

STATIO CONFERENCE

“DIALOGUE OF CULTURES”

By: Sister Pia Lansang, OSB

A GLANCE AT OUR CULTURE OF SUFFERING IN EASTER

At no other time in the Church Year or liturgical cycle are we more keenly aware of the power of the “*Gospel as a “living and life-giving message” (Lineamenta)* ¹ than at this time of Easter.” To me, this powerful phrase from the 2012 document for the Synod on the New Evangelization stands out in the section on CULTURE. In fact, culture is mentioned first among the six sectors which call for the new evangelization.

This *Statio* Conference for the month of April coincides with Palm Sunday and the start of Holy Week. Once more we shall be participating in and witness some of the traditional “Christian” pageantry in our country (which also exists in some other Christian countries of the world): -- e.g., the colorful folk religiosity in our various geographical regions like the processions; the Stations of the Cross in some public streets (a cry of the “oppressed” for justice and an end to violence and killings); the reading and staging of the Passion of Christ; the sight of penitents walking on roadsides; and even actual scenarios of crucifixion in Pampanga.

Side by side with this dramatic “re-enactments”, there is the more silent but profound liturgical rituals during the *Easter Triduum* in fully packed churches in the Philippines. Filipino Christians will come in droves to God’s house and occupy every available place – from sheer numbers, the crowds could be daunting (just think of Baclaran in Metro Manila!). While some critics may tend to belittle these cultural expressions of popular Filipino religiosity, one cannot ignore the fervor and devotion, as well as the faith experience of oneness at this time.

Practically the whole nation takes a “Holy Week pause” and all seems to be at a standstill. All roads lead, so to say, to a symbolic journey to “Gethsemane” and “Golgotha”. We know how it could be quite formidable to attempt to travel to the provinces as Good Friday approaches. Our bus stations will be teeming with people and luggage – all travelers are eager to go home to worship the suffering Christ in their localities (the annual worship of the black “Nazareno” in Quiapo kind of mirror this phenomenon). In all this, there could be, of course, always the danger of focusing on the “spectacle” and “drama” and maybe missing the deeper message of Easter and the Resurrection. Can we get stuck with a culture of suffering and miss the passover to new life in Easter?

MOVING OVER TO EASTER’S CULTURE OF LIFE

Therefore the Easter *Triduum* (from the Evening Mass of the Last Supper to Vespers of Easter Sunday) ² was restored by Vatican II to its rightful place as the high point of our whole

paschal liturgy. With its distinct spirituality of a call to *transformation and new life*, it depicts Christ's supreme love and sacrifice during these three most important and sublime days of our liturgical year. For some of our people the moving liturgical rituals during the *Triduum* (Footwashing; Last Supper; Veneration of the Cross; Easter Vigil and Blessing of the new fire and the Easter candle; and especially the Renewal of Baptismal Vows) sometimes get overshadowed by the pomp and drama happening outside of the formal liturgy. Herein lies the challenge to look deeper into our folk religiosity and so-called "Christian culture" and be able to lead our people to a new evangelization through the official liturgy of the Church. This, too, involves a dialogue that can purify, deepen and enrich the faith of our people.

The documents from Vatican II tells us: "*Christ redeemed us all and gave perfect glory to God principally through his paschal mystery: dying he destroyed our death and rising he restored our life. Therefore the Easter Triduum of the passion and resurrection of Christ is the culmination of the entire liturgical year.*"³ And Easter is the most important feast of our Christian life: the start of a season of unsurpassed joy that will last all of 50 days of rejoicing and singing the alleluia.

Yet, in all this, year after year, we see a dominant culture of suffering and poverty in our Christian nation, a suffering which the greater majority of our people identify with. This "culture" is a condition which must be brought into dialogue with the Easter culture of life -- life to the full! Deep down, in their simple faith, our people (and all of us) are yearning for life! Hoping for a better life! This could be as concrete as the longing for affordable prices of basic commodities; or as real as the desire for healing from the oppressive pain of poverty. How can we make the Gospel that the Church enjoins us to "*boldly proclaim*", in the spirit of the new evangelization, better penetrate this culture of seeming hopelessness? How can we help our people move over to an Easter culture of redemption? How can we transform our lives to a "Gospel culture" of living hope and joy?

