

CONVERSATIO 2008



MONTH : January
NUMBER : 1
VOLUME : XXXVIII

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Editorial
page 2

Statio Conference

OUR FLAWED FOUNDER: FR. ANDREAS AMRHEIN
by Sister Mary John Mananzan, OSB
page 3

...continuation

Be Filled with Enthusiasm and Sing God's Glory
From the Book
SADHANA OF THE HEART
by Gurumayi Chidvilasananda
(Excerpts)
page 8

* * * * *

St. Scholastica's Priory
Manila

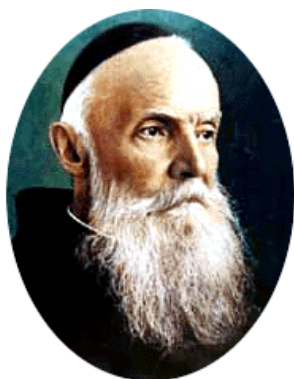
Dear Sisters,

I wish you all a New Year of Hope! When we think of New Year, we think of New Year's Resolutions which started me on this reflection. I was asking myself: Why is it so hard for us to change? Of course some people don't change because they were not made aware of the areas they should change. Believe it or not some of us are stuck at the third Johari window, the one where everyone or many know something about you which you yourself do not know—the so-called BLIND SPOTS. The rather gross example I give is B.O. Everyone smells you but you cannot smell yourself! There are also psychological or spiritual B.O.'s. Everyone is aware of your quirk except you. And it is ok if it is just a quirk. That can be bearable. But it could actually be a trait that makes living with us in the community rather difficult—in some cases almost impossible. For example, we may not know that we are acting like a “universal novice mistress” correcting everybody and for everything even if it is not really our business. We may not know that we are so hard-headed, rigid and inflexible that people find it useless appealing to us for anything. We might not know that we actually “terrorize” people making them nervous and even mentally paralyzed when we are around. (Although some of us might actually know this effect on others but somehow unconsciously enjoy a sense of power in thus affecting others.) We might be secretly proud to think we are a “defender of the oppressed” but actually our self-righteousness” and “taking people under our wings” may undermine the authority of the Superior and keep these people unhealthily dependent on us. We might think our inquisitiveness is “concern” or “interest” in people but actually it is a way of ferreting out the weaknesses of others. And so forth and so on. Now, one would think if by the grace of God we had a real friend or we have a forthright Superior who dare to give us a feedback on our “blind spot” in no uncertain terms, one would think that then we would really change our ways. Not necessarily, not always, not even often. Why? Because maybe we are on denial. Or it could be that we intellectually accept what we are told. But the psychology of change has three levels: intellectual understanding, psychological acceptance, and behavioral change. Most of us get stuck in the first level. Yes, we understood what was told to us. We see the correctness of the feedback. But maybe we are so entrenched in our fundamental attitude that our psyche rejects what our intellect see as true. Then when we do get to the point of psychological acceptance, we might not honestly know how to change our behavior. In other words, when the actual opportunity comes along to behave differently, we don't recognize that opportunity, because the needle is stuck in its groove. We need to create a new groove with our consciously resolved new behavior and make a habit out of it. And yes, we do need the grace of God! Does that make sense to you? I hope so.

Lovingly yours,



Sister Mary John Mananzan, OSB



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

OUR FLAWED FOUNDER: FR. ANDREAS AMRHEIN by **Sister Mary John Mananzan, OSB**

EDITORS NOTE: This statio conference begins the series on our Constitution. The first part of our Constitution is our history. Since we cannot reflect in detail on all the events of our history, I thought it important to choose a statio conference on our founder, since without him, we would not have existed.

INTRODUCTION

When I was a young professed Sister in the 1960's, I remember we were gathered in that small wooden building in Baguio at the back of the main building. It was during recreation and I simply blurted the question which had been troubling me for some time. I asked quite innocently: "Why don't we ever celebrate the feastday of our Founder?" (Actually, I never even saw a picture of him) I was awestruck at the deafening silence that descended on the professed Sisters. It was very much later on when I was writing my thesis in Missiology and was researching in our Archives in Bernried that I understood that shocked reaction to my simple question. I will come back to this.

