

WORLDS REEMERGING

For the fourth year in a row the Italian Oblates have sponsored a rather original missionary animation initiative called "Reemerging Worlds" (in Italian, "Mondi Riemersi"). Each year it focuses on a specific country where Oblate missionaries are present. Through multimedia presentations the local culture of places like Senegal, Uruguay, Korea or Cameroon are portrayed to an invited audience. Pictures and music, poetry, dances and food are presented in various programs through five days. The venue has so far been the Scuderie Aldobrandini, a facility of the town of Frascati, near Rome. The events are prepared with the help of the embassies of the respective countries and some immigrants willing to volunteer their services. Within this framework, one or two Oblate missionaries also speak about their experience of immersion into that particular culture, which they have often known for many years.

Up to now, the yearly event has been very successful. This in part is due to broad publicity, carried out particularly by visiting several schools. The students then repay the visit - this March they came in large numbers, more than 1,500 of them - and through the students, the program reaches their families as well.

I believe that, to a great extent, the good public response comes also from the originality of this idea of missionary animation. It starts with an appreciation for the local culture; it is not at all the missionary who occupies center stage. The visitors experience how a new world, of which they had some knowledge but not in clear terms, re-emerges from a dim memory and shines in its beauty. To show the beauty of a country and the peoples with whom we Oblates are in contact, is another of the secrets of this approach to missionary animation. On that basis, it becomes easy for the participating Oblates also to witness to the mission itself in which we believe.

Our mission is still the same, to announce the Christ-event, but we have to present it today to our home countries and churches in appropriate ways. Nothing should smell of those colonial times when it was all too often pointed out that the missionary brings, along with the faith, a supposedly superior Western civilization into a strange world; he himself may not know this world too well and be tempted to distance himself from it. Such a presentation would do justice neither to today's missionary endeavors, nor to the best of mission in the past and even less to the mission in biblical times. To treat the culture of the country that receives us with great respect must be the starting point, and we already find that approach in the Bible. Peter, when he speaks to the Jews on Pentecost, and Paul in his discourse at the areopagus, first highlight the positive value of the local beliefs and culture before they pass on to speak of their limits and the need for Christ the Savior.

In today's mission field, respectful dialogue between cultures and religions is essential. As missionaries we are aware of it; however, we may have missed one logical consequence of this: forcefully sharing today's approach to mission with our people at home. "Mondi Riemersi" - "Reemerging Worlds" is a fine example of letting emerge in the missionary's native country the many worlds and cultures to which Christians are sent in all parts of the planet, to announce the news of Easter to every creature. These worlds and cultures need to rise again in the hearts of people in our home countries; it is a prerequisite to our speaking to them of mission more specifically. The reason is simple: The world of the other needs to reemerge because we can only love what we know and we can only evangelize those whom we love.

Wilhelm Steckling