

# CONVERSATIO 2012



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St. Scholastica's Priory  
Manila

Dear Sisters,

The theme of our General Chapter which is scheduled for September-October 2012 is: WHEREVER THE STREAM FLOWS, IT WILL BRING LIFE—CONVERSATIO MORUM AND NEW EVANGELIZATION. So it is but fitting that our monthly statio for the new year will be related to this theme.

The Prepcom referred us to the Lineamenta on the New Evangelization which has six themes that correspond to the sectors that call for a new evangelization. The topic of the monthly statio will be taken from these themes. I have requested some Sisters to write their reflection on any of these themes relating it to CONVERSATIO MORUM.

I have assigned myself the first topic which comes from the first theme CULTURE. I have zeroed in on the culture of consumerism which I think characterizes our time and has a great impact on our lives.

May our reflections on the statio themes for this year prepare our minds and hearts for the General Chapter that we hope will usher in a new spring in our Congregation.

When you read this editorial, we are most probably in our election chapter choosing our new Prioress for the next six years. I would like to take this occasion to thank all of you for your allowing me to serve you for the last eight years, for your cooperation and good disposition. I also welcome our new Prioress and wish her abundant blessings from God and Our Lady in her new task.

Sincerely yours,



Sister Mary John Mananzan, OSB

# STATIO CONFERENCE

## ON CONSUMERISM, NEW EVANGELIZATION AND CONVERSATIO

By: Mother Mary John Mananzan, OSB

### INTRODUCTION:

We live today in a rapidly changing world. To face the challenges of this world, Pope Benedict XVI has placed the topic of the new evangelization at the top of the Church's agenda. This term is relatively new and its objective is to reawaken the zeal and ardor of the first evangelizers in proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ. According to the Lineamenta, it is not merely re-evangelization but rather a "new evangelization; new in its ardour, methods, and expression. (Lin. Ch. 1) It is not just redoing what has been inadequately done in the past but "it is the courage to forge new paths in responding to the changing circumstances and conditions facing the Church in her call to proclaim and live the Gospel today." (ibid)

As Benedictines this new evangelization is necessarily linked with our vow of conversatio morum which is our vow to continual conversion, always beginning anew and forging ahead. It is with the zeal of this vow that we participate in the new evangelization that the Church is calling us to commit ourselves in our times.

### CONSUMERISM

Our present society is characterized by a quantum leap in technological advancement but likewise by a profound secularism that has affected people's capacity to listen and understand the message of the Gospel. One of the characteristics of this secular society is: CONSUMERISM.

As human beings, we have to consume in order to survive—we need houses to live in, food to eat, and other material things to let us live comfortable and safeguard our well-being. We need to strive to fulfill these basic necessities to live a proper human life with dignity.

Consumerism is something else. In the encyclical Centesimus Annus, Venerable John Paul II refers to the phenomenon of consumerism as a lifestyle which "maintains a persistent orientation towards 'having' rather than 'being.'" It is an insatiable urge to acquire more and more beyond one's needs. It is wanting to "keep up with the Joneses" even if it means getting into debts that one cannot pay. It is measuring one's value by one's possession, social standing, position of power. On the side of manufacturers, consumerism is a mentality where providers and producers spend time competing for existing market share and replacing products that are still functional. It creates a "disposable, throw away" attitude and a craving for instant gratification.

## **IMPACT OF CONSUMERISM ON RELIGIOUS LIFE**

Although the extent of consumerism and consumerism mentality in the convent would not be as bad as in secular society, we cannot deny that we also have been influenced by consumeristic attitudes, values, and practices:

### **1) VALUE IN HAVING RATHER THAN BEING.**

When we have time to reflect, for example during our Statio days or Retreat, we have to admit that we, religious, also succumb to measuring worth of people by what they have rather than by what they are. We do have different ways of treating people because of their social status, level of education, wealth, etc. We are deferential to people with status and we do tend to condescend to those we think are lower than us in any way. For example, do we lose our patience, get irritated, actually say hurtful things to people we think higher than us? How come we cannot exercise the same control of our impatience or irritation when we deal with employees, helpers, etc.? Even when we look at ourselves we tend to compare ourselves with others like—she has a doctorate, I don't have. She comes from a prominent family, I come from a poor family. She is popular, I am not, etc. Our self esteem seems to depend on these things which we have or do not have rather than on the fact that we truly are all children of the same God.

