THE PROMOTION OF THE FOUNDER VEN. FR. PIUS BRUNO LANTERI AND THE CONGREGATION OF THE OBLATES OF THE VIRGIN MARY IN NIGERIA

By

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"*They will never cease to love more their own Congregation, as a child is wont to love his mother more than the Queen*" (Ven. Lanteri)

*"When, speaking of Lanteri, the Pope (Pius XI) asked: '**and what do you do to make your great founder known?**' - Fr. Pechenino promptly replied: 'Among the various initiatives, here, Your Holiness, is also this dissemination work.' "* (Quoted by P. Ayme, OMV, in a personal notebook of "News of the Congregation ")[1]

INTRODUCTION

The promotion of the Founder, Ven. Pius Bruno Lanteri, has always been done and continues to be done throughout the Congregation of the Oblates of the Virgin Mary (OMV). The preparations in Rome for the video presentation on the history of this promotion is unique and historic. It led, indirectly, to the writing of this article. I had not planned to write it. The Director of Communications, Fr. John Wykes, OMV had contacted some Oblate confreres in different regions of the Congregation, asking for information. This article is an offshoot, ultimately, of my initial response to his request.

In this article, a list of initiatives and activities of Oblates in Nigeria to promote our Founder is reported. The items are listed in no particular order and can be updated in the future when necessary. This depends, of course, on the availability and reliability about new initiatives that are pertinent to the subject under consideration.

After the presentation of a basic conviction, shared by many, the article discusses the request for (and gathering) of information as a phase of the project. Seen as a matter that should concern everyone, the reflection presents the inquiry made. Then, it reports, in a collage as it were, responses received on promotion of Ven. Lanteri and the Congregation in Nigeria, including proposals of some ways of furthering it in the future. Some final remarks will follow.

1. A BASIC CONVICTION. "HOW DO WE PROPERLY PROCEED?"

[1] Translation from this Italian version: "Quando, parlando del Lanteri, il Papa(Pio XI) domandò: 'e cosa fate per far conoscere il vostro grande fondatore?' – P. Pechenino risponse prontamente: 'Tra le varie iniziative, ecco Santita', anche questa operetta di divulgazione.'" (Citato da P. Ayme in un Quaderno personale di "*Notizie della Congregazione*")

We Oblates look to the future with hope. The Nigeria Delegation, in my view, can advance the promotion of the Founder and the cause of his canonization in the following ways:

- Continue to build on the initiatives (and subsequent achievements) the OMV Nigeria have done and are doing.
- Appreciate, strengthen, celebrate and promote the good initiatives from and of the OMV in Nigeria Delegation.
- Faithfully implement the recommendations of: (a) the Delegation and (b) the Congregation, its General Chapters, and the Rector Major concerning the promotion of our Founder and the cause of his canonization.
- Develop personal convictions, commitments and sacrifices that favour and strengthen our sense of belonging to the Congregation of the OMV.
- Encourage, appreciate and harness individual and communal creativity in the Associates Oblates of the Virgin Mary (AOMV) regarding the promotion of Ven. Lanteri and his cause. This requires the courage to take feasible and sustainable initiatives and to persevere in their implementation. It also requires the ability to work in collaboration with the other people and in union with the Delegate and his Council.
- Recognize, welcome and celebrate the good efforts and successes of other confreres and uplift them. Encourage each confrere to make his own contribution to advance the approved initiatives for the common good.
- Know and emulate, with due adaptations to the local situations in Nigeria, the applicable projects and best practices for planned promotion of the Founder adopted in other Oblate entities.

In truth, from the outset there has been and there still is a basic and unwavering conviction that "the charism of Ven. Fr. Pius Bruno Lanteri and the ecclesial mission of the Congregation (…) are very important for Africa" and, therefore, that the OMV must adopt "concrete, adequate and efficient or ways of making the Congregation of the OMV known in Africa" (*Lanterianum,* December 2008, Vol.XVI, Fasc.1, p.154). So, when in June 1985 the former Secretary General of the Congregation OMV, Fr. Kelvin Walsh, OMV, and the present writer (Fr. Ogunu) were sent to visit several Catholic Bishops of Nigeria our aim, as Fr. Walsh's final *Report* rightly states, was to introduce Ven. Fr. Lanteri's Religious Congregation and formally seek their counsel on how best we, the OMV Congregation, are to "properly proceed" to establish an Oblate presence in Nigeria:

> "(a) Above all, I wanted to introduce the Congregation to the bishops that we met" and to ask "*Whether it is necessary to accept other vocations from Nigeria?;*

(b) If the Oblates want to establish a community in Nigeria, how do we properly proceed?"[2]

The basic conviction that the Lanterian spirituality and charism can and must be made known and lived in Africa was very much present. This fundamental motivation led to the request that the Congregation should establish an Oblate house in Nigeria. There was also the openness and expressed desire of the Congregation to contribute its quota to the evangelizing mission of the Catholic Church in Nigeria by establishing OMV communities in this country and admitting African vocations. Ultimately, the Congregation -- under the Rector Major Fr. Patrice Veraquin, OMV and the Italian Provincial Rector, Fr. Sergio Zirattu, OMV --- chose to establish the first Oblate house at Minna Diocese (Suleja town) in Nigeria in 1998.

From their earliest arrival in Nigeria, the Oblates have always endeavoured to make the Congregation and its Founder, Ven. Lanteri, known in this most populous African nation. Both priests and seminarians are committed to this. This endeavour was both an existential and practical/pastoral need. It was necessary for the life and development of the OMV in Nigeria. It was also a natural demand, I believe, arising from the OMVs own self-understanding and beliefs about the identity and mission of the Congregation. The spirituality and charism of the Founder and his Congregation are gifts of the Holy Spirit to the *entire* Church that is to be joyfully shared with everyone. Promoting the Congregation and its Founder is an expression of love and sacrificial service. It is the responsibility of every Oblate to make them known, even while we esteem and venerate other religious institutes and their achievements.

