

Conversion: A new heart – a new Spirit – a new Mission

The Pre-capitular Commission has asked a number of Oblates to write a reflection on some aspect of the theme chosen for the 35th General Chapter. Over the next few months, *OMI Documentation* will be publishing those reflections. They can be found under the **General Chapter** link of www.omiworld.org as well as under the **Documentation** link on the same page.

They are meant for the personal and communal reflection of Oblates and their Lay Associates. A General Chapter is not an event that involves only the elected and “ex officio” capitulars. It involves everyone who shares the charism of Saint Eugene de Mazenod.

**Centered on the person of Jesus Christ, the source of our mission,
we commit ourselves to a profound and communal conversion.**

Return to your former love

An experience of conversion and communal mission

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The process of investigating Religious Life at the end of the 20th century has seen much progress in the area of relationships and the animation of local communities. From the road to Emmaus, we have arrived at a creative refounding which recovers a prophetic mysticism as the foundation of a life-giving renewal. This idea includes a two-fold movement: a revision of life or a taking account of one's self; and a conversion for a future that is more remarkable. The exhortation in *Revelation* alludes to that idea: "*Yet I hold this against you: you have lost the love you had at first. Realize how far you have fallen. Repent, and do the works you did at first.*" (Rev 2:4-5)

The return to one's former conduct is a process of triple conversion (moral, intellectual, religious), both personal and communal. Thus, conversion is a journey which leads to newness within a hope-filled mystical-prophetic apostolic life. It is not a question of returning to the past and of making our communities archeological objects, but it is to remind us of our past and to show us the way. It is a question of confirming, renewing

and giving new life to the freshness of the Gospel, rooted in our history, beginning with a personal and communal encounter with Jesus Christ, who calls disciples and missionaries; It is a call to rethink deeply and re-establish faithfully and courageously the ecclesial mission in new circumstances. It's a question of making our Oblate communities houses of God's Word, through Jesus Christ, the personification of that Word.

The 35th General Chapter of the Oblates is approaching. It would realize this return to the prior love, "Christ the Savior," without losing sight of the needs of our time, the new conversion and the mission. The spousal triptych--love of God (conversion--vocation), love of the Church (mission--evangelization), love for the poor (fundamental option--new faces)—leads us to rediscover in the life of the Oblate Congregation the healing power of Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life of our people. May our Founding Father, Saint Eugene, guide us in this process with confidence!

Do we really have the desire and the courage to convert?

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Soon we will celebrate 200 years since Eugene de Mazenod invited others to join him in living his charismatic vision for a renewed world based on the liberating values of the Gospel. In 200 years more than 14, 000 people have responded to his dream with the perpetual oblation of their lives. Our Oblate family continues to incarnate this vision in 67 countries. Yet, as we rejoice in our achievements, we have some uncomfortable uncertainties about our future. The question looms: “for how much longer will we survive?” A simple internet search on Google with the words “refounding” or “restructuration” will show up hundreds of religious congregations who find themselves in a life-or-death mode and are searching for ways to survive. Many authors say that, following the patterns of cycles of development of organizations, some 70% of religious congregations will run out of steam and die out during their third century of existence. Is our Oblate Family going to be one of them?

Chapter 2010 promises to be one of the most important general chapters in our Congregation’s history. I would put it on an equal footing with those of 1850 and 1980. Both were responses to major situation shifts. Eugene’s founding vision for us was expressed in 1818 for a small group of southern France religious mission preachers in response to the French Revolution. In 1850 the Congregation had to grapple with the question of responding to a world in which we were now present in four continents, while remaining true to the founding vision and spirit. It also had to prepare the way for Oblate life without the dominating presence of its Founder. The shift worked well and there are extraordinary fruits to show. The 1980 Chapter had to face a similar major shift by adapting a charism, which had been lived out for 164 years, in response to a radically transformed world and Church. Our

Congregational response was begun by using our founding vision and spirit to draw up the present Constitutions and Rules that has guided our Oblate life and response with clarity since then.

Why do I give this importance to the 2010 Chapter? Its call is to respond to what has been described as a “multi-cultural, pluralistic, globalizing, nuclear-threatened, and environmentally compromised postmodern world that is changing kaleidoscopically at blinding speed.” It is the Chapter that is going to lead us into the 200th anniversary of our founding and prepare the way to enter into the third century of our existence. It is the Chapter that has to respond to the many questions being posed about the significance and expressions of religious life in a world that is questioning and rejecting most religious and cultural values that were once taken for granted as being the indisputable foundations of society.

