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## **Oblation, conversion and discernment**

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## **Christ as a center of conversion during the formation of Eugene de Mazenod**

**By Cyrille Atitung, omi  
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***Conversion: A new heart – a new Spirit – a new Mission***

### ***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 35<sup>th</sup> 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](http://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.**

## Oblation, conversion and discernment

By Gianni Colombo, omi  
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The OMI Constitutions state that “the Chapter is a privileged time of community reflection and conversion. Together, in union with the Church, we discern God's will in the urgent needs of our times and thank the Lord for the work of salvation which he accomplishes through us.” (C 125) In this description, we find three fundamental biblical categories for the life of the Congregation: *kairòs*, *metànoia*, *dokimàzein*. In fact, it is about living a time of grace (*kairòs*), in an attitude of conversion (*metànoia*), in order to be able to discern (*dokimàzein*) the will of God about the mission that He gives us in the present social, cultural and ecclesial context. The theme proposed for the capitulars, and which involves all Oblates, places the accent on conversion, an attitude constantly mentioned in biblical texts. Conversion implies a change of heart and mind, involving the ways of feeling and thinking of persons and of communities, as regards their identity and their mission. The various facets (persons, communities, institutions) are interdependent and, in order to renew themselves, they must rely on the promptings of the Spirit. In my simple reflection, I will rely upon a Pauline text which I find enlightening in its conciseness: Romans 12: 1-2.

1. “*I urge you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship.*” (Rm 12:1)

In his exhortation, Paul offers us a synthesis of the Christian life as an offering of the person within his actual lived experience. It is an offering of one's intelligence and will, of one's freedom and affectivity, of one's resources and limitations, of one's fears and one's attempts at bravery. It is in this offering without reserve that one experiences life as an authentic, daily worship “in spirit and in truth,” a participation in the sacrifice of Christ who offered His life to the Father for all of humankind.

The terms “oblate and oblation,” which define our identity, are contained in this attitude of total gift. They are words that risk losing their dynamism if they are not understood in the sense of a positive choice to live one's own life as “a living sacrifice, pleasing to God,” in union with Christ (cf. CC 2 and 65). This knowledge of our fundamental choice to follow Christ is the indispensable condition for taking on an attitude of sincere conversion, for discerning the Will of God. Only in this sense can our life and our mission be renewed and redefined in order to respond in a significant way to the expectations of our contemporaries.

In the oblation of our “*bodies*” as spiritual worship, we express, in the passionate appeal of Paul, the authenticity of our fundamental decision to “follow Christ.” The *following of Christ* does not exhaust itself, in fact, when we accept Christ as a teacher to listen to and a model to imitate, but it requires that we identify with Him, allowing Him to live in us (cf. C 2). The Pauline expressions are significant when he describes the intimate participation of the Christian in the experience of Christ with such terms as “*to suffer with*” (Rm 8:17), “*to live with, to die with, to rise with*” (Rm 6:6 & 8), to “*be seated with in heaven*” (Eph 2:6), to “*reign with*” Christ (2 Tim 2:12).

The fundamental choice to conform oneself to Christ deepens, by the work of the Holy Spirit, in the development of a theological life: with faith we become participants in the consciousness that Jesus has of the loving design of the Father; with hope we participate in the total trust that Jesus has nurtured towards the Father; with charity we experience the total love that Jesus had towards the Father and his brothers and sisters (cf. C 1). The Christ-centered dimension of our vocation was underlined clearly by Fr. Jetté when, stating the criteria to evaluate the maturity of an Oblate, he affirmed: “He is a person who has encountered

Jesus, has loved him profoundly and has given himself to him, to continue with him, the work of Redemption”.

Oblation is not exhausted in the act of consecration to the Lord, rather it is a constant attitude that qualifies and gives consistency to the dynamic of one's whole life. *Gaudium et spes* reminds us of this: “Man [...] cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself” (GS 24). It is a truth expressed with the biblical category of covenant, with the theological category of espousal and with the philosophical category of otherness-reciprocity-responsibility. In fact, the fundamental choice of gift of self, following Jesus in his theological life and in the style of the beatitudes, unites life by conquering fragmentation and dispersion, defines vocational identity by overcoming ambiguity, decides the meaning of life and profoundly involves the person, sustaining perseverance.

