



Monastery of the Ascension

THE DESERT CHRONICLE

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Evangelization: Old and New

By Hugh Feiss, OSB

BISHOP AMPHILOCHIUS OF ICONIUM (D. CA. 400) USED THE PHRASE “TO BE A MONK IN ACCORD WITH THE CHURCH” (*monazein ekklesiastikos*). At the present moment the two most prominent stirrings in the Church are “The New Evangelization” and the “Preferential Option for the Poor,” both of which call Catholics to personal involvement in the mission of the Church. How to respond to these stirrings in the Church within a monastic and Benedictine context deserves consideration. This issue of the *Desert Chronicle* is a first step in that direction. Fr. Prior Kenneth explores the origins of the idea of evangelization in Isaiah 52:7: “*How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the one bringing good news, announcing peace, bearing good news, announcing salvation, saying to Zion, ‘Your God is King!’*” Not unfittingly, this verse is nestled in the midst of the four “Servant Songs” that point to Christ’s life, death and resurrection on our behalf. In what is the longest and one of the best articles to appear in the *Desert Chronicle*, Sr. Diane Villeneuve, CSC, describes her life as a missionary among the poor in Haiti. John O’Hagan introduces us to the heroic efforts of the Franciscans to evangelize Alta California from 1767 until the 1830s. Finally, a brief article brings readers up to date on efforts to make the monastery library into a more effective tool of ministry and evangelization. All of which are not quite the New Evangelization. However, they do raise the question: Where and how can I direct my feet as a herald of Christ’s Good News to the chapel, the scullery, the library, and the places where the poor and those without Christian faith are found? •

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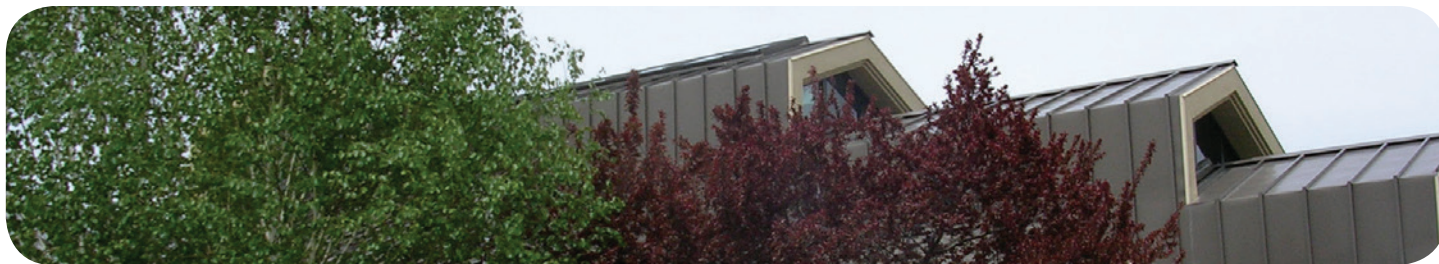
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From the Prior's Pulpit

THE "OLD" EVANGELISM

AS FR. HUGH INDICATED, "THE NEW EVANGELIZATION" IS AN IMPORTANT THEME IN CATHOLIC DISCOURSE THESE days. I'm going to save my remarks on it for some other time, after I have taken in the workshop of abbots and priors early next year when this topic will be discussed in great detail. So for now I'll dwell on "the old evangelization." By "the old evangelization" I do not mean the way the Church has previously tried to bring the good news (the Gospel) of salvation to the world. Rather, I want to dwell a moment on the "good news" that is announced with that title in the Old Testament, in Isaiah 52:7, *How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings glad tidings, announcing peace, bearing good news, announcing salvation, and saying to Zion, "Your God is King!"*

