort s'est tissé entre les laïcs et leurs pasteurs. Plusieurs activités paroissiales ont été programmées et réalisées pour que croisse la foi, l'espérance et la charité des laïcs, tant les adultes que les plus jeunes, les enfants, sans oublier les anciens. Robertus Yohanes Prabowo, un des premiers paroissiens et toujours actif comme catéchiste, s'en souvient : « Ma première rencontre avec les Oblats m'a vraiment marqué. Elle a eu lieu au début de l'année 1975. Sans doute à cause de l'aspect extérieur du P. Patrick, c'était pour moi comme si j'étais en présence de Notre Seigneur ; il respirait la paix mais

en même temps réchauffait le cœur. Je vois encore sa soutane blanche et sa ceinture noire avec la croix passée dedans et reliée à son cou par un lacet. Son regard était tout à la fois perçant et apaisant. Cette émotion, je l'ai ressentie avec les trois premiers Oblats qui ont desservi la paroisse Trinité. » Et R.Y. Prabowo de poursuivre : « Auparavant, Cengkareng était un localité en bordure de ville dont la population était constituée d'habitants de classe moyenne ou pauvre et de jeunes foyers chassés par les grandes constructions en cours à Jakarta. Au début, le ministère des Oblats à Cengkareng coïncidait tout à fait avec la visée missionnaire oblate du service des jeunes et des pauvres. Et cela se vérifiait dans la facilité de relation du P. Patrick avec les voisins du presbytère et les jeunes du quartier avec lesquels il n'hésitait pas venir s'asseoir et bavarder. »

UN PARTAGE VIVANT DE LA SPIRITUALITÉ ET DU CHARISME OBLAT

Chacun à sa manière, les Oblats s'efforceront de faire connaître la spiritualité et le charisme oblats par des activités régulières menées dans le cadre de la paroisse. En 1986, le P. Peter Kurniawan Stoll OMI fait connaître le mouvement Antioche. Un programme de renouveau spirituel sous la forme de week-ends pour les ados et jeunes adultes qui réussit à rassembler plusieurs groupes de jeunes puis à les faire s'intéresser et s'investir dans la vie de la communauté chrétienne locale. Plus tard, en 2004, le P. Gregorius Basir Karimanto, OMI – premier Oblat Indonésien – fait connaître le mouvement des Roses, un programme de d'accompagnement spirituel pour les enfants et les pré-adolescents. C'est le P. Basir lui-même qui mit au point ce programme en vue de faire se développer les capacités et le dynamisme des pré-ados ainsi que la solidarité entre eux en tant que génération relais dans l'Église.

L'AMITIÉ PROFONDE AVEC LES LAÏCS

En 1991, se constitue l'Association Missionnaire de Marie Immaculée (AMMI) à l'initiative du Directeur de l'AMMI de l'époque et qui était aussi le curé de la paroisse de la Trinité, le P. John O'Doherty OMI. Les membres de l'AMMI continuent de se rencontrer de façon régulière une fois par mois. Ils prient et partagent leur expérience de

foi. Ils mettent sur pied diverses activités pour collecter des fonds pour l'œuvre missionnaire des Oblats en dehors de Jakarta. Depuis octobre 1997 jusqu'à aujourd'hui est célébrée la neuvaine St Eugène de Mazenod. En 2006, le programme des « Amis du Séminaire »⁵ a été mis en place comme moyen d'action pour les laïcs portant une attention particulière à la formation des candidats prêtres et frères oblats indonésiens. Mr Petrus Hendro Hermanto, membre de l'AMMI, pro-diacre et ancien coordinateur de la commission sociale économie de la paroisse de la Trinité, nous livre son expérience : « J'ai connu les Oblats depuis leur arrivée à Cilacap⁶. Pour moi, les Oblats m'apparaissent d'abord comme des personnes simples car ils vivent toujours près des pauvres. J'ai beaucoup appris de la façon de vivre des Oblats, en particulier de leur attention aux malades ». Il en va de même pour Mme Christina Mardiana, membre active de l'AMMI et accompagnatrice des jeunes du mouvement Antioche : « Je vois les Oblats comme des gens humbles qui se mettent au service de celles et ceux qui sont les plus délaissés. Les Oblats sont toujours pleins d'enthousiasme et de générosité ».

Membre de l'AMMI et des « Amis du Séminaire », Mr Julius Husen s'est investi dans la vie paroissiale dès les années 1980. Il souligne la franche collaboration entre les Oblats et les laïcs dont il a lui-même pu faire l'expérience : « Je connais les Oblats depuis 1987 et mes relations avec eux ont toujours été très bonnes. Ce qu'il y a de remarquable chez eux c'est leur extraordinaire amitié avec les laïcs. Les Oblats ont cette particularité de se lier d'amitié profonde pour les laïcs avec qu'ils rencontrent. Ils en deviennent si proches qu'il n'y a plus de distance et que nous, les laïcs, nous nous sentons vraiment accueillis et devenons comme membres de la famille OMI... Dans toutes les activités que j'ai accomplies avec les Oblats, j'ai vraiment senti une franche collaboration, une complémentarité où chacun donne et reçoit. Je n'ai jamais eu aucune difficulté à travailler avec les Oblats, tel que je suis avec les limites de mes capacités et de mon temps disponible. »

DIFFUSION DE LA SPIRITUALITÉ ET DU CHARISME, LES MÉDIAS

La spiritualité et le charisme oblats sont aussi bien connus des laïcs grâce aux diverses médias produits par la paroisse Trinité. Dans chaque bulletin hebdomadaire est proposée une courte méditation avec des ci-

tations du fondateur, St Eugène de Mazenod. La revue de la paroisse qui paraît tous les deux mois offre dans chacun de ses numéros des articles, des récits ou des interviews concernant le travail missionnaire des Oblats en dehors de Jakarta. Enfin, notre site offre un lien avec le site des Missionnaires Oblats en Indonésie et celui de Rome pour l'ensemble de la Congrégation. De cette façon, les laïcs peuvent aisément s'informer et approfondir leur connaissance de la spiritualité et du charisme Oblat.

UNE ATTENTION PARTICULIÈRE AUX JEUNES

La Province OMI d'Indonésie a toujours accordé une place importante à la pastorale des jeunes. Il en va de même pour la paroisse de la Trinité. Tous les deux ans, la Province OMI d'Indonésie organise une rencontre durant le mois de juillet, la « Temu Raya Muda OMI » désignée par l'acronyme TERAMO. En juillet 2013, cette rencontre s'est tenue à la paroisse de la Trinité et ce fut un honneur d'y accueillir près de 1 000 jeunes venant des différentes paroisses desservies par les Oblats en Indonésie. Un grand succès et un moment riche d'enthousiasme, de fraîcheur et de fraternité évangélique. Mr Yohanes Bosco Sri Wikuncoro, actuel responsable adjoint du Comité paroissial de la Trinité nous a confié : « Les Oblats et les laïcs de la paroisse sont devenus des compagnons de pèlerinage sur cette terre en chemin vers le Royaume des cieux. En tant que fidèle, je suis impressionné par le ministère des Oblats qui font preuve de tant de générosité. L'attention des Oblats aux jeunes, bien dans la ligne du charisme de leur fondateur, est quelque chose d'extraordinaire. Nous espérons que la tenue de cette rencontre des jeunes trouve toujours un appui chez les paroissiens, en particulier les parents, afin qu'encore plus de jeunes y participent et s'y investissent, et qu'ainsi l'Église se développe et que naissent de nouvelles vocations ».

PRÊTER ATTENTION À TOUS SANS EXCEPTION

Mme Lydia Endaryanti, membre actif de la paroisse Trinité et responsable de l'AMMI local, poursuit : « Je connais les Oblats depuis 1978, au moment où nous n'avions pas encore de lieu pour prier et célébrer. Le développement de la paroisse a été très rapide car de nouvelles habitations se sont construites dans ce secteur de la ville. Mais c'est à

nous tous qu'est revenue et revient encore aujourd'hui la tâche de faire croître la qualité de la foi des membres de la paroisse Trinité. Encore jeunes, mon mari et moi, nous nous sommes investis dans la vie de notre communauté chrétienne ; nous connaissons bien les Oblats et sommes très proches d'eux. Je les vois toujours très accueillants aux gens dans le besoin. Ils ne sont pas exclusifs mais au contraire très ouverts. »

Quant à Mme Stephanie Maria Titi Suhartono, membre des « Amis du Séminaire » et de la commission de la Communication Sociale de la paroisse, elle partage volontiers son enthousiasme : « Je suis tombée amoureuse du charisme oblat depuis l'an 2000. Les Oblats sont très réactifs pour susciter et soutenir les actions en faveur des gens frappés par une catastrophe naturelle ou quelque événement dramatique. En matière de religion, les Oblats savent être très tolérants et ils n'hésitent jamais à ouvrir le dialogue avec tous ceux qui croisent leur chemin. Pour eux, toute personne est un frère, une sœur en humanité. Ils prêtent attention à tous sans exception. »

UN SOUHAIT POUR CONCLURE

Après avoir cheminé et pérégriné durant ces 35 ans avec les laïcs, les Oblats de la paroisse Trinité sont plus que jamais désireux de poursuivre et d'intensifier leur tâche apostolique à Jakarta. La paroisse de la Trinité a donné naissance deux autres nouvelles paroisses : la paroisse St Thomas Apôtre à Bojong Indah et la paroisse St Philippe Apôtre à Kapuk⁷. La paroisse Trinité elle-même dessert deux stations : Ste Marie Immaculée dans le lotissement Citra Garden III et la station St Vincent Pallotti dans le quartier de Dadap qui jouxte la région de Tangerang (Province de Banten). Quatre Oblats sont au service d'environ 20 000 personnes sur cette paroisse et ils ont donc à faire face à un sérieux défi.