Our response at this Chapter cannot be to reheat the same themes, with which we reacted in the past, or to give us new leadership, or to restructure government and provinces, or to produce a synthesis document of what the capitulants said. It is about having the courage to try to make some sense of our situation through the eyes of our founding vision that will lead to new directions to ensure life. Too much is at stake for us to stay at the level of cosmetic changes. It is our heart that must change, or we must face the consequences and die.

The Chapter cannot allow itself the luxury of concentrating only on structural changes of government. It is not about an organization, but about the **persons who make up our Congregation**. Oblate consecrated life is not a system – it is persons who strive to respond to the call of Jesus Christ within the Church through

people's need for salvation in a world changing at an incomprehensible speed. Hence the pre-capitular invitation to conversion is the key to its success. The odds for our survival as a Congregation depend on the seriousness with which every single Oblate takes the call to personal and communal conversion, and has the courage to do the hard work necessary to make it possible.

A CALL TO HAVE COURAGE TO CONVERT TO WHAT?

1) CONVERSION CALLS US TO THE COURAGE TO ACCEPT THAT WE NEED TO CLARIFY OUR UNDERSTANDING OF OUR OBLATE IDENTITY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS AND TO BE PERSONALLY RESPONSIBLE FOR IT.

Eugene codified his founding vision in the first paragraph of his 1818 Rule, which today finds its expression in our Constitution 1: "We come together in apostolic communities of priests and Brothers, united to God by the vows of religion. Cooperating with the Saviour and imitating his example, we commit ourselves principally to evangelizing the poor."

Thus, according to Eugene, we have three essential pillars in our Oblate vocation: a **FOUNDING EXPERIENCE** which gives us a specific relationship with Jesus the Saviour, lived personally and as part of an **APOSTOLIC COMMUNITY** of religious for the sake of **MISSION** to the most abandoned. If individually or as a community we are not faithful to **ALL** of these simultaneously, then we are in need of conversion.

Conversion is the call to face reality and to strengthen our journey by grappling with some of the inconsistencies in what we profess to be non-negotiable values of Oblate life and what we really are in our Congregational lives. Some areas of consideration could be:

- That we lack of clarity as to our foundational vision and identity in the Church. What is the essential difference between an Oblate, a Redemptorist, a Vincentian or SVD etc.? Have we become generous but identity-

less Gospel workers where our charism and spirituality does not significantly touch our ministry? C163 clearly points a direction for us: "The Constitutions and Rules set out a privileged means for each Oblate to follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. They are inspired by the charism lived by the Founder and his first companions; also, they have received the approval of the Church. Thus, they allow each Oblate to evaluate the quality of his response to his vocation and to become a saint." Sadly, the words of Eugene continue to be true today: "Our Rule remains a closed book."

- That over 25% of Oblates live and minister alone within the context of a charism that has apostolic community as a prerequisite for mission: "We fulfil our mission in and through the community to which we belong" (C37).
- That our culture of being "Oblate Fathers" leads to a consequent downplay of the role and meaning of our religious life, which is sacrificed at the altar of ministerial efficiency.
- That sometimes in our mission we may spend great quantities of time and energy in maintenance-mode looking after a few faithful in our existing structures, without being able to respond to the call of the enormous groups around us of those whom the Church structures do not reach – those whom Eugene calls "the most abandoned."

2) CONVERSION CALLS US TO THE COURAGE TO STEP OUT OF OUR COMFORT ZONES

"Conversion" is one of those words that constantly crops up in our living the Gospel, and which we hope to take seriously sometime in the near future when the more important demands of ministry give us the opportunity to pause. But our survival as a Congregation depends on our taking "conversion" seriously **NOW** as an imperative to move out of our personal and unit comfort zones. Conversion is the call to face reality:

- That we are ageing and dying out in many parts of the world and that in those

parts where there are numbers there is a worrying trend of lack of perseverance. The cries of the most abandoned get louder while our dwindling resources frustrate our attempts to respond and we tend to lose hope. Consequently there is the temptation to take refuge in situations of ministry where we are appreciated with our steady level of performance and to create mental boundaries to block out situations we cannot cope with.