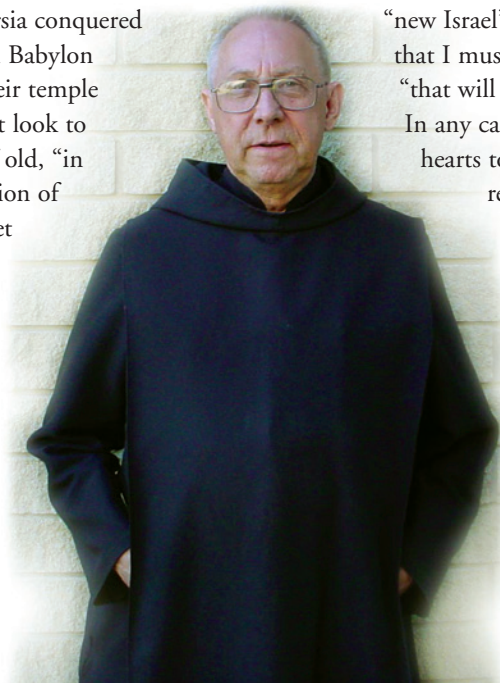
Regarding this passage, a footnote in my Catholic Study Bible states, "God leads his people back from Babylon to Zion, from whose ruined walls watchmen shout for joy." In 539 B.C., Cyrus the Great of Persia conquered Babylon and allowed the Jews enslaved in Babylon to return to their homeland to rebuild their temple and their nation. But Isaiah 52:7 does not look to the reestablishment of Israel's kingship of old, "in the line of David". Rather, at the conclusion of the Babylonian exile the unnamed prophet proclaims that God is Israel's real king, leader and liberator. This is a return to the concept of kingship that the prophet, Samuel, wanted to instill and maintain some 400 years earlier, when the Israelites asked him to anoint a king from their midst. Samuel was displeased with this demand. But the Lord told him: "Grant the people's request; for it is not you they reject, they are rejecting me as king" (1 Samuel 8:7). Samuel then went on to

anoint Saul as king, and then David at a later date. (Read 1 Samuel 9-16 for the complete story).

With the end of the enslavement in Babylon, there was a surge of hope that David's royal line of kingship could be renewed in the restoration of Israel. But Cyrus' far-reaching arm of government did not allow that to happen, lest a king of Israel should eventually incite the people to rebel against Persian rule. Consequently, the hope grew that God would one day soon send a messiah ("an anointed one") to rid the country of foreign influence and power and restore autonomous rule to Israel. This messianic hope reached "fever pitch" by the time of Jesus' birth, much to the dismay and dislike of the likes of murderous King Herod. As Jesus' messianic reputation grew, so did the expectation grow that "he would be the one to redeem Israel" (Luke 24:21). However, . . . you know the rest of the story.

At the conclusion of the Church's "liturgical year", we celebrate the feast of Christ the King. The good news is that Jesus really is "the anointed one of God"—the King of the "new Israel", the Church. Ultimately (and I don't think that I must declare myself a prophet in order to say this), "that will be the core message of the new evangelization".

In any case, with Christmas upon us, let us open our hearts to celebrate the birth of Christ as the ongoing rebirth of his kingship in our hearts and our daily lives. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might have eternal life" (John 3:16). Now that is certainly more than reason enough to shout "Merry Christmas!" even in the face of the trials and tribulations of this present life. Peace and Good Will to All. Oh! And a "Happy New Year" too. •





Thirty-Five Years in Haiti

By Sr. Diane Villeneuve, CSC

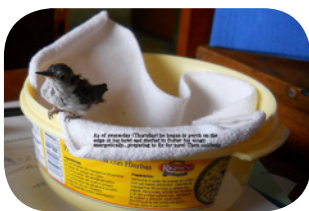
MY NAME IS SR. DIANE VILLENEUVE, A SISTER OF HOLY CROSS WHO HAS BEEN LIVING AND WORKING IN PILATE, HAITI. A GOOD friend, Fr. Hugh Feiss, has asked me to share some of my experiences as a missionary. Indeed, I am happy to do so because the past 35 years have been such a good experience for me, very challenging at times, difficult too, but above all, a time of good work, of love and a truckload of assorted blessings.

A brief word of how I came to be here. Two memories of my long ago past come up as I begin to write this piece. In the first, I'm a youngster, maybe in grade 6. A missionary priest from the Philippines is visiting our school and at the end of his talk, he asks the assembly of students, "Who would like to work like him as a missionary?" It was only my extreme shyness back then that held me back from jumping up with a 12-year-old's version of "Here I am, Lord, send me". In the second memory, I'm a bit older, in high school, and we're studying Chaucer's Canterbury Tales. Among the pilgrims, there is a teacher of whom it was said, "gladly would he learn and gladly teach." Once again, something inside clicked and I heard myself affirming that I wanted to be that teacher.

To be a missionary, and to be a teacher in order to learn and share that learning—these two calls have grown, matured and merged throughout the years and have led me to where I am now in Haiti. My entry into this work in underdeveloped countries had an unusual twist. In 1977, I went to Afghanistan to join two of our sisters working there through the Peace Corps. They had been

seeking a third sister interested in sharing their enriching experience. I began working with science teachers of Kabul through the ministry of education. It was also quite an experience to work in a totally Muslim culture, but that too was very positive. We were in a pre-Taliban Afghanistan with a charming, proud and open people. We could not do the normal missionary religious work of openly preaching the gospel, but we evangelized just by our presence and personal witnessing. We made many friends. After just 18 months, it all came to an abrupt end. One morning we came face to face with armored trucks coming up our street. It was the beginning of the coup that would eventually bring in Russian forces. Two months later, we all came home.