> "All will tenderly love the Congregation as Mother, and all will be ready to sacrifice themselves for it (...). However, they will not cease to profess the greatest esteem and veneration towards all the other Congregations, always speaking of them with praise. They will try to participate in the good that the others do, to rejoice that God be the more glorified, that a greater number of souls be gained for God, and to enjoy such good as if they did it themselves, and every kind of envy of this kind will be greatly abhorred by them.
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> *Moreover, they will never cease to love more their own Congregation, as a child is wont to love his mother more than the Queen*".[3]

In February 2004 the Provincial Rector emeritus, Fr. Mauro Oliva, OMV, expressed his appreciation and gratitude for the contribution of Fr. Efeturi Ojakaminor, OMV. At that time, Fr. Ojakaminor was the Formator of Postulants and Local Rector of the Oblates' Seminary Community at Suleja and was active in the effort to make the Congregation and Fr. Lanteri

[2] "Report on the Visit of Fr. Kevin to Nigeria", in: *Minutes of the General Council* OMV 8-9 July, 1985, n.13.

[3] Ven. Pius Bruno Lanteri, *Directory of the Original Rule of the Oblates of the Virgin Mary*. Part 1, Chapter V, Art.3. Italic is mine.

known. Summarizing the activities of Fr. Ojakaminor during the first five years of the OMV's presence in Nigeria, Fr. Oliva, said:

> "It was since 1998 that you [*Fr. Ojakaminor*] have started the Mission in Suleja. Sergio [*Zirattu, OMV*] sent you and supported you, we all admired you for what you did: you chose the place, you bought the house, you started to welcome the postulants, you enlarged the rooms, you taught at the faculty [*i.e., National Missionary Seminary of St. Paul*] of the Missionary Society of St. Paul, you have kept in touch with the Province, you have made the Congregation and Lanteri known and esteemed; you have collaborated with the diocesan clergy ..., and more. We all appreciated you, and for what you did we thanked you and thank you."[4]

In the years that followed the efforts of the Oblates in Nigeria to make Ven. Lanteri and the Congregation better known continued. This was done with greater intensity and passion, depth and geographical spread as well as with new vigour and methods. The initiatives were diversified and grew in number. This was made possible thanks to the assistance and collaboration of many persons and groups. The Rectors of the Community and Formation Team in the Seminary initiated, encouraged and sustained the efforts. The seminarians effectively collaborated and worked hard in carrying out entrusted assignments and were involved in the brainstorming concerning many of the various initiatives presented. The Oblates also received the support and collaboration of diocesan clergy and parishes, of other Consecrated persons, of benefactors and benefactresses, and of many lay faithful – whether individually or in groups -- in numerous dioceses. In a special way, sustained support and cooperation was received – and we still receive -- from the AOMV who are co-responsible in the realization for the OMV mission. The Major Superiors (Italian Provincial Rector and the Rector Majors and their Councils) gave financial and/or moral support. The annual General Assembly (since December 2014) and the leadership of the Nigeria Delegation (first established June 2015) play a significant role in encouraging and supporting the relevant initiatives. The Council and the General Assembly of the Delegation contribute to the promotion of Lanteri and his Congregation in Nigeria through their directives and guidelines.

2. THE PROJECT: THE REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

In 2019, the OMV Director of Communications in Rome, Rev.Fr. John Wykes, OMV, in collaboration with the Rector Major, began the preparation for the project on the promotion of the Founder, Ven. Lanteri, and the cause of his canonization. In view of this, Fr. Wykes contacted some individuals in the Congregation, making a request for related information. This writer (Fr. Oseni Ogunu) was one of the recipients of this request. So, Fr. Wykes and I agreed to have a brief conversation concerning the promotion of Ven. Lanteri in Nigeria -- what has been done, what is being done and what could be done in the future.

[4] Words in square brackets and the *italics* are mine.

As a preparation for the conversation, he sent me some questions (e-mail of January 31, 2020) so I could think about them before hand. I added a few questions of my own.

The present article was originally written as a personal letter (Feb. 9, 2020) to Fr. Wykes, OMV in response to his inquiries. It is presented here with the consent of Fr. Wykes.

For Oblates of the Virgin Mary, it is considered to be comprehensive, rich in content, and informative – particularly for those OMVs who were not familiar with these initiatives in Nigeria. It is also an expression of this author's gratitude to the Oblate brothers who generously contributed to the composition of the original report.

The original letter needed to be reviewed. It was re-edited for the purpose of publishing it for a new audience. In the original letter, I responded to Fr. Wykes' questions to the best of my ability. The questions often raised issues with which I was familiar and prompted me to relate experiences of which I was personally a part. The letter touched upon a variety of themes. Of no little help was a previous e-mail message to the Rector Major, Fr. Dave Nicgorski (January 18, 2020), in which I had briefly listed some ways in which the Oblates have made Ven. Lanteri and the Congregation known in Nigeria.

3. A MATTER THAT CONCERNS ALL

Given the circumstances and the timeframe available, I chose to write (e-mail Jan. 31,2020) twelve Nigerian Oblate confreres, asking for their help in answering Fr. Wykes' questions. My hope was to obtain some updated information and at least refresh my memory of this subject. Apart from this, the collective aspect of this initiative underscored the fact that the promotion of Ven. Lanteri is a matter that concerns or should interest all the members of the Nigeria Delegation, too. The collective memories were enhanced and made stronger by this process and added to the larger documentation of work done to promote Lanteri around the world. It was thus very helpful for me to incorporate this collective knowledge in my own response to the inquiry of Fr. Wykes.

