

# STATIO CONFERENCE

## *Conversatio*

### FORMATION AND TRANSFORMATION

By: Sr. Pia Lansang, OSB

#### Introduction

At a recent National Congress of the Benedictine Nuns of the Eucharistic King (BNEK), I took part in an interesting panel-interview “on stage” where we were to answer questions regarding mission-experiences. We represented a cross-section of society, with very varied “ministries” and calling. There was Jamie Rivera (of “Miss Saigon” fame), Rene Salud (the well-known couturier), an SVD priest, a wife-and-mother-Oblate in one, and myself. One of the straight-to-the-point questions fielded from the big audience was “up close” and personal. It was about the experience of Christ in our lives: “*Have you experienced Christ in your life? Could you share a personal encounter with Christ?*” The query was presumably against the background of the *Christ-impact* in our life and its effects on our ministry and mission). Indeed how can one preach Christ without having met him?

Theme for June: ***Conversatio***: Formation and Transformation

Here is therefore an attempt to take a look at ***Conversatio*** as a lifelong process of **formation and transformation**. From this viewpoint let us take a look at our journey of **conversion**, as individuals and as community. While I am writing this conference, I am quite strongly aware of the very same question quoted above (cf. Introduction). To say the question of *personal experience of Christ* is relevant – nay, crucial to the topic is an understatement. For our life of commitment to Christ through ***Conversatio*** and the other vows, to begin with, is just unthinkable (not possible) without that *personal encounter with Christ* who is central in our life as religious. Thus, we need ongoing formation to set out on a process of transformation in Christ.... A very humbling realization indeed.

Striving to follow the “monastic way of conversion” (term, Veilleux) and to change our lives is far from easy. It is a long shot and the way is often tedious. We will need all the help we can get. After 10 years, 25 years in religious life, and more, we find ourselves always trying anew to come a bit nearer to the goal, each day. There are no ready made solutions to the challenges we face in our day-to-day life of conversion as Missionary Benedictine Sisters, e.g. in community life, prayer and work, horarium and fidelity to the Rule. The way is long and the Holy Spirit has to help provide a good road map to navigate our journey.

#### The Approach

My main goal is really to share straight from the heart – “Heart-to-Heart” (“H2H” in “texting

code”), because we all know that real conversion starts and happens in the heart, not so much in the intellect. I read somewhere that when people get to meet someone, “they don’t really care about what you know until they know that you care”. In our monastic Benedictine journey it is the community (of which we are a part -*constitutive*) which is called upon to give us this care, love, encouragement and support as we help one another -- “run together” – with good zeal, to live the vows and remain faithful to monastic life. Along the way of our sharing insights, we could undertake a review of our precious basic Benedictine documents in order to recapture the beauty of our calling.

## I. Our Revered Sources

(arranged not in order of importance but convenience)

### A. Our Constitutions

#### [1.] *Conversatio*, All-Encompassing Conversion of Life

The first text we read on the topic of *Conversatio morum* in the chapter on “Profession” (II,2) is the ff.:

*“Conversatio morum encompasses our whole life as Missionary Benedictine Sisters;  
It is a way of following Christ in religious community  
under the guidance of the Gospel.  
This way demands of us a continual striving for conversion,  
ever trusting in God’s mercy.”*<sup>1</sup>

*Sharing (“H2H”)*: (not an exhaustive text exegesis): *Conversatio* involves the entirety of our life as monastic Missionary Benedictines – it is all encompassing. Therefore, there is no aspect of our life in the monastery that is not relevant to this vow, e.g., all the monastic values and practices -- living in community, prayer, relationships, service, dealing with authority and so on. As Novices we were taught early on that *Conversatio* -- this Benedictine vow -- includes poverty and chastity. So, although these two other vows, are not explicitly pronounced by us, they are part and parcel of our *following of Christ in religious community* guided by the Gospel and the life of Christ himself. We are also to live and accept the demands of a simple life and the obligations of consecrated chastity. In all the above sense, *Conversatio* is an all-inclusive vow. It points to our need for total conversion of life. All dimensions of our being, : heart-body-mind-and-soul need to be conformed to Christ. In this spirit, this month’s *Statio* theme is an invitation to examine all of my life, not just parts of it.

