

An interview with Fr Ron Rolheiser OMI

You're an Oblate of Mary Immaculate and a systematic theologian. How would you describe your spirituality to someone who didn't know anything about your background?

I belong to a Missionary Congregation, the *Oblates of Mary Immaculate*, and I am very proud to wear that label. We have a proud history and a vibrant present. We were founded to serve the poor and to live and work on the margins where the poor are. For the most part, we have done that and continue to do that. For example, I come from Western Canada. The Oblates founded every diocese but two in the entire Canadian West. Today there is a vibrant diocesan church in all those dioceses, even though few Oblates remain. For our part, we've moved on, to new frontiers, to other edges, but we have left a vibrant church in our wake. And we still are where the poor are. Today, if you go into cities like London, Leeds, Edinburgh, and Dublin and go to those sections of the city where the police are afraid to go, you'll find the Oblates there. That's also true for the borders of Texas and California, just as it is true for those areas in the Philippines where Islam poses the most threat. You'll find the Oblates there, living with the people, in dialogue with the Islamic militants, helping them sort through their own issues of poverty. During the six years that I served on our General Council in Rome, we founded two new missions even though we were radically strapped for the resources to do so, but we began those missions because they were in the two poorest countries in Africa. I minister and write out of that missionary context.

In terms of our spirituality, our Founder, St. Eugene de Mazenod, was a pragmatist and an eclectic. He drew his spirituality from a variety of rich sources: Among others, he drew from the Sulpicians, who had formed him in the seminary; from St. Alphonse Liguori, the Founder of the Redemptorists; from St. Ignatius of Loyola, vis-à-vis the structure of religious life and apostolic community; and from the Carmelite tradition on prayer, contemplation, and asceticism. He was humble, wanting to rely on the giants who were already out there rather than on building only with his own ideas. And that has been, in a way, our Oblate modality ever since. We are missionaries on the ground, content to lean on the giants. It's been my way too. I am an unapologetic eclectic. My spirituality, both for my own life and for my teaching and writing, has been most deeply shaped by: St. Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, John of the Cross, Karl Rahner, Henri Nouwen, Robert L. Moore, and a lot of good novelists. So that list includes an Augustinian, a Dominican, a Carmelite, a Jesuit, a diocesan priest, and a Methodist layman.