Exprimons un souhait pour conclure ce trop bref témoignage : Que dans fidélité à la force spirituelle de leur fondateur qui, sans relâche, allait à la recherche des âmes à sauver, les Oblats travaillent en étroite collaboration avec les laïcs de la paroisse Trinité. Et qu'ainsi soit annoncée la Bonne Nouvelle aux pauvres, aux délaissés, à tous les laissés pour compte de notre capitale, Jakarta.

Team Komsos
Cengkareng, Jakarta, Indonésie

¹ Commission de la communication sociale de la paroisse de la Trinité, Cengkareng, Jakarta, Indonésie, commission qui est l'auteur de cet article.

² Cengkareng est un district de la capitale, Jakarta. Situé à l'Ouest du centre la ville il est proche de l'aéroport international Soekarno-Hatta. Continuant à se développer, ce district couvre une superficie de 27, 93 km² pour une population d'environ 500 000 habitants en 2012.

³ Capitale de l'Indonésie, Jakarta compte actuellement près de 21 millions d'habitants (20 496 358 en de 2011). L'archidiocèse de Jakarta compte environ 500 000 fidèles répartis en 61 paroisses.

⁴ *Haji* est un titre honorifique décerné à une personne musulmane ayant réussi à faire le pèlerinage (*Haj*) à la Mecque.

⁵ Ce programme « Amis du Séminaire » (ou « Amis du Scolasticat ») fournit non seulement une aide financière précieuse au programme de la Formation première des Oblats de la Province d'Indonésie mais encore un appui moral et spirituel de la part des laïcs pour les jeunes en formation et leurs formateurs.

⁶ Ville importante de la Province de Java Central, Cilacap est située sur la côte sud de l'île de Java et compte actuellement plus d'1 000 000 d'habitants. Les Oblats y sont en charge de la paroisse St Étienne depuis plus de 35 ans.

⁷ Ces deux localités densément peuplées se situent à la périphérie Ouest de Jakarta. Si Bojong Indah est plus à l'intérieur, Kapuk se situe en bord de mer.

Documenta

“THE COMMUNITY OF AIX WAS TRULY A FAMILY”

BISHOP JACQUES JEANCARD

INTRODUCTION BY FABIO CIARDI, OMI

Bishop Jacques Jeancard, in chapter 4 of his book *Mélanges Historiques* *, entitled “Family spirit; practices and virtues of the first missionaries,” has given us a description of the life that the young community of the Missionaries of Provence led in the former Carmelite convent in Aix. He praised their family lifestyle, full of closeness and reciprocal love. It was a community that, in the style of the first Christian communities in Jerusalem, was of one heart and one soul, a community that, in their ascetical practices, journeyed step by step to sanctity, a community that, gathered around their superior as the first Christians were around the apostles, appears as the most perfect communion of saints, a community where there were no rivalries, even to the point of pride in another’s success, and where each was content to serve the other, a community in which they lived an obedience both absolute and sweet at the same time, radical poverty and, at the same time, faithful trust in Divine providence.

Copies of Jeancard’s book are rare these days, and difficult to find. In this first year of the triennium in preparation for the Bicentennial, dedicated to community, it seems worthwhile to publish chapter 4 in English for the first time.

* JACQUES JEANCARD, *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.

IDEALIZING THE FIRST COMMUNITY

What can be said about Jeancard's description of the Aix community? In it, he puts all the resources of his writing and, being a fine writer, gives breath to all the most delicate nuances of the poetic art. We can imagine, thanks to the particular grace of the foundation, there might have been, in the early community, that unity and intimacy on which he insists so much. Eugene de Mazenod himself, in letters to future companions, puts forth the ideal of a community where the members would be linked by the bonds of a very deep fraternal charity so as to become one heart and one soul. It is equally undeniable the vision he demonstrated made him a natural leader and formator of the community, the center around which all its members were gathered, "as chicks under a mother hen's wings."

The lack of even minimal indications of difficulties and tension, even if inevitable, show Jeancard greatly idealized the beginnings of the Congregation. He was more interested in hagiography, with a literary style in a clearly romantic vein, than scientific and documented history.

It might be said that this community was idealized, as was that of the first Christian community in Jerusalem according to the Acts of the Apostles. More than an historic description, I think we must understand Jeancard's description as an attempt to point out the basic elements which made up the Oblate community as they were understood at the time in which he wrote his book. In any case, the descriptions echo the memory and communitarian anxiety of Eugene de Mazenod, to whom, especially during his episcopacy, Jeancard was always near. So it has a notable instructive value, which looks deeply at the mature community in the later years, in its actual development, but above all in the spirituality and personal life of the founder.

THE SPIRIT OF THE BEGINNING ACCORDING TO THE SOURCES

On the other hand, there are other descriptions of the early community confirming this unity among its first members. From the first moments, the same de Mazenod, during the mission in Grans, wrote to Tempier back in Aix: "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” (February 24, 1816)

Many other letters give firsthand witness to the affection and profound sense of communion that existed among all the members

The first were written in the summer of 1816 from Bonneviene in the vicinity of Marseilles, at the summer home of his cousin Dedons de Pierrefeu, where Eugene went for a time of rest after the intense foundational period. He went, persuaded by Tempier to whom he vowed obedience, but felt the distance from the community as someone in exile. Being separated, he did not comprehend all of the positives.

From the place of my exile, July 1816

To our dear brothers, the missionaries at Aix,...Did you really think of that my good brothers, when you chased me from it so cruelly? I am like a fish out of water here. My sole consolation is to follow you in your pious exercises. I am more faithful to them than when I was among you....If the good God heeds me, there will be no priests more saintly than you, my dear brothers, whom I love tenderly in the Lord, our shared love.

Feeling like a fish out of water, he didn't want to find himself far from the brothers whom he loved tenderly in the Lord. In this love, at the same time deeply human (tendrement) and profoundly supernatural (dans le Seigneur), he could bring together the essence of community life and the need to be together.

In the time he spent in Paris in the following year (July 17-Nov. 24, 1817) to deal with important matters for the newborn society, he again lived his time as an exile. Eugene bore the weight of the distance from those whom, affectionately, he called friends, sons and brothers (cf. July 25, 1817). They were spoken of continually in the talks he had with the people he visited (July 19, 1817). Thanks to this distance, he was able to write letters that, besides showing us his journey to sanctity and growing love for his companions, also permit us to discover the basic traits of the community of the Missionaries of Provence. Now that he was far from his own, he better understood the value of the community he had left behind.

I am bored when separated from you and pine for my return. Nothing on earth is worth being kept from dwelling pleasantly in our holy

house with such good brothers as yourselves. Never have I appreciated so much ‘*quam dulce et quam jucundum habitare fratres in unum*’. This strikes me all the more in that I see with my own eyes that it is not given to all communities to taste this happiness, harder to find than one thinks in this world below. Let us pray God to preserve for us this precious blessing that men cannot snatch from us except by our own fault. (August 12, 1817).

He rebuked Tempier when he was left without news, while recording, once more, how he considers his sojourn in Paris as an exile: “Do you not know that I regard myself as exiled in Paris, that I cannot live long separated from my dear family, and that my sole consolation is to converse with you and about all of you.” (August 22, 1817). Later he wrote to the whole community, confiding his refusal of the proposal that he be named bishop.

I love you more than anything, my dear friends of the city of my birth. No, nothing has been able to seduce me. I have sacrificed for you what is called in the world one’s fortune, and I am well pleased. I am not referring to the two positions of Grand Vicar in the provinces, for they were not worth counting or comparing with our holy mission and our dear Congregation, but to something more. And how could I consent to live two hundred leagues away from what is most dear in the world? I did not have the strength to acquiesce to that idea. (August 22, 1817)

Also in these letters, the true and clearly human love that, especially with Tempier, was the basis of a pure friendship, has a supernatural dimension, almost a precious blessing that only God could preserve and from which arises the beauty and the joy of loving in unity as brothers. Because of this, even from afar, he acted so that unity could be built and protected in common prayers

Almost every evening,” he wrote again to Tempier, “I am with you before the Blessed Sacrament when you are saying your evening prayers. I delight in this thought in the chapel of M. Liautard [Founder of Stanislas College] where I go at that hour to adore our divine Master. Think of me at that moment. It is my only consolation, for I pine far from you; nothing assuages our separation. (July 26th, 1817)

Finally, the last exhortation: “Let us stand together, let us be for God alone, and we will be strong.” (October 22, 1817)

PROJECT FOREVER

In the Rule of 1818, de Mazenod had expressly written that Missionaries are one among them, “united by ties of intimate love... and perfect submission to Superiors.” (*Constitutions et Règles*, 1818, p. 55)

The same thought is found in the years immediately following. He writes to Fr. Courtes on March 3, 1822: “We are united in the love of Jesus Christ, in our common perfection, let us love one another as we have always done so far: in short, let be one.” A letter to a diocesan priest, Father Viguiet, dated January 6, 1819, provides a good summary of community life: “We live in community under a mild Rule... The spirit of charity and of the most perfect brotherhood reigns amongst us. Our ambition is to gain souls for Jesus Christ.” On May 11, 1822, the novice Jacques Joseph Marcou, writes to a seminarian, Hippolyte Guibert: “We are all striving toward perfection, a perfection which we will not fail to attain by following faithfully our holy Rule. We have here one heart and one soul.” A year later, St. Eugene writes to Guibert in much the same words: “We form a family of which all who compose it wish only to have one heart and one soul.” (January 20, 1823)

The memory of the first community of Aix is still alive in the second community of the Congregation, Notre Dame de Laus, on May 28, 1834. The Founder in the acts of the canonical visitation, wishes that there be the same unity in all the future communities.