Further we could ask: What does new life, new hope mean for our people? What does "being raised to life with Christ" mean for them? How is the message of the Easter Vigil to be received? Are we truly a renewed people, transformed into a new creation? How does Easter impact the life of our society in our specific context of widespread poverty, so different from the context of many highly developed western countries of the world? How do we engage the Gospel of Christ in a dialogue of cultures in the varying circumstances of peoples and races, nations and continents?

THE PHILIPPINES, A CHRISTIAN CULTURE?

Exactly a year ago, in April 2011, I took part in a celebration of the 75th Anniversary of the Foundation (1936-2011) of Student Catholic Action (SCA) in the Archdiocese of Manila. On this occasion we held the 10th National Leadership Training, which coincided with this milestone, at the *Fleur de lis Auditorium* of St. Paul University in Herran. There I discussed the topic of "*Are We Really A Christian Nation?*" in the area of "Religion and Spirituality".

In line with our reflections here, we could really reformulate the question into “Do we Filipinos have a truly Christian culture, with all the necessary Gospel values that should characterize this culture?” In other words, we could ask sincerely, “Has the culture of the Gospel successfully influenced our Filipino culture in terms of family life, society, our communities and nation as a whole?” This question is also directed to each one of us personally: “Am I a truly a Christian in my way of thinking, acting and living the values of the Gospel (conversion of life)? How far are the Gospel values operative in my own personal life?”

Through all the centuries of “dialogue” and interaction between Christianity and our Filipino culture – have we found a convergence or are there disparities which continue to exist? In this dialogue between the Gospel and our lives, what are some conflicts that we see between Christ’s values and our values as a nation, as a people? Which Gospel values seem to clash with our lifestyle? Think, for example of the changing attitude towards the sanctity of and fidelity in marriage. What Gospel values are in conflict with the values of our social milieu? How do we practice the Christian tenets of honesty and truth in public and government service? Here we remember, for example, the efforts of our current government to root out the culture of corruption in the government. The task is far from easy and points to a long process before it can get accomplished. While we are still on an uphill climb, we do hope that leadership, together with all of us, may be able to sustain the momentum towards restoring integrity, justice and truth in our nation. The struggle is certainly worth it.

OUR CULTURAL IDENTITY AS CHRISTIANS

Knowing one’s identity is of basic importance to a person. As a Christian I also have my distinct identity and corresponding culture. It is valid to ask: Who is a Christian? What makes me a Christian? What would you consider as indicators, or Hallmarks of a Christian individual or group of Christians? Which would be the criteria that determines that a community is truly Christian? Are there common ideals that bind a Christian community together? Again, who is a Christian? Are there unmistakable trademarks and characteristics that identify the Christian?

From a very old discourse by *Diognetus* we read “*Christians are not distinguished from the rest by their homeland, or by their language, or by their customs. Because they do not live in their own exclusive cities, neither do they speak a strange language... Rather, living according to their own particular situation...adapting themselves ... to the customs and habits of each country, they give signs of a peculiar admirable behavior, amazing in the opinion of everyone.* (underlining mine). *They live in their own countries ... they share everything as citizens...*”⁴

Coming across these lines, in fact, recorded by an anonymous author, personally reminded me of the distinguishing characteristics of the early Christian community which we are familiar with. The following are what we find when we read Acts 2:44-45 and Acts 4:32, 34. In the spirit of interactive reflection and dialogue, you may certainly feel free to add your own hallmarks --

(Note: In the context of this reflection, I purposely use the term “culture” which, in the following, could be interchangeable with “value”)

HALLMARKS OF THE EARLY CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

A CULTURE OF SHARING WITH THE NEEDY

The Christians had all things in common. They would sell what they had and distribute the proceeds to all, as they had need.

A CULTURE OF UNITY and LOVE

The Christians were “*of one heart and soul*”) No one claimed private ownership but everything was held in common. There was not a needy person among them; those who owned lands or houses sold them and the proceeds were brought to the community.