### **2) ACQUIRING MORE THAN ONE'S NEEDS**

This consumeristic attitude, I believe, is one of the factors that cause our environmental crisis. If human beings only get from the earth what they need, the earth would be able to supply all the needs of humankind for all ages. But since for the sake of profit, industries have to have surplus production, they also have to get from the earth more than what people need. And so the ecological crisis that we are facing today. It is said that the indigeneous people of the mountain province have the custom of getting kangkong from a lake when they go home after work to eat during their supper. But they only get what they need for the supper because they know other people will also need to have some for their supper. That is what they call "sapat lang" mentality. Wouldn't it be wonderful if this mentality could be adopted by everyone?

We, religious, have also to admit that we do acquire more than what we need. We do make resolutions to get rid of our superfluties but it is really difficult to maintain a truly simple lifestyle. Even in the matter of food. Surely our meals are more than enough and have greater variety than people outside. And yet, don't we catch ourselves complaining about it?

### **3) THE LURE OF ADVERTISEMENTS**

One of the greatest promoters of consumerism is advertisement. And we see how preposterous their claims are – about getting that super abundant, supper glossy hair, getting rid of pimples in seconds, wiping away colds and coughs like magic, etc. Again we are not totally immune from the deceptions of advertisements and of colonial mentality—preferring branded goods, imported toiletries, etc. Our campaign in our schools for integrity and truth may help in providing an antidote to deception and lies that is actually at the core of advertisements.

#### **4) CUT-THROAT COMPETITION**

The consumerist mentality promotes cut-throat competition because companies use all means to capture their share of the market. So they resort to deceptive advertisements, bribery and political maneuvers to gain control of the market.

Again we cannot say that competition does not exist in religious convents. Maybe it is lesser in virulence and certainly it is not for market shares but maybe it is about having influence, wanting to be perceived as a better principal, a better directress, a better superior than our predecessor. It is not unknown to us that a newly appointed administrator can discontinue all the projects of her predecessor instead of building on them. Professional rivalry is not totally absent in religious institutions.

#### **5) INSTANT GRATIFICATION**

Another product of consumerism is instant gratification. That is why there are so many instant products—instant coffee, instant noodles, instant this and instant that. There is a veering away from natural processes because these take too long.--or an example, the unhealthy way of breeding chicken for 40days and injecting them with hormones and enclosing them in smaller cages so they can get fat quickly. Since there are many choices, people go from one to the other tasting this and discarding that and preferring those that gratify their wants in the shortest time possible.

Again we are not unaffected by this tendency. In fact when we are looking at the TV, we keep on changing channels to see to what pleases us or it can happen that we are looking at three programs at the same time, fleeting from one channel to the other. I think my computer gets confused because when I get impatient with delay, I push so many buttons that the computer no longer knows which command it should obey.

I think here is where we can exercise the virtue of patience, practice the asceticism of waiting and choosing natural processes rather than accelerated artificial ways of answering our needs or wants.

#### **CONSUMERISM AND CONVERSATIO**

Since as we have seen and admit in the depths of our hearts that we are also infected by the consumeristic virus with its attendant erosion of values, it is clear that this is an area where we can put into practice our vow of conversatio morum. We need a continuing awareness of our love of comfort, of the seduction of material things, of our competitive tendencies, of our lack of patience, of our lack of asceticism, of our tendency towards superfluities, and so forth. These actually show that in actual practice we are not really “preferring Christ above all things.” And as Bishop Victor Dammertz, OSB defines conversatio morum, this is exactly what conversatio morum means: “The life of a monk has meaning only when he is “seized by Christ” and prefers nothing to the love of him. He knows that he has not yet reached his goal and remains on the path to the great goal of a life lived in the strength of the Gospel.” To succumb to consumerism is precisely what is meant “to prefer the mammon.” Our conversatio gives us the opportunity

according to Joan Chittister “to demonstrate to the postmodern world that happiness is found in God and God is found in relationship with others—community.” Struggling against consumerism is not a one time battle but is a continuous one and conversatio morum according to Sr. Aquinata is “constant conversion, going ahead, always beginning anew. I can never say I have arrived” but it is also great that God gives me constantly the chance for beginning again.”