Otherwise the discourses repeated since Vatican II and later are deprived of meaning, especially those for the occasion of the Synod of Bishops on consecrated life on the “charismatic” and “prophetic” character of evangelical radicality specific to religious consecration with the exhortation addressed to the Institutes to return to their sources in order to enliven the requested renewal in the present historical context. I allow myself to ask one question, which I have asked myself many times this year: Don't we suffer perhaps from a certain “*bulimia*” in our spiritual discourses, with a corresponding “*anorexia*” in our human and Christian maturity, whose condition is an authentic spirituality? It is certainly a personal and partial impression which does not want to ignore the profusely serious commitment in every aspect, to be able to produce a new and vital vigor in our institutes. Placing oneself in an attitude of conversion, personal and communal, means to walk effectively the path to rediscover, trustingly, the gift of the Holy Spirit and assume our responsibility.

2. “*Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind*” (Rm 12,2).

The conviction of the importance of the fundamental choice to follow Christ does not free us from the knowledge that we are in need of a continual conversion (cf. CC. 2; 47). Every call to conversion that we address to others resounds, above all, in the interior of our heart. The path to be conformed to Christ is a path that must be taken for the rest of our life: only grace will lead us to the goal at the end of our days. In this tiring and uplifting journey, we discover spaces in our life that have not yet been evangelized, we experience fragility which slows down our advancing down the road of the Spirit, we suffer fear and laziness which are obstacles to spreading the Kingdom of God. The experience of community and missionary life becomes a continuous call to verify the authenticity and coherence of our presence and our action.

It is a call that impels us also to look again at the structures of our Congregation, so that they may always be more appropriated to their missionary finality. In the past institutes (family, schools, church), with their respective structures, enjoyed a notable authority whereas today their evaluation depends greatly on the authoritativeness of the people that incarnate them. It is always more evident that even the best structures, built by the greatest architect, are worth something as long as they are inhabited and are placed at the service of the people and their mission. We find here another space that requires a personal and communal conversion.

The need for conversion, on the other hand, does not look only at the personal and institutional aspect in self examination, but rather is imposed by a world which is undergoing serious transformations. Our time has known events that force us to change our way of thinking. It is enough to point out the Council which has forced us to rethink the identity and mission of the Church in the world at the end of political colonialism which has brought to light traditional cultures and religions, the emergence of new peoples as protagonists in the historical scene. They are events that force us to rethink, sometimes exhaustingly, even our mission.

At the same time, the globalization phenomenon,

in its various aspects, favors the spread of a postmodern culture, which progressively pervades single traditional cultures. It is no surprise that our time is described as the “*time of disenchantment*” due to the fall of the illusions of the optimism of the enlightenment, “*a time of a fleeing world*” due to its incapacity to figure out an orientation of meaning, “*a time of disappearance*” due to the conviction of the impossibility to grasp a guaranteed truth, “*a time of uncertainty*” due to the rejection of a long-term project, “*time of emptiness*” due to the lack of every foundation that gives consistency to thought and life. This realization should not make us forget the progress and potentiality present today, for example in the field of human rights, promotion of women and ecological sensitivity.

Vatican II started a serious dialogue with the modern world and we Oblates are called to live in “the heart of the world” (C 1), not to allow ourselves to be passively absorbed, but to give, like Mary, Christ to the world (cf. C 10): the world in which many aspire to integral freedom and fullness of life (cf. C 20; RR 9a; 67a), to make the world more human (cf. C 4). Our presence would be insignificant if our word, and above all the witness of our life and of our communities, should cease to provoke to conversion the people whom the Lord places on our path. Among so many voices and messages of every origin and color, the strong and humble message of the Gospel would end up suffocated.

So that the Spirit might convert and mold freely our way of thinking, living and working, it is necessary that we allow ourselves to be transformed interiorly, to recognize the richness and limits of the culture in which we are immersed, if we don't want to let ourselves be crushed in the negation of important values. Before the primacy attributed to efficiency immediate usefulness, we are called to substitute the primacy of gratuity in love; before the primacy known to fragmented experiences, we are led to prefer the continuity of a daily commitment; before the primacy assigned to anarchic sensibility, we are called to harmonize reason and sentiments; before the primacy given to technology, we are called to insert ethical values.

