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St. Scholastica's Priory  
Manila

Dear Sisters,

I wish you a glorious Easter after these days of Lent. Actually, during these days, I feel as if I were stepping into history being written. This is because of the participation of the AMRSP-Association of Major Religious Superiors of the Philippines, of which I am the National Chairperson for Women, in the press conference of Jun Lozada, the Star Witness of the ZTE NBN Deal and his testifying in the Senate for the truth about this deal which implicated many important official of the government up to the highest. I became one of the two “guardian angels” of Jun, the other one being Sr. Estrella Castalone, a Don Bosco Sister, who is our Executive Secretary at the AMRSP. We stayed with him throughout his ordeal, praying over him, accompanying him (he insisted on that to the Senate bodyguards) when he went to the Senate hearing sessions, would encourage him when he asked for break when the going was rough. We also set up a Sanctuary Fund for him. You have seen the public reaction in the papers and on T.V. – people hailing him as a new hero, praising him for daring to speak even at the risk of endangering his life and that of his family, losing his job, disrupting his domestic life. But it has given hope to the Filipino people to work for fundamental change in society. I saw how his presence in the Masses he attended, inspired people, brought out the best in them. It is wonderful to see how students and young people came to him, expressed their belief in him and telling him that he is inspiring them to be more involved in their country going beyond their usual dream of finishing a career which will give them a chance to go abroad. He has awakened the innate goodness of the Filipino and for that the nation is grateful to him. He is however very sober about all the adulation he is receiving. He said “I did this to save my soul. I know that cries of alleluia can turn into clamor for ‘crucify him.’”

I really can say that these days have been a real spiritual experience for me. Help me pray that Jun’s sacrifice will not be in vain and fundamental positive changes may happen in our country.

Lovingly yours,



Sister Mary John Mananzan, OSB

# S T A T I O   C O N F E R E N C E

## **HISTORY: BAPTISM OF BLOOD IN EAST AFRICA**

by Sister Josefina Nepomuceno, OSB

If you, dear Sisters, react to the topic of this Statio Conference thinking, “what, another history of our Congregation? Don’t we already know it? Whatever new learnings can we possibly gain from such a worn topic?” What can I say? Give it another try?

For we also believe that with our God there are no coincidences. A statio day spent in reflecting on the early history of our congregation may have an important place in the divine plan for our spiritual development. Precious insights and learnings could still be ours for the building up of our personal faith edifice, our community relationships, and the advancement of our mission-apostolate whatever it is, wherever we are.

We have to start from the beginning. With Fr. Andreas Amrhein.

Amrhein? There was a time, specifically in my novitiate years and in the 60’s and early 70’s, when that name was never mentioned. Only when S. Ligouri del Rosario dug into the archives for the history of the congregation did the name of Fr. Andreas Amrhein suddenly break into the horizon of our collective MBS consciousness. The German Sisters in our communities were surprised. Some were displeased, still others had a hard time accepting the “revelation,” for that was what it amounted to. We, the younger ones at that time were somewhat perplexed. In muted whispers we asked among ourselves, why were our older Sisters reacting that way? Mother Mary John in her January 2008 statio conference entitled “Our Flawed Founder: Fr. Andreas Amrhein” gave us the reason. “Because he committed a grave sin. He went into a consummated relationship with the first superior of the Sisters’ congregation, S. Katharina Sheins in the years 1884-1885.” (Conversatio, January 2008, p. 8) But to come to a deeper appreciation of our founder, flawed as he was and so that we can also better appreciate our congregation, we have to know more about his almost single-handed feat of founding a missionary Benedictine congregation against all odds.

### **Fr. Andreas Amrhein, Founder**

Amrhein. Josef Amrhein, even as young man manifested a basic generosity, a desire to share with others whatever had brought him joy or profit. (Walter, p. 11). He felt an attraction to the priesthood. On Pentecost Sunday, June 9, 1867, he awoke early startled by a loud call: “Leave everything!” This made a deep impression on him and removed all doubts and uncertainty about the call to be a priest. His interest in non-Christian peoples was aroused in a visit to the ethno-logical exhibit at the World’s Fair in Paris. During his study of philosophy and theology in Tübingen he heard with great interest from Professor Carl Josef von Hefele of the important part that Benedictine monks played in the Christianization of Europe. Thus the basic elements of his vision were set: to recover and revive the Benedictine missionary achievements of the past. He wrote:

One remembers how many lands and peoples, once pagan, owe salvation and Christian civilization to the Benedictine Order and to the Benedictine apostles. This has given rise to the idea that even today, the Order could accomplish the same for the pagan world. Benedictines would need to resume once again their divinely blessed ancient tradition of missionary activity. (Manila Prepc, pp. 3-4)

After meeting Abbot Maurus Wolter, who had refounded the Bueron Abbey in 1863, Amrhein visited the abbey and was deeply moved by the solemn liturgy. Another Pentecost experience, this time in Beuron in 1870, sealed his resolve to enter Bueron. This rather quick decision did not fail to take into account the missionary monk ideal in Boniface that was part of his vision. Thinking that there was an openness in his superiors to his desire for apostolic service, he entered Bueron and received the name Andreas. And so the struggle began to pursue what he felt was a calling to apostolic service which came into conflict with the Benedictine monastic contemplative life in Bueron. Already as a novice he wanted to leave, but was dissuaded. "He began his monastic life bearing an apostle's name – but his road to apostolic service was to be a long one." (Walter, p. 16) He was ordained a priest on July 16, 1872 and made solemn profession on February 2, 1875. In his own words, "I was destined to receive a monastic training which has produced so many missionaries who went forth to convert peoples and lands." (Op. cit.)

His hope for understanding of his frequently voiced wish for apostolic service was tested and he had to prove himself. "Through long years his dream of a missionary foundation was nurtured 'through prayers, exercises, labors and sufferings of a life of sincere striving to serve God.'" (Working paper, p. 4) As Sister Bernita Walter wrote: "These were difficult years for Fr. Andreas, for the ideal of combining monastic life with apostolic activity beckoned to him with steady and increasing urgency, yet there was no prospect of any kind of apostolic work for him." (Walter, Ibid.)