- That I am generally well looked after in my present mission, or that I am too old to change, or too busy with ministry to waste valuable work time on introspection, or that I am responding to real needs “out there” away from my critical community. I am secure and doing well where I am, so please don’t rock the boat!
- That no matter how generous I am being in my response to God’s call through the cry of the most abandoned, I am in daily need of personal conversion out of the comfort zones that sinfulness, relativism and a consumerism place me into.

3) CONVERSION CALLS US TO THE COURAGE TO FACE OUR PERSONAL AND COMMUNITY WEAKNESSES AND FAILURES HONESTLY

The General Chapter will give us a vision and guidelines for the future direction of the Congregation. I believe that any initiative will only be successful to the measure that we become honest in facing uncomfortable issues at ground level that prevent us from putting many of our ideals into practice. Congregational revitalization begins with the renewal of the individuals and communities that make it up. Each community and unit has festering sores in its relationships: long-time hurts, men not talking to one another, distrust and unhealed pain caused by differences of culture, language, colour, age, ideological points of view, and many other lacks of coherence. These are found in any human group, but what is destructive is when they have become endemic, known by everyone, and are accepted as being “the realistic situation and that there is nothing that can be done!”

The call to conversion is the call to have the necessary courage to heed the warning that a house divided against itself is heading for ruin (Luke 11:17) and to put into practice the ideal of C37 that “by growing in unity of heart and mind, we bear witness before the world that Jesus lives in our midst and unites us in order to send us out to proclaim God's reign.” With the power of Jesus among us, it will be possible that “in humility and with the strength of charity, we express our responsibility for each other in fraternal correction and forgiveness” (C39) as we pray and share life and ministry together.

In a world screaming for a sense of direction, how can we dare to preach Gospel values of reconciliation, welcome and mutual acceptance when we are incapable of doing it among ourselves in our own units? Gandhi’s words are indeed evangelical when he says: “We must become the change we want to see in the world.”

4) CONVERSION CALLS US TO THE COURAGE TO EXPLORE NEW DREAMS ENLIGHTENED BY OUR FOUNDING VISION

If we really believe in the vision of Saint Eugene and in the charism that God gave to the Church through him, then we have to have the courage to seek new ways to express it today. The confusion that many aspects of our life are facing cannot leave us untouched and unquestioning. The questions on our religious life and mission, and their relevance and expressions, which are being asked by all schools of thought, have to be faced and evaluated.

A NEW HEART – A NEW SPIRIT – A NEW MISSION! These words recall those of Martin Luther King: “I have a dream...” It is in this sense that I use the word “dream” to ask how the Chapter’s dream can best interpret our founding vision to respond to the cry of those people whose 21st century condition cries out for salvation and the hope which only Jesus Christ can fully bring. The Chapter’s call to explore new ways of expressing the same wonderful heart, spirit and mission that we have been living as Oblate religious for 200 years invites us to dream about

some of the following conversion issues:

Our founding experience

- To shift our understanding of the Constitutions and Rules from being a book of laws to the discovery that it is an incarnation of Eugene's spirit and charism and a privileged means for each Oblate to follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. What if we were to take it seriously as a daily guide to help us to live our dream...
- To rediscover the supremacy of religious life in our Oblate missionary vocation – something only possible if we tackle the understanding of the place of the brother in the Congregation as the key to understanding Oblate religious life. What if we have the courage to dream that our starting point is not the clerical state but that as Oblate brothers we are called to proclaim Christ and his Kingdom to the most abandoned? As Oblates we are all religious brothers, and that some of us brothers have the vocation to be “ordained brothers”...

Apostolic community

- If we commit ourselves to regular quality moments of community life together. What if we gave these moments of prayer and sharing the same importance that we give to our missionary work.
- What if reconciliation were to become the main characteristic of our community... Our wounds, seen and handled through the Saviour's eyes, would become the signs of resurrection.

Mission

- What if our mission were a reflection of our personal and community experiences of God because it is from our converted heart and spirit that mission flows... Mission is nothing more than our inviting others to participate in our founding experience of God as we live it in apostolic community. This is the specifically Oblate character of our parishes and works.

The Mazenodian Family

- Eugene's charism inspired the foundation of some 44 religious congregations and

secular institutes. What if the groups that are still functioning would cooperate in dreaming and presenting together Eugene's vision for the 21st century...

