

STATIO CONFERENCE

Fundamentalism *New Evangelization and Conversatio Morum*

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Still fresh from the exhilarating election Chapter, we are naturally excited with bright expectations of what the new phase in the life of our priory will be like with S. Lumen Gloria Dungca as our new prioress. What will be new, what will remain the same? Certainly we can be sure that the priory-wide renewal we lived through in the last three years will proceed steadily and with even greater impetus. The New Evangelization beckons us with challenges to our Missionary Benedictine way of life through our *conversatio morum*.

The Lineamenta for the 2012 Synod of Bishops states that Pope Benedict XVI chose the theme “The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith.” This is an expansion of the scope of the New Evangelization which primarily addressed “*those who have drifted from the Church in traditionally Christian countries,*” *those of the first evangelization mainly in the old world, Europe, to include the offering “of the Gospel to the need for a new evangelization for the Middle East.” (Lineamenta, Preface)*

Scanning the horizon of the New Evangelization, the Synod aims “*to examine the present situation in the particular Churches and to trace ...the new methods and means for transmitting the Good News to people in our world today with a renewed enthusiasm proper to the saints, who were joyous witnesses of the Lord Jesus Christ.*” (*Ibid*)

What then should distinguish the new evangelization? It is to be “*new in its ardour, methods and expression.*” Consequently, the new evangelization is not a matter of redoing something which has been inadequately done or has not achieved its purpose... Nor is the new evangelization taking up the first evangelization again, or simply repeating the past....Instead, *it is the courage to forge new paths in responding to the changing circumstances and conditions facing the Church in her call to proclaim and live the Gospel today. (Lineamenta, 5)*

Fundamentalism

Briefly mentioned in the Lineamenta as within the scope of the New Evangelization, fundamentalism is a movement existing in substantial areas of the world and would therefore constitute part of what the Lord Jesus meant when he commissioned his apostles to make disciples of all nations. What is fundamentalism?

When I mentioned that I was working on a statio conference touching on fundamentalism, a sister spontaneously said, Ah, born again! Her quick remark illustrates the broad way the term is commonly understood by many people. To get a clearer understanding of the term is the first task.

The simplest definition of the term fundamentalism is: “A usually religious movement or point of view characterized by a return to fundamental principles, by rigid adherence to those principles, and often by intolerance of other views and opposition to secularism.” It is an “organized, militant Evangelical movement originating in the United States in the late 19th and

early 20th century in opposition to Protestant Liberalism and secularism, insisting on the inerrancy of Scripture.” (Free Online dictionary)

The term has become “general designation for revivalist conservative religious orthodoxy.” (Fighting the Good Fight)

Author Karen Armstrong defines fundamentalist movements as "*embattled forms of spirituality, which have emerged as a response to a perceived crisis*" - namely the fear that modernity will erode or even eradicate their faith and morality. That concern is shared by Fundamentalist Christians, Jews, and Muslims, Sikhs, and others. (Fundamentalism in Christianity and Islam)

In reference to Christianity, Judaism, Islam, the media generally use the term to refer to the most conservative wing of the religion. For example, fundamentalist Christianity is often described as the most conservative wing of Evangelicalism. Sometimes the term is used as a general-purpose "snarl" word which is intended to denigrate a religious group, implying that they are intolerant or prone to violence. (ibid)

Fundamentalism then is a self-defensive reaction, a kind of retreat to basic ideas and beliefs, therefore fundamental, as a form of religious security against the threats of change. It is not confined to a single religious persuasion or denomination but is found in most religious systems.

Christian Fundamentalism

How did the term fundamentalism start?

The word fundamentalism originated with an early 20th Century American religious movement which was named after a compendium of twelve volumes published between 1910 and 1915 by a group of Protestant laymen entitled: *The Fundamentals: A Testimony of the Truth*. This testimony proposed five required Christian beliefs for those opposed to the Modernist movement. (Fighting the Good Fight)

Spurred on by reactions to Darwin's theory of evolution, the original Fundamentalist Movement was seen as a religious revival. “It came to embody both principles of absolute religious orthodoxy and evangelical practice which called for believers to extended action beyond religion into political and social life.” (ibid)

The spread of Christian fundamentalists to Roman Catholics is attributed to some extent to changes in 1960's in the wake of the renewal with Vatican II.