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF FR. ANDREAS AMRHEIN, OSB

Our founder was born on February 4, 1844 in Gunzwill, Luzern in Switzerland. He was of a weak constitution and had a sensitive highly-strung temperament common to artistic and literarily gifted. As a young boy he had dreamt of being a missionary. In one of his letters, he once told his grandfather: "Only if I can become a missionary will I enter priesthood."

While studying Art in Florence and Paris, the young student struggled with the idea of a possible vocation to the priesthood. In Pentecost, 1867 after an intense spiritual experience, he decided to become a priest. In 1868 he began his theological studies in Tübingen. Here he came to the conviction that to be an effective missionary one must be a religious. A lecture of Professor Hefele about the work of the Benedictine missionaries in the Christianization of Europe helped him to decide for the Benedictines. He entered Beuron on July 10, 1870, but with the important condition that what he considered his missionary vocation should be realized.

The poor health and rather independent character of the young novice did not make religious life easy for him. He had agonizing doubts about his vocation even up to his profession.

He celebrated his first High Mass on July 28, 1872 in the Abbey Church of Beuron “in fear and trembling and intense excitement.”ⁱ

All through the following years, Fr. Amrhein’s conviction of having a special missionary call did not leave him even after his superiors’ repeated persuasion that this was a temptation. Twelve difficult years were to pass before his dream would see the dawning of realization. He obtained the permission of his Abbot for a trial period with the Divine Word Missionaries in Steyl, Holland and with the Mill Hill Fathers in England in order to test the genuineness of his missionary vocation and to learn more about the works of modern missionary congregations. There he gave himself to an intensive study of Missiology. Both societies however required that he should leave Beuron if he was to be a full-fledged member of their Societies. Fr. Amrhein could not bring himself to join them since he thought it his special call to found a missionary society according to the Rule of St. Benedict. Two options were open to him: either to ask for secularization or to put himself under the disposal of the Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith. On August 30, 1883, he received the following document of permission from Abbot Maurus: “With regard to the petition of the beloved in Christ, Fr. Andreas Amrhein, I hereby declare that in as far as I am concerned, I do not see any obstacle to his petition that his obedience to the Beuron Congregation should be transferred to the Propaganda.”ⁱⁱ (free translation).

On November 30, 1883, Fr. Amrhein outlined his program in a document entitled “A German Seminar for the Propagation of Christian Culture in Uncivilized Lands.” The articles of the document stressed the need for a missionary establishment in view of the German colonization in Africa. This was to be done not by individuals but by corporate works of a Benedictine family, the center from which hospitals, asylums, schools, and trades should develop.

In 1884, he installed his newly acquired recruits (including 4 women whom he met in the Katholikentag in Muenster originally planning to go to mission in India) in the dilapidated secularized former Benedictine Abbey of Reichenbach in Oberpfalz. He then went to Rome to submit his plans to the Propaganda. He obtained ecclesiastical approval for his venture on June 29, 1884 and was given a special blessing by Pope Leo XIII with the words:

*I gave my blessing once already, and I will give it again. I bless but God gives the success. Many numerous missionaries come from this new institute and many young people of Germany receive their vocation and an education for the work of God among the heathens.*ⁱⁱⁱ

Fr. Amrhein would guide the new foundation and will serve as its Superior until his resignation in 1896. About that later.

ⁱ Missionary Benedictine Sisters, Missions-benediktinerrinnen von Tutzing: 1885-1935 (Tutzing: Selbstverlag, 1935, p. 2.

ⁱⁱ Suso Brechter OSB, “Grundung von St. Ottilien” in Beuron 1863-1963: Festschrift zum Hundertjahriges Bestehen der Erzabtei St. Martin ©Hohenzollern: Beuron Kunstverlag, 1963), p.260.

ⁱⁱⁱ Loc. Cit.

THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF FOUNDATION

Fr. Amrhein's special Charism, which caused the agonies and ecstasies of his religious life, consisted in the unshakable conviction that just as the Benedictine missionaries of the past christianized and civilized Europe, their modern counterparts should also be able to render the same service to the non-European world. The essential principles and norms according to which this ideal is to be realized are distilled in a short document which Fr. Amrhein entitled "The Seven Fundamental Thoughts of the Foundation of the Congregation O.S.B. pro Mission. Ext." This was the product of 17 years of prayer, study, experience and suffering.