*Inspirational Note*: In this connection I recall a short essay 2 I came across some months back. It is written not by a Benedictine but by a student, a learner in a Creative-Writing Class. The

writer's beautiful image of "the garden of my life" spoke to me and it seems to fit here. She (writer) was looking at her life experiences through "the eyes of her heart." The actual title of her essay is "Wither" (fits our sizzling hot summer weather, right?). But I suggest that for our purposes we could look at it from the symbolism of -- "The Garden of My Life" ... maybe it could invite us to reflect on our own life, as ongoing *Conversatio* (conversion of life).

Here's an excerpt of the essay: <sup>2</sup>

*"... I decide to take a stroll along the garden of life, canopied at present by a generally sunny sky with occasional grey clouds here and there, my garden reveals a variety of flowering plants and fruit-bearing trees.*

*Many happily, evoke a pleasant feeling.*

*Low flowering plants blooming with little victories over self, humble accomplishments, generous blessings and simple joys and contentment form a carpet on both sides of a brick pathway. Several trees laden with fruits of beautiful memories, happy thoughts, gratitude for a loving family (mine; read "community) and true friendships as well as memorable surprises dot one side.*

*I sit on wooden bench and from there I see other plants and trees of varying heights on the other side. These ones seem to prick fiercely with their invisible thorns, giving a feeling of discomfort that makes the pleasant feeling, go away. I look closer and see patches of ivory "pain-settias" beckoning for continuous attention and lavender "sore-chids" thirsting for more water. There are also "anger-aniums" that seem to want to keep their roots in place forever.*

*At the far end are a few "fear trees" bursting with dark fruits of insecurity, worries, doubts and anxieties. At the end of the brick pathway, the white buds of peace of mind hanging from a pink trellis are being threatened by creeping vines of regrets, disappointments and guilt.*

*I study the landscape carefully and feel a strong desire to make my garden more beautiful. Life is short and I know I must take steps now if I must enjoy my garden more meaningfully in my twilight years. So I decide to weed out the undesirables. I know I should not water them any longer so they will finally dry up and fade away. In their place, I think I will plant forgiveness, clovers, fun flowers and "adventur-riums."*

*I know it will not be that easy, human as I am, but it always pays to try to make one's self a bit happier even in little ways. So in my garden there is one thing I know – wither may not always be bad or sad. In fact, it can even be my friend.*

Does this essay not remind you of our lifelong task of *Conversatio* -- to prune and fix the garden of our life? And "think RB": Chapter 4 on "The Tools for Good Works". See how many of the 74 enumerated (there are surely more..) tools there could equip us with means to transform our lives (similar to the quoted essay): (22) on anger; (23) grudges; (32) bless, not curse; (50)

wrongful thoughts; (58) change from evil ways; (65) not harbouring hatred; (66) not harbouring jealousy (67) no envy (68-9) no quarrelling; shun arrogance; (73) make peace (forgive). Using the tools in our monastic workshop will surely be a help to transform our lives into its intended beauty, as God wills it. Benedict established not only a school, but a workshop as well – where we are expected to roll up our sleeves and, “hands on”, work. Along the lines of improving our lives, “pulling up our socks”, there is the Rule to guide us. *Conversatio* means that everything about our life counts. Through time tested experience men and women who followed this way of life before us have succeeded to find God and happiness.

*Personal Reflection:* How is the landscape of your religious life right now? Are there facets you wish transformed? How? Life is short. Our religious life is even shorter. How and where can I sow seeds of transforming joy, peace and love to make my garden flourish and metamorphose into a happy and joyful haven?

[2.] *Conversatio*, Embracing a Cause and Direction Bigger than Ourselves  
Our Constitutions state: *Conversatio morum* demands that,

***“together with our community, we keep advancing more and more towards God and strive without ceasing for the perfection of charity.”<sup>3</sup> (love)***

*Sharing (“H2H”):* What could be a bigger life-project than God? What could be a larger-than-life calling than the call to love and charity – the service of others – inviting me to move beyond myself? God is the one towards whom we move, whose love brings us to an ever deepening relationship. Seeking and finding God... so many saints have embarked successfully on this most fascinating of adventures.

