

# Treasures of the Past *and* Experiences of the Present

Society of the Divine Word
1875-2025







150th Anniversary of the Foundation
of the Society of the Divine Word (1875-2025)

# Treasures of the Past *and* Experiences of the Present

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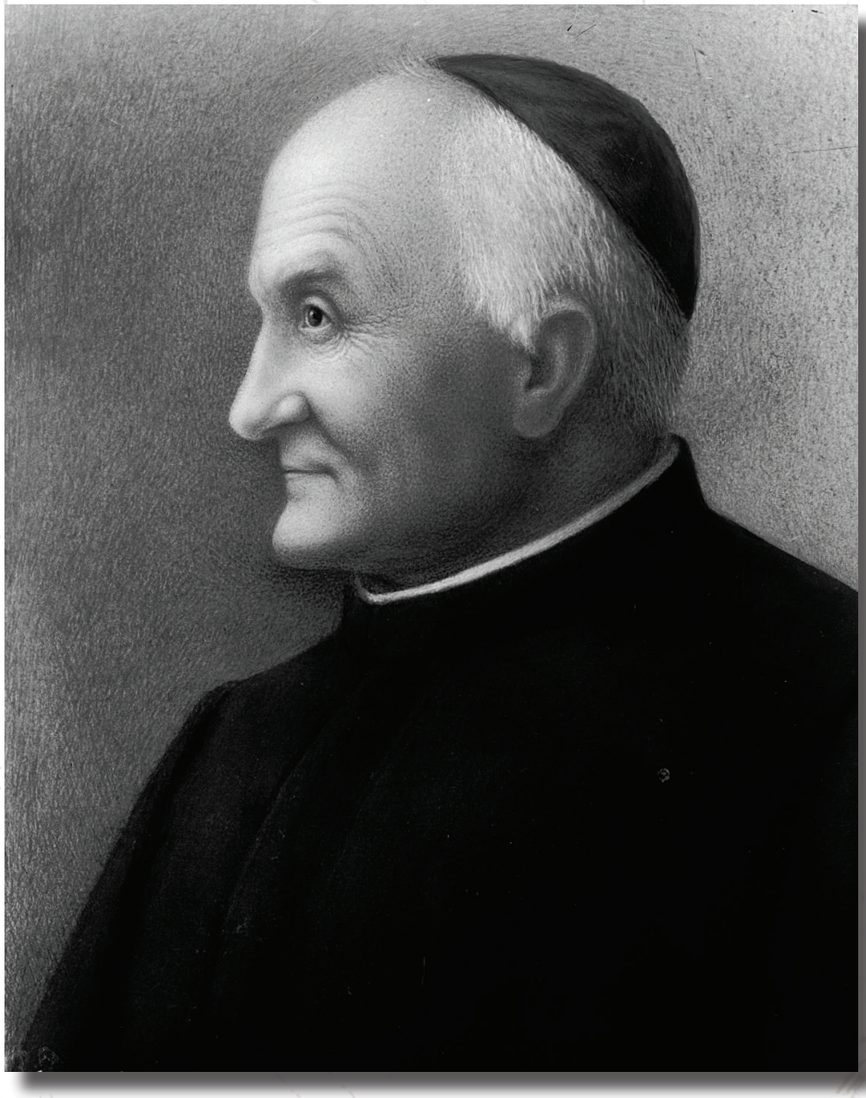
In commemoration of the
150th Anniversary of the Foundation
of the Society of the Divine Word (1875-2025)

Apud Collegium Verbi Divini
Rome: 15 January 2025








May
the Heart
of Jesus
Live in the
Hearts
of All
-Arnold Janssen
#fromeverywhereforeveryone


Hierdurch erkläre ich, daß ich
Plan des hochwürdigen Herrn
Janssen, ein deutsch niederländisch
für auswärtige Missionen in Verb
mit einer Apostolischen Schule
Vorbereitungsschule zur Heraub
von Missionaren zu errichten gathe
und hoffe, daß dieses Vornehmen
dem besten Erfolge gekrönt werden
Br. Heldemar Mertens
6-7 1890
6-4 1956
IN CORDIBUS

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# ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| **AdF** | Archivio del Fondatore at the Generalate, Rome |
| **AG SVD** | Archivio Generale della Società del Verbo Divino, Rome |
| **AJyt** | Peter McHugh (ed.), *Arnold Janssen - Yesterday and Today*, AN SVD-63/III, Romae 1998 |
| **Alt, Journey** | Josef Alt, *Journey in Faith. The Missionary Life of Arnold Janssen* |
| **AN** | Initially as *Arnoldus SVD* (*Inter se Filii*) 1948-1968; *SVD Nota* 1969-1971; from 1972 onwards *Arnoldus Nota* |
| **AN SVD** | *Analecta SVD,* Internal series of books on the SVD, Romae 1966 |
| **ARC** | Research Center for Religion and Social Communication |
| ***Arnoldus*** | *Arnoldus Societatis Verbi Divini inter se Filii*, 1948-1971. The Society's internal news bulletin. Its introduction was decided by the VII General Chapter in 1947 |
| ***Catalogus*** | Curia Generalitia SVD, *Catalogus Sodalium Societatis Verbi Divini* 1912-2024 |
| **CEP** | Conferencia Episcopal de Paraguay |
| **CFC** | Common Formation Center |
| **CIC** | *Codex Iuris Canonici*, 1983 |
| **Cons.** | *Constitutions* SVD (Rule) with year and number |
| **Founder AJ** | Fritz Bornemann, *Arnold Janssen - Founder of Three Missionary Congregations 1837-1909. A Biography,* Manila 1975 |
| **FW** | SVD Generalate, *Faithful to the Word* (Rome, 2019-) |
| **FTW** | SVD Generalate, *Following the Word* (Rome, 1988-1999) |
| **GC** | General Chapter |
| **HB** | *Kleiner Herz Jesu Bote,* 1874–1902 [*Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart]* |
| **History SVD** | Fritz Bornemann (ed.), *A History of Our Society*, AN SVD-54/1, Romae 1981 |
| **HVK** | Haus Völker und Kulturen (House of Peoples and Cultures) |
| **IDW** | SVD Generalate, *In Dialogue with the Word* (Rome, 2000-2012) |
| **IWD** | SVD Generalate, *In Word and Deed* (Rome, 2013-2018) |
| **MAJ** | *Maison* Arnold Janssen |
| **MAVD** | Auxiliary Missionaries of the Divine Word, Mexico. |
| **NV** | *Nova et Vetera*, 1959–1987 |
| **Nuntius SVD** | *Nuntius Societatis Verbi Divini*. Official organ of the Generalate, 1896 ff |
| ***Personal Notes*** | Arnold Janssen, *Persönliche Aufzeichnungen aus dem Jahre 1906*, AN SVD-55, Albert Rohner (ed.), Romae 1981 |
| **PRMs** | Provinces/Regions and Missions of the Society of the Divine Word |
| ***Remembering AJ*** | Fritz Bornemann (ed.), *Remembering Arnold Janssen. A Book of Reminiscences,* AN SVD-42, Romae 1978 |
| **St. Augustin** | St. Augustine's Mission House, Hangelar, Germany (1913) |
| **St. Gabriel** | St. Gabriel's Mission House, Mödling, Austria (1889) |
| **St. Michael** | St. Michael's Mission House, Steyl, Netherlands (1875) |
| **StMChr** | *Steyler Missions-Chronik*, 1959– |
| **StChr** | *Steyler Chronik* (1919–1939) |
| **WTW** | SVD Generalate, *Witnessing to the Word* (Rome, 1978-1987) |





# PRESENTATION

*Dear confreres, sisters, lay associates, friends, benefactors and collaborators in the mission.*

With joy I present to you this book, *Treasures of the Past and Experiences of the Present* to celebrate the 150 years since the foundation of the Society of the Divine Word.

This publication is neither just an account of our history, nor even less an ode to our mission work, but rather a recognition of what the Lord has done in us and for us. Unless the Lord builds the house, in vain do its builders labor. *Unless the Lord guards the city, in vain does the guard stay awake* (Ps 127:1).

Each historical event portrayed and each experience of a missionary of the Divine Word recounted here points us to the hands of the potter who, over the years, has shaped our lives and mission until we became who we are, men consecrated to the mission, gathered in intercultural communities, who announce the Divine Word and assume His life and mission as our own. We are those who pitch our tent in places where the Gospel is not known or is not yet lived, and who seek to dialogue with everyone, becoming one with the people, putting the vulnerable, the poor and the suffering first.

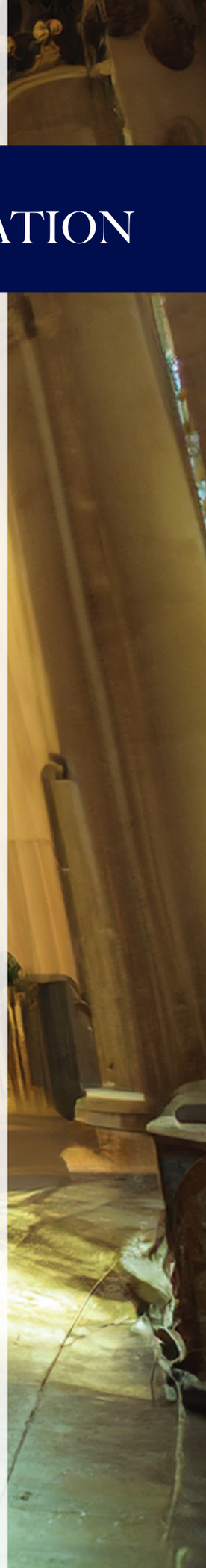
Our worldview and our way of being missionaries have contributed to the Church in its universal mission and, undoubtedly, have contributed to making the world better. Our communities and institutions, as well as the fidelity and creativity of our confreres, are a light shining amid dark realities. Our international and intercultural character offers signals to a divided and wounded world. But, above all, our presence with the people, especially those abandoned or wounded, puts us in a privileged position to exercise compassion and act as true healers, despite our own vulnerability.

The celebration of our Jubilee in 2025 should make us aware that a quarter of this century is complete and that we have already entered a new era. It is from this vantage point that we have to look to the future from what we have experienced so far. We must be aware that the Lord is the one who shapes the mission. We are workers of *Missio Dei*. Our plans and undertakings have to be the result of listening to and accepting God's will.

Our future is in the hands of the Lord. In our hands we have only the fruits that He made to grow throughout our existence as a missionary congregation. What we present in this book is a sample of a variety of achievements. But for more and better fruits to be received in the future, we need to ask the Lord to continue calling other young people to this endeavor. We need to present ourselves to the young people of our time not just as showing the past but as offering a vision for the future. In this sense, this book can also help us in promoting new missionary vocations.

Finally, on behalf of the entire Congregation, I express my gratitude to those who contributed with their reflections and testimonies, leaving a historical record for us and for future generations. I thank our confreres Andrzej Miotk, Stanislaus Lazar and Sonny Crescente de Rivera for their work in editing and publishing this book. We ask the Holy Spirit to multiply these gifts that we present, the fruit of our life and mission. May Saints Arnold Janssen and Joseph Freinademetz, our blessed men and women and martyrs of all times, intercede for us, so that we can continue writing our history and building a future in collaboration with all people of goodwill.

**Fr. Anselmo Ricardo Ribeiro, SVD**
Superior General




Baksteen van het stichtingshuis 1875
Ziegelstein vom Grüdnungshaus 1875
Brick from the foundation house 1875



# ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The idea of the Jubilee Publication, a significant milestone in the 150-year history of the Society of the Divine Word, was conceived by the former General Council under the leadership of Fr. Paulus Budi Kleden as Superior General. When the General Mission Secretary proposed I take over the editorial task, I knew it would be challenging. But at the same time, I was fortunate to have competent assistance from Fr. Stanislaus Thanuzraj Lazar - the Mission Secretary of the Society, and Fr. Sonny Crescente de Rivera, the chief editor of *Arnoldus Nota* as part of the Editorial Committee. I want to express my profound appreciation for their unparalleled support, helpful advice, and guidance during our numerous meetings and different stages of the editorial process. In our first meetings in April 2023, the concept of a comprehensive publication was inspired by combining past and present experiences given our future.

Embracing the concept of a wide and representative range of authors, the Editorial Committee aimed to present a panoramic view of the past and current presence and activity of the Society. This approach not only opened the floor for the exchange of experiences and thoughts but also fostered a spirit of gratitude for the great works of God accomplished through our confreres. As a result, the initial plan of 30 authors for the Jubilee Book expanded to 50, including Sisters and Lay Partners. The original design was refined by differentiating the volume of the contributions within the six chapters.

Concluding the lengthy editorial process, I am writing to extend my sincere thanks to all authors who contributed to making the Jubilee Book engaging and profitable. Your unique perspectives and insightful contributions have enriched the publication and made it a comprehensive representation of the Society's journey. I appreciate your excellent understanding of meeting the editorial requirements and timely constraints. I am deeply indebted to Fr. Peter McHugh for proofreading the book and generously dedicating time to ensure linguistic consistency.

Special thanks to Fr. Luis Antonio Vergara Solís, who promptly agreed to translate the English articles of the book into Spanish. Many thanks to Fr. Sonny Crescente de Rivera for translating some of the articles into English and Spanish and for the overarching Introduction. Thanks should also go to Fr. Marcelo Oyarzun for his invaluable service in checking the correctness of the Spanish translation, and to Olgierda Furmanek and Carlos A. Fasola for final proofreading in Spanish. I am incredibly grateful to Fr. Pedro De Dios Martin, who took much time to ensure the accuracy and fluency of the Spanish translation. Their dedication and linguistic expertise have made this publication accessible to a wider audience, and for that, we are truly grateful.

I wish to express my gratitude to Fr. Mark Angelo M. Ramos, the Generalate Director of Publications, who prepared the layout and contributed with great passion to the external beauty of the publication. His efforts, along with the assistance of Fr. Kieran Sun, the Photo Archivist, in providing some illustrative material, have significantly enhanced the visual appeal of the publication.

The Editorial Committee extends heartfelt gratitude to both the past and present General Councils for the trust and support they have shown us. Their invaluable input and encouragement have been crucial in guiding our work and helping us achieve our goals. We are especially thankful to our current Superior General, Fr. Anselmo Ricardo Ribeiro, for his support during the final stages of publication. To all of them, we owe a deep sense of gratitude for their dedication and partnership, which has been essential in bringing this work to fruition.

**Andrzej Miotk**, **SVD,** 5 November 2024

# From Steyl

## 1875

**SVD Foundation-Steyl**

1875 **STEYL, NETHERLANDS**
1882 China
1888 Rome
1889 Austria
1889 Argentina
1892 Togo (*1974)
1892 Germany
1893 Ecuador (*1962)
1895 Brazil
1895 USA
1896 PNG





## 1900

**SVD Silver Jubilee**

1900 Australia
1900 Chile
1906 Japan
1909 Philippines

## 1909

**Death of St. Arnold Janssen**

1910 Paraguay
1911 Mozambique (*1997)
1913 Indonesia
1916 Hungary
1920 Poland
1920 Switzerland
1923 Slovakia

## 1925

**SVD Golden Jubilee**

1928 Belgium
1930 United Kingdom
1932 India
1934 Uruguay (*1982)**
1938 Ghana
1938 Italy
1939 Ireland
1945 Spain
1947 Czech Republic (1993)
1948 Hong Kong (*1962)
1948 Taiwan (*1959)
1949 Portugal





## 1950

**SVD Diamond Jubilee**

1950 Canada
1951 Congo (Kinshasa)
1962 Mexico
1962 Colombia

# to the World

## Vatican Council II

1962-1965

1965 Angola
1970 Yugoslavia (Serbia-Montenegro)
1971 West Indies
Antigua and Saint Kitts and Nevis (1971),
Montserrat and Tortola (1972),
Anguilla (1984),
Jamaica (1993)
Virgin Gorda (2006)

## 21st Century SVD 125th Anniversary

2000

2001 Tanzania
2003 Chad
2003 South Africa
2006 Costa Rica
2007 Macau
2008 Dutch Caribbean
2008 Venezuela
2012 South Sudan
2014 Latvia
2015 Liberia
2015 Albania
2016 Uganda
2017 French Caribbean
2017 Norway
2018 Bangladesh
2018 Myanmar
2018 Malawi**
2018 French Guiana







## SVD Centennial Jubilee

1975

1976 Timor Leste (2002)
1979 Croatia
1980 Nicaragua
1981 Botswana
1982 Bolivia
1983 Panama
1984 Kenya
1984 South Korea
1985 New Zealand
1986 Samoa
1986 Zambia
1987 Benin
1987 Zimbabwe
1989 Cuba
1989 France
1989 Madagascar
1991 Romania**
1991 Belarus
1994 Russia
1994 Ukraine
1996 Moldova**
1998 Thailand
1998 Vietnam (1936)

* Returned anew
** Closed

The event's highlight was the publication of the Jubilee Book, a comprehensive history of the Society's first twenty-five years








# INTRODUCTION

> **“Not to us, Lord, not to us but to your name be the glory.”**
>
> *- Fr. Arnold*

The Society’s silver jubilee in 1900 was a significant and memorable event, celebrated in Steyl with a solemn Pontifical Mass by Bishop Drehmanns of Roermond. Father Arnold Janssen, in his heartfelt sermon, reflected on the first twenty-five years, acknowledging the hard work, worries, and suffering but emphasizing the blessings of God that followed. Bishop Drehmanns echoed this sentiment, declaring, “Here is the finger of God; the power of God is at work here.”

Despite the lack of congratulations from *Propaganda Fide,* the celebration was uplifted by warm felicitations from Rome, signed by Cardinal Felice Cavagnis. The event’s highlight was the publication of the Jubilee Book, a comprehensive history of the Society’s first twenty-five years. Edited by Fr. Hermann auf der Heide after the original author, Fr. Joseph Reinke, fell ill, the book was a beautifully illustrated volume of 608 pages, filled with 106 illustrations, and a complete list of all 48 deceased members of the Society.

The Jubilee Book was a collaborative labor of love, realized under Fr. Janssen’s supervision. In his April 1900 remarks, he expressed gratitude to Divine Providence for bringing the book to fruition. The book was distributed to a wide circle of SVD friends and benefactors, encapsulating the spirit of gratitude and divine praise, as Fr. Arnold eloquently put it in his circular letter: “Not to us, Lord, not to us but to your name be the glory.”







## Preparing for the 150th Anniversary

Now, 125 years later, the Society is preparing to celebrate its 150th Anniversary, a monumental event that marks a significant milestone in our history. This sesquicentennial celebration, much like the silver jubilee, is a time for us to come together in gratitude and reflection. It also serves as a beacon of hope, guiding us towards a future filled with renewed commitment and enthusiasm.

The new Jubilee Book reflects the sesquicentennial celebration theme: "Witnessing to the Light, From Everywhere for Everyone." It acknowledges the challenges faced, the evolution of our mission, and the steadfast witness of many who have come before us. As we stand at the threshold of new directions in mission work, we draw inspiration from our past experiences and best practices and look forward to the future.

Much like the jubilee celebrations of 1900, 1925, and 1950, this Jubilee Book stands as a testament to our collective effort and dedication. This beautifully illustrated volume captures not only the historical milestones of our Society but also the personal stories and sacrifices of our members. Our century-and-a-half journey as a Congregation owes its success to the selfless dedication and generosity of countless benefactors and lay collaborators. As we prepare to honor our 150-year legacy, we do so with a similar spirit of humility and gratitude, ensuring that the glory is always directed to the Divine.

The Society's journey, from its humble beginnings to its global presence today, is a testament to faith, perseverance, and divine providence. The Society of the Divine Word has nearly 6000 members, 59 provinces/regions/missions, and is working in 79 countries. As it stands on the threshold of its 150th Anniversary, the Society looks back with gratitude and forward with hope, ready to continue its mission with renewed vigor and commitment.

## Treasures of the Past and Experiences of the Present

The 150th Anniversary celebration will honor the past and inspire future generations to uphold the values and vision that have guided the Society for a century and a half.

In the first chapter, we delve into the early days of our Society, starting in 1875 with the inspiring vision of Saint Arnold Janssen. We move through significant moments like the role of the brothers in 1877, the first missions in China in 1882, our expansion into Latin America in 1889, and so forth. Each story highlights the unwavering commitment and personal dedication that has driven our work, inspiring us to continue the mission.

The second chapter delves into the Society's significant contributions and innovative endeavors. From the cultural engagement of *Anthropos* Enterprises, where we have actively sought to understand and respect diverse cultures, to the focus on evangelizing missions with a preference for low-income people, we showcase our commitment to understanding and serving diverse communities. The authors provide insights into how our mission has evolved to meet contemporary challenges.

The third chapter centers on spirituality and formation. We explore our charism's relevance today, the development of mission formation centers, and the beauty of our SVD vocation. The articles offer a deep investigation into the spiritual foundations that sustain our work and how we foster spiritual growth and development among our members.

Chapter four highlights our various apostolic endeavors. This section outlines our dynamic approach to spreading the Divine Word, from the Biblical apostolate to mission animation and the use of new communication technologies, where we have embraced new tools and platforms to reach a wider audience. The chapter also covers specific missions, including the Pastoral *Indígena* in Paraguay, showing the breadth of our outreach.

The fifth chapter celebrates the diversity of our mission work, recounting noteworthy experiences and initiatives. The authors share stories of renewal centers, ministries among marginalized communities, contributions to higher education, and so forth. These narratives highlight our service's impactful and varied nature, making everyone feel valued and included in our mission.

Finally, the last chapter profiles notable missionaries who have significantly contributed to the Society. From Lucas Kolzem's artistic service to Fr. Henry van Straelen's commitment to dialogue, we honor the legacy of all those who have paved the way for our current and future missions.

## Call to Action

As we stand at the threshold of our 150th Anniversary, we invite all members of the Society to join us in celebrating this remarkable milestone. Reflecting on our rich history, from the memorable silver jubilee in 1900 to today, we recognize the unwavering faith, perseverance, and divine blessings that have guided us. We are deeply grateful for your continued support and dedication, which have been instrumental in our journey.

The publication of our new Jubilee Book is not just a chronicle of our past but a beacon for our future. This richly illustrated volume captures the essence of our journey, highlighting the sacrifices and dedication of those who came before us. It is a testament to our mission, "Witnessing to the Light, From Everywhere for Everyone." Your contributions and involvement in this book are invaluable, and it is through your efforts that our story is told.

We invite all our members to immerse yourself in this Jubilee Book, transporting yourself back to the early days of our Society. Relive the inspiring vision of Saint Arnold Janssen in 1875, pivotal moments such as the first missions in China in 1882, and our expansion in other continents. Each chapter offers a meaningful experience in the personal stories and significant milestones that have shaped our mission.

As you turn the pages, reflect on our cultural engagements through the Anthropos Institute and others, our evangelizing missions that prioritized marginalized and excluded communities, and the innovative approaches we have adopted to meet contemporary challenges. Immerse yourself in the spiritual foundations that sustain our work, explore our dynamic apostolic endeavors and celebrate the diverse experiences and initiatives that make our mission impactful and inclusive.

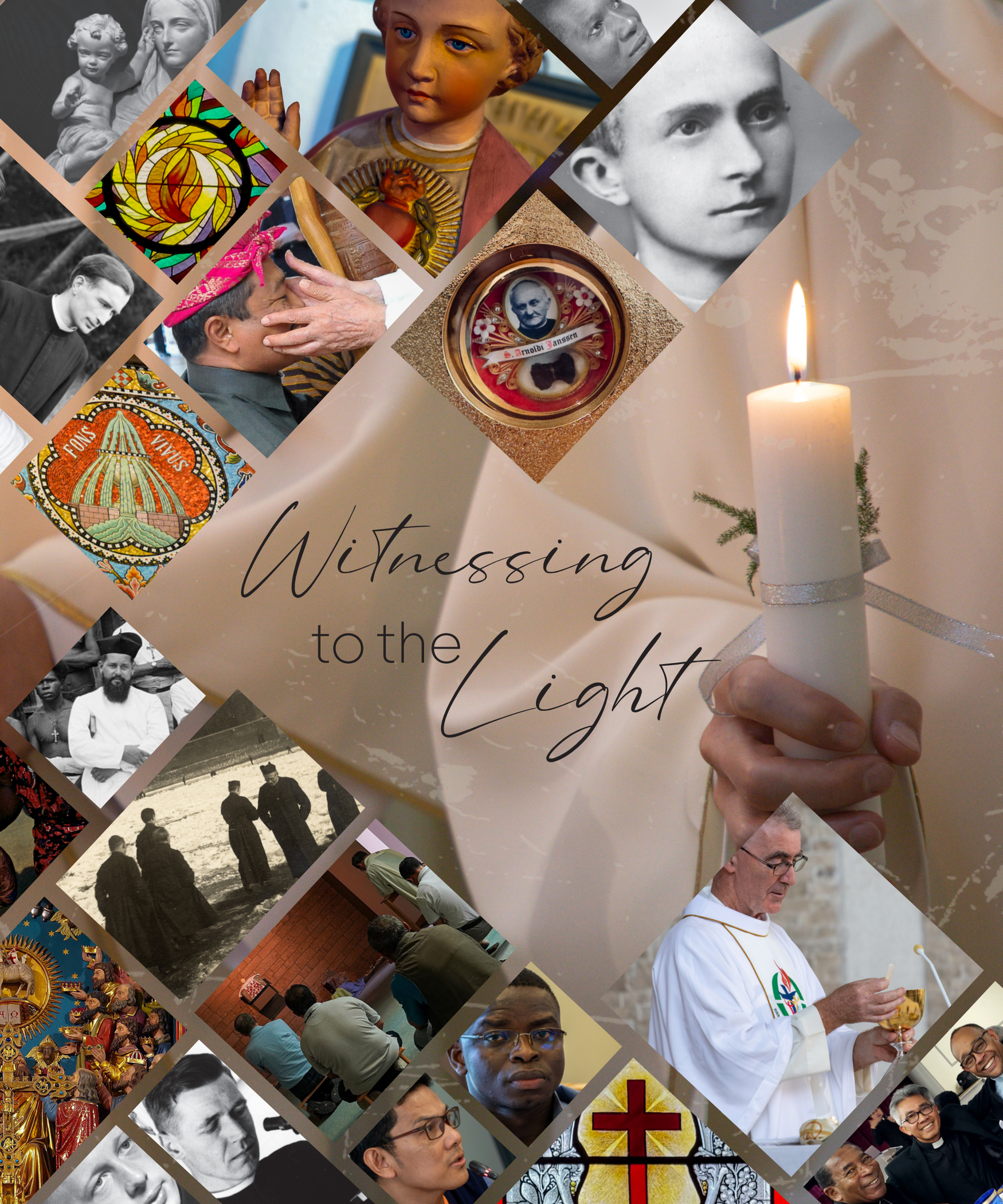
Let the echoes from this Jubilee Book resonate within us, reaffirming our commitment as missionaries. This book highlights our continuity, a reminder that our collective efforts and shared faith will continue to guide us. As we honor our 150-year legacy, we also look forward with hope and renewed dedication to our mission.

Join us in this celebration. Enjoy the Jubilee Book, and may it inspire each of us to witness to the light with renewed vigor. Together, we can uphold the values and vision that have guided us for a century and a half, ensuring that our mission reaches "From Everywhere for Everyone."

In the spirit of Fr. Arnold Janssen, we echo his heartfelt words: "Not to us, Lord, not to us, but to your name be the glory." Let this jubilee be a time of gratitude for the past, a celebration of our present, and a beacon of hope for the future.




150




# Witnessing to the Light





# from everywhere for everyone

BISDOM

VAN

ROERMOND.