By the late 1930's Christian fundamentalists had formed a sub-culture and had largely withdrawn from the rest of society. Following major revisions to Roman Catholic beliefs and practices during the Vatican II conferences in the 1960's, the term "*fundamentalist*" started to be used to refer to Catholics who rejected the changes, and wished to retain traditional beliefs and practices. Thus it became a commonly used word to describe the most conservative groups within Christianity: both Protestant and Catholic. (ibid)

A Catholic source confirms that Catholics seem to constitute a disproportionate share of the new recruits to Fundamentalist groups. In many Fundamentalist congregations, anywhere from one-third to one-half of the members once belonged to the Catholic Church. Among Hispanics, often former Catholics are the congregation. (Fundamentalism. Catholic Answers.)

The strength and influence of some fundamentalist groups can be gathered from the positions taken by the Moral Majority in the US.

[The] Fundamentalist-led Moral Majority emerged to challenge social and religious beliefs and practices. Today, Fundamentalists are the most vocal group, on a per-capita basis -- who oppose abortion access, equal rights for homosexuals, same-sex marriage, protection for homosexuals from hate crimes, physician assisted suicide, the use of embryonic stem cells for medical research, comprehensive sex-ed classes in public schools, etc. (Fighting ...)

Distinguishing Marks of Fundamentalists

Certain characteristics mark the belief system of Fundamentalists.

The belief that is first and foremost the defining characteristic of Fundamentalists is their reliance on the Bible to the complete exclusion of any authority exercised by the Church. The second is their insistence on a faith in Christ as one's personal Lord and Savior. "Do you accept Christ as your personal Lord and Savior?" they ask. "Have you been saved?" (Fundamentalism. Catholic Answers)

A Catholic reaction to this is that there is something missing in this idea of salvation.

This is unmodified Christian individualism, which holds that the individual is saved, without ever considering his relationship to a church, a congregation, or anyone else. It is a one-to-one relationship, with no community, no sacraments, just the individual Christian and his Lord. And the Christian knows when he has been saved, down to the hour and minute of his salvation, because his salvation came when he "accepted" Christ. It came like a flash.

In that instant, many Fundamentalists believe, their salvation is assured. There is now nothing that can undo it. Without that instant, that moment of acceptance, a person would be doomed to eternal hell. And that is why the third most visible characteristic of Fundamentalism is the **emphasis on evangelism. If sinners do not undergo the same kind of salvation experience Fundamentalists have undergone, they will go to hell.** Fundamentalists perceive a duty to spread their faith—what can be more charitable than to give others a chance for escaping hell?—and they often have been successful. (ibid)

Many criticisms are thrown to Fundamentalists but they do succeed in attracting adherents. And it is only fair to credit them for the "praiseworthy task of adhering to certain key Christian tenets in a society that has all too often forgotten about Christ." (ibid)

In the Philippine experience, the fundamentalist tag has been applied to the Born Again charismatic groups which usually claim to be non-denominational. The vast majority of these Born Again Christians are former Catholics who have left the Catholic Church.

Other charismatic groups in the Philippines remain Catholic and form a substantial support to parishes. Some of these claim national membership, having chapters in provinces. The fundamentalist strain in these is their adherence to the Bible but they adhere to the Catholic interpretation of the Bible and have contributed to the spread of the practice of reading and praying with the Bible.

Islamic Fundamentalism

Islamic fundamentalism ([Arabic](#): *usul*, the "fundamentals") is a term used to describe religious ideologies seen as advocating a return to the "fundamentals" of [Islam](#): the [Quran](#) and the [Sunnah](#). (Islamic Fundamentalism.)

Scholars of Islam disagree on the meaning of the terms Islamic fundamentalism and Islamism. American historian [Ira Lapidus](#) calls Islamic fundamentalism "an umbrella designation for a very wide variety of movements, some intolerant and exclusivist, some pluralistic; some favourable to science, some anti-scientific; some primarily devotional and some primarily political; some democratic, some authoritarian; some pacific, some violent."

Moreover, he says that a fundamentalist is "a political individual" in search of a "more original Islam," while the Islamist is pursuing a political agenda. (Ibid)

Author [Olivier Roy](#) distinguishes between fundamentalists (or neo-fundamentalists) and Islamists. Fundamentalists are "more passionate in their opposition to the perceived 'corrupting influence of Western culture,' avoiding Western dress, 'neckties, laughter, the use of Western forms of salutation, handshakes, applause.'" Islamists like Maududi didn't hesitate to attend Hindu ceremonies. (Ibid)

Other differences between Islamists and Fundamentalists are:

Islamists often talk of "revolution" and believe "that the society will be Islamized only through social and political action: it is necessary to leave the mosque ..." Fundamentalists are uninterested in revolution, less interested in "modernity or by Western models in politics or economics," and less willing to associate with non-Muslims.