The first principle entitled "Motive and Purpose". This declared his resolution to found a Congregation, whose members should undertake mission to the "pagans" and this Motherhouse should prepare and send such missionaries to the "pagan" world.

The second principle outlined the missionary method centering around a cenobitical Benedictine Cloister which would then build small mission stations which are attached to it.

The next 3 fundamental principles and the seventh concern mainly the monks and the brothers.

The sixth fundamental principle which concerns the Sisters does not yet witness the emancipation of women to the extent we witness today, thought of the Congregation of Sisters not as an independent missionary body, but as an auxiliary branch of his Congregation of missionary monks. They should focus on the education of children and women towards Christian and civic life. These "Mission Helpers" as he called them were also to devote themselves to the work of nursing the sick. They are to have a separate Rule and Mother General but in mission matters they have to obey the Mission Superior. There were no detailed plans concerning the form and organization of the Sisters' congregation. These will take shape in the course of further developments.

THE CRISIS: CLOTHED IN A MANTEL OF SILENCE

Now we come to the crucial part. Why did we for a long time not acknowledge our Founder, Fr. Andreas Amrhein? Why did we not celebrate his feastday, refer to him in conferences, or in the lessons on the history of our Congregation for a long time? Why did we not even have a picture of him for a long time?

Because he committed a grave sin. He went into a consummated relationship with the first Superior of the Sisters' Congregation, Sr. Katharina Scheins in the years 1894-1895. After the Bishop's visitation of both branches, a mantel of silence was declared on the incident. We will not render any condemnatory judgement nor shall we offer excuses or rationalizations. In the inscrutable ways of God this happened. Both resigned in 1896. Sr. Katharina would leave the convent and Fr. Amrhein would live in exile from his Congregation for many years. He lived in poverty and penance and his letters in the Bernried archive show deep and abiding sorrow till the end of his life. He died on December 29, 1927 and is buried in St. Ottilien.

We have to thank Sr. Liguori del Rosario, OSB who so to say gave back our Founder to us. As the head of the Preparatory Commission of the General Chapter of 1976 where the theme was our self-understanding, she sent the priorities materials on our Founder. She felt that what happened should not prevent us from acknowledging the debt of our existence to him and should give him due honor as our Founder.

REFLECTIONS

What could be God's message to us through this crisis in our early history? Here are some that I can think of.

1. GOD WRITES STRAIGHT WITH CROOKED LINES

I heard this paradoxical statement for the first time from Sr. Caridad Barrion when she was our teacher in College. I think this is one message God wanted to tell us. He chose a broken vessel to make it clear to us that it is HE who is the one at work in the life of our Congregation right from the beginning. It is by HIS GRACE and BY HIS GRACE ALONE that we continued to exist, to expand and to spread throughout the world.

I think God is also telling us something about ourselves – that our contribution to our Congregation does not lie so much in our personal achievements—the projects we have conceived and brought to fruition, the edifices we have constructed, the material gains and advantages we have earned for it which could all be tainted by self-interest, vainglory and pride, even if we think we are doing it for people. Our REAL contribution is in how much we have put ourselves completely at the disposal of God when we do these things according to “the Rule and a Superior” in unfeigned and authentic obedience. Because it is only then that God can truly work through us as sacraments of His love to the world.

2. THE POWER OF A DREAM

Fr. Andreas Amhrein was a man of vision. And he pursued his dream, single-mindedly, unwaveringly, undaunted by obstacles or opposition. He must have guessed that for sometime after our foundation, we would be considered “second-class Benedictines” or not Benedictine enough because of our missionary activities. But he had the examples of the first Benedictines who christianized Europe and so he was sure his dream was doable. And he was not just a starry-eyed dreamer. He looked for concrete means of realizing his dream – he went to Steyl and London. And he did not follow the temptation of giving up his dream by becoming one of them, because his dream was definite: monastic spirituality that radiates into missionary action, not just one or the other.