—

Approval letter
by Bishop Paredis
for establishing
the Mission House

Hierdurch erkläre ich, dass ich den
Plan des hochwürdigen Herrn Arnold
Janssen, ein deutsch niederländisches Haus
für auswärtige Missionen in Verbindung
mit einer Apostolischen Schule oder
Vorbereitungsschule zur Heranbildung
von Missionaren zu errichten gutheisse,
und hoffe, dass dieses Vornehmen mit
dem besten Erfolge gekrönt werden möge

Roermond, den 3 December 1874

Der Bischof von Roermond,

† J. A. Paredis,



Chapter I

# UNFOLDING EVENTS IN THE HISTORY OF THE SOCIETY

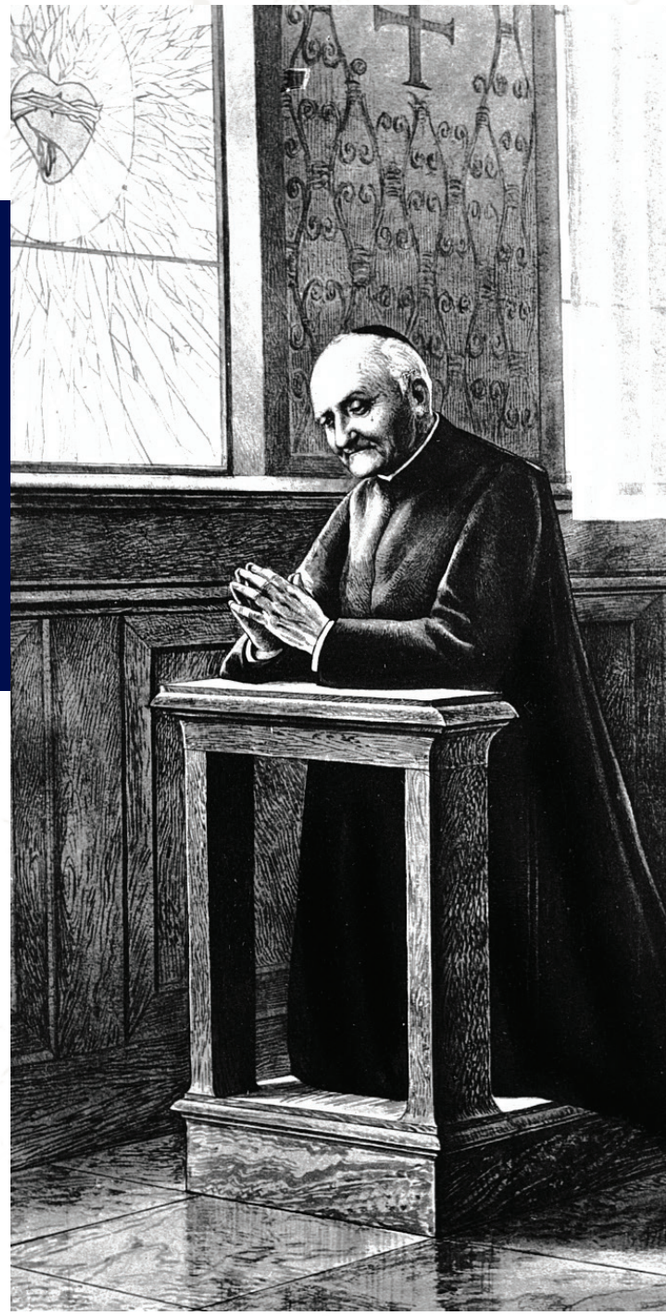



St. Michael Mission House , Steyl, 2024




Vivat Deus
Unus Et Trinus
In Cordibus
Nostris!

# 1875: Recovery of the Inspiring Force of Saint Arnold Janssen



## Introduction

The 150th Anniversary of the founding of the Society of the Divine Word is a good opportunity to return to our origins and let ourselves be inspired by the spiritual adventure of Saint Arnold Janssen. An anniversary can and should also be a time of gratitude and evaluation of the development of the Founder's work. We ask ourselves about historical facts. But it is also necessary to know how these events were told.

As for the sources, there is a large quantity and they have continued to grow over time, especially thanks to the publications of Saint Arnold's manuscripts, such as the outlines of his retreats, homilies and spiritual conferences that saw the light only in the years 1974-1976 and are only available in the German edition of Analecta SVD-30 and SVD-31.[1] On the other hand, many of these materials have never been used in the monographs or articles until now and that is why the discovery of new content is possible, as demonstrated by the work of the Arnold Janssen Source Study Group (a joint initiative of SVD, SSpS and lay people in Chile),[2] or the two-volume work of Fr. Andrzej Miotk, SVD.[3]

[1] Albert Rohner, *Die Vortragstätigkeit P. Arnold Janssens*, Part I and II, AN SVD-30 and -31, Romae 1974-1976.

[2] Roberto Diaz, Anneliese Meis (eds.), *El dinamismo del Espíritu Santo y sus efectos en Arnoldo Janssen según sus cartas, conferencias y retiros*", Santiago de Chile: Andros Impresores 2021. See: *Verbum SVD*, 2019, fasc. 3, 227-269.

[3] Andrzej Miotk, *Untiring Missionary of the Word and the Spirit*, Vol. I and II, Romae 2022.

They underwent a great change regarding theological paradigms at the time of the Second Vatican Council. From a theocentric paradigm, where the main focus was on liturgical worship and the preaching of doctrine, we moved to the anthropocentric paradigm where interest in the Church as a community and service in favor of a dignified life predominates. For this reason, the Founder's thought, strongly anchored in the second half of the 19th century paradigm, should be read according to the historical context.

Although the Congregations founded by Saint Arnold strongly preserved their missionary charism, the theological understanding of the Founder's inheritance must be understood in the light of his time. The new generations of SVD members face the challenging task of theological updating based on understanding historical and theological developments.




Arnold Janssen, the Founder of Missionary Congregations in Steyl, painting by Br. Lucas Kolzem, SVD, 1910

What I am going to present below is the result of my study on the transmission of the spiritual history of Arnold Janssen. I will also try to propose some theological guidelines that I consider rooted in the experience of the Founder and that are relevant for us today.

## I. Milestones in the History of Saint Arnold

The structure of the history of any work or person revolves around decisive moments. In the same way we treat the history of Saint Arnold and his work. That is why we talk about his family roots, his preparation for the priesthood, etc. Beginning with the founding of the Mission House in Steyl, his personal history is interwoven with the history of his work. From that moment on, we began to see Fr. Arnold through the sending of the first missionaries, the general chapters, the founding of the Congregations, etc. However, in this way we can run the risk that the personal history of the Founder Arnold will be somewhat lost in the history of his work. For this reason, it seems necessary to outline the main events of the Founder's history, paying special attention not so much to external events in general, but to those that represented a novelty for him at the level of perception of life and vocation. We can call this personal history: the spiritual history of Saint Arnold. Although the history of his work is clearly stated in the available publications, this is not always the case with regard to his spiritual history.

In this search for defining moments in Arnold's life, we will first pay attention above all to his activity as promotor of the Apostleship of Prayer, calling this period "the time of the Heart" and then to the moment of the intensification of his devotion to the Holy Spirit, which we will call "the time of the Spirit."

### 1. The Time of the Heart (1866-1884)

In the lives of the great saints of the Church, there often appears a crucial moment that begins their spiritual adventure. This moment can be the result of divine intervention, as in the case of the Apostle Paul, or of a serious setback leading to conversion, as in the case of Saint Francis of Assisi. Did Arnold have a similar experience? We will focus on two moments that we consider important both for Saint Arnold and for our SVD identity: the origin of Saint Arnold's missionary commitment and the origin of the name of our Congregation.

#### 1.1. The Apostleship of Prayer

In the life of Saint Arnold, we notice neither great revelations nor great personal misfortunes. He was a devout child who, thanks to the influence of the assistant priest in Goch, continued his education in ecclesial institutions until reaching the priesthood. If we look for a decisive moment in his spiritual adventure, we must look

- without a doubt - at his participation in the Apostleship of Prayer, of which he was a member starting from 1866. Thanks to this movement, his life took a new direction.

After ordination, Saint Arnold worked as a teacher in the city of Bocholt. It seems that this job did not fully satisfy him. He himself commented: "There [in Bocholt] I was imbued with the idea of doing more for the spiritual welfare of the Church and especially the foreign missions."[4] To do "more" he had to find an activity that could be compatible with his main occupation as a teacher and Arnold found this possibility in the said apostolate.

In the Apostleship of Prayer, the central place was occupied by the mystical Heart of Jesus. The members were called to collaborate with the desires of the Divine Heart. These desires are mainly the glory of the Father and the salvation of all, especially those most distant. The origin of Saint Arnold's missionary interest seems to lie in these ideas. Thus, the mystical mission of the Heart of Jesus had become for Saint Arnold one of the main spiritual forces in his activity. For the needs of this apostolate, Arnold commissioned a painting, which he designed himself: "The Heart of Jesus among the clouds." He would use it in the booklet for admission to the Apostleship of Prayer. Once he was finally freed from his responsibilities as a teacher, he could dedicate himself fully to propagating the Apostleship of Prayer. For this purpose, he began to publish a missionary magazine *The Little Messenger of the Heart of Jesus*. These activities then led him eventually to found the mission seminary in Steyl.



The Image of Sacred Heart in the Clouds in Chludowo by Wanda Kachlicka

### 1.2. The Heart of Jesus and the Divine Word

The "time of the Heart" in the life of Saint Arnold is linked not only to the founding of the first seminary but also the emergence of the name of the male Congregation: the Society of the Divine Word. When explaining the origin of this name, we usually remember the frequent use that the Founder's family made of the *Prologue* of St. John in prayer.

However, already in the first generations of the Society, this explanation seemed insufficient. Father Joseph Grendel, SVD, the fourth Superior General, in an extensive article about the meaning of our name, says: "It is true that this has not yet been fully clarified and perhaps it will never be possible to fully clarify how and from where this name appeared for the first time in the spiritual consciousness of our Father and Founder, that is, what paths of thought led him to choose this name for his Society."[5]




Relief of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, 1896

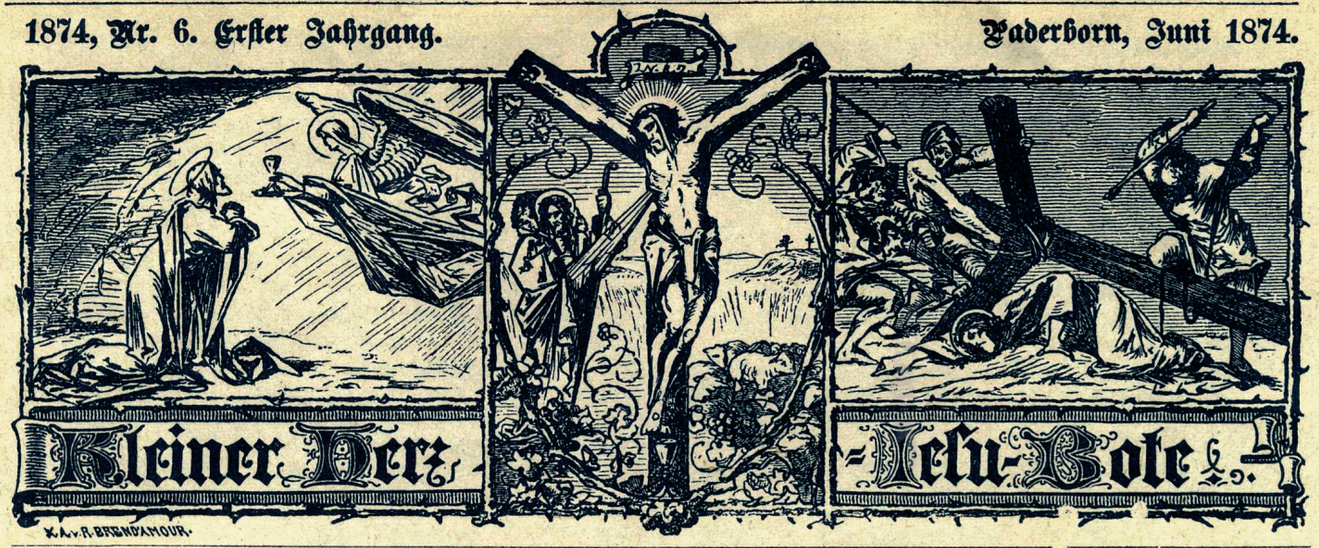
The mystery was largely revealed thanks to the notes of the Founder's personal secretary, Fr. Hermann auf der Heide.[6] According to his testimony, Arnold Janssen decided to give the Society the name of the Divine Word on 25 March 1875 (feast of the Annunciation), at the time of thanksgiving after Mass, the commemorative day of the incarnation of the Word. Furthermore, in the Tridentine liturgy the Mass ended with the ritual of the "Last Gospel" in which the *Prologue* of Saint John was read every day. All this content undoubtedly influenced Saint Arnold's thinking.

From this testimony we also learn that the appearance of our name was the effect of inspiration. This means that the name of our Society does not necessarily reflect the spiritual path of the Founder prior to this moment. And so, we can have the opinion that the Divine Word was not as dominant a factor in the spirituality of Saint Arnold, as were the Holy Trinity, the Heart of Jesus, and then the Holy Spirit.

On the other hand, it cannot be said that there is no connection between our name and this path. We must seek the solution in the relationship between the idea of the Heart of Jesus

[4] Josef Alt, *Journey in Faith. The Missionary Life of Arnold Janssen,* AN SVD-85, Romae 2002, 41.
[5] Joseph Grendel, „Titulus congregationis nostrae est Societas Verbi Divini", *Nuntius SVD*, Vol. II, 1934, fasc. 1, 74.
[6] Joseph Grendel, „Rundschreiben über den obersten und allgemeinen Zweck unserer Gesellschaft (Cons. 1) (Jahresübung für 1945*), Nuntius SVD*, Vol. IV, 1944, fasc. 1, 147.

1874, Nr. 6. Erster Jahrgang. Paderborn, Juni 1874.




## Missionsschrift für das katholische Volk.

Wir bitten, den Artikel auf der letzten Seite dieses Blattes nicht übersehen zu wollen.

### 35. Es lebe das göttliche Herz Jesu in unseren Herzen.

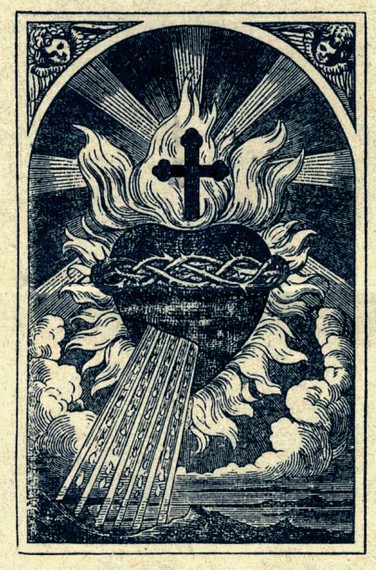
(Lied zum Herz-Jesu-Monat 1874.)

O Herz der Kraft und Größe,
O Herz der Herrlichkeit!
O Herz der Mild' und Liebe,
Gelobt in Ewigkeit!

O Herz, für uns verwundet
Mit scharfer Lanz' im Tod!
O Herz, für uns gebrochen
In bitt'rer Todesnoth!

O Herz für uns gestorben
Am heil'gen Kreuzesstamm!
O Herz, in Lieb' uns suchend
Im Tod als Opferlamm!

O Herz des besten Menschen,
Uns liebend ohne Weis'!
O Herz des höchsten Gottes,
Geworden uns zur Speis'!



Seht's an, ihr Christenherzen,
Und liebet euren Herrn,
Doch nicht mit eitlen Worten;
Die haltet von euch fern!

Helft Jesu Reich mit Thaten
Befördern, wie ihr könnt,
Doch nicht mit Bettlergaben,
Wenn Vieles euch vergönnt!

Dient Jesu großen Wünschen,
Ihr Jünger, treu und gern;
Helft Seelen Ihm gewinnen,
Dem Herzen eures Herrn!

Dann werdet groß ihr werden,
Da Großes ihr begehrt,
Und fern von Eitelkeiten
Mit Jesu Herz verklärt.

Hingabe an das göttliche Herz Jesu. Ich N. N. schenke Dir, o mein liebenswürdigster Jesu, mein Herz, um mich Dir dankbar zu erzeigen und meine Untreuen gut zu machen. Ich opfere mich Dir gänzlich auf und nehme mir mit Deinem Beistande vor, nicht mehr zu sündigen. (Vor einem Herz-Jesu-Bilde gebetet, täglich einmal 100 Tage Ablaß.)

**Geliebt sei überall das heiligste Herz Jesu! Amen.** (Jedes Mal 100 Tage Ablaß.)

### 36. Die Reichthümer des göttlichen Herzens Jesu.

(Zum Juni 1874.)

Der Maimonat ist vorüber; der Monat Juni ist gekommen. Jener gehört der Verehrung der h. Jungfrau Mariä; dieser, worin gewöhnlich das Fest des göttlichen Herzens Jesu fällt, ist schon seit langem durch die fromme Gewohnheit der Christen bestimmt für die Verehrung dieses Heiligsten aller Herzen.

Der Maimonat ist der Monat, worin das Sinngrün blüht und die Tulpe, die Kaiserkrone und die Narcisse, der Milchstern und die Syringe und draußen im Wald und am Wege das Windröschen, die Maiblume und die Sternmiere.

Im Junimonat aber erschließt die hundertblätterige Rose ihre duftende Krone. Da blüht die weiße Lilie, die wohlriechende Nelke und das duftende Geißblatt. Da sehen wir in Teichen und Gräben die Blüthe des Vergißmeinnicht, des Pfeilkrauts und der Teichrose, draußen auf den Wiesen aber die Kukuksblume und viele Ehrenpreisarten.

Betrachten wir von den genannten Blumen zwei, die Lilie und die Rose.

Die Lilie ist das Sinnbild der Reinheit, die Rose das der Liebe. Wie passen sie also so vortrefflich zu jenem h. Herzen, welches die höchste Reinheit mit der höchsten Liebe verbindet.

Unser göttlicher Heiland hat der sel. Margaretha Alacoque die Reichthümer Seines göttlichen Herzens offenbart.

Betrachten wir heute diese Reichthümer. Der erste Reichthum des göttlichen Herzens Jesu ist das h. Blut Jesu. — Die Verrichtung des menschlichen Herzens ist es nämlich, das Blut aus dem Körper aufzusaugen, alsdann es zur Lunge zu treiben, damit es dort durch den Athem belebt werde und endlich das belebte Blut in den Leib und in jedes kleinste Theilchen jedes Gliedes zu treiben.

Die Schrift sagt: **Anima carnis in sanguine est** (Levit. 17, 11. 14), d. h. das Leben des Fleisches ist im Blute. Dies ist völlig wahr. Empfängt z. B. das Gehirn nicht beständig frisches Blut, so hört alle Thätigkeit desselben auf. Auch können die Glieder nur arbeiten, wenn sie beständig frisches Blut empfangen. Sollst du aber schwer arbeiten, z. B. rasch laufen, so bedarfst du viel frisches Blut. Du

The First Issue of the
*The Little Messenger of the Heart of Jesus*

and that of the Divine Word. According to another of Saint Arnold's personal secretaries, Fr. Hermann Sandkamp, "The Heart of Jesus was for him the most expressive incarnation of the Divine Word, the image of God made visible and understandable, through which he could more easily manifest the ideas of God to people."[7] Saint Arnold speaks about this union between the Heart of Jesus and the Eternal and Incarnate Word in his theological texts[8] and represents it in the "key-picture"[9] in which we see the Heart of Jesus but with the inscription *Et Verbum caro factum est* which refers to the Divine Word. In this way, it is clearer that for Saint Arnold the "Divine Word" was first the Son pronounced by the Father (Heb 1:1-2), and consequently all the words pronounced by this Son-Word-made flesh (the Gospels), and by the Holy Spirit (the entire Bible).[10]




## 2. The Time of the Spirit (1884-1909)

The year 1884 marks a very significant change in the spiritual history of Saint Arnold. J. Alt in his biography of the Founder says that from then on devotion to the Holy Spirit occupied the dominant center.[11] A good understanding of this moment can help us perceive the story of Saint Arnold in a more lively and comprehensive way. At the same time, we will try to propose a theological basis for a common spirituality of the Arnoldus Family.

### 2.1. The Origin of the Change in the Spiritual Preferences of Saint Arnold

We intentionally do not speak of a "change", but of a "shift of accent", since the devotion to the Holy Spirit was very strong in Saint Arnold already before the year 1884. This change was a consequence of his encounter with people linked to the Confraternity of the Holy Spirit in Vienna, especially with the visionary Magdalene Leitner and her confessor Fr. Ferdinand Medits, CM. The visionary declared that she received messages from the Holy Spirit for Saint Arnold and for the Congregation. This whole topic has already been investigated and the results are published in the great biographies of the Founder by F. Bornemann and J. Alt and in the book by K.J. Rivinius.[12] Over the years, Saint Arnold distanced himself from the visionary, but his fervent love for the Holy Spirit remained intact until the end of his days. His *Personal Notes from* 1906[13] testify to this very well. Under this influence, the prayers of the Society were modified, adding invocations to the Holy Spirit, the sisters' Congregations received a different name from the male Congregation, churches were built in honor of the Third Person of the Trinity, etc.

Despite all this, it is surprising that the notion of this important moment is not widespread in the Arnoldus Family. Why did this happen? First of all, the Founder himself did not talk much about this topic. Then, the first biographer of Fr. Arnold - Hermann Fischer, SVD - seems not to consider this moment as important. Only modern biographies address the subject openly. Despite that, this important topic is often left untouched when telling the spiritual story of the Founder. This is due, perhaps, to the change in the theological paradigm after Vatican II. Private revelations became a marginal and even - perhaps - shameful topic.

Possibly the most appropriate treatment of this issue is to accept it as a simple historical fact. We do not have the obligation to believe in the supposed revelations, - far from it - but, yes, it is helpful to know what effect this influence had on Arnold Janssen and his work, because when we avoid these questions, the spiritual history of the Founder becomes opaque and lacks understanding. And, also, things that are not well understood become uninspiring.

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[7] Hermann Sandkamp, *An heiligen Quellen. Aus der religiösen Gedankenwelt des Dieners Gottes P. Arnold Janssen*, Steyl 1947, 7-8.
[8] *Kleiner Herz Jesu Bote* [Little Messenger of the Heart of Jesus] = HB, 6 (1874), 44.
[9] A term used by Jacob Reuter, *Zeszyty Werbistowskie,* 7/1996, 72.
[10] *The Common Constitutions and Statutes of the Society of the Divine Word from the Year 1891*, Steyl 2011, 10-11.
[11] Alt, *Journey,* 390.
[12] Karl Josef Rivinius, *Der Heilige Geist in der Spiritualität der Steyler Missionare – Der Beitrag von Arnold und Johannes Janssen und Richard von Kralik*, Studia Instituti Missiologici SVD 114, Siegburg: Franz Schmitt Verlag 2019.
[13] Arnold Janssen, *Persönliche Aufzeichnungen aus dem Jahre 1906,* AN SVD-55, A. Rohner (ed.), Romae 1981.

## 2.2. Two Names - One Charism

The change of the emphasis in Saint Arnold's spirituality has important consequences for the Congregations founded by him: we have the same Founder, we pray the same prayers, we share the same missionary charism, but we have different names. The name of the "Divine Word" takes the male Congregation in the direction of the incarnation and Christmas, while the name of the Servants of the Holy Spirit brings the female Congregations closer to Pentecost.

In his time, Fr. Fritz Bornemann was skeptical of the possibility of finding an appropriate theological basis for uniting the two titles, especially since devotion to the Holy Spirit seems more accentuated in prayers. He expressed it in the following words: "There have been attempts to explain this peculiar situation of the Society of the Divine Word using sophisticated theology. But the authors of these arguments do not believe them themselves."[14]




Arnold Janssen's life - a Eucharistic celebration painting by Br. Lucas Kolzem, SVD

In reality, the Word and the Spirit are strongly united. We see it in Holy Scripture. The Word and the Spirit carry out the act of creation: "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth" (Ps 33:6). The incarnation of the Word is carried out with the "Power from above" (the Holy Spirit), the Spirit comes to earth from the open side of the Word on the cross (cf. John 7:37-39). The disciples are able to understand and preach the Word only when they receive the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 2). Finally, the incarnation of the Word by the power of the Spirit occurs in the Church today during the Eucharist, and on the other hand, when carrying out the mission we consider ourselves to be continuers of the mission of the Word under the force of the Spirit: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor" (Luke 4:18).

This theology of the Word and the Spirit fits very well into our Trinitarian spirituality, as our *Constitutions* attest: "The solemnity of the Holy Trinity is our main feast. In it we celebrate the mystery on which our missionary vocation is founded: the sending of the eternal Word and of the Holy Spirit" (Cons. 405). In this way, instead of accentuating the difference of our names, we have to look for these common moments, in such a way that the Society of the Divine Word turns towards the Spirit, and the Congregations dedicated to the Spirit always have the dimension of the Word in their life and mission. This thought, in fact, is perceived in many people and communities of the Arnoldus Family.

[14] Fritz Bornemann, „Zwei Genossenschaften mit dem gleichen Gebetbuch", *NV*, 1962 Juni, 1037.

It only remains to add that the unity of the Word and the Spirit is strongly accentuated in the spiritual heritage that Saint Arnold left us. It is enough to remember the prayer "In the light of the Word and the Spirit of grace," or the "key image" that we spoke about earlier, in which the Spirit and the Incarnate Word are represented. In this image we have to consider the invisible presence of the Father, just as in the scene of Jesus' baptism.

## II. Breaking the Fischer Matrix!

The strange phrase, "breaking the Fischer matrix!" is a call to reformulate our way of telling the spiritual story of Saint Arnold. Hermann Fischer was the author of the first biography of Arnold Janssen and the first book on his spirituality – *You are the Temple of the Holy Spirit*.[15] He himself sees his work in the following way: "This book is the first attempt to present the originality (…) of Father Arnold and to understand and appreciate his practices of piety (…)." The author himself sees this work as simply an architectural framework upon which much more can be built. "Many others, especially his spiritual sons, should enter more deeply into Arnold's spiritual life and service of God to use the holy sources of his spirituality for the salvation of souls."[16]



Hermann Fischer, SVD, (1867-1945)

Despite being the first attempt, this is a book written with great talent, as seen from its presentation and clear arguments. It also has the advantage of coming from the pen of someone who knew the Founder personally. The words he wrote about 90 years ago have been fulfilled throughout this entire period since then. Indeed, many others completed his effort, entering more deeply into the spirituality of Saint Arnold. But there are a few aspects that need to be rethought.

First of all, in recent decades the very concept of spirituality has changed. The spiritual life is not perceived as your "favorite devotions," since this approach does not reflect the Christian life itself. G. Cavazos-Gonzalez in the Preface of his book with a very significant title *Beyond Piety: The Christian Spiritual Life, Justice, and Liberation* writes: "Christian spirituality is not simply about devotional practices or religiosity. Moving beyond piety we find that Christian spirituality is primarily and most emphatically about life in the Holy Spirit. More than piety, the Christian life is a vocation, a calling in the world, a life project and a share in God's mission."[17]

But Fischer's work is structured around the "devotions" of Saint Arnold. This is his "architectural framework" which we call "the Fischer matrix." It is a static concept of spirituality that does not connect well with the real life of Saint Arnold. To make the discourse about his spirituality clearer and more inspiring, we have to free ourselves from speaking about him in a historical way, based on a theoretical systematization, and start talking about his spiritual life based on the concrete facts of his life, without leaving any of them aside because, in his work, struggles, doubts, his joys and interests, his creativity and passion for the mission, what we are looking for is the hidden treasure of his relationship with God, a very rich relationship that has many names.

**Dariusz Pielak, SVD (Poland)**
***Researcher of Arnold Janssen spirituality***



[15] Hermann Fischer, *You are the Temple of the Holy Spirit, The Spirituality of Blessed Arnold Janssen*, 1932, transl. Paul LaForge, Rome 1999.
[16] Fischer, *You are the Temple,* X.
[17] Gilberto Cavazos-González, *Beyond Piety: The Christian Spiritual Life, Justice and Liberation*, Wipf & Stock Publishers 2010.