The "Third World Bug" had bitten me and I was ready to continue with the challenges of working with peoples in developing countries. So, when I was offered a placement in Haiti in October 1978, I readily left for my new country. Since then, Haiti has been home. More than anything else, Haiti has fashioned me to become the person I am today. At first, the adaptation was a bit difficult. There is an enormous difference between Afghanistan and Haiti. At the top of the list, Afghanistan had never been a colonized country, never subjugated to a foreign power. Haiti on the other had been a land of slavery and although long independent, its people had not been able to completely cut the psychological chains that had bound them. This makes for a rather complex people, but one rarely finds such tenacity and joy of life as is found here. In spite



See "HAITI", cont. on page 4



of yourself, you become hopelessly attached to these people and ready and even eager to start all over with them for the hundredth time. Discouragement will drag them down, but will not keep them there. They will rise up and try again, and again, and again.

Since 1978, I've been in several educational situations here. I began teaching biology and English at our largest school, "College Regina Assumpta" in Cap Haitien. A college here is just a private school. It took me quite by surprise to see 12-year-olds referred to as students of a college! After a few years there, I went on to another unexpected work. Our sisters have a rural hospital in Pilate a remote town tucked in green mountains. At the time they were just two sisters. One of them was preparing to return to Canada to continue studies in nursing; that left Sr. Madeleine by herself. I joined her and went to work in the laboratory, in which I felt quite comfortable. I had an MA in biology, and labs were not new to me. The most interesting part of my new job was to work with Sr. Madeleine in organizing courses for the continuing formation of her nurses and especially the health workers. This kept me connected with the world of education. Together we invented courses in physiology, anatomy, parasitology. With Madeleine guiding, I even invented and presented a course in pharmacology.

A few years later, it was time to move on again, this time to a small rural area called Thibeau. Sr. Monique had founded a school and dispensary in this lovely little corner of northern Haiti. She had organized community and pastoral committees, and formed many of her own teachers for the primary school. With time, this fantastic woman would become my mentor in the work of education in Haiti, a counselor for anything about Haitian culture, and above all, my dearest friend for the years ahead.



During the 5 years I spent with Sr. Monique in Thibeau, we became acquainted with solar power and together even began installing systems for others: an orphanage of one our sisters, a house and church system for the priest of the neighboring parish, a center for agronomists in the area of Gonaives, and a few other projects, until the commercial solar power industry took off in the country. The other "regular" work we did together in Thibeau was on-going formation for the teachers, supervision of the dispensary, and presiding at services for three of the four Sundays of the month. Thibeau was a chapel of the parish at Milot; we had the priest for the Eucharistic Celebration only once a month. We also organized and found funding for various community development projects: a new cemetery, latrines for 400 families, and a variety of projects in agriculture and health.

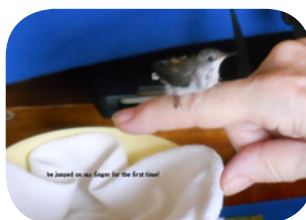
Following five years at Thibeau, I left to return once more to the hospital of Pilate, Monique spent a year in Canada following a burnout and although she expected to return here, she was asked to go to Rwanda for a possible new foundation. Finally, in 1994, as I was at the end of a wonderful sabbatical year in Mt. Angel, OR, I received a call from my superiors to return to Pilate, but this time to take over the position of principal of the school. This I didn't need or want! Directing anything is not among my talents or something I feel comfortable with. However, to keep this wonderful school from slipping out of the hands of the community, I agreed to try, at least for a while. A year later, following the genocide in Rwanda, Monique returned to Haiti and joined me at Pilate. I handed her the keys of the school on a golden platter (well, figuratively at least). With that, the two of us started anew with a wonderful group of teachers in this school of about 450 students in grades k through 9. It's still here that you will find me nearly 20 wonderful years later.

Monique was a powerhouse for work, and a fantastic people person. We had sessions for our

teachers and invited teachers from other schools: sessions for teaching hands-on science, practical methods for French, (for most of the children speak only Creole before coming to school), the importance of creative art, teaching English in grades 7 to 9, even sessions on liturgy for the parish committee.