In this section, many of the ff. points are based on a talk of Veilleux (*“The Monastic Way of Conversion”*)<sup>4</sup> who points out that *“the reality of conversion is in itself something much deeper and much larger.”* I can only deal with a few points, at times adding my own comments.

In promising *Conversatio* we have embraced a cause, a program of life which is bigger than ourselves. Our journey of transformation / conversion situates us in a *great forward movement (sometimes we lose the momentum)* which goes beyond our individual selves.

Movements of transformation: some examples

1. Creation

Here I am reminded of our daily prayer in the Priory House community (*Oratio Imperata*) following Lauds where we speak of “creation of which we are a part”. We are part of the “groaning” of creation” for transformation, of the whole cosmic movement advancing toward renewal and fulfilment. We know that the same wounds inflicted on creation (exploitation of nature resulting in erosions, uncontrolled flooding, destruction...overheating and climate change and so on) reflect our own human woundedness and fragility. We bear the same suffering in our bodies longing to be transformed and redeemed (cf Rom 8:22).

## 2. Society

This collective movement towards transformation of which we are a part also embraces our world and society. As agents of change, we realize the need to participate actively in bringing about a just and peaceful society, where no one is excluded. Concretely, we face the never-ending challenge to help improve the lot of the poor that they may have the means to live a decent life in accordance with their God-given human dignity.

## 3. Life Transitions

This great process of conversion and transformation starts with our birth, and conversion is described as

*“any passage from one stage of growth to another until we reach the perfection to which we are called.” (Ibid.)*

Our long journey of conversion implies successive deep stages of transformation, a long process of conversion: from our Baptism (though for many of us baptized as infants this awareness seems often dim if not missing), our gradual growth in the faith; then as Sisters our entrance into religious life and profession, and the series of “conversions” we experience in our life.

## 4. Christ’s own stages of transformation

Veilleux’s uses Phil. 2:6-9 to show the model of God’s own *transformation to humanity*, emptying himself and being born in our likeness and coming as one who serves (a servant). In Jesus’ own journey of transformation (which, of course, unlike us, was not a conversion from sin to virtue) we see a slow process of “*growth in age, grace and wisdom and the radical change at his baptism*”, *the Spirit upon him*, his sense of identity (Father’s love, “beloved Son”), new insight into his mission, solitude in the desert, his ministry of healing, preaching, and so on.

*Reflection: A cause bigger than ourselves:* Does this great journey towards God truly fill my life? Am I contented with what religious life has given me so far? Does the love of Christ satisfy me – way beyond what the world has to offer: security, good food, education and career? Do I feel a sense of gratitude for all that this consecrated life has given me?

### [3.] *Conversatio*, An Ongoing Formation and Process of Conversion

Here the chapter on “Formation” (VI) of our Constitutions says:

***“Formation is a lifelong process of transformation into Christ.”*** (VI,2).

A lifelong process sounds formidable. Will we not get impatient along the way? Bored that things are not happening fast enough? Restless and confused – because it takes too long? Get out of focus and forget what the process is all about?

Will the goal not get dimmer and dimmer with my aging?

What about our community – will we get tired, collectively, waiting for the end results? Shall we persevere?

#### An Image of Hope

The image that comes to my mind is that of Jessica Cox. A Fil-Am woman with disability and much publicized human wonder, she defied all odds to be where she is now: a much accomplished and admired celebrity. Born without hands and arms she drives a car, does Taekwondo, plays the piano, pilots a plane and goes around the world giving talks to bring hope everywhere – in the Phil., for “Yolanda victims.” Did this “Epitome of Hope” as the News dubbed her (Mla Bulletin, March 11, 2014, B-11) evolve into such a stature overnight? No, from birth to babyhood, to adolescence and womanhood and as wife, it was a long process of transcendence and courage for her. Yet she exudes a quiet confidence and beauty about her in spite of genetic physical disability. We surely know of such courage everywhere, in different aspects of life, including our own pioneer Sisters who knew that growth takes time. Whether transforming institutions, establishing a system of excellence, or developing anything takes time. But most especially human growth takes time.