The Founder's *Preface* remains an urgent and timely invitation to personal and communal conversion, if we want to contribute with our work and open new paths of conversion to those to whom our mission sends us. With the words of the Founder we are encouraged by the illustrious example of so many Oblates who have preceded us and of so many Oblates with whom we share today a missionary commitment.

3. “*So that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect.*” (Rm 12,2).

Revelation presents conversion as an authentic vocation of biblical man: God calls man continuously to conversion and this invitation assumes tones and various characteristics according to the historical situations and the experiences of living people. Concretely, conversion assumes religious, ethical and cultural modes which constitute for Paul the conditions for a genuine discernment. The reprimand and invitation of Jesus to the crowd that followed him is significant: “You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret (*ou dokimazete*) the present time (*kairòn*)? And why do you not judge for yourselves what is right?” (Lk 12, 56-57). Notice that Jesus, confronted with the incapacity of the people to discern the messianic times, exhorts the people to discern, because they have the necessary signs. In every age, the Christian is called to conversion, to come out of his “hypocrisy” and recognize the presence of Christ. With even more reason, this is for those who have been “chosen beforehand ‘to proclaim the Gospel of God’ (Rm 1,1)”. (C 2)

All of us, people and institutions, live within complex situations. It is not always feasible to guess which are the most opportune choices and decisions. It is normal in those circumstances, as happens in a Chapter, to take up an itinerary of prudent discernment, which presupposes an attitude of discernment as an habitual style of living the Gospel today.

To discern means to evaluate, distinguish, examine, verify, analyze, scrutinize that which

is should be chosen, decide, do, and respond to the call of the Lord. Certainly we are constantly called to conversion, but it is important to recognize which of our attitudes must be looked at, the way of thinking that must be corrected, the structures to be renewed, the new paths to walk. To continue allowing oneself to be guided by the Spirit to the fullness of truth (cf. Jn 14, 26), it is necessary to have some fundamental attitudes. I mention them briefly:

- being conscious of one's own resources and limits, personal and communal, before one's own responsibility to the Church, the Congregation, the part of humanity entrusted to our mission; it is not sufficient to have a general knowledge; rather it requires the clarity to be able to give a name to the richness and poverty which we possess;
- being guided by the fundamental choice of faith which works through charity, remembering Paul's prayer to the Philippian community: "And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that on the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless," (Phil 1, 9-10);
- being ready to question oneself, welcoming the advice of brothers, about how the fundamental choice of charity could incarnate itself in the concrete situations and problems being considered;
- being ready to seriously face up to the means which help one to discover the most valid choices and decisions, in line with

the Gospel: the Word of God, the Church Magisterium, the Constitutions, dialogue and the counsel of experts.

These are some indications, without any pretense at completeness, to discern the paths down which the Spirit urges us to walk to respond to today's challenges placed before us, our community and the whole Congregation. Surprised by the speed and vastness of the historical-cultural changes, we are finding it difficult to perceive new positive opportunities offered to us. Sometimes the negative evaluations prevail, which show the difficulty making dark the paths that the Spirit opens to giving witness and a renewed proclamation of the Gospel. It is necessary that we make ourselves available so that the Spirit, conquering the "*hardness*" of our heart, may work in us an intimate conversion and, healing the "*blindness*" of our eyes, may give us a renewed vision to read the signs of the time.

Only in this way will we be able to discover in the actual cultural tendencies and in the various contexts of our missionary presence what is needed so that a personal and communal life, according to the evangelical counsels, may be credible and significant, in what ways our vocation and missionary age are called to express themselves, and which structures are more suitable in our present historical time.

The exhortation of the Apostle of the unconditional offering of ourselves in a constant attitude of conversion regarding evangelical discernment is totally current.

## Christ as a center of conversion during the formation of Eugene de Mazenod

By Cyrille Atitung, omi  
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When Eugene de Mazenod enters the Seminary of Saint-Sulpice<sup>1</sup>, in his heart he has something precious to offer, his very person. But especially he commits himself to live his life differently. The memories of his past, which trouble his spirit, struggle to overwhelm this particularly atypical young man of the French nobility. Eugene chooses the ecclesiastical state, thinking he would not be able to continue living unless totally consecrated to the Lord.

