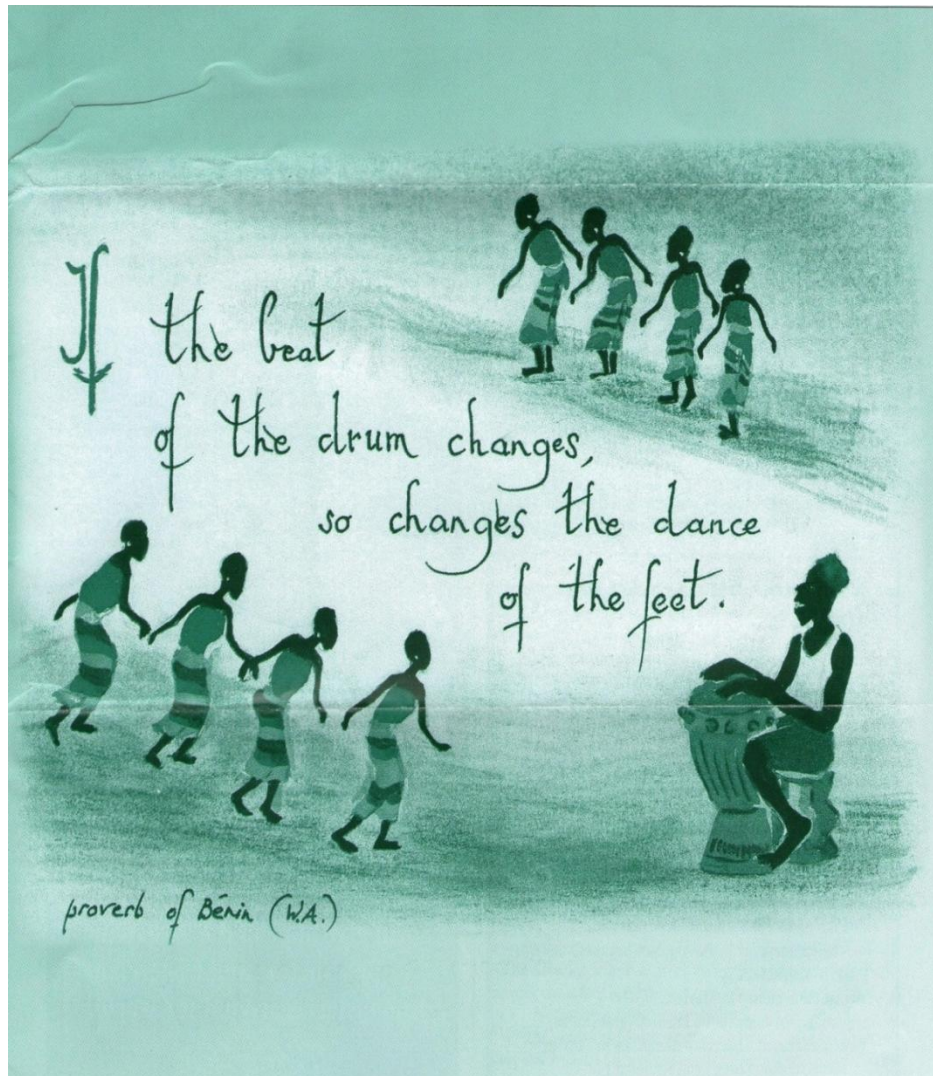


STATIO CONFERENCE

NEW EVANGELIZATION

(12th General Chapter 2012, Direction II)

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INTRODUCTION

“If the beat of the drum changes, so changes the dance of the feet.”

These days, writes Sr. Stephanie Schmidt, OSB, Executive Director of AIM, USA, the dance of our feet not only changes but changes rapidly as technology brings the drumbeats of the world into our immediate awareness. Facebook brings us to hundreds of “friends” from around the world with just a click or a touch on the screen, we chat via video, receive updates, source any information via Twitter, create our own fans club and not to mention the vast array of web and news sites and blogs waiting to be opened.

Fifty years ago, bishops and theologians from 116 countries gathered in Rome for the Second Vatican Council. Pope John XXIII believed it was time for the church to enter into dialogue with the modern world, to invite some much needed fresh air into a centuries-old institution. The meeting forever changed the beat of the drum in the Catholic Church. The Spirit drummed a new understanding of church and our role in it. New images called us, the People of God, to dance with all people of good will, to build ecumenical bridges, to respect the values, customs, and languages of other cultures by incorporating them into liturgy, to work passionately for peace and justice, to recognize the gospel’s preferential option for the poor.