A CULTURE OF TRUTH, HONESTY AND INTEGRITY

Soon after we see a breach of conduct against the value of honesty: the couple, Ananias and Sapphira cheated the community by deviating from the practice of sharing everything as they kept part of the proceeds of a sale for themselves.

A CULTURE OF GOOD ORGANIZATION, FAIRNESS AND JUSTICE TO ALL

No one in the community was to be neglected. As the group grew in number, we learn about a complaint on behalf of the needy widows who were neglected in the distribution of food... As a result, seven persons were appointed to attend to care for the needy.

A CULTURE OF PRAYER and MINISTRY TO GOD’S WORD

The apostles (leaders) themselves continued with prayer and the ministry of the word. And so the community continued to pray and to serve (*Acts 6:1-7*).

While we do not claim that these Christian values found in *Acts* are the only criteria for life, we could certainly ask ourselves “To what degree can we re-capture the admirable zeal of the first Christians for the culture of sharing? We also know, however, that many other religions have their own practice of goodness, sharing and care of others, perhaps even to a greater degree than us Christians. We could then ask further “What and who, then, is specifically a Christian?”

FAITH IN CHRIST

In a book entitled “This is Our Faith”, we read: “*The Christian is not distinguished from the rest by his external works, but rather by his inner being (all underlinings mine) as a Christian: by his faith in Jesus of Nazareth. This is the specific characteristic of a Christian. The believer may do the same things as the non-believer, but the motivation of the former will be grounded on faith; the cosmivision that frames his commitment emanates from faith. It is faith that gives the direction of his life.*⁵

So important is this faith, that we read in 2 Tim 1:3-7 about how Paul advises his beloved disciple Timothy in these words: “*Fan into flame the gift of God within you*” (*gift = Timothy’s Faith*). Paul reminds him to enkindle, “set on fire” the faith which Timothy inherited from his grandmother Lois, and from his mother Eunice, and now, the very faith (a great legacy) “living in him”. This indicates to me a heritage of an effective “*transmission of the Christian faith*” (a term used by the *Lineamenta* (#6). ” Here we see a “culture of Christian faith” handed down from one generation to the next in Timothy’s family. Many of us can surely recall a similar faith-culture in our own homes where we learned habits of prayer and worship in church from our grandparents, parents, and so on. May this faith continue to be strengthened and enable us to become strong agents of the new evangelization.

ADDITIONAL HALLMARKS OF BEING A CHRISTIAN ***A CULTURE OF COURAGE, LOVE, SELF-DISCIPLINE***

As Paul fires up Timothy with zeal for his faith, he gives us additional hallmarks of the Christian culture. He mentions for example the spirit of courage (not cowardice) and power, of love and self-discipline (In connection with “courage”, I am strongly reminded of *Lineamenta’s* repeated use of the word, “bold”, “with boldness”, “boldly entering into dialogue” with the signs of the times; thus, an urgent exhortation to *boldly proclaim* the Gospel in all areas of life today.

In summary, the early Christian community manifested specific Gospel values pointing to a culture of

A STRONG SENSE OF COMMUNITY, and

A SENSE FOR THE COMMON GOOD BEFORE THE INDIVIDUAL.

Christ, at the center of being Christian

Again we may ask: What constitutes my being a Christian? I wish to underscore that at the center of being a Christian is CHRIST. He is the deciding factor of our culture and identity. As followers of Christ, we bear not only his name but his trademarks. As people imbedded in the Christian culture, we imitate his life and continue his mission which form the basis and the framework of our evangelization. From Christ flows all our activities, the origin and end of our actions and service to others. We embrace all the values he stood for -- LOVE, TRUTH, JUSTICE, INTEGRITY, SHARING, PRAYER, COMPASSION, SERVICE and so on.