The language he uses in his copious and profound correspondence with his family clearly shows his firm desire to engage himself in a special way. In poignant words, Eugene admits his need for a special conversion.<sup>2</sup> He does not plan for himself a puny piety, but he clearly burns with desire and accepts to become, day by day, a passionate devotee of God. He looks with horror upon easily justifiable lapses or even the least frustration with God. His journey in the seminary took the unique path which he imposed upon himself. At all costs, he wanted to resemble the One who was calling him.

In this simple little exposé, we will approach his time at the Saint-Sulpice Seminary as an important milestone in his effort for personal conversion. We will present two directions: the discovery of Christ as truth for his own life and as commitment to the road to sanctity.

### *1. The discovery of Christ as truth for his own life*

The abundant tears shed one Good Friday were but a prelude to an important turning point, a rebirth that was already taking shape. And for

<sup>1</sup>We limit ourselves to his seminary period at Saint Sulpice in Paris. We take our inspiration entirely from his spiritual writings in volume 14.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. *Ecrits spirituels*, n° 14 ; 24. Prières, p. 33.

that, Eugene put everything into motion in order to achieve his new and very demanding rule of life.<sup>3</sup> *“Nothing against God is the strictly indispensable motto of every Christian, however halfhearted he may be; a man who aspires to the ecclesiastical state should go infinitely further. Therefore horror and the greatest of horror toward anything that could offend the good God. But besides, I must aim at the most scrupulous fidelity in the least of things...”*<sup>4</sup> This deep desire to be radically transformed remains the same, from one point to the other of his journey. Eugene is convinced that his destiny is tied to that of the religion of his Master. That called for a regular conversion in which the person of Christ would remain ever the absolute exemplar.

At all costs, he wanted to make his life correspond to the commitment he had made. He will not understand the truth of his own life other than within the state of life whose dignity he acknowledges with legitimate pride: *“But from now on, my person, my honor and my reputation will be so united with the religion whose minister I am, although unworthy, that I must walk carefully; I need not say more, my dear mother, to make you see how important it is for me to follow the plan I have made for myself, and which is surely approved by those who, because of their experience and their sanctity, can appreciate my reasons.”*<sup>5</sup> Eugene becomes more and more conscious of what he must be in spite of his unworthiness. The desire to be exceptional especially predominates. He will make every

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Ecrits spirituels* n° 14 ; 27. Lettre à Madame de Mazenod, le 29 juin 1808.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Ecrits spirituels*, n° 14 ; texte n° 28, Resolutions made during the retreat made upon entering the seminary in the first days of October 1808.

<sup>5</sup> *Ecrits spirituels*, n° 14, lettre 68, à Madame de Mazenod, 14 avril 1810.

effort to satisfy his friend, Christ, once he has crossed the threshold of Saint Sulpice major seminary. *“Independent until my entry into this holy house, it was impossible that submission and obedience would seem hard for me, especially as far as the choice and the way of studying are concerned ... Thus, not only must I congratulate myself for having revealed myself to my director, such as I am, and even such as I was, which was a great victory that the grace of God made me bring upon myself (and which my pride fought against, giving me several deceptive reasons), but I still must be disposed to admit everything, even the most humiliating things, supposing that my director will believe me; I don't say they are necessary things, but only useful things...”*<sup>6</sup> This goes without commentary. It must be noticed that Eugene is attached to Christ and would be unable to detach himself. Even more, Eugene realizes that he would never again want to abandon Him.

The conviction which the young Provençal aristocrat demonstrates in his correspondence with members of his family, concerning his progress, shows an internal journey which sheds light on his own personality. He recalls the origins of his vocation. The Christ whom he personally encountered during a Good Friday celebration, after a street detour, remains at the heart of a work of internal renewal of great consequence. *“It seemed to me that this loving friend must have been satisfied that at the very moment when the greatest number of his children, these ungrateful persons, for whom he shed all of his blood, are offending and cruelly insulting him, it seems to me, I say, that this adorable Savior must be satisfied to see at his feet a miserable sinner, repenting his faults, weeping over his depravations.”*<sup>7</sup> Eugene de Mazenod has no illusions about the personal battle he must fight to find again his true self. The time of formation serves him as the context for establishing the lifestyle that makes up his character as a passionate lover of Christ, a friend ever transformed. Eugene goes so far as to ask his family to be even bothersome with Christ

as long as they obtain for him grace for his life and his ministry: *“I reckon that the ordination of deacons will be on Saturday from 9 until 10 o'clock; if my letter gets to you before that hour, put yourself immediately at the feet of Jesus Christ to ask of him everything that a mother can ask for her dear son; don't be afraid of bothering Him; God is rich enough and generous enough to make everyone happy.”*<sup>8</sup> Surprising as this sort of statement might be, one thing is clear. Eugene de Mazenod sees Christ as an internal book of life, to make use of in order to find the reason for living and for engaging himself in the world so as to be better and perfect.