This might be a good time to mention that if there's any undiscovered potential or hidden talent in a person, something she can't even imagine doing one day, it probably will be uncovered or invented if she is a missionary in a Third World country. Directing construction workers, supervising carpenters, installing solar systems, helping a self-made plumber install a hot water heater and explaining how to "split" the incoming water into hot and cold faucets—these are part of the job, The "missionary" often finds herself amazed at what comes out of her. Necessity will do this to you.

During my last four years with Monique, we built what we considered our finest project in education: introducing teachers, ours and others, and then our students to the beauty and power of the "New Story of Creation" and the New Cosmology. Monique had returned after a sabbatical period in which she was introduced to the work of Fr. Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme. Once again, learning in order to share gave birth to a new project. With Monique's help, I did a lot of translation into French. The teachers took to it with practically no problem and so did the children. I think simpler people, living close to the natural world, have less resistance to this new vision, which presents to us the interconnectedness of all that is created. This would be the climax of Monique's work and probably the project that gave her the greatest satisfaction and joy. It was also her last accomplishment, for in January 2011 she felt she had to let go and rest. She was constantly tired and felt it was just the accumulation of so many years of hard work. That was surely part of that,



but the real cause was a cancer eating away at her. She left for Canada and not quite three months later, passed away. I lost my mentor, companion, and the director of the school. I lost someone who was truly my soul mate. A part of me died with her. Yet, in a very real way, she is still with me here in Pilate, and I never cease to call on her when the going gets rough.

I'm aging too; in a few days I will be 73. I still have plenty of energy to continue working for a long time, but I need to let go of this position of school principal. This coming January, we'll welcome one of our younger sisters who, we hope, will eventually take charge here. I will stay, work and help train her to this job and if all goes well, I will stay on as long as I can be useful. Part of my favorite activities now, and one I'm hoping to be able to do more of if I can be relieved of some of my work, is to continue preparing material in French from the rich sources we have in English on this New Story of Creation: (1) how it can it change the way we relate to the environment and can help us save our planet; (2) how it must change the way we see and relate to God, who must cease to be a God "elsewhere, up there" and become for us, as the children now refer to him, "the Heart of the Great Mystery" in all that makes up the Universe.

So this is my story. Sometimes I wonder that after so many frustrations, difficulties, and even moments of sheer discouragement, I can stop and look at myself and see a woman unbelievably happy. I have grown in ways I would never have imagined, I have learned so much. Most of all I have learned about people, all kinds of people and how we are all the same—wounded and wonderful, beloved children of God. When Jesus promised to those who left all things for his sake that he would repay us with a hundredfold, he wasn't kidding. I am among the happiest and most fulfilled people of this world. •





The California Missions:

UNKNOWN MONUMENTS OF FAITH AND EVANGELIZATION

By John J. O'Hagan*

IN 1769 BLESSED JUNIPERO SERRA LED A GROUP OF FIVE FRANCISCAN PRIESTS TO SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA. THEY HAD BEEN SENT THERE, TO solidify Spain's hold on the west coast of the North American continent. Despite overwhelming difficulties and impossible odds, Serra, and his dedicated band of friars accomplished the task of establishing a formidable Spanish presence in California. They founded twenty-one missions, ranging from San Diego to Sonoma, a distance of over six hundred miles at what was literally the "ends of the earth." A thoughtful examination of these mission complexes, their history, and particularly of the lives invested in them can provide us with significant insight into a way of life which brought to our soil a religious zeal and dedication of singular purpose seen nowhere else in the United States.

Most of the Missions are today situated in well-developed cities. Several of them are in the heart of California's largest cities (San Diego, Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Jose.) At their founding though they were literally at the "ends of the earth." The Franciscan friars who founded the California missions were a unique blend of faith, fanaticism, devotion to duty, and unrelenting labor. They gave up life as privileged persons, resident in a great world power, in order to labor in grueling toil in the New World. While the missions were being built the Franciscans lived in crude, brushwood shelters, or even in holes dug in the hillsides. They suffered greatly from the elements, from hunger and from the hostile activities of the natives. Several of them would have died had it not been for charity extended to them by the natives. Most of them died in what can only be described as grim circumstances.

All of these missions are still in existence today. Nineteen of them are active Catholic churches; two of them are State Parks. They are virtually unknown to the vast majority of the American public. They remain unknown until, often by happenstance, on a visit to one of the Golden State's more famous attractions, a starkly beautiful whitewashed building appears in a valley or even more incongruously on a major city street. Then there might be a quick visit, a tour and a brief history. The story of each of these buildings and the story of the entire endeavor is so much more than can be learned in a quick tour of an empty, silent church. There are in each of the missions stories of sacrifice, suffering, defeat,



San Diego Campanero

and triumph. There are also stories of romance, mystery, political intrigue, violence and death.