The example of our Founder urges us to clarify our own vision, to look for creative means to concretize it at different periods of our history and to remain steadfast to it no matter what. I am convinced that if we hold on to our dream, all the forces of the universe, even the cosmic forces will align themselves to make our vision come true.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. In your personal life and in the life of our Priory, can you give examples when “God wrote straight with crooked lines?”
2. Can you think of any other lesson or message that we can derive from the early history of our foundation?

Be Filled with Enthusiasm and Sing God's Glory

From the Book

SADHANA OF THE HEART

by Gurumayi Chidvilasananda

(Excerpts)

...continuation

As a true seeker you must develop this sense of wonder. Everything in God's universe is a cause for wonder. You must be able to experience awe and respect for all the forms of life around you. Then you will be able to maintain your enthusiasm. This means never feeling dull or at a loss, never feeling lethargic or defeated, never feeling helpless or betrayed, never feeling dead or deserted. When you go to work, go with a sense of wonder. "Oh, how is the office going to be today? Who will I meet today? What conversations will take place? What wonderful work is waiting for me?"

When you contemplate in this way, enthusiasm comes and presents itself before you. When you go to meet someone, have this sense of wonder. "Who will I meet? How will the meeting be? What will be the outcome?" Don't walk into the office thinking, "Do I really want to see that woman's face again? Oh, so much paperwork. What will I do?" No! Go to your office eager to find out, "How many more projects can I look into? How much more paperwork can be put in order? What is the best way to accomplish the work?" And when you go shopping, don't disparage everything on the shelves. Let the market be filled with wonder. "Those artichokes—aren't they wonderful! That cashier—isn't she nice! The person over there, she's my neighbor. I'll go help her. She is always so kind to me." And when you are driving somewhere, instead of dreading all the traffic, find ways to create a wonderful *satsang* for yourself. "I hope I don't have to drive too fast, because I want to listen to this new chanting tape. I hope I have a lot of time in the car to chant all the way."

A little child constantly experiences wonder. Everything about life tingles and activates curiosity in the being of a child. Children come into this world with an inner smile and eyes that want to grasp the magic of the universe. Being with children, parents relive their youth, whatever their age may be. This sense of wonder, which is the essence of life, continually creates fresh life. *Be filled with enthusiasm and sing God's glory.*

You can fill your entire year with enthusiasm. Begin now by welcoming the year with your whole heart. Who knows? It may be filled with wondrous teachings, magical insights, marvelous experiences and encounters. Whatever it brings, adopt a yogic attitude and discern the same sense of wonder within your own self. Whatever the year presents you with, remember to sing God's glory. Keep the name of God on the tip of your tongue. Relish its ineffable beauty. Let the new year be the most wonder-filled year.

Welcome this sense of wonder into every aspect of your life. When you first wake up in the morning, greet the day with praise: "What a glorious, grace-filled morning! What a

wondrous feeling I have inside! Awake I am! May the entire day be filled with God's wisdom!" Hear the strains of the mantra echoing inside you. With great wonder, look forward to what the next moment will bring. Visualize every cell in your body filled with vitality. As Baba Muktananda would say, "Vitality is coursing through every blood corpuscle." Let this vitality assist you, let it see you through the day.

As you breathe in and breathe out, become filled with more and more enthusiasm. God's glory is flowing in your veins. God's glory is singing through all your actions. Let this energy guide you throughout your day. Do not judge whether what you are doing is impressive or mediocre, spiritual or mundane. Just do it with enthusiasm. Just give yourself to whatever you do with this full knowledge: "God is within me. All actions that I perform are offerings to Him. Whatever He wants to do with me, let Him do it as He wills." Have the certainty that God is with you, that you carry God's energy, and that all your actions are in praise of Him. Walk happily. Speak sweetly. Do everything diligently. Be meticulous in every dealing. Let *dharma* support you.

Baba Muktananda used to say:

Always remember your own inner Self with great love. Always think of the dazzling flame of love that is present inside you. That flame will fill you with great delight, great happiness, great zest.

How do you experience this dazzling flame of love? Through singing God's glory. This doesn't mean just sitting in one place and chanting the name of God. Singing God's glory is allowing your entire being to send forth God's beauty, God's bounty, God's love. You must let God's energy flow into every minute of your day. That is singing God's glory.