Islamists generally tend to favour the education of women and their participation in social and political life: the Islamist woman militates, studies, and has the right to work, but in a *chador*. Islamist groups include women's associations. While the fundamentalist preaches for women to return to the home, Islamism believes it is sufficient that "the sexes be separated in public." (Ibid)

The Islamic fundamentalist tag has been further confused with its association "with political activism, extremism, fanaticism, terrorism, and anti-Americanism. ...which are better termed "Islamic revivalism and Islamic activism." Terrorist attacks by Arabs come to mind. In contrast,

American author Anthony J. Dennis accepts the widespread usage and relevance of the term and calls Islamic fundamentalism "more than a religion today, it is a worldwide revolutionary movement." He notes "the intertwining of social, religious and political goals found within the movement" and states that Islamic fundamentalism "deserves to be seriously studied and debated from a secular perspective as a revolutionary ideology." (Ibid)

Common to all Muslims is the practice of praying four times a day, the men kneeling facing Mecca and touching their foreheads to the ground.

Highly controversial is the women issue in Islam which calls for caution in any discussion caution due to lack of objectivity. Rights granted to women in the Quran and the Prophet Mohammed "were a vast improvement in comparison to the situation of women in Arabia prior to the advent of Islam" but "after the Prophet's death the condition of women in Islam began to decline and reverted back to pre-Islamic norms." (Women in Islam)

Concurrent with the feminist movement in the West in the 20th c, a movement of Muslim feminism started which was mainly among upper class Muslim women. Eventually Muslim feminism stepped out of the western model following the shift to the socio-political models in the Muslim world. Muslim women have been developing a distinctly "Islamic" feminism.

An example is the wearing of the veil or *hijab* which in the eyes of western feminists is an obvious sign of oppression and "a symbol of a Muslim woman's subservience to men." But the veil "has become increasingly common in the Muslim world and is often worn proudly by college girls as a symbol of an Islamic identity, freeing them symbolically from neo-colonial Western cultural imperialism and domination." (ibid) It will be recalled that the wearing of the veil has become an issue in France and other European countries which have large Muslim populations.

The cultural practices grown from the basically fundamentalist orientation of Islam govern social relations. An example is the wearing of the burkha by Muslim women in some countries. Another is the rigid prohibition of marrying a non Muslim. Even dating a non-Muslim carries a death sentence which is meted out by the family in violation of all the laws of the country they have settled in.

The future outlook of the spread and reach of the Islam religion is projected below.

Muslim population has been ever increasing through birth rate as well as high rate of conversions. Islam is fastest growing religion and consequently this religion has become now the largest followers on this planet. At this moment Muslim population stands at 2.1 billion which is far greater than currently estimated 1.6 to 1.7 billion whereas Christian Population is 1.98 billion... It is expected that if present rate of increase of Muslim population continues that by 2030 One out of Three person will be Muslim. (Muslim Population in the World.)

In contrast the Christian populations are decreasing.

In many parts like Europe [Cambridge University], North America [CNN], Christian's are getting away from their religious belief. On the contrary among the Muslim Population the faith to their religion is ever increasing [CNN]. (Ibid) In many parts like Europe [Cambridge University], North America [CNN], Christian's are getting away from their religious belief, On the contrary among the Muslim Population the faith to their religion is ever increasing [CNN]. (Ibid)

Moreover, Muslims are much more likely than Christians and Hindus to say that their own faith is the only true path to paradise.

New Evangelization and Fundamentalism

Clearly, Fundamentalism of both the Christian and Islamic kind poses grave difficulties to the New Evangelization. The Fundamentalists' rigidity in embracing their beliefs, black-and-white convictions, intolerance of other religious groups, and their aggressive zeal to convert others to their way of salvation provide little room even for dialogue.

Shall we then just leave the fundamentalists to continue spreading their brand of religion and salvation? Do we feel helpless against the rapid spread of Islam to cover the whole world? Can we ignore the encroaching American Evangelicals who attract baptized Filipino Catholics to their sects? How shall we relate to the Born Again "non-denominational" groups who have recruited our students, and even our own family members and relatives?

New ardor, new methods, new expressions are the "battle cry" of the New Evangelization which we Missionary Benedictines are challenged to learn. In what ways can we take up the challenge in our approach to fundamentalists?

We would dearly love to share our Catholic faith with them because we are convinced that our way to salvation in Jesus Christ and membership in the Kingdom of God is the true way. But that is a monumental task which can be approached only in incremental steps under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It's important that we know their beliefs. Those of us who have to deal with Muslims specially in Mindanao will do well to study Islam as a religion and the Muslim social practices.