# SUPERIORS GENERAL



**ARNOLD JANSSEN**

The Founder and the Leader of the Society of the Divine Word

**NICOLAUS BLUM**

1909 - 1919

**WILHELM GIER**

1920 - 1932

**JOSEPH GRENDEL**

1932 - 1947

**ALOIS GROSSE KAPPENBERG**

1947 - 1957

**JOHANN SCHÜTTE**

1958 - 1967



| JOHN MUSINSKY | HEINRICH HEEKEREN | HEINRICH BARLAGE | ANTONIO PERNIA | HEINZ KULÜKE | PAULUS BUDI KLEDEN | ANSELMO RICARDO RIBEIRO |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1967 - 1977 | 1977 - 1988 | 1988 - 2000 | 2000 - 2012 | 2012 - 2018 | 2018 - 2024 | Present Superior General |







# 1877: The Brothers and their Role in the Development of the Society

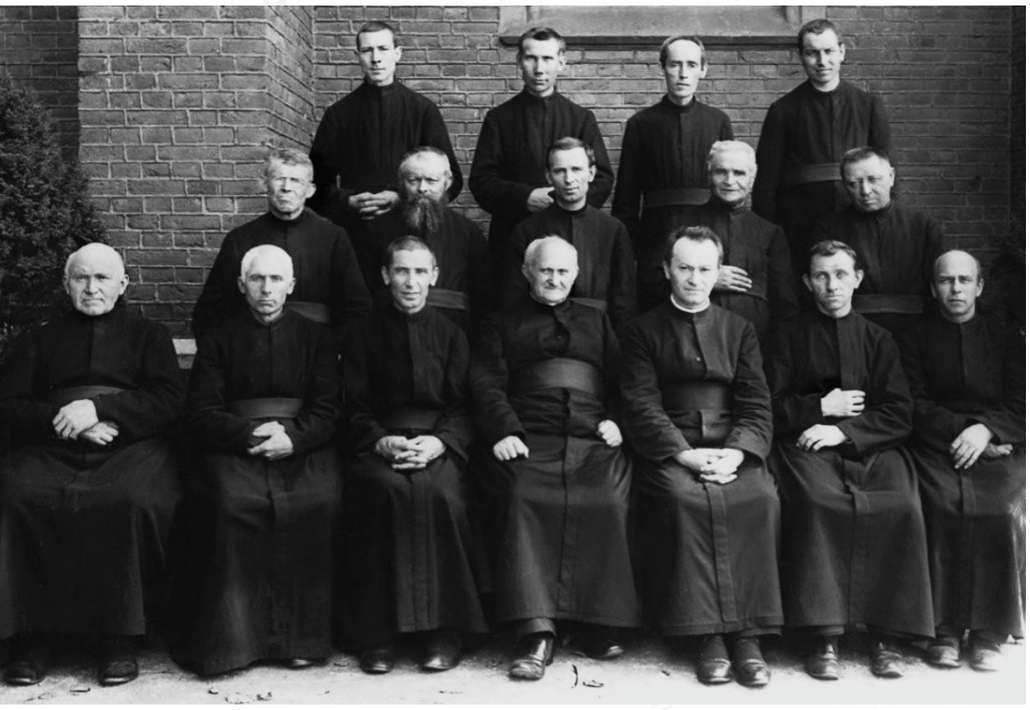


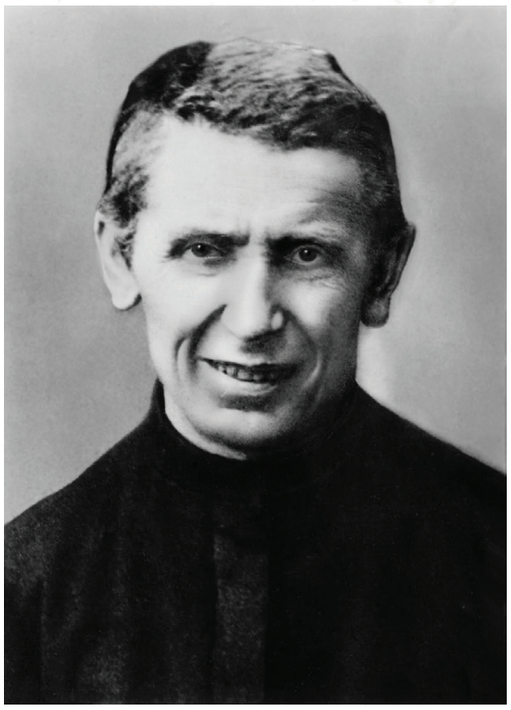
## Introduction

With this present article, I am taking up some previously published information about the SVD brothers related to the history of our Society. The reason for this approach is twofold: on the one hand, I wish to highlight the historical research that some confreres have done on our Founder, Saint Arnold Janssen, and our Society. On the other hand, I would like to offer the more recent generations of confreres' summarized narrative on the history of the SVD confreres.

The title of this article seeks to condense the beginning of the brothers' history with the reception of the first postulants and their subsequent influence on the SVD. Our Founder began to write the *Brüderbuch* (Book of the Brothers) in May 1877, progressively recording the names of the postulants. They left their imprint on the SVD, as we shall see later.

Considering that this article will be part of the publication for the 150th Anniversary of the SVD (1875-2025), I also wish to celebrate the contribution of so many brothers from different countries and cultures to the life and mission of the SVD in the world. This recognition is primarily for the first generations of brothers who contributed so much to the development of our Society through the printing press in Steyl, the construction, and maintenance of many missionary structures (houses, schools, churches, pastoral centers, etc.), but also by their witness as consecrated persons, practicing the Gospel with their simple, prayerful, and hardworking lifestyle.





**Left:** Arnold Janssen with his esteemed community of Brothers

**Right:** Heinrich Elskemper, later known as Br. Marcolinus

## The Book of the Brothers

SVD historians state that Arnold Janssen established the Mission House to prepare future missionary priests for Catholic missions outside Germany. However, in the first two years of the existence of this institution, our Founder perceived the need for lay people dedicated to the maintenance and expansion of the Mission House and, above all, to the printing press in Steyl, which began its activities in 1876. In this context, Arnold envisioned the possibility of creating a *section of brothers*, although, from the beginning, it needed to be clarified how he went about it. He came to the decision about the brothers section after reflection, prayer, and consultation with other religious congregations, such as the Franciscans and Dominicans.

Thus, in May 1877, Arnold Janssen began registering the first postulants for brotherhood in the so-called *Brüderbuch*. That month, he recorded the first three names: August Kreichel, Friedrich Müller, and Johann Bachl. Two left the postulancy soon after. Only August Kreichel began the novitiate in December 1878, together with another postulant who had entered in April of that year, Heinrich Elskemper, later known as Br. Marcolinus, one of the "pillars" of Steyl.

Despite this humble beginning, the Founder continued building up a section of brothers. In the following years, there was a considerable increase in brother candidates, of whom many professed temporary and perpetual vows. When asked about the *Book of Brothers*, Fr. Jürgen Ommerborn, SVD, of the Arnold Janssen Secretariat in Steyl, replied that it covers the period from 1877 to 1928 and contains the names of 2,697 brother candidates. The last one to be recorded in that Book was Wilhelm Altstädter in December 1928. (Apparently, new brother candidates were no longer recorded in that *Book*, as each province/region began to record them in their archives).[18]

[18] According to the *Catalogus Sodalium Societatis Verbi Divini, Romae 1928*, the SVD in that year was already present in 19 countries (8 in Europe, 4 in America, 5 in Asia and 2 in Oceania). Germany and China had 4 SVD provinces each. Unfortunately, the SVD had to interrupt its missionary work in Africa (begun in 1892 in Togo) because of the First World War (1914-1918). However, it returned to Africa in 1938, starting in Ghana.

| № | Vor- u. Zuname | Geburts- u. Postort | Pfarre u. Diöcese | Name der Eltern | Geburt | Eintritt | Novizen-Nummer | Pr… Nu… |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | August Kleichel | Freudenberg i/W. | Neuemann - Emlan | Joh., Barb. Schulkte | 13/11 53 | 4/5 77 | 1. | — |
| 2 | Friedr. Müller | Zorbig | Paderb | | 29/12 49 | 15/6 77 | — | — |
| 3. | Johann Bachl | | | | | 12/5 77 | — | — |
| 4. | Heinr. Elskemper | Merfeld Pülme | ib | Münste | Gerh. Agn. Focke | 19/10 51 | 25/4 78 | 2. |
| 5. | Wilh. Solbach | Wenkershagen | | Köln | | | — | — |
| 6. | Rud. Schwerdtfeger | Dobel il | Meissen | Sachsen | Friedr. Heinr. Stecher | 15/3 59 | 4/10 78 | 3 |
| 7. | Heinr. Domschen | Wesel | | | | 3/6 51 | 12.78 | — |
| 8. | C.P.J. Reichmann | Horstmar, Schöpping | Schöpp., | Münst. | Franz, Clara von Wedell | 4/2 60 | 13/10 78 | — |
| 9. | Matthias Gotten | Greimerath, Niederzerf | Greimerath | Trier | Matth., Mgr. Schreiner | 21/12 49 | 23/12 78 | 7 |
| 10 | Liborius Lahme | Bonkirchen Messinghaus | Bonnk., | Paderb. | Joh., Franz. Brüm | 15/12 53 | 19/5 79 | — |
| 11. | Rudolf Pieper | | | | | | — | — |
| 12. | Heinr. Krieger | | | | | | — | — |
| 13. | Joh. Hrm. Jürgens | Hemsen id. | Meppen | Osnabr. | Hrm., Mgr. Albers. | 30/9 55 | 20/10 79. | 4 |
| 14. | Ant. Bettinger | Neuerburg | id., | Trier | Wilh., A. E. Neis. | 5/6 34 | 23/10 79 | — |
| 15. | Joh. H. Pappenhöner | Oberhürholz id. | Lindlar, | Köln. | Gerh., | 25/4 69 | 1/3 80 2/10 80 | 6/4 81 5 |
| 16. | Ant. Billigmann | Kirchworbis | id. | Paderborn | Philipp, Fict. Stöber. | 30/12 58 | 9/8 80. 23/9 80 | — |
| 17. | J.C.O. Postel | Langerhausen | Eisleben | " | Joh., Elis. Gau | 17/2. 62. | 25/9 80. | — |
| 18. | Joh. Koester | Niederwenigern, id | id. | Paderb. | Heinr. A. Staffelshau | 12/4. 56 | 14/6. 80 | 6. |
| 19. | C.A. Brüchmann | Trier i. | St. Gangolph | Trier | Peter, | 24/12. 41. | 5/10 80 | — |
| 20. | Heinr. Casteel | Hüssen id | id | Utrecht | Joh., | 26/5. 46 | 11/12 81. 21/11 81. | 14. |
| 21. | Peter Hochhardt | | | | | | | — |
| 22. | Cornelius Wenders | Buirscheid id. | id., | Köln | Franz, Joh. Hubi | 3/1. 54 | 16/7. 81. | — |
| 23. | Peter Deves | Thelej b. Tholej id | id., | Trier | Pet., Ma. Kirsch | 2/4 62 | 1/8 81 | 8 |
| 24. | Emil Seiter | Söllingen Schwarzach | id., | Freiburg i/B. | Remig. Pauli. Hasags | 21/1 62. | 27/8 81. | 9 |
| 25. | Albert Tülich | | | | | | — | — |
| 26. | Herm. Franz | Beienburg id. | id., | Köln | Carl, Carol. Alzinger | 24/9 59. | 27/10 81. | 15 |
| 27. | Heinr. Wand | Heiligenstadt, id | id., | Paderb | Phil. Luise Riekmüller | 3/9. 62 | 26/10. 81. | 11 |
| 28. | Wilh. Hauser | Brerjell, id | id., | Münst | Heinr. Joh. Kath. Bellen | 11/2. 39. | 1/3 81 1/11 81 | 16. |
| 29. | Joseph Schroeder | Geilenkerchen, id | id. | Köln | Joh., | 4/4 58 | 20/3 81. 4/11 81 | — |
| 30. | Heinr. Nies | Rehringhaus, Olpe | Neuenkleusheim, | Paderb | Heinr. Mar. Jos. Schmidt | 12/1 48 | 3/11. 81 | 12. |
| 31. | Conrad Schürmeyer | Borgloh, id | id., | Osnabr | Franz Cath. Lettmann | 26/12. 33. | 23/10. 81. | 10. |
| 32. | Gebh. Gerber | Eichendorf, id | id., | Erbg i/B. | Joh., M. Bluemer | 28/12. 53 | 13/12. 81 | — |
| 33. | Emil Fecken | Lennep, id | id., | Köln | Jul., Wilhm. Filespe | 23/7. 60 | 15/12. 81 | 13. |
| 34. | Andr. Gerner | Bonn, id | St. Remig | Köln | Joh. A. C. Langen | 9/1 40 | 31/1. 82. | — |
| 35. | Friedr. Beushausen | Dorste, id | id. | Hildesh | Heg., Carol. | 16/5. 59. | 6/2. 82. | 24 |
| 36. | Heinr. Tobges | | | | | | — | — |
| 37. | Herm. Blas | Altenessen, Essen | id., | Köln. | Wilh. Ther. Sträter | 9/5. 57 | 10/4. 82. | 17. |
| 38 | Gerh. Kempkens | Monthart, | id., | Roermond | Pet. M. Zeolen | | 24/10 81 18/3 82 | 25 |
| 39. | Joseph. Koch | Erkeln, id | id. | Paderb. | Joh., Ther. Hedeken | 16/3. 35 | 18/7. 82 | 18 |
| 40. | Ant. Kawranch | Tokorkowitz Kattsch. | Kattschin, | Bresl. | Franz, M. Stanik | 10/1 52 | 4/8. 82 | 46 |

*Brüderbuch* (Book of the Brothers) since 1877

## Provisional Statutes for the Brothers

At the beginning of the brothers' section of the Society, Fr. Arnold still needed to have a definite statute, both for the Society in general and for the brother candidates. However, he chose to establish a *provisional statute* with the following formation program: *the duration of the postulancy was at the superior's discretion* and could vary from a few months to a year or even longer. During this formative stage, the candidates did manual work in Steyl, maintaining the Mission House, the garden, and the printing press. They also took technical courses as apprentices in the trade school of the Mission House and participated regularly in community life, including prayer, Mass, and other practices of Catholic piety.

Those brother postulants considered suitable were promoted to the novitiate for two years. The well-known motto *Ora et Labora* was also put into practice. The stage of temporary vows lasted nine years, during which the professed brothers continued to work and update their professional preparation – this long preparation period allowed the respective superiors and formators to better understand each one's capabilities and limitations before recommending them for perpetual vows. It is interesting to note the emphasis that Arnold placed on devotion to the Archangels since the first profession of vows for three years was made in honor of the *Archangel Raphael*, followed by another three years in honor of the *Archangel Gabriel* and, finally, three years in honor of the *Archangel Michael*. Perpetual vows were professed in honor of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary.[19]

In addition to the above, it is necessary to mention the following: The brothers made their vows according to the *Third Order of St. Dominic.* This was because up to that time (1878), the members of the Mission House of Steyl, seminarians, priests, and brother candidates made only a *vow of obedience* to the superior, Arnold Janssen, according to *the Statutes of 1876*. Thus, between 1878 and 1884, the Mission House in Steyl was guided by consecrated life according to the Dominican Third Order, which was revoked by the first SVD General Chapter of 1884-1886.

Historian Fr. Alt points out that on the morning of 8 September 1878, the *Archconfraternity of the Holy Rosary*, a spiritual association dependent on the *Order of St. Dominic* (OP), was set up in Steyl. With this arrangement, on the afternoon of the same day, three priests from the Mission House in Steyl professed their first vows in the Third Order of St. Dominic, two brother candidates (August Kreichel and Heinrich Elskemper) entered the novitiate, and three other diocesan priests, one of whom was Fr. Joseph Freinademetz, a newcomer to Steyl, received the imposition of the scapular of St. Dominic. This celebration took place in Steyl, and was presided over by Fr. Augustin Maria Keller, OP, competent commissar for all the houses of the Dominican Order in Germany.[20]

How must Arnold Janssen have felt at that celebration? I could not find any reference to it, but I imagine him to be quite uncertain about the form his foundation would take in the future, although open to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, the search for God's will gave fruits shortly after that.

## New Identity of the Mission House

By introducing the vows, according to the Third Order of St. Dominic, in the Mission House, due to the presence of brother candidates, Arnold Janssen was, in a way, modifying the identity of that institution. At the beginning it was considered a Mission House to prepare future missionary priests. Now, it was becoming a religious congregation whose purpose was the mission *ad gentes*, integrating into its structure not only priests but also consecrated lay people, the brothers. This process would later lead to the *Societas Verbi Divini* (SVD - Society of the Divine Word), a name defined by the First General Chapter of the Society (1884-1886), with its own Rule of Life.[21] Although it was approved only in 1905 by the Holy See, it remained in force provisionally for almost 20 years.

Thus, we can clearly state that the brother candidates, later professed, motivated this *change in the identity of the SVD* when it was still known as a mission house. In this sense, it is recorded in the history of Steyl that on 30 April 1882, three brothers professed the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Thus, they professed the three traditional vows before the priests and other clergy in the Mission House.

It is important to remember that there was a process of transition from the vows, which were considered

[19] Alt, *Journey*, 315.
[20] Alt, *Journey*, 312.
[21] Andrzej Miotk, *The General Chapters of the Society of the Divine Word (1884-2012)*, AN SVD-95, Romae 2016, 18-22.

private, from 1885 to 1905, the year in which the SVD Rule was approved. According to Fritz Bornemann, from 1905 onwards, all SVD members professed public and simple vows.[22]

## The First General Chapter (1884-1886) and the Brothers

What were the consequences for the brothers of the new juridical status of the SVD? First, the brothers were recognized as influential members of the SVD by the profession of the same religious vows. Br. Elskemper, who professed his vows, was given the name Marcolinus. The same happened to the other professed brothers.

However, that chapter also resolved that they did not need an active or passive voice. They could not elect superiors and councilors or be candidates for eventual leadership positions in the institution.[23] Nor could they elect delegates to provincial and general chapters. Unfortunately, this practice lasted for many years.

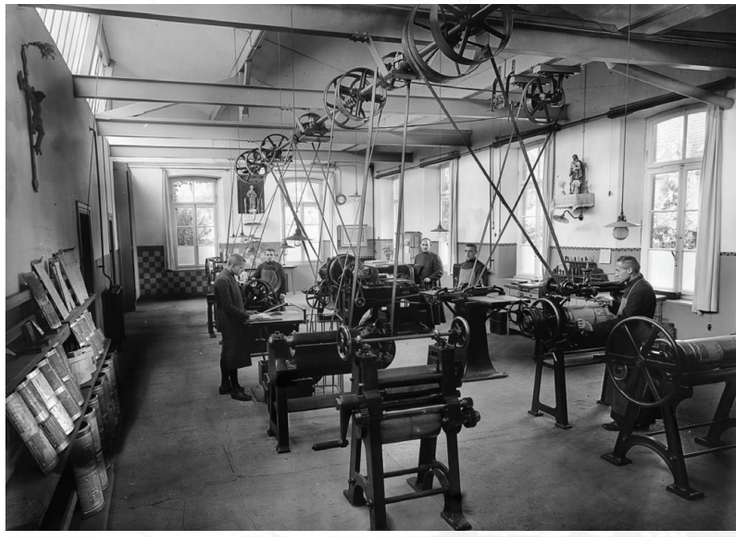
On the other hand, it was made clear that the brothers also participated in the missionary work of the SVD. However, they were always "helpers" since "the general theological vision of that time, missionary work was approached in clerical garb,"[24] prioritizing the proclamation of the word of God and the celebration of the sacraments. The brothers' collaboration was mainly through their manual/professional work.

## The Main Contributions of the Brothers

Through their dedication to manual/professional work and witness to the Gospel, the brothers helped shape the Society into a religious congregation serving the mission *ad gentes*. In this regard, the 1988 General Chapter recalled, "In the Society, we all share the same religious-missionary vocation and the fact that we are a community of laity and clerics constitutes one of the features of our charism (Cons. 104). The lack of a brother in an SVD community is a negative note that impoverishes our religious and missionary witness" (FTW 1988/1, 67).

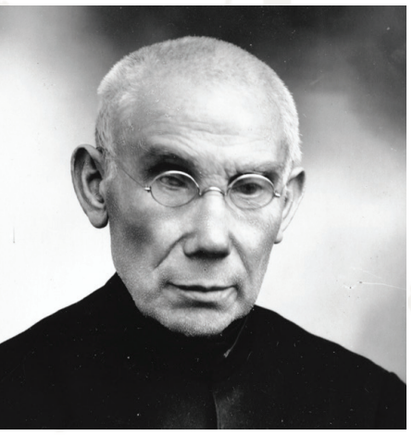
The second significant contribution of the brothers to the Society was their material support of the missionary work, beginning with the expansion of the structures of Steyl, for, within a few years, the number of new members increased. Photographic records from the early decades of the SVD show the brothers (candidates and professed) in the maintenance of gardens, farms, houses, kitchens, carpentry, painting, crafts, and civil construction, among other activities.[25]







[22] Fritz Bornemann, "The Transition from Private to Public Vows in the Society," *Verbum*, 9 (1967), fasc. 1, 5-13.
[23] Alt, *Journey*, 217.
[24] Vinzenz von Holzen, Peter McHugh (eds.), *The SVD Brother Vocation Today. Assembly on the Brother Vocation*, 10-29 January 1994, Nemi. Trans. Eduardo Saffer, AN SVD-70/2, Romae 1995, revised edition in 2006, 35.
[25] Manfred Krause, *History of St. Michael's Mission House, Steyl, Memoirs of Brother Martinus Jürgens*, published in Steyl 2011. (This book has several interesting photos about the brothers in Steyl).



Br. Clemens Lanze
Originator of the
Traveling Brothers



Br. Josimar F. de Sousa,
phisician in Bolivia



Ghanian, Br. Pius Agyemang

Special mention should be given to those brothers involved in the printing press in Steyl and the *Reisebrüder* (Traveling Brothers). The brothers, under the guidance of Br. Bernardus Schwerdtfeger, the Founder's editorial team and other SVD priests, published missionary magazines such as *Die Heilige Stadt Gottes* (The Holy City of God), whose title was later shortened to *Stadt Gottes*; *Kleiner Herz Jesu Bote* (Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart of Jesus), later replaced by the magazine *Steyler Missions Bote*; and *Michaelskalender* (St. Michael's Almanac). The number of copies of these publications reached thousands of people. For example, in 1909: 73,000 copies of the *Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart of Jesus* were printed monthly, 220,000 of *Stadt Gottes,* and 655,000 copies of St. Michael's Almanac annually.[26] The *St. Michael's Almanac* was distributed to the public.

With these printed materials, news about the missions was disseminated, and, at the same time, new vocations were attracted to the Society, either as brother candidates or priests. The annual subscriptions to the magazines and the almanac expanded the list of benefactors, who provided the financial resources to maintain and develop the SVD missionary work worldwide.

On the other hand, the traveling brothers went to cities and towns in German-speaking countries (Germany, Switzerland, and Austria), promoting the sale of these magazines and the almanac. Shortly afterward, this action was also expanded to different cities in Holland. The initiative to create teams of *Reisebrüder (Traveling Brothers)* came from the postulant, Br. Clemens Lanze, in 1883, which found a favorable reception from our Founder.

The *Traveling Brothers* concept was subsequently embraced across Europe and beyond, promoting the exploration of missionary topics among Catholics. This approach involved direct engagement by an SVD member who distributed printed materials, inspired both young and old towards the missionary cause, and also solicited donations to support the missions. Br. Wendelin Meyer, dispatched by Arnold Janssen in 1895 to the U.S., spearheaded the dissemination of SVD missionary publications among German immigrants while mobilizing resources for SVD missionary endeavors. This pioneering effort catalyzed the establishment of the SVD presence in the United States, marking a period of substantial growth in personnel and financial support over the ensuing years.

Another very important aspect is that the brothers lived with intensity the Benedictine motto *Ora et Labora*. Still, with an additional touch: *pro-Missionibus*, that is, at the service of the mission *ad gentes*. Thus, everyone contributed to the missionary work of our Society, whether maintaining the SVD structures, preparing apprentices in the workshops, printing presses, or selling missionary magazines.

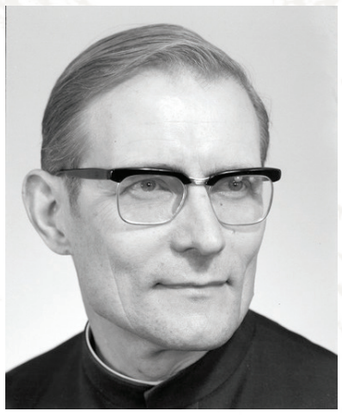
This profile of the *Steyler Bruder* was known for many decades in Europe. It was an important attraction for the emergence of new brother vocations, as they received professional training, especially in the Steyl workshops, according to their talents. They were then assigned to work in the mission houses in Europe and beyond. According to the statistics from 1905, the SVD already numbered 511 professed brothers and 94 brother novices, 288 priests (including one Bishop), 184 clerical students, and 48 clerical novices.

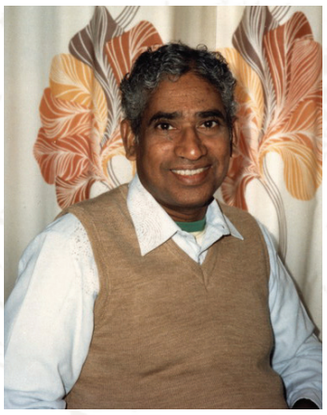
## Brothers in Other Continents

Soon, the first brothers were being sent overseas. The devolvement of the Society led to the birth of native brother vocations who soon marked their presence in the Society with a significant contribution. In 1925, the Society in Brazil accepted the first two lay novices. Br. Joaquim Bueno was the first Brazilian brother and took final vows in 1933. The novitiate for SVD brothers was opened in China in 1934 with 16 Chinese brothers accepted by 1947. In the USA, the first Afro-American, Br. Vincentius Webb, professed his first vows in 1937. He learned cooking in the French Creole manner. Also in Asia, the number of local brother vocations was increasing. In 1943, the formation of brothers started in Indonesia and the first brothers took final vows in 1951. In India, the first five brothers from the novitiate in Palda pronounced their first vows in 1953.

In Ghana, the novitiate of *St. Joseph* was started in Adoagyiri-Nsawam in 1958. The Society wit-

[26] Joachim Piepke, "Arnold Janssen, an inspiration for today," [In:] https://janssenfreinademetz.wordpress.com/2019/01/15/arnoldo-janssen-una-inspiracion-para-el-dia-de-hoy/article published in 2019 [ Accessed: 15 November 2023].







**Left:** Br. Max Staudinger, first Brother in the general council

**Center:** Br. Anthony Thottan, first non-European brother in the general council (1982-1988)

**Right:** Br. Roberto Duarte during the Workshop of New PRM Superiors - 2023

nessed significant contributions of the native brothers. The first brother in Africa was the Togolese Br. James Djadou who took his first vows in 1954 and worked in Ghana as the principal of the Catechetical Institute (Sunson) and as local manager of Catholic schools in Yendi and later in the finance office of the Department of Health of the National Catholic Secretariat of the Catholic Bishops' Conference. The Ghanian, Br. Pius Agyemang (first vows, 1964) developed a ministry based on his God-given talent for music, and the ability to connect with people. He composed hundreds of songs both in Akan and English. In 1960, there was already a good number of native brothers in Indonesia and India, with around 30 brothers in each country. In Japan, Br. Isao Joachim Yamamoto took perpetual vows in 1962 and later became provincial treasurer. Then, Indian Br. Anthony Thottan, provincial treasurer, became the first non-European brother in the general council (1982-1988). After his commerce degree at the University in Indore, he was known for his methodical and conscientious work, always respectful of his coworkers whom he encouraged to develop their initiative.

## Events and Circumstances Affecting the Brothers

Among the events that greatly affected the brothers were the two world wars (1914-1918 and 1939-1945), because many were called to defend their homeland, especially in Germany and Austria, which resulted in the death of many and some left to these related problems.[27]

Among the adverse circumstances was the industrialization of societies, resulting in the loss of several manufacturing activities that involved many brothers: shoemakers, tailors, bakers, etc. Along the same lines, technological evolution resulted in the closure of several SVD printing presses in different parts of the world, leaving many brothers "unemployed." They did not remain idle but sought other ways of integrating themselves into the SVD missionary work, not without difficulties, for example, by learning new professions: teaching, technical, secretarial, or other possible tasks.

The growing clerical profile of the SVD, especially in the second half of the 20th century, also strongly affected the emergence of new brother candidates since many of those who entered wanted to become priests. This, together with the publication of the new Code of Canon Law (CIC) in 1983, which classified the SVD as a Clerical Congregation of Pontifical Right (cf. Cons.104), made the brothers, from a juridical point of view, second-class members.

Another challenge is that the brothers are at an advanced average age in Europe and the USA in the context of a general shortage of new vocations for the Society.[28] The *Catalogus 2024* shows that there are 457 brothers in perpetual vows in the SVD, of whom 46% are in the ASPAC zone and only 59 brothers in temporary vows.

## Signs of Hope for the Brothers

Since the 1967 General Chapter, the brothers have received the right of active and passive voice in the SVD, which had been denied to them since 1885. Thus, they began participating in the general chapters, and in 1972, Br. Max Staudinger was the first Brother elected as general councilor. Subsequently, in several provinces, regions, and missions (PRM), some brothers were elected to local leadership posi-

[27] *Catalogus* shows 1,763 professed brothers; the *Catalogus 1947*: 1,195 professed brothers, which means a loss of 568 brothers during that period.

[28] According to the *Catalogus 1924* brothers of European origin in perpetual vows and working in the European zone have an average age of 72.5. Brothers, originally from the USA in perpetual vows, currently working in the three provinces of the USA, have an average age of 78.9.




First Zonal Assembly of PANAM Brothers in Brazil

tions and became provincial/regional council members. However, to exercise leadership positions, it was necessary to request the corresponding rescript from the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (CIVCSVA), which, in most cases, granted them, but occasionally denied.

Let us reflect on the significant changes made by Pope Francis in May 2022, when he abolished paragraph 2 of CIC 588. This revision allows brothers in clerical institutes/congregations to assume roles as *local superiors* without requiring a specific rescript. However, obtaining the rescript remains mandatory for critical positions such as superior general or PRM superior. The decision to grant such authorization lies with the respective Vatican Dicastery, which evaluates each case. It is worth noting a pivotal moment in December 2022 when Br. Roberto Duarte received the necessary rescript to become the first brother provincial superior in the SVD province of Ecuador (ECU). His appointment marks a significant milestone, symbolizing a new chapter of opportunities for brothers in the Society.