4. THE INQUIRY

That decision proved to be a choice that was worth making. Thankfully, some persons contacted responded. They contributed precious information and perspectives. I have incorporated nearly all of their responses and comments in the following pages. In many cases, this text quotes *verbatim* from their comments.

The varied initiatives that the Oblates in the Nigeria made during these years, whether collectively or individually, have contributed to:

- ✓ the promotion of the Founder Ven. Lanteri and his Congregation;
- ✓ The proclamation of the Word of Truth and Mercy of Christ in the spirit and the charism of our Founder, Ven. Lanteri.

These activities were done in the spirit of love and service to the Oblate Religious Family, to the Church and the people they serve.

Thankfully, the OMV Director of Communications' promptings gave me something to consider. The following, then, is a response to the main issues his inquiries touched upon. It includes:

(a) The actions and initiatives that the Oblates took and/or are taking in the Nigerian Delegation (n.5 below).

(b) Some recommendations on the way forward, that is, on the possible actions and means to take in order to make the Founder Ven. Lanteri more known and esteemed and, we hope, invoked for his intercession and contribute to advance his cause of canonization. (n.6).

(c) Some concluding reflections (n.7).

5. THE REPORT

This report focuses on the scope and limit of the inquiry. It tries to be as concise, precise, and complete as possible, even in places where additional explanation could have been either beneficial or appropriate. In collating them, the issues are presented following the order of the questions asked.

5.1. **VEN. LANTERI AND PRAYER CARDS**

(a) **In Nigeria, have there been Lanteri cards distributed?**

Yes, in Nigeria, there have been many Lanteri cards, and even relics,

distributed over the years.

(b) **With pictures of Lanteri and perhaps a prayer on the back?**

Yes, most of the cards bear the pictures of Lanteri and, either on the back or at the bottom, there is the prayer for his Beatification. There are translated copies of the prayer card. The prayer cards were distributed to individuals, families and friends of the seminarians and priests, and to other Catholic faithful.

5.2. THE LANTERIAN VOICE NEWSLETTER

a) **The "*LANTERIAN VOICE. Newsletter*". Who started it and for how long was it published?**

The name of the publication is**, "***LANTERIAN VOICE. Newsletter of the Seminary of the Oblates of the Virgin Mary***".** The *LANTERIAN VOICE* (LV) was "founded by Fr. Oseni

Ogunu in the seminary" in December 2004, the year of its first publication, with the help of the theology students. It began as a theology students' project. At that time, the Seminary was located at Kwamba-Suleja (Minna Diocese, Niger State).

Since its foundation at Kwamba, Suleja (Niger State), thousands of copies of the LV were distributed *gratis* (freely) to the faithful in different dioceses in the country, especially during the student holidays and weekends. Some Oblate communities in other Provinces and Delegations received copies of this newsletter. The LV was very well prepared, beautiful and much appreciated by the people across the nation. It was distributed *gratis* in order to make it accessible and affordable and its message available to a larger number of people. One of the core purposes was to make the Ven. Lanteri and the OMV presence known as widely and quickly as possible across Nigeria, particularly in the first phase of the OMV existence and consolidation in the country.

It existed as an independent publication until about 2011, when it was suspended. Its publication was suspended solely because of the financial cost that its production involved, considered unsustainable for a Seminary financially already struggling in other areas. Then, to keep it somehow alive, the LV was merged with the *Nigerian Catholic Encounter Magazine* -- another effort of Fr Oseni--, with the approval of the Formation team (Fr. Mike Songu, OMV). Subsequently, part of news content usually meant for the LV was to be regularly reproduced as a section of the nascent Oblate periodical *The Beatitude* Magazine (e.g. 2012 edition).

In appreciation of the efforts of the Oblates in Nigeria, in 2010 or so the then Rector Major, Fr. Sergio Zirattu, OMV, encouraged the involvement of Nigerian Oblates in the internet and strongly recommended the online publications of OMV periodicals – aware that the practice of online publications was universally growing. This encouragement came in the context of the general pastoral plan and project to promote *Social Communications,* which in part was already in practice via the Seminary's publications. Engagement in Social Communication was one of the Oblates' approved four main areas of focus for the OMV apostolic (ecclesial) mission in Nigeria in years to come. For this purpose he sent funds for the purchase of equipment, namely computers and accessories.

(b) **Why was it called "Lanterian Voice?"**

The first edition of the LV reports that we called the newsletter "Lanterian Voice", because:

(i) "We wish to echo the voice of the Founder of our Religious Family, Venerable Fr. Pius Bruno Lanteri"; The voice of Fr Lanteri speaks to the people of today through his spiritual sons and daughters (Fr. John Idio, OMV).

Some confreres who responded testify to it. It was called *Lanterian Voice,* because:

- "Lanteri is seen as speaking through his children, the Oblates in Nigeria, in their various apostolates" (Fr. Oviemuno Obi, OMV)

- "The Newsletter was called *Lanterian Voice* because through it, the hope was that Oblates in Nigeria will share with the Christian community of the Nation the patrimony of Fr Lanteri." (Fr. Michael Songu, OMV)
- The Oblates' desire is "for Lanteri to speak to the Nigerian audience" (Fr. Isaac Abu, OMV).

(ii) "It is necessary to specify the part of the world from where we are speaking" -- Nigeria, Africa.

(iii) "Since we live, work in and communicate from Nigeria-Africa, we will report and share views or opinions, experiences and happenings from and /or concerning this region."

In a word,

> "Through the *Lanterian Voice*, Ven. Lanteri lives on, speaks to you and me and accompanies us in our journey of faith, joy and hope, as we try to proclaim Truth and Mercy of Christ. Through this newsletter, our life and mission as Oblates of the Virgin Mary will be gradually unfolded. We trust you can help us to advance in this journey."

For more information on the aims, and the reasons and significance of the name "Lanterian Voice", see: http://www.omvnigeria.org/voice.php .