## ***2. With Christ, as commitment on the road to sanctity***

Young de Mazenod is going to have an experience of great value in terms of desire and effort toward sanctity during his stay at the Saint Sulpice Seminary. That is seen in his daily life. We refer to two orientations taken by Eugene: first, the respect which he has for the seminary; second, his style of personal conduct which he imposes on himself at the seminary.

What strikes one in reading the letters and notes Eugene wrote right after arriving at the seminary is his awe at discovering his new milieu: *“Unable to hide from myself that I am unworthy, very unworthy, to be living among the saints who make up the heavenly home, I must deeply humble myself in view of the iniquities that should closed to me forever the entry to this sanctuary.”*<sup>9</sup> Eugene considers his seminary community as an highly spiritual environment. The sanctity of the Church and his own occur through the experience of the seminary. The seminary, as a heavenly home, simply means a place where live holy ministers who are following Christ, the real saint. He renounces all personal glorification.

In a letter to his mother, he praises the seminary as a paradise on earth: *“What a life we live*

<sup>6</sup>*Ecrits spirituels*, n° 14, 28. Resolutions made during the retreat made upon entering the seminary in the first days of October 1808. (between 12 and 19 October 1808).

<sup>7</sup>*Ecrits spirituels*, n° 14, Lettre 45, à Madame de Mazenod, 13 février 1809.

<sup>8</sup>*Ecrits spirituels*, n° 14, Lettre 70, à Madame de Mazenod, le 10 juin 1810.

<sup>9</sup>*Ecrits spirituels*, n° 14, 28. Resolutions made during the retreat made upon entering the seminary in the first days of October 1808. (between 12 and 19 October 1808).



*here! The days fly by like a single moment, and in spite of their brevity, they are full before the Lord. Here, everything leads us to Him; there is not a minute of the day that is not for Him. Our actions, even the most insignificant ones, are important for us, because they are done in view of the obedience that we owe Him. In a word, the seminary, when one is there in the spirit that everyone destined for the ecclesiastical state should have, is a veritable paradise on earth.”*<sup>10</sup>

The reason is quite clear; Eugene finds it to be the place for the encounter with Christ. With the help of the Eucharistic sacrifice each day, he bathes in this heavenly atmosphere: *“For example, we are at Mass when you are getting up. Well now! Don’t you think that your son is asking of Jesus Christ, who during His blessed life was the most excellent of sons, that your day and your entire life be filled with blessings and graces? And when I have the joy of receiving this God of love, which is very often in this holy house, would you find it hard to believe that in giving everything to Him so as to receive everything from Him in exchange, I don’t offer you as well, so that you might share my fortunate journey?”*<sup>11</sup>

It should be stated that this aristocratic young Eugene upset his mother who was less than disposed to let him embrace the clerical life. He had to been of a completely different stripe to extinguish the hopes of a mother whom he loved with great affection. Eugene seems to have been acted upon by Christ like so much leaven. The practice of such austere fasting which he adopts speaks only of that desire to resemble Christ in the matter of perfection. *“Let us often seek ourselves in the heart of our adorable Master, but especially receive his adorable Body; that is the best way for us to be united, for, in identifying ourselves, each on our own part, with Jesus Christ, we will be but one with Him, and through Him and in Him, we will be but one among ourselves.”*<sup>12</sup> His true joy is to participate in the mission of the divine Son, even if it means to leave aside vanities, allures and needs. He

<sup>10</sup>*Ecrits spirituels*, n° 14, Lettre 29, pour bonne maman grande, le 18 octobre 1808.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibidem*.

<sup>12</sup>*Ecrits spirituels*, n° 14, Lettre 37, à Madame de Mazenod, le 25 décembre 1808.

questions himself intensely on the meaning of life: *“And this divine Master who is calling me to Himself to serve His Church, at a time when she has been abandoned by everyone, should I resist His voice so as to languish miserably outside of my element?”*<sup>13</sup> It is an existential question which the Oblates of this third millennium should ponder as they are called to affront the difficult missionary realities of today.