- The charism of Eugene is given to the whole Church and is bigger than us. What if all the lay people who are inspired by and heroically live this charism throughout the world would cooperate to dream together with us...
- And what if we listened more to the dream of the “most abandoned” and that instead of making them the objects of our evangelization we allow them to evangelise us and enlighten us about “our” evangelizing vision ...

WHAT IF...?

What if we had the courage to dream new dreams inspired by our founding vision? What if Abraham, Moses, the Hebrew slaves in Egypt, John the Baptist, Mary, Peter, John, Levi, Mary Magdalene, Saul and many other Biblical figures had not had the courage to choose God's dream for them by leaving their zones of security and stepping into the unknown, rooted only in the conviction of God's vision for them? What if...?

Centuries later, Eugene's conversion gave him the courage to leave his noble lifestyle in Aix and go to the seminary, to refuse the comfort and status of a city parish in 1812 so as to set out towards an unknown future with the most abandoned. Henri Tempier stepped into the unknown in 1815, as did the Oblates who set out for the British Isles and North America in 1841, for Asia in 1847 and for Africa in 1848. They dared to put their Oblate dream into practice and blazed the trail for thousands of others to follow likewise in our nearly 200 years of history: crossing frontiers where others did not dare to go, not knowing what was awaiting them, and continuing today to cross the man-made frontiers of global exploitation, injustice, multi-culturality, meaningless lives. Always with the same vision: *Evangelizare pauperibus misit me / pauperes evangelizantur* - the same message of Good News for the poor, freedom for captives, sight to the blind, liberty to the oppressed and God's

time of grace breaking through in the Kingdom and its values. All reaching out was done with the security and conviction of a God-given vision.

Will the General Chapter solve all our difficulties and plot out the precise map we must take in the future to ensure a long and bright future? Clearly not! If the answers were that easy to find there would be no need for soul-searching or for a Chapter! The Chapter cannot be tempted to fall into the trap of trying to be a gathering that is going to provide all the solutions.

For many years in my longing for clear solutions I have been inspired and guided by the words of R. M. Rilke in his *Letters to a Young Poet*:

Have patience with everything that remains unsolved in your heart. Try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms and

like books written in a foreign language. Do not now look for the answers. They cannot now be given to you because you could not live them. It is a question of experiencing everything. At present you need to live the question. Perhaps you will gradually, without even noticing it, find yourself experiencing the answer, some distant day.

My hope is that the Chapter will help us to identify the questions that need to be dreamt and lived on our conversion journey – they are God’s questions because it is God’s vision given to us through Saint Eugene. God will not let us down as long as every single Oblate and every community and unit has the desire and the courage to convert. A NEW HEART – A NEW SPIRIT – A NEW MISSION will only be possible to the extent that each of us believes in the process of being prepared to live the questions with courage.

Conversion a psycho-spiritual perspective

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Introduction

There is an **in built desire- a drive** in human beings to change and to grow and to develop; it's a **maturational process**. **Margaret Wheatley** in her book *Leadership and New Science* says: "Everything alive is an open system that engages with its environment and continues to grow and evolve. A living system changes in order to preserve itself." At a higher level- the human level, we speak of an innate desire to be converted again and again in the direction of its Ultimate Love, the Truth, and the Life. "Remain in me, as I in you" Jn. 15:4; and again, "Remain in my love" (Jn.15: 9). **Gerald May** speaking about the purpose of life writes, "We are born with a heart full of desire for God. This yearning is our fundamental motive force: it is the human spirit. It is the energy behind everything we seek and aspire to" (The Dark Night of the Soul, 2004). **St. Augustine**: "Thou hast made us for Thy self, and our hearts are restless until they rest in thee." (Confessions)

Conversion

Conversion can be seen as an ongoing **identity formation**, an individuation process towards wholeness (Carl Jung), a process of attachment and separation. Conversion can also be seen as an expansion of one's self-definition and an unfolding of self-hood which is transformation.

In religious language, it can be seen as a process of emptying, the kenotic process towards wholeness (Mt.5:48), fullness (Jn: 10:10), completeness (Jn.15:11), and eventually Oneness (Jn.17:21). This was further summed up by Jesus when he said:

"Love the lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the

greatest and first commandment. The second resembles it: you must love your neighbour as yourself" (Mt.23:37). This is a call to mysticism and to action (mission).

Integral Conversion

Conversion as any change in a person's thinking, feeling, and behaviour that is relatively enduring – an ongoing 'call' – is a process of discovering one's real identity or the real Self. It's a movement towards God, the God within (an inner journey).

