

# THE OBLATE AND RECONCILIATION

June 29th, 1983 - Letter - Rome

*Reconciliation within oneself. - Reconciliation with those around us. - Allow ourselves to be reconciled with God.*

*L.J.C. et M.I.*

The Synod of Bishops will again be in session next September 29. It will be the seventh time since the Council. The last four sessions dealt with "Justice in the World" and "The Ministerial Priesthood" (1971), "Evangelization in the Modern World" (1974), "Catechesis in our Time" (1977) and "The Christian Family in Today's World" (1980).

Oblates cannot be indifferent to meetings such as these. They manifest the Church's life in all its diversity and its determination to find new, more effective ways of evangelizing today's world.

The Superiors General met at Villa Cavalletti near Rome from May 25 to May 28 to prepare for this Synod. They came to reflect together on this event, to consider how religious life is challenged by the Synod's theme – "Reconciliation and Penance in the Mission of the Church" – and what religious life can contribute thereto.

In point of fact, several rather positive elements emerged from this meeting. I would like to share with you the thoughts this gathering suggested to me.

## **Reconciliation within oneself**

During the years that followed the Council, a good number of religious were shaken in their personal life and deep convictions. The questioning and the many changes seriously affected their practice of prayer, their striving for personal discipline, their relationships to the world. In most cases, after the inevitable searching and groping, the proposed changes proved justified, even necessary for an appropriate renewal of religious life.

Unfortunately, however, because of a certain weariness and lack of dialogue, many religious have remained at a standstill. The first phase of renewal led them to abandon some of their former attitudes; today they feel too exhausted to embark on the second phase, that of integrating new attitudes into their life. Thus, for example, because a definitive edition of the new breviary did not materialize soon enough, they began to omit the recitation of the divine office altogether; today, when the breviary reform is accomplished, they no longer manage to recite it regularly and completely. The same is true for mental prayer, the practice of obedience, and sacramental confession.

We Oblates have not escaped this phenomenon. To break out of it, a first step is essential: we need to be reconciled with our own selves and with today's Church. In the light of the new Constitutions and Rules and of Vatican II as interpreted by the Church's authentic *magisterium*, we need to face and work the truth within ourselves. This is the starting point, the only starting point, for true spiritual and missionary renewal.

In this field there is a very important element to be borne in mind: we must not saddle the young men who join us with the burden of a trial they themselves have not experienced. Yes, they too need

reconciliation and conversion, but in quite a different line: they need to be converted to Jesus Christ with all the enthusiastic thrust of their youth; they do not need to be reconciled to the new world whose sons they are, nor with today's Church for whose presence they have been longing.

### **Reconciliation with those around us**

Being a religious also means being a promoter of unity and reconciliation among those with whom we live. Daily, if we are alert, we will perceive particular calls in this sphere: the need for reconciliation between the different generations; between persons of differing mentalities, of varying apostolic or political positions; between persons of different social classes, beliefs, color and race; between persons possessing different charisms as, for instance, a group of religious and their bishop in a given diocese.

These conciliation needs exist as much within religious life as they do outside it. Sometimes a hardening of positions has arisen between religious or apostolic groups which make all dialogue and true collaboration very difficult, if not impossible. This is a scandal for those who observe our way of life.

As the Congregation becomes more universal and open to non-Western people, it needs to free itself from certain attitudes of narrow-mindedness and bias. An African Oblate, engaged in formation ministry, recently made some comments in this regard. He said:

*Some think they own the Congregation. Others, to the contrary, always feel they are 'staying with others'. We cannot open our doors to young people from Africa if they are made to feel like strangers in our midst.*

*The young people who come to us are neophytes, and so we need to have some understanding. No one is helped if all we do is criticize. And if setbacks do occur, all of us should hear them together. Criticism cannot foster a real vocation...*

*Something we often hear is this: 'As for him we'll see!'. This is destructive. We are content simply to watch what another does, instead of coming to support and encourage him.*

*Each of us comes with a different outlook on reality. For Africans, relationships are important; for Europeans, it is work and the job at hand. We can spend our time criticizing each other: each one becomes more closed to the other and no progress is made. We need to be mutually converted. Dialogue needs to be achieved between us, Europeans and Africans. Until now you were the only ones, and there has only been monologue. As we accept young Africans, we must achieve dialogue. If religious cannot come together, who can? Setting up separate communities (some for Africans, whites in others) would be a very grave step.*

*We need to be mutually converted and achieve communities that are signs of love... Very often we make mistakes, without there being any malice. Good will is not enough. Often we remain in the state of monologue, closed within one's culture and attitudes. We do not open up to the other person. (Excerpt from the Cameroon-Chad newsletter, Entre Nous, May 1983).*

### **Allow ourselves to be reconciled with God**

As we can see, conversion, repentance, reconciliation are issues that directly and closely concern us. In the final analysis, all human reconciliations, within our own selves as well as with others around us, are possible and lasting only if each one of us admits, before God, to being but an ordinary creature and a sinner with limitations and weaknesses. Reconciliation is inseparably linked to humility.

Sin is stamped on this or that unjust social structure. The Church has been increasingly aware of this, an awareness that is both a gift of light and a new missionary appeal. But if sin is present there, it is

because it is first of all present in the hearts of people. "We implore you, in Christ's name: be reconciled to God!" St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians ( *2 Corinthians* 5:20).

Pope John Paul II addresses this same invitation to us in this Jubilee Holy Year of the Redemption. Taking my cue from him, I, in turn, also address it to you.