We have been very consoled by the spirit of true fraternal charity, mutual respect and submission to the Superior that prevails among this beloved portion of our family. Here, as in other houses of the Congregation, it may be said that they are of one heart and one soul. May God preserve forever in the Congregation this valuable conformity with the first disciples of the Gospel. (*Selected Texts*, 339)

“We have but one heart and one soul” wrote Eugene de Mazenod, towards the end of his life, synthesizing the lifestyle of the Oblate community. “That was always our vision, like that of the first Christians; it is because they have forgotten this that many have abandoned the spirit

that I wished to establish in our Congregation” (to Fr. Durocher, January 17, 1851).

“The core unum and the anima una which the Founder enjoined upon his Oblates in his Rule as one of the characteristics of the Society, was the distinctive trait of this small community,” writes Jeancard. In fact, this expression does not appear in the Rule, but scouring the sources from the first years of the foundation, we have the clear impression that this phrase of one heart and one soul is the synthesis of the life of the first community of Aix. The Oblates found the inspiration for a true community in this phrase, as did all the Christians in the first community of Jerusalem, the inspiration for the life of the church in every age.

THE AUTHOR OF THE BOOK

A cultured man, Bishop Jacques Jeancard especially loved to write. Most of the letters of Bishop de Mazenod addressed to civil and religious authorities were written by Jeancard*. He wrote books well-known by the Oblates, namely: the *Vie de Saint Alphonse de Liguori* (1828), the *Notice de Notre-Dame du Laus* (1829), the *Vie du frère F. M. Camper* (1859), the death notices of Father N. Mie (1866) and Jean Bernard (1870). The Lenten pastoral letter of 1861 of Bishop de Mazenod was composed by Jeancard, as well as his eulogy. But the work most dear to the Oblates is *Mélanges historiques sur la Congrégation des Oblats de Marie Immaculée à l’occasion de la vie et la mort du R. P. Suzanne*.

Bishop Jeancard was already in his 70s when he wrote it. The book was commissioned by Fr. Fabre, the second Superior General, and can be considered the first history of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. “Bishop Jeancard,” Fabre writes in the introduction, “who lived the longest in close proximity with our venerated Founder, who knew most of the first members of our family, has been an eyewitness to many of our foundations, has heard the list of the works accomplished each day. Bishop Jeancard has the right to be called the historian of our congregation.” (p. VI). Fabre asked him to prepare an obituary of Fr. Maris Jacques Antoine Suzanne. In fact, it was the occasion for him to

* Cf. Yvon BEAUDOIN, *Jeancard, M^{gr} Jacques*, in *Historical Dictionary of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate*, Rome, AORS, 2008, I, p. 343-347.

write his memoirs of the origin and initial development of the Missionaries of Provence.

Born in Cannes, Dec. 2, 1799, Jacques Jeancard entered the major seminary of Aix, which was under the direction of the Sulpicians, in October 1818.

Here he met Jacques Marcou, with whom he began theological studies. With Marcou he had been a member of the Youth Congregation since 1813 and was a faithful disciple of Father de Mazenod. Friends that they were, the two Jacques often came to see the Founder at the house of the Mission. They decided to enter the Congregation together. After a week-long retreat, they began their novitiate at Aix on December 21, 1821. They made their oblation at N.-D. du Laus on May 30, 1822 and then continued their theological studies as day students at the major seminary of Aix.

When the following year, the bishop of Frejus recalled priests and seminarians who were working outside of his diocese, Fathers Deblieu and Maunier, as well as Jeancard, returned to their original diocese. Jeancard, on October 30, 1823, entered the major seminary of Frejus and on the following December 23, was ordained to the priesthood by his bishop. Shortly after, with the bishop's permission, Jeancard was able to return to the Oblates and, at the end of October 1824, was in the house of Le Calvaire in Marseilles. In November he took part in his first mission, at Allauch, with Fathers Suzanne, Albini and Marcou.

He remained in the Congregation for ten years, working in Marseilles, Notre Dame du Laus and Aix. After the July 1830 revolution, he was sent to teach dogma and sacred Scripture in the major seminary of Marseilles.

During the summer of 1834, Bishop de Mazenod, now titular bishop of Icosia, allowed him to go home to his family for a rest. From Cannes, Jeancard wrote and asked for a dispensation from his vows. He remained sincerely attached to the Congregation and to the Founder. "With the exception of Tempier," wrote Fr. Beaudoin, "no other Oblate worked so closely with the Bishop de Mazenod and enjoyed to such a degree the latter's friendship and confidence." Soon he became his secretary, residing at the bishop's residence with the Bishop, and accompanying him in his trips, to northern Italy and Algeria in 1842, to Rome in 1845 and 1854, to Paris in 1856, 1857, and 1858.

After various positions in the diocese of Marseilles, among which was that of Vicar General, he was named bishop of Ceramis in 1844, and auxiliary bishop to Bishop de Mazenod in 1858.

With the arrival of Bishop Cruice in Marseilles, Jeancard had to resign, and lived the last ten years of his life in his native city, Cannes, from where, each year, he went to visit the Oblates for a few months, especially Bishop Guibert at Tours, Fathers Fabre and Tempier in Paris, the scholastics at Autun, etc. In 1870, he accompanied Bishop Guibert to the Vatican Council, and then followed him to Paris, helping him to administer the diocese. After three years in that position, he became ill and retired to Cannes, where he died after a year of illness on July 6, 1875.

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TEXT OF BISHOP JACQUES JEANCARD

The community of Aix was really a family. Everyone was living of the same life, and every heart there bloomed under the same influence. They were like warmed without ceasing by the affection of the Father, whose solicitude for all was well what one could imagine as the most appealing. There was from his part a sort of holy fascination, who addressed himself to the best instincts of the soul, subdued and placed under the best felt inspirations of the spirit which made the apostles. All, to varying degrees, were submitted with happiness to this sweet and easy yoke. The “cor unum” and “anima una” that the founder recommends in his rules as one of the characteristics of the Society was really the distinctive trait of this small community, which sought, amidst a thousand external difficulties, to spread its first roots, to then rise to the point where it would please God to make it grow.

The Society did not yet exist more than as in a seed, but it is not without interest to consider for a moment that mustard seed, which would become a tree whose branches have extended much further than one had then supposed. While following the holy inspiration that came

to him to seek everywhere priests willing to sacrifice everything for God, and to unite them in a congregation to work with him for the sanctification of souls in the work of the missions, M. de Mazenod had thought at the same time to form around himself like an apostolic school, which would continue the generous undertaking and be the element by which it would grow.

The young people I mentioned above were the first pupils of this holy school. They were all especially cared for by M. de Mazenod himself, who became the director of their conscience and their master of novices. The care that he gave to their education was at every moment: to the recreation, to a walk (when he had time to accompany them), in his room, in the hall of exercises, in the chapel, and finally above all he tried to animate them with the spirit of God. So one could say that the air in the house was all permeated by this spirit; they constantly breathed it without ceasing, and they were not breathing of any other. Thus they lived in a fully apostolic atmosphere, that they were still maintaining, it must be said, all the priests of the community, even those who later were not part of the Society finally constituted by the Holy See. The zeal and selflessness were, with some inevitable differences, the essence of these priests, all, without exception, elite men in the ratio of priestly virtues.

The exercises of the day were much the same as today, except that they did not recite Matins and Lauds in common. The practices of piety and mortification were those used as they existed. The confession of sins at the foot of the superior took place every night after the examination of conscience and *coulpe took place* every two weeks. They fasted every Friday, except the Friday of Easter week, and in the days of weekly fasting, they replaced the foods of the body by a discipline, each in his cell. This discipline was practiced sometimes other days by the most fervent, that it was necessary ordinarily to moderate the severity. One required on this subject a total submission to the decisions of the superior. Indeed, with any degree of goodwill one became holy under this regime. One only had to let oneself go to the current that led everyone to God, and this is the great advantage that exists to live in a community where fervor reigns.

These young people were not as yet even zealous seminarians for their perfection. They aspired for nothing but to become excellent missionaries, without dreaming to make one day a profession of religious life, which did not prevent them from making unceasing progress in the direction of the evangelical counsels. Led by M. de Mazenod, imbued increasingly more of his spirit, they strengthened themselves particularly in the feelings of denial of themselves and of all that is earthly, and also in the practice of obedience. It was noticed in all of them a great liveliness of zeal that made them want to be able to sacrifice themselves for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. One understands what should be their piety towards God: to live and die for him was their most ardent wish and the most constant disposition of their soul, in which was reflected admirably that of the father of the family, visibly elevated to the higher thoughts of the heart of an apostle.

The members of this small community, huddled around their superior like chicks under the wings of their mother, provided a touching sight by the bond of affection which, uniting them to their leader, united them all among themselves. It was a bit like the image of the first Christians, such as the Acts of the Apostles presents them to us. There the point of rival contention, the point of seeking for oneself to the detriment of another, but rather the joy and almost the pride of success of a brother. One extolled with an unequivocal appreciation their talents and works. One defended them as necessary like property belonging to the family against criticism from outside, if criticisms rose. There was, indeed, a true community of merits. There was in a small circle the most perfect communion of saints. Also, how happy they were to obey even an inferior, if he had the mission of presiding somewhere! How they were indifferent to any kind of employment and easy to honor the choice by which another one was preferred! It is that they were blessed to feel directed as a child of the same father under one law of obedience, and that the interest of the glory of God and his own sanctification was for each child the highest interest of obedience.