DIALOGUE WITH ANOTHER CULTURAL REALITY **TODAY -- *SECULARISM***

The *Lineamenta* presents another cultural reality today — SECULARISM — which is prevalent in many parts of the world, especially in the west. (But we, too, have to reflect on where this secularism is increasingly becoming present in our own society). Here, too, we face

the challenge to “*proclaim and witness to the Gospel as a living and life-giving message*”. In today’s age of secularism, the question is “Do people still have a need for God?” As opposed to the Christian culture and Gospel values, there are secular values which pull us to the other direction – e.g., the pursuit of affluence, wealth, money, prestige, honor, success and fame. There is also the danger of “glorifying” pleasure (hedonistic culture) and pursuing whatever contributes to my perception of my highest goal (pleasure): addiction to alcohol, drugs, sex, and so on. What about the danger of maybe “deifying” technological progress and scientific advances which can even rule out God as the origin and source of life?

Where is God’s place in a secularized environment? Does it really matter that there is a God? How can the culture of the Gospel enter into dialogue with the secular world? How do we face the evident clash of values? The *Lineamenta* points to the need to develop our ability to read and understand the new situations in our times – such as the changing culture in many parts of the world. (#6).

To know and understand this changing culture enables us to dialogue wisely, as informed Christians, with the realities of this age for the sake the Gospel which we proclaim. The 2012 synodal document underscores that to be effective agents of the new evangelization presupposes *a life of prayer, listening, and *conversion of life --* all profound Christian values which we also commit ourselves to as Missionary Benedictine Sisters.

*To this last requisite, we could read our own monastic-Benedictine vow of *conversatio morum*. The Working Paper for the 2012 General Chapter cites some beautiful texts on this Benedictine vow.

The urgency of a bold approach to new evangelization in our time is made evident in a culture of secularism which “*fosters a mentality in which God is completely or partially left out of life and human consciousness*”. This means that in a secularized milieu, God does not really play a significant role in the way many people live their lives. In a list of priorities, God would rank low – be that in terms of going to church, or engaging in worship, receiving the sacraments, joining religious activities, understanding God’s word, moral considerations and so on.

We read in the document (*Lineamenta*) that today’s form of secularism has not taken “*the form of a direct, outright denial of God, religion or Christianity. Instead, the secularizing movement has taken a more subtle tone in CULTURAL FORMS which invade people’s everyday lives and foster a mentality that God is not at the center of the picture*” (#6). This indicates that God no longer really counts in the way many people in modern society live their lives in an age of secularism.

*Lineamnet*a describes the culture of secularism as *a threat which has to be faced each day in life in the various manifestations of the so-called CULTURE OF RELATIVISM*. Old values held sacred such as the relation between man and woman (my insert: does marriage and a permanent commitment still make sense?), the meaning of human life and reproduction and even the mystery of death itself are all put to question.

CULTURE OF SECULARIZATION FAMILIAR TO US

An “image” of *secularism* which probably is quite familiar to many of us is what we see in not a few churches abroad which are near-empty during a Eucharistic celebration. During a tour, visitors and tourists would flock to admire the magnificent church architecture and click their cameras left and right, as if, partly, to preserve the vestiges of a “past” Christian culture. Perhaps, indirectly, the large and formerly flourishing religious institutions (including some convents, a seminary or monasteries in old traditional Christian countries) which, in some cases, are now also becoming empty are closed, or even sold. What about some Catholic schools that also have to be closed because there is now a lack of Sisters, Brothers or priests to run them? Is the low birth rate in some countries of the west affecting vocations? This development (downsizing families) could also be a lurking threat in our own country. And what about schools in one or the other country abroad where Christian symbols (e.g., crucifixes in classrooms) are no longer allowed? Or schools where Prayer before classes is to be legally prohibited? And what about materialism and all that this attitude to life includes — just how do we bring the Gospel into a transformative interactive dialogue with such a social reality?