And so, if formation takes our whole life, so does transformation. There are no short-cuts here. In this process of **Conversion of life** there are no “instants.” Unlike in our world which is often almost addicted to quick and fast results, *Conversatio* seems to be a never ending cycle, a long process of ups and downs. But the life learnings are worth the wait. In this lifelong process of conversion we are forever being motivated to grow and improve.

The School of the Lord’s Service

In the RB we are permanently enrolled in the School of the Lord's Service" ("Dominici Schola Servitii") which Benedict established - Prol 45. Our Status: student (Novice). It is the RB's way of the Gospel that teaches us, shapes us, *forms* and reforms us, again and again, in order to *conform* our whole life into Christ's own way of loving (his heart), his way of thinking (mind), and of his way of serving (deeds).

In this School of the Lord's service, unlike in the secular world, there appears to be no real designations for "graduation diplomas" or "finishing" a course on "Formation and Transformation", major in Benedictine-Gospel values. Although in this RB monastic school we could count on God's grace and mercy (given freely and abundantly if we open our hearts) and, of course, the help and action of the Holy Spirit. And certainly, some genuine spiritual (non-academic) credits can be given for sincere effort, daily striving and perseverance in the desire to be truly formed and transformed.

#### [4.] *Conversatio* and The image of the Ladder

It is interesting to note that the overall RB reference given under *Conversatio morum* in our revised Constitutions (2002 Ed.) is RB 7, On Humility. A Chapter of Renewal material from the Generalate (# 11, 2004) points out that this chapter on Humility is given in connection with *Conversatio* not exactly because of the theme of "humility" but rather the symbolism of the *image of the "ladder"*. The rungs of the ladder is a symbol of our *Conversatio* seen as

#### a "*steadfast ascending and continuous growing*"

in our life of conversion and transformation into Christ. This ladder-image spoke to me (as many times, images do), in a way stronger than words. Did you ever experience climbing a guava or *camachile* tree as a child? How did it feel "to ascend?" And when you reached the top, what did you enjoy? The height. The fruits. Regardless of falling from a tree, we still did not give up climbing. Maybe this time higher still. So, images can be a help to reflection, prayer and meditation because they evoke a wordless encounter in the soul. As it is said "A picture speaks a thousand words."

Two other things spontaneously come to my mind. First, Richard Rohr's book, "Falling Upwards" which captures our path to growth despite the falls and failures. Second, Pope Francis' memorable interview where he was asked about his identity. According to the story, Francis went silent when the question was posed. And then he answered: "*I am a sinner*". And he spoke of God's mercy in His life. Even as a Pope, Francis does not shy from the fact that he, too, needs conversion and **transformation**. Consistently he proclaims to us our need for God's mercy and His love, of God's compassion and forgiveness in a world thirsting for human warmth and acceptance. Pope Francis connects to people — especially the poor — as a simple and humble servant of God.

## The New Saints: Icons of Transformation

On April 27, not even a month ago as of this writing, Pope Francis officiated at the canonization of two icons of transformation: Pope John XXIII and Pope John Paul II. Millions sat glued to the TV set to watch and be inspired by the lives of these two icons of the faith. As leaders of the Church, both transformed the Church and our lives as Christians. Clearly...they brought about change not only by their actions but by the witness of their own lives.

People love to say that both St. John XXIII and St. John Paul II were both charismatic, and they were hailed as two of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's great spiritual leaders. They transformed the face of the Church and were influential in the world. JP II left his clear mark on believer and non-believers alike.

Some 2-3 homilies ago, in our own Chapel, the priest quoted "You cannot give what you do not have" in Latin, repeating it 2x. M. Casey was saying to us the same in Rome, also in Latin, and where some Oblates and I were at a Congress: "Nemo dat quod non habet." On the weight of these words, the two new saints had charisma, but more than that they were witnesses to a holy life, lived in the following of Christ. Soon Paul VI will follow in his beatification, another giant of change and transformation. In December 2013 we celebrated 50 years (1963-2013) of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy). Just think of the far-reaching reforms and transformation of the liturgy and how much he had a hand in this big liturgical movement. It is no wonder that the Institute for Liturgy in the RP is named after him, Paul VI Institute of liturgy in Malaybalay, Bukidnon.

Since these three Popes have lived in our generation, conversion and sainthood seem palpable. It is God's work and Christian life is beautiful.