As in Christian antiquity, the name of Christian meant the total membership of the new believer and at the same time revealed the resolve of those who professed or admitted to the religion of Jesus Christ. This name strengthened the believer in Christ in all situations. More than a name, it was an identity. To belong to Christ consisted in a series of saving renunciations. During his formation, Eugene experienced this resolve for his ecclesiastical state whose adorable fruit would be the founding of a missionary Congregation known for its *“difficult missions.”* To live the Oblate vocation today amidst so many trials, the watchful and resolute spirit of Eugene permits us to move full steam ahead for the mission in today’s world.

In summary, the formative journey of Eugene in the St. Sulpice Seminary makes way for the discovery of Christ at the heart of his life and of his vocation. It is clear that the conversion of Eugene is to inhale Christ who purifies his entire breath. Thus there takes place the day by day renewal of the young Eugene. The noteworthy idea to retain is the resolve of the young man during his formation which the indomitable victory of Christ makes permanent. Eugene teaches us to fix our gaze on Christ and to hold on. He states without ambiguity: *“When I came to the seminary, it was not to make up my mind but rather to confirm myself in the holy vocation which the Lord was pleased to give me. A year in the seminary, at my age, is more than sufficient to know what to count on; and when one passes this test, he can be serene.”*<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup>*Ecrits Spirituels*, n° 14, lettre 46, à Madame de Mazenod, le 28 février 1809.

<sup>14</sup>*Ecrits Spirituels*, n° 14, lettre 51, à Madame de Boisgelin, mi-avril 1809.

## Centering Again on Christ

by Olegario Domínguez, omi  
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Taking advantage of the invitation that has been given me, I wish to make a modest contribution. "Give from my poverty," as we usually say in Latin America.

I find the theme for the Chapter very rich and timely. Conversion to Christ is always a condition and key for our growth in our personal, apostolic and communal life. I believe this is so, in our present circumstances, in a very special manner for our Congregation, due to the enormous quantity of work that it holds within its hands and due to the many requests that it receives from the world in which and for which it lives, and at the same time, due to the atmosphere of insecurity and confusion that reigns in the ideas and praxis of our present society. As perhaps never in history, the Church is confronting a world burdened with problems and insecurity; as never before, we find ourselves without any paths made in situations that demand resourcefulness and decisiveness, and frequently we see ourselves motivated to give quick and partial responses without sufficient time to reflect and pray. We are asked to produce good fruits; we must count on good roots. We must work with speed and audacity, and therefore we improvise less and less. (It is worth mentioning the saying: "visit me slowly because I am in a hurry").

We must convert ourselves by going to the center of our life, returning with dreams and joy to the God "of the joy of our youth", to Christ, Master and Savior, who one day passed by our side and called us, like He did Andrew and John, like He called Paul, like He called Eugene de Mazenod "so that we would be with Him and so He would send us to preach". After working a few years in His fields or in His vineyard, after working until tired and fatigued, after much preaching, we recognize that we lack "being more with Him", to be submerged in the spring of His life, in the

light of His gaze, in the harmony of His Word, in the mysterious scent of His heart. We feel a real need to "revive the charism" (2 Tim 1:6), to feel a new invasion of life and the Spirit that will makes us capable to confront in a new way the evangelization of the world, of our world far from God because of materialism and consumerism, tired, skeptic, disturbed and disoriented.

When we come down to it, it's what is asked of us by Constitution 2, which is the deepest and richest nucleus of our spirituality: The Oblates are "...men ready to leave everything to be disciples of Jesus. The desire to co-operate with Him draws us to know Him more deeply, to identify with Him, to let Him live in us." This intimate knowledge, this active and passive identification with Him, is the task and grace of our whole personal and collective life. And it will be especially a task and grace of the Chapter in 2010.

In this "vital re-centering on Christ", in this new immersion in His mystery, I see three fundamental aspects that respond to the triple dimension of our theological life and that invites us to a simple and pleasant reflection.