We also see traces or tendencies to secularization in our own country when more parents now find it more difficult to bring their children to church. Like in many parts of the world, Sundays, for example, can easily get crowded with many other options (which, in themselves are not bad and are part of our human needs). But they could relegate other priorities such as worship on Sunday which may be deemed as “less attractive” and unimportant. Some examples: hobbies, sports, “mallng”, shopping, the gym, yoga sessions, the “wellness SPA”, movies, parties, outings, and so on. If not regulated, in this overcrowded “culture of options” it is quite easy to leave God out. God could become “inconvenient” in my busy schedule and priorities. After all, if God does not count for me, why should I mind or notice the difference? This mentality becomes a kind of *cultural mindset* in a lifestyle oriented toward pleasure, individualism, consumerism and love of “the good life.” Church activities could pale in comparison to the ready thrills and excitement which modern life has to offer in an age of technology: travel, freedom and independence, “the good life” with a “fluid” lifestyle, various experiences which the age of speed and “instants” makes possible today. It cannot be overlooked that such a culture — a mode of individualistic living — would often tend to avoid the hindrances of stable commitments, sacrifice, or whatever proves inconvenient. The things of God and God himself, could easily fall under this category of “inconvenient”. Or maybe “irrelevant” and even “boring.”

ADDRESSING A CULTURE ATHIRST FOR GOD

Amidst the seeming lack of consciousness and even total disregard of God, *Question # 24 of Lineamenta* (p.32) addresses “*the deeply felt expectations of humanity and its THIRST FOR GOD?*”. Certainly, here, we feel doubly addressed as Missionary Benedictines -- with our own monastic orientation of “Seeking God” above all, an orientation which, for that matter, is also true of every Christian. The new evangelization challenges us Christians to create, with boldness

and determination, *forms of dialogue* by which we share our experiences of seeking God. In such a dialogue can those who listen to us recognize in us someone who has personally encountered God in our life? ⁶ Is the Gospel we proclaim operative in our own lives? Are the values of Jesus the same values that motivate my actions? This dialogue becomes a *cultural forum* for the existence of God, a God who offers not temporary and fleeting pleasures but a more lasting fulfillment for the human heart in its never ending search for happiness.

“DIALOGUE”, AS WE KNOW IT

The term “dialogue” comes from the Greek word “*diá*” which means “through” and “*logos*” - “word” or “*meaning of the word*”. Dialogue takes place when we – two of us or more -- talk to one another about something we wish settle or about which we want to reach an understanding. It is common to engage in dialogue especially when the parties have different backgrounds and concerns. Then we look forward to the enrichment such a dialogue can bring about, widening our horizons and shaping our perspectives. Dialogue is a tool or methodology widely used for educational purposes, as well as in intercultural organizations: between different nations, cultural groups, and associations.

A glimpse at some ideas on dialogue: D. Bohm considers dialogue as a way to explore “the roots of the many crises that face humanity today”. In his opinion, dialogue is “exploratory” the essence of which is *learning*, and therefore no rules can be fixed for processes of dialogue. He undercores that *dialogue needs time and can't be rushed*.⁷

Another author sees dialogue as a “*form of action aimed at trans-formation*” and is different from discussion which mainly allows each person to express or communicate what they think.⁸

In genuine dialogue listening and “attentive silence” and understanding are required, as opposed to mere technical dialogue which aims at objective understanding. For *Buber*, “...*dialogue can be in danger of becoming a monologue, excluding “the other” or the supposed partner in the dialogue*”.⁹ How can we restore God in society and communities- that the question of God becomes again a part of human consciousness?

One of the questions posed by *Lineamenta*¹⁰ refers to the “great cultural institutions Catholic universities, cultural centres and research centres”....and asks how these have a voice in the present day discussion on the basic values of the human person (defense of life, family life, peace, justice, solidarity, creation. It is heartwarming that these are all issues which we increasingly address in our apostolates, educational, social, health – in our own Benedictine schools, hospital and social centers. The new evangelization can permeate all these places as we continuously empower our people, lay partners and the poor to imbibe the relevant values of the Gospel of Christ. Annually, we see this expressed and articulated in our institutional objectives, in our goal-setting in our communities and prioritized in our Priory projects and community activities. Our Chapters and periodic community evaluations show us our strengths and deficits and enable us to re-shape policies and directions in line with our mission of evangelization.