### **From Shopping for a Mission Society to the Propaganda Fide**

Fr. Amrhein's persistence paid off and he finally obtained the permission of his abbot to try out with the Mill Hill Fathers who subsequently wanted him to join them. Arnold Janssen founder and director of the mission institute in Steyl, Holland would have accepted him. But in both instances he decided against joining them and chose to remain a Benedictine, convinced no doubt by the monastic-missionary configuration of his vision. However, Janssen wrote a letter to Archabbot Maurus Wolter of his conviction that Fr. Amrhein's missionary calling was from God and not to oppose it. Thus on August 30, 1883, Abbot Maurus gave permission for Fr. Amrhein to offer himself to the Propaganda Fide in Rome. "This was Father Amrhein's green light! Now he could hope to realize his plan of a monastic mission... as he wrote in his petition to the Propaganda Fide on March 1884, which contained his autobiographical notes in Italian." (Op. cit.)

### **Reichenbach**

In November 24, 1883, Fr. Amrhein arrived in Reichenbach, a secularized former abbey, now totally dilapidated that was slated for demolition. He bought it cheaply with financial aid from 2 priests and set about the work of its restoration as the site of his foundation. While the building was thus being rehabilitated with the work of lay brothers, Fr. Amrhein set about the

enormous task of obtaining approval for his foundation. So while one almost nearly insurmountable obstacle to the realization of his Benedictine-Missionary vision was hurdled, Fr. Amrhein faced another – the hostile laws of the “Kulturrekampf” of the Germany of his day that did not allow him to found a monastery.

### **Navigating Legal Obstacles**

This man so unusually and richly endowed with intellectual gifts set about working within the parameters of what the laws of the state allowed. After a number of drafts, he submitted a document that no longer mentioned the disallowed mission seminary, but a private association called “A Catholic German Mission Society for the African Interior.” As it turned out no approval was needed for a private association of this type.

To begin only a mission house or seminary house rather than a monastery was hard for Fr. Amrhein, but there was no other way at that time. Later he wrote: “This hybrid nature of the foundation was detrimental to its spiritual life. The Rule of Benedict for Monasteries was to be observed in the house, but this fact had to be concealed from outsiders.” (Op. cit.)

The acceptance by the state ministry did not end the suspicion, surveillance and inspections that continued until the move to Emming which eventually came to be St. Ottilien.

### **Approval from Rome**

Approval from Rome through Propaganda Fide was quicker. The papers seeking permission to found a mission house were submitted to Propaganda Fide. Fr. Amrhein was required to submit detailed plans for the training of the candidates including the matter of vows or promises which could be considered vows outside Bavaria. Finally, on June 29, 1884, definite approval from Rome was granted for the foundation of the mission house in Reichenbach.

### **Beginnings**

Even before the approval from Rome, Fr. Amrhein had accepted 5 candidates who passed as laborers but prayed and worked according to the monastic life as in a novitiate until the approval of the government. This came in March 15, 1885 after which the missionary association could present its building, the St. Joseph Mission House, to the public. The young men candidates need no longer be called “workmen” but candidates for missionary work. Their numbers had to be limited because of poverty. However, “[material] poverty during the foundation period was not the only obstacle to receiving candidates. A greater problem was the opposition of the local government agencies and the obvious distrust of the chancery office in Regensburg. This attitude of the bishop was to cause the founder much anxiety.” (Ibid.)

### **Missionary Sisters**

Missionary sisters were part of the intention of Fr. Amrhein, as stated in his 6<sup>th</sup> Fundamental Thought which was drafted by him in 1882-1883 but was publicized only much later.

Wherever a promising mission center of our congregation is founded in a well-populated area for our missionaries to convert and educate boys and men, a convent of missionary sisters should be founded simultaneously or soon thereafter to care for the education of girls and women in Christian living... These mission helpers... will also care for the sick.... I hope our holy Mother Scholastica will bring about a motherhouse of "Benedictine Sisters for the foreign Missions." (Op. cit, p. 37)

In August 1885 he had discussed and planned often and at length with Friedrich Scheugenpflug, pastor and supporter of the mission house, how to establish the necessary community of sisters (Ibid, p. 40) He became friends with Rector Joseph Ehring, head of the former American College in Munster which was closed during the Kulturkampf who sent him candidates, among them four young women who had a missionary vocation and were in fact planning to travel to the missions in India. (Op. cit.) Johanna Katharina Scheyns, Elisabeth Sivering, Auguste Smedding and Gertrud Reckers decided in favor of the mission house and in three weeks arrived in Reichenbach on September 24, 1885. (Ibid.) His December 5, 1885 letter to his benefactors in Tutzing, the Ringsies sisters announced: "In Munster the foundation of a new, important branch of the missionary society was laid, that is, missionary sisters! God's providence is marvelous." (Ibid.)

#### ***Ora et Labora: The rhythm of life in the mission house***

What was life in the mission house like? "From the beginning, the monastic rhythm of prayer and work shaped daily life in the mission house. The day's labor was to be supported and permeated by prayer." (Ibid., p. 45) The prayer offering of the week's work which paraphrased the Our Father was recited kneeling before their morning and afternoon tasks. The four new sisters candidates very likely soon learned this custom. This prayer "conveys the spirit which the founder wished to awaken and maintain in the community in Reichenbach: the balance between prayer and work, striving for personal holiness and dedication to the salvation of all humankind, glorifying God and minding everyday needs." (Op. cit., p. 45-46) Brothers and sisters prayed the Little Office of the Blessed Mother in the first years, adding various extra-liturgical prayers.

"The Liturgy of the Hours included Matins and Lauds in the morning, Prime and Terce after Holy Mass, Sext before dinner, None and Vespers at 1:30 pm and Compline in the evening. The day ended with the superior blessing the community with holy water around 9 pm.... The entire day was to be permeated by a spiritual climate of prayer, giving it a supernatural orientation." (Ibid.) "There was a daily half hour of spiritual reading and frequent religious or ascetical instructions by the superior which deeply impressed the young listeners... Rector Amrhein had a unique talent for inspiring young people with noble ideals and appealing to their generosity. They loved him as a father. During his unavoidable absence he continued from a distance to fan their enthusiasm for the common cause." (Op. cit., p. 48)

In a letter to the Bishop of Regensburg, Fr. Amrhein wrote: "Though much has been achieved in the renovation of the stone edifice..., I devote most of my attention, care and time and limited strength to the upbuilding of the spiritual edifice... guided by the goals and principles I learned in the Benedictine Order.... the missionary monastery that is to proceed from Reichenbach is meant to be... a Benedictine monastery." (Op. cit. p. 49)

The solid spiritual foundation gave the first members the strength to persevere in the difficult conditions of the early days. They were poor, they worked hard and the food was meager. They lived very simply but did not lack essentials. As for studies, it had to give way to work. For the sisters, specialized training became possible only in the later years.