I ask forgiveness of my repetition, but I cannot stress enough to insist by retracing this great family spirit that was the proper character of the Congregation before it was formed. It was there the powerful charm which attached to this common existence all those who were associated; it was a preservative, and, if necessary, a defense against

the temptation to separate from his brothers; it was a link that seized all hearts, and chained them to the hopes inspired by a great dedication to the success of an undertaking which they saw not yet the proportions. One believed never to be that one frail society be withdrawn entirely under one roof. But this roof was dear as a convent, as a fireplace where God poured ineffable blessings that, by expanding hearts, were, properly taken, the harbinger of the expansion of the work. There was in all the people of this holy abode a kind of flowering of domestic happiness. They were not mutually as foreign peers one to another, and who, having met each other fortuitously, they allow to elapse on the benches a few quick years, after which they must separate. All looked at each other as destined to spend a lifetime together. Thus it was with all the abandonment of trust and all the expansion of a holy familiarity that was in a reciprocal relationship.

Obedience was absolute, but it was sweet: it was an obedience of affection, and at the same time they practiced humility in all perfection. The superior, on the one hand at the same time moderate and strong not less than loved, distributed to all humiliations in proportion to the degree of strength of each one. They had in this distribution a much larger part than that they were known to be able to benefit from.

What shall I say of poverty? Nothing equals the destitution in which they found themselves. The house was devoid of anything. It was like camping in an abandoned shack. This house where what is called the comfortable has always been unknown at all levels, where they had no other furniture than a few old things, discarded spoiled and rotten from old houses, offered barely a miserable shelter to its inhabitants, and they were more than happy to resemble in something to He who did not have a stone to rest his head. They particularly felt themselves favored in having to charity a poor chair on which they sat, and the boards on which they took their rest. Everything was a delight for them in this house improvised by devotion, regardless of material well-being!

The temporal existence of the community had no other resources than the help of Providence, and if Providence had nothing lacking to those who trusted in her, she allowed them to acquire by constant privations of every kind the least equivocal merits of poverty...this life of poverty was pleasing to all. They laughed a bit on occasion, and congratulated themselves as of a happy conformity with the divine Master

and his apostles. They tasted it (poverty) again, in such that she provided the advantage to enjoy a little more of the freedom of God's children and rendered them almost independent of earthly demands.

Here's how, to the bosom of the joy and the contentment of a supernatural order, this family that came to be born under the breath from on high, lived in the most perfect fraternal union and in the practice of the highest virtues. The young people were imitating the priests, and both groups were preparing themselves in this house in Aix to receive further communications from the Spirit of God to raise themselves *ad majora*. I have described in part the preparatory testing of the Congregation. It was not more than a rough draft of the true novitiate of the religious life, but this initiation to the strong virtues that are necessary for the apostolic man, admirably made available the vocations for the great work of which the new community contained the germ.

However, while seeking to make progress in virtue, they did not neglect the work necessary to make progress in science or in the sanctification of souls. The priests, who from the beginning had taken the title of *fathers*, were employed in the sacred ministry, whether the missions or the parochial retreats, or in the beautiful chapel at Aix open to the public. For their part the young people were engaged in the studies. They followed the courses of philosophy and theology of the major seminary. Morning and evening, at the desired time, one saw them walking the streets of the city, their book under the arm and often the rosary in hand (because, although one recited daily Rosary in community, many, by devotion, had to recite by heart the fifteen decades of the Rosary) they went and returned journeying in silence. Upon return, they conferred together on the lesson of the professor they had heard. Then they went into their cells to study in particular. Recreation and walks were spent very often in discussions on the purpose of the studies or on matters of spirituality. The new missions given by the Fathers, as the news that interested the Church in general, were not omitted, not more than that concerned with the welfare and progress of the Congregation. All these conversations breathed the spirit of zeal. They were mutually aroused to perfection in the service of God, and they put in all the reports to each other as much charity as holy cheerfulness. Discussions or purely literary interviews took place sometimes, and everyone

brought the tribute of his knowledge and the results of his readings. As for books of piety, theology, philosophy and good literature, they read a lot in that time. One did not read for simple amusement or fun, but with the firm intention to learn, and one did not want to learn but that which would be useful to the Church. That was a general intention. The movement printed by famous writers who have illustrated the first quarter of the nineteenth century, produced then excitement in spirits that was all the more to be shared by our young people, the most famous of these writers held the pen in the interests of religion. One read them constantly among us. They discussed them in commenting on them, and they were put at the height of the great thoughts which they were interpreted. Nothing was better calculated to stimulate and adorn the mind, as to form judgment. It goes without saying that the great French writers of the seventeenth century were also studied, although to varying degrees depending on the ability and taste of each one. They were not content merely to know the reputation and some choice morsels learned by heart in humanities classes, they read them with result, at least the ecclesiastical writers and authors of prose...

(Translated by Warren BROWN, OMI)

MY INTELLECTUAL ITINERARY. ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

DAVID POWER, OMI

I was invited to write of my intellectual journey as a scholar and theologian over a span of sixty years. At the outset I can say that teaching and written output have been for me the effort to put theology at the service of mission, a purpose marked in its own way by working within the horizon of our Oblate charism.

Upon finishing basic studies at the Gregorian University in 1957, I was immediately put teaching theology and liturgy at the Oblate Scholasticate in Piltown, Ireland. I had asked to be sent to Africa as a missionary, but Fr. Leo Deschâtelets told me that teaching in Ireland was missionary task enough since many of my students would end up on mission fields. At the time the Anglo-Irish province had about seventy students in theology, and decades later I did meet several of them in such places as Brazil, South Africa, the Philippines and Australia. They never voiced such a thing; but sometimes I think that I could not have served them well, being so unprepared for the task committed to me.

Some things I tried to do may be worth recording however, because it at least shows how my own mind was working. In Piltown, I found that liturgy had been a matter of teaching rubrics and so it aroused some surprise among both students and faculty when I introduced a study of the encyclical *Mediator Dei* and something of the history of the liturgical movement. I was fortunate that the Benedictines of Glenstal Abbey ran an annual workshop on liturgy, which I was able to attend and so meet some like-minded young scholars. Around the same time, some creative doers at Maynooth College had founded a Mariological Society, which sounded harmless but made it possible for members to take on such questions as historical criticism in scriptural study, the development of dogma in the life of the Church, the meaning of the sense of the faithful, and the study of some important figures, from the 19th century and from within the “new theology” that prepared Vatican II. In those

first seven years of teaching in Piltown it was a constant struggle to get material to read; the library was poor and financial assistance to teachers was non-existent. On approaching one provincial about this, I was informed that we ought to be content to follow standard manuals. In the circumstances, use of a small monthly allowance intended for such personal needs as smoking and bus travel, made it possible to buy a few books in Dublin bookstores, books at that time being relatively cheap and of more value than cigarettes that would go up in smoke.

Despite the limitations, I was able to draw on some influences coming from my years as a scholastic in Rome. In our theological studies at the Gregorian in the fifties, we had been fortunate to have professors such as Juan Alfaro, Bernard Lonergan, Zoltan Alszegehy and Herman Schmidt; and in the library of the international scholasticate we had access to works of Yves Congar, Karl Rahner, Edward Schillebeeckx and Louis Bouyer. We also received some intellectual stimulus from our superiors, from Jean Drouart's devotion to reading Greek texts in the original and his interest in languages and cultural diversity, and, more profoundly I think, from André Nottebaert, learnedly read in works of mysticism and contemporary personalist philosophy. Drawing on this background allowed me in teaching to make the effort, however hobbled, to go beyond the manual tradition and introduce Alfaro into a course on grace, Lonergan into Christology and the Theology of God, and Schillebeeckx, Schmidt and Bouyer into sacraments and liturgy. Congar turned up in teaching ecclesiology because of his work *Lay People in the Church*. The professor of scripture at the time, John Daly, was well versed in currents in biblical studies; and this was a great help to me in teaching dogma, as it was then called. Looking back on what has developed since then, I suppose one could say that what we did allowed some initial dialogue with modernity and escape from a Catholic fortress mentality. It was for me a matter of regret that my studies in philosophy had been so poor. This was partly because of some poor teaching and partly because I was too young to take on philosophical questions on emerging from a farm-based novitiate year, which did not even succeed in giving me an interest in farming or football. It was only in teaching theology that I began to read ancient and medieval texts and the modern philosophical authors who had been locked away from our perusal in the fifties, which was still within the era of the Index of Forbidden Books.

I had felt that my teaching in ecclesiology was the most deficient area because we seemed tied to a hierarchical and institutional sense of Church. To my great delight the emergence of the Vatican Council's Constitution on the Liturgy, as well as some readings in the history of liturgy, opened up a vision of the Church as a visible and living organism of the baptized, with the celebration of the mystery of Christ at its heart. As the Council continued there was a chance to enliven much of theology, but in 1964 I was sent to pursue doctoral studies. I had wished to go to Paris to study Christology but was told that I had to go to Rome to study liturgy at the newly founded Institute of Liturgy at San Anselmo. This turned out to be my good fortune for three reasons. One was that the Council was still in session; and students had the opportunity to traipse around Rome to hear lectures by such as Karl Rahner, Yves Congar, Marie-Dominique Chenu, Edward Schillebeeckx and Bernard Häring, as well as representatives of other Churches including Oscar Cullmann, Nicholas Nissiotis, Max Thurian and Bishop Mohrman. The second reason was that courses at San Anselmo, which frankly I often found boring, made me read more of patristic writers and liturgical traditions and thus develop a greater historical consciousness. The third reason was that those years gave me greater ecumenical contacts, the high point of which was three weeks at the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey in Switzerland where some seventy people from different confessions and continents were guided in a study of the first ecumenical councils under the tutelage of experts from the Anglican, Catholic, Lutheran and Orthodox Churches. Added to all this was the fact that I expanded my reading beyond what was taught at San Anselmo whose programme did not wholly capture my interest. In my own time I read the works of Paul Ricoeur on phenomenology, symbol and language, Mircea Eliade on religions, Rudolf Otto on the holy, and Clifford Geertz on culture. It was an eclectic curriculum to give myself, but it nurtured an interest in language, symbol, the history of religions, and cultures; vital I thought to developing a good liturgical history and theology.