The state of affairs half a century ago as described by the Second Vatican Council can also be applied to the present day: “Today, the human race is involved in a new stage of history. Profound and rapid changes are spreading by degrees around the world.” (*Gaudium et Spes*)

We are living in a particularly significant historical and cultural change. These times are increasingly forcing us to live immersed in the present and in passing things which make it increasingly difficult for us to listen, to transmit an appreciation for the past and to share values on which to build the future for new generations. Just in the first decade of this millennium you and I have witnessed developments which have indelibly marked the history of humanity and dramatically affected it in many ways. These developments, for many observers, have surpassed far beyond those which have happened in the last half of the twentieth century.

Truly, the beat of the drum has changed, and changed so rapidly it did.

DANCING TO THE DRUMBEAT

How have we, as the People of God moved our feet to dance to the drumbeat? In what way has the Church respond to change in the work of spreading the good news to all people?

❖ Taking a look at Church documents, it is clearly stated in *Lumen Gentium, Ad Gentes, Christus Dominus, Presbyterorum Ordinis and Apostolicam Acutositatem* that the people of God, religious, priests, and bishops have the responsibility to play their part in the missionary-evangelization activity of the church. To bring the light of Christ, to spread the good news of a Father who is so in love with the world to give His only begotten Son, who took us as sisters and brothers is ours to live and give witness to the whole world.

❖ In his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Pope Paul VI has obviously promulgated the touchstone document of the modern evangelization movement in the Catholic church. The document states, “We wish to confirm once more that the task of evangelizing all people constitutes the essential mission of the church. It is a task and mission which the vast and profound changes of present day society makes the more urgent. Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize.”

❖ In 1990, Pope John Paul II chose the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council to issue the most important recent magisterial document on evangelization, the encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (Mission of the Redeemer). In this important encyclical, the pope made clear that this new evangelization has its roots in the documents of the Second Vatican Council.

❖ “Today,” Pope John Paul II declared in *Redemptoris Missio*, “the Church must face other challenges and push forward to new frontiers, both in the initial mission ad gentes and in the new evangelization of those peoples who have already heard Christ proclaimed. Today all Christians, the particular churches and the universal Church, are called to have the same courage that inspired the missionaries of the past, and the same readiness to listen to the voice of the Spirit... Faith is strengthened when it is given to others.”

❖ It is well known that one of the most important legacies of John Paul II’s pontificate is his urgent and repeated call to a “new evangelization.” John Paul II first used this phrase on March 9, 1983, at Port-au-Prince, Haiti, speaking to the bishops of Latin America. He suggested especially that, with the arrival of 1992, five hundred years of evangelization will have taken place in the Americas. The year 1992 was highlighted as a benchmark for evangelization with new vigor, techniques, and methods. In addressing all the bishops of Latin America on the occasion of the 500th anniversary of Columbus’s discovery of the New World and its subsequent evangelization, John Paul II again called for a new evangelization, explaining it more fully.

THE NEW EVANGELIZATION

Much has been written on the new evangelization. The *LINEAMENTA* is an excellent document to help us in the understanding of what it involves. To reflect and discuss on the new evangelization, the Bishops all over the world came together in the synod last October 2012 upon the invitation of Pope Benedict XVI.

The **new evangelization** has as its point of departure the certitude that in Christ there are “inscrutable riches” (Eph. 3:8) which no culture nor era can exhaust, and which we must always bring to people in order to enrich them...these riches are, first of all, Christ himself, his person, because he himself is our salvation. It does not consist of a “new gospel.

“While the notion of evangelization”, writes Dave Nodar, the Director of Christlife in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, Maryland, “may seem foreign to Catholics, in light of the times we are living in, the changing world scene, the deterioration of western civilization, and the weak condition of the Church in many parts of the world, Pope John Paul II’s urgent call to a new

evangelization is imperative. The entire Church must come to embrace this calling and make it a normal part of Catholic life.”