All of us have to deal with Born Again groups. We need to admit our negative attitude and prejudices towards them and treat them with respect. We also must find out what they hold against us and the Catholic Church. And to be able to hold our own, we must be sure and convinced of our own faith and our beliefs. Perhaps it is with some Born Again groups that we have more chances of holding dialogue and to come to some level of understanding. For all these, ardent and sincere prayer is needed, for it is only the Holy Spirit working in us that any approach to peoples of fundamentalist persuasion is possible.

Challenge to *Conversatio Morum*

Again and again it has been emphasized that witness of life is the most convincing and persuasive way of drawing others to our faith. For us Missionary Benedictines this witness of life is through our *conversatio morum*. As our Constitutions states so briefly and simply, “*Conversatio morum* encompasses our whole life as Missionary Benedictine Sisters; it is the following of Christ in religious community.” (Constitutions, Chap II, 5)

In the spirit of the New Evangelization we are challenged to discover how our way of living *conversatio morum* can be infused with new ardor, new zeal so that the way we live will be a convincing confirmation of what we proclaim by our Missionary Benedictine calling.

In his talk in our Election Chapter Archbishop Luis Tagle’s first point was the renewal of culture, what he termed evangelization of culture (Tagle) In our priory we have our own monastic culture which encompasses our liturgical prayer including the Divine Office, other religious practices, our feasts, our community exercises, etc. Our formation initiated us into this monastic culture and as we grew in monastic life these practices have become almost second nature, almost automatic. Faithfulness to these exercises is expected of a MBS of good standing.

In his book “Making Time for Yourself,” Abbot Primate Notker Wolf remembers a scene in the play “Death of a Salesman.”

The scene takes place in the first act. Willy Lohmann, the hero, is talking to his wife Linda and at the same time remembering another woman. His thoughts and feelings are elsewhere while he is talking to Linda. During their conversation someone is walking backwards and forwards in the background. The woman he is really thinking about is already visible. She is the one who is really present for him. (Making Time ... Abbot Notker Wolf, p. 84)

We can ask ourselves, when we are at Holy Mass or praying the Divine Office, are we really there? How often are our minds elsewhere? Like the woman in the scene our worries, problems, concerns are present and alive in the background and they are the ones really present for us, more than the Lord we are praying to. Our prayer becomes a cultural activity which we do everyday almost automatically. This holds true of our participation in the liturgy of the Mass everyday when we hardly join in the responses. The challenge is for us to shake ourselves out of routinary prayer, and to reclaim unity of heart and voice that Benedict admonishes us to do so that our prayer will be real worship that draws down God blessings on us, the Church and the world. That is why we say that our prayer is a missionary activity.

We could ask similarly about community recreation. Do our recreations serve to strengthen the bonds of community relationships from the sharing of experiences? Do we converse only with the sisters we like to be with? Do we give the sister who is speaking the respect of listening? Do we try to draw into the circle those who tend to sit in the margins of the group passively waiting for the recreation to end?

Moving to our labora, do we give to our assignments in school, social apostolate, health service, etc. the energy, full-hearted dedication, reliability and spirit of self-giving – the excellence in service -- that we expect from the seculars? Have we grown in a work ethic that does not count

the cost of serving? Or have we settled on ways of giving 50% of our selves and reserving the other 50% for an undetermined future need?

Our living of our monastic cultural needs renewal of meaning, attention, commitment, excellence and a spirit of joy that can be contagious.

From the fundamentalists we could learn to hold fast to the basics of our faith and to be faithful to the promises of our vows. We could emulate their eagerness to convert others to their way of thinking. From the Muslims we could learn faithfulness to daily prayer. Without being rigid and reactionary, we could reclaim the tradition of fidelity of our Missionary Benedictine forebears, infusing them now with deeper meaning and appreciation that we have discovered from years of living the life. This requires some form of denying ourselves so that a more vigorous faith life can mature in us.

The witness of life through our faithful living of *conversatio morum* in the details of our monastic culture draws power from on high for the advancement of the purpose of the Lord Jesus for his people, even of the rabid fundamentalists. We are Missionary Benedictines, and Evangelization is our task. By our very lives of prayer and work we evangelize, and it is only fitting that we are clear enthusiastic channels as well as committed, zealous laborers that the Lord can count on in the mission of bringing all peoples into the Kingdom of the Father.

Guide questions:

1. Take an honest and critical inventory of your own attitude towards fundamentalists and share what you can do to change that attitude.
2. From the brief and limited presentation in this conference, what do you think we can learn from fundamentalists?
3. Discuss suggestions on how we can overcome our fear of the spread of fundamentalism and what we as Missionary Benedictines can contribute to contain that spread.
4. In what more ways can our *conversatio morum* make us more effective evangelizers?

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