My doctoral dissertation, done under the direction of Herman Schmidt, SJ, was an effort to take liturgical history and liturgical texts as a theological source, and to address questions about priesthood which were coming into focus at and after the Council. It led to the publication of my first book, *Ministers of Christ and his Church* (Lon-

don 1969) which was given a very positive review by Yves Congar in *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques*, commenting that it combined a good use of liturgical and patristic sources with attention to contemporary issues. Leo Deschâtelets as superior general had been very encouraging of scholarship and scholars within the congregation, and I still recall his delight in seeing the publication of my first book and his personal encouragement to continue working in the theological field. I can still remind myself of that by looking at the hand-written letter which he sent me on receipt of the book.

Coming to the attention of elders as a young scholar led subsequently in 1969 to my co-option on to the board of the international journal *Concilium*, whose purpose was to pursue the issues opened up by the Vatican Council. It had been started by Karl Rahner, Yves Congar, Edward Schillebeeckx, Johannes Metz and Hans Küng, with the financial support of a Dutch industrialist and a Dutch book publisher. I returned to the Irish scholasticate in 1968 and though those were its dying days, with a fine faculty and good student collaboration we were able to develop what I think was a solid pastorally oriented curriculum, where teachers and students learned the authentic values of cooperation and scholastics were encouraged to develop their talents for art, poetry, music and drama as well as study theology. I also branched out to teach courses in Ireland's major seminary, Maynooth College, and in the Jesuit Institute of Philosophy and Theology in Milltown, Dublin, thus being in touch with the growing intellectual ferment in the Church in Ireland.

In 1971 I was called to the international OMI scholasticate in Rome and soon found myself teaching theology at the Gregorian, the University of St Thomas and Regina Mundi, an institute for religious sisters. During that decade intellectual and missionary challenges came from my participation in the work of *Concilium*, teaching theology at the Roman faculties, visits as lecturer to the USA, South Africa, Brazil, and Sri Lanka, and working with a talented and internationally diverse group of Oblate students (I mention no names for I would have to give a full listing). My second book, *Christian Priest: Elder and Prophet* (London 1972), emerged from a lecture tour in the South African Winter School of 1971. This and my first work featured on the reading list of some seminaries at the time but now of course they are out of print and left behind in the dust.

The articles which I published in *Concilium*, *The Heythrop Journal*, and *The Way* in the seventies, as well as my editorial work with *Concilium*, gave focus to my effort to develop a sacramental theology within a historically and culturally conscious grasp of the meaning and historical development of liturgy, always sensitive to pastoral fields. My visits to other continents, aided and hosted often by Oblate confrères working there, made me conscious of a needed openness to the poor and the voice of the poor in liturgy and devotion. At the Gregorian I began to direct doctoral dissertations, opening the way to the stimulus that such work continued to give to the development of my own thought and research.

I stayed on the editorial board of *Concilium* until 1991, when it was clearly time to make way for a younger generation, though some wanted me to stay. Over twenty years great changes took place in the membership of the board and in its schedule of publication, some dictated by financial restrictions. My participation in this work had a deep and formative influence on my thinking. At the beginning it was an education to work in partnership with people like Karl Rahner, Yves Congar, Edward Schillebeeckx, Giuseppe Alberigo and Marie-Dominique Chenu and to learn how to do a historically conscious theology in the service of the Gospel, sensitive to all the wonders and miseries of a vast humanity. From the start the purpose was to work on an interpretation of the Council that best served its active reception into the life of the Church. To be understood and lived in the light of Christ, the Church had to be viewed as a historically developing and diverse body of people, whose common characteristic is to be disciples of Jesus Christ. To be a Church in the world and for the world, the Church had to change if it were to become a vital part of human history. Karl Rahner saw the Vatican Council as “that event of Church history in which the world Church modestly began to act as such.” The board of the review were sensitive to the fact that working out the consequences of this historic turn requires considerable exploration.

The orientation of the Council itself made it necessary to take up new challenges and new questions. The historian, Giuseppe Alberigo, was an ever gentle but persistent voice reminding us of the importance of taking history seriously, both in its past and in its making. Changes on the editorial board reflected the desire to expand horizons and become

a truly global Church. Thus co-opting David Tracy enlarged the possibility of dialogue with modernity and post-modernity. When we were joined by Gustavo Gutierrez and Leonardo Boff from Latin America and Aloysius Pieris from Sri Lanka, this gave the face of intercultural dialogue to the issues published as well as a well-founded effort to be the Church of the Poor that Pope John XXIII had visualized. The arrival of Anne Carr, Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Mary Collins incorporated women's issues and broke the barriers of excessively masculine thinking. This expansion was not easily made and there were disagreements on policy and on theology within the board, but a good palaver always resulted in accord and cooperation. As for my own work, the eighteen volumes that I co-edited over the years with a sequence of collaborators (Schmidt, Maldonado, Collins, Lumbula) may stand as a recall of what needed to be done, and still needs to be done, to give liturgy its rightful place in the Church, recognizing the wonderful cultural and historical diversity of the peoples of this People of God.

Where the editorial work of Concilium did not thoroughly succeed was in relating all theological enterprise to its scriptural origins. Even the Council did not manage to get completely beyond using scriptures as proof-texts for whatever position was espoused. More would have been needed by way of exploring the art of interpretation as an ongoing living force, subject always to downfalls, from which it is then necessary to recover. In editing volumes on liturgy, with my colleagues we usually included an article on scripture in the proposed volume, but this was not an adequate way of integrating a reference to scriptural origins and mystery into all considerations. Today, while the practice of *lectio divina* is being helpfully reinstated, it runs the risk of by-passing an authentic interpretation of scriptural story and form of speech. Interiority and attention to the work of the Spirit is good, but not at the expense of scriptural truth.

When the alternative review, *Communio*, started this was welcomed by most members of the Concilium board who saw it serving the ever needed work of return to the sources, scriptural, patristic, medieval and liturgical. Unhappily some of those working with *Communio* could be aggressive, but I seldom saw any of my colleagues wanting to take up a fight. It is well known that Hans Urs von Balthasar, who was the icon of the review, was dismissive of both Rahner and Gutierrez, so I

find it encouraging that some scholars now trace convergences between the three. This I believe is rooted in the underlying mystical strain present in the writings of each of them. We are nothing if not beneficiaries of the gracious gift of divine life and of the invitation to be with the whole of humankind and of creation partakers in divine mystery. As Rahner had written in contemplating the modern world, in the future Christians will be mystics or they will be nothing.

My years at the international scholasticate ended in 1977 and with that so did the possibility to continue Roman teaching. With the superior's approval, and even encouragement, I accepted an invitation to teach theology and liturgy at the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC, where in time I became Ordinary Professor and holder of the endowed Shakespeare-Caldwell-Duval chair of systematic theology. Teaching alongside such as Avery Dulles, Charles Curran, Carl Peter, William Hill, Gerry Austin, Joseph Komonchak, Elizabeth Johnson and Francis Schüssler Fiorenza was in itself an ongoing theological seminar. Being part of a consortium of schools which included Anglicans, Lutherans and Methodists contributed an ecumenical edge to our work. I also benefitted from participation in two learned ecumenical societies, the North American Academy of Liturgy and the American Theological Society. Membership of the Catholic Theological Society of America kept me in contact with the galaxy of Catholic scholars that emerged in North America with the Council.

Working with international students did not end, since some candidates at CUA came from Africa, Asia, Latin American and Australia, resulting in theses and dissertations that took account of the human and ecclesial realities of these continents. I continued to go in the summer time to lecture or give retreats in South Africa, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Australia. (Later I added the DRC and Japan to places visited). Relieved from formation work I was able to become more acutely immersed in scholarly work and published several books, namely *Gifts that Differ: Lay Ministries* (Collegeville, MN 1980/85), *Unsearchable Riches: the Symbolic Nature of Liturgy* (Collegeville, MN 1984), *The Sacrifice We Offer: the tridentine dogma reinterpreted* (Edinburgh & Dublin 1987), *Worship: Liturgy and Culture* (Washington, DC 1991), *Eucharistic Mystery* (New York & London, 1992) and *Sacrament* (New York 1999). The first two were the most popular with

a general readership in that they addressed key contemporary issues and were not too heavily foot-noted, the third was acknowledged to have made some small contribution to ecumenical dialogue, and the fourth was a collection of essays which incorporated what I had learned about culture and the world of the poor in Africa, Asia and Brazil. The last two were recognized in academic circles as contributions to a historically conscious and hermeneutically aware sacramental theology. Of the book on Eucharist, John E. Burkhart affirmed in a book review in a Lutheran journal: "This is not just another book about the Eucharist... what makes Power's volume distinctive is the urgency and breadth of his concerns." In another book review Jeffrey Gros says of *Sacrament*: "This book is an important contribution to Christian studies of hermeneutics. It is also an ecumenical contribution to seeing sacramental understanding in contemporary perspective." I was gratified later to find that two doctoral candidates from India had done dissertations at the University of Leuven on my work, finding in it a heuristic within which they could take up questions of culture and poverty within their own Church.