Changing societies and cultures call us to something new: to live our communitarian experience of faith in a renewed way and to proclaim it through an evangelization that is “new in its ardor, in its methods, in its expressions”. (*Lineamenta*) 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.

Our 12th GENERAL CHAPTER 2012 AND NEW EVANGELIZATION

Our 12th General Chapter was being held at the Casa in Rome while the Bishops of the whole world gathered to reflect on “the new evangelization for the transmission of the Christian faith”, last October 2012. The General Chapter stressed the call to deepen our faith in order to better share it with others and become effective ministers of new evangelization. It has laid out four directions in living authentically our Missionary Benedictine charism in the next six years. We focus on the second direction laid out by the General Chapter for this March statio.

Direction II: NEW EVANGELIZATION

- ❖ *“New evangelization invites us to undertake new responsibilities and generate energies to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ with renewed enthusiasm in various cultural and social settings and in changing circumstances.*

“A true evangelizer is so caught up in the beauty of the Good news that he or she is energized by it to proclaim. If we feel timid and dry, perhaps the fundamental and deeper question to ask is, “Am I convinced that the news I bear is good?” First and foremost, “Is it good news for me?” People are able to detect whether the news we bear with joy and passion is truly the Good news. The Second Vatican Council on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*) speaks about the *sensus fidei*—the the christian community has been given a collective charism by the spirit through which we are enabled to discern the presence of the true word.) Luis Antonio Tagle, *An Easter People*, Jesuit Foundations, Ateneo de Manila, 2003, p.3)

We cannot fool the Christian community no matter what gimmickry we inject into our proclamation. The people will know if the news we bear is really the Good news of salvation and if we have truly experienced it and have experienced it faithfully. The spirit does not and will not fail the collective memory of the Church.

- ❖ *We offer the evangelizing presence of our communities in listening to the cry of the people. We are challenged to look for new ministries and new ways to proclaim the Gospel. We renew our commitment to address the different types of poverty that beset society.*

“In communities of love and reconciliation,” Yves Raguin, SJ writes, “Jesus has success, as redeemer, as savior, as missionary. In divided communities, Jesus fails.” A divided community keeps the world in disbelief.” When a little community reflects Jesus, it will become a leaven in the world. What Jesus said and did will become visible in the concrete life of the monastics together, in their way of working and praying and in the way they deal with the things of this world. Furthermore, an accepting and forgiving community, radiating joy in the midst of poverty and still is generous is the best impulse for people to believe in Jesus and his Father. It is I believe what is meant by an evangelizing presence of communities.

Looking for new ministries and new ways to proclaim the gospel spring from the divine invitation that rings daily in our ears for the Lord wants us to keep going. “It is high time for us to rise from sleep.” (Rom 13:11). Here, Esther de Waal relates this to *Conversatio Morum* in responding totally and integrally to the call of Christ, “Come follow me.” She meant it “to live provisionally, ready to respond to the new whenever and however that might appear. There is no security here, no clinging to past certainties. It means a constant letting go.”

Jesus tells His disciples to travel light, to go with a companion, and to be ready to move on. “Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread nor money, not even an extra tunic. Whatever house you enter, stay there, and leave from there.” (Lk.9:2-4) Jesus encourages His disciples to be ready to move on, not to over invest in any one place or effort. We are called to give our best efforts to the tasks of the ministry but always to be ready to move on. This becomes more concrete particularly in our yearly call for transfers, locally or to international assignments as part of inter-priory sharing.

❖ *We shall be a counter witness to a world that misuse modern technology as an illusory form of prosperity and instant gratification. On the other hand, we acknowledge it as a powerful tool for new evangelization.*

Our General Chapter recognized the potency of modern technology. Being the world where our youth and the present generation live and breath, it is of utmost importance to evangelization. In the Message of the General chapter 2012, p. 11, I quote “From the rising of the sun to its setting let the name of the Lord be praised.” (Ps. 113:3) It is the springtime of new evangelization in a digital continent. The name of the Lord is no longer proclaimed just from the rooftops but from the laptops. It is handed on not only through Oral Tradition but through technological innovation. The use of modern technology can be a powerful tool in faith formation, prayer and evangelization.”