### **The Early Life of the Sisters**

The sisters lived apart from the men. The first missionary service for the men was restoring the ruined monastery. For the sisters, their first missionary service was in the kitchen and the laundry. They also tended the modest farm and occasionally learned basic nursing from S. Katharina. In 1886, the sister candidates numbered 10. Their numbers was also limited because the sisters' community also needed the approval of the government. They were listed in the police report as "ten female servants." Training of the sisters for the mission was one of the preoccupation of Fr. Amrhein. He considered a hospital but it was beyond their means. A kindergarten in Tutzing partly to realize the intention of the Ringseis sisters was also discussed.

### **Harrassment, Surveillance**

Meanwhile the authorities would not approve the acceptance of sister candidates, and for that reason their presence as female servants was suspect. The growth of the community was being set back by the close surveillance by the district office of Roding. The inspection covered every room and every person in the house. "The number of beds matched the list of persons."

Such close surveillance became a source of further pressure to Fr. Amrhein who had to explain and clarify such matters as identification documents, the work of the "maids", and the rumored intention of putting up a hospital which the authorities vehemently objected to.

Further harassment was due to suspicions about the "so-called sisters" who had no permit to live in the mission house. The commissioner ordered a report on the operations of the mission house "including the number of members, ages, nationality, and the status of the candidates and servants, to keep checking up on the same and to provide an exact listing of the present members of the institute." The surveillance should "concentrate on the female staff of the institute specially whether a convent is intended or has already been established since they are wearing religious garb and seem to live in enclosure." (Op. cit., p. 58)

From a police report on a visit on December 6, 1886, we learn that the sisters, "the female servants," wore black dresses of a special make and a head covering; however, it did not resemble a religious headdress." (Op. cit., p. 59)

The unwelcoming attitude of the Bishop of Regensburg prompted Fr. Amrhein to delay giving information of the acceptance of women into the mission house and his plan for a congregation of sisters. He decided to look elsewhere, and found the Bishop of Augsburg encouraging and open to the foundation of the women branch of the mission society. Thus began the search for another site which eventually ended in Emming, the future St. Ottilien, as a possible foundation for the sisters. At the same time he established contacts with the Ringseis sisters for a possible foundation in Tutzing.

On December 28, 1886, still in Reichenbach, Fr. Amrhein received seven candidates into the novitiate in simple clothing ceremonies when they were also given their religious names: S. Benedicta, S. Scholastica, S. Lioba, S. Bernardine, S. Michaela, S. Gabriela and S. Raphaela. The names revealed their being Benedictine, missionary, and a special devotion to the holy angels. The seven sister novices lived hidden but continued to prepare themselves for their religious and missionary life. When they went to church they wore “long, buttoned coats over their religious clothing and hats to cover their faces.” (Ibid., p. 63)

Fr. Amrhein had to be ingenious in talking about the foundation. To his friends he called it a “monastic mission house”. To church authorities he referred to it as a monastery, a Benedictine missionary monastery. To the government authorities it was a mission house.

### **Transfer to Emming – St. Ottilien**

The transfer to Emming was observed on the feast of Epiphany 1887 and its liturgical octave. Hard work awaited the brothers and sisters to restore the buildings to a habitable state. The Sisters’ dormitory was the castle attic divided into small cells by boards. One sister remembers, “You couldn’t sit up in the beds without bumping into the rafters.” (Op. cit., p. 66) There were separate function rooms for the sisters, including a separate dining room. They joined the brothers for meetings and conferences, entering together through a separate entrance from their attic living quarters. A great joy was the solemn installation of the Blessed Sacrament in the old chapel of St. Ottilia on April 11, 1887. (Op. cit., pp. 66-67)

The people around Emming were not suspicious about the monastic nature of the foundation. Shy at first, in no time they were friendly and offered their help and even gave alms of money and food. Still from past bad experiences, Father Amrhein remained cautious and enjoined his community from talking about a monastery. All were registered as “workers and female servants.” (Op. cit., p. 68)

An unsettled matter through 1886-1887 was the sisters’ motherhouse and novitiate. Were they to remain in Reichenbach as an institute for women missionaries? But there was yet no sister capable of taking the spiritual leadership of the community. Finally the decision to move all the different groups to Emming was arrived at by Fr. Amrhein. This move was precipitated by a hate campaign against him and the strained relation with the Bishop of Regensburg.

The move to St. Ottilien was on all counts favorable to the growth and development of the foundation. But leaving Reichenbach was difficult for the pioneer brothers and sisters who had worked so hard to preserve it from ruin and built it up to be their first spiritual home. A brother wrote: “Now, I have to lock the monastery which had received me and to hand the keys to Mr. Rauch for safekeeping. The action filled my heart and spirit with nostalgia. I had been very fond of Reichenbach monastery.” (Op. cit., p.71) The detachment required in this departure was an important step that prepared them to leave their homeland for good.

It was not only the brothers and sisters who felt sad. The mayor and council of Reichenbach officially testified “to the good relations between the people of the village and the members of the mission house, mentioning the good discipline and exemplary good order among the students, whether in the house or during their excursions.” The students “had won the esteem

of the people by their friendliness and helpfulness to all, rich or poor.” Moreover, “the villagers regretted the departure of the mission society because ‘their zealous and devout prayer inspired the inhabitants of Reichenbach and surroundings to follow the good example.’” The rector had been “truly a father to the poor, a comforter to the afflicted, and a helper to the needy and oppressed.” (Op. cit., pp. 71-72) By the way they lived during their short stay in Reichenbach, the brothers and sisters gave testimony of the genuineness and effectiveness of their missionary zeal.