In 1992, to mark my sixtieth birthday, two former doctoral students, Michael Downey and Richard Fragomeni, published a collection of essays by some colleagues and former students, entitled *A Promise of Presence* (Washington, DC 1991). In introducing the volume with a survey of my work, Downey noted several prevailing orientations. First is the attention to the place of liturgy as a source of theology. Second is the importance given to both text and context in interpreting texts and rites found in traditions, reading them with an inherent option for praxis, that is for the place they have in guiding the practical and pastoral life of the Church. Third he notes how I take account of the multivalence or variable meaning and use of symbol, language and culture, and fourth the call to be ever responsive and vigilant in speaking the name of God aright. Finally he found in my writing the sense of prayer as the praxis of desire, something that has its well-spring in the desire for God inspired by Word and Spirit. One Oblate confrère, Ciaran Earley, noted the place given to the evangelization of the poor and indeed years later writing a forward to my book, *Love Without Calculation* (2005) Downey himself noted the primacy given in my work to the evangelization of the poor and to the call to evangelical poverty addressed to all *Christians and all Churches*.

In 2000 I retired as professor at CUA and became more visibly a missionary in the Lord's vineyards, going to help out in Oblate run institutions in Tahiti, South Africa, and San Antonio (Texas) and for two years to help with the philosophical formation of OMI prenovices in Zambia. I continued to respond to requests to contribute to liturgical publications, but more especially I broadened the scope of theological reflection in two books, *Love without Calculation: theological reflections on the mystery of divine kenosis* (New York 2005), and one co-authored with Michael Downey, *Living the Justice of the Triune God* (Collegeville, MN 2012). On the first of these, John Baldovin, SJ, of Boston College wrote in a book review: "In this book, Power demonstrates the breadth of his profound grasp of the whole theological enterprise. ... With some (but by no means all) of the traditional scholarship set off to the side we meet ... his poignant and persuasive reflection on the self-emptying of God. *Love Without Calculation* is one of those books that not only merits reading, but reading again and again." Just as gratifying was an e-mail message from an Oblate in Australia, a former student: "it is a wonderful book." Of *Living the Justice* Catherine Vincie wrote: "This book deserves close reading of anyone interested in what the Christian narrative has to offer to a diverse and suffering world."

I cite reviews because authors themselves learn about what they have done from what others say. The focus of both works is to reflect on the Christian life as a participation in the divine missions of Word and Spirit, keeping liturgical celebration of the mystery at the heart of churches across the world and across confessional divides, and attending more consistently to the cry of the poor. I also tried to bring my studies in ministry up to date with a book entitled *Mission, Ministry, Order* (New York & London 2009) which I am afraid turned out to be somewhat cumbersome and is not much read. The last chapter however I believe could be taken as a matrix for structural changes in the Church, centred on life as lived, attentive to diversity, to cultures, to lay participation and to the poor.

Now, at the age of 81 and back in Washington I am dealing with some health issues which slow one down but towards the end of a long and varied, graced, and even intercontinental and interconfessional, journey, I would say what I said at the outset. I have wanted always

to put theology at the service of mission, incorporating attention to the Oblate call to evangelize the poor. To the orientations of my work noted by Michael Downey in 1991 I would only add the abiding concern to present the Christian call as a participation in the mystery of the divine gift of Word and Spirit at work in the world.

The interest I had in Christology when I began doctoral studies has remained and developed through the years. Indeed it has served as a focus of studying liturgy and has been enriched the more I see how Christ across time and culture has been presented in liturgy and in popular religiosity. An enormous question for a missionary Church is how to present the figure and the person of Jesus Christ. This has to be centred increasingly in a reading of the scriptures and attention to peoples' histories and cultures. To begin with what Jesus Christ meant to those evangelized, we see in the Gospels and in Paul's letters the nature of the impact of the Gospel of Christ Crucified and Risen on their lives and their place among their peoples. Reading the Gospels in the full, with the liturgical and popular celebration of the mystery in mind, but going beyond liturgical readings, we find directions on how he is to be presented to other peoples, attuned to their needs, desires and aspirations. Attending to his works (what John's Gospel calls signs), to his teaching on the coming of the Kingdom, to his parables, to his presence among the poor and marginalized, we are invited to think about what such a person may mean to a variety of peoples, in a variety of contexts.

Though the bibliographical listing of my writings has around 170 titles, inclusive of 12 books and 20 edited volumes, there are a few items to which I would like to draw attention in regard to the presence of Jesus Christ among many peoples: "Foundations for Pluralism in Sacramental Expression. Keeping Memory," *Worship* 75 (2001): 99-106; "Eucharistic Justice," *Theological Studies* 67 (2006/4): 856-879; "Worship and Ecology," *Worship* 84 (2010): 290-308; "Jesus the Today of the Poor," *ICST (Immaculate Conception School of Theology) Journal* 12 (2010): 70-85 (a journal published in Vigan, Philippines), as well as the last chapter of *Mission, Ministry, Order*. These are also writings which seem to me quite pertinent to the Oblates' global and intercultural mission.

Teaching and writing for me has always been an invitation to students and readers, the hope to offer them an opportunity of understanding and engaging with mystery. A philosophy professor, full of years,

once said: a teacher teaches and a student learns but it is not what the teacher teaches that is learned, for learning is the active grasp in heart and mind which comes totally from within the learner. A teacher or writer is happy to have provided a stimulus, or even indeed an occasion for thought and wonder. Personally I would now like to see the present efforts at Oblate renewal focus more on a response to a varied call to mission, heard increasingly in the cry of the poor; it was for this that de Mazenod brought a number of priests together and it was for the sake of mission that he wanted them to become a religious community. It is on mission that we contact the poor, it is this which is life-changing and has to shape life together as apostolic communities. Grasping what the mission has to be today, apostolic community can take shape, it is neither an immutable given nor forcedly identical among all peoples. To be faithful to history and to our own history we have to go far beyond de Mazenod in our thoughts on mission and if we do that, this will give as yet unsuspected shape to apostolic communities. I had already said this in a contribution to “Vie Oblate Life” in the seventies (Y-a-t-il une théologie du charisma des fondateurs et des instituts? “Vie Oblate Life” 36 (1977), p. 8-15) but the elderly tend to ask the indulgence to be allowed to repeat themselves.

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LAS REFERENCIAS A DIOS Y JESÚS EN NUESTRAS CCRR

MIGUEL FRITZ, OMI

Ya está en nuestras manos la nueva edición de nuestras Constituciones y Reglas (CCRR 2013). Con este escrito quisiera hacer una entrega de comparar la edición anterior con la nueva, así como la comparación de las traducciones en las tres lenguas nuestras, en cuanto a las referencias de Dios. Citaré las diferencias más notables, como las coincidencias más usadas.

Conviene aclarar que el texto base oficial para nuestras CCRR sigue siendo el francés, mientras de facto, los cambios fueron hechos más bien a partir del texto en inglés.

He aquí primeramente la versión de la Edición 2000 de las CCRR:

	En Castellano	In English	En Français
Dios - God - Dieu	21	41	35
Padre - Father - Père	3	9	9
Jesús - Jesus - Jésus	13	21	13
Jesucristo - Jesus Christ - Jésus Christ	6	11	9
Cristo - Christ - Christ	16	22	32
Señor - Lord - Seigneur	22	26	27
Salvador - Saviour – Sau- veur	5	8	9
Espíritu (Santo) - (Holy) Spirit - Esprit (Saint)	12	13	11
Total	98	151	145

Lo que más llama la atención es, que en castellano, Dios es mucho menos mencionado que en inglés o francés: sólo 98 veces. Directamente con el título “Dios”, incluso el inglés duplica al castellano. Tomando el título “Padre”: se triplica, igual en inglés como en francés. Mientras,

para “Jesucristo”, de nuevo el inglés lo usa dos veces más. Más se asemejan las cantidades de referencias, cuando se trata de los títulos “Señor” y “Salvador”, siendo el castellano siempre la lengua que menos los usa.

Discutir, si el castellano se presta más que las otras lenguas, para remplazar un nombre por le pronombre, dejaría a los lingüistas. Sin embargo, tan altas diferencias llaman la atención.

Vayamos ahora a la versión de la Edición 2013 de las CCRR:

	En castellano	In English	En Français
Dios – God - Dieu	34	40	34
Padre – Father - Père	9	9	9
Jesús – Jesus - Jésus	13	21	13
Jesucristo – Jesus Christ – Jésus Christ	9	10	9
Cristo – Christ – Christ	25	20	26
Señor – Lord - Seigneur	25	23	24
Salvador – Saviour – Sauveur	9	9	9
Espíritu (Santo) – (Holy) Spirit – Esprit (Saint)	17	18	17
Total	131	150	131

Un primer vistazo ya es suficiente, para descubrir, que las desigualdades son mucho más reducidas en esta nueva edición. Aun descontando la mención del “Espíritu Santo”, el número total de títulos para Dios en castellano se ha aumentado en un 50%, mientras en inglés y francés, se ha ligeramente reducido.

Para “Padre” y “Salvador”, se da ahora una perfecta coincidencia, siendo la diferencia más notable para la evocación de “Jesús” en su forma escueta: mientras en castellano y francés coinciden las 13 veces, en inglés aparece 21 veces. Las demás divergencias, por lo menos no llaman tanto la atención – hablando de números.

Veamos ahora las traducciones en detalle; primero para *Dios – God – Dieu*:

	Dios	God	Dieu
C 2	Pueblo de Dios	God's people	peuple de Dieu
C 7	Palabra de Dios	God's Word	parole de Dieu
C 25	Voluntad de Dios	God's Will	vouloir de Dieu
C 65	hombres de Dios	men of God	hommes de Dieu
C 2	Evangelio de Dios	Gospel	Évangile de Dieu
C 6, 32, 37, 46	Reino	God's reign	Royaume
C 8	nuevos caminos	new ways for the Word of God	des voies nouvelles
R 22 ^a	ayudar a los pobres.	benefit God's poor	aider les pauvres.
C 66	Palabra de Dios	the Word	Parole de Dieu
C 72	ante el Padre	before God our Father	devant le Père

Es fácil constatar, en qué contexto el título “Dios” es usado: pueblo, palabra, voluntad... Y hay una gran coincidencia. Mientras ni el castellano, ni el francés precisan la concreción, cuando se trata del “Reino” (CC 6, 32, 37, 46) o de “los pobres” (R 22^a) respectivamente – y ni siquiera para los “nuevos caminos” (C 8) –, la traducción inglesa, siempre prefiere añadir a “Dios”. Al contrario, en cuanto al “Evangelio *de Dios*” (C 2; castellano y francés), no considerado imprescindible en inglés.