(c) **And was Fr. Lanteri part of the articles in this publication?**

Yes, "there was always something on Lanteri". Even though not necessarily on every page of every single edition, certainly the name of Ven. Pius Lanteri was mentioned severally throughout existence of the Newsletter. (Fr. Mike Songu, OMV; Cf. Fr. Isaac Abu, OMV)

(d) **Do you have some past issues of Lanterian Voice?**

- Yes. Copies of the *Lanterian Voice*, dating back to its first edition, are found in the Seminary library (Suleja; Ibadan). Some Oblate priests have their personal copies in their private libraries.

e) **Does the Nigeria Delegation operate an online edition of the Lanterian Voice?**

(i) The *Lanterian Voice* does not yet have an online edition.

(ii) However, on a related note, the "Lanterian Watch" (LW) started in 2016, under the editorship of Fr. Oviemuno Obi, OMV, as a quarterly *virtual newsletter*. The LW, along with a Facebook channel, served "to pass across vital information" concerning the Oblates and the AOMV; in other words, it was used "to pass across the happenings around our delegation" (*Editorial*, in: LW, Vol.1, No.2, pg.1) However, "it was put on hold" in 2018, according to Fr. Oviemuno, OMV, "because confreres were not cooperating in sending in news stories from their various places of apostolates."

5.3. ASSOCIATE OBLATES OF THE VIRGIN MARY (AOMV)

(a) What did the *"Association of the Families, Friends and Collaborators of the Oblates of the Virgin Mary"* (AOMV) do to talk about Lanteri or learn about Lanteri?.

"The Association of the Families, Friends and Collaborators of the Oblates of the Virgin Mary, also known as The Associate Oblates of the Virgin Mary (AOMV), initiated in 2007, was formally founded in 2008 by Fr. Oseni J. Ogunu, OMV" with the Seminary Formation Team on the occasion of the first Priestly ordination of Oblates on Nigerian soil.

"The AOMV is an organization of Christ's lay faithful associated and co-responsible with the Congregation of the OMV, each according to its own vocation and state of life, for the advancement of the Church's evangelizing mission in Nigeria, and inspired by the Oblate spirituality, mission and charism. They promote the mission by organising prayers for the OMV priests; training of Oblate seminarians; assisting in the development of the OMV in Nigeria." (Fr. Chukwunonso E. Onyemeh, OMV: See: http://www.omvnigeria.org/newsdetail.php?tab=66).

The AOMV talk and learn about Lanteri in many ways, for example through the following means:

- The AOMV members feed and drink from the Lanterian patrimony: "Concretely, most of the literature that animates that association comes from the Lanterian patrimony." (Fr. Michael Songu, OMV).
- "They spread the name of Ven. Lanteri through retreats and seminars organized for them by their Directors." (Fr. Oviemuno Obi, OMV)
- "They read the life and biography of Lanteri." (Fr. John Idio, OMV)

(b) **Did the AOMV promote Lanteri or help to make him known?**

Yes, the AOMV promote Ven. Lanteri. The AOMV members do this promotion, among others, through:

- *Encounter* with and talks to parish communities and Catholic groups or societies. For example, in Ibadan City, the AOMV members in the main Parish Church (in St. Anthony's Parish, Asipa) have gone to the "Outstations" (Mass Centres or Chapels) to talk about Lanteri and the OMV and "to talk about Lanteri and the OMV and to solicit for more membership" (Fr. John Idio, OMV).
- *Contacts* with their friends and sensitization during public events such as Ordinations and Religious professions. (Fr. Oviemuno Obi, OMV).
- *Prayers*: The AOMV groups, during their meetings, say the Prayers for the Intercession of Ven. Pius Lanteri.

5.4. WERE THERE OTHER WAYS BY WHICH FR. LANTERI WAS MADE KNOWN IN NIGERIA?

Absolutely, YES!. There were and are many important and varied ways by which Ven. Lanteri, and his Religious Congregation, was made known in Nigeria. These include:

- The publications of articles (in Magazines, journals) and books.
- Pastoral, informational, spiritual, educational, evangelization initiatives, etc.

In particular, the Oblates have made Ven. Fr. Lanteri known in Nigeria, over the years, through the following main ways and means:

1. *Teachings through Homilies and Seminars. "*Our homilies should reflect the Lanterian elements." (Oviemuno Obi, OMV)
2. *Giving Spiritual Exercises (Spiritual Retreats)*.
3. *Books* written by Oblate confreres: e.g. *Love and Serve in the Name of Jesus,* edited by Fr. Oseni Ogunu, OMV (2009): this book is a collection of Nigerian Oblates' articles on various topics -- including Fr. Lanteri and the Lanterian spirituality, charism and mission. It was published to document and propagate the Oblates' (priests and seminarians') articles relating to the Nigerian Oblates' thought on a variety of issues and activities and their contributions during the first 10 (ten) years of the OMV presence in Nigeria.

4. *LANTERIAN VOICE – Newsletter* (Founded 2004). It was published at least once a year. See also Question 2 above. (http://www.omvnigeria.org/voice.php).