The Franciscans introduced agriculture to California, now the most agricultural of all of the states. The Franciscans introduced irrigation to California, now the most irrigated of all of the states. Before the coming of the Franciscans and establishment of the Missions, there was not a single cow, horse, hog, sheep, goat, grape or grain of wheat in the entire province of Alta California. The Franciscans were pioneers as well as evangelists. •

*John O'Hagan, an oblate of the monastery is the author of *Lands Never Trodden; the Franciscans and the California Missions* (Caxton Press, 2012).



San Antonio





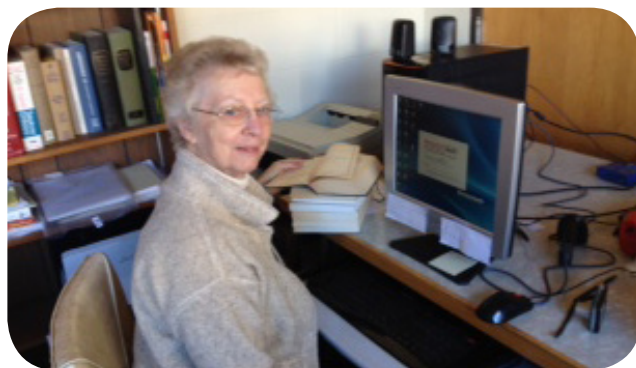
Books In Space

By Hugh Feiss, OSB

IN THE SEPTEMBER ISSUE OF THE DESERT CHRONICLE, AN ARTICLE TOLD ABOUT THE SPACE AND SYSTEM PROBLEMS FACING THE library and asked for some suggestions. We received twenty responses. Most were emphatic that a library is an essential part not just of the Benedictine past, but also of our present and future as well. One chided the monks for not doing more *lectio divina*. Several said the resources in the library are not well publicized, made suggestions on how to remedy that, and even offered to help spread the word. One letter cautioned about letting pride prompt us to keeping big numbers of books when we only need a very few. Several people said that the library is not very accessible: they feel like they are intruding when they go into that part of the monastery. No one mentioned the basement where a considerable part of the library is hidden away; presumably no one goes there. A number of people said a first step would be to make the library catalog available on-line. One person offered to help fund raise.

Two quite unexpected things have happened since then. Sr. Rebecca Abel, OSB, of Monastery Immaculate Conception in Ferdinand, Indiana, has come to work for a month in the library. She recently retired after seventeen years as librarian at the North American College in Rome. She wants to devote some time now to helping small Benedictine libraries in the United States. We were the first to respond and so here she is (we will pay for her travel and work with a small "Friends of the Library" endowment). Her first item of business has been to install a new cataloging system, one feature of which will be that it will be searchable over the internet via our monastery website. In that way, anyone anywhere can find out if we have a title they are looking for. In the midst of that project, Sister Rebecca is also helping us catch up on the cataloging backlog. This will not ease the space crisis in the library, but it will help us have a better handle on what books we have and make more books available to users. In the process, Sister Rebecca is making corrections to the catalog.

The other unexpected event is that Rob Thornton, a Boise architect, met with the monastic community to talk about their space needs. Besides the library, these include infirmary rooms, a business office, a new site for the bookstore, and a couple of rooms and study spaces for visitors who want to be at the monastery when retreatants occupy the guest house. After Thanksgiving, Rob will respond with some suggestions about how we might proceed.. What will come of all this remains to be seen, but the welcome suggestions of Desert Chronicle readers have certainly been met with timely responses. •





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Coming Events

Retreats

April 11–13, 2014: Pearling a Prayer Knitting Retreat
Contact Joanne Draper: joanned23@gmail.com
208-539-5474

April 4–5, 2014: Retreat by Sr. Barbara Glodowski, OSB
Contact: Anita Koehn: anita_koehn@q.com; 208-324-8094

Road Scholar Programs, 2014

May 26–June 1: Floods, Fossils, and Fissures—Geology of the Snake River Plain

June 9–15: Quilting at the Monastery of the Ascension

June 30–July 6: Ancient Rome: Life, History, Literature and the Spread of Christianity



July 7–July 13: Religion and the Settling of the West

July 21–July 27: Ireland: History, Myth, Saints and Culture

August 4–10: Poetry in Paradise: Reading Dante's "The Divine Comedy" at a Benedictine Monastery

September 1–7: Hiking Amid Nature and History of the Snake River Plain

TO REGISTER: www.roadscholar.org

For information: Fr. Hugh hughf@idahomonks.org
208-761-9389.



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