So far, we have touched on only 4 points in connection with *Conversatio*. They are not meant to be exhaustive but are highlights freely chosen for this conference. If you have the time you could review other aspects of *Conversatio* in our Constitutions.

Let us move on to the RB which, together with Scriptures, is the foundation of our Constitutions.

Let us now move on to the next book.

## **B. Rule of St. Benedict (RB)**

Looking up the different passages in the RB where the term *Conversatio* appears was an interesting exercise for me, -- to a certain extent, even enjoyable. Those who took up the RB courses of Sr. Aquinata will recall this method of learning. The result of my search: we find 10x

the use of the word **Conversatio** in the RB – running through different chapters: 2x in ch. 1; 58; 73 and 1x in the Prol. and ch. 21; 22; 63.

(Note: English trans. of the 1980 RB of Collegeville, MN) ... allowing for other english translations of texts which may sometimes differ. Here the intention is not exegesis but just to give a general overview of the occurrence of the word and to understand the gist of the text meaning in English. Below is the list of abbreviated texts.

The translated equivalent of **Conversatio** is given in bold letters, while the original Latin term referring to **Conversatio** is indicated below the English reference, likewise in bold letters:

[1.] On the term **Conversatio**:

1) Prol.49: “But as we progress in this **way of life** and in faith,”

“*Processu vero **conversationis et fidei***”

2) RB 1:3 “..the hermits, who have come through the test of **living in a monastery** for a long time”

“***conversationis** fervore novicio,...*”

3) RB 1:12 “...their disgraceful **way of life**” (a reference to the gyrovagues)

“*de...miserrima **conversatione**...*”

4) RB 21:1 “their good repute and **holy life**...”

“*fratres..... sanctae **conversationis***”

5) RB 22:2..”suitable to **monastic life**”

“*pro modo **conversationis**....accipiant*”

6) RB 58:1 “..newcomers to the **monastic life**”

“*veniens quis ad **conversationem**..*”

7) RB 58:17 (the novice’s reception into the community after the prescribed

time and test) "...promises

**fidelity to monastic life, ..."**

"promittat de ....**conversatione morum** suorum"

8) RB 63:1 "rank **in the monastery** according to the date of their entry

(mine: into **monastic life**) ..."

"ut **conversationis** tempus ....discernit"

9) RB 73:1 "some degree of virtue and the beginnings of **monastic life** ....."

"initium **conversationis** ... habere"

10) RB 73:2 "anyone hastening on to the perfection of **monastic life...**"

"ad perfectionem **conversationis** qui festinate"

**2.] On the term Convertere** (to be converted; conversion)

Prol 38 "the Lord assures...*I do not wish the death of the sinner but that he  
turn back to me and live*"

(Ezek 33:11) "*sed **convertatur** et vivat....*"

RB 2:18 basis of rank in the in the monastery .... **becoming a monk**

"**convertenti** ex servitio"

RB 7:30 "... a loving Father who waits for us **to improve (be converted)**

"*expectat nos **converti** in melius*"

RB 63:7 "all the rest should keep to the order of their entry (into **monastic  
life**)

"ut **convertuntur** ita sint"

Summary: 1.) the range of meaning of **Conversatio** in the RB brings out its flavour .

*fidelity to monastic life;*

*living in community under a Rule and a Superior (1:1);*

*living the monastic way of life and in faith;*

*monastic life;*

*the monastery.*

**Conversatio** is seen as all of the above and, accordingly, it includes observing all that has to do with the growth of monastic life. This embraces our life of prayer and work, Gospel-Benedictine values, etc.; and adapting our lifestyle, habits and practices that are suitable and proper to the monastic life.

2.) On the other hand, the term **Convertere** appears as

*turn back and live;*

*becoming a monk;*

*to improve;*

*monastic life;*

I invite you to pick out the words in the different texts that speak to you. If you wish, you could find time to share with an individual Sister or a group about your reflections on the indicated texts.