5. *THE NIGERIAN CATHOLIC ENCOUNTER* (NiCE): It is an annual Magazine, founded by Fr. Oseni Ogunu (in 2006) as a project of the Temporary Professed Theology students of the Seminary of the OMV; subsequently, the postulants were authorised to join them. Hundreds of articles have been published till date. See: http://www.omvnigeria.org/nice.php

6. *LANTERIAN ENCOUNTER* (LE): It's a formation and evangelization program initiated in 2005 by Fr. Oseni Ogunu, OMV, approved and sustained by the Seminary Formation Team. The LE has two distinct editions, one per semester, with its own format/ audiences; each is held as an annual encounter. One edition is an internal event in the Oblate Seminary for its community of priests and seminarians only. The second edition is open to all clergy, seminarians, religious women and men, and the laity for formation on a chosen theme, often but not always of social/cultural or ecclesial nature. There was an attempt to create a third edition design for students/young people. The first LE for school students was held at St. Mary's College, at Suleja, in2012, thanks to collaboration of Oblate novices. However, due to imminent security problems, the sudden transfer of the formation house to Ibadan. and other major obstacles, it was not feasible to continue the third version, that is student and young people's edition. Generally, it focuses on one important current, historic or topical aspect of:
   a) The life and teachings of the Founder, Ven. Fr. Pius Bruno Lanteri;
   b) The life, charism and mission of Congregation;
   c) The life, teachings, and mission of the Catholic Church today; OR:
   d) Contemporary issues and problems in the society, in the light of the spirit and mission of the Congregation and the teachings of the Church today. For more information, see: http://www.omvnigeria.org/viewcontent3.php?tab=7

7. *WORD AND LIFE Seminar*: It's an annual one-day event, initiated by Fr. Oseni Ogunu in 2004, approved and organized by the Seminary Formation Team. Concerning the reasons why is it called "Word and Life" Seminar, please see: http://www.omvnigeria.org/viewcontent3.php?tab=6 . This Seminar examines a practical or hands-on theme of particular importance and topicality in the life and mission of the Church and/or Nigerian society, or that is relevant to the life and formation in our Seminary itself (in accordance with the *Ratio* and in the *Constitutions & Norms*).

8. *THE ASSOCIATE OBLATES OF THE VIRGIN MARY* in Nigeria (AOMV) and its activities. (See Question no.5.3 above)

9. *THE BEATITUDES* - Pastoral Magazine (founded 2011). It was planned to be a quarterly publication run by Oblate Priests and Perpetually Professed members. For example, visit: http://www.oblati.org/public/news_file/120120404164158.pdf)

10. *PAMPHLETS* or leaflets.

11. *WEBSITE*: It was created by the Oblates' Seminary community, first in 2009 (as www.omvafrica.org, with the financial support of the USA Province of St. Ignatius of Loyola). After a brief pause, it was re-activated in 2015. It has now become the official website of Nigeria Delegation, which sustains it. The website has sections on Lanteri and speaks of Lanteri in other website sections as well. (http://www.omvnigeria.org).

12. *LANTERI WATCH* – Virtual Newsletter (2016-2018).

13. . LANTERI HEALTH MONITOR. A publication of the Ven. Lanteri Hospital, Suleja.. Its first (maiden) edition was published on 2017.

14. The OMV Priest's membership of Executive (administrative) Board of the Conferences of the Major Superiors of Nigeria (CMSN[Men]) (until 2014) and his membership of the Editorial Board of the journal jointly-owned and published by CMSN[Men] and the Nigeria Conference of Women Religious (NCWR). The name of the journal is: "*The Catholic Voyage: African Journal of Consecrated Life".* It has print and online editions. These important avenues contributed to publicize and promote Venerable Lanteri and his Congregation OMV. Some Oblates contribute articles to this same journal and mention Fr. Lanteri.

15. *VIDEOS/DVDs:* There was the production of "A Journey with Africans in Africa" Video (available on youtube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ivkdLaiB5gA). This DVD/video marked the 10th year anniversary of the Oblates of the Virgin Mary in Nigeria in 2008. This 10th anniversary video was produced by the Seminary of the Oblates of the Virgin Mary. It was sold and distributed to friends, collaborators, families and others. There is also the video, produced by Fr. John Idio, OMV, that was, in his words, "made on the occasion of our 20th anniversary of the OMV in Nigeria" in 2018.

Through DVDs, videos, internet and other electronic means the awareness of the Founder Ven. Lanteri is gradually created and spreads. There are other Youtube and video reports that document some important events and activities concerning the OMV in Nigeria. Many of these video recordings explicitly mention Ven. Fr. Lanteri and his religious Congregation..

16. *Facebook and Whatsapp*: In their use of Facebook, Whatsapp and other social media, Nigerian Oblates speak of Fr. Lanteri and his Congregation.

17. *The books by the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria(CSN), Abuja, headquarter of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria*: There was the presentation of our Religious Institute OMV and its Founder, Ven. Lanteri, both in (a) *The Official directory of the Catholic Church in Nigeria* (published by the Missionary Society of St. Paul) and (b) in a book published by the CSN's *Mission and Dialogue* Department.

18. *A Presentation of the Lanteri and OMV* in the national DIRECTORY of the Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria (CMSN), entitled: "*Male Religious Congregations And Orders In Nigeria (Information For Inquirer)"***,** Revised Edition (2009) pp.24-29. That information, periodically updated, is available both in the subsequent print editions of the Directory and on the CSMN official website - www.cmsn.com.ng.

19. The active involvement of OMV Priests with the *Catholic Television of Nigeria [CTV]*, Abuja, FCT -- through Fr. Oseni Ogunu, OMV and Fr. Paul Ubebe, OMV -- was another unique and favourable opportunity that was used to make the Founder and his Congregation known. Their leading roles and the varied activities they had at the CTV offered opportunities and contributed in different ways to the promotion of the Founder and the Congregation.

20. Music and plays.

21. "*Conferences* in and outside the Oblate communities, including some parishes, to promote the name of Ven. Lanteri." (Fr. Isaac Abu, OMV).

22. *Fliers* (two or more pages) containing information on Ven. Lanteri and the Oblates' Seminary -- normally attached to all letters for applicants and inquirers interested in the OMVs.

