

Newman, DeMazenod & Bede

In the last issue of *VieOblateLife* (68,#1),, Bishop Gilles Cazabon OMI explained that St. Eugene visited Blessed Newman in 1859, at Maryvale, England (p. 41). As in many things, St. Eugene was ahead of his time, recognizing Newman's holiness and insights. Do we need to continue our ecumenical conversion as a congregation?

"Ecumenism is the twin of mission" (Cardinal Walter Kasper, explaining the importance of the 1910 Edinburgh, Scotland World Missionary Conference). As we approach the 50th anniversary in Oct. 2012 of the opening of the Second Vatican Council, Oblates can celebrate our conversion to ecumenism and interreligious dialogue. Fifty years ago, most Catholics expected Protestants and Eastern Orthodox to return to our faith, rather than be the recipient of our apologies. Other religions were regarded as completely in error. We underwent of a conversion of mind and heart which expressed itself succinctly in the 1972 Chapter's Missionary Outlook: Especially in areas where the great non-Christian religions are a living reality our evangelization should include a common search for Truth in dialogue. . . .We will habitually examine what other Christians are doing in our area before initiating new projects or programs; we will do everything with them which faith does not oblige us to do separately (#16, d-e). The longer paragraphs from which these excerpts are taken are a commentary on our current Constitutions and Rules which express our commitment to ecumenism and dialogue (6, 66a).

St. Eugene's Example

Our Founder was far ahead of his time regarding other Christians, and religions. When he visited the Irvingite Protestant Church in London in 1857, he watched Evening Prayer, and concluded that the devotion of these Protestants was something his canons in chapter could imitate (Leflon 4:289). When he visited Tunisia in 1842, he watched a mosque service, and hoped that Christians would imitate the silence, prostrations, beseeching invocations and profoundly religious services of Moslems (North African Journal).

A New Development

Evangelical Christianity and Roman Catholicism have unexpectedly converged since the emergence of the Charismatic Movement. Are we ready to work with these Christians so that our divisions do not harm the

preaching of the Gospel, and that our limited resources are expanded? The latest documents of this convergence, the USA "Manhattan Declaration" of Nov. 20, 2009, and the British "Westminster Declaration" of April 4, 2010 are remarkable missionary and ecumenical achievements which should be prayed over by every Oblate. Each declaration has a website; the "Manhattan Declaration" features 14 languages.

Cardinal Francis George OMI was one of the Catholic co-authors of the original 1994 statement, "Evangelicals and Catholics Together for Mission." What he wrote then for American Oblates applies with even greater force for the "Manhattan Declaration," the 8th statement of this group:

Catholics can learn from Evangelicals a few lessons on how to put evangelization at the center of the Church's life. Catholic evangelization is different in some significant ways. The Christ we proclaim is a Eucharistic Christ; the methods we employ must respect the work of the Holy Spirit already present in the people we evangelize; the Gospel we implement changes society as well as individuals. But the fervor to introduce people to Christ, the joy in being with fellow believers, the sense of the immediacy of God's action in the world--these lessons we can learn again from Evangelicals. Oblates, above all, should be interested and eager. Be nice to Evangelicals and even Fundamentalists. Often to our surprise and theirs, we have more in common than we had once thought. (Cardinal George, "Mission-Unity", #30, Oct. 1994).

Proclamation and Dialogue

Proclamation is the shorthand for the teaching that Jesus Christ and His Church are necessary for the salvation of all on this planet. Dialogue is the shorthand for the teaching that we must work with other Christians, with members of other religions, and with all people of good will. Archbishop Marcello Zago OMI witnesses to us that we can and must live this tension of both Proclamation and Dialogue.

A Challenge

The recent May 10-11, 2010 celebration at our Obra, Poland Scholasticate of Fr. Matteo Ricci SJ's missionary accomplishments shows the steady growth and progress in living this tension. Ukranian Orthodox and Protestant Missions in China were both featured (Oblate Communications, May 17, 2010). I personally experienced the USA scene in addressing the six USA Oblate area meetings on Missionary Ecumenism in February and March, 2009, and hearing many Oblates tell of their joys and problems in working with other Christians, and other religions. But the problem is that almost all

of this ministry remains at the local level, and is rarely shared or coordinated in the Oblate world. Look at our structures for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation. We have invested talent and treasure well in this work. Where are the similar structures for Mission, Ecumenism and Dialogue:?? Can our 2010 Chapter look seriously at this need?

Let us continue our conversion to Mission, Christian Unity and Dialogue by moving from the accomplishments of individual Oblates to establishing flexible structures at the provincial, regional and congregational level. May the Chapter celebrate what the Holy Spirit has already led us to achieve, and inspire each Oblate to search the signs of the times. Mary, Mother of Christians, guide us

When Pope Benedict became the first pope to visit Westminster Abbey (Sept. 17), he sought common ground with the Anglicans who have administered the abbey since the Reformation. He found it in St. Bede the Venerable, and stated: At the dawn of a new age in the life of society and the Church, Bede understood both the importance of fidelity to the word of God as transmitted by the apostolic tradition, and the need for creative openness to new developments and to the demands of a sound implantation of the Gospel in contemporary language and culture. This nation, and the Europe which Bede and his contemporaries helped to build, once again stands at the threshold of a new age. May St. Bede's example inspire the Christians of these lands to rediscover their shared legacy, to strengthen what they have in common, and to continue their efforts to grow in friendship. May the Risen Lord strengthen our efforts to mend the ruptures of the past and to see the challenges of the present with hope in the future which, in his providence he holds out to us and to our world. Amen. May Oblates join to the name of Bede that of Eugene, and apply the pope's insights to ourselves, recovering a shared legacy with Protestants and Eastern Orthodox, thus strengthening our mission.

Oblate General Chapter, Rome
(Sept, 8-Oct. 7, 2010)

"The Chapter Call to Conversion," is a 9 pp inspirational statement of great beauty. In the section "Oblate Mission" each Oblate is challenged to "cooperate with the new Central Government, who will develop...new missionary strategies...in dialog...with all people of good will(#1). "The Oblates be open to and involved interdenominational and inter-religious dialog, particularly in terms of positive working with other religions to build God's Kingdom" (#5).

Edinburgh 2010
(June 2-6)

Boston 2010
(Nov.4-7)

Over 1,200 Christian leaders celebrate the centenary of the World Missionary Conference, which began the ecumenical movement, with its vital missionary dimension. The main speaker in Edinburgh was an American Methodist Dana Roberts (for her background, see below, Dana Roberts interview) She reprised her presentation at the Boston meeting of seminarians and faculty, which publicized "The Antioch Agenda" (see side page)

Unfortunately, the Oblate outgoing Central Government was unable to have any representation at the Edinburgh meeting. The Oblates in the four provinces of the USA and Canada were unable to have any representation at the Boston meeting. Part of this was due to the focus on changing leadership on the USA and international level.

There are five different spiritualities operating today in every denomination, parish and religious order: catholic, evangelical/charismatic, Vatican II/neo-orthodox, fundamentalist and liberal. If we use these riches and treasures in and with all denominations, we can witness our Christian faith to the world. If we rely only on our shrinking Oblate resources, we will perish as a religious order. "The Antioch Agenda" lists four "pressing issues. . . in the proclamation of Good News: . . . the need for human flourishing, the demands of reconciliation in specific settings, an affirmation of religious freedom in the context of dialogue among religions, and the necessity of freedom from fear." In the spirit of the Central Government's "Call to Conversion," may each Oblate in first formation be challenged to meet these issues. And may those of us in ongoing formation rededicate ourselves.