Public Profession of **Conversatio**

Our Constitutions (II 1, &2) translates our vow of **Conversatio** with the words “*to follow Christ in religious community*”. (An aside): just in this month of May we witnessed this public vow (**Conversatio**) pronounced at least 11x. What a joy and privilege! The context: 3 Jubilees - 1 Diamond, 1 Golden, 1 Silver, and 1 First Profession. And just yesterday, a couple of monks from the Abbey of Our Lady of Montserrat on Mendiola St., Manila, also renewed the same vow (“*conversion of life*”).

At the usual touching ceremony of First Profession, this one on May 18, 2014 in Marikina, we saw once more some symbolic changes which belong to our monastic Benedictine profession: the change of habit, and change of name. A lot of tears flowed from the parents and many of the guests. For us perpetually professed Sisters it was a time to recall our initial conversion of life. Further it was a moment of reflection on our response to the grace of transformation in our life.

With courage the three young women, as many before them, embraced the monastic Benedictine way of life. With determination they will start their journey of living a vowed life, among them, the great monastic vow of *Conversatio*. They will journey through uncharted paths with no other blueprint than the way of the Gospel. “To walk the way of Jesus”. What will sustain them on the way?

May many more young men and women receive the grace and courage to embrace this way of life.

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## II. *Conversatio*, An Effective Means of Formation

The phrase “Effective Means of Formation” brings to mind our Tenth General Chapter in the Great Jubilee Year 2000. The theme at that time was “Our MBS Response to the Signs of the Time through a **Transforming Community**. At this Chapter, four Statements of Directions were given. The third direction reads “Develop effective ways of formation”, and the first direction was on “Building **transforming** communities”. Without going into details I just want to say that that these topics remain as relevant for us today, 14 years after this 2000 Chapter.

### 1. How is our life of *Conversatio* an effective way of Formation?

Let me take a small quote again from the little leaflet on a Chapter of Renewal on *Conversatio Morum*:

*“Clearly, the way of **Conversatio Morum**, the Gospel way, is the way of most effective formation. Let us continue walking the way of the Gospel that “with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another, for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18).*

### 2. Essential Element of Our Life

Our nourishment through the Eucharist, our Divine office, our *Lectio*, good works, our prayer and service, the practice of Gospel-Benedictine values, etc.: *living all these practices is essential* to our **formation and transformation**, to our life of *Conversatio*. Our fidelity to all these elements which constitute our religious life will change us. We become what we eat (Eucharist),

“bread broken for others”. What we do shapes us and our attitudes.

*Conversatio*, is a potent means of ongoing formation towards spiritual growth and maturity (transformation). Of course, the action of the Holy Spirit is crucial. A coincidence? By the time you read this conference, the official Novena to the Holy Spirit would be well underway in all our churches. We pray for openness *to the action of the Spirit* for, as our Constitutions say, it is the Holy Spirit “*who will conform us to Jesus Christ and lead us to the perfection of love*”. (II,2)

Here we shall now focus mainly on the practice of one of our cherished spiritual traditions, namely, our *Lectio* in relation to our topic of ***Conversatio: Formation and Transformation***.

### III. Our Lectio: The Transformative Power of the Word

A. The ff. points are taken from a talk by Michael Casey, OCSO <sup>5</sup> which deals with the **formative** and **transformative** power of God’s Word and our practice of *Lectio*. Given in Rome at the *Third World of Congress of Oblates of St. Benedict* in October 2013, the talk was addressed to Delegates from 50 different countries. Among the international participants were a group of Oblates from the Philippines (and a couple of others represented 2 Pories of our Congregation). Incidentally, at this same Congress our own Sr. Mary John Mananzan, OSB was also a speaker. <sup>6</sup> I wish to share some of Casey’s points (in abbreviated form) regarding the power of the Word to form and transform us (conversion):

1. *Lectio Divina* which is a signature activity of the tradition coming from the Rule of St. Benedict brings us into an interactive contact with The Word which is as a powerful agent of change and transformation in our lives. ***Lectio Divina, does not merely inform, it seeks to reform so as to conform*** to Christ” (Hand-out, p.11)...the Word is spoken, we listen to it; the Word is received, internalised and then externalised in words from your own particular experience and in inspired actions prompted by your own situation. “This **process** is one of the agencies through which God works so that all may be saved” (1 Tim 2:4)..