23. The Oblate seminarians who went for summer Pastoral Work were strategically assigned to many dioceses for diverse forms of apostolate in different ecclesiastical provinces in Nigeria, as much as it was feasible and financially affordable. In this way, the word about Lanteri and his Congregation gradually spread, in capillary way: many Oblate candidates willingly and openly spoke, as best they could, about the OMV and its Founder in response to the questions frequently asked by parishioners and other inquirers in these places. In addition to acquiring pastoral experience, the idea and hope behind this strategy and approach was to raise awareness among the people about Ven. Lanteri & OMV presence in Nigeria. (It was what I called the "Spread – Encounter - Speak" initiative). In fact, geographically *spread out* to wherever parish he was, an Oblate's personal *encounter* with the people/groups and his convinced presentation and witness (*speak out*) about his religious family contributed to the advancement of Ven. Lanteri and his Congregation. In Nigeria, the then newly-established OMV had a

rather peculiar situation which was distinct from that of other Oblate entities. Making Lanteri and the OMVs known as widely as possible was one of the priorities. Today, in addition, an OMV presence on the internet and social media can help people to better know and appreciate Ven. Lanteri and to pray for his intercession.

5.5. *LANTERIAN VOICE* YOUTUBE CHANNEL: TOWARD A COMMON PURSE OF EVANGELIZATION AS AFRICANS

One of the recent developments is the creation of a YouTube channel named "Lanterian Voice". The Delegate Superior gave "his blessings" to this initiative. It is a timely and necessary social media project. The initiative reflects a desire and spirit of continuity in newness and of, we hope, collaboration in service. Continuing with the name of the first OMV Nigeria publication project (begun in 2004), this new social media project is inspired by the desire to "contribute to a common purse of evangelization as Africans" and expresses an openness to adopt "new and opportune means" of apostolate. It wants to respond to a felt need for "a common YouTube channel" that belongs to the entire Nigeria Delegation, not to one individual only, and is accessible to everyone in the OMV Nigeria and its diaspora. Rev. Luka Joshua "created a unified YouTube channel in the name of the Congregation", specifically the Nigeria Delegation. The initiative is indeed a commendable and welcome development. In a response to a follow-up inquiry, he presents the "why", the "how", the "when" the channel began, its proposed contents, "Who" can contribute to it, and so on. The following section summarizes and quotes from his presentation on the *Lanterian Voice YouTube initiative,*[5] unless otherwise indicated.

Why it begin?: "The reason for the establishment of the Youtube channel, called *Lanterian Voice* is in response to following issues [here in italic] raised by the Constitutions and Norms of the Congregation," Art.40, which states:

> '' According to the Spirit of Fr Lanteri who was full of ***zeal for the salvation of souls*** and in ***proclaiming and defending the truth threatened by the errors of his time***, the Oblates are engaged in ***knowing the world of today and its most urgent questions***, open to its needs and aspiration, witnessing by prayer and action to the efficacy of the good news of love, justice and peace. The Oblates take care to ***faithfully conserve the mission and works of the institute.*** However, ***in harmony with the directives of the church***, ***attentive to the needs of the times and of places,*** they will ***adapt their apostolate with prudence to diverse circumstances***, even by adopting ***new and opportune means.***''[6]

The promotion of good Catholic videos online, with its good content, can help to evangelize many more persons, even those of we never can tell who or where they are. Through videos with positive content, we Oblates can:

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[5] Rev. Luka Joshua, OMV "***A Presentation Of The Lanterian Voice Youtube Channel",*** **June 2020.**

[6] The italics are mine and indicates the phrases in this Art.40 that Rev. Luka, "*A Presentation*", highlighted and commented upon.

- Proclaim and defend the truth threaten by the errors of our times.
- Strengthen and consolidate the frontiers of our evangelization as Nigerians.
- Document and conserve the mission and works of the Institute. "Every initiative is a product of divine inspiration and strenuous mental and human effort. We can't allow the labours of our elder brothers to be in vain. We must revive all that is positive about our Nigerian mission".
- Express our fidelity and communion with the Church and her Magisterium.
- Communicate the lived experience of the different pastoral peculiarities we find ourselves in Africa. Positive video content will help a viewer, say in Europe or Americas, to know what is happening in Africa and vice versa.

The Lanterian Voice Youtube channel, started during " the heat of first lockdown in Nigeria", in the first half of *2020*. Like the OMV's Oblati-nel-Mondo website, this channel is intended to be made available and accessible to Oblate brothers in Nigeria and diaspora, with each one using his e-mail and password. This shall, as he hopes, enable brothers who run private YouTube channels, too, to also share their contents in a common youtube channel of the Delegation. "By so doing, we contribute to a common purse of evangelization as Africans".

Generally, the video contents to be uploaded foresee, among others, the inclusion of themes relating to: homilies, catechesis, Scripture Teaching, Good books, Teachings on the Sacraments of Reconciliation, Ignatian Spiritual Exercises, Interviews, news and information, and so on. In a word, "the idea is to get good catholic content, preferably done by an Oblate and make an upload, in the name of the Congregation."

The invitation and expectation is that Oblates in Nigeria and in diaspora "can contribute to the online media apostolate." The email, the password and Whatsapp number "shall be made available to all who wish to send their videos."

The *Lanterian Voice* Newsletter, founded in 2004, hitherto printed, will be reactivated and its aims and contents reviewed and expanded as an *online* publication, and, in this context, its vision and mission shall be strengthened. The nascent *Lanterian Voice Youtube Channel* "is not a replacement to the Lanterian Voice. Hence, the Youtube channel *Lanterian Voice*. It will however, serve to consolidate and strengthen the online media apostolate." If the reactivation of the Lanterian Voice Online is successful, "our new and opportune means shall tentatively be: (a) The Youtube Channel (b) The Online Edition."