"*Metanoia*" – an ongoing conversion to **inner truth**, and outer action (my mission needs to flow out of my conversion experience). With each new acceptance of consciousness, a conversion takes place. From the unconscious to consciousness, there is a birthing process, a conversion process.

Conversion to be integral or radical needs to include all three dimensions of human life: cognitive, affective and behavioural ((growth/ conversion, see also: OMI CC 47 & 69). The cognitive change signifies the change of our attitudes and the change of our mind-sets (Rom.12:2). The search for truth through our learning in contrast to just gathering of information is our intellectual formation. The search for God in deep meditation is genuine prayer.

The affective change/conversion begins from self-acceptance, which presupposes self-knowledge, and self-knowledge presupposes self-awareness. The affective conversion also calls for the development of our self-esteem and self-worth, and a deep sense of self-forgiveness. Forgiveness releases the forgiver. I personally feel that if these two dimensions, i.e. cognitive and affective, of conversion take place together

(integral), the third, which is behavioural will naturally follow. *“By their fruits you shall know them,”* said Jesus. What is meant by ‘fruits’ here is our relationships to people and to the environment.

Self-awareness and Self-knowledge

These aspects of our lives have been neglected or down played in our spirituality over the years or even centuries. *“True self-knowledge, the knowledge of one’s true self, is discovered in the alternations of emotions and feelings which bring about suffering of spirit. We need, therefore, to explore the meaning and implications of this kind of self. Self-knowledge is so essential for deeper covenant conversion. Such explorations seem helpful not only to allay the fear and anxiety accompanying this journey, but also because self-knowledge has not been highly regarded in more recent spirituality”*(Paul Robb, sj, 1982, emphasis added). Human development and faith development need to go together, and we do not dichotomize.

“Dichotomizing pathologises and pathology dichotomizes...isolating two interrelated parts of a whole from each other, parts that need each other, parts that are ‘truly’ parts and not wholes, distorts them both, sickens and contaminates them.”

Abraham Maslow, Religions, Values, and Peak experiences,(1964, p.12). However, the faith development as a process takes us to deeper levels of our lives where mere psychology cannot help.

The search for God in our learning and the search for one’s real self will naturally encounter at some point in one’s life, and therein lies an inner freedom, and therein one discovers his/her inner truth. It’s not so much freedom from but more so freedom for – to love beyond human barriers, ‘the expansion of love’ as Dalai Lama puts it.

The depth of our faith can be gauged, I believe, by the width of our relationships. The deeper we are rooted, the wider we are connected.

The Will to Change

People who are satisfied with the status quo, who are **comfortable** where they are, and feel

very secure with the way they are, who are settled in their positions and power, who feel certain with their ideologies, philosophies, theologies and religion will be unlikely candidates for conversion. They will promote **external religion only**. We can be caught up in dualism, separating the cognitive from the affective, religion from spirituality which pathologizes religion. Looking at religion as it is practiced today (not lived) in many places, I am inclined to say with Abraham Maslow *“dichotomized religion is doomed because it tends to become arbitrary and authoritarian.”*

People are **ready to change** when they experience a sufficient degree of **internal restlessness or dissatisfaction or a discomfort that cannot be ignored**. We also can speak about **an existential anxiety** that may be caused by a death (a loss experience), or any other external factor or a crisis in life. It also could happen by a positive factor, like getting in touch with the **thirst**, or a **quest** (*“is that all there is?”*), an urging of the heart, a search for meaning in one’s life, a search for one’s identity, a desire for *“lasting union,”* a thirst for togetherness or oneness, that drive within us to be awakened.

“My whole being yearns and pines for Yahweh’s courts, My heart and my body cry out for joy to the living God.” Ps. 84:2

Every identity crisis has a religious significance.

It is an opportunity to reorganize the self, a time to make new commitments, and faith (faith as relationship, to deepen and widen that relationship) is a form of ultimate commitment. Every identity crisis is a time for **discovering new faith** – a new birth- an ongoing conversion, a deepening of faith, a renewed relationship that is deeper than before. There is a renewed relationship to oneself, because there is continuous new discovery of oneself. Religious conversion is a process of **new identity formation**. It is a **rebirth of selfhood** towards transformation.