2. So doing *Lectio* is participating in an activity bigger than ourselves – a grander enterprise. We become transformed personally and as a community (an evangelised and transformed community). When we are formed, we give what we receive (as a transformed and transforming community) being now equipped to proclaim God’s Word to the world. (deepening of our monastic-missionary vocation).

3. By receiving God’s Word we are beginning a process by which justice and peace are brought to fulfilment on earth (*Lectio* is also a participation in the transformation of our society). (Psalm 85) “*I will hear what the Lord God has to say, voice that speaks of peace, ...justice ....*” (cf.

whole Psalm which is printed here as an Appendix).<sup>7</sup>

## B. Some examples of the **formative and transformative** aspects of *Lectio*

1. When the Word impinges on our consciences it heightens our practical perception of right and wrong. This gives rise to the behavioural or **moral sense**.
2. Formation in Joy through Lectio: the Word enhances our hope by lifting up our hearts and spirits to God and so gives birth to prayer. Lectio Div. strengthens our faith and guides our behaviour and leads us to prayer.
3. *Lectio* is interactive and like being engaged in a living dialogue. The Word shapes us but we also have a role in shaping what we hear when God speaks. Whatever is received is received according to the measure of the receiver.”
4. *We are able to grasp the Word, not in its eternal totality but only in so far as it speaks to our present experience as individuals and as communities.....* what we hear applies to us, not necessarily to all. It is this interactive element of Lectio where we see lectio is also a source not only of knowledge of God but also leads us to **self-knowledge**, a deeper and more **comprehensive knowledge of our selves**, our true and **authentic self**.
5. St. Athanasius speaks of Scriptures as “a mirror in which we can see ourselves more clearly.” The Psalms, in this sense chasten us (quote adjusted to inclusive language...)

*On the Transformative Power of the Psalms we sing:*

*“ (The Psalms) become like a mirror to the person singing them, so that we might perceive ourselves and the emotions of our soul, and thus affected we might recite them. Indeed we who hear the one reading receive the song that is recited as being about us, and either, when we are convicted by our conscience, being pierced we will repent, or hearing of the hope that resides in God and of the succor available to believers – how this kind of grace exists for us we exult and begin to give thanks to God....and so on the whole each psalm ....concerns us, and the same (psalm) issue from us as our own words, for a remembrance of the emotions in us and a chastening of our life” (Athanasius Letter to Marcellinus, p. 12).*

## C. Other Points:

### 1. A Transforming Community

In *Lectio* we are moved to be personally, but also communally transformed and empowered to give what we have. We give further what we have received becoming evangelizers as we proclaim the joy in us in receiving the Good News.

Again, our Tenth General Chapter 2000 dealt with “Transforming Communities” (p. 46, Compiled Edition). The chapter’s concern was “*to form communities of peace and joy in order to manifest the reign of God more strongly in us and in the world.*”

Our chapter document expresses our own need for continuing formation as communities comes to the fore so that we may come to human and spiritual maturity. This maturity is characterized by authenticity, inner freedom, selfless love, readiness to serve, and willingness for genuine reconciliation.

We ask ourselves. Is a joyful community something elusive for us — or even maybe illusory? How can we really radiate joy in our time of hurry, stress and the threatening overwork? For most people, especially in a poor country like ours, so many of our privileges as religious (shelter, good food, travel by plane and cars, medical care, and so on) are not within reach. Few enjoy the stability of our lifestyle. But does this make us contented and joyful?

I smile quietly as I recall another homily in our Chapel. The priest said on “All Saints’ Day”: *Saints were men and women others wanted to be around. There are no grumpy saints. Teresa of Avila said: “A sad nun is a bad nun.” She also said: “I am more afraid of one unhappy sister than a crowd of evil spirits.”*

Surely, joy is the most infectious thing for witness.

## **2. Transforming A Culture of “Globalization of Superficiality”**

a) Our practice of *Lectio* is a call to become **prophetic** in that it can reverse what A Nicolas, SJ – Superior General, calls the “*Globalization of Superficiality.*”

He points out that western society no longer yearns for justice, wisdom or international peace. Instead, today, we desire and demand **entertainment**. We are bombarded with trivial detail through, for example, the 24-hr news cycle; the lives of “celebrities become the focal point of interest for hundreds of thousands of their followers....

b) “The fact is that the mass media may seem like harmless amusement, but we should be in no doubt that the more we expose ourselves to influence by these organs of social communications, the more our beliefs and values are shaped according to principles that are foreign to the Gospel....And more than that. Our capacity to seek a higher truth is debilitated the constant involvement with matters of no importance....Too much TV degrades our mental and spiritual faculties.”

