

CONVERSATIO 2007



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St. Scholastica's Priory
Manila

Dear Sisters,

Our General Chapter has enjoined us to make a serious study of our Constitutions. Our echo Priory Chapter recommended that the CONVERSATIO take as theme for this year, Our Constitutions. I think that it would need more than a year to do this. So I have chosen the following topics to be the themes of our monthly statio for this year, 2008 and continue with the rest of the Constitutions next year.

MONTH	TOPIC	AUTHOR
1. JANUARY	HISTORY: OUR FOUNDER - ANDREAS AMHREIN	SR. MARY JOHN MANANZAN
2. FEBRUARY	HISTORY: BAPTISM OF BLOOD IN EAST AFRICA	SR. FE ANDREA COLLANTES
3. MARCH	CHAPTER I: CHARISM “The fundamental characteristic of our way of life is seeking God in community under a rule and a superior.”	SR. LUMEN GLORIA DUNGCA
4. APRIL	CHAPTER II: PROFESSION - CONVERSATIO MORUM “Conversatio Morum encompasses our whole life as Missionary Benedictines.”	SR. IRENE DABALUS
5. MAY	PROFESSION - CONSECRATED CHASTITY “Consecrated Chastity is a sign of God’s reign in the world already begun and still to come.”	SR. JOSEFINA NEPOMUCENO
6. JUNE	PROFESSION - POVERTY “Enriched by His love, we have left all things in order to be totally available for God and His Kingdom.”	SR. MARY THOMAS PRADO
7. JULY	PROFESSION - OBEDIENCE “The goal of obedience is union with God and the fulfillment of his saving will in the world.”	SR. MARY BERNARD LANSANG

8. AUGUST	PROFESSION - STABILITY “The unshakable fidelity of the Lord gives us confidence and courage to persevere in our vocation.”	SR. HILDA BUHAY
9. SEPTEMBER	CHAPTER III: PRAYER “The Benedictine way of life helps us come to a keen awareness of God’s presence and to an attitude of unceasing prayer.”	SR. MARY BELLARMINE BERNAS
10. OCTOBER	CHAPTER III: PRAYER - EUCHARIST “In the Eucharist which is the center of our liturgical life, we encounter the Risen Lord in a special way...Here above all, our community is ever renewed and united.”	SR. BAPTISTA BUSMENTE
11. NOVEMBER	PRAYER - DIVINE OFFICE “The Opus Dei bears witness to the priority of rendering glory to God. It is itself a proclamation of faith.”	SR. RUTH BARTONICO
12. DECEMBER	PRAYER - LECTIO DIVINA “Lectio Divina intensifies our relationship to Christ and deepens our understanding of his message.”	SR. PIA LANSANG

May I still wish you a blessed Advent!

Lovingly yours,



Sister Mary John Mananzan, OSB

S T A T I O C O N F E R E N C E

EVALUATION OF OUR APOSTOLATES

by

Sister Mary Bellarmine Bernas, OSB

Abba Nilus said:
Do not want things to turn out
as they seem best to you,
but as God pleases.

Then you will be free of confusion
and thankful in your prayer.

Sayings from the Desert Fathers

I. INTRODUCTION

The theme for this month's Statio Conference is taken from the section on Evaluation of our Apostolates as found in the Message of the Eleventh General Chapter and the Sixteenth Manila Priory Chapter. These sections are quoted below to refresh our memories.

A. THE MANDATE FROM THE ELEVENTH GENERAL CHAPTER 2006

EVALUATE APOSTOLATES IN THE LIGHT OF MISSIONARY COMMITMENT

“Today, new needs of people arising from new situations in the world are calling us for a response, and new mission fields are beckoning to us for our missionary service. Yet we are committed to our existing apostolates and institutions.

*It is therefore imperative that we discern wisely
where we can best make use of our limited resources
according to our charism,
the signs of the times,
and the missionary needs of the local church.*

*This requires an honest and courageous evaluation
of the impact of our current apostolates and mission,
their witness value
and the necessity of our presence.*

Consequent decisions and the readiness for adjustments to new methods of evangelization, or letting go totally, may be demanded of us.