	Padre	Father	Père
C 2	obedientes al Padre	to the Father in obedience	obéissants au Père
C 12	don del Padre	gift of the Father	don du Père
C 16	amor que el Padre nos tiene	the Father's love	l'amour du Père
C 24	en escucha del Padre	Father's voice	à l'écoute du Père

Las aplicaciones para “Padre” son entonces: obediencia, don, amor, escucha. Esta última traduce el inglés con la “voz” (C 24).

	Jesús	Jesus	Jésus
C 6	discípulos de Cristo	followers of Jesus	disciples du Christ

Para “Jesús”, la diferencia más notable es aquí en C 6, donde el castellano y francés usan “discípulos de *Cristo*”, mientras el inglés habla de “seguidores de *Jesús*”.

	Jesucristo	Jesus Christ	Jésus Christ
C 2	dejan todo para seguir a Jesucristo	to leave everything to be disciples of Jesus	abandonnent tout à la suite de Jésus Christ

La diferencia más llamativa para el título “Jesucristo” se da en esta C 2, donde el inglés reduce a “Jesús”, pero añade “discípulos”.

	Cristo	Christ	Christ
C 6	Cristo como Señor	Christ as Lord	Christ comme Seigneur
	sacerdocio de Cristo	priesthood of Christ	sacerdoce du Christ
C 24	alimento de Cristo	Christ’s food	nourriture du Christ
C 26	unidad en Cristo	unity in Christ Jesus	unité dans le Christ
C 29	fidelidad de Cristo	Christ’s fidelity	fidélité du Christ
C 66	Cristo sacerdote, pastor y profeta	Christ’s own ministry of priest, prophet and shepherd	ministère du Christprêtre, pasteur et prophete

C 33	Esposa de Cristo	spouse of Christ	Épouse du Christ
R 18b	amar con el corazón de Cristo	love others as Jesus loves them	aimer avec le coeur du Christ
C 33	Cristo Salvador	Jesus the Saviour	Christ Sauveur
C 52	Cristo no cesa de llamar	Jesus never ceases to call	Le Christ ne cesse d'appeler
C 56	los novicios crecen en amistad con Cristo	The novice develops his personal relationship with Jesus	les novices grandissent en amitié avec le Christ
R 66b	el Evangelio	Christ's Gospel	l'Évangile
R 67 ^a	Cristo, Palabra encarnada	the Incarnate Word	Christ, Verbe incarné

Muchas coincidencias por un, como muchas diferencias de traducción por el otro lado tenemos en cuanto al título “Cristo”. De igual modo lo aplican, tratándose de: Señor, sacerdocio, alimento, unidad, fidelidad. El inglés cambia solamente el orden de “sacerdote, pastor y profeta” (C 66). Interesante es que varias veces, en inglés se usa “Jesús”, donde en castellano y francés se dice “Cristo” (CC 33, 52, 56 y R 18b), mientras que lo agrega para el “Evangelio” (R 66b); pero, lo deja, hablando de la “Palabra encarnada” (R 67^a). Además, prescinde del “corazón”, cuando al amor de Cristo se refiere (R 18b).

Un detalle: en castellano y francés se escribe “novicios” (plural) y “Cristo”, en inglés empero “novicio” (singular) y “Jesús” (C 56).

	Señor	Lord	Seigneur
C 3	presencia del Señor	presence of the Lord	présence du Seigneur
C 6	Cristo como Señor	Christ as Lord	Christ comme Seigneur
C 12	amor al Señor	love to the Lord	l'amour au Seigneur
R 33a	encuentro con el Señor	encounter the Lord	rencontres avec le Seigneur
C 34	Señor crucificado	crucified Lord	Seigneur crucifié

C 55	llamamiento del Señor	Lord's call	l'appel du Seigneur
C 56	escuchar al Señor	listen to the Lord	d'écouter le Seigneur
C 74	administradores del Señor	stewards of the Lord	intendants du Seigneur
C 11	venida del Señor	Christ's coming	venue du Seigneur
C 31	encuentro con Cristo	encounter with the Lord	rencontre avec le Christ
C 38	alabar al Señor	praise and thank the Lord	célébrer le Seigneur
C 52	ruegue al Señor	pray that the Lord	ferons prier le Maître

Donde más coincidencias dan, es en la aplicación de “Señor”: presencia, amor, crucificado, llamamiento, administradores... Sin embargo, el inglés dice “Cristo”, cuando los otros: “Señor” (C 11) – y viceversa (C 31). En C 38, añade “agradecer”. Y en C 52, el francés cambia el “Señor” en “Maestro”.

	Salvador	Saviour	Sauveur
C 4	mirada del Salvador Crucificado	eyes of our crucified Saviour	le regard du Sauveur crucifié
R 7g	comprensión del Salvador	compassion of the Saviour	comprehension du Sauveur
C 10	obra del Salvador	work of the Saviour	l'oeuvre du Sauveur
C 45	misterio del Salvador	mystery of the Saviour	mystère du Sauveur
C 63	amor del Salvador	love of the Saviour	l'amour du Sauveur

El “Salvador” es relacionado con: crucificado, obra, misterio y amor. Sugestivo que la “comprensión” del castellano y francés se transforma en “compasión” en inglés... (R 7g).

	Espíritu Santo	Holy Spirit	Esprit Saint
R 9a	El impulso del Espíritu	the call of the Spirit	L'action de l'Esprit
C 10	Dócil al Espíritu	Open to the Spirit	Docile à l'Esprit
C 13	Llamada del Espíritu	call of the Spirit	l'appel de l'Esprit
C 21	Animados por el Espíritu	The Spirit prompted	Animés par l'Esprit
C 29	Su Espíritu	His Spirit	Son Esprit
C 36	guía del Espíritu	guidance of the Spirit	conduite de l'Esprit
R 37a	don del Espíritu	gift of the Spirit	don de l'Esprit
C 49	inspiraciones del Espíritu	promptings of the Spirit	inspirations de l'Esprit
C 68	la acción del Espíritu	movement of the Spirit	l'action de l'Esprit

El “Espíritu Santo”, casi siempre es tratado como la tercera persona (sólo una vez como el Espíritu de Jesús: C 29). La diferencia más grande se da en R 9^a, donde el “impulso” (castellano) pasa al “llamado” (inglés) y finalmente a la “acción” (francés); mientras que la “acción” en C 68 se traduce con “movimiento” en inglés.

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Théophile DIDIER, OMI, *Cinquante ans chez les Inuits (1935-1986). Correspondance à sa famille*, [S.L., S.D. 2013 ?], 140 p.

Fr Théophile Didier has contributed in an eminent way to the apostolate among the Inuit of the Hudson Bay area. It could be said of almost every missionary who faithfully gave his life for the Gospel, but probably it is even more appropriate when one speaks of somebody who made an effort to translate the Bible into the language of the people he was sent to serve as a missionary. Fr Didier spent 50 years in the Canadian Arctic and his life ended tragically in 1986 in a plane crash near Rankin Inlet, an Inuit community located on the shore of Hudson Bay. This event was an unspeakably tragedy for the Oblate and the diocesan community of the Canadian Arctic. Together with Fr Didier the plane crash took away the lives of bishop Omer Robidoux OMI, sister Lise Turcotte, the pilot and his friend. The bishop with his collaborators was on the way to Pelly Bay, for a meeting of the Inuit catechist families. Their pastoral efforts of the preceding decades were focused on the ministry of inculturation of the Church among the Inuit. The publication *Cinquante ans chez les Inuit (1935-1986). Théophile Didier OMI. Correspondance à sa famille* brings together over 100 letters and postcards written by Fr Didier to his family, especially his brothers, Marie Didier, his sister in law, and François Didier, his nephew. Apart from one short letter written in 1949 and three others dated 1957 and 1959, the majority belong to the decades of 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. They were written in many locations, mostly in the Canadian Arctic: Repulse Bay, Rankin Inlet, Coral Harbour, Chesterfield, Churchill, Pelly Bay, Igloolik, Baker Lake, Eskimo Point (today's Arviat). Others, usually shorter notes or postcards, were sent from southern Canada, Montreal, Winnipeg, etc. The editors have also included in their book a short speech of Paul W. Fox, on the occasion of the ceremony of the Doctorate honoris causa at the University of Toronto in June 1986, a discourse of Fr Didier on the same occasion, and two texts published after the tragedy in Rankin Inlet together with a short notice of a prayer service for Fr Didier's intention. The letters are simply transcribed, without any major commentary (there is only a brief introduction), and the book lacks the date and place of publication.