### 3. Influence on our Behavior / Formation

Casey challenged us listeners: *Add up the hours spent each week with the radio, TV, the internet, and social networking. Compare these with the hours spent weekly in lectio divina. It should not be too difficult to calculate which of these sources of **formation** has the greater influence on our thought and, eventually, on the way we conduct ourselves.*

I wish to end with a prayer: (adapted, 2004 Chapter of Renewal No.11)

*Lord Jesus Christ, you called us graciously and we vowed to follow you in our religious community. Grant us your love and your strength that we may never tire in our journey of conversion. Fill us with your Holy Spirit so that we can live our vow of Conversatio Morum. May we, as a community, support each other in ongoing formation so that we may be transformed and reach the perfection of love. Amen.*

I wish you a fruitful Statio!

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Reflection Questions (choose 1 or 2 of your choice):

1. Change begins with me. Become the change you wish to see.

(In Private Prayer) Take the opening essay on the “Garden of My Life”. How is the landscape of your own religious life at present?

Have a personal Talk with the Lord about what you wish him to help you (form/enhance) in your life; weed out, prune, change (re-form) in your garden so that a transformation happens (the “beautiful flowers and trees”, originally there, could be restored).

If you are an artist, you might like to sketch your present landscape.

2. In the past 2-3 years, where have you experienced a “Transformation/Transfiguration Moment” in some aspect of your life?

3. Can you remember a particular time and stage of your journey : of *following of Christ in religious life (**conversatio**)* where you felt you flourished most / “bloomed” the most -- spiritually and as human person? What were the factors / agents of transformation that really helped you?

4. Which aspect of your initial formation do you feel needs to be most strengthened and sustained in your present stage of religious life?

5. A transformed and transforming community (Gen. Chapter) is known by its fruits. How can you contribute to your community's witness of joy and contentment in your place (station) of work and service?

6. Are there any "danger zones" that I perceive in my religious life which seem to distract me from seriously living a life of *Conversatio*?

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#### END NOTES

1. Constitutions , Conversatio Morum.
2. Published in The Phil. Star, Feb 8, 2014, Sat., "Lifestyle"  
Section by Cený Ungson.
3. Constitutions II, Norm 202
4. A. Veilleux, The Monastic Way of Conversion, American Book  
Review (37:1, March 1986, 34-45
5. M. Casey's Talk entitled: "The Word Became Text and Dwelt  
Among Us". The Oblate Listening in the World, 12 pages.
6. Sr. Mary John Mananzan's Talk: "*Listen With the Ear of Your  
Heart*" which also touched on *Lectio* and dealt with such aspects  
as "Conversion That Leads to Action".
7. Appendix: Psalm 85, Casey: " ... *when we receive God's Word we are beginning a  
process by which justice and peace are brought to fulfilment on earth*":

I will hear what the Lord God has to say,  
a voice that speaks of peace,  
peace for God's people and friends,  
and those who turn to him in their hearts,

Salvation is near for those who fear God,  
And his glory will dwell in our land.

Mercy and faithfulness have met;  
justice and peace have embraced.  
Faithfulness shall spring from the earth  
and justice look down from heaven.

The Lord will make us prosper  
and our earth shall yield its fruit.  
Justice shall march before God's face,  
and peace shall follow his footsteps.

The word became flesh. The Word became text so that those who receive the Word will become agents of mercy, faithfulness, justice and peace so that, ultimately, all may be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.

Sources:

1. Constitutions, Second Ed. 2002.
2. Rule of St. Benedict.
3. A Compilation of the General Chapter Documents (1976-2006) of the MBS.
4. Lecture by Armand Veilleux at the American Academy, 1984.  
Published in *The American Review* (37:1, March 1986, 34-45).
5. Address of Michael Casey at the Thurd World Congress of Oblates of St. Benedict "And the Word Was Made Text...."