## **QUESTIONS :**

1. What consumeristic tendencies can we find in our community?
2. Which of these tendencies do I personally struggle with?
3. What concrete steps can we do to overcome these tendencies?
4. What new features can we adopt in our new evangelization to help overcome consumerism in our society?

**Sermon For The Epiphany of Our Lord**  
**Isaiah 60:1-6; Matthew 2:1-12**  
**"Towards The Light - By The Word"**  
**By: Rev. Richard J. Fairchild**

The journey of the magi by the light of a star to find the one born King of the Jews is a part of the Christmas Story. In fact, the day of their arrival in Bethlehem, the 12th day of Christmas, is for almost half of the world's Christians the day that they celebrate Christmas. I don't know about you, but for me many of my favorite Christmas Cards feature a picture of the wise men travelling by camel through a star lit night, one star dominating the sky, arriving on the crest of the hill overlooking Bethlehem. I have always found that image very special - I can see it so well in my mind: the journey is almost done. it's been a long trip, fraught with peril and yet full of hope, and now the town of Jesus' birth, and the stable and manger, are just a few more hundred yards away, and I can imagine the cold crisp air, and the beautiful sky, and the feeling of peace and satisfaction that the magi must have had as they looked down from the star in the sky to the building lying below its light.

For most of us the story of the wise men, the magi, is dominated by the part of the scene I have just described, it is dominated by the star, and by the wonder of how it pointed the way to Christ, for the three kings - the three wise men. It is a good image to have, it helps make the whole story of Jesus' birth and his unique place in the plan of God even more special. The Rev. Doctor John Moses once pointed out to me that the wise men were not just led to Jesus by the star that they saw in the East. In fact, he said, the Wise Men did not find the one they sought, they did not discover Jesus and worship him, until they had done one other very important thing - until they had consulted The holy Scriptures, until they had asked Herod, and Herod had asked the chief priests, and teachers of the law, where the Christ was to be born.

John said to me that he had read the story of the magi hundreds of times - but never really taken in, or thought about this part of the story for the longest time. Then, the thought came to him that the same thing that was true for the wise men, is true for us: - we may know the way to Christ, what direction to travel in, and we may have a general idea of where he lays, but

until we, like the wise men, consult the scriptures or those who know the scriptures well, we cannot find Jesus and worship him as we would like to.

I confessed to John that this part of the story of the wise men had not really penetrated my consciousness before either - yet, now that it had been pointed out to me, it seemed very obvious and very significant. It is the word of God that leads us to God, as much as it is the light that God gives for guidance, be it the light of a star, or, more commonly, the light that shines through another person's life - the light of peace, joy, hope, and love. Two things, in other words, are required, if we are to make a connection with our Lord, - the willingness to track down the light that God gives to see where it leads, - and the willingness within that tracking down, to turn to the Word of God, and take the advice it gives about how to find and how to follow the Lord.

The hymn we sang before the sermon -- Shine on Star, which is mainly concerned about the star, or the light of God's presence, alludes to the linkage between God's light, God's guidance if you will, and the scriptures when it says in the language of prayer: LET GOD'S WORD GIVE LIFE TODAY. It's a good prayer to pray, Let God's word: the Word made flesh - Jesus our Lord give life today, Let God's word, the word of scripture - the inspired word, give life today. We need the word to find Jesus today, as much as we need the light that is cast by faithful disciples and witnesses to Jesus Christ, our saviour and our Lord.

My experience and that of Rev. Moses shows something that I believe is true of us all - it shows that it is easy to miss things of importance because we are looking at other things or concentrating on other issues. We easily overlook things of importance, things that help us become happier, more faithful, and more fulfilled - while at the same time focusing on things that make us unhappy, less faithful and less fulfilled. It seems that we all operate a bit like Sherlock Holmes, who once, when asked why he could not remember a certain event replied: "because my dear Watson, my brain can contain only so much information, and whenever I learn something new, something old must go."