Previously, in October 2015, CIVCSVA published a booklet, long awaited by the religious brothers of various congregations: *Identity and Mission of the Religious Brother in the Church*. It is interesting to note its structure in the second chapter: I. The mystery: brotherhood, the gift we receive (n. 13-20); II. Communion: brotherhood, the gift we share (n. 21-26); and III. The mission: brotherhood, the gift we give away (n. 27-31). With this text, the Church explicitly recognizes the dignity of the brothers and their contribution to the mission of the Church.



Brs. Alois Kratser and Wojciech Gądek

In October 2020, Pope Francis published the Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti,* in which he also highlighted fraternity as a gift received from God the Father, with the task of cultivating it in our communities and civil society, especially in this wounded world. The proposal "to become" brothers to those who suffer, to be in solidarity with them, was inspired by the Gospel (Luke 10:25-37). Our Superior General, Fr. Paulus Budi Kleden, in a letter to the brothers of ASPAC in 2021, made an excellent reflection on this encyclical under the title: *Being a brother - Becoming a brother.*[29]

## Final Considerations on the Brothers

Although the motto *Ora et Labora pro Missionibus* did not formally exist, it was practiced, above all, by the brothers who, despite not having an active or passive voice for a long time, dedicated themselves entirely to contributing with their work and witnessed by their consecrated life to the development of the SVD in the world. Jesus was their main inspiration for their daily service and St. Joseph for their humility.

Over the past five decades, the Society has actively promoted greater recognition of the dignity of the brothers to ensure that their voices are heard both actively and passively, and facilitated unity amidst diversity.[30] Relationships between the brothers and priests have significantly improved, with several brothers now participating as elected delegates in provincial and general chapters.

Presently, brothers are engaged in various missionary activities aligned with the four characteristic dimensions, practicing prophetic dialogue through their secular or ecclesial professions or simply through their presence. Some are involved in educational endeavors, while others contribute to administering and maintaining SVD

[29] Paulus Budi Kleden, *Being a brother - Becoming a brother,* [In:] https://www.svdcuria.org/members/brothers/202n/2106es.pdf [Accessed: 15 November 2023].
[30] We are "One Body and many members" (1 Cor 12:12) is the opening sentence of the Final Document of the 2nd General Assembly on the SVD Brother Vocation, held in Cebu, Philippines, in 2009 (AN SVD-93/S, Romae 2010, offers a lot of information about this assembly).

structures. Their joyful and committed dedication is a testament to the Gospel, reminiscent of the pioneering spirit of the early brothers who embarked on their journey in Steyl. Many brothers have entered retirement or face health challenges; we extend our gratitude to them for their life-giving contribution during their active years and for their continued prayers and sacrifices for the mission.

In conclusion, I thank God for the unique vocation of being an SVD brother. I also extend heartfelt thanks to all brothers, past and present, for their invaluable contributions to the life and mission of the Society. Your fraternal presence in SVD communities exemplifies the vision of Jesus of Nazareth – a vision of universal brotherhood, reflecting the Kingdom of God that he proclaimed on earth.

**Alfonso José Berger, SVD (Brazil)**
***Former General Councilor, now administration***



Brother Capitulars during the XIX General Chapter with Fr. Heinz Kulüke

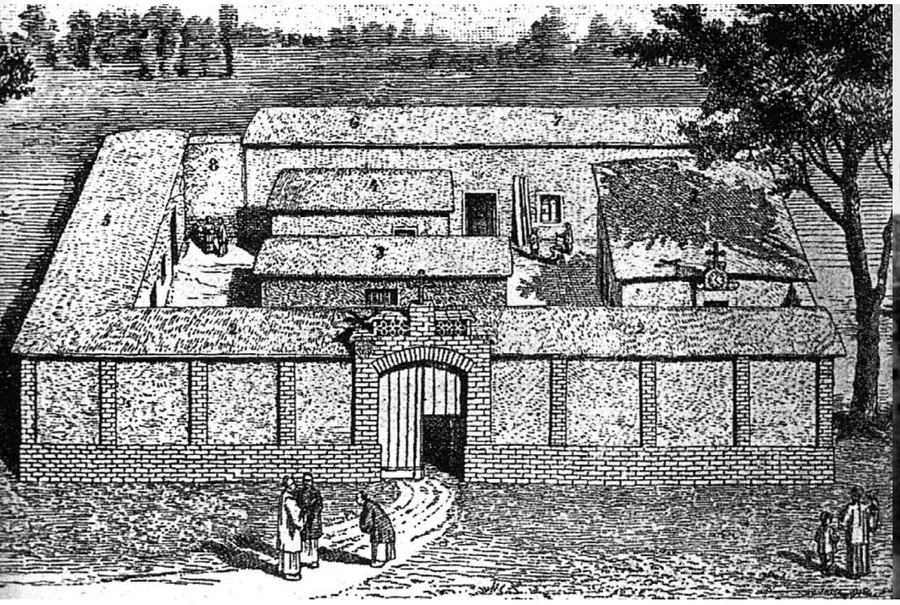


# 1882: The Mission in China Viewed Through the Prism of the First Two Pioneers



The two outstanding pioneers of the SVD in China, Bishop Johann Baptist Anzer (1851-1903) and St. Joseph Freinademetz (1852-1908) came from different geographical and cultural backgrounds, the one from Bavaria, the other from a remote mountain region in what is now South Tyrol, Italy. Their dream of becoming a missionary brought them together, first in Steyl, then in China, and the challenge of the China mission was bound to unfold their providential talents in different and unique ways.

The two men had different talents and tempers, Anzer an energetic and capable leader and organizer, Freinademetz a humble preacher and patient worker. The young theologian Anzer met Fr. Arnold in 1875 and became one of the co-founders of the new mission seminary and the congregation. Anzer was ordained priest in 1876. Fr. Freinademetz reached Steyl in August 1878, and there the two men met. Together they prepared for their mission in China, learning some Chinese from Fr. Everard Smorenburg (1827-1904) who had served in China from 1855-1870. When the two men entered the ship for the journey to Hong Kong in March 1879, it became obvious that from now on their lives would be bound together in a special way for the rest of their earthly journey. After more than one month they reached Hong Kong, where they had to wait until the SVD was assigned a region in China. Anzer was asked to teach at the Catholic seminary in Hong Kong, whereas Freinademetz was sent to care for scattered Catholics on remote islands where life and mission work were much more challenging than in the classrooms of the seminary.





First SVD mission Poli in China: Catechumens House

## The Geography of Our Mission

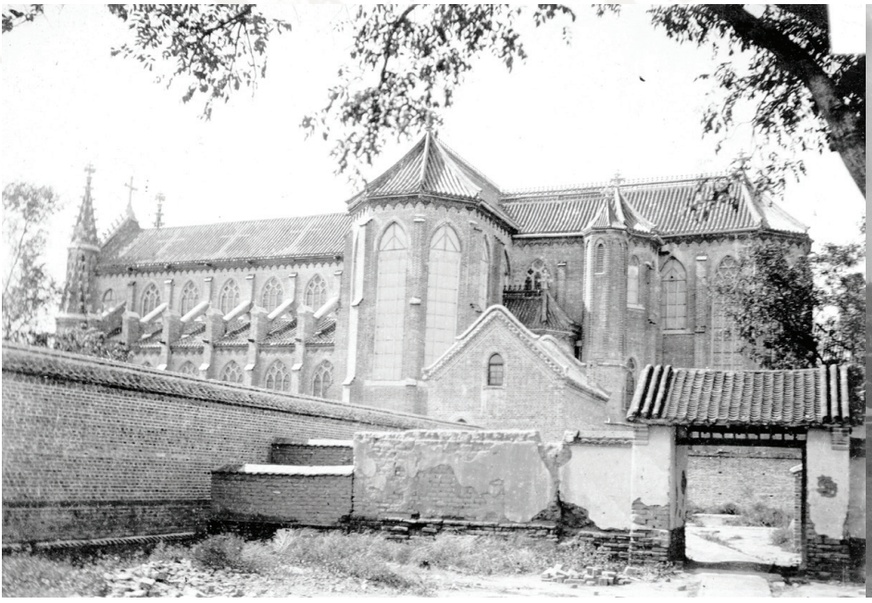
The intention of any missionary society in those decades was to obtain and develop a geographical region (vicariate) in China. Once the *Propaganda Fide* assigned a province or district to a missionary society, the messengers of the faith would begin to establish a central station and from there reach out to the surrounding areas. In this way the Jesuits had established a large center in Xujiahui, Shanghai, the Vincentian missionaries developed church compounds in Beijing, and the Scheutveld Mission had built up Xiwanzi, a small village some 200 km north of Beijing. Anzer and Freinademetz had passed through Shanghai and seen the Jesuit compound in Xujiahui.[31] They were inspired by this model and aspired to build up a similar mission in the SVD mission in China.

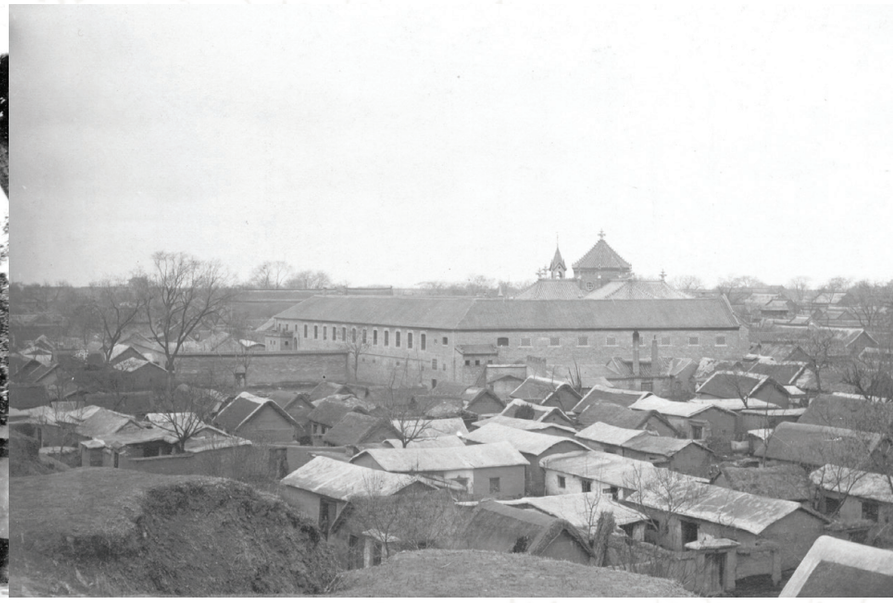
From 1879 to 1881 the energies of both Fr. Arnold and Fr. Anzer were devoted to the crucial matter of obtaining a suitable piece of land for the SVD mission. Fr. Freinademetz was not involved in this process of decision making. He was ready to go anywhere, but Anzer was very anxious to obtain a promising mission area in China and tried to obtain information concerning the situation of different regions in China proper.[32] In June 1880, Anzer arrived in Jinan, Shandong, where he negotiated the matter with the Franciscans who were in charge of Shandong at that time.

Understandably the Franciscans would not give up the more promising and well-established Catholic communities in north Shandong but rather entrusted the troublesome region of south Shandong, almost totally devoid of Christians, to the SVD newcomers. South Shandong was considered a thorny ground for several reasons. It was the home of Confucius (551-479 BC) and Mencius (372-289 BC), which implied a more hostile attitude of the local scholars, who guarded orthodoxy.[33] Besides that, the partly mountainous area was notorious for unrest and robbers. The formation of robber gangs was due to overpopulation: young men could not find land to till. Other causes of unrest and migrations were frequent floods, droughts, and famine in the southwest regions of Shandong.

It is well known that Anzer's outspoken reluctance to accept the region caused conflicts with the Franciscan Bishop Eligio Cosi (1819-1885) who in the summer of 1881 would have preferred to name Freinademetz superior of the SVD mission.[34] The event manifests the different attitudes of the two men: Anzer already had a strategic plan for the development

[31] In May 1881 Freinademetz visited Xujiahui (Zikawei) on his journey to Shandong. See: Fritz Bornemann, *As Wine Poured out: Blessed Joseph Freinademetz SVD: Missionary in China 1879-1908*, Rome 1984, 60.
[32] Karl Josef Rivinius, *Im Spannungsfeld von Mission und Politik: Johann Baptist Anzer (1851-1903) Bischof von Süd-Shandong*, AN SVD-94, Romae 2010, 81.
[33] Rivinius, *Im Spannungsfeld*, 300.
[34] Bornemann, *As Wine Poured out,* 65.





**Left:**
The magnificent cathedral of of Yanzhou (Yenchow)

**Right:**
The large compound of Jining in China (Zining Residence)

of the new mission and hoped for a port, for a sufficient number of traditional Catholics in the area, for catechists and for other conditions which would have led to a fast development and to the desired results: the conversion of substantial numbers of Chinese. Fr. Freinademetz, on the other hand, was willing to start from zero and to accept the conditions as they were.

The cradle of the SVD in China was in the remote village of Poli (Puoli) which was especially important from 1882 to 1895. The large and beautiful church of Poli was built in 1889 and has remained intact until today, being one of the few surviving old churches built by SVDs in Shandong. Following the vigorous push of Bp. Anzer, the center of gravity shifted from Poli to the cities of Yanzhou and Jining around 1895. From 1901 to 1945 the large compound of Daijia ("Taikia" in the old transcription) near Jining was the central house of both SVD and SSpS (since 1920). After 1922 the SVD reached out to other provinces, namely Henan (Vicariate of Xinyang and Vicariate of Xinxiang) and Gansu (including Qinghai and Xinjiang), and from 1933 to 1950 our men served in the administration of the Catholic University of Beijing. More than seventy of our 546 foreign confreres who served in China between 1882 and 1955 died in Shandong and found their last rest in the cemetery of Daijia, among them Fr. Freinademetz, a fact which helps to explain the lasting emotional attachment to Daijia. Only three of our missionaries were buried in Beijing, but neither their tombs nor the tombs of those in Daijia have been preserved, although some tombs in Daijia have been restored and new tombstones were erected around 2010.

## Remote Villages and Large Cities

Although the conditions of the vicariate "Shandong South" were challenging indeed, the following two decades saw a slow growth of the mission, and after 1901 a faster development of parishes, schools, seminaries, printing facilities, and sister convents (after 1905) ensued, so that in the 1920s the SVD mission was even seen as a model for others. This must be attributed to the interplay of the charisms of our missionaries, as it can be seen from the cooperation between Anzer and Freinademetz. It was God's providence that in January 1886, Fr. Anzer was consecrated Bishop in Steyl and became Vicar of the newly instituted "Vicariate of South Shandong", because he actively expanded the mission work and pushed for the move to the big cities, especially Yanzhou and Jining. The locations in the cities "enhanced the prestige of the Church and provided easier access to Chinese officialdom."[35] Already in October 1891, the mission purchased a house in Jining, but the Chinese officials and scholars in Yanzhou spread rumors against the Christians and obstructed the efforts of the mission to buy a house in the city. In their eyes, Yanzhou was the home city of the sacred tradition of Confucius, and to build a church there would be sacrilegious. Bp. Anzer insisted on

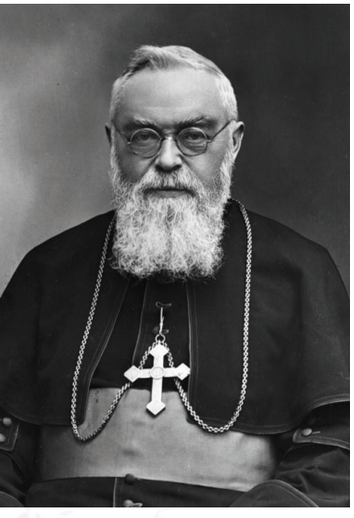
[35] Quotation by the historian Tiedemann, quoted in Rivinius, *Im Spannungsfeld,* 296.



Bp. Johann Baptist Anzer of South Shandong in China



Joseph Freinademetz as Retreat master for SVD Fathers in September 1902



Bp. Augustin Henninghaus of South Shandong after Anzer

his demands to have a residence in Yanzhou and tried to use his connections to the German consul in Beijing to put pressure on the governor of Shandong.[36] After Japan destroyed the Chinese fleet and exposed the backwardness of the Middle Kingdom in 1894, the attitudes of Chinese mandarins oscillated between reform spirit and extreme conservatism. When the new German consul Edmund von Heyking (1850-1915) energetically demanded from the court in Beijing that the provincial governor of Shandong would allow Bp. Anzer to visit Yanzhou, the Bishop was received very respectfully in September 1896 and a few weeks later obtained the permission that a missionary could legally stay in the city.[37] Probably Bp. Anzer's ambitious fixation on a church in Yanzhou in the early 1890s was not wise, although it led to a constructive settlement after a struggle of several years.

On the other hand, if Fr. Freinademetz would have been superior of the mission, the missionaries might have remained much longer in the rural areas around the remote and insignificant Poli, a village that was first built up as a model station. The remoteness of Poli was an advantage during the long centuries of persecution. It became a stronghold in the early days of the SVD in Shandong and was developed generously, but in the long run, the large mission compound of Poli was bound to lose its significance, a development which was foreseen by Bp. Anzer. Therefore Anzer, consecrated Bishop in Steyl on 24 January 1886, tried to obtain properties in the cities of Yanzhou and Jining, where he planned to establish the central institutions of the SVD mission. His decisions laid the groundwork for the SVD in Shandong: The central stations in Yanzhou city, Jining city and Daijia, all within a distance of 20 kms, became the triangle where most mission institutions (schools, seminaries, printing facilities, hospitals, retreat house) were located conveniently. Daijia, the heart of the prospering mission, continued to beat until the compound was occupied by Communist guerillas in summer 1945. By 1955 all our foreign missionaries were expelled, in 1958 most Chinese confreres were imprisoned or forbidden to hold any religious services, and the large churches in Yanzhou and Jining were razed to the ground in 1966 when the Cultural Revolution brought a tragic decade of chaos and violence to the nation.

Making full use of his connections with politicians and diplomats, Bp. Anzer was able to secure tolerance for the nascent Church from the side of local mandarins, he summoned the assistance of German ambassadors in China, and financed building projects, schools, seminaries, and printing facilities, thus caring for the needs of the Church in South Shandong. However, his public support of the German occupation of the Jiaozhou Bay (Qingdao) also aroused much controversy, and even within the SVD his occasionally arrogant way of treating others led to opposition against him. At the 2nd General Chapter (6 November 1890) the conflict between Fr. Arnold and Bp. Anzer came to a spectacular eruption, and after that the superior general harbored suspicion against Bp. Anzer.[38]

[36] Rivinius, *Im Spannungsfeld,* 307-331.
[37] Rivinius, *Im Spannungsfeld,* 331.
[38] Rivinius, *Im Spannungsfeld,* 432.

Fr. Freinademetz who never returned to Europe and identified with the locals was the "soul" of the mission. He was not only a man of prayer but enjoyed preaching the Gospel to the farmers of Shandong. He liked to have conversations with simple people and cultivated friendships. His approach was more personal, sympathetic, and less authoritative. Of course, being a leader of the local communities, he was also forced to push for lawsuits to fight for the rights of the believers who were often marginalized and pressurized. His attitude of empathizing with the Chinese certainly also had an impact on the other missionaries coming from Steyl. For example on Fr. Henninghaus (1862-1939) and on Fr. Pieper (1861-1909) who in his work *Unkraut, Knospen und Blüten aus dem Blumigen Reiche der Mitte (Weeds, Buds and Blossoms from the Flowery Middle Kingdom*, 1900) portrayed the Chinese people in a sympathetic way although he vividly depicted the problems in Chinese society.

Fr. Freinademetz who found his home in China also sought to build up the community life of the Society of the Divine Word and a community house where retreats for the missionaries would be held. After 1901 the house in Daijia near Jining City became the much-loved center of the SVD community (and after 1922 also of the SSpS) in China. Here the newly arrived missionaries learned the language and script; here were the retreat house, the retirement home, the novitiate (since 1924) and the cemetery. Daijia was the home of the SVDs in Shandong in a special way, and it was linked to Freinademetz who developed it. Even today, we are emotionally attached to Daijia, although the section of the compound which has been restituted to the diocese is still not easily accessible for foreign visitors.

## Teaching Catholic Farmers and Non-Catholic College Students

Fr. Anzer was more "extrovert" and sought to establish the mission by reaching out to the larger cities, to the higher strata of society, to international politics, and by resorting to educational projects, publicity, and print media. Fr. Freinademetz, on the other hand, was known for his successful preaching among the farmers and uneducated people of Shandong. It was said that he "loves silent work more and shies away from publicity."[39]

The following example may show how the two men were involved in different ways. Fr. Anzer pioneered in a new region and then asked Freinademetz to follow up with the tasks of evangelization.

In November 1882, Fr. Anzer responded to a request from Wangzhuang, a village in the mountains of the region of Yishui. The journey from Poli to Wangzhuang took ten days by foot or horse cart, since the roads in China were in a deplorable state, and railways became more common only after 1900. Fr. Anzer settled matters with the local mandarins near Wangzhuang, and before Christmas 1882 he ordered Fr. Freinademetz to come over from Poli and to stay in the village for a couple of months to teach the new converts. In this village Freinademetz taught the farmers the elements of the Christian faith, the daily prayers and the meaning of the sacraments. In this way he was able to plant the faith among the simple farmers of Wangzhuang and the surrounding villages in such a way that Wangzhuang became the second "Catholic village" in South Shandong after Poli, and its large church has survived the vicissitudes of the Communist era.

Bp. Anzer always intended to reach out to the upper echelons of society, and he had excellent relations with the governor of Shandong Yuan Shikai (1859-1916), a man who was open to reforms. Already in the spring of 1900, Fr. Freinademetz had visited Yuan Shikai and felt that this governor was modern and benevolent toward foreign influence in China. In December 1900, Yuan Shikai even asked Bp. Anzer to direct a university in Ji'nan.[40] Yuan's plan was later realized with the help of Protestant missionaries. A year later Anzer opened a college in Yanzhou which was recognized and financially supported by the provincial government, certainly an outstanding achievement showing the new positive role of the missionaries as educators. However, due to the lack of teachers, in the following years the SVD concentrated on schools strictly in *bonum ecclesiae* (responding to the needs of the Church), such as seminaries, catechism schools, and institutions for the education of catechists.



The main entrance of the Fu Jen University

[39] Bornemann, *As Wine Poured out,* 211.
[40] Rivinius, *Im Spannungsfeld,* 745.



The printing press of Yanzhou

The teaching efforts led gradually to the founding and maintenance of all kinds of schools, including basic ABC courses in elementary schools, learning the prayers in catechism schools, up to the training of seminarians and catechists. From 1898 to 1915, Fr. Joseph Hesser (1867-1920) directed a school in Jining which was designed to train lay catechists, giving them an overall education in many fields. Even more famous was Fr. Georg Stenz (1869-1928) who organized and directed the Franz-Xaver College in Jining, a German-Chinese middle school, from 1904 to 1923. Our confreres also helped the SSpS Sisters, who arrived in Shandong in 1905, to organize schools for girls, schools for female teachers, catechists, and sister candidates.

Certainly, it was because of these tireless efforts to raise education standards on all levels that the SVD was known in China as a fervent and capable missionary Congregation. Only because of the rich experience in education, was our Society entrusted with the administration of the Catholic University in Beijing in 1933.

## Print Media and Scholarship in the Service of the Church

Neither Bp. Anzer nor Fr. Freinademetz were known to be scholars, linguists, sinologists, or authors of numerous works. However, both were erudite and eloquent, they spoke at least four languages (German, Latin, Chinese, French, and Italian)[41] and communicated efficiently with Chinese mandarins, farmers, French and Italian prelates, and German-speaking confreres. Especially Fr. Freinademetz' eloquence was legendary, he spoke the language "like the Chinese," and he composed several booklets on spiritual or administrative matters, such as a Rule for Catechists *(Chuanjiao yaogui)* and a life of St. Alexius in the colloquial language *(Yalaixiu baihua juben)*[42]. The two men also laid the groundwork for the printing press in Yanzhou, where some of our confreres published hugely influential works. For example, Fr. Joseph Hesser's illustrated Chinese version of the Bible stories *(Gujing lueshuo, Xinjing lueshuo,* 1905*)* was later known in Catholic circles throughout China. Fr. Hesser also produced a *Chinesische Grammatik* (Grammar of Chinese, 1905) to help the missionaries learn Chinese.

Through the labors of missionary brothers, especially Br. Adolphus Glaremin (1865-1925), the printing press developed exceptionally well. Br. Adolphus began with the small printing workshop in Poli (1894-1895), moved the printing facilities to Jining (1896-1899), then worked as printer in Qingdao (1899-1905) and finally directed St. Paul's Mission Press in Yanzhou (1905-1925), where he educated a number of Chinese printers. Fr. Henninghaus and other confreres produced heavy bilingual dictionaries, thus testifying to the long-term efforts in the field of linguistic studies, which were so necessary for translation. One fruit of the profound analysis of the local language was the edition of one of the first periodicals in the colloquial language, the *Gongjiao Baihuabao* (*Catholic News*, founded in 1913 by Fr. Peter Röser, 1862-1944, a prolific translator).

Both Anzer and Fr. Freinademetz were steeped in the spirituality of the Word, and they believed that the spoken and written word of the good news would slowly transform Chinese society. This same faith made other confreres envisage the compilation of large works, and the SVD was entrusted with important literary projects. In 1924, at the Synod in Shanghai, Bp. Henninghaus, SVD, was put in charge of the compilation of the unified catechism of China, which was to appear in three versions, namely a simplified one for children, a standard one for adults, and an elaborate one for seminarians and students. During the 1940s an even more ambitious project was undertaken by our confreres, namely the production of a multi-volume *Catholic Encyclopedia* for China. Due to the chaotic times the project unfortunately failed.[43]

[41] During his stay in Hong Kong from 1879 to 1880, Anzer contacted many priests from missionary congregations and prided himself on being able to converse in the "European languages" (including French, English, Italian, Spanish?) to an extent that "not many missionaries could compare with me", Rivinius, *Im Spannungsfeld,* 81.
[42] Bornemann, *As Wine Poured out,* 200.
[43] Karl Josef Rivinius, *Das Projekt einer Katholischen Enzyklopädie für China*, Sankt Augustin: Steyler Verlag 2013.



## Involvement in Seminary Education



Both Anzer and Freinademetz worked for the education of seminarians, Anzer already in Hong Kong in 1879. Soon after his arrival in Poli, Anzer began to arrange the education of native seminarians. On 23 February 1884, he opened a minor seminary in Poli with five students.[44] Soon the number rose to nine, three of them selected from the orphanage of Poli. They were instructed in Latin and Chinese, and they learned the basics of Christian doctrine, according to the curricula formed by Franciscans, Lazarists, and Jesuits. Although there were many challenges in the beginning, the seminary continued to develop, and on 8 December 1889, Bp. Anzer ordained the first two Chinese priests in Poli, Joseph Xia (1861-1939) and Matthew Zhao (1856-1920).[45] In the fall of 1892 the seminary was divided into a minor seminary in Poli and the major seminary under the direction of Fr. John Weig (1867-1948), which moved to the village of Wangzhuang. In 1895 the major seminary moved from Wangzhuang to Jining, and from summer 1895 to summer 1897 Fr. Freinademetz was in charge of the seven major seminarians.[46] For the alumni Freinademetz wrote a Latin booklet on the spiritual meaning of the liturgy and prayers of the Holy Mass. Like Fr. Weig before him he was basically alone in teaching all the required courses to the seminarians and used both Latin literature and Chinese explanations for theological instruction. The seminary moved into the new seminary buildings in Yanzhou in 1901. From 1901 until the spectacular flight of the seminarians from Yanzhou to Shanghai in summer 1948, the major seminary was in Yanzhou.[47]

[44] Rivinius, *Im Spannungsfeld,* 407.
[45] Rivinius, *Im Spannungsfeld,* 410.
[46] Bornemann, *As Wine Poured out,* 227-231.
[47] In 1948, fifty-five seminarians of the Major Seminary of Bp. Theodore Schu (SVD) in Yanzhou escaped from the Communists to the Philippines. After a long march, they arrived first by train in Xuzhou, Jiangsu, then to Shanghai where they found a place with the French Jesuits in unused rooms of the former seminary. But due to the lack of clean water, they had to move elsewhere. Their next three-month stop was in Lokiahshing in the south Chinese Province of Fujian. Eventually, the seminarians sailed to Hong Kong and from there they





Easter 1903 in Yanzhou with German visitors from Tsingtao. From left: Klapheck, Br. Rudolf, Interpreter Mootz, Bishop J. B. Anzer, Governor von Truppel, Fr. Freinademetz, General-Senior Doctor König, Fr. Teufer, First Lieutenant Kurz, Captain von Ganderberger

The example of cooperation of Fr. Anzer and Fr. Freinademetz in the seminary education in Shandong shows the common concern of the SVD confreres, namely, to educate native priests, and to educate them well. In the first half of the twentieth century, the SVD confreres ran a number of minor seminaries (in Poli, Heze, Daijia, Gaomi, also in Wuwei, Gansu Province, Xinyang, Henan Province) and founded major seminaries in Yanzhou and Lanzhou. Finally, the important project of ongoing priestly formation, realized in the *Collegium Sinicum* (1938-1951) at the Catholic University of Beijing (the Fu Jen University) was entrusted to our confreres.[48]

## Protection of the Church

When the Manchu governor Yu Xian (1842-1901) who, since 1896 supported the "Society of the Big Swords" *(Dadao hui)* in Shandong and hated the foreigners, did not protect the local Christians in Shandong from being oppressed, Bp. Anzer saw that the future of the mission in Shandong depended on the removal of this one official. Bp. Anzer wrote several letters to the German ambassador in Beijing, Clemens Freiherr von Ketteler (1853-1900), and partly because of his urgings Yu Xian was removed from his post in Shandong and was sent to the province of Shanxi in the last months of 1899.[49] The new governor of Shandong was Yuan Shikai who saw that China needed cooperation with the westerners in order to be modernized, and because governor Yuan effectively suppressed the Boxers in Shandong, no foreign missionaries were killed in Shandong in the year 1900, whereas in Shanxi more than one hundred foreign missionaries were captured and executed by the cruel Yu Xian.