OUR CONSTITUTIONS ON CULTURE

Our Constitutions mentions “culture” in a number of places. Supplement 11 of our Constitutions (p. 53) gives us the “Guidelines on Interpriory Sharing of Sisters”, among them, (#4) “Preparation” – speaks of the need to prepare the Sister sent on mission “*to learn about and respect the culture and history of the place where she will be assigned.*” This includes, of course, the study of the language of the new place. This familiarity with the culture (language, history) is also mentioned in SN 508.1.

Ch. IV on Community (#2b) speaks of “*the variety of cultures in our international community*” which is enriching and challenging. Enrichment is brought about by learning to appreciate the values of others; adapting ourselves to diff. ways of living, and through attitudes of flexibility and adaptability as missionaries. With so many of us having experienced foreign mission, I asked a few Sisters to tell me one thing in the respective culture where they were sent to. It was delightful to hear **Sr. Baptista Busmente’s** cultural adjustment to her concept of time in **SPAIN**.

“I learned to eat breakfast at 9:45 a.m.; lunch at 3:00 p.m. and supper at 10.00 p.m. I played the organ (in the parish) for Funeral Masses at 8 p.m. which was indicated as “A las ocho de la tarde.”
*“Spain is the only country where you go to bed and wake up on the same day.” **

*(it belongs to the culture that people go to bed only at past midnight and wake up later in the morning — a cultural shift in reckoning time, e.g., “night rest”; mealtime, office time etc.).

TANZANIA

Sr. MARISSA PIRAMIDE: “*One thing I appreciate most about Tanzania: the way they treat a guest or visitor. They must treat them in a personal, respectful way...and say goodbye the same way. Besides serving him/her the best food available.*”

PORTUGAL

SR. LUZIA MARIA MANALO: “*Once a personal relationship has developed, greetings become more personal: men may greet each other with a hug and a handshake and women kiss each other twice on the cheek...gifts are usually opened when received.*”

PHILIPPINES

SR. ANNA YU (Korean Sister currently on studies in the Phil.)

“One thing in Philippine culture that I learn from is “openness”, “welcoming, open heart ...” (sic)

And to this I add my own joy in experiencing NAMIBIAN culture for 8 years.

I certainly always enjoyed the joyful dancing to the music of drums in the liturgy, truly a “celebration of life.” I remember in particular, one Easter night, when, after the Easter vigil, we went out in the church square (Windhoek Cathedral) and danced and danced together with Bishop Ndumbu to express our Easter joy.

Back to our Constitutions, N 501 speaks of our open missionary service which is rendered to all peoples – and not limited to any race, culture, social and economic class. In all of these assignments, “... *we adapt ourselves to the cultural expressions of the respective people, assimilate its authentic values and seek effective ways of proclaiming the Gospel*” (N 509).

MISSIONARY LIFE: A DIALOGUE OF CULTURES – DIFFERENT WAYS OF LIFE

Isn't this what the wealth of cultures is all about? Our own internationality as a congregation is a gift, in spite of the challenges we face in our differences of cultures. It is an exchange that enriches, that shapes me as I encounter different “ways of life” and “life practices”. As I immerse myself into a respective culture, I open myself to the uniqueness of a new world of meanings: a new people, *location, nation, history, lifestyle and ethnicity, systems and webs of representation and meaning, and realms of artistic value and heritage.*¹¹ Jesus himself entered a specific culture, that of the Jewish nation. He followed faithfully the religious customs of his people, for example, he celebrated the Feast of the Passover in Jerusalem (remember how he got lost there at a young age); he paid taxes, and prayed in the synagogues. He respected the culture and he was a good Jew. But even more awesome is how Jesus enters our human history, becoming man and taking our human form. He incarnates himself, becoming like us in everything human except sin.

OUR GENERAL CHAPTER 2012: A RESPONSE IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

The monthly prayer booklet sent by the Generalate and Chapter Preparatory Commission to the diff. Pories in preparation for our 12th Gen. Chapter highlights our *Conversatio Morum* and the New Evangelization.

The prayer intention for the month of February 2012 (pp. 14-5)¹² is precisely for “*Conversion of Life*”, a vow we all have undertaken as MBS. In it a Scripture passage from Eph. 4:22-24 is quoted which exhorts us to give up our old way of life and putting aside our old self.... “*Your mind must be renewed by a spiritual revolution*” that each one of us can put on the “*new self in the goodness and holiness of truth.*” Timely? What an appropriate Easter message for this year!