- a. The Generalate and priories will make an evaluation of their apostolates within the next six years.*
- b. Each priory is responsible for developing evaluation tools suitable to its particular apostolates.*
- c. In balancing the needs of present apostolates and the need of making new foundations, the urgency of the need should be the decisive factor.”*

B. THE RESPONSE OF THE SIXTEENTH MANILA PRIORY CHAPTER

- 1. “that the Priory Government, through its implementing arms, evaluate our apostolates in the light of our missionary commitment. The tools for evaluation will take into account:
 - i. “our limited resources according to our charism, the signs of the times, and of the missionary needs of the local church.”*
 - ii. “The impact of current apostolates and mission, their witness value and necessity of our presence.”*
 - iii. “readiness for adjustment to new methods of evangelization or letting go totally . . . “ of some of our apostolates.**
- 2. Within two months after the end of the Priory Chapter, the Priory Government will create a committee to study the turn-over of three diocesan schools managed by our sisters (namely, St. Alphonsus Catholic School, Holy Family Academy, and St. Peter’s College) to the diocese or to another religious congregation. The study must be finished by April 2008.”*

II. REFLECTION

About a year ago, when I received my assignment for this year’s *statio conference*, I wondered how I could write a spiritual conference on the topic “Evaluation”. The word seemed so technical and did not suggest anything that would be fitting for a day of prayer and recollection. When the delegates to the Priory Chapter were told to choose the commission they wanted to join, I quickly chose the Commission on Evaluation, hoping that I would get some ideas for the *statio conference* as we discussed the directive of the General Chapter. (Sr. Soledad was glad that I made it my first choice because nobody seemed to be eager to join this commission.) At the end of the chapter, I still did not have a clue as to how to start my assignment.

From time to time, I looked for related articles or searched the internet for related topics – evaluation of ministries or apostolates, evaluation and change, discernment, attitudes towards evaluation --- detachment, wisdom, integrity, etc. Not one of the articles that I read triggered a starting point for this conference. Not one of those reading materials addressed the topic of evaluation of our apostolates to my satisfaction.

Finally, having nowhere else to turn, I asked myself why it is so important that we as a priory should spend one *statio* day to “ponder about” and “pray about” the evaluation of our apostolates. Then in a flash I realized that each one of us in our priory are stakeholders in our apostolates and as such this mandate of the generalate and priory should be very close to our hearts. Our commitment to the evaluation of our apostolates is a key factor in the successful outcome of both the process of evaluation and the process of implementation of the results of the evaluation. No one of us can just stand aside and say

“I am glad I have nothing to do with it.”

“Let the PG take charge.”

“Let the implementing arms do what they are assigned to do.”

“It’s a good thing I don’t belong to any of the three schools being evaluated.”

“It does not matter to me, one way or the other, if we give up those schools.”

“I am against giving up those schools but what can I do.”

“I will refuse to be a member of any evaluating committee.”

“I am too old to care really.”

On this *statio* day we could spend some prayerful time to ask the Holy Spirit to gift us with the right attitude towards the evaluation of our apostolates. Our community sharing could help us arrive at the right perspective in looking at our apostolates in the context of the changes in the world and within our own country and vis-à-vis the personnel situation in our priory.

As we try to make ourselves open to the voice of God through our sisters, let me quote to you some lines from John Gardner who wrote that our institutions today are caught in the crossfire of “*uncritical lovers*” and “*unloving critics*”.

“*Uncritical lovers*” smother their institutions in the embrace of death, loving their rigidities more than their promise, shielding them from life-giving criticism. They are believers in renewal of spirit who refuse to make the necessary changes.”

The “*unloving critics*” are the “critics without love,” reformers who do not understand and love authentic religious life. They are skilled in demolition but untutored in the arts by which human institutions are nurtured and strengthened and made to flourish.”

During this *statio* day, let this be our hope and our prayer that we will stand together as “*critical lovers*” of our priory to which God has called each one of us. And as we await the results of the evaluation of our apostolates, let us heed the admonition of Abba Nilus who said:

Do not want things to turn out
as they seem best to you,
but as God pleases.

Then you will be free of confusion,
and thankful in your prayer.