The move to St. Ottilien was more than a relief. The welcoming attitude of the bishop of Augsburg, his understanding and helpfulness enabled the growing community to develop and stabilize. “Fr. Amrhein above all appreciated these benefits of the new location after four difficult beginning years of coping with anti-monastic, suspicious government agencies and the bishop’s lack of trust. The founder did have the approval of Rome, that is, the Propaganda Fide, since the beginning in Reichenbach, but in St. Ottilien he also felt accepted and encouraged by the diocesan authorities.” (Op. cit., p. 72)

### **“Missionary Sisters”**

For the sisters, St. Ottilien meant they could go in public wearing their black habit, white veil and red cincture. The constitutions draft of February 1 which he had sent to the bishop of Augsburg for review and approval mentioned the “missionary sisters associated with the missionary monks of St. Joseph of Reichenbach.” (Ibid.)

In Rome, Fr. Amrhein could speak of the “congregation of sisters” to the secretary of the Propaganda Fide. His memorandum accompanying the request for assignment of an African mission area mentioned, for the first time, the sisters in referring to a donation of a house in Tutzing.

We were also given a house on Lake Starnberg in the Augsburg diocese... for establishing there a community of sisters who are also destined for the mission. Here I need to mention that with the approval of the bishop and the government, a second rapidly growing community of the society of Reichenbach has developed, namely, a group of women religious for cooperating in the missions by educating girls and helping the sick... At this time it consists of 24 sisters. (Op. cit., p. 73)

Sister Bernita wrote: “This is the first written record in the Propaganda Fide documents of the community of sisters which, in God’s plan, was to become the ‘Congregation of the Missionary Benedictine Sisters of Tutzing.’” (Op. cit.)

The Tutzing convent began when 4 sisters moved there in June 1887 to start a kindergarten. The solicitude of Fr. Amrhein for the sisters is seen in the letters to the Ringseis sisters. “Please be motherly supporters to them for they are still in need of guidance and instruction. They still lack a superior...” In another letter, “It is my wish and desire that the sisters there, being still young postulants with much to learn (they are still in their formation period) should learn all they can. I am exceedingly grateful for you kind ladies’ good efforts in helping them study, specially English...” Regarding their spiritual life, “Are the sisters receiving Holy Communion every Sunday and Wednesday? When I come, I will inform the Rev. parish priest of the arrangements concerning leadership and the rules of the house.” (Op. cit., p.74)

Some people and the village authorities of Tutzing were at first not pleased about the arrival of the “sisters.” Fr. Amrhein, from previous experience, decided to let the presence of the sisters be experienced quietly and to proceed slowly in putting up the kindergarten and care center. He wrote:

My plan is... to have the house occupied and diligently readied for a group of sisters small enough not to be considered a religious community. The neighbors will become familiar with the sisters and get used to them in the village. If asked about their presence, the sisters can truthfully say they are missionary sisters preparing to be sent to the pagans. This purpose seems safe for the government, even patriotic, for they will serve in the colonies. For the sisters, it is an opportunity to adjust to being on their own and becoming self-reliant, as future missionaries need to be. (Op. cit., p. 75)

This gradual approach applied likewise to the little girls that were to come from abroad. They were not to learn German, so that they need not attend the local school. “Not only will children be cared for who have been baptized and raised as Catholics (as in kindergarten) but unbaptized, non-Christian children will be won for God and for heaven and the holy Church.” (Ibid.)

This neat plan however, failed to be realized. The sisters lacked a leader. Then, even though the children flocked to the sisters, the village authorities refused to grant permission for a kindergarten. These plus the limited space for their living quarters was too much for the young sisters and there were vocation casualties. In March 1890 the candidates returned to St. Ottilien.

This planned withdrawal of the sisters created the unforeseen: the local authorities decided to grant the long-withheld approval for a kindergarten. The Ringseis sisters promised to enlarge the house.

### **Mission in Africa**

In 1887, the long nurtured vision of a mission was suddenly about to be realized with limited time for preparation. The German East-Africa society had requested Catholic missionaries from the Missionary Society in Munich for the East African mission areas under German colonial protection. There were no available missionaries, so Father Amrhein felt obliged to accept it. Despite some doubts about the readiness of his group, he said yes, “with his characteristic spirit of enterprise, supported by his great confidence in God.” (Op. cit., p. 78)

In St. Ottilien, this event of the first sending of missionaries was the center of interest from the spring to fall of 1887. The sisters were also excited. Fr. Amrhein had written, “It is now almost certain that sisters ...will also take part in the expedition.” (Op. cit., p. 81) Bismarck himself had pledged support for the Reichenbach mission society in German colonies in November 1886, despite the prohibition of founding a monastic community in Germany. Both men and women mission groups were given publicity by Fr. Amrhein resulting in many interested inquiries. He drew attention to the sisters in a declaration:

For the work of conversion to be complete, the women as well as the men among the pagans must be educated. Therefore an institute of missionary sisters was begun, approved by the government and by the bishop of Augsburg, for the education of girls and for nursing in the mission lands, and also for managing the housekeeping in the mission institutes. (Op. cit., p.82)

The preparations for the “expedition” included perpetual adoration in St. Ottilien so that prayer would be the support of Christ’s workers in the mission activities. The brothers and sisters took turns in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. Thus, prayer at home supported the missionary labors even before they began. The selection of those to be sent was also to be the fruit of community prayer, according to the wishes of Fr. Amrhein. The spiritual morale was high, as attested by the bishop of Augsburg who visited St. Ottilien at this time. “The brothers and sisters introduced to me by the rector appeared to be animated by a genuine religious spirit, conscious of the dignity of their vocation and in love with it. Those chosen for the first missionary expedition are longing for the day of their departure.” (Op. cit., p.83)

The Bishop of Augsburg took a direct hand in approving the constitutions of the men’s congregation. The missionaries to Africa were to make their vows in Rome because religious vows were not permitted in the mission house in Germany. The provision in the men’s constitution on the pronouncing of vows applied to the sisters who at this point did not have their own constitution.

Fr. Amrhein in Rome tried his utmost to remove the obstacle to the pronouncing of vows for the missionaries who did not have a canonical novitiate. Some had less than a year of probation. Fr. Amrhein had to work for an exemption, submitted on November 11 and granted on November 13 by the Pope for vows for five years.