As you start this New Year - my prayer is that you will get rid of any old things that are holding you down and preventing you from discovering the abiding presence of God in your life. And it is my prayer that you will replace these things by a careful examination of the word of God and a long hard look at the stars in the sky - for when you do this you will find the Christ in your midst. This is what the magi did when they followed the star, and when they consulted the scriptures and the wisdom about them held by the chief priests and teachers of the law. They focused on the right stuff, they listened to the right voices, and they consulted the right sources and they did this while actually dealing with a man who had nothing but evil upon his heart - King Herod... and so they ended finding Christ and were able to bless him and be blessed by him. Which just goes to show, my friends, that for the righteous, even the words of evil people can point the way to God, and to the Christ whose spirit lives in our midst. Can you find the good in the midst of what seems to be all bad? Can you find the light of God in the world around you and the presence of Christ in the people you meet?

A while back I read an article that helps illustrate the importance of having the correct focus in how we look upon the events and the people in the world around us. The article was on RAP MUSIC and was titled "Media and Parent Expect Worst, but Rap has Positive Message." The point of the article was very simple. It was that while RAP music is accused on filling the

heads of young people with garbage, it also can fill the heads of young people with virtue. The author of the article, a young man by the name of Todd Simmons, points out that if anyone really listens to RAP, they would quickly discover that while some of it is full of violence and openly encourages racial discrimination and sexual bigotry, other RAP music, in fact a great deal of it, has exactly the opposite content. While 2 LIVE CREW have actually gone to court on obscenity charges, their songs and performances are so bad -- artists like BPD and Queen Latifah helped create a STOP THE VIOLENCE MOVEMENT and have participated musically in anti-drug campaigns and have encouraged in their songs environmental awareness and caring human relationships. Todd Simmons states "if you believe that people who listen to violent rap artists are more likely to become violent, then you should also believe that people who listen to rap artists who project positive values will be less violent and show positive values in their everyday lives - sort of like monkey see, monkey do." In other words, it is not the entire RAP musical scene that is a problem - it is what individuals chose to listen to and concentrate on within the RAP world.

In the same way it is not the world outside that depresses us and makes us feel that there is little hope for the future - nor is it the world that makes us feel that God is not present with us and that Christ's spirit is not dwelling with us, it is what we chose to look at and focus on in the world that creates those problems and makes it seem to us as if the faith of others is nothing but a misguided delusion. Everyone knows about "self fulfilling prophecies". We know for example if a child constantly hears that he is stupid, he will most likely act stupidly and that if he hears that he is smart he will most likely act in a smart way.

In the same way, my friends, if you constantly think about negative things or believe that only negative things are going to happen, you will become a kind of emotional black hole, a person in which all good things quickly vanish without leaving a trace of joy behind, and from which nothing good can escape or be seen. By what you choose to look at, and what you choose to listen to, you determine whether you end up being a vortex of despair, or a radiant star in the heavens of God. Those who expect the economy to get worse, will not invest in it, and the economy will indeed get worse. Those who believe Canada is doomed as a united country will likely tell this to all their friends, and thereby create an environment wherein any positive steps that are taken by others are belittled and doomed to failure. Those who listen to those who claim it is futile to give food to the hungry and aid to the oppressed, most likely will provide any help themselves, and so in fact help hunger and oppression to continue. What you expect is most likely what you will get; What you believe about yourself is mostly likely what you will become; And what you think God is doing for you and for the world is all that you will most likely see him doing.

If you feel trapped, alone, and have little hope in your life, it is time for you to develop a new view, and look at new things and listen to different songs. As you go into this new year remember this, many, many, good things are happening all around you, and that good things lie in store for all those who believe that good can and will happen, and that good is always triumphant over evil. God is present to support and guide all those who listen to his word and who look for the light he gives in the lives of his saints and in the stars of the heavens themselves. The wise men found Jesus because they watched for the signs of God, and listened to God's word. Praise be to God for his word, and for his light, and for the gift of faith which allows them to work in our lives. AMEN.