The Chapter prayer booklet points to us some ways in which we could make this *conversatio morum* a reality in our life:

- to allow God to enter the very core of the way we live our lives: by what criteria? By what standards? How Christ-motivated is our life?

- to change by seeing our life through God's eyes;
- to strive to live a new style of life in Christ; a new life with the values of Christ and the Gospel;¹³

In view of this spiritual advice, what is it, then, that we can change in our own personal and communal life? (conversion of life?)

The concluding prayer reads in part:

"...convert our hearts and minds to you!" and asks for renewal in our communities and missionary endeavors.

IN SUMMARY, SPIRITUALITY OF DIALOGUE IS A TRANSFORMATIVE SPIRITUALITY

The FABC (Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference) Booklet of 1998¹⁴ speaks of the spirituality of dialogue as a "transformative spirituality". In the section on "Understanding Evangelization in the Context of Asia Today", *Dialogue and Evangelization* comes up as one of the key points. It highlights our context of the millions of people belonging to other different religious traditions (Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism). With the great religions of Asia in our midst, ours is a context where inter-religious dialogue becomes even more relevant as an integral part of evangelization.

As in all dialogical endeavors, we need here the basic attitudes of Christ in our "dialogue of cultures" with other faiths: *humility, openness and receptivity*. The FABC continues to point that "*Christian spirituality is at heart a spirituality of dialogue.*"¹⁵ This dialogue will lead us to "*a transformation of life, conforming it more and more to the Image of Christ*", which gradually, will bring about the transformation of society, and the birth to the "*new humanity in Christ.*"¹⁶

With the wish that we may be graced to take our *conversatio morum* to heart as our own concrete response to the synodal document on "*The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith!*"

Happy Easter!

END NOTES

¹ *Lineamenta for the Synod 2012 on the New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith*, Article # 6.

² *Gen Norms for the Liturgical Year and the Calendar*, # 18-19.

³ *Ibid*, # 18.

⁴ In Gonzalez-Carvajal, "This is Our Faith", (transl. by J. Vazquez), p. 119. (Anonymous, *Discourse to Diognetus*, 5.)

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ *Lineamenta*, Question # 24, p. 32.

Notes #7-9 below as contained “In Forum on Intercultural Dialogue:

Organised by the Conference of INGOs (International Non-Governmental Organizations and Practitioners) of the Council of Europe”.

⁷ *Bohm, David (1991): On Dialogue. Reprinted in 2004 by Routledge, New York.* (written with Donald Factor and Peter Garret in 1991).

⁸ *Allman, Paula (1987): Paulo Freire’s Education approach: a struggle for meaning. In: Allen, Garth et al (1988).*

⁹ *Martin (1947): Between Man and Man. Republished in 2002 by Routledge, New York) M. Buber*

¹⁰ *Lineamenta*, # 22, p. 32.

¹¹ G.Titley, *Gavan (2004): Resituating Culture. Council of Europe, Strasbourg.*

¹² *Conversatio Morum and New Evangelization. Monthly Prayer for the 12th General Chapter, Sept 20 to Oct 25, 2012, Rome.*

¹³ From J. Ratzinger’s *New Evangelization 2000*, (cf. p. 15 of General Chapter Prayer-Booklet).

¹⁴ *Discovering the Face of Jesus in Asia Today, FABC (Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences), OHD. Phil.1998.*

¹⁵ Ibid, p.16.

¹⁶ Ibid, p.17.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Share with one another your experiences of “other cultures” in your local or foreign mission.
2. Name one learning that enriched you in your vocation as a Missionary Benedictine Sister.
3. What to you are the greatest challenges of the new evangelization
 - in our own communities?
 - in our society and country?
4. How can I become a better witness to the Gospel as a “living and life-giving message”?
5. The *Lineamenta* calls Mary the “Star of the New Evangelization”. How does her culture of contemplation and cooperation in her Son’s mission apply to you in your task of evangelization?