In my view, the YouTube channel initiative is promising for the promotion of our Founder and his Religious family as well as for OMV Nigeria's own specific contribution to evangelisation through its ecclesial mission. Like some of the other OMV communications media presence around the world, the OMV online media apostolate through Lanterian Voice – the YouTube channel and the online edition--, if well sustained, could become two of the vital ways that the Nigerian Oblates use to:

(a) Bear "witness to the Gospel through the communications media" (*Vita Consecrata*, 99) and
(b) Promote the dignity and rights of individuals and peoples, especially in the context of Nigeria and Africa;

(c) Work at the service of truth, of the good, the beautiful and of fraternity (cfr. *Africae Munus*, nn.142-145.166).

In addition to its evangelizing and educating role of the Oblates' involvement in the social communications in general and to other benefits of a Youtube channel, the proposed YouTube channel of the Delegation in particular can contribute to:

d) increase the *accessibility, the visibility and efficiency* of some of the Delegation's projects and activities;

e) Facilitate the *access, sharing and the showcasing* of the richness and values of, and the commitment to and happenings in the vocation, life and mission of OMV in Nigeria and abroad.

f) Promote *history and legacy of the Nigeria Delegation*: putting materials on YouTube is one effective way of documenting the history, legacy and memory of OMV life and mission in Africa.

Therefore, the proposed Youtube Channel project, started "in the name of the congregation", is important and, I hope, will be beneficial to all. It deserves support, subscription and sharing it. It's worth sustaining this project as well as encouraging the zeal and passion that animate its initiators and proponents.

6. LOOKING FORWARD, WHAT DO YOU RECOMMEND SHOULD BE THE EFFECTIVE WAYS TO PROMOTE VEN. LANTERI, THE FOUNDER, IN NIGERIA?

ANY OTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR THE SUSTAINMENT OF THE PROMOTION OF VEN. LANTERI?

Moving forward, the recommendation is that, in the future, we should adopt the following ways and means to promote and sustain the knowledge of Ven. Lanteri in Nigeria:

6.2. Continue and strengthen the activities and initiatives already in place such as most of those stated under question no. 4 above.

6.3. Promote and deepen the knowledge of Ven. Lanteri and his teachings and fundamental insights among members of the Delegation, the AOMV members, and all Catholic faithful. We cannot love and be attracted to and desire, much less seek help to what/who we don't know. Therefore:

(a) *Prepare and publicize a translation of a simpler and popular biographies of Lanteri into English*; and/or familiarize ourselves as Oblates with the existing biographies in English and, in popular versions, distribute them -- either in print form and/or online -- to Christ's faithful in Nigeria.

(b) *Translate selected writings of Ven. Lanteri* into English for the OMV members and the Catholic faithful in Nigeria. It's necessary for the initial and on-going formation of the OMV, but also in order to better promote Ven. Lanteri. (Cf. *Lanterianum*, December 2017, Vol. XXV – Fasc.1, pg. 267). The XXIII General Chapter OMV already recommended that the General Government should create "one or more commissions which", among other responsibilities, "will also see to the translations into the languages

in use in the Congregation of the documents of and on our Founder, and they will program a course of readings to draw closer fruitfully and progressively to his writings."(*Our Consecrated Life: Epiphany of God's Merciful Love*. Final Document [1997], n.9.4).

6.4. The Rector Major should officially write or talk to the Nigeria Delegation (and other entities of the Congregation, too) about the necessity, and the suggested ways and means, to make Ven. Lanteri known and promote the Cause of his Canonisation.
6.5. Organize Retreats, Seminars;
6.6. Promote Conferences about the founder and OMV in parishes and OMV communities, and in schools;
6.7. Encourage AOMV to be promoters of the Founder;
6.8. Establish OMV Youth group;
6.9. "Our parishes in Nigeria should intensify efforts to make him known." (Fr. Isaac Abu, OMV).
6.10. Promote prayers to the founder in OMV parishes;
6.11. Produce "documentaries on the Founder, social media short videos about the Founder" (Fr. John Idio, OMV).
6.12. Make a more creative use of the social media for the promotion of Ven. Lanteri. Adopt promotion patterns that favour community mobilization, i.e., rallies, symposia, retreat encounters.
6.13. The important *days* of the Founder should be celebrated with the AOMV members and other collaborators in Oblates' places of apostolates.
6.14. The use of the *prayer cards* should be further encouraged.
6.15. Encourage the use of *Music* and *Plays* to promote the Founder Fr. Lanteri and his spirituality and mission.
6.16. Create and use *blogs* to make Lanteri known.
6.17. "Every Oblate must have the consciousness of who he is in his place(s) of apostolate(s). It's after that awareness and conviction that we could truly carry out effective promotion of our Founder". (Fr. Oviemuno Obi, OMV).
6.18. "*A more active presence in the local church in its diversity* may also be helpful. Over a little more than twenty years, the Congregation has spread in Nigeria. However, more Oblate presence is necessary for a more profound effect in the nation." (Fr. Songu, OMV). To be effective, the presence need to be clearer in its forms, active and incisive in its actualization, and animated by the spirit of unity.

7. FINAL REMARKS

I had tried to respond to the request for information within the limited time available, addressing specific and clear questions, received from the Director of Communications in Rome. Most of the questions required and received factual responses, as accurate as possible. Rather than giving a mere "yes" or "no" answers (as was in some of the feedbacks received), explanations were given where necessary. The present article builds on and expand the original report. However, it remains within the scope and spirit of the initial questionnaire. Some of the information I had was confirmed, completed, corrected or shared by other confreres. The solicitation and integration of relevant inputs and insights were necessary and

helpful. However, this article reflects a personal response and perspective, not an official response of the Nigeria Delegation, to the inquiries received.

All in all, more work remains to be done in order to make the Founder, Ven. Fr. Lanteri and the Congregation, known better and more widely. It is feasible to invite or persuade more people, in truth and charity, to seek prayerful relation with him and invoke his heavenly intercession. Perhaps we ourselves, the Oblates, need to be increasingly convinced about this need and lead more by example -- invoking Ven. Lanteri and speaking about him with and to other people.