“But there is one area too, the media, which we, the Church, have not yet tapped” declares then Archbishop Tagle. “When we say media, the means of social communications, we are approaching media not just as means of communicating. **The media themselves constitute a new culture.** It is a new culture that is powerfully changing tastes, the second nature of Filipinos. It is a culture of how to transmit ideas, how to behave, how to be who I am. And they use powerful images, compelling messages, catchy tunes. They present idols, and in no time they have changed minds and hearts. (Luis Antonio Tagle, DD, STD. Conference to the Priory Chapter 2012

An article I read in the February 2013 issue of National Geographic magazine is entitled *Crisis Mapper*. It features Patrick Meier who was sitting in his Medford, Massachusetts apartment when the January earthquake struck Haiti. The 35 year old Tufts Ph.D candidate was soon assisting quake victims—without even leaving home. Opening his laptop, he mobilized hundreds of volunteers to scrape data points from tweets, text messages, UN reports, and more to build a constantly updated online map. His efforts guided citizens, aid workers, and the U.S. Coast Guard; experts say that the map likely saved hundreds of lives. What a positive way to use media for mobilizing for action and change!

Close to home, a recent experience of maximizing the use of the media and modern technology is the worldwide event that occurred last February 14th. The propagation of the campaign to stop violence against women and children through the **One Billion Rising PHILIPPINES** went via the use of television, internet, Youtube, Facebook, Twitter and the like. The campaign was participated in by over two hundred countries with countless women and children and men participating. The email from One Billion Rising Philippines shows personalities like Mr. Robert Redford, Ms. Anne Hathaway, Ms. Monique Wilson declaring their being counted in the one billion rising. In St. Scholastica's College Manila, everyone from the students, faculty, general services personnel, office staff, administrators and Sisters gathered in the campus grounds at 7:30 in the morning to join women all over the world in dancing to the One Billion Rising to say, "Enough! The violence ends now." Media and press people, television and radio networks were there. The next day, the major dailies had it on front page. Within the week, we got the news from friends abroad that One Billion Rising in SSC made it to NBC News, Times News, Hindu Times News. Marie Claire Magazine of the United Kingdom made it as the photo of the day. All tabloids published our photos too.

I last August 2012 Habagat floods, our students, faculty, alumnae texted, used Facebook, Twitter to tell other classmates, friends and other connections to bring to their attention the relief operations in our school, about classmates and families who need help. In no time, school personnel, students and friends came over to SSC to pack relief goods and then help distribute to reachable though flooded areas.

I believe these are good ways of using modern technology in spreading such a worthwhile campaign, in reaching out to disaster areas; protesting against physical and sexual abuse; for upholding human/women's rights, give support to the victims, and enhancing the dignity of God's people. The media is very powerful in touching people's minds and hearts, in shaping culture. Here is also an area where so much of the drumbeat has risen to a crescendo that we cannot afford to shut our ears from. Our interconnectedness, says Sr. Stephanie, is so real that a new beat from far away can send shock waves throughout and demand action from the global family: an ongoing war in Syria, a tsunami in Japan, a super typhoon in Mindanao, a young girl in Pakistan severely wounded for standing up for the right of all females to go to school. These drum beats have the power to ignite violent riots and protests and to bring positive and enduring change.

There is still so much to be done in the area of modern technology and social communications. Many congregations have been founded to spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ through the printed word, via media and other forms of communications. It is said that the youth of today are more visual but they are at the same time hungry for the written word and words spoken with compassion that touch their hearts. Our General Chapter encourages us to explore

this field rich with possibilities for new evangelization as we live our monastic-missionary charism.

CONCLUSION

As we undertake new responsibilities and generate energies to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we are mindful of the need for *Conversatio Morum*, the key which opens to a new paradigm of evangelization. (Message of the General Chapter, p. 7) With our enthusiasm renewed, we are challenged to look for new ministries and new ways to proclaim the good news. The new evangelization is very much tied up with “entering a new missionary age which will become a radiant day bearing an abundant harvest, if all Christians respond with generosity and holiness and challenges of our time.”

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- What were your significant/memorable communities/assignments? What made them memorable?
- In trying and difficult times, how were you helped to meet the challenges of evangelization? What were your sources of energy that invigorated you to carry on?
- “Respecting the values, customs and languages of other cultures is a posture of life that is called for in one who will bring the good news.” Does this mean anything to you in your life as a Missionary Benedictine?

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