**1. See the world with the eyes of Christ:** Come closer to Him, listen to His words, share with Him our worries, this will make us think like Him, assume His criteria, walk in His Light, see the world with the eyes of the good Master, who came to us to give witness to the truth (Jn 18:37), the redeemer who dies to give life to all men, the Good Shepherd, who knows His sheep lovingly, intimately and vitally, impregnating with affection, tenderness, understanding and compassion.

Our faith is precisely seeing everything through the enlightened eyes of Jesus: See with Him the Abba, committed to our poor, strayed humanity,

the good and compassionate Abba who sends His sun and rain upon the good and the bad, who listens to the cry of the poor and afflicted, who wants the salvation of all, who holds a feast when he recovers the son who wasted all his belongings, who shows His power over all by forgiving and being compassionate.

Seeing with the enlightened eyes of Jesus our littleness and misery, our clay pot chosen by Him to take His Message, the treasures of His Grace and His Love to the men He loves. Seeing with the enlightened eyes of Jesus the world redeemed by His blood, the souls that belong to Him, the souls that under the impulse of the divine Spirit respond with exquisite love and heroic dedication, those that hesitantly and fearfully follow Him, without clearly seeing the horizon and fearful of giving all, and those that resist the request of love.

Eugene saw the world of his time with the enlightened eyes of Jesus: he saw the accumulated ruins of the Revolution, he saw the Spouse of Christ persecuted and devastated, he saw the souls redeemed by the mysterious torrent of Calvary running aimlessly to their ruin, he saw how the glory of the Father was unappreciated, and thus, with his heart moved, he threw himself into the adventure of a lifetime...

And we are in that adventure. Hopefully we will be able to accomplish it with the same faith, with the same interior serenity and profoundness, with the same certainty and security of the disciple who exclaimed: "To whom shall we go, you have the words of everlasting life" (Jn 6:68). If we get used to looking through the eyes of Jesus, this attitude will allow us to see "the signs of the times" better than all sociological, psychological, and political analysis necessary in other places. Discernment together with audacity will ask us for serious changes and sometimes costly commitments, but they will not submerge us in agony nor will it make us live in instability and nervousness. Coming near to Christ means letting oneself be guided by His Word and living in the Truth which will make us free...

We do much, we correct much, we preach much,

and sometimes God grants us the grace to see the fruit of our labors, we see that our missionary commitment is effective... But many times there is too much anxiety, too much human burden in our hectic, exhausting and stressful activities. Perhaps we should do less, run less but rooted more in the Word and therefore with more love, more understanding tenderness and more freeing effectiveness.

**2. Lean upon the bosom of Christ.** If Christ is light for our eyes, truth for our minds, He is also support and relief, consolation and joy, strength and enthusiasm for our worried, fragile and hesitant hearts... Only He could say words ineffably encouraging like these: "Come to me all you who are tired and burdened and I will give you rest...learn from me for I am meek and humble of heart and you will find rest for your souls..." (Mt 11:28s). We think about the friend who never fails, about the Good shepherd who carries on His shoulders the lost sheep, about the Master who lets His beloved disciple rest calmly on His chest... Sustained by Him...

In the midst of the battles and contradictions, uncertainties and perplexities, we count on a firm and secure support... With the Apostle we will be able to say in any case: "I know in whom I have believed" (2 Tim 1:12). He had the respect to consider us worthy of his trust (cf. 1 Tim 1:12); and therefore He counts on our poor clay vase to carry His treasures.

The Master did not show us an easy path, He introduced us into His, that of the cross, of persecution, of trouble and failures. So it was for the apostles, for Saint Eugene and his missionaries. So it is for us in our materialistic world, allergic to true values and saturated with egoism and violence. Paul spoke of the outside battles and the fears he felt interiorly (2 Cor. 7:5). Battles and fears surround us and attack us dangerously and can lead us to fatigue, skepticism, to a neurosis or to search for a remedy in a weak and sterile activism. The Mission, with its great demands and its dangers, with its inevitable hardships, invites us to seek refuge in Christ, to count on His comforting presence in our ministry ("I will be with you always":

(Mt. 28:20) ) and especially in the Eucharistic banquet. There He will repeat to us: “It is I, don’t be afraid” (Lk. 24:36) and “Take courage, I have conquered the world!” (Jn 16:33).

Our Founder ends his enthusiastic sketch of apostolic men who want to renew the society of his time with this phrase: “thus, filled with unbounded confidence in God, they are ready to enter the combat, to fight, even unto (a cruel) death...” (Preface).