Meanwhile in St. Ottilien, 11 women postulants had their clothing ceremony still behind closed doors. The publicity about the missionary sisters attracted many young women, but strict admission requirements in keeping with the admonition of the St. Benedict “admission should not be granted easily,” ensured that those “who were more enthusiastic about new adventures than aware of the necessity for selfless and dedicated service in ordinary, daily work” were weeded out. The number of those admitted was low in comparison with the number of applicants. In April 1888 there were only about 30 sisters. Those who were admitted had to contend with a frugal austere life style due to the poverty of the house. But the spirit animating the young sisters was high as excerpts of a letter of a novice attests:

We live according to the tradition of the Benedictine monks of old... When we dedicate ourselves to God without reserve..., the way by which God leads us to our goal becomes unimportant. His call to us is pure grace, and anything we can do, suffer, or offer to him – no matter how much and weighty – cannot be compared to the grace of our vocation. The chief requirement is a resolute piety which makes us readily accept any sacrifice, exertion, task or suffering for God and for the salvation of souls. (Op. cit., p. 93)

Fr. Amrhein made sure that zeal for Divine Worship was cultivated. The liturgical celebration of the feasts of the mysteries of salvation was a source of joy and strength. In 1890 the sisters sang Gregorian chant on the feast of St. Scholastica and spent many hours learning the Latin form of the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary which they had been praying in German. Popular forms of piety were also observed: Stations of the Cross, May Devotions. In 1889, during the feast, the whole community was consecrated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

“For God and for the salvation of souls” was the daily motto in the work of the mission house. (Op. cit., p. 98) And there was a lot of hard work on the farm for the support of the members. Still efforts for intellectual formation of the sisters continued: “Besides the necessary

tasks in the house, garden and fields, lessons were given in composition, French, Swahili and other subjects until at harvest time the work became too pressing.” (Op. cit., p. 99)

Fr. Amrhein endeavored to fulfill his responsibility for the further training of the sisters as his report to the bishop on April 30, 1888 attests:

The missionary sisters are yearning for a hospital and an opportunity to teach to prepare themselves for their future ministry; ... at any rate I must soon find a way to meet these worthy aspirations. The sisters are amazingly modest in their requirements and their superior firmly insists on monastic discipline. (Ibid.)

With the entry of more teachers, an expanded curriculum was set up which included apart from the basic subjects, teaching methods and violin instruction. Classes were designed to prepare teachers and catechists for the mission. In fact, everything was directed to preparing the sisters for work in the mission, including the taking up of hospital work. The growing numbers of sister novices and professed soon required additional buildings in St. Ottilien.

### **First Mission in East Africa: Pugu**

The group of missionaries that left for East Africa – 1 priest, 8 brothers and 4 sisters landed in Zanzibar in January 1888 and soon moved to Pugu about 20 kilometers southwest of Dar es Salaam. They built up the convent “Mission Monastery of St. Benedict.” amidst hardships and deprivations. Soon, Brother Wendelin Schon, 19 years old, died of sun stroke on March 28, and on August 14, 1888 S. Lioba Ellwanger died after a brief intense fever. Despite their poor health and their limited number, the missionaries constructed a spacious house for 100 children. Of the two sisters that remained, S. Martha Wansing who took care of the children expressed her sentiments: “Even though the mission work brings crosses and sufferings, these are far outweighed by the joys and consolations of saving souls. Each day my joy and courage increase. I feel like singing all day.” (Op. cit., p. 123)

While ten more missionaries were planned to be sent, the political situation deteriorated, directed against the German colonial masters. In an attack on the Pugu mission, two brothers and S. Martha were killed, their corpses cremated by the fire that razed the buildings. One brother escaped alive but three brothers and S. Benedikta were taken prisoner and had to be ransomed. Fr. Amrhein appealed to German Catholics to support the ransoming of the captives and printed a prayer for the captive missionaries and sent it to religious houses and convents. The rosary was prayed daily in St. Ottilien.

This incident was the spark that attracted many young men and women to the new congregation. At least 6 young women decided to enter the mission house for this reason. All of them served in the mission in Africa. Among them was a young woman “who wanted to be a missionary sister. To be at the Lord’s disposal as completely as those two sisters at Pugu – Westphalians like herself – who had sacrificed their freedom and their life for his sake. She wanted to fill the gaps left by their captivity and death in the missions.” (Op. cit., pp. 183-184) This young woman who was given the name S. Birgitta was to become the first prioress of the motherhouse.

When the conditions in East Africa became favorable, the brothers returned and the mission was reestablished in Dar es Salaam. Nine sisters, all new missionaries were sent out in June of 1890. By 1891 one after the other, a number of the missionaries succumbed to fever, causing sadness to Fr. Amrhein.

### **Resignation of the Two Superiors: Crisis of Leadership**

His health and emotional balance were also adversely affected by accusations, one lodged with the Propaganda Fide about violations of enclosure in the mission which he disproved. Special blessing from the bishop was requested for Fr. Amrhein, the superior general “who is almost being crushed by excessive care and work and constant physical suffering.” He seemed on the verge of a nervous breakdown. (Op. cit., p.133-134)

A serious concern was the superior of the sisters, S. Katharina, whose effectiveness and good qualities were negated by her domineering ways and severity in dealing with the sisters. Despite complaints about her, Fr. Amrhein did not change her, even when she became ill with pleurisy and pericarditis in May 1895. On September 5, Bishop Petrus of Augsburg conducted a visitation of the sisters’ convent. All except one wanted a new superior. S. Katharina also saw the bishop and resigned from her office. (Op. cit., p. 137) She separated herself from the congregation and left St. Ottilien in October, 1895.

An election for the new superior was held on September 17, 1895, resulting in the unanimous vote for S. Birgitta Korf as the first elected prioress of the motherhouse. The bishop granted the twenty seven year old sister exemption from the age requirement of 30 years. She was recalled from Lukuledi in East Africa where she was superior.