In the tragic year of the Boxer Rebellion 1900, Bp. Anzer was not in Shandong, he had traveled to Rome for the fourth time, and Fr. Freinademetz served again as administrator of the mission. In the spring of 1900, the anti-foreign and anti-Christian movement swept through the provinces of north China, and the governor of Shandong ordered all missionaries to be evacuated to the safe port cities of the province, especially to Qingdao. However, Fr. Freinademetz was worried about the many orphans in the large stations of Poli and Wangzhuang.[50] The missionaries gathered in the two cities of Jining and Yanzhou, and from there they traveled to Qingdao, but Fr. Freinademetz and Br. Ulrich Heyen (1870-1928) secretly left the group and marched off to Poli, without any military protection from the governor. In Poli, Freinademetz and a Chinese priest directed the resistance of around one thousand refugees in the fortified mission compound against the attacking Boxers. After a week (from 7 to 13 July) in Poli, Fr. Freinademetz and Br. Ulrich secretly left Poli and

reached the Philippines. Thirty-five seminarians were accommodated in the old rectory of San Vicente, near Vigan, where, a new seminary was opened. Bishop Schu could meet his seminarians again after three years and in June 1952, he conferred priestly ordination in the local parish. By 1954, from the entire group 31 had received ordination. Some of them were sent to study in Rome; others remained in the Philippines, where they were needed in pastoral care among the Chinese Catholics.

[48] Karl Josef Rivinius, *Collegium Sinicum. Eine Bildungsanstalt für chinesische Priester in Peking*, Siegburg: Franz Schmitt Verlag 2015.

[49] Rivinius, *Im Spannungsfeld,* 655-656.

[50] Bornemann, *As Wine Poured out,* 308.



safely reached Wangzhuang after marching 80 hours. From there Fr. Freinademetz sent some messengers to Poli and returned to Poli himself at the beginning of August. There he accompanied the Christians who still faced pressure from the Boxers until the situation became stable in September, when the refugees left Poli again. However, the other missionaries had to wait until the first months of 1901 before they were allowed to return to their former mission stations. The political change in 1900 (Beijing was invaded by foreign powers) led to a general shift in the attitude of the Chinese people, and a wave of fast reforms made life easier for the Christians in China.

The missionaries had tried to protect the fledgling communities in Shandong, Bp. Anzer by meeting influential politicians, and Fr. Freinademetz through his courageous physical presence in a dangerous and chaotic situation. In the years after 1900, there were many more situations in China, when our missionaries needed diplomatic skills and personal courage as mediators between fighting warlords.[51]

## Conclusion

After 1879 Bp. Anzer and Fr. Freinademetz worked together in Shandong, and all the energies of their lives were dedicated to the mission in China. They were very different in character and spirituality, and because of certain occasions when Anzer behaved in an arrogant or domineering way, Fr. Freinademetz felt compelled to correct the ambitious Bishop, who in the beginning accepted these critical remarks. However, since the year 1887, Anzer began to suspect that Freinademetz fomented opposition against him among the confreres[52], and this soured their further relationship. Even though the tension between the two continued until Anzer's death in 1903, they constructively cooperated in many areas, such as the developing of new mission areas, establishing the Church in urban centers, opening and maintaining schools, publishing books, educating Chinese clergy, and protecting the Christians. Their fruitful cooperation in the face of so many emotional, cultural, and political challenges remains a model from which we may draw inspiration and encouragement. Instead of contrasting Fr. Freinademetz' saintliness to Bp. Anzer's ambitiousness it would be better to perceive their specific contributions to the overall development of the China mission of the SVD.

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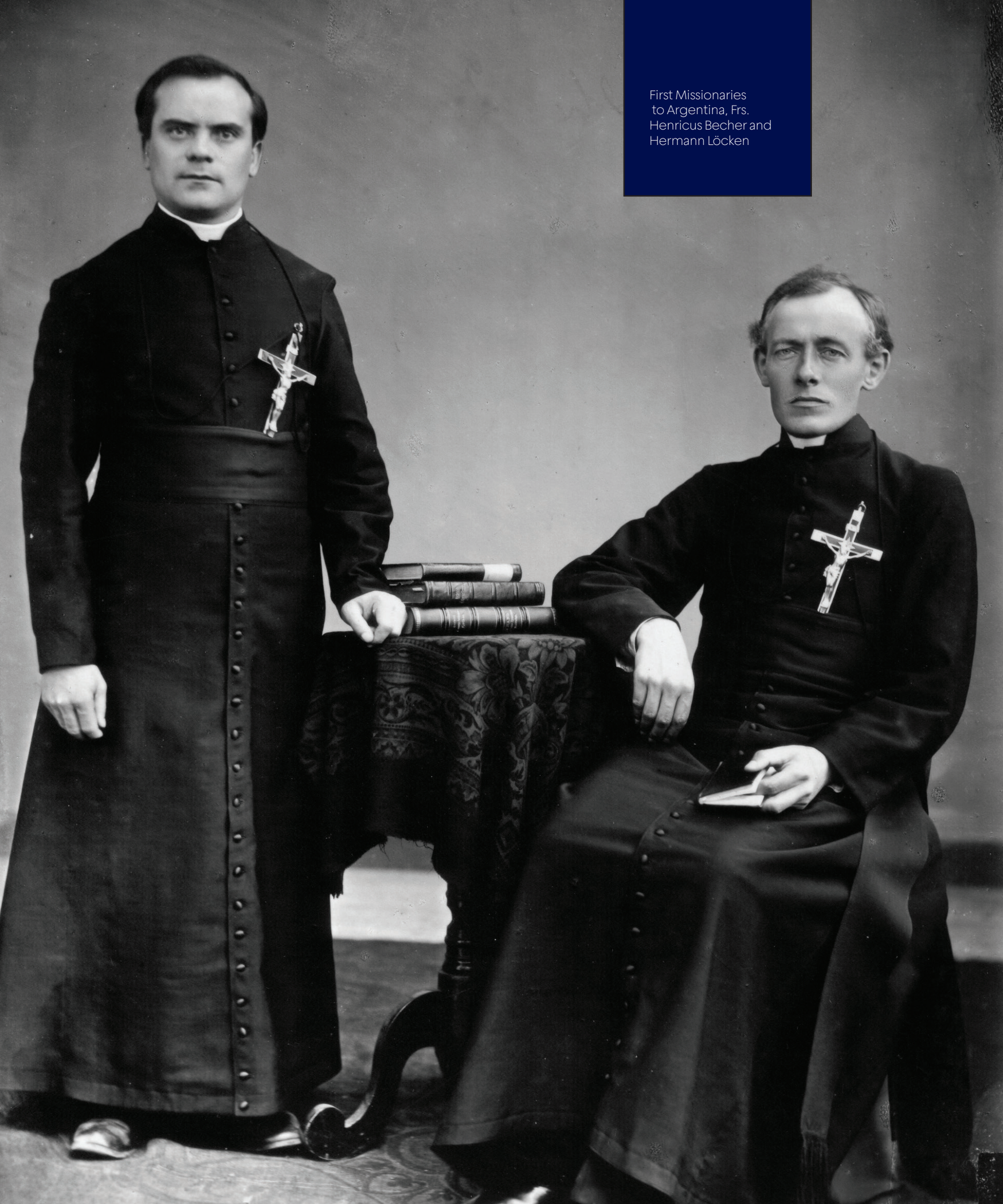
[51] See: the MA thesis by Xu Guotang, *Zhanzheng de tiaotingzhe* (*War Mediators: The Construction of the Image of Divine Word Missionaries in National China*), Renmin University of China 2023.
[52] Bornemann, *As Wine Poured out,* 115.



First Missionaries
to Argentina, Frs.
Henricus Becher and
Hermann Löcken



# 1889: SVDs in Latin America, Concerned About People, but Centered on Christ



## Response to Religious Orphanhood

Argentina was the first field of action of the Society of the Divine Word in America and the second in the world. Until then, the Society was active only in China, for where the first two missionaries had left in 1879. Ten years later, the Founder Arnold Janssen accepted that his missionaries would also work in Argentina, which was a controversial decision and did not fail to raise criticism in the young missionary Society since it had been created for the explicit purpose of bringing the Gospel to the so-called "infidels."

What moved Fr. Arnold to send missionaries to Argentina – only fourteen years after the SVD foundation, against the opinion of some of his collaborators – were the insistent requests presented by numerous German-speaking settlers who had entered the country more than thirty years before. They asked for priests who knew the German language to be sent to them for their spiritual care. A similar situation existed in Brazil.

Here we cannot study the reasons in 19th century Europe, especially after 1830, that caused a dense migratory flow, mainly oriented towards the new countries of America: The United States and Canada in the north and Argentina and Brazil in the south. Most of the immigrants belonged to the classes that the new conditions of life in old Europe left marginalized from progress or subjected to harsh oppression. Exploitation was certainly not, in those years, a mere invention of demagogues but a scandalous reality.[53]

[53] Valerico Imsant, *Los Misioneros del Verbo Divino en Argentina*, Buenos Aires: Guadalupe 2003, 15.

The orphaned religiosity revealed by the frantic calls from Argentina could not leave our holy Founder indifferent. If it was essential to bring the light of faith to unbelievers, it was no less important to preserve it among those emigrants who, for years, had been living far from their homeland. They had suffered the cultural uprooting typical of migration and, lacking pastors who could speak to them in their mother tongue, ran a severe risk of losing their faith.



The Chapel in Lago of the "Volga Deutsch" emigrants in Palmeira, Brazil

In 1878, the first contingents of a new wave of German immigrants arrived in Argentina, to whom the Society of the Divine Word would be firmly linked. They were the so-called "Volga Germans". Their ancestors had emigrated in the 18th century, more precisely between 1764 and 1767, from the Rhine to Russia to settle in the Volga area, where Tsarina Catherine II had offered them land, with the right to live in colonies to guarantee better the preservation of their customs, language, and religion. For a century, these colonies enjoyed broad administrative and even political autonomy. But, after a hundred years, the Russian authorities decided to terminate the privileges that Catherine II had granted to the German colonists indefinitely. The efforts made in favor of their maintenance only succeeded in postponing, for a few years, the deadline of their inevitable extinction. Many settlers were not willing to lose their prerogatives and thought of emigrating.

The search for new horizons was directed towards Brazil, whose government, eager to populate its immense territories, had made tempting proposals. They sent a delegation there to ascertain *in situ* the possibilities offered by that country. The commissioners' report was positive, and emigration began at the end of 1877. However, not only was the Brazilian government interested in attracting immigrants, but also the Argentine government. The agents of the latter had enough skill to divert the course of the Germans from the Volga to the beaches of the Rio de la Plata so that those who had left to go to Brazil arrived in January 1878 at the port of Buenos Aires. According to Fr. Ludger Grüter, SVD,[54] there were 1006 people, all Catholics, "except 40 families coming from the upper Volga area."[55]

Some smaller groups went ahead of the main contingent in their departure from Russia and arrived on American soil. Thus, since Christmas 1877, eight families and three single men from Brazil were in Argentine territory. In the first days of January, they founded the Hinojo colony in the center of the province of Buenos Aires.[56] The national authorities intended to place the large contingent that arrived in 1878 in the same area, but interests not well identified twisted the destiny of these settlers for the second time and sent them to the province of Entre Ríos. Between Paraná and Diamante, the national government confiscated approximately 20,000 hectares of land, creating the General Alvear colony, where the Volga Germans settled. Despite some resistance from the authorities who insisted that each settler should stay on his farm, the immigrants were grouped in five villages whose structure and even whose names were reminiscent of those they had left in Russia: Marienthal (Valle María), Spatzenkutter, Kehler (Salto), Pfeifer (San Francisco) and Aldea Protestante (Protestant Village).

The colonies of Hinojo[57] – in the province of Buenos Aires – and General Alvear – in the province of Entre Ríos – were the centers of expansion of the Russian-German immigrants. Other nuclei moved towards the east of the latter province, toward the Uruguay River, where they seriously began colonizing the area of Gualeguaychú.

Once the decision was made to accept the new field of work, the Founder appointed Frs. Henricus Becher and Hermann Löcken for the mission. Both

[54] Fr. Ludger Grüter (1860-1940) was pastor, provincial superior and from 1917 editor of the *Argentinischer Volksfreund.* He wrote about SVD history in South America.
[55] Grüter, *Festschrift zum Fünfzig-Jahr- Jubiläum der Einwanderung der Wolga-Deutschen in Argentinien,* Buenos Aires: Guadalupe 1928, 49.
[56] Grüter, *Festschrift,* 45.
[57] In December 1898, Fr. Hermann Löcken, SVD, took over as parish priest in Colonia Hinojo.

were close to 32 years of age. Arnold Janssen accompanied Fr. Becher to Exaeten to interact with a Jesuit named Rathgab, who had been, for eighteen years, superior of the Jesuits in the Province of Rio Grande do Sul, in Brazil, a region with many German immigrants. The account of his experiences was beneficial for our missionaries in several aspects. In addition, Rathgab had recommended the SVD missionaries to the Jesuits in Buenos Aires.

It took a whole month for the ship to cross the Atlantic and to unload the missionaries in the port of Buenos Aires. This happened on 23 October 1889, a historic date for the SVDs in Argentina and, therefore, in Latin America. The Jesuits and the Redemptorists had mainly exercised pastoral work for the benefit of the German-speaking people of Argentina. Both religious families welcomed the arrival of the newly arrived SVDs. They mediated the handing over to their care the first apostolate fields in Santa Fé, Entre Ríos, and Buenos Aires provinces.[58]

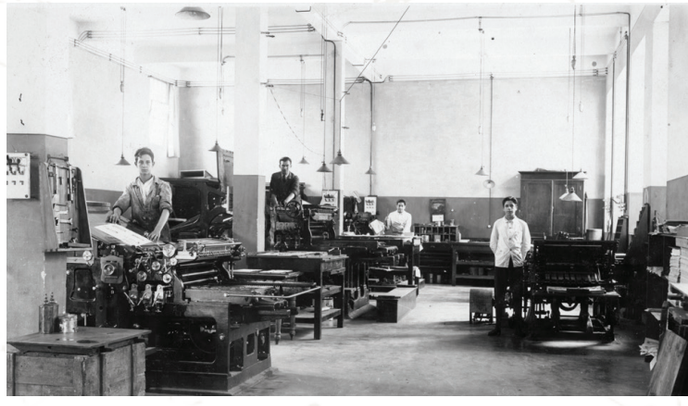
What were the initial activities of the first missionaries in Argentina? There was accompaniment of the immigrants in the places where they settled. Not only the Volga Germans, but also the Swiss, among other nationalities, benefited from the SVD missionaries. In the province of Santa Fé, particularly the presence in Humboldt,[59] San Jerónimo Norte[60] and Esperanza were the initial places of activity for our missionaries. In Esperanza, less than two years after their arrival in the country, overcoming enormous difficulties, the first house of the Society of the Divine Word in Argentina was opened. The chapel and the house were solemnly inaugurated on 25 January 1891, and on 1 March 1891, the school was inaugurated, with an enrollment of approximately 60 students, 10 of whom were boarders. The chapel was dedicated to the Sacred Heart, while the house and school were placed under the patronage of St. Joseph. Later, on the first Sunday of Lent in 1893, Fr. Antonius Ernst took over the parish of Esperanza.

In addition, their presence was extended to the province of Entre Rios[61] and the city of Buenos Aires, where Frs. Antonius Ernst and Wilhelm Klocke took on pastoral service in the chapel of Guadalupe, in the Palermo area, as of 1 November 1894. Later, it was constituted as a vice-parish of Guadalupe on 16 October 1896, and as a parish on 2 June 1901. Fr. Antonius Ernst was the first pastor. Later, on the order of Arnold Janssen, a church was built in honor of the Holy Spirit, and consecrated on 18 May 1907. On 14 April 1895, the publication of the *Argentinischer Volksfreund* (Friend of the Argentine People) began, published by the SVD printing house in Buenos Aires.

In the meantime, the presence in other South American countries also began. According to the studies of Josef Alt, in Brazil, the Jesuits took







**Above:** The frontal views of Casa-Colegio San José in Esperanza

**Center:** Students of the College of San José College -ready to ride

**Below:** SVD printing press in Buenos Aires

[58] Josef Alt (ed.), *Cartas de Arnoldo Janssen, SVD, a América del Sur,* Vol. I: 1890-1899, AN SVD-65/I, Estella: Verbo Divino 1992, XXVIII.
[59] In November 1891 the Society took over the parish of Humboldt, the first parish priest being Fr. Ernst Weigang, SVD. At the beginning of the following year, he opened a school attached to the parish.
[60] On 6 May 1895, the Society took over the parish of San Jerónimo Norte with the first pastor Fr. Michael Colling, SVD.
[61] Fr. Henricus Becher, SVD, in December 1891, began the pastoral care of San José de Crespo and in July 1892 the Society began pastoral service in the colony of General Alvear, both towns in Entre Ríos.

charge of the pastoral care of the German-speaking settlers in the State of Rio Grande do Sul. Also, in the 1890s, nine diocesan priests from Münster worked in the State of Santa Catarina. In addition, the Franciscans of the Saxon Province were also engaged in this apostolate.




Photo of the priestly ordination on 5 December 1945 taken at the garden of Buen Pastor of the Colegio Apostólico San Francisco Javier, Villa Calzada

It is not that the SVD's had not been invited to exercise their apostolate in Santa Catarina. However, they did not yet have the required personnel. They remained in Santos, seeking later to set foot in the province of Rio de Janeiro and finally in Paraná and Minas Gerais. Also, in Chile, the Jesuits provided pastoral care in the main centers of German-speaking Catholics, e.g., Valdivia, Osorno, and Llanquihue. The Capuchins of the Bavarian province should be added here.[62]

Our Society began pastoral care in Valdivia, Chile, on 24 May 1900, and in the departments of Caaguazú and Alto Parará, on the Monday River, in Paraguay in 1910.

We could give more details of the beginning and the initial fruits that were gathered in the years following the start in each nation, which were abundant and allowed the Society to establish itself in the respective places. This took shape in various ways (parishes, educational institutes, creation of minor and major seminaries of its own, and helping out in diocesan seminaries, printing presses, ...). The one that took the lead was the promotion of vocations for the missions of the Society.[63] This theme was renewed at the Second Vatican Council, the most significant event of the Holy Spirit in the 20th century. Its fruits in the Church and the Society were substantial.

## The Breakthrough of Vatican Council II

The historical stage of the post-World War Two was a time of profound transformation in family life – social, economic, and political coexistence. It was the beginning, not only of living an epoch of changes but a change of epoch now.[64] In many aspects, we must recognize that the whole Church had not finished adapting to modernity and apostolic religious life – including our missionary Society – lived until the beginning of the 1960s trapped in structures of previous centuries. Until the Second Vatican Council, the changes had responded to local motivations or congregationally inspired alignments; from then on, they had to be part of a profound reform of the universal Church. The challenges implied a serious challenge for the renewal of Christian life in all the Institutes and Congregations. Religious life and missionary activity, two essential aspects of the existence and work of the Congregations, merited two decrees from the Council (*Perfectae caritatis* and *Ad gentes*) that established the guidelines for renewal.

Once the Second Vatican Council was over, it was time to receive it in the churches of the different continents. In Latin America, it was received with enthusiasm and reread in the light of its own historical and social circumstances. The Documents of Medellín (1968), the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975), and the Document of Puebla (1979) were among other means for interpreting the Council's teachings and orientations.

The process of change was lived from a spirituality that marked the continental Church. This was reflected by Blessed Eduardo Pironio when he stressed that "the 'situation of sin' that the Medellin Documents themselves denounced for the entire continent,"[65] because of unjust structures, impeded the

[62] Alt, *Cartas de Arnoldo Janssen* ..., XXVIII and XXIX.
[63] From Latin America they collaborated in the founding of the SVD Provinces of Spain and Portugal, also in Ecuador, Colombia, Mexico, Cuba, Bolivia, Uruguay, Venezuela, and others. Before Vatican II there were Latin American SVD missionaries in various countries (among others): Philippines, India, Japan, Zaire, Indonesia, and Papua New Guinea.
[64] It is impossible for us to go into more detail in this regard.
[65] Eduardo Pironio, "Un año después de Medellín", report by a journalist from the newspaper *El Tiempo de Bogotá* to Msgr. Eduardo Pironio, Secretary General of CELAM, 18/VIII/69, *Criterio*, 1579 (1969), 625-626.

integral development of all men and women. Thus, from the Episcopal Conference of Medellín emerged a Church authentically "the servant of humanity" (Paul VI).[66] Faced with the Latin American situation of injustice, Pironio proposed a Church that was "authentically poor, missionary and paschal".[67] in situations of accelerated change and transformation on the continent. The testimonies of bishops, priests, and religious and lay people impregnated evangelization with a marked transforming conciliar mystique. Many shed their blood for this cause.

Our Society recognized new perspectives for its life and mission in encountering the poor and the Gospel. It lived a spiritual experience of *paschal exodus* (WTW 1981/7, 321; FTW 1989/2), and the mission was perceived as liberating. The various currents of liberation theology motivated people to recognize the injustices that cried out to heaven and provoked commitments to human-evangelical promotion. The option for low-income people – including the youth – motivated new dynamics in SVD life. Without wishing to be exhaustive, here are some experiences.

*Ad intra* of the Society meant breaking with the model of "monastic" coexistence to give way to more unstructured relationships. The initial formation was the one that made the most visible changes. The minor seminaries were closed, and the major seminaries underwent profound transformations. From living within "comfortable and safe walls," they moved on to living together in small communities in popular environments. The vow of poverty was assumed with radicality and and inspired by the structural poverty experienced by the people of God.

*Ad extra,* the SVDs listened to the call for social justice. In Nicaragua, they accompanied communities that suffered human rights violations and terrorist attacks.[68] People suffering in poverty experienced the company of the Society, while at the same time, it was evangelized by the faith of the simple. Thus, some discernments led to the opening of communities among the forgotten or neglected native peoples in the Colombian Atrato, the Brazilian Amazon, and the Mexican states of Oaxaca, Chiapas, and Hidalgo, among many others. Parishes tended to become communities of communities, and basic communities were encouraged, where the spiritual reading of the Word of God had a privileged place. Parishes were also taken over in various dioceses due to the shortage of priests, such as the diocese of Holguín in Cuba. There was much experience in training lay animators of smaller communities far from the main headquarters. Educational institutions – present in Brazil, Paraguay, Argentina, and Chile – had to reconfigure evangelization to respond to the epochal change. In addition, there were experiences of accompanying children's and youth movements according to the cultures and place.




*Centro Biblico Verbo Divino* in Quito, Ecuador

Among other apostolates, we highlight biblical animation. The *Verbo Divino* Bible centers in Ecuador and Brazil stand out, followed by the confirmation of the *Verbo Divino* Publishing Group: Spain, Mexico, Costa Rica, Colombia, Ecuador, Bolivia, Paraguay, Chile, and Argentina. The publishing houses and bookstores played an essential role in the diffusion of bulletins, magazines, and religious books, and especially in the expansion of the Word of God, among others, the translation known as the *Latin American Bible (Biblia latinoamericana)*, which is still influencial today.

After Vatican II, the SVDs began to learn to belong to both the Church and secular society. This was lived with joy and enthusiasm but also with tension. The simultaneous commitments of this double belonging took a lot of effort to combine. To discern the new epoch and the religious-missionary position in it – inspired and suggested by the General

[66] Pironio, "A cinco años de Medellín," 4, Highlights of the author.
[67] *Final Documents of Medellín*, Chapter 5, No. 15.
[68] "Contra revolutionaries" is the name given to the mercenaries financed by the U.S. government who tried to overthrow the government (1979-1990) of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN), which ruled Nicaragua after the overthrow of the dictatorship of Anastasio Somoza and his family in July 1979.

Chapter of 1972 – the Assemblies of Latin American Provincials began. The first one took place in Encarnación (Paraguay) from 15-17 October 1974, with the participation of the Visitator General, Father Joel Catapán. The theme was the commitment of our missionary presence in Latin America.[69] It is not possible to continue with the enumeration of examples. The experiences were mostly joyful, but they also involved ruptures, difficulties, and the reconstruction of mysticisms and organizations.

## New Horizons

As in other parts of the world, our Society in Latin America faces a stage marked by change, transformation of society and its inhabitants. Despite the time that has passed, the prophetic words of Bishop Marcos McGrath are still valid: "'There is always change.' 'To live is to change' - said John Henry Newman - 'and to live long is to have changed often.' But never have the changes been so rapid and radical as they are today [...] and we can assume that this period is only just beginning; and that the changes to come will be more extraordinary than anything we have already seen."[70]

Some brief examples. Our large cities constitute a very complex human mapping and, in several aspects, are almost out of control. The changes produced by the internal migrations of recent years are faster than the programs of current governments and societies. Latin America faces a lack of social, political, and religious reference points. Many have attracted the adhesion of popular masses, but more from a demagogic and populist profile, whose leadership was based on the ambition of the maximum concentration of power. The degrading of social institutions also challenges us, bleeding with corruption, which increases disbelief and the feeling of impotence. We are questioned by the high degree of aggressiveness and violence at all levels in families, institutions, and societies. The influx of drugs continues to plague the new generations and corrupts them in their very human structure. Another characteristic that concerns us is that the new generations are distant and indifferent to our Church structures and practices. With all this transformation, America continues to be the continent with the highest percentage of Christians, a true blessing, and an enormous commitment. We Divine Word Missionaries take on the challenge of evangelizing in a synodal way in Latin America where the Church is "deeply incarnated, concerned about people, but fundamentally centered on Christ."[71]

**Luis O. Liberti, SVD (Argentina)**
***Former Provincial Superior,***
***now Researcher in various theological and pastoral subjects***

[69] From 1990, the PANAM Zone began to have assemblies including the USA.
[70] Marcos McGrath, "Los signos de los tiempos en América Latina," [In:] CELAM, La Iglesia en la actual transformación de América Latina a la luz del Concilio, Secretariado General del CELAM, Bogotá 1969, 79.
[71] Pironio, "A cinco años de Medellín", 4.



Fr. Ulrich Kollwitz visits a comunity in the Atrato Mission, 1980



# 1889/1896: The Foundation of the Missionary and Adoration Sisters: A Conversation Between "Martha" and "Mary"




*Mother Maria Magdalena Kruse, SSpSAP, Superior General (Sister Servants of the Holy Spirit Adoration Sisters), conversing with Sister Anna Damas, SSpS (Missionary Sister Servants of the Holy Spirit), about the foundation, development and present perspectives of their Congregations.*

## Sister Anna

Thinking of how Fr. Arnold Janssen struggled with the foundation of the sisters' Congregations, a German expression comes to my mind: *He carved the Sisters out of his rib.* Referring to the story of Adam and Eve, it means that someone creates something out of nothing, but also that someone creates it at great cost to him/herself. A female branch was part of Arnold Janssen's plan from the outset; but with his workload as Superior of a rapidly growing mission institute, it took him about a decade to establish the sisters' Congregation – much to the distress of the small group of women who had joined the Mission House at Steyl. While waiting for the novitiate to start, they worked as maids, cooking and darning. Household tasks are not at all a missionary occupation from our point of view today, but these women felt that they were part of a big story: the developing story of a German mission institute, and the ancient and ever-new story of Jesus'



Ghana, Nkawkaw, Sr. Helen Marie Yockel, pre 1962



invitation: Go and evangelize all peoples. That made them persevere and gave meaning to their daily work.