The Call to Conversion

Conversion requires that **we hear God in a new way in our life** and the experience is often

preceded by a crisis, but that does not mean that a crisis is a requirement for conversion. The Living God is constantly calling us, we need to create the environment of silence and solitude to listen deeply to this call (the inner voice of love) and respond. Every time, I listen to this call and respond there is a conversion experience, and this is an on-going call and therefore conversion too is ongoing.

Being one with God is our natural, higher state. Call to conversion is a call to change- a call to growth- and the self is the vehicle for that change. Becoming new is an illusion unless the self you inhabit everyday and recognize in the mirror, starts to lose its old habits and conditioning. **Deepak Chopra**, *The Third Jesus*, p.74. Call in the Christian sense “*means both an invitation from an initiating other and something capable of touching the inner core of one’s being, one’s mind and heart...*”

“*To get to the core of God at God’s greatest, one must first get into the core of oneself at his least*” **Meister Eckhart**. This inner journey calls for exploring, adventuring, wondering and pondering (all characteristics of a searcher) as Mary did (Lk. 2:52).

“*To venture causes anxiety, but not to venture is to lose oneself. ...If I have not ventured at all- who then helps me? And, moreover, if by not venturing at all in the highest sense (and to venture in the highest sense is precisely to become conscious of oneself) I have gained all earthly advantages...and lose myself! What of that?*” **Soren Kierkegaard**, *Sickness Unto Death*, 1941, p.52. Spirituality is venturing into the unknown, and is in the uncertainty of the future. There are no road-maps into the future on this journey. **Teresa of Avila** said: “*God does not lead everyone along the same path*” (*The Way of Perfection*, ch.17).

Is **Kierkegaard** echoing what **Jesus** said: “*If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross everyday and follow me. For anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake, that man will save it. What gain, then,*

is it for a man to have won the whole world and to have lost or ruined his very self?” Lk. 9:23-24. This itself is a call to conversion, to let go of all those we are attached to, to empty so that we can be filled in our emptiness.

Conversion and Call to Mission

A faith experience or a religious experience is also a conversion experience. We are called to internalize that experience and reflect on that conversion experience (theologizing). We are called to integrity and authenticity where there is no dualism. This experience further calls us to reality and existentiality, to be in touch with the socio-political and economic situation of our people. That further challenges us to radicality, meaning to work (mission) on behalf of the marginalized, the oppressed, the exploited, and are **called to co-create a new world**. This is the story of Jesus, Mary, the disciples and so many men and women before us. If a conversion experience is not calling us to reality and to radicality that conversion experience needs to be discerned as to whether it is truly from God or whether I am under some illusion.

Conversion is a hallmark of **genuine faith development**, but is possible only when we are in relationship to another because it implies letting go and surrendering to another in love.

An Invitation to the Capitulars of the Next General Chapter (2010)

The Oblate of the future is called to be a mystic in the market place or else may I take courage from Karl Rahner and say “*everything is useless.*” The time has come to make a paradigm shift (if you wish) to change the emphasis from missionary to mystic in action or **contemplative missionary**, and the emphasis is on the contemplative. Jesus knew when to leave the crowd and get away to be alone with God (mystic), and he also knew when to return to the people, and challenge the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the High Priests of his time (prophetic mission). A real contemplative will know when to come out of the monastic walls to the market place to be with the oppressed, the marginalized, the poor and to work towards justice for all, and when

to get back into solitude and contemplation as Thomas Merton did, and as Dalai Lama and Thich Naht Hanh are doing today. The world of today and tomorrow needs such contemplative missionaries and prophets.

The **quality of the life of an Oblate** is much more important and necessary than his work that is alienated from his life (dualism). The mission needs to flow out of his personal conversion experience to be authentic and integral. Further I have come to believe that it is only when as an Oblate I can experience solitude in my life, I can not only live in community but contribute towards the building of our religious communities that will be witnessing communities (see also:

WAC, 1982, nos. 7 & 18), or we end up living in glorified boarding houses or in gentlemen's clubs, not to speak of dysfunctional communities. The highly or overly institutionalized religious life desperately needs a paradigm shift (may be a communal conversion) before it becomes totally irrelevant to the post-modern society, be it in the Northern hemisphere or in the Southern. If we as religious don't go beyond (transcend) our signs and symbols, rituals and religion, religious life will deteriorate further and further. Signs of deterioration are all over the walls of our institutions. Realizing the urgency of this call, I do sincerely hope that our next General Chapter (2010) will sufficiently deal with this theme. Will they?

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