In the *Ramayana*, Hanuman, the great devotee of the Lord, says, "Any moment spent without singing God's name and glory should be regarded as a great loss. That moment is a moment of ignorance and delusion."

Singing God's name is singing His glory. Chanting the mantra is singing God's glory. But isn't there another, even more meaningful way to sing God's glory? Isn't there another means that is very pleasing to God? Yes, there is. There is a splendid path by following which you truly do sing God's glory. To experience God's perfection in all the people you meet is to sing His glory. When you meet people, instead of sizing them up and down, look for the great virtues they carry within them. Begin to appreciate every little thing they do. That will make it easier for you to recognize the great things they are capable of. Allow yourself to acknowledge the goodness you see in each person. That is singing God's glory.

When you see a beautiful plant, let yourself feel its loveliness and thank God for its existence. When you see the sun rise and set, let yourself be engulfed by its majesty spreading across the sky. Watch it display the most unearthly combination of colors—each sunrise unique, each sunset unrepeatable. Thank God for the existence of the sun. Understand that each one of your days is just incomparable and just as heavenly.

When you see the stars and the moon in the night sky, let yourself be overcome by tender feelings and thank God for their existence. When you receive compliments from others, let them warm your heart and thank God for His grace in that form. When you are afflicted with troubles and unexpected calamities, thank God for their existence, too. Know full well that He will protect you and that He wants you to extract a lesson or two from them. That is singing God's glory. When you expect people to do something for you and they don't come through, feel good about them anyway. Don't change your good opinion about them. That is singing God's glory. When nothing seems to go the way you want, continue to maintain your inner composure, your inner delight, and offer your gratitude to God. Perhaps God wants it some other way. That is singing God's glory.

God's power is *śrī*. It is filled with auspiciousness, beauty, sacredness, abundance, nobility, dignity, and good fortune. When you allow your actions to be suffused with these qualities of *śrī*, you are singing God's glory.

When you allow your good understanding and virtues to guide your words and actions, rather than letting your intention be led away by lack of understanding, then you are singing God's glory. When you take the time to speak with someone who is seeking spiritual upliftment and tell her about your inner experience of God's love and grace, you are singing God's glory. When you recognize unconditional love flashing forth in someone's smile, in a gesture of kindness, in his steady helping hand, in her cheerful spirits, don't let the chance slip by. Take a moment to express your love. This is singing God's glory.

When someone awakens great love in your heart, don't just keep it yourself, thinking, "Oh, her love is meant just for me." Acknowledge such a loving nature. That is singing God's glory. When you meet someone who has worked every hard for the benefit of many people, who has given his or her best to the world, don't presume that your appreciation is immediately felt. Take a moment to express your gratitude, your heartfelt appreciation. This is magnifying God's beauty, God's abundance, God's sacredness. It is spreading good fortune everywhere and singing God's glory.

Whenever your actions express the inner magnificence of the Heart, the inner auspiciousness, the inner spiritual power, you are singing God's glory. *Be filled with enthusiasm and sing God's glory.*

Right now, in this very moment you can allow yourself to experience an ocean of enthusiasm and the continuous pulsation of God's glory in your own being. You can experience your Self. Just become aware of your body; your own being carries the energy of God, enthusiasm. You don't have to wait for the circumstances to be impeccable and perfect. You simply make a decision: "I am going to let God's energy pour through me. I am going to make all the space in my heart, all the space in my being, available for God. I am going to walk through the day and night seeing God's presence everywhere around me and allowing His energy to work through me." Let the sense of wonder be constant. It's just simple resolution.

Remembering God is singing God's glory. Repeating His name is singing His glory. Seeing God in each other is singing God's glory. Respecting God in each other is singing God's

glory. Understanding and worshipping God in each other is singing God's glory. Loving God in each other and being generous with each other is singing God's glory. Showing kindness to each other is singing God's glory. Expressing gratitude to each other is singing God's glory. Then in turn you experience His rewards as great enthusiasm, zest, and ecstasy.

When enthusiasm courses through your veins, when music dances in every cell of your body, you become a beacon of light for this world. Everyone around you is happy—automatically. You don't have to roam from continent to continent trying to fulfill yourself. Fulfillment is already yours. You carry the vessel of fulfillment. Then wherever you go, you have something to offer others. This is singing God's glory.