

TO THE OBLATES OF EUROPE

May 16th, 1979 - Letter - Hünfeld, Germany

Being alert to present-day problems.- Concern for vocations. - Cooperation between Provinces.

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The Joint Meeting of the Provincials of Europe, along with the delegates representing the mission and formation, and the members of the General Council, ended a few days ago at Hünfeld. It was a week of praying together, of sharing, and of reflecting on the Oblate reality in a Europe that is reshaping itself.

Preceded by Council members visiting several Provinces, these days were the occasion of real enrichment for us.

In spite of unavoidable limitations, this meeting greatly met our expectations. In this letter I would like to continue reflecting with you on three points raised during the meeting, points which especially struck me

Being alert to present-day problems

First, we must be alert and attentive to the problems of Europe today. A new Europe is gradually being built, new economically, new politically, a Europe that considers itself more integrally human. The resultant major problems are only too obvious: the problem of unbelief and of indifference, the problem of the migrants and unemployment, the problem of relationships with the Third World, the problem of the young who feel more and more adrift... The Europe that is being built is filled with a multitude of the new poor. Do we hear their appeal, and what response have we to give them?

A certain number of Oblates are a prey to a grave danger, that of becoming closed in on themselves, of lacking interest in the new world that is being born. They see themselves as too old, and, not seeing any young Oblates coming after them, they tend to become discouraged. And yet, Paul VI, a few years ago, invited Religious "to have their eyes wide open to the needs of men, to their problems, to their searching..., to try to understand deeply the current trends and the modern world's request..." and to make an attempt at responding to them in a Gospel manner (cf. *Evangelica testificatio*, nos. 51-52).

That invitation is addressed to each one of us. Even if only a small number of us can actively commit ourselves to these new ministries, all of us should keep our eyes open to the present-day needs of man; and most of us can, in our usual parish ministry, in our teaching, in our preaching, in our ministry to the working class, make other people aware of the pleas coming from the new poor. In doing this, we are already missionaries and helping to build Europe.

Concern for vocations

Secondly, we must have faith in our vocation and not be afraid to invite others to follow us. As Father Vanpetegem, the President of the European Conference of Provincials, reminded us, Religious and Oblates have their place in the Europe that is in the making. And for his part, Pope John Paul II, last April 6, insisted: "Institutions alone will never make Europe, it is men who will make it» (*Address to the members of the Presidency Office of the European Parliament*). I am convinced that religious can have great influence on these men, if Religious are capable of frankly and radically living their

religious consecration in their midst.

Allow me here a recollection from the past. It happened during the war. I was then a Scholastic. Cardinal Villeneuve, O.M.I., had come to visit us in Ottawa. Prior to this, he had met with Mr. Mackenzie King, the Prime Minister of Canada, who was not a Catholic. While they were talking together about peace and the conditions needed to bring it about, a Capuchin monk walked past them. Mr. King remarked, "We politicians can do something for peace; but, if there were more men like that in the world, perhaps peace would be deeper and more lasting!". We are often unaware of how much real influence we do have.

Cooperation between Provinces

Thirdly, we must continue to work together more and more. How much the Oblate community is the place "par excellence" for discerning the challenges of today's world was strongly reasserted during the course of the Joint Meeting. This working together in community would gain if it were at times extended beyond provincial boundaries. I have in mind, for example, certain works considered very important for evangelization which one Province alone cannot sustain. In such a case, for the good of the Gospel, could not other Provinces provide a few men who would assure the survival and development of that work? This, too, is a way of being missionary and of contributing to the spiritual building of Europe.

In concluding, I want to thank, in a very special way, the community of Hünfeld for the brotherly hospitality it has shown during these three weeks to the members of the General Council. Equal thanks to the Brothers who directly looked after our needs. Through them, I greet all the Brothers of Europe: once again, I want to tell them how much the Congregation counts on them, on the fervour of their consecrated life, and on their devoted service in favour of the mission.