From reports of missionaries abroad, Arnold knew that Missionary Sisters were necessary to complement the work of male missionaries. In those days, mission often took place in the context of colonization. Sisters gained more easily the trust of the local population: one did not usually suspect them of collaborating with the colonial powers. Moreover, being women and working in healthcare and education, they had ready access to families and private houses.

But what about the Adoration Sisters? Why did Arnold Janssen want them to be part of his mission institute? Contemplative Missionary Sisters – that is a concept that does not easily fit our action and productivity-centered times.

## Mother M. Magdalena

Father Arnold believed in the power of prayer. Mission is not merely a set of activities; it needs prayer as its source and foundation. That is why the Founder wanted a contemplative branch as a "powerhouse of prayer" to bring the missionary intentions and concerns into the presence of God: perpetual adoration 24/7. In his view, this is how mission unfolds: in prayer and in action. Originally, he planned only one female congregation with two branches, one contemplative and one active. He envisioned the two branches as complementary: "Both should consider themselves as sisters in mutual belonging, just as Mary and Martha, their role models, were sisters," as the Acts of the SVD General Chapter of 1891 have it. Mary and Martha are sometimes misinterpreted as clichés: Mary the prayerful, Martha the hard-working. But complementation does not mean division of labor, to



Ghana, Accra,
Sr. De Pazzi Zurowski,
1964

say: The missionaries work hard, and because they have no time to pray, the Adoration Sisters pray in their stead. No, it is not possible to delegate one's spiritual life to another person. All need to cultivate a deep prayer life that connects us to the Love that God is, and all are called to share this Love with others by what they do and how they live.

## Sister Anna

The foundation of the sisters' Congregations was a collaborative effort with many people involved. Nowadays it seems strange to us that men should establish religious institutes for women, but in those days it was common. Nevertheless, some women played an important role in our foundation. There were the women of the first hour who joined the Mission House at Steyl and desired to give their whole lives for mission, just as much as Arnold Janssen desired it. The first leaders of the women's community certainly put their stamp on the development of the institute. That is why we call them "mothers": Mother Maria, Mother Josepha, Mother Maria Michaele and Mother Theresia.

Interestingly, a visionary was directly involved in the foundation of the sisters' Congregation: Miss Magdalene Leitner from Austria. In the start-up years of his institute, Fr. Arnold consulted her on important matters concerning governance and spiritual life. She gave decisive contributions to the foundation of the sisters. Originally, the Founder wanted to name them *Sorores Verbistarum* - Sisters of the Divine Word. She, however, "en-visioned" (this is the fitting word here because she saw it in her visions) a sisters' congregation dedicated to the Holy Spirit and therefore called *Daughters of the Holy Spirit*. Arnold agreed but changed "daughters" to "servants". Miss Leitner's instructions based on her visions even went into details such as the color of the sisters' habit: the Marian colors blue and white for the Missionary Sisters, and a rose-colored habit in honor of the Holy Spirit for the Cloistered Sisters.

## Mother M. Magdalena

This is characteristic of Fr. Arnold: he reserved the final decision for himself, but not without consulting others. He was a thorough worker and thinker and wanted to make sure that the foundation he laid was sound and solid. The first *Constitutions* (Rule of Life) for the sisters stipulated minute details such as what time to get up, what to eat for breakfast, how to clean the room, how many minutes for recreation etc. When exceptions needed to be made – and that was often – all was decided on the Founder's desk.



Nowadays we would call his leadership style micromanagement. However, he made it a point to consult the sisters in matters concerning them. He always showed respect for them. They, in turn, respected him as the Founder and did not want to do anything against his will and wishes. But they did have their own opinions. After his death, they tried new things, took risks and dared changes. For instance, Mother M. Michaele Tönnies, the first superior general of the Adoration Sisters, introduced the Liturgy of the Hours; until then, as suggested by Miss Leitner, the sisters prayed the Pentecost office every day. Moreover, Michaele founded convents overseas, something that Arnold had never thought of for the Adoration Sisters.

## Sister Anna

By that time, the Missionary Sisters and the Adoration Sisters had become two independent Congregations. This too was something that Arnold had not intended. He wanted the sisters as one congregation with two branches. He followed Miss Leitner's idea of the Adoration Sisters' superior being also the superior general of the Missionary Sisters. In those days, many congregations were divided into so-called choir sisters and lay sisters; the former were usually from higher social classes, better educated, prayed the office in Latin and did mental work, whereas the latter practiced devotional prayers and did the manual work. However, Fr. Arnold disliked class distinctions; for him, it was clear that both branches were first and foremost Missionary Sisters. Whether Eucharistic adoration or manual work – all was to be at the service of mission just as Martha and Mary both served Jesus. But as time went on, it became apparent that both branches, the contemplative and the missionary sisters, were too different in character as to be united in one congregation.

## Mother M. Magdalena

From the beginning, the sisterhood of Martha and Mary proved not easy to live. In 1896, after more than a decade of life together, the first group of sisters was selected for the contemplative branch. Strangely, the preparations – the sewing of the new rose-colored habit and the furbishing of the rooms – took place in secret; only the future Cloistered Sisters were in the know. Then they moved into a separate wing of the house and had almost no more contact with the others. I imagine this to be a traumatic experience for both sides. It must have been very difficult: for many years they had everything in common, sharing joys and sorrows, and at this crucial point, the Missionary Sisters who stayed behind were not allowed to help or participate. The Cloistered Sisters too felt the pain. The chronicler writes: "After we had everything pretty much in order, we went to rest. The last day amid our dear fellow sisters, the Missionary Sisters, with whom we spent many a day in the house of the Lord and in His holy service, in whose community we received so many graces and were so happy, was over. Now we were to leave them."

## Sister Anna

This leads us to the "black sheep" in our congregational history: Sr. Aufrida-Seraphim, Marie van Basten-Batenburg. Much of this secrecy and pain of separation can be blamed on her. Father Arnold had accepted her into the Congregation only with hesitation because the nearby Benedictines had dismissed her due to her delicate health. As a novice at Steyl, Sr. Aufrida fell gravely ill and was near death. But then, literally overnight, she was restored to complete health. The Holy Spirit had healed her,



she said. And everyone believed it because she experienced visions and ecstasies and was seen – really seen by all the sisters! – floating in the air at prayer. She believed herself destined for great things, more concretely to be the superior of the contemplative branch. And since she was obviously favored by the Holy Spirit, all the sisters voted for her, and the Founder and his council appointed her first superior of the Adoration Sisters. She received the new religious name Sr. Seraphim. But then, as a superior, she upset the unity of the sisters with her high-flying, ambitious plans for the Cloister. She designed the fanciest habit and claimed privileges for the Cloistered Sisters. The Missionary Sisters felt the sting of degradation because they had to do the laundering and cooking for the Cloistered Sisters so that these would have more time for prayer. The unity of "Martha" and "Mary" turned into ill feelings. Sr. Seraphim's behavior became increasingly eccentric. Her mystical visions turned out to be a mental disease (hysteria it was called then) and Arnold Janssen dismissed her. Sr. M. Michaele Tönnies, her assistant, took over from her and became the first superior general of the Adoration Sisters.

At first glance, this seems an embarrassing episode in our history. At second glance, though, there are interesting facets. Sr. Seraphim might have been "crazy," but she was also an educated woman, intelligent and clever. She was a visionary in both senses of the word: she had religiously inspired imaginations, but also far-sighted plans and ideas. For instance, she envisaged independence for the Adoration Sisters and the expansion to other countries and continents – something that Mother M. Michaele later realized. Father Arnold preferred to keep the reins firmly in his hands, but Sr. Seraphim had her way to wrestle some control from him: that way was her mystical visions. Everyone believed in them, including herself. "The weapons of a woman" – in the clergy-dominated Church of those days, visions were these weapons. A woman with visions had something to say, she spoke with divine authority as it were. As visionaries, both Miss Leitner and Sr. Seraphim exerted great influence on Arnold Janssen which was decisive for the sisters' foundation. It must be said, however, that the Founder had the ability to discern the spirits, and it did not take long for him to recognize that Sr. Seraphim's leadership was divisive and that her visions had an unhealthy source.



## Mother M. Magdalena

Another strain on the sisters that weighed heavily on their life together was the workload they had to cope with. Besides running their own household, they worked for the SVD: first in the kitchen, then darning, and later services in the printing press. In the era of industrialization, long working days were normal for laborers; but how can one sustain a spiritual life while being physically exhausted all the time? They were few in number, and many sisters shouldered multiple responsibilities. I think that some of the conflicts between the sisters resulted from this work pressure, for instance, the constant irritations between Mother Maria (the first superior of the sisters when they were still united) and Mother M. Michaele. The latter was a teacher by profession and placed great value on education. This was also the task given to her in the convent. She had to make the *curriculum* and prepare the lessons, and Fr. Arnold, himself also a teacher, personally checked each lesson plan. Mother Maria, by contrast, had to see to the overall organization and that all the work would be done in time. And there was so much work that studies seemed not to fit in anymore. Household, services for the SVD, prayer, studies: it was just too much for the sisters.

On a positive note: in those days, the convent was a real and attractive alternative to what life ordinarily offered to women. Unless you were from a well-to-do family, you had little chance of higher education or choosing a profession. In the convent, by contrast, talents were promoted; sisters studied, worked as artists, writers, and in managerial positions. The sisters designed liturgical vestments, painted, wrote chronicles and religious books, and oversaw their household affairs. In modern words: the convent offered career opportunities. What is more, convent life provided personal time, time for solitude and introspection, something that hardly any woman in society could afford. Meditation, examination of conscience, journal writing, etc. were part of the sisters' daily order. It gave them space to reflect on themselves and cultivate their emotional and spiritual life. Last but not least, a missionary congregation opened a window to the big world. Sisters went abroad to live and work in other countries and cultures – a life adventure! Even the sisters staying at home had a share in this adventure through a lively letter exchange with the sisters working abroad in exotic worlds. In pre-Internet times, missionaries were among the first global citizens.

## Sister Anna

It must have been exciting for these women to be part of a growing and expanding mission institute. Within a few years, they had communities in all continents: Argentina, Togo, Papua New Guinea, and China. In the beginning, the Missionary Sisters mostly trained as teachers and nurses and established schools and hospitals where education and health care were not yet available. They certainly did pioneer work. Even today, in developing countries, these services are still much needed. But overall, the

way we carry out our mission has been changing with the changing times. After the Second Vatican Council, we ventured into pastoral and social work. We work for poverty eradication and social justice. In post-communist and secularized societies, we accompany people on their spiritual journey. We want to share the Good News and be good news for people on their way to God. What we do and how we do it has changed, but what has remained the same since our foundation is the focus on women. According to our *Constitutions*, our specific task is the promotion of women's dignity and participation in society and the Church.

## Mother M. Magdalena

Our life as contemplatives, by comparison, has not changed that much. Our ministries have, more or less, remained the same: prayer, and being available for people coming to our door, looking for a listening ear, or contacting us by letter. Our presence as such is important; by having a convent in a country, a diocese, a town, we are a visible sign of the contemplative dimension of the Church and give witness with our life of total dedication.

Of course, we too keep updating ourselves theologically and adjusting to a changing world. Presently, for instance, we are discerning a way to make use of the Internet and social media in a way that is in line with our life centered on silence and prayer. The essence of what we live, though, has remained the same. I would like to quote our *Constitutions* here; the language is not modern, but reading it carefully, it has a depth:

> We consider our duty of glorifying the triune God in his mysteries and saving works as being intimately connected with our specific service to all humanity, whom we represent before God. We are aware of a special call to efficacious participation in the Church's missionary work, in which we cooperate through prayer and sacrifice. […] The closer our union with the triune God in loving contemplation, the more we are taken up into the dynamic of God's love for all (Cons. 104).

God is a mystery, and in our prayer, we place the whole world into this mystery. The purpose of our prayer is not to inform God about all that goes wrong in the world and needs God's attention. God knows. Rather, the purpose is to offer myself completely, with my love and my emptiness, so that God's Spirit can use me for whatever God wants to accomplish in this world.

## Sister Anna

I am intrigued by what your *Constitutions* say about sacrifice as a vehicle for mission: the idea that I can offer God my inevitable sufferings as a gift that God can use for the benefit of others. I find this idea, too, in letters of who often wrote about "offering up" the hardships they endured in a foreign land. The Adoration Sisters, in turn, offer to God their cloistered life, foregoing, and time spent in prayer. Sick and old sisters offer their suffering. Humanly speaking, pain and suffering are contrary to a happy life, and we avoid them intuitively. But pain and suffering are also inevitable in our lives. By offering them to God, one can give meaning to what seems meaningless. It is a powerful act, really: I take control of what I cannot control and hand it over to God so that it is turned into a blessing.







**Above:** Argentina, Posadas, Santa Teresita, Sr. Crisina Keiner, pre 1964

**Center:** Argentina, Zapala, Neuquen Sr. Clara Celia Ludojoski with native Indians, 1971

**Below:** Sr. Anna Damas with natives of PNG



## Mother M. Magdalena

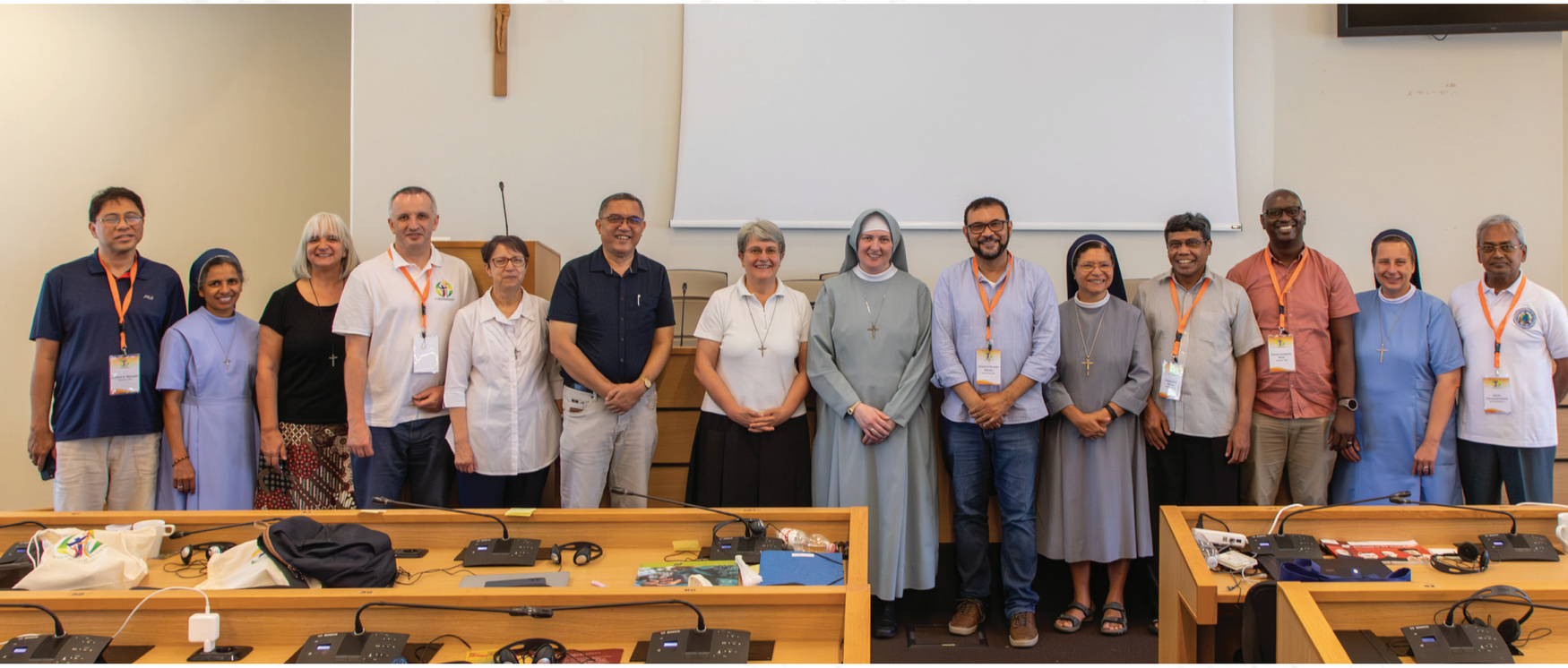
We have so much to offer to the world and to each other, even when we grow sick and old. We are experiencing this in our communities. Presently, we are about 300 sisters in 21 communities and 12 countries worldwide. There is a good number of elderly sisters among us. That changes the quality of our living together. We are learning to help each other, to be patient, and to accept our diminishing physical and mental capacities. We are also learning to involve the so-called lay people. For instance, they take turns during adoration. Most of our convents have established a Eucharistic Adorers League: lay people who want to live our spirituality in their day-to-day lives, give witness to Christ, and commit themselves to regular times of adoration. It is good to see that our charism will outlive us.

## Sister Anna

This is true for us Missionary Sisters too. We are discovering how enriching it is to work together with laypersons with their different experiences and perspectives on life. We are about 2,800 sisters in 49 countries. Whereas in the past the majority of sisters came from Europe and the Americas, our membership has shifted to Asia and Africa. This too has afforded us new experiences. Mission looks different in multireligious Asia than in the mostly secular societies of Europe. And each sister, from her cultural background, gives color to our prayer life and our communities.

## Mother M. Magdalena

Martha and Mary had a brother, Lazarus. So, let us have, last but not least, a word about our brothers, the Divine Word Missionaries. Our relationship with them has been a work in progress. In the 19th century society and Church, the relationship between men and women was asymmetrical, likewise the relationship between priests on the one hand and sisters and brothers on the other. Only priests were seen as missionaries in the full sense;



everyone else was a helper and supporter. Naturally, this view characterized the relationship between our Congregations. Initially, the sisters were founded to assist the Society of the Divine Word; they were perceived as such and perceived themselves in this role too. For both sides, the way to more independence was long. Legal independence was achieved in the period after the Founder's death; mental independence needed a longer time to mature. But in the end, we have rediscovered what it means that we have been founded for each other: to complement and enrich each other as equals, each with their respective charism.

**Anna Damas, SSPS (Rome)**
***Researcher in the department of history and spirituality at the SSpS Generalate***

**Maria Magdalena Kruse, SSpSAP (Steyl)**
***Superior General***










# 1892/1994: Africa as Mission Priority: Flashbacks in Historical Perspective



## SVD Mission in Africa: The Beginnings

This article examines the historical development of the Society of the Divine Word in Africa starting with the Togo mission in 1892, the prioritization of Africa and Madagascar at the 1994 General Chapter and other significant contemporary developments. The SVD mission in Africa started in Togo (now Togo-Benin Province) under German Empire protectorate (1884-1914). In the aftermath of World War I,[72] the Togo mission, however, had to be abandoned around 1918, but it was revived later in 1974.[73] After the Togo mission, the Society moved to Mozambique in 1911. But, as we shall later see, this mission also suffered challenges and the confreres left, then they returned in 1997. In 1938, the Ghana mission took off as a way of ministering to people in the British colony. After Ghana, the Society began a mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1951 with the aim to reach out to French colonies with the Gospel. The Angola mission started in 1965, also with the intention of evangelizing colonies under Portuguese rule.

[72] During World War I, France and Britain occupied the protectorate, and in 1922 it was formally divided between them under a League of Nations mandate. The SVD mission collapsed with the expulsion and internment of the SVD Missionaries (1917-1918). Subsequent attempts to regain the Togo mission failed due to the vengeful policies of France and England, encapsulated in the Treaty of Versailles. The Congregation of *Propaganda Fide* formally transferred the Togo Mission to the Society of African Missions on 11 January 1921.

[73] Kossi Firmin Azalekor, Jacek Jan Pawlik (eds.), '*Vous les Reconnaîtrez à leurs fruits' (Mt. 7, 20): La Société du Verbe Divin au Togo*, S-CAN: Wydawnictwo s.c. 2023, 12.







**Left:** SVD missions in AFRAM 2018

**Center:** Heinrich Heering and Karl Koche, SVD, in a village near Kpalimé, around 1910 (Azalekor & Pawlik, 2023)

**Right:** Fr. Johann Schäfer, SVD, with children in Togo

To expand and consolidate the SVD presence in East Africa, missions were started in Botswana (1981), Kenya (1984) and Zambia (1986). Thereafter, missions were established in Benin (1987), Zimbabwe (1987), Madagascar (1989), Tanzania (2001), Chad (2003), South Africa (2003), South Sudan (2012), Liberia (2015), Uganda (2016) and Malawi (2018).[74]

These missions were started as a way of witnessing to the Reign of God among the people "through primary evangelization, formation of our young confreres, biblical pastoral ministry, mission animation, communication and works of justice and peace for the integrity of creation."[75] Today, quite apart from the above-mentioned apostolates, all provinces, regions and missions (PRMs) of SVD in Africa have specialized or context-specific missionary activities that drive their missionary efforts to meet the socioeconomic and religious needs of the people they minister to. For instance, in Ghana, the province has developed an apostolate in a leprosarium, and in the D. R. Congo, the street children's apostolate has become a window of hope and support to many street children.

## The Togo Mission

The SVD mission in Africa started in Aného, Togo in 1892. But, in order to avoid conflict with protestants and Muslims who were already established in the area, the confreres quickly moved to Lomé. Lomé was found to be conducive because it had good medical facilities, trade and transport and a post office. After Lomé, they established a place in Atakpamé and Kpalimé between 1900 to 1912, Aledjo in 1913 and many other places.[76]

The basic method of evangelization at the time was home visitations which was found to be very effective in offering the SVD confreres a better understanding of the culture of the people and how to evangelize them. Other methods such as catechesis and homilies during the Eucharist were equally employed.

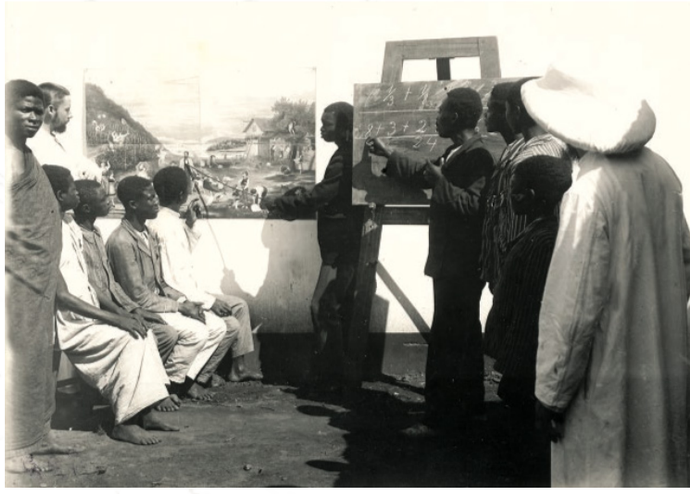
The SVD confreres built schools and churches and offered much-needed medical support to the locals. The established schools became the basis of academic, human and professional training for the youth who deployed the acquired knowledge/skills to serve both the Church and state.[77] The educational drive of the confreres was complemented by the efforts of the Sisters Servants of the Holy Spirit (SSpS) who arrived in Lomé in 1897. The SSpS taught the young girls skills in handwork while the boys were offered skills in different trades and in agriculture. Education was very important to the confreres because they saw it as a means of empowering, espe-

[74] Niels Berthel Johansen, Thomas Ascheman (eds.), *SVD Mission 2006*: *Province Reports for the XVI General Chapter,* Rome: SVD Publications Generalate 2006, 80.
[75] *SVD Mission 2006*, 17.
[76] Azalekor, Pawlik (eds.), *Vous les Reconnaîtrez*, 16.
[77] Azalekor, Pawlik (eds.), *Vous les Reconnaîtrez*, 23.

cially the youth with employable skills and jobs for their livelihood. Additionally, education was also perceived as a durable means of ensuring sustainability of the faith and doctrines of the Church among the locals.

As early as 1894, the SVDs helped to start a minor seminary at Adjido to promote local clergy who were very much needed to sustain the mission or Church.[78]

Moreover, the confreres were also involved in matters of justice and peace. Through this ministry, they educated the locals of their rights, but also protected them from constant harassment and punishment from colonial officials who deliberately abused the rights of the locals. The SVD confreres appealed to the German government in Berlin and the administrative head of the area involved in the abuses was removed from office.[79]





Very early in their missionary endeavors, the confreres took great interest in learning the language and culture of the people seeing it as a significant vehicle of understanding the people and ensuring success in the mission. In fact, many of the locals at the time (and still today), testified to the hardworking disposition of the confreres to learn the culture and language, and to preach in the same language.[80] This is so because from the very beginning of the establishment of the SVD, Saint Arnold Janssen stressed that an SVD cannot effectively evangelize the people and inculturate the message when he does not understand the culture and language of the people to some appreciable degree. In line with this effort, the confreres started to write the orthography of the Ewe language and translated many parts of the scriptures and liturgical rites. The Bible Centre in Lomé is an eloquent testimony of the involvement of the SVD in the biblical ministry. By 1910, some people were already baptized after they had been taught basic catechesis from the confreres.

Dzifomo (the way to heaven), a famous book in Ewe containing Catholic prayers, hymns and liturgical rites was written by the confreres. Today, this book is not only in use in Togo, but also in the Ho, Keta-Akatsi and Jasikan dioceses in Ghana, where the Ewe language is native to the people. This is not surprising because, while working in Togo, the confreres also extended their missionary activities to Kpandu (1904) Hohoe (1906) and Ho (1908) which were part of the then Togoland, now the Volta Region of Ghana.[81] Confreres such as Witte, Litzenburger, Stangier, Kost, Hoffmann, Mertens and Ewen were instrumental in writing and publishing in the local languages of the people.[82]

**Above:** SVD confreres offering lessons to pupils, 1910 (Azalekor & Pawlik, 2023)

**Below:** Mission Station in Aného in Togo

Additionally, the confreres showed great respect to traditional authorities and built strong relationships with them knowing that their support and encouragement was crucial for the success of the mission. This effort increased bonding and promoted a sense of belonging between local leaders, the people and the confreres.[83]

The cathedral in Lomé was built in September 1902 through the instrumentality of the confreres and was solemnly consecrated by Vicar Apostolic of Costa d'Oro, Maximillien Albert, one of the SMA priests who were already working in Togo long before the SVD arrived. Today, the Cathedral has been renovated with modern structures and aesthetics and stands as a unique visible representation of the Catholic Church in Togo. The locals contributed towards the building of the Cathedral, although, most of the building material came from

[78] Azalekor, Pawlik (eds.), *Vous les Reconnaîtrez*, 31.
[79] Azalekor, Pawlik (eds.), *Vous les Reconnaîtrez*, 32.
[80] Azalekor, Pawlik (eds.), *Vous les Reconnaîtrez*, 32.
[81] Azalekor, Pawlik (eds.), *Vous les Reconnaîtrez*, 32.
[82] Azalekor, Pawlik (eds.), *Vous les Reconnaîtrez,* 18.
[83] Azalekor, Pawlik (eds.), *Vous les Reconnaîtrez*, 17.

The Sacred Heart Cathedral built by SVDs is the mother church of the Archdiocese of Lomé

**Insert:** Newly baptised in Lomé, 1910 (Azalekor & Pawlik, 2023)



Germany.[84] The confreres built churches in Aného, Atakpamé, and other places and offered professional training, especially to the local youth.

Although missionary endeavors were very much appreciated by the locals, by 1918, the SVDs in Togo had left amidst mixed reactions. The Togo mission was, however, restarted in 1974 through the mission in Ghana. Today, the Togo-Benin province continues to grow in many areas of missionary endeavors and has confreres working in many provinces and in different apostolates.

## Expansion in Africa

In 1911 the Society made another move into Africa through Mozambique to replace the Jesuits who were expelled by the Portuguese colonial regime. However, "our missionary presence did not manage to plant roots in a political situation hostile to religious activity. Our confreres, too, were deported back to Portugal in 1917-1918 and were repeatedly denied re-entry to the colony."[85] We managed to restart the mission in 1997. In 1938, the Gold Coast, now Ghana mission was started by Frs. August Gehring and Alphonse Elsbernd whose first station was the Sacred Heart Parish in Accra, the capital city of Ghana.[86] Later, in 1974, Ghana spearheaded the renewal of the Togo mission, which, as already mentioned, was brought to an abrupt end due to political issues. Other missions were started in different parts of Africa focusing on primary evangelization, catechesis, Bible reading and youth apostolate among other activities. Considerable attention was given to the construction of churches, schools, and health clinics, some of which were run by SVD brothers. Centers of pastoral formation for purposes of training catechists, and other pastoral agents were built. Through these formation programs, the laity were empowered to serve the needs of the Church by supporting the priests and religious in their pastoral duties.

