

RECEIVING AND FORMING CANDIDATES

May 22nd, 1980 - Letter - Rome

Will anyone succeed us? - The shortage of formators. - What people expect of a priest.

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We are now only a few months away from the General Chapter. Its preparation is already quite well advanced, thanks to the work of the Precapitular Commission and to the excellent cooperation of the Provinces. For this, a heartfelt thanks. I invite you one last time to intensify your prayers for the success of this Chapter. The Oblates as a whole expect a lot from it.

Will anyone succeed us?

A missionary who has been devoting himself for over forty years to the Eskimos of the Far North wrote to me on April 17: "We are thinking of the Chapter almost as much as you and the Capitulars are. May God and also Mary Immaculate help you! Thank you, thank you for the new Constitutions and Rules... I pray that they will be quickly approved by the Chapter. They are filled with substantial nourishment for many young Oblates!". With a certain touch of sadness he added: "Will anyone succeed us? You have seen us... you know the condition of our people and our affairs: think of us, should there be some volunteers for the North."

I hear this appeal coming from pretty well everywhere in the Congregation. It comes from Oblates; and it also comes from bishops and churches we serve in our work.

From April 13th to the 20th, I visited our fellow Oblates in Scandinavia: 3 Scandinavians, 1 Belgian, 7 Poles, 20 Americans. They are doing splendid work. They are a true presence of the Church, a missionary presence recognized and appreciated in a milieu where secularism and religious indifference prevail. The Bishop of Oslo came to tell me and the Provincial of Poland how much he needed priests and missionaries.

The shortage of formators

Earlier, in February and March, I visited one Province (Sri Lanka) and several Delegations of Asia (Thailand, India, Malaysia, Bangladesh and Pakistan). Thanks be to God, there are vocations in most of these countries. The Province of Sri Lanka, which is responsible for four of these Delegations, has shown great zeal for serving and evangelizing the poor and, at the same time, a noteworthy concern for furthering and fostering local vocations. There are already ten scholastics in India, three of whom are young Fathers; eight scholastics or students in Bangladesh, one of whom is a priest in temporary vows; and some aspirants in Pakistan. These are admirable results, filled with hope for the future. But everywhere the Scholastics as well as the Fathers said to me: "We absolutely must have formators, and formators with experience! Alone, we are not able to carry on".

I will be relaying this appeal to the Chapter, but I want the whole Congregation to hear it now. There was a time, not so long ago, when we had many formators in our novitiates and scholasticates. Today, many of those Oblates are involved in pastoral ministry. Would some of them who are English-speaking and – if at all possible – members of the British Commonwealth, be willing to give several years of their life to the service of these young Oblates in Madras, Dacca, or Karachi? They will suffer and be deprived of much, but they will also experience in these places a warm welcome and a deep joy, the joy of working to establish the Congregation in young Churches that are filled

with promise. I will gratefully receive the names, of those who would be ready to answer this call.

What people expect of a priest

What do people in these countries expect of a priest, of the candidate we are to guide during the entire time of formation? In Asia, the priest is "the man of God". This is how people see him. In the Catholic religious and priest they expect to find what they see in the Buddhist or Hindu monk or in the imam of Islam.

In Dacca one evening, the Archbishop, summing up for us the conclusions reached during an exchange about the priest in Asia, told us that the people expected three things of a priest: that he have a true experience of God, that he be interiorly free and detached from all things, and that exteriorly he lead a mortified life. The Preface to our Constitutions and Rules does not ask anything else of us: it only adds apostolic zeal and daring.

I make the same appeal for Oblate formators in favour of the scholasticate of Zaire. In Kinshasa we have 18 French-speaking scholastics and practically no one steadily to accompany and guide them. Furthermore, there are 9 novices in training at Ifwanzondo. Would there be one or two French-speaking competent Oblates who are willing to offer themselves as a help to these scholastics?

Today, May 21, is the one hundred and nineteenth anniversary of our holy Founder's death. I presided at the giving of the first obedience to the five finishing Fathers of the Province of Italy. Ceremonies like this are a source of hope and joy. May Blessed Eugene de Mazenod, whose spirit is ever alive among us, renew in each of us the grace of our vocation!