At the instance of Fr. Amrhein as superior general, September 26, 27 and 28 were observed as days of penance, with strict fast and singing of the *Miserere* before the exposed Blessed Sacrament “in atonement for the failings of the community and to implore God’s blessing for the future. Now a new beginning was to be made.” (Ibid., p. 138) Fr. Amrhein himself announced he was leaving for a longer time and travel to Rome. Neither of the two congregations were aware that this was his final farewell to them. He sent a telegram from Rome announcing his resignation as superior general but the resignation and complete withdrawal of Fr. Amrhein from his foundation was finalized on January 1896. At the instance of the bishop, a mantle of silence was declared on the “incident.” (Conversatio, p. 8) At the time of his resignation, the two communities in St. Ottilien numbered 16 priests, 13 seminarians, 46 brother and 71 sisters, quite an achievement for a foundation that was only on its 12<sup>th</sup> year of existence but now facing an uncertain future.

### **Mother Birgitta**

S. Birgitta arrived in the motherhouse on Christmas eve 1895 but with Fr. Amrhein in Rome, her installation as prioress of the motherhouse was on January 2, 1896. She was directly accountable to the superior general and bound to obey him.

The identity of the two missionary communities in St. Ottilien and their canonical status had to be resolved by the bishop of the diocese, the Propaganda Fide, and the abbot primate of the Benedictines. The latter brought this up to the abbots of the Beuron Congregation who

decided that a visitation was called for and designated Abbot Ildefons Schober of Seckau as visitor.

He reported on the exemplary good will which met him in every house and recommended that the Constitutions which should be drawn up soon should clearly state that St. Ottilien is a Benedictine monastery. "Then the missionary ideal and task need to be defined as clearly. It should grow like a ripe fruit from the Benedictine seed, as indeed was the founder's intention: the true, perfect Benedictine will be a genuine, perfect, holy missionary." (Op. cit., p.148)

To the sisters, the visitor gave the reminder: "The former superior general is and remains your founder and father. . . Now more than ever you owe him your compassionate love and the gift of your prayers." (Ibid.) This admonition can as well be addressed to all of us MBS. Single handedly and tenaciously, Fr. Amrhein pursued his vision and gave birth to a Benedictine monastic-missionary congregation of men and women for the sole purpose of bringing the message of the Gospel to peoples who had not heard of it. Through tremendous personal suffering, hardships, misunderstanding and obstacles on nearly all aspects of his enterprise, he persevered, plagued with physical weakness and illnesses and He did see the first fruits of his efforts but in some way like Moses, he did not enjoy entry into the promised land of fully accredited and recognized men and women Benedictine missionary congregations. From afar, he must have heard of the growth and progress of his brain child. His years as an exile from the Congregation were spent in poverty and penance and his letters in the Bernried archives reveal deep and abiding sorrow till the end of his life.(Conversatio, ibid.) Even at his last breath he blessed the men and women of the two congregations, repeating. "God bless you for ever, and ever, and ever." (Walter, op. cit., p. 140)

### **Tutzing**

The development of the women branch into a separate juridical body and its relocation at a distance from the men were both a condition for the state to recognize the men's congregation at St. Ottilien and the desire of the bishop of Augsburg. After considering different locations not too far from St. Ottilien, Tutzing was finally chosen as the motherhouse for the sisters. This relocation fulfilled the requirements for the sisters' community to be recognized by the state as a convent, entitled to corporation rights. For some sisters "the thought of parting from St. Ottilien, their cradle and spiritual birthplace, was quite painful." (Op. cit., p.162) By July 1904, with a greater part of the new motherhouse completed, the sisters moved to their new convent and the blessing of the entire house was held on August 28 by Abbot Norbert Weber.

### **New Mission in East Africa**

A group of the missionaries who went to East Africa in 1890 moved from Dar es Salaam to the interior and founded the Lukuledi mission station. Due to the lack of water, they transferred to Nyangao in 1899. In 1901 a sisters' convent was established in Peramiho. The missions were doing well until the Maji-Maji uprising in 1905. On August 14, Bishop Cassian Spiss, two brother and S. Felicitas Hiltner and S. Cordula Ebert on their way to Peramiho were killed by rebels. Both missions were attacked and destroyed and S. Walburga Diepolder was murdered in Nyangao on August 29. She was 35 years old. In the morning of the attack and the flight of the missionaries from the approaching rebels, S. Walburga told her superior that while

receiving Holy Communion she told the Lord: “If you need a sacrifice, please, agree to take me as sacrifice and save all the others for the future work in your vineyard. (Sr. Walburga Diepolder, OSB, p. 17) The Lord took her at her word.

It was this spirit of self sacrifice to save others that had animated Fr. Amrhein and which he instilled in the young men and women of his monastic-missionary foundation. The spirit lived on in the priests, brothers and sisters who gave their lives for the mission not just in East Africa but in the different parts of the world where they were sent. The blood, spilled by rebel sword, or spent by tropical diseases, has born abundant fruit in the many lands they labored, bearing witness to the power of the love of Christ. May the same love set afire the hearts of all the Missionary Benedictines of our time to offer their lives so that others may know the saving love of Christ.

### **Questions for Sharing:**

1. Is there a pattern that emerges from this brief narration of the early history of our congregation? What does the pattern say to you as an MBS today?
2. Go back to the statio conference of M. Mary John in *Conversatio* January 2008 and consider the reflections which are rich material for personal consideration and group sharing.
3. Saving souls for the glory of God was the motivation repeatedly mentioned by our pioneer sisters. How is this expressed in our present-day missionary-apostolate projects and activities?

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*[Editor's Note: There was a suggestion that I print this also in the CONVERSATIO for those who do not get my common letter.—SMJ]*

## LENTEN REFLECTION

The second reading of the Mass (2 Corinthians 5) on Ash Wednesday proclaims:

**NOW IS THE ACCEPTABLE TIME,  
NOW IS THE DAY OF SALVATION!**

Did you know that one meaning of the word “Lent” is *spring*? This is significant because Lent is a time of spiritual renewal. The Lenten practices that we choose—prayer, fasting and almsgiving—are not ends in themselves but serve to help us in this process of *metanoia*—going back to the original purpose of our existence. The marking of ashes on our forehead is a reminder that God has put his mark on us—claiming us as his own—first in Baptism and in our religious consecration. We belong to God. We may have given pieces of ourselves away to worldliness, distractions, and egoism—Now is the time to gather these pieces of ourselves and offer them anew, acknowledging God’s claim on the totality of our being. Over and above the practices we will choose as a community, I would like to suggest that as the ashes remind us of our mortality, we enter into a period of serious reflection and ask ourselves one question: **HAVE THE YEARS OF LIVING RELIGIOUS LIFE REALLY MADE ME A BETTER PERSON?**