## The 1994 General Chapter and Africa as Priority for the Society

During the 1994 General Chapter, it was agreed that, in spite of the daunting challenges of refugees, poor social services, conflict and violence, political instabilities and religious tensions, the African continent is still rich in many ways and was certainly a blessing to the Society and the world. So, the general chapter resolved to prioritize the African zone and to give it special attention on the grounds of the following considerations.

The AFRAM Zone was growing in vocations, and its Common Formation Centers (CFCs) were forming young confreres willing to be assigned to any places where the dearth of vocations was creating a dire need for confreres to work in different apostolates. To continue to promote the formation of young confreres as well as formators, AFRAM needed financial and logistical resources to achieve this laudable objective.



The IV AFRAM Vocation Animators and Formators Workshop in Kinshasa (Congo), October 2023 (*AN*, 2023 December, 13)

The AFRAM Zone was also prioritized on the grounds that it offers many opportunities for prophetic dialogue not only with faith-seekers but also with Islam, other Christian denominations and African traditional religion.

Moreover, AFRAM was given special attention so that it can constructively engage in "new situations" on the continent such as racism, the integrity of creation, interfaith and ecumenical dialogue, urban ministry, women and gender issues, migrants/ refugees/displaced people, media and HIV/AIDS.

Additionally, AFRAM was given a focused priority to create and harness language and culture learning institutions because of the multiplicity of languages and cultures on the continent. Given that language and culture learning are essential tools for mission, the Society needed to empower the zone so that it is able to instill in the confreres the desire to learn the culture and language of our faith partners.

Furthermore, the need to train good and creative treasurers in the PRMs who will help to generate local funds or resources of their respective areas equally necessitated the need to prioritize Africa.

[84] Azalekor, Pawlik (eds.), *Vous les Reconnaîtrez*, 36.
[85] Stanislaus T. Lazar, Mark Weber and Crescente de Rivera (eds.), *SVD Mission 2018: Rooted in the Word, Committed to His Mission,* Rome: SVD Publications Generalate 2018, 59.
[86] Alphonse Elsbernd, *The Story of the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Accra*, Accra: Catholic Book Centre 2000, 40.













There was also the need to attend to the personnel needs of AFRAM and from that general chapter till today, AFRAM has received its fair share of personnel. There is, however, the need to sustain this objective as many Bishops in the zone are asking for the services of the SVDs in their dioceses.

Thus, from the 1994 Chapter, till date, it is generally, acknowledged that many areas of missionary endeavors in AFRAM have been given the needed attention. The expansion of the Common Formation Centers (CFC) and the novitiates to take care of the growing numbers of vocations in the zone are notable examples. The responsibility is on all the AFRAM PRM superiors and Executive Committee (Execom) to do everything to consolidate the gains made so far in the different areas of ministry, and to attend to those areas that still need attention.

## AFRAM Zone Today – "When Two People Carry a Load, It Does not Weigh Them Down"

The statistics below attest not only to the growing numbers, but also how the collective efforts and intercultural life of confreres in the zone have yielded the success that we witness in the different apostolates of the PRMs in the zone now. The AFRAM zone comprises 18 countries. In 2018, there were 589 SVD confreres: 10 bishops, 410 priests, 55 brothers, 10 brothers in temporary vows, 75 scholastics, 26 clerical novices and three brother novices.[87] In 2024, there are 686 confreres: 11 bishops, 421 priests, 53 brothers in perpetual vows, 12 brothers in temporary vows, 163 scholastics, 26 novices. Ghana hosts the highest number of confreres - 194, and it also has the highest number as a country of origin - 219. The confreres working outside their country of origin are: Ghana 116, Togo 77, D.R.Congo 45, and so forth.[88]

In my estimation, the governance structure, objectives and leadership style of the Society have been very decisive in promoting the various missionary pursuits in AFRAM. The 1994 General Chapter said: "The zonal assembly, made up of provincials together with the zonal coordinator and, if the provincials consider it necessary, the secretaries for the different areas, is the forum for leadership and animation on a zonal level."[89] In this sense, leadership is exercised not solely from a centralized entity like the general council, but a collegial system in which leaders of the various PRMs act as agents participating and promoting the mission of the Church and the

[87] *SVD Mission 2018,* 18.
[88] Stanislaus T. Lazar, Crescente de Rivera and Pushpa Anbu Augustine (eds.), *SVD Mission 2024: Your Light Must Shine Before Others (Mt 5:16): Faithful and Creative Disciples in a Wounded World,* Rome: SVD Publications Generalate 2024, 12.
[89] *SVD Mission 2006,* 11-12.

Society. In this system, leadership is decentralized in a manner that highlights the crucial role of the PRMs in the development and expansion of SVD mission in the world. In my view, this style of leadership is premised on the African adage that, "when two people carry a load, it does not weigh them down." In other words, when the responsibilities of running the Society are shared through a collective sense of purpose and direction, each PRM can achieve its goal of proclaiming the Word through intercultural living, communication, dialogue and ministry in justice and peace.

## Distinctive Characteristic Dimensions of the SVD Mission in Africa

***Biblical Apostolate:*** The Bible ministry is at the heart of the mission of many PRMs in the zone. The SVDs are Bible people. Congo has a good distribution system of the Bibles. Every year, the Ghana province organizes the Dei Verbum program to train priests, religious and lay people to love the word of God, make it part of their lives, and spread it in the different places where they live and work.

***Mission Animation:*** Through the mission animation ministry, the PRMs create awareness among the people they work with and a culture of sharing in their missionary effort through supporting the mission in cash and kind.

***JPIC (Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation):*** In this ministry, the AFRAM zone is able to stand by and with the under-privileged such as refugees, street children, and those banished to witch camps, and in promoting the sustenance of our ecosystem through seminars and workshops, but also direct involvement in alleviating the plight of these people.

***Communication:*** Here trained confreres are involved in the production of video materials, TV and radio programs, as well as capacity building workshops for priests, religious and lay people on the use of modern media tools such as radio and television in spreading the word of God.

The zonal coordinator argues that "primary and new evangelization, family and youth apostolate, education and research, JPIC and reconciliation have been top priorities among the characteristic dimensions for all the PRMs in this Zone."[90]

These characteristic dimensions influence and direct the priorities of the zone in the areas of primary evangelization, family and youth, education and research, and with vulnerable groups such as street children and refugees.

## Successes – "If a Bird Does Not Fly, It Goes to Bed Hungry"



Success in every human endeavor comes from hard work. If nothing is ventured, nothing can be gained. In other words, just as the bird will go hungry if it does not fly, so will the AFRAM zone remain stagnant when it does not move or act in ways that ensure success or progress. The observable success in the AFRAM Zone is the result of the resilience of confreres to stay the course of the mission in spite of the many socioeconomic, religious, cultural, political and environmental challenges.

The SVD in AFRAM has demonstrated success in the way that it has expanded the frontiers of the gospel in all its mission territories, with some offering themselves as Bishops to serve dioceses where we work. Additionally, the SVDs in AFRAM have been considerably successful in the promotion of vocations and the formation of formandi not only for us, but also for dioceses where we work.

An equally successful area of the mission of the SVD in AFRAM is the promotion of lay associates or lay partners who have become significant players in our mission and life. This is so because "lay partners play a vital role in our mission and many lay people share our charisms and it is our duty to welcome the lay partners to share our mission. This will enrich our Society and the Church at large."[91]

Furthermore, the success of AFRAM is seen in the sustained pursuit of the characteristic dimensions of

[90] Kamion Bhia, "AFRAM Zone," [In:] *Celebrating SVD Mission Week*, Stanislaus T. Lazar (ed.), SVD E-Publications Generalate, Rome 2023, 12.
[91] *SVD Mission 2018,* 6.

the Society (CDs) namely, Biblical Apostolate, Mission Animation, Justice and Peace, Communication. Moreover, many confreres from AFRAM are serving capably in many parts of the world as formators, financial administrators and university lecturers among other responsibilities.

The AFRAM Zonal Coordinator affirms, "One of the most successful stories of the Divine Word Missionaries in the AFRAM Zone concerns formation and education. In general, education has been the key to the success of our endeavors in this zone. In all our PRMs, confreres are engaged in the education of the people in all dimensions of life."[92]

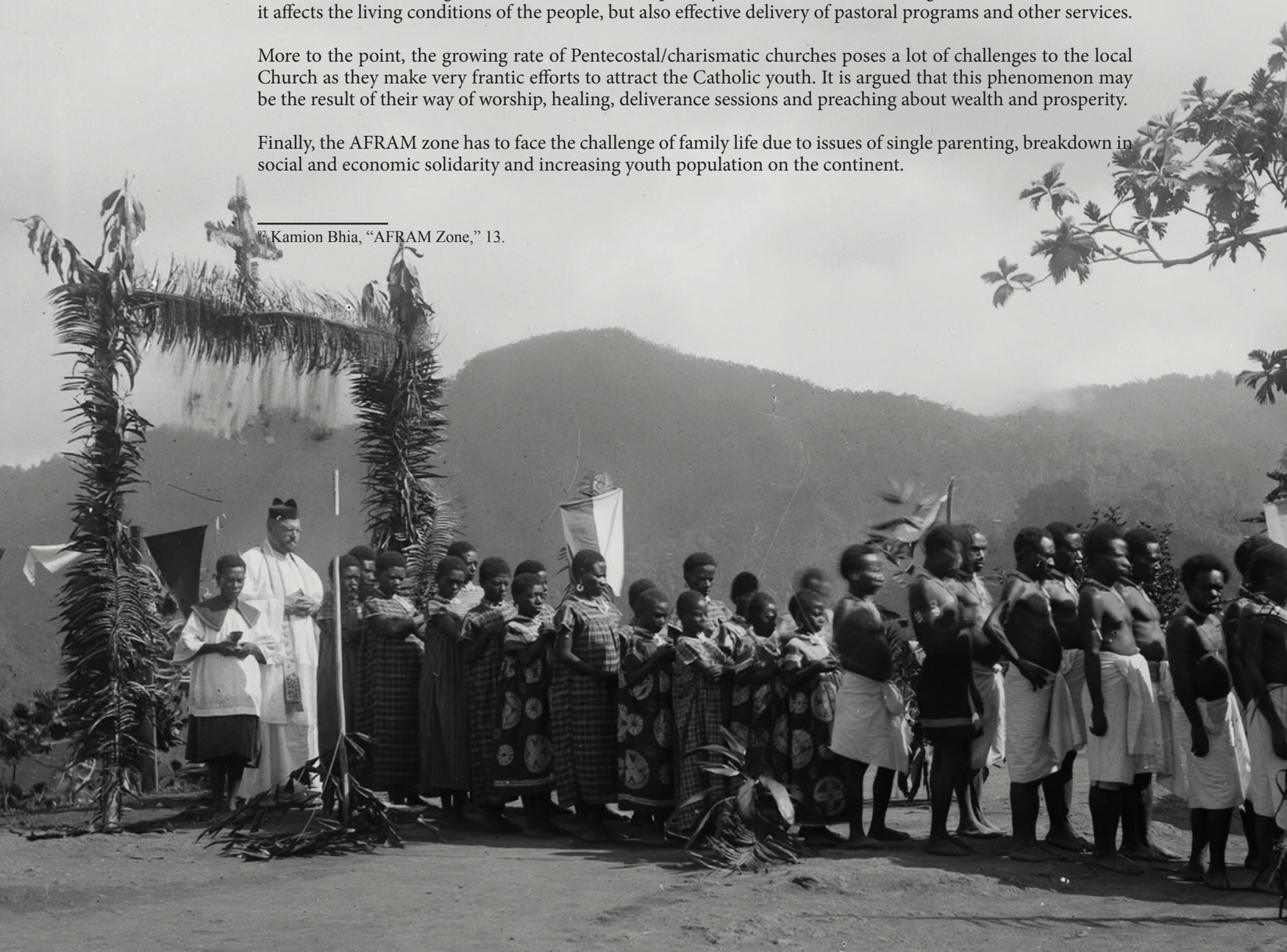
## Challenges – "There Are no Shortcuts to the Top of the Palm Tree"

Like many other zones in the Society, the AFRAM has its fair share of challenges to reckon with. The major challenge facing many PRMs in the zone is the lack of personnel to effectively manage the different areas of their apostolate. For instance, constant concern to have a good number of well qualified and experienced formators has still to be achieved due to lack of funds and serious planning. Additionally, the lack of funds to help many PRMs to build churches, rectories, run pastoral formation programs, and to acquire a means of transport for different purposes is still a big challenge.

More so, challenges emanating from climate change continue to affect the work of some PRMs in the zone. Furthermore, the increasing rate of multidimensional poverty in some of the PRMs is a great source of concern as it affects the living conditions of the people, but also effective delivery of pastoral programs and other services.

More to the point, the growing rate of Pentecostal/charismatic churches poses a lot of challenges to the local Church as they make very frantic efforts to attract the Catholic youth. It is argued that this phenomenon may be the result of their way of worship, healing, deliverance sessions and preaching about wealth and prosperity.

Finally, the AFRAM zone has to face the challenge of family life due to issues of single parenting, breakdown in social and economic solidarity and increasing youth population on the continent.



[92] Kamion Bhia, "AFRAM Zone," 13.





## Conclusion

This article has demonstrated that, despite the numerous social difficulties besetting the African continent, it is still a land with incredible potential for the promotion of Biblical Apostolate, Mission Animation, Justice and Peace, Communication, family life and youth apostolate.

Africa's youth population is growing every day. Given that they are the future of the Church, it is significant that PRMs in the zone continue to develop systematic programs geared towards the youth, most of whom are in a state of uncertainty.

Our intercultural living continues to be a shining example of respect and acceptance of cultural diversity among the people with whom we work. Thus, in spite of the challenges involved in living intercultural life, confreres in the zone should do everything to make it a strong identity marker of SVD life in AFRAM, and indeed in the other zones as well.

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# 1896: The Story of the SVD Mission in New Guinea




While visiting our confreres working in parishes and talking to people there, I often heard them say: "Pater, yu harim, mipela SVD" (Father, listen, we are SVD), "Mipela bilong SVD" (We belong to SVD). I understood that the sense of belonging to the SVD, and the trust people have in SVD is a result of many years of dedicated service of SVD confreres. But it also made me wonder whether we had prepared the people to become the local Church, at whose service we are meant to be. When I arrived in PNG in 1982, I heard elder confreres saying: "We came here to establish a viable local Church, this is our mission, and when it is accomplished, we will move to other places where there are greatest needs."

In this article, I will present some aspects of the work of SVD in New Guinea (New Guinea in this article means the north side of the mainland of New Guinea Island, which was entrusted to SVD as their mission. The name Papua New Guinea was given in 1972 and in 1975 it became the Independent State of Papua New Guinea). I will attempt to describe the experiences of our missionaries and the things they had to face. I will then pay attention to the kind of relationships they established with local people and how that evolved. Finally, I will point to the challenges our missionaries in New Guinea face today.





**Above:** Fr. Eberhard Limbrock, the SVD Pioneer in New Guinea and First Prefect Apostolic

**Below:** Tumleo Island, first SVD mission station on New Guinea soil; Prefabricated house brought from Steyl

## Context

For thousands of years, the people of New Guinea lived totally independent of the outside world. They lived in small tribal groups with elaborate beliefs and traditions. They had well-developed agriculture, which provided them with sustenance. They defended their territory and were almost constantly at war with their neighbors. They were fearsome fighters. They adapted very well to the environment they lived in. Yet their world was limited to their immediate surroundings, and their mind was full of fears.

At the end of the 19th century traders and explorers landed on this island. In 1884 the northern part of the island was taken up by Germany as their colony and called it Kaiser-Wilhelmsland.

At about the same time the first missionaries arrived from various Churches; London Mission Society around Port Moresby (1872), Lutherans at Finschhafen (1886) and Madang (1887), Catholics in Rabaul on the New Guinea side (1882) and on Yule Island (1885) on the Papuan side. Catholic Missionaries were French Missionaries of the Sacred Heart Congregation. The Vatican was informed that the German administration of New Guinea found it difficult to deal with the French missionaries and it would be advisable to send German missionaries to that German colony.

Cardinal Ledochowski of the Propagation of Faith at the Vatican sent a letter to Arnold Janssen asking him if the Society of the Divine Word would be willing to accept the mission in German New Guinea. Father Arnold consulted his Council and accepted the request. Next, Arnold handpicked the men to be sent to New Guinea with experienced China missionary Fr. Eberhard Limbrock as the leader of that mission. In the middle of the year 1895 five men, Fr. Franz Vormann, Fr. Joseph Erdweg, Br. Eustochius Tigges, Br. Canisius Hautkappe, and Br. Teodulph Schmitt received their mission crosses at the motherhouse in Steyl.[93] They were all in temporary vows at that time.

## Founding of the Catholic Church on Mainland New Guinea

The SVD were given a mission on mainland New Guinea. They were the first Catholic missionaries there, the founding fathers of the Catholic Church in that area. They arrived in Madang on 13 August 1896 on the ship *Stettin* with 30 tons of cargo. It contained a prefabricated house made for them by brothers in Steyl. They were sent 450 km to the west of Madang and settled on the Island of Tumleo. The mission grew very fast and along the coast new stations appeared: Leming/Walman (1897), Monumbo (1899), Ali (1901), Bogia (1901), and Alexishafen (1905).

From the very beginning, Fr. Arnold Janssen followed the development of the New Guinea mission.[94] He educated himself on the tropical conditions and wrote letters to Limbrock offering advice on how to proceed. In his first letter to Limbrock on 27 August 1896, he wrote: "…after you have settled a bit, establish good contact with the local people and start setting up schools…"

Limbrock began by acquiring land, setting up coconut plantations and building boarding schools for local children. From those children educated in mission schools future catechists came. Many of them were later employed at various workshops run by SVD brothers and became skilled builders, carpenters, plumbers, shipbuilders, etc. Human development went parallel with evangelization in New Guinea.[95]

[93] Paul Steffen, *Sios bilong yumi long Niuguini: Catholic Mission History in mainland New Guinea, 1896-1945,* Madang 2022, 67.
[94] Josef Alt, *Arnold Janssen SVD: Letters to New Guinea and Australia,* AN SVD-79, Romae 2001.
[95] Hermann Fischer, *Missionsbrüder. Ihr Werden, Wirken und Vollenden*, Kaldenkirchen: Missionsdruckerei Steyl 1931.

James Lyng – Rabaul Journal editor, and District Officer made the following comments in his book, Our New Possession:

> (…) where the missionaries have settled cannibalism has ceased, the cruelty towards one another has been toned down, polygamy has gradually disappeared, race suicide has become less pronounced, and the population commenced to increase. And, again, the missionaries... have greatly assisted the Government in extending law and order by reporting cases of illegal recruiting, or disastrous feuds... the missionaries have been often the first to open up new country, and where traders and at times planters preceded them, a district has not been considered safe to live in until missionaries have held their entry (...).

In the late thirties, the SVD mission reached its peak of development. James Sinclair in his book *Madang* writes:

> Alexishafen continued to grow. The jewel in the crown was of course the majestic Cathedral, but there was much more. Alexishafen was really an almost totally self-sufficient small town. Alexishafen-Danip was the best-equipped copra plantation in the district. More than 1,000 cattle were run, plus large numbers of mules, horses, pigs, sheep, fowls and ducks. Alexishafen could accommodate up to 2,000 people. There was a desiccated coconut plant, a timber mill, boat building facilities, a wood-working plant, a machine-shop equipped with lathes, a bakery, refrigeration shop, a candle and soap plant, a rope walk, saddler's shop, a bacon curing plant, a small goods plant, a tailor shop and shoe repair shop, a plumbing plant, and a wireless repair shop.
>
> The station had electric power, a well-equipped hospital, many stores and accommodation blocks, a number of schools, a parish church, and chapels. Water was reticulated from a high-water tower, and Alexishafen was linked to Madang by telephone. A light railway system ran between the wharf and the airfield through the plantation, with a rail motor and about two dozen bogie trucks.
>
> The main wharf could take ships drawing up to 23 feet and had in fact been used by vessels of 5,000 gross tons. On the south side of the station, near the timber yard, was another wharf suitable for vessels of up to 300 tons, with a slip alongside which could take the 110-ton Stella Maris now operated by the Mission.

## Early Conflicts

In the mission field in New Guinea our missionaries ran into conflicts quite early. One of the conflicts which accompanied SVD missionaries through all the years was around the question how much we should help local people and how that help should be given. The first recorded case is of the conflict between Fr. Limbrock and Fr. Klaffl. In fact, Klaffl who was stationed on Ali Island, was of a generous spirit and shared with local people the supplies he got from the main station on Tumleo Island. Limbrock, who had to watch the purse, was counting how much food could be allocated for each station per month. So, when Klaffl sent the brother for fresh supplies to Limbrock before time, he sent him away empty-handed. Klaffl got very upset about that. This conflict so aggrieved Klaffl that he left the New Guinea mission and subsequently was sent to Togo.

The SVD missionaries, who at that time, came mostly from European countries looked at tribal people in New Guinea as extremely poor. Many experienced inner conflict having access to better accommodation, food, and overseas assistance. The fact that they were not able to share all of that with local people was a source of uneasiness. Every missionary dealt with it according to his conscience, helping as much as he could. Yet it remained a source of conflicts between the confreres





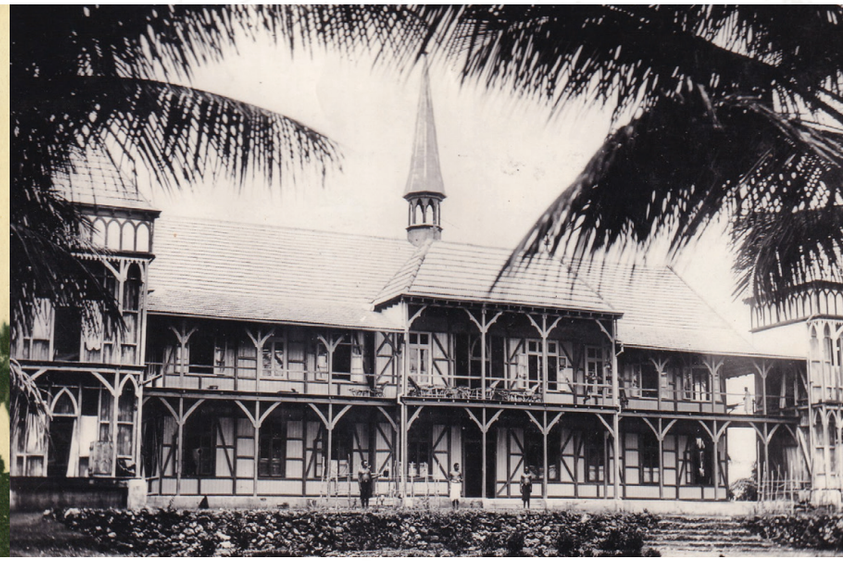


**Above:** Mission school at Alexishafen, ca. 1914

**Center:** Fr. William Ross is shown here with Rempi school boys in Alexishafen

**Below:** Church in the bush





**Left: :** St. Michael's Cathedral in Alexishafen ca. 1939; destroyed by American air force on 1 September 1943

**Right:** Bishop and priests residence at Alexishafen, ca. 1939



Frs. Richard Nowak (right) William Ross (left) on expedition in the mountainous hinterland of Alexishafen, before 1934

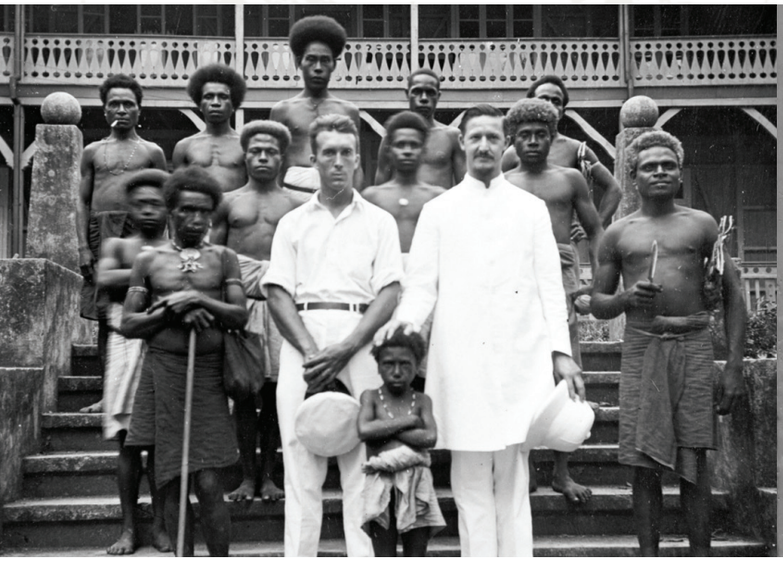
responsible for organizing and making funds available and those who felt they needed to distribute them generously.

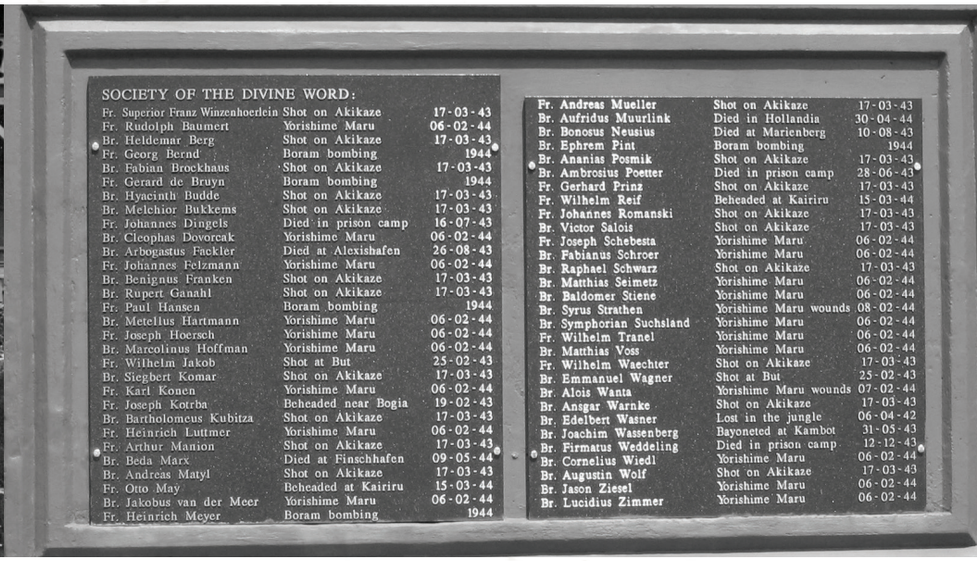
In 1897, a new station was opened on the coast just opposite Tumleo Island among the Walman people. The first SVD priest to work there was Fr. Christian Schleiermacher. He died of black water fever in March 1900, after living two years there. Next was Fr. Nicolaus Spölgen who died of black water fever in March 1901, after a year at Walman. Then Limbrock was appointed to Walman with newly arrived Fr. Friedrich Vormann. Initially, Friedrich was willing to sacrifice his life for the people of Walman. But then he changed his mind. He came to believe that Limbrock, by appointing him to Walman, was demanding too much of him, and he turned his ill feelings against Limbrock. Friedrich left New Guinea and was sent to Argentina, where he continued his mission.

The case of Friedrich brings about an obvious truth that the mission in New Guinea, especially in the early years, demanded a lot of sacrifice. Today we can ask questions: Were the superiors in a position to demand such sacrifice? Is not the sacrifice in the Church welcomed only when it is freely given? Through many years of New Guinea mission and through the stories of various confreres those questions would reverberate. We can say that the confreres did not escape from doing violence to themselves and to others. Yet it was all done in good faith and for a good cause, as one can see now.

## Wars in New Guinea

Right at the beginning of the First World War Germany lost the territory of New Guinea to Australia. The Australian Government decided that all German nationals would have to leave New Guinea. That decision included German missionaries. It was a blow to the SVD because many of the missionaries were Germans. Those who just before the war went for home leave, were not allowed to return. Those who remained were told that they would have to leave soon. Thanks to Vatican diplomacy via the Papal Nunciature in Australia their expulsion was initially postponed and later called off. In 1921, during the celebration of the Silver Jubilee of opening the SVD mission in New Guinea, the missionaries prayed that the Lord would allow them to stay. The ban on German missionaries in New Guinea was lifted in 1924.






**Left:** Eugene Frank (right) in Alexishafen

**Right:** Alexishafen cemetery, commemoration plaque for SVD missionaries who died during Second World War

Thus, the situation changed, and the official language of the territory became English. The SVD missionaries had to learn that language and in mission schools they had to introduce English. There was a need for native English speakers and missionaries from the USA were asked for. Among the first to arrive were Fr. William Ross and Br. Eugene Frank.[96]

The First World War severed the links with Europe and Steyl but the SVD mission was well established by then and the copra production was big enough to sustain the mission. The brothers were skilled enough to produce food and all the articles the mission needed.