Points for discussion:

1. How do you understand Abba Nilus' admonition as quoted in this conference?
2. No one of us would like to be an "uncritical lover" or an "unloving critic" of our priory. How does one show herself to be a "critical lover"?

Be Filled with Enthusiasm and Sing God's Glory

From the Book

SADHANA OF THE HEART

by Gurumayi Chidvilasananda

(Excerpts)

Enthusiasm dances in the bloodstream of the great saints and sages and all the true leaders of the world. Enthusiasm enables a person to realize his goal. Enthusiasm makes you soar. When you become aware of your own great capacity for enthusiasm, you realize there is something sacred within you. Why is this?

The answer is contained in the word itself. If you trace it back to its roots, you discover that the word *enthusiasm* comes from the Greek *enthusiasmos*. The syllable *en* means, “in,” “within,” or “possessed.” And *theos* means “God.” So the word *enthusiasm* literally means “carrying God within” or “possessed of the inner Lord.” When you are filled with enthusiasm, you are filled with the energy of God, with great power, with amazing grace. To become fully conscious of what you are carrying inside is to inherit all of heaven. This awareness frees you completely from worry. You are filled with God. What can possibly dampen your spirit? This new understanding of the word *enthusiasm* evokes a deep longing within you.

The question is, how can you make this divine quality stream forth within you? By singing God's glory. When you sing God's glory, you become filled with enthusiasm. And when you are filled with enthusiasm, then you sing God's glory as spontaneously as water flows in a stream after a bountiful rainfall. Each part of the New Year's Message is complete in itself, and each one also leads to the other.

In his book, *Play of Consciousness*, Baba Muktananda says, “Enthusiasm and energy are very helpful friends in this world.” You must have noticed how you are spontaneously drawn toward people who are enthusiastic. When someone is full of exuberance and vigor, you want to be around them. Which one creates greater *rasa*, a greater flavor of life: the sight of a dry withered leaf or a fresh green leaf? If you see a depressed person and a happy person, which one of them generates a feeling of newness inside you? If you come across a gloomy face and a happy face, with whom do you want to talk? If you have a choice between two conversations – one that is depressing, sullen, and argumentative, or one that is filled with energy, laughter, good will and eagerness – toward which conversation will you gravitate? There is an inherent impulse in every human being to move forward to a place, to a person, or to a time that is sparkling with enthusiasm, with God's energy.

To be filled with enthusiasm means to give yourself completely to God and let God steer the wheel of your life. Everyone wants his or her life to be full of purpose. In fact, many people ask, “What is the purpose of my life? How can I know the purpose of my life?” Everyone is looking for a way to live that is meaningful, dedicated, and full of wonder, *camatkara*. Everyone wants to be full of happiness and love, to lead a harmonious life with great friends, sweet pleasures, a feeling of abundance, and great wisdom, uninterrupted by loss. Everyone really does want all this.

However, most people seem to look for meaning outside themselves. They think that abundance, purpose, and pleasure are hiding somewhere else in the world, and they need to go and hunt for them. They forget that each human being is the pivotal factor in his or her own life. Each person holds within himself that which he is seeking. In order to make your life the way you want it to be, you have to become filled with enthusiasm. You have to become the perfect vessel to carry the golden light of grace.

You don't have to leave it to fate to decide what the coming year will hold for you. If you make the best of each moment, then 1996 can become the greatest and most wonder-filled year of your life. *Be filled with enthusiasm and sing God's glory.*

Once, in response to a seeker's question, Baba Muktananda said:

Whatever you acquire in the outer world will ultimately leave you weak and feeble. There is only one thing that will make you stronger day by day, which will release more and more enthusiasm within you, and that is the Guru's grace. As you pass into meditation through your Guru's grace, you find your life becoming sweeter and happier.

To visualize enthusiasm being released within you through the grace of the Guru is a great *dharana*, a centering, technique.