The edition is not scholarly, but it is nevertheless precious. Fr Didier in his letters spoke not only about the facts understandable by his family, but shared much information concerning the progress of the Oblate missions among the Inuit of the Hudson Bay area. He described his travels in the far Canadian North, some interesting events making news in the Arctic, the evolution of the pastoral ministry and growing involvement of the Inuit catechists, the changing social and economic situation of Inuit settlements (e.g. building of the airports and the more frequent flights in the early 70s). He didn't lack a sense of humor and a philological awareness, like in the following passage from one of his letters: "Bonjour à tous et toutes! Je ne sais pas si c'est en France comme au Canada, mais de plus en plus les dames veulent qu'elles soient mentionnées expressément à côté des messieurs et gare à nous si on a le malheur de l'oublier. Pour les esquimaudes cela n'a aucune importance vu que la grammaire de leur langue ne comporte ni masculin ni féminin et je trouve que c'est beaucoup mieux ainsi quoi qu'en pensent les dames blanches, jaunes ou noires" (letter written in Churchill, dated 18 mars 1985). The relatives of Fr Didier should be appreciated for sharing their personal correspondence with the broader public, thus giving access to the unique sources illustrating the daily life and preoccupations of a missionary. In recent years more and more professional anthologies of missionary sources are being published by the scholars in the field of Church history, missiology and religious studies. It is to be hoped that publications like *Cinquante ans chez les Inuit* will encourage more initiatives of the same nature – even if possibly improved from the academic point of view – concerning Oblate history and heritage. (*Paweł Zajac, omi*)

40 Tahun OMI Berkarya in Indonesia 1972-2012. 20 Tahun Provinsi OMI Indonesia 1993-2013. [Pauperes evangelizantur. Celebrating the 20th Anniversary of the Indonesian Province & 40th year of the Presence of the Oblates in Indonesia], Provinsi Indonesia OMI, 2013, 236 p.

Evangelizare pauperibus misit me is at the soul of the groups of Oblates from different nationalities and which is becoming fully present in Indonesia. A group of Australian Oblates came and started working in Java in 1972, in the diocese of Purwokerto, and a couple of years later, also settled in the Archdiocese of Semarang and the Archdiocese

of Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia. In 1977, the two separate groups of Oblates, namely French and Italian, set foot on the island of Borneo: one in the East, in the Archdiocese of Samarinda, and one in the West in the Diocese of Sintang. Most were Oblates who had been expelled from Laos, due to political reasons. They were searching for a place similar to Laos within Asia and found Borneo/Kalimantan to harbor their missionary hearts (p. 44-52).

Separately, in their respective delegations, they worked hard with and for the people until they began to discern the possibility of merging and forming a single Oblate province. The processes began with several sessions, meetings, and retreats. Finally, with the approval of the General Administration, a vice-province of Indonesia was born on May 21, 1993. This solemn moment was realized in the presence of then-Father General Marcello Zago, and Father Angelito Lampon, at that time the counselor of Asia-Oceania (p. 53-62).

What is the core mission of the Oblates? Our Founder, St. Eugene de Mazenod, invited all his sons to live in community as brothers and then work zealously outside of it for the salvation of souls. By living together as a community the Oblates were able to live “charity, charity, charity among us..” and so set out to spread the Gospel for the salvation of souls. Living the charism of the Founder, the Oblates choose to become “the servant and priest and brother for the poor” and give their lives wholly to them. The Oblates lead people to act like human beings, first of all, and then like Christians, and finally help them to become saints. With this mission, the Oblates live and work in countries spreading to the five continents, including within Indonesia (p. 25-43).

What are the works for the souls in Indonesia? The Oblates work in two of the main islands of Indonesia in six archdioceses. They collaborate with the local Church as well, since most of the Oblate works are basically parish ministries. It is true that the Oblates live as parish priests; but they came as missionaries, and the Oblates’ missionary spirit is clearly revealed in their ways of doing ministry. Thanks be to God that the bishops have seen and truly appreciated the presence and works of the Oblates in their respective dioceses (p. 11-26).

Within parish ministry, the Oblates work wholeheartedly for the poor. In the context of Borneo, with its jungles, rivers, and groups of tribal peoples, the Oblates work tirelessly in reaching out to the people

to bring them the Good News of salvation. In both the West and the East, Oblates encourage families to send their children to school. The Oblates provide lodging to children from various isolated villages in boarding houses connected to the presbytery or under the guidance of some trusted families. It saves a lot of young women and men or teenagers from a “culture of marriage” at a young age. Many of them are even able to continue their studies at a higher level either in the university or any of the vocational schools. It takes a long time to change the mentality of the people and continues to be so even now.

Visiting families is another option for the Oblates in doing their ministries. Riding by “motor” in the muddy roads, travelling by small boats in the unpredictable weather, and staying overnight with people with limited facilities and sanitation provide the background for their “art” of being close to the people. We have lost two zealous Oblates in road accidents. Despite this cost, Oblates also enjoy the harvests such as hundreds of youth achieving various higher levels of education, thousands of people who know and follow the Savior, great contributions toward preserving local cultures, the works of JPIC, and of course, great missionary witnesses for the sake of the Church which our Founder loved so much - the glorious inheritance purchased by Christ the Savior at the cost of his own blood. The Oblates have done a lot of church-building as pioneers in order to pave the way for a future ministry of faith among the people (p. 127-186).

The island of Java is the most populous island in the world (the UN census 2013 notes its population as 135 million persons). The Oblates from Australia arrived in Cilacap, Central Java and then spread their wings to the west of Jakarta for more ministries and to the east of Yogyakarta to begin houses of formation. The Javan Oblates have tackled some significantly different challenges compared to the Oblates in Borneo. The main issues are poverty and unemployment. People have no money to improve their living standard or to send their children to school. Right after their arrival in 1972, the Oblates became involved in some social projects for the benefit of the people by building roads, sanitation facilities, schools, micro-credit, and empowerment of the housewives to raise incomes for the family.

All those projects are done in the context of parish ministry. The Oblates work for the poor without neglecting the original mission with-

in the Church. Cultivating faith by administering the sacraments, visiting families, and opening a national Marian Grotto in Kaliori, Central Java, have been expressions of the Oblate religious charism. Moreover, Oblates engaged in parishes are conducting ministry to youth such as Roses, Antiokhia, and Oblate Youth Encounter every two years, and show their concern for the support of families in ways such as encouraging couples to join Marriage Encounter weekends. Building churches are also part of the missionary zeal among the Oblates engaged in parish ministry. By doing all of these, the Oblates have been much involved in the local Church as well as in the broader society of Indonesia, their appreciation for the Oblates being notably expressed when Fr. Charlie Burrows received the Ma'arif Award from a prominent National Islamic Institution in 2012 (p. 64-107).

The future of the Oblate congregation lies at the heart of formation. The presence of the Oblates attracted some young men to join, which gave hope to the continuation of the mission as well as presenting the need of setting up formation houses. In 1982, after some discernment involving the delegation of France and Italy, the Australian Oblates began a joint construction project for the scholasticate and novitiate in Yogyakarta, an autonomous region well-known as a city of culture and study. In 1990, the novitiate moved to the new location, about 3 kilometers north of the scholasticate. The number of vocations is always up and down but they were prosperous during the time of the unification of the three delegations. Although the number of novices and scholastics were fantastic, the number went down dramatically after several years; but, thanks be to God, the number has recently been going up again. The future looks brighter and brighter for the Oblates in Indonesia. The average age of the Oblates is between thirty seven and forty five. The vocation of brotherhood has also increased in recent years, which gives more hope for doing ministries in a broader context and variety (p.108-126).

What are the challenges of the mission in Indonesia? The issue of transferring to a new generation and continuation of the mission is one of the major concerns among the Oblates. The magnificent works of the expatriates (former three delegations) is slowly being handed over to local Oblates, which requires both trust and accountability among all of them. Despite the differences in backgrounds, way of being missionaries, and the lack of personnel, the commitment remains the same: the

Oblates will carry on the mission of the Founder, bringing the Good News to the poor and abandoned. The Oblates serve the unserved: the poor among the rich in the city, the isolated people in the jungles, the dynamic-modern youths, the issues identified by JPIC, and, of course, the service to the Church. With one heart and one soul, *cor unum et anima una*, and through congresses and meetings, the Oblates as a community, holding hands with an abundance of faithful lay men and women (p. 199-212), look forward to firmly assuring that the poor have received the Good News. Many have received and many more will receive. (*Henricus Asodo, OMI*)

LECTURES RECOMMANDÉES / RECOMMENDED READING / LECTURAS RECOMENDADAS

El beato **José GÉRARD**, OMI, *Apóstol de los Basutos* (1831-1914), *Cartas a los Superiores Generales y a otros Oblatos, Escritos espirituales*, Traducción por O. Domínguez, o.m.i., Asunción, 2012, 232 p.

Yvon BEAUDOIN, OMI, *Fernand Jetté, o.m.i. Un guía sabio en un tiempo de crisis*, Traducción por O. Domínguez, o.m.i., Asunción, 2013, 230 p.

Święty **Eugeniusz DE MAZENOD**, *Prisma Duchowe (1812-1856)*, Z francuskiego tłumaczył o. Roman Tyczński OMI, Poznań, Polska Prowincja Misjonarzy Oblatów Maryi Niepokalanej, 2013, 312 p.

Jens WATTEROTG, OMI - **Christian ORTH**, *Die Klosterorgel des St. Bonifatiusklosters Hünfeld, Hünfeld [2013]*, 58 p.

Aimé ROCHE, OMI, *Sekreto en igloj. Neebla komisio en la Kanada ekstrema notdo [Le secret des iglous. Mission impossible dans le Grand-Nord canadien]*, Traduit en Espéranto par / Esperantigis Robert Moulin & Claude Gerlat, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2013, 276 p.

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Pour une erreur typographique l'article de Alfred Kerling, *La méthode missionnaire de Mgr Ovide Charlebois*, OMI, paru dans **Oblatio** 20013/3, p. 293-313, n'a pas les 40 notes. Elles peuvent être trouvés dans l'article publié sur le site : <http://www.omiworld.org/oblatio/oblatio-home-page.asp>. Nous présentons nos excuses aux lecteurs et à l'auteur.