In Nigeria, the members of the Delegation have made great efforts, doing several projects in promoting Lanteri and his Congregation. I suggest they can continue to advance in this direction, through:

- ✓ The adoption of a multi-faceted approach to the work of promotion of Lanteri;
- ✓ Building on and, preferably, improving on the work already done;
- ✓ Having new ardour (passion) and using new methods and expressions; offering bold and creative ways of disseminating our message;
- ✓ Use of different instruments available to communicate and express, or "market" our "product", that is, to make Founder known and promote the cause of his Canonization.

The Oblates' work for the promotion of Ven. Lanteri may also advance:

- ✓ In extension, i.e., by going for a wider geographical outreach. In some cases, such outreach may need to focus on targeted audiences;
- ✓ In intensity and quality;
- ✓ In depth (i.e., in a more profound way).
- ✓ By imbibing positive attitudes and convictions (personal and communal) and having some enthusiasm and passion for the project itself (the promotion of Founder).
- ✓ By soliciting and involving more lay faithful, including those among the AOMV.
- ✓ The creation of Documentation and archive services on the history, spirituality and mission of the OMV in Nigeria: its appointed team of, among others, accompanies and helps to animate the initiatives and activities for the promotion of Lanteri and the cause of his canonization.
- ✓ Establish a proper section and more use of the Delegation's website, as long as this is responsibly managed and regularly updated.

Regarding the way forward, perhaps some (but not all) of the key issues today involve the following questions. Which of the actions and initiatives taken so far (as mentioned in Questions nn.5 above) and of those recommended to be taken (in Question no.6), or any additional actions, should the Nigeria Delegation particularly encourage among its members and the AOMV, in order to further promote the knowledge of and the devotion to Ven. Pius Lanteri?. Practically, what are the best ways and strategies to achieve this purpose?. Who in the Delegation must help directly oversee this project, aside from the Delegate of the Rector

Major? How best must it be sustained even at the grassroots, parish and educational centres levels? The response will be symphonic, because this matter is multi-dimensional. It involves all members of the Nigeria Delegation, indeed the Congregation. And the contexts, experiences and perspectives are different in each country, though the aim and mission are each essentially one.

While remaining available in case more information on the text were needed, I was hoping it would be possible to respond to other eventual questions, if any, the Director of Communications might have on this subject when we meet for the proposed chat. The one-on-one meeting turned out to be no longer necessary for the intended purpose and didn't take place.

In this article I have limited myself to the questions that the initial inquiry presented. It does not claim to offer an in-depth and complete response to them. When it comes out, I think that the video on the promotion of Ven. Lanteri shall be enlightening and enriching for many. I also hope it helps us respond to the questions briefly touched upon, or unable to address in this article. At least, the video, and this article too, may stimulate other confreres to present their responses and comments on the questions asked insofar as they concern Nigeria. More importantly, I hope the message of the video and exchange of ideas that may follow it confirm the desire and resolve to rise and act, that is to say, to renew and advance promotion of Ven. Lanteri in Nigeria.

Acknowledgments and Appreciation

Many Nigerian Oblate confreres generously responded to the request for comments and proposals, or at least acknowledged the receipt of my letter, concerning the received questions about the promotion of Ven. Pius Bruno Lanteri, Founder of the Oblates of the Virgin Mary, in Nigeria. I gratefully acknowledge their contributions.

A few months after the initial inquiry, the Director of Communications requested (email June 4, 2020) for images relating to some of the initiatives and activities of OMV in Nigeria for the promotion of the Founder Ven. Lanteri. Since I was not in the condition to give him some of the images and in order to adequately respond to his appeal, again I turned to eight Nigerian confreres (email June 4, 2020) seeking their collaboration in providing some images. Some of them responded: two persons sent some photos. An inquiry for images was made to yet another confrere through phone. All the images received were promptly forwarded to the Director of Communications.
I humbly appreciate all of them for their valuable input. I am grateful for their acceptance and readiness to share memories, ideas and suggestions, and/or send some photos needed to accompany the information, or at least acknowledged the receipt of an email. Without their collaboration the presentation of the Nigerian aspect of the "Promotion of Lanteri" project would have been inadequate. I say and mean "all of them," independent of whether or not their names or quotes from their responses were explicitly cited, though their comments are integrated into the report. A heartfelt gratitude goes to: Fr. Paul Ubebe, OMV, the Delegate Superior; Fr. John Idio, OMV; Fr. Oviemuno Obi, OMV; Fr. Lawrence Alle, OMV;

Fr. Michael Songu, OMV; Fr. Isaac Abu, OMV, Rev. Deacon Luka Joshua, OMV; and also Fr. Aloysius Ebonine, OMV, Fr. Emmanuel Emalume, OMV, Fr. Solomon Ushie, OMV. To Fr. John Wykes, OMV, Director of Communications, Rome, goes a special thanks. He made a unique contribution through his requests, promptings and passionate zeal and encouragement. It was he who first proposed "a chat with you about the history of promotion of Venerable Lanteri in Nigeria". Subsequently, he suggested "some thoughts and questions" in view of a face-to-face meeting. He requested images he needed for the information he chose. In this he probably wanted to ensure that the contributions – i.e., the initiatives and activities -- from Nigeria, like those of other Oblate entities, are sufficiently recorded, widely known and appreciated, and well represented in the video documentation – which may be a sort of OMV world "report, prospect and path to action" -- on the past, the present and the future state of the promotion of Ven. Lanteri. Thanks, Fr. John, for the sensitivity, dedication and hard work. A whole-hearted "Thanks!" goes to the Rector Major, Fr. David Nicgorski, OMV, initiated, directed and patiently coordinated the execution of this arduous, historic and timely project through video presentation. His encouragement to one person motivates others, too. Thanks, Dave!.