If we contributed to our Centennial book: **THE CHOSEN PATH**, let us re-read the article we wrote about our finding our way to the convent. Put ourselves into that young person, feel again her awakening, her falling in love, her enthusiasm, her commitment, her undaunted singlemindedness, conquering all obstacles to fulfill her dream. Of course it is not to be expected that we retain the same degree of emotional high, but has this initial fervor solidified into a more sober but genuine commitment? So, let us come back to our present self and try to answer the question we posed to ourselves: After so many years of religious life—of inner and outer sources of spiritual nourishment—the many opportunities of prayer, reflections, spiritual guidance from books and living teachers, chances of growth, yes, also the trials, difficulties and crisis—**CAN I TRULY SAY I AM A BETTER PERSON?**

1. Have I become a more authentic person—coming to the **TRUTH** about myself, seeing through my justifications, rationalizations, self-deceptions, and defense mechanisms, truly learning from the feedback that superiors and sisters have given me all these years? Or have I been successful in fending off these feedbacks and continue in clueless existence with my blind spots?
2. Has my vow of poverty succeeded in detaching my heart from material attachments and easy living making me truly one with the poor or has the relative comfort and conveniences of life in the convent where I don’t have to struggle for survival as some people in the world have to do, made of me a hothouse plant, self-centered and pre-

occupied with my own physical well-being unable to endure the *dura and aspera* that daily living as religious brings?

3. Has my vow of celibacy truly expanded my heart towards unfeigned love for my co-sisters and genuine compassion to those in need, able to ask and give forgiveness without bearing grudges, or has it soured me making me rigid, inflexible, self-righteous, judgmental condemnatory, and unforgiving?
4. Has my vow of obedience taught me genuine freedom of the heart and surrender to God's will communicated through my superiors or have I become expert in giving "good" rather than "real" reasons to obtain permission and have I at times deceived myself, interpreting as "God's will" what I know in my heart of hearts as "my will". Have I evaluated my religious life in terms of the buildings I have constructed, projects I have accomplished, millions I have earned for the convent or have I realized that the only criterion for success in the religious life is work done in the spirit of obedience.
5. Has my life in an enclosure given me an oasis of solitude and space for reflection and prayer that has contributed to the serenity of my soul or has it merely reduced my world to the 4 walls of the convent, narrowing my perspective, limiting my vision, constricting my heart making every petty thing that happens in it a tragedy—making me blush with embarrassment when I compare these to the real life and death crisis of my friends and relatives in the world.
6. Have I through the years developed an inner core and a sense of inner security that enable me to live with a measure of peace, contentment, and joy regardless of the kinds of people that I have to live within my community, or do I experience a crisis of vocation every time I experience opposition, conflict or tension with my superior or members of my community?

I have come to realize that living in the convent does not necessarily make us better persons. And so during these 40 days of Lent, it is truly imperative that we seriously reflect on these things. And with God's grace we may experience a new spring, a new Easter in our life as religious. Then perhaps we will become better human beings, and we know, that when we become more human we become more divine.

**AMRSP STATEMENT**  
**on the Jun Lozada Case**  
*“...and the Truth shall set you free!”*

We thank God for having been given the rare privilege of taking an active part in the triumph of truth over lies in a culture of fear and moral bankruptcy. We believe Jun Lozada is only an example of what is happening in our government institutions.

We humbly recognize that God, in His mysterious ways had made us his instrument in enabling Jun Lozada to come out with his historic revelation to the press and to the Senate: we consider him a modern David confronting a Goliath.

Being with him these past few days is a genuine spiritual experience – getting to know a man who embodies what is best in the Filipino. We saw his courage unfolding before our eyes as he tried to overcome his fears and apprehensions leading to his testimony before the Senate in unparalleled authenticity, courage, honesty, humility and unfailing courtesy.

It is unthinkable for us to imagine that this basic heroic act, that is putting him and his family not only in danger but in a state of dislocation that sees no immediate end, would be in vain. We cannot go back to business as usual.

As he spoke we began to realize with growing horror the extent of corruption that is systematic in our government bureaucracy and its toll on our suffering people who could actually live in well-being if the resources of the country were truly used for their good.

We recognize the important role of the media people in this critical moment of our country. We commend them for the support given to Jun Lozada and for their unrelenting pursuance of the truth.

We commit ourselves to pursue this crusade for TRUTH. We call on all sectors of society especially the Church to join us in this commitment.

Let us heed the call of the CBCP for communal action:

*“Truth hurts. Truth reveals. But the truth must be served. The truth will set our country free. Only the truth – not lies and deceits will set us free. This truth challenges us now to communal action.”*

What could this communal action be? This is a challenge to our creative commitment. We identify some action points:

- Put up **TRUTH CAMPS** in your community:
  - school
  - parish
  - offices
  - other settings

This can be any place where we can gather to be informed on the latest turn of events in our country, be helped to reflect on these and deepen our awareness of truth, spend some moments of common prayer and light a candle for Truth to prevail. Competent persons will assure the constant flow of updates and materials for reflection.

- Launch **SIGNATURE CAMPAIGN FOR TRUTH**

Suggested introductory text for the signatures:

*“Naninindigan ako sa katotohanan. Naniniwala ako kay Jun Lozada. Kung sino man ang magtataguyod sa katotohanan ay paninindigan ko”*

- Join the fund drive **“FUND FOR TRUTH”** to concretely help Jun Lozada now and eventually other witnesses who will also hopefully find the courage to come out and uphold the truth.
- Continue the **CRUSADE FOR TRUTH** initiated by Jun Lozada’s testimony
  - This is especially an earnest call to people in government offices. We encourage you to find the courage of the truth so that you, too, may experience that “The truth will set you free.”
  - If you are a professional organization, make your own statement.
- Join Prayer Rallies and other forms of mass actions

## THOUGHTS OF JUN LOZADA

*Dearest Sr. Mary John,*

*I can't express how deeply I appreciated your help...*

*I'm sharing my thoughts on this subject which I wrote a few months ago, kindly go over it once you have the time.*

*Feel free to share it if you find it fit.*

*Sincerely yours,*

*Jun*

### **AN APPEAL TO OUR PATRIOTIC COUNTRYMEN-AND-WOMEN IT IS TIME TO MOVE**

“Once you achieved your aim of destroying the system you fought against, do not leave a single trace or else the bad habits that were formed during the period of the dysfunctional system and which still remains in the heart and mind of the people, shall nurture this remnant and allow it to come back in a more vicious form.”