This strength which is Christian hope, we need to make it grow and enliven it even more when we are surrounded by dissatisfaction, disappointment, practical skepticism and the same despair which darkens all horizons. Today the missionary not only has to give the world “reasons for hope” (1 Pt. 3:15), but also must make his attitude contagious by his generous, serene and happy life. He must give a clear witness of the Gospel beatitudes. This can only be possible by cultivating an intimate friendship with the Savior.

**3. Love with the heart of Christ.** The summit of our identification with Christ is achieved in love, which is the sum of perfection as He himself taught us. Our “being with Christ” means above all “being there loving Him” and “and letting ourselves be loved by Him”, it means feeling the redemptive beats of His heart and His wish to “bring fire upon the earth” and that that fire be ablaze (Lk. 12:49), and seeing ourselves committed to Him realizing that His Kingdom is one of love... We understand that the lack of love that exists in our humanity, due to our egoism which impoverishes and saddens us deeply. And that is where we feel called to be witness of the inscrutable love of Christ the Messenger and reflection of the Father, Redeemer and Good Shepherd of men...

Being Christ implies for us the daily commitment to place our hearts in contact with His, through prayer and the Eucharist, at His rhythm, as a living prolongation of His. Paul manifests to the Philippians that the tenderness of Christ does not permit him to forget them, for He loves them “with an interior longing in Christ Jesus”, that

is to say, with the Heart of Christ (Phil 1:8). To the Corinthians he teaches: “The love of Christ urges us”, for if He dies for all it is fitting that all live for Him (2 Cor. 5:14s). To the Thessalonians, he shows his love of an apostle, made up of an audacious and fighting zeal, but penetrated by an intimate, paternal and even “maternal” affection (1Thes. 2:1-12). Vatican II also reminds us how Mary is a model of “maternal” love that all who work in the apostolate should show (LG 65).

On the other hand, Paul lives in profound awe because it is Christ who lives in him and because He loved him to the point of giving himself for him (Gal. 2:20), he feels an undaunted security in the definitive victory of that love in the midst of all the evil that surrounds him and he cries out triumphantly: “Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Tribulation? Anguish?... The sword?... In all this we are conquerors because of Him who loved us” (Rm 8:35ss). Here we see how our being with Christ culminates in a marvelous exchange of love. Being with Christ, in whom a dynamism of a simultaneous double current acts: from us to Christ, there is an ascetic strength of imitation and following; from Christ to us, there is a mystical radiance through which the Spirit configures us and identifies us with Him. The Spirit of Jesus is the one who pours out the Love of God in our hearts, so that we will be able to call God “Father” from our identity with Christ (Rm 5:5). And Jesus himself asks the Father “that the love with which You have loved me be in them and I in them” (Jn 17:26).

It is not difficult to see what this triple immersion in Christ could signify in our life and our mission: looking at the world with the eyes of Christ and with His feelings of compassion and understanding; encountering in Christ the consolation and the strength to overcome the difficulties and weariness; letting ourselves be invaded by the love of Christ to be efficacious instruments of His Kingdom, and announcing “with the fervor of the Saints”, as we are reminded by Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (n 80).

Nor is it difficult to perceive the necessity of the interior life which that ideal asks of us, which is what Constitution 2 asks: a constant and friendly exchange with the Master, the Savior and

Good Shepherd of humanity, though an intense contemplation of His mysteries and a deeply Eucharistic life.

It is evident that this union with Christ does not exclude or minimize recourse to the human, technical, social, etc., for with His incarnation He taught us to value all that is human and assume it for the coming of His Kingdom. But all that is human must be empowered by divine grace.

As Christians, as apostles and as Oblates, we have an exceptional means to come closer to Jesus, being with Him dynamically and submerged in His mystery: it means having Mary present and letting ourselves be guided by

her in the living contemplation of the acts and words of the Incarnate Word and counting on her motherly intercession to be able to take to our brothers the proclamation of the Kingdom as it should be done.

**Conclusion:** By inviting us to convert to Christ, to center ourselves again on Christ, the 2010 Chapter invites us to renew and strengthen the stability of our missionary spirituality in Christ, according to the example left to us by our Founder and therefore offering us the hope of seeing within our Oblate family a new flowering of holiness and missionary apostolate in today's world and today's Church.

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