Baba was always filled with enthusiasm. That was one of the things that drew people to him. Enthusiasm poured out of Baba – when he was in the kitchen cooking, when he was playing with a child or talking to people, when he was looking at the ocean or giving scholarly commentary on a scripture, when he was studying alone at his desk, or when something was humorous. Just as the ocean roars, enthusiasm roared within Baba. Whether he was watering a plant or giving instructions to a sevite, whether he was gazing out at space or sitting quietly in the courtyard, you could experience unbounded enthusiasm streaming from him, washing you clean, filling you with a sense of the glory of life. You felt moving inside you when you watched him, whether he was in action or just sitting quietly.

When Baba strolled through the gardens or sang the name of God, when he gave profound advice or greeted a visitor, you could feel his unimpeded enthusiasm, the exuberance that was dancing with him. Whenever you caught even a glimpse of his brilliant orange robes on the other side of the upper garden of Gurudev Siddha Peeth, our mother *āśram* in India, you felt a tremendous flood of enthusiasm pouring out of him. From the first thing in the morning till the last thing at night, Baba's entire day was lived with enthusiasm. He was always bright-eyed and brightly smiling. His entire being pulsated with great wonder. When you saw him, you wanted to know more about life. Enthusiasm is what Baba taught. He would say, "Do your work with enthusiasm. Chant God's name with enthusiasm. Let there be enthusiasm in your being." Baba's enthusiasm was contagious. To be with Baba was to be full of Baba's joy.

A scholar of Kashnir Shaivism, commenting on the teachings of the sage Utpaladeva, writes, "Wonder is the essence of life. To be incapable of wonder is to be as dead and insensitive as a stone. We live and enjoy the vitality, *virya*, of Consciousness to the degree in which we are sensitive to the beauty of things around us." Each aesthetic experience should be enjoyed mindfully and with a disciplined intention. This intention is directed toward heightening the general level of our sensitivity to beauty. In that way, every bit of beauty that you encounter

will bring you a little closer to a sustained sense of wonder. This wonder is the pulsation of Consciousness that permeates all experience. The scholar continues his commentary, “A yogi at first practices to penetrate into this state of wonder through the medium of objects more easily pleasing and then, as he makes the progress, he learns to discern that same sense of wonder in himself, even when confronted with the foulest of things or in times of great trouble and pain.”

This is what Baba Muktananda continually taught us. Whenever we got upset as young children, Baba would call us and say, “Look! Isn’t this stone beautiful!” And he would look at the object and think, “A mere stone.” He would say, “Look, this is so beautiful!” We looked at him and looked at the stone. And then he would laugh, and within a few seconds we would be laughing, too. As soon as we started laughing, we could see that the stone was in fact so beautiful. Baba showed us the great wonder in simple things. And he completely changed our mood, our way of thinking, by infusing great wonder into these simple things.

We found out that people can have dramatic experiences if they continue meditating. But we noticed that our meditations weren’t that deep or dramatic. We were just sitting quietly. So we became a little restless and we walked around the *āśram* with long faces. We felt our meditations weren’t really going that well. Baba would unfailingly find out what we were feeling. You see, the *āśram* was very small in those days and Baba had an invisible magnifying glass—at least that’s what we thought. And so he invited us to come to the courtyard where he was sitting, and he asked, “How’s your meditation going?”

Of course, we weren’t eager to describe our meditation experiences. So we just sat there and looked at him.

He said, “Your meditation is great?”

Finally, we said with downcast eyes, “No.”

“No? Your meditation is not good? What do you mean? When do you meditate?” Baba asked lots of questions, and we tried to answer them as well as we could. Then he said, “That’s wonderful! You are so fortunate! You are so lucky!”

We thought, “Really? Just to be able to sit quietly is wonderful?” We had never realized that. Just to sit quietly is meditation. That really is a great attainment, just to sit quietly for a couple of hours. We became infused with this novel idea that to sit quietly for two hours without going anywhere was a dramatic experience.

Baba continued to say how wonderful it was and how fortunate we were, and we completely melted into his enthusiasm—about our boring meditation sessions. And then we went back to our daily meditations with so much enthusiasm. In fact, we woke up singing because we were so happy to go and sit for meditation—just to sit quietly for a couple of hours.

So you start with simple things, and then you carry your enthusiasm to greater and greater realms. You carry the wonder-filled attitude into every moment, into every action, and you experience your own boundless enthusiasm.

...to be continued