This is one of the three conditions set forth by our beloved hero, Jose Rizal, this condition captures the framework of action and shall act as the guiding principle in any postgame scenario that must be formulated as part of the preparation to undo this brazenly corrupt regime.

But before we consider any action to take, it is a must to first address the concerns and arguments of other individuals and sectors that I believe are critical in creating a broad based support for such an action.

**The Arrogant Mindset** – First of which are the purveyors of the Perversity issue whose main contention is that taking action may simply result to a more seriously worsened scenario than the present one we are against with. This is typified by remarks such as “any action against the administration will only result to anger and chaos in the street, a situation that can be taken advantage of by ideologically and militarily cohesive groups such as the CPP/NPA or the Right Wing military groups, which will be bad for the economy and will only worsen the already bad situation.” Let me warn you to look out for this arrogant mindset, it is arrogant because it is their view that the universe is totally predictable, and that they are capable of knowing ahead all the unforeseen both the intended purpose and unintended consequences of such purposive social action. It is a fact that no person has been endowed with such gift that borders on the Divine.

**The Insulting Mindset** – Second are the believers of the Futility issue, whose main contention is that any action taken will simply result in the same thing we are fighting against. This is typified by remarks such as “*Kahit ano pang gawin natin, kahit sino pang ilagay mo dyan, pareho pareho lang ang mga yan! Ganun pa rin ang kalalagyan natin, magnanakaw din lang ang papalit dyan!*” Filipinos who say these words are insulting our entire race, they are condemning

all of us as incapable of patriotism and love for one another. It seems that they are the majority now, they may have the numbers, but they are wrong. I've always believe that real strength does not come with numbers but it comes with commitment.

**The Untrustworthy Mindset** – Third are the proponents of the jeopardy issue, whose main contention is that any action taken will be too costly for the intended purpose of removing a morally corrupt administration. This is typified by remarks such as *“Hintayin na lang natin hanggang 2010, anyway mahigit 2 taon na lang yan. Baka pag ginalaw yan mas lalo pang masaktan ang ekonomiya at maghirap pa tayo lalo.”* This type of statements are usually observed from people who are willing not to do the right action now for fear that they may not have the courage to do what is right in the future. Watch out for people who think like this, for they will be the practitioners of the same corrupt practices that you are now fighting against once they are the ones in power.

### **What alternative action can we suggest?**

**Take action together** – There seems to be a common agenda from among all sectors to eradicate state sponsored corruption in the country, as practiced by the current and her immediate predecessors. This shared goal will be enough to put together a sober and well thought out post scenario plan that will address the concerns of the first group in a more synergistic and certainly with a more chances of success compared to a number of separately conceptualized plan by different independent groups.

**Inaction is going to be more expensive both in short term cost and long term goals** – The short term cost of this state sponsored corruption is going to be enormous if measured in total peso cost, our quick estimate just for the current Chinese projects will run into tens of billions of pesos. But the more costly and hidden from the public is the long term damage to the government institutions, which will now have a new standard for public service that is *“Corruption pays as long as you as steal big, only the small gets to jail.”* This argument will blow the second and the third groups arguments for not taking action, because it is more costly and it will not be the business as usual even if a new group takes over government.

**History will vindicate us** – The history of our Nation has repeatedly shown that Filipinos do not punish a sitting administration for political and authoritarian misdeeds but rather only upon gross moral transgressions such as exemplified by Rizal's death by the Spaniards, Moises Padilla's death from the hands of a Quirino henchman in Negros, Ninoy's murder from Marcos' thugs and the Tessie Aquino's jig from the unsealed envelope in Erap's Senate. The Filipino people are now being subjected to such gross moral abuse such as the ZTE-NBN deal, the bribery scandal, Garci affair and other outright and blatant lies to the people.

*“Why be a single stone alone out there in the field? If you can be part of a great monument of the Filipino people.”*

Lumabas ang mabuting Pilipino!

## SIGNATURE CAMPAIGN

To our public servants,

We the signatories, in solidarity with all decent and truth-loving Filipinos, are angered by the rampant and systemic corruption that is eating away at the fiber of our society. Corruption is theft; it violates justice, erodes the common good, and offends the will of God. It dehumanizes those who engage in it even as it robs the food from the poor man's table. Our political landscape is littered with large scale, unresolved cases of graft and corruption. Enough is enough! We can no longer be silent! We demand the following:

1. That we be told the whole truth about the NBN-ZTE case based on the testimony of Rodolfo "Jun" Lozada and other whistleblowers and that those found guilty of wrongdoing be prosecuted and punished.
2. That there be a clear and just resolution to high profile cases like:
  - The North and South Rail projects
  - The Jose Pidal scandal
  - The Bolante fertilizer scam
  - The "Hello Garci" scandal
  - The reported shameless distribution of bags of cash in Malacañang
  - The COMELEC-Megapacific computerization deal
  - The overpriced Diosdado Macapagal Boulevard
  - PIATCO-NAIA Terminal 3

We denounce in the harshest terms all attempts to distort and suppress the truth (i.e. EO 464 that prevents Cabinet Members from testifying in Senate) and to coerce, intimidate imprison, and do violence all those who dare to speak it. We condemn all forced disappearances and extrajudicial killings and demand that these be properly investigated and the perpetrators held accountable.

We call on all public servants to stand up for truth, justice, honesty and integrity. Without these, no government can be trusted, and where there is no trust, governance degenerates into bribery, manipulation and intimidation. We encourage those of you who love this country and who know the truth about such issues to speak out. God does not abandon those who, striving to obey His law and heed the voice of their consciences, place themselves in his hands. Stand by the truth and we will stand by you.

Let us heed the Word of God: "For once you were in darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of the light, for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but expose them." (Eph 5:8-11)

We call on you” Stand up for right; walk in the light! We know that you like us dream of a nation that is free, just, united and prosperous. Act now to make this future possible. Together with us, be the change you want to see!

So say we and to this we affix our signatures:

Name

Address

Date

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