When the Second World War broke out and Japan joined in, it became evident that the war would engulf also the territory of New Guinea. It happened at the end of 1942. The war in New Guinea was bloody and brutal. All along in the coastal mountains were Australian soldiers, the coast watchers, who reported by radio to headquarters in Port Moresby the movements of the Japanese army and their shipping. In this way the American Air Force always knew where and when to strike. The Japanese did not know about the Australian coast watchers. The only expatriates were the missionaries, so they suspected them of passing the information to the enemy. Therefore, the missionaries were rounded up and imprisoned by the Japanese. The SVD were kept in three camps: at Gayaba near Alexishafen, on Kairiru Island near Wewak and on Tumleo Island. The missionaries from the Kairiru camp were taken on board the *Akikaze* destroyer and executed at sea on 17 March 1943 and their bodies thrown in the sea. The surviving confreres learned about that only after the war in 1947.

Confreres from Alexishafen were taken from Gayaba and after a short stay on Manam Island put on the *Yorishime Maru* ship to be brought to Hotegan and Koya camps near Hollandia (Jayapura-Indonesia). On the way the American air force strafed the ship on 6 February 1944, resulting in the massacre of many missionaries. They were purposely kept on deck and they lost their lives.

The missionaries from the camp on Tumleo were brought to Koya camp in March 1944 and most of them survived the war.

Before World War II, the SVD in New Guinea had 2 Bishops, 72 priests and 89 brothers. During the war 2 bishops, 22 priests and 37 brothers lost their lives. All surviving SVD missionaries were rescued by the American army and taken to Australia. German missionaries were informed that they would not be able to return to New Guinea. After some negotiations that decision of the Australian Government was changed and in 1946 the

[96] Mary Mennins, *Hagen Saga: The Story of Fr William Ross, Pioneer American Missionary to Papua New Guinea,* Port Moresby: Institute of Papua New Guinea studies 1982, reprinted: Port Moresby: the University of Papua New Guinea Press 2015; Alfonse Schaefer, *Cassowary of the Mountains: The Memoirs of a Pioneer Missionary in Papua New Guinea 1930-1958,* AN SVD-69, Romae 1991.





**Above:** Group of SVD Brothers at Alexishafen, ca. 1938

**Below:** Procession in the hills of Saruga, Fr. Richard Nowak, ca. 1920

German missionaries were allowed to come back to New Guinea to continue their mission.

## SVD Community Versus Individual Confreres

The Society opened the New Guinea mission as a community. They understood that community life was essential for the quality of their ministry as it is spelled out in our *Constitutions*. The character of this new mission resulted in the situation that some missionaries lived alone. Over the years some confreres drifted away from religious life and followed the lifestyle of diocesan priests. The Society administration maintained yearly retreats and quarterly meetings, but some confreres were reluctant to take part, telling their superiors that they had a busy schedule in the parish. Many confreres became victims of the New Guinea circumstances and lost the sense of belonging to a community and did not feel the need for it anymore.

These historical circumstances, which resulted in confreres living alone on a particular station, created an image of a missionary hero, who could survive alone because he was tough and strong. In some way, that image was set up as an ideal missionary. Yet the flip side of it was that for those strong confreres it was difficult, if not impossible, any more to live in a community. They were dominating and found it difficult to treat other community members as partners. So, for the apparent success of spreading the Catholic Church they paid with the loss of community spirit. By now we all know that our ideal is to live in a community, which is meant to trim our egos, and keep in check individualistic tendencies. Yet in the language we use the old ideal remains, and from time to time we can hear: "He is not strong enough to live alone."

## SVD Relationships with Local People

Recalling the great differences between European education in every area and the state of mind of local people, it is not surprising that SVD missionaries at the initial stages of their mission related to local people as parents to children. The missionaries were knowledgeable in every aspect, so the local people were to be taught and trained, like children. Some confreres would be in this regard more forceful and others more lenient. Some resorted to corporal punishment, others to persuasion and rewards. The greatest motivations for the local people to follow the instructions of the missionaries were the missionaries' possessions. This was the object of their desire. The missionaries in turn desired to make of them followers of Christ, as they understood it and practiced it. Most of the SVD missionaries were perceived as good fathers and brothers by the local people and thus loved by them.

Fr. Richard Nowak writes in 1934 about his arrival in Alexishafen after home leave:

> At last, we arrived at Alexishafen port. There was great commotion on our arrival. Everybody was at the pier to welcome us, Bishop Francis Wolf with priests and brothers. Local people came also. And that small group standing at the side. I looked and saw that those are my people from the hills, they came walking to the coast to welcome me. We shook hands, hugged each other, there were questions and answers on the way to the chapel, where we went to thank God for our safe arrival. When I came out of the chapel, my people surrounded me. *'Pater iga saijo,'* Father you came back to us, their faces were smiling and there were tears of joy in their eyes.[97]

Sr. Siglinde Poboss writes: "... on 16 October 1943 we were ordered to leave the camp at Maria Helpim. By this time all the priests and brothers from the various mission stations were together, except Fr. Felzmann from Utu. His parishioners insistently demanded the return of their 'papa', otherwise they would refuse to work; so, the Japanese yielded."[98] Most of our missionaries experienced being loved and supported by the people whom they served. Slowly, over the years, as New Guinea people got educated and developed their skills and talents and

[97] Richard Nowak, Letter (1934) transl. by Fr. John Tschauder, PNG Province archive, Madang.
[98] Siglinde Poboss, *My Captivity Experience,* Madang 2016, 16.

most of all grew in faith, they became SVD partners in building Christian communities.[99]

## Social Life

Looking through the old photos taken at Alexishafen, I was amazed to see choirs and bands of musicians made up of SVD confreres, mixed race and native boys and men. Obviously, our confreres had time and energy to engage in artistic activities to nurture the spirit. In the mission chronicles we read that there were choir competitions in and around Madang in which the SVD mission choirs took part regularly before and after World War II. The confreres who organized those activities were: Fr. Richard Nowak, Br. Edelfridus Pohl, Br. Venantius Michelkens, to mention the few.

There is a photo taken in the mid-thirties of a group of ladies and gentlemen from Madang walking under the shade of coconut trees in Alexishafen or taking a ride on a carriage of a narrow railway being pulled by horses. It looks like Alexishafen was a popular place to come out for Sunday picnic for expatriates from the area.

## Story Untold

Men usually want to be perceived as strong and effective achievers. They do not talk about their weaknesses and failures. It is very seldom that they talk about their emotions. We have a lot of stories telling us what they did but very few stories on how they felt during their mission in New Guinea. It is mostly an untold story. We can attempt to draw our own conclusion knowing the circumstances they were in and the difficulties they faced. It is an area in which a lot of suffering took place and a lot of stories of individual confreres' struggles.

From the beginning of the SVD mission to New Guinea in 1896 till 2021, that is the jubilee of 125 years of our mission there, 993 confreres were appointed to the New Guinea mission. Out of those number 683 confreres left New Guinea for all sorts of reason. Some after only a few years of service, some overcome by sickness, others after spending all their life energies in service in building the Church. Among those who left the country, there were 208 confreres who decided to leave the Society as well.



## Violence

People of New Guinea were and are violent people. Here are a few facts. On 8 April 1901 on the island of Goaribari in Gulf Province of Papua, James Chalmers and Oliver Tomkins of the London Mission Society were killed and eaten by the native people whom they intended to evangelize. On 13 August 1904 Baining tribesmen brutally murdered ten missionaries (two MSC priests, two MSC brothers, a Trappist brother, and five MSC sisters). We can only speculate how the news about those events influenced early SVD missionaries.

On 16 December 1934, Fr. Karl Morschheuser, SVD, was killed by Kulkane tribe people at Womatne, in Chimbu. Significant details in that story are that the people were provoked by a missionary killing their pigs, and that when they realized that Fr. Morschhauser was dead they stopped fighting and came running to see him, some of them in tears.[100]

On 7 January 1935, Br. Eugene Frank, SVD, was badly wounded in the attack by local warriors in Goglme area of Simbu River valley and died of the wounds on 23 January 1935, after being taken to Salamaua hospital on the coast. The attack on Br. Eugene was partly unprovoked.

Some confreres believed that the local people should be overpowered. One confrere expressed it by saying: "We had to show them who is the boss." The story of Br. Lucidius Zimmer would be a telling case



**Above:** Alexishafen music band of SVD confreres, mixed race and native boys and men ca. 1926

**Below:** Fr. Karl Morschheuser,SVD, killed at Womatne, Chimbu in 1934

[99] Francis Mihalic, *Reading in PNG Mission History: A Chronicle of SVD and SSpS Mission Involvement on Mainland New Guinea between 1946 and 1996,* Madang: DWU Press 1999.
[100] Schaefer, *Cassowary of the Mountains,* 83.

concerning that approach. Early in 1936 Br. Lucidius unintentionally killed a local warrior. Fr. J. Nilles writes about it in his book: *They went out to sow:*

> The Brothers had built a suspensions bridge over the Simbu River between the Gembogl station and the Inau clan area. (…) During one fight warriors approached the bridge from both sides and were warned not to use it. (…) One man from the Siago clan disregarded the shouts of warning and, weapons in hand, made for the bridge. Brother fired a warning shot into the air. The man, however, continued his slow forward advance. Brother fired a second shot at the top part of the bridge. The man, unfortunately, moved into the line of fire and was struck in the head. (…) The body of the man was brought onto the station. Brother asked the leader of the group to call the family.[101]

Br. Marcolinus testified at the court case, which followed those events: "We gave a consolation present to the wife of the dead man: a pig, a small knife and some smaller shells."[102]

It would not be an exaggeration to say that every SVD confrere sent to New Guinea experienced violence in some form. They were beaten, stabbed, and assaulted for all sorts of reasons. Some were witnesses to violence or assisted others who suffered violence. We need to keep this in mind when telling the story of our New Guinea mission.

## Present Challenges

Confreres in New Guinea in recent years had to let go of their dominant role in the PNG Church. The Church, which they created from the very beginning, is more and more independent; there are more local Bishops, and most priests are local. Of course, the Bishops still want the SVD to work in their dioceses and be part of the local Church, playing a supportive role. So, the SVD, from being the boss of everything, as was the case for many years, has to adapt and take a role at the back and not up front. There is still the conviction that we would do it better. It is also part of the process of letting go. Yet it is precisely what we came to do, to build a viable local Church. Like the elders we can take pride in seeing the local Church grow.

The Melanesian Institute in Goroka, Eastern Highlands Province was founded in 1969. This is an ecumenical Socio-Pastoral Institute which responds to the need for new missionaries to have a greater knowledge and understanding of the people, culture, and traditions of Melanesia. The SVDs have contributed a lot to this Institute. It has been promoting the understanding of indigenous values, customs and socio-cultural changes among diverse Melanesian societies. [103]

We are also glad that the SVD is a part of the PNG Church and that SVD PNG Province is growing in numbers of local confreres. The formation program in the New Guinea Province started only in 1978, when the novitiate was opened in Mt. Hagen. It happened 82 years after the SVD began our mission to New Guinea. Since then, many young men went through our formation program. About 10% of them finished formation and professed final vows. We have PNG confreres working in New Guinea and overseas. They are helping the local Church to be aware of its missionary dimension.

**Józef Maciołek, SVD (Papua New Guinea)**
***Former Provincial Superior, now Archivist and Researcher***

[101] John Nilles, *They Went Out to Sow: The Beginning of the work of the Catholic Mission in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea,* AN SVD-62, Romae 1987, 63.
[102] Nilles, *They Went Out to Sow*, 63.
[103] The results of its research are communicated through courses and seminars, and are made available in a variety of publications including the most important *Catalyst* (since 1971: 45 volumes), annual book *Point – Forum for Melasian Affairs* (since 1972, then since 1976: Point Series 39 issues), Occasional Papers e Umben (up to now 16 monographical studies) and *Melanesian Mission Studies* (research done into a particular topic published since 2004 up to day 5 volumes). Paul Steffen, "II Melanesian Institute - la sua Missione e il suo ministero pastorale e sociale," *Nurt SVD*, 2013, fasc. 1, 73-116.



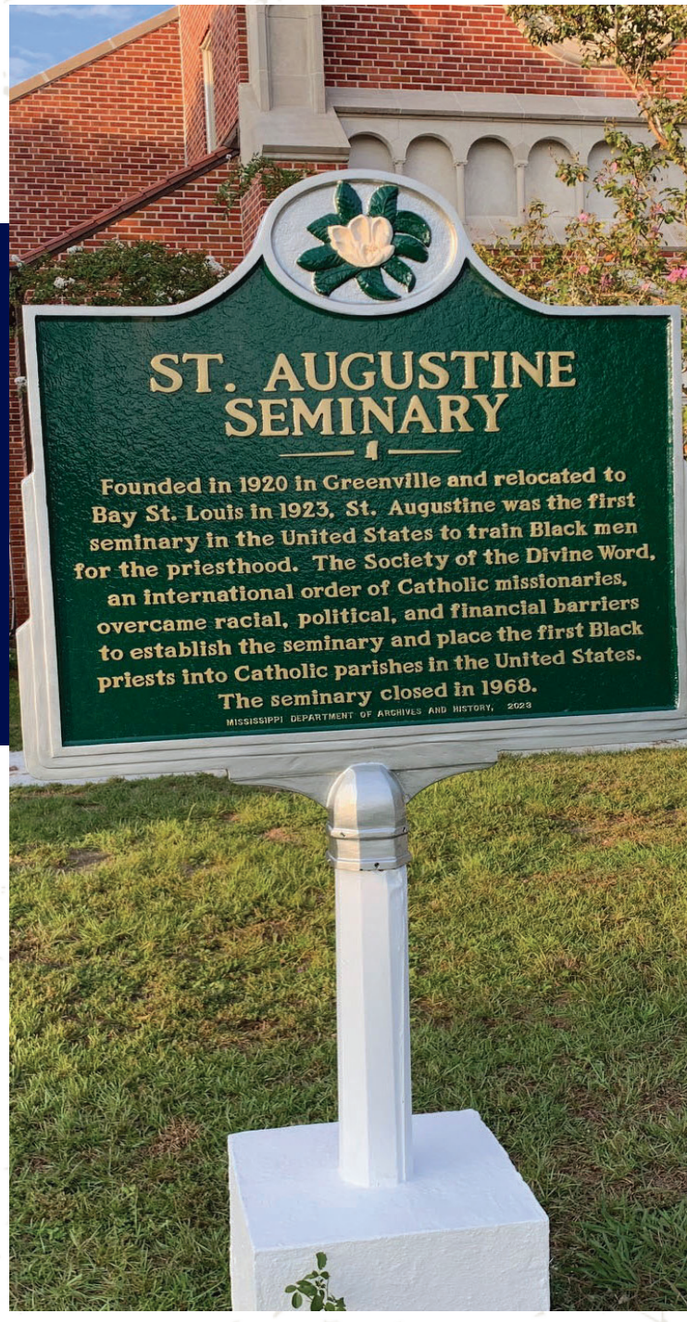








# 1906: The Black Mission in the United States of America




The impact of the SVD work in the Black apostolate in the United States of America is noteworthy. What the early missionaries accomplished was extremely important for Black Catholics and the Church in America and continues to this day. The catalyst was the establishment of a Seminary for Black men in 1923. Noted historian Cyprian Davis in his book *Black Catholics in the United States* said: "Certainly the establishment of a seminary for African American students by members of the Society of the Divine Word was one of the most important events in the history of Black Catholics during the first part of the twentieth century."[104]

How did all this come about? The background and history are filled with many parts that are all connected with the determined German missionaries who came to the Southern United States. The SVDs came to the United States on 15 October 1895 with Br. Wendelin Meyer. Wendelin came to the United States to sell the Society's mission magazine. He aimed his efforts at the many German-speaking people in the north. On his journeys, he saw an opportunity for the missionaries to reach out to the African American population who were being underserved. He wrote letters to the Founder Saint Arnold about engaging the SVD missionaries in reaching out to the many African Americans. He wrote on 5 April 1897: "The way I see it, we will have to work among the Indians and Negroes which will enable us to do much for the Church over here.

[104] Cyprian Davis, *The History of Black Catholics in the United States,* New York: Crossroad/Continuum 1990, 234.





**Left:** Fr. Visitator Johannes Bodems (form left) and Fr. Aloysius Heick with African Americans, 1906-1907

**Right:** Greenville seminarians

If we take on this work, we will have to establish a base in the South."

In 1899, the SVDs purchased property near Chicago. In 1906 the name given to this establishment was Techny. Techny would be the center of the Divine Word Missionaries' activity in the United States for many years. Techny oversaw work in the Southern missions until 1940 when the Southern Province was created.

It would be John Peil, SVD, Rector of Techny, who would begin the evangelization of African Americans in the Southern United States. This was done at the urging of Archbishop James E. Quigley of Chicago. A man by the name of David Bremner asked him to supply priests for his workers in Merigold, Mississippi. Archbishop Quigley asked Peil to consider the offer Bremner had proposed. Peil was enthusiastic and accepted. In 1905, he sent Fr. Aloysius Heick to Merigold, Mississippi.

On 15 July 1905, Aloysius went and began the mission. However, it was not easy. There were no Catholic Blacks in the area and opposition from Protestants and the White population was intense especially when they heard he was to build a school for Blacks. It is said that Fr. Heick was threatened many times and told to leave, or he would be killed. There was no way he could continue. In fact, the stories of how he left Merigold are shrouded in legend. Some accounts say he had to flee for his life after stopping the flogging of a young boy by a white man. It is said he had to hide in a coffin or piano box and be taken away before the *Ku Klux Klan* could find him. Aloysius never talked about how he escaped the angry white community. He then went on to Vicksburg, Mississippi in 1906 where the priest had much success. Other parishes were subsequently founded in Jackson in 1908, Meridian 1910, Little Rock in 1910, and Greenville in 1913. Eventually, the Bishop of Natchez gave the entire northern part of Mississippi to the care of the Divine Word missionaries.

With the SVD now established in the work amongst Blacks a swell of support developed for the ordination of Black men to serve as priests for the Blacks among the German Divine Word missionaries. From the very beginning, the German missionaries insisted that African Americans needed priests who were like them. The missionaries had seen how Fr. John Dorsey, SSJ reached people through his preaching. Divine Word missionaries in whatever country they entered had ordained an indigenous clergy. The missionaries could not understand why it could not happen in America. They did not understand this country called America and how racism and benign neglect was part of the American Church.

## Establishing a Seminary for Blacks

It was no surprise that from the beginning these German priests talked about establishing a seminary to educate men for the priesthood. World War I slowed down any extension of missionary work. However, the SVDs tried indirectly to prepare the United States for the founding of a seminary. In a meeting of the Southern missionaries at a Christmas gathering in 1914 in Jackson, they declared their support for the foundation of a seminary. They asked the Bishop of Natchez for permission to estab-





**Left:** First in US minor seminary to train Black men for the priesthood founded in Greenville in 1920 and subsequently moved to Bay Saint Louis in 1923

**Right:** First four Afro-American priests of the Society in USA,1934

lish a seminary for the training of African American men for the priesthood. Bishop Gunn thought the time was not yet ripe to start a seminary and explained that he could not give his consent. Despite the negative answer there was hope that one day he would give permission to open a seminary.

Although there had been a few Black priests over the course of the nation's history (often trained abroad), most Catholic colleges and seminaries, like other American schools at the time, did not admit Black students. The road taken to accomplish the creation of the seminary in Bay Saint Louis was fraught with many obstacles. However, because of the determination of the Divine Word missionaries to ordain African American men success was achieved with the dedication of St. Augustine Seminary on September 16, 1923. St. Augustine Seminary changed that tragic omission in the Catholic Church in America. For years the only place African American men could be ordained to the priesthood was at Saint Augustine Seminary in Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi.

The Vatican was very interested in what was happening not only in America but the world as well. Pope Benedict XV had written an encyclical titled *Maximum illud* on 30 November 1919. A pivotal emphasis of *Maximum illud* is the development of the indigenous clergy. There must be "special concern to secure and train local candidates for the sacred ministry." Benedict XV asserted: "In this policy lies the greatest hope of the new churches." It should be noted that some American clergy argued that the Pope had not intended his encyclical (i.e., *Maximum illud*) to apply to the United States, with its "unique race conditions."

The SVD Procurator General, Fr. Carl Friedrich, approached Rome about establishing a seminary in America. The Roman Curia had been supportive of the SVD wish to establish a seminary. They arranged for him to visit Pope Benedict XV. The Pope welcomed him and gave approval to a seminary. The Pope himself gave his blessing and stated to Friedrich that if anyone had a problem, they should come to him.

Pius XI further supported the seminary at Bay Saint Louis. In his letter to the Society on 5 April 1923 he wrote:

> You, beloved son, regard it as a very practical step to admit into the Society of the Divine Word Negroes who give evidence of a vocation for the regular life. These candidates are later to be admitted to the priesthood, and eventually work as apostles among the members of their race. You have chosen this path because you are firmly convinced that the Negroes can thus be brought much more easily and rapidly into the Church, and also because, in the spirit of true filial obedience, you wish to follow the guidance of our immediate Predecessor. In his Apostolic Brief of 30 November 1919, the latter gives a list of practical suggestions and precepts to which no reasonable man can take exception. For does it not indeed follow, as our Predecessor points out, from the very nature of the Church as a Divine institution, that every tribe or people should have priests who are one with it in race and character, in habit of thought and temperament? Aside from the fact that such priests will find a friendly welcome, will they not also prove far more effective in leading their breth-



Fr. Matthaeus
Christmann
with Afro-American
seminarians

> ren into, and confirming them in, the faith than any priests of a different race and from another country? Moreover, as experience has shown, the young Negro is not poorly gifted, mentally, so that he cannot assimilate higher education and the theological sciences and the latter, not in a superficial and abbreviated form, but, as our Predecessor commanded, in the full courses as prescribed.[105]

It was Frs. Jacob Wendel and Matthaeus Christmann who were the driving forces for the ordination of African Americans. Fr. Jacob Wendel, SVD, was ordained in 1906. He was assigned to New Guinea where he served until 1910. He became very sick and was transferred to the United States where he became pastor of St. Joseph Church in Meridian, Mississippi. He built up St. Joseph Church and formed a parish community and the school associated with the parish. He built a gym for the community, and this was the model for other parishes as well.

He joined the other Divine Word missionaries in advocating for Black priests. He was passionate and zealous in promoting a need for Black priests. He was convinced of the need for Black priests after seeing the effect of Fr. John Dorsey's preaching. He and other SVD believed that people responded better to one of their own. This despite the feeling of the white priests at the time that African Americans preferred white priests. Wendel did not accept that idea.

This fighting nature was something Bishop Gunn of Natchez, Mississippi would have to experience, even though he respected Wendel very much. Wendel was not put off by superficial excuses and unfounded reasons. If his concern was good and had to do with Blacks, he repeated his requests and petitions with insistence until the Bishop gave in. In this way, he got a lot done which otherwise seemed impossible to accomplish. With the good results of his demands for a better Catholic education for blacks, he opened the way to the seminary. For this reason, for a while, he held off in the fight, but he did not give up. By means of the magazine *The Colored Messenger* which he edited, he succeeded in changing Whites' attitudes towards Blacks and thus prepared a broader basis for the seminary for Blacks.

Even if Wendel never lived to see the building of the seminary for Blacks for which he had struggled (he died on 24 February 1920), he still parted with the security that his efforts would be crowned with success. A few months before his death, Bishop Gunn of Natchez positively answered his renewed request for the founding of a seminary for Blacks in his diocese. Father Wendel passed away at the age of 39.



St. Augustine Seminary, Bay Saint Louis

## The Legacy of Matthaeus Christmann and the Growth of the Seminary

As a contrast to Wendel, Christmann worked quietly and concretely, but no less effectively for the seminary for Black priests. As a born teacher and educator, he was especially gifted in this undertaking.

He was ordained a priest on 29 September 1912. His superiors sent him to the United States to teach philosophy at the newly erected mission seminary in Techny, Illinois. He had hardly arrived in the country, and he already showed great interest in working in the Black apostolate in the South. He was sent to Sacred Heart Church at Greenville, Mississippi in the midst of the Mississippi Delta. His entire strength and activity were spent, according to his gifts, in the building of a school. Christmann had put his efforts in developing a high school in Greenville, Mississippi. The school met opposition, but after a couple of years could successfully compete with any high school in the state. But his plans went over and above the school. His real lifetime labor, planned by himself, was the education of a native clergy. Perfecting the school system was only a means to an end.

[105] *Nuntius SVD*, Vol. I, 1923 June, 455.

In 1919, Fr. Peter Janser, the provincial, found that, when he approached Bishop Gunn of Natchez about founding a seminary, the Bishop stated emphatically he did not want any African American priests. When, however, Fr. Janser asked how it would be if these Black priests did not join the diocesan clergy but became members of our Society or of another Society specially founded for them, the Bishop's difficulties suddenly disappeared. The groundwork was set, and Bishop Gunn now accepted the request of the Divine Word missionaries to start a seminary when he realized that the men in the seminary would join a religious order and not request a diocese to take them, and he gave his official approval in 1919.

The Sacred Heart Preparatory Seminary began in 1920 in Greenville. The school Christmann had set up would be used for the students. Students began to arrive and at Christmas, there were 14 students. By the end of 1920, there were 16 students. The second year began with 26 students. In 1923 the Seminary moved to Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi because of lack of space to sustain a growing enrollment. Also, Bay Saint Louis was closer to Catholic New Orleans and Louisiana and was considered to be ground for future vocations.

The seminary at Bay Saint Louis was finally opened formally with much fanfare and a solemn blessing on 16 September 1923. The House Chronicle describes the day thus:

> Today is marked as a "RED LETTER" day in the annals of St. Augustine's Mission House at Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi. It was the day of the dedication of this new Mission House: and in the history of the Catholic Church among the colored people of America, the day of the opening of the portals of the first seminary for young men of their race with a vocation for the priesthood, a day that will be long remembered particularly by the hundreds of visiting Knights of Peter Claver and thousands of colored Catholics from New Orleans and other points along the coast, as an epoch-making forward step, and as a pledge of their most hearty endorsement of the great enterprise... A grand parade was formed... Thus, they marched through the business section of the town, then to the seminary grounds.

Once the seminary was dedicated in Bay Saint Louis, Christmann worked tirelessly to keep the seminary running smoothly. He taught classes and worked to secure financial help from friends and benefactors of St. Augustine. One of the most generous donors was Saint Katharine Drexel. In 1925 Christmann collapsed under the weight of his workload. Although he was at the edge of his grave, a medical operation saved him, and he recovered in two months, he went back to work in the seminary where he was practically a "broken man." Nevertheless, he once more took up the responsibility for the seminary and taught philosophy.

On Thursday after Ash Wednesday, he had to go to New Orleans on business and took the occasion to visit his doctor. The doctor was quite concerned about his condition and wanted to put him in the hospital immediately, Christmann was very much against this and went home that evening on the train. During the trip, he felt very sick but was able to get to the seminary. He had hardly gotten to his room when he collapsed and was dead in a few minutes, on 14 February 1929. He was 42.

Christmann worked with patience and perseverance, the many problems never discouraged him nor did little failures irritate him. He did not reflect long whether or not the time was ripe to educate American Blacks for the priesthood, he simply acted, and opened the seminary.

A large number of American Bishops sent their condolences at the death of Christmann, whom they had come to respect because of his service to the Black Church in the United States. They expressed their interest in the work he had realized. Bishop Gerow of Natchez, Mississippi wrote: "Father Christmann has always been a most earnest and prudent man in his work, and my acquaintance with him made me look upon him as a true man of God; I feel that the seminary has suffered a great loss in his demise." An ordinary layman, who was a good friend of Christmann, wrote: "His loss is a severe one to this section of the country and undoubtedly, he will not be easy to replace. Many learned to appreciate and respect this quiet man who labored among the least of our population and accomplished much in bettering the existing conditions and lives of the colored people."[106]

So those early missionaries did it. They defied the odds and opened the doors for African American men to become priests. With the beginnings of the seminary, the SVDs now looked forward to the day

[106] This was published as "Answering the Call," *In a Word. Publication of the Society of the Divine Word, South Province,* 33 (2015), No. 2. February and No. 4 April.







**Left:** After 1934 ordination

**Center:** St. Augustine students

**Right:** First African American Br. Vincentius Webb, SVD

when African American men would be finally ordained to the priesthood. However, there was still more to come from the seminary's founding in 1923 till the ordination of the first four priests in 1934. The Divine Word missionaries' work with African Americans continued to grow.

More parishes were being created and schools followed. The missionaries felt that schools could aid in conversions and building up of the parishes. The schools opened doors but were successful because of the Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters (SSpS). Without these wonderful sisters, the SVD schools would have suffered.

The establishment of the brotherhood was presumed when St. Augustine Seminary began. It took a few years but in May 1937, Brs. Vincentius Webb and Conrad Williams pronounced religious vows. The brothers would become the backbone of the seminary as well as serve in the foreign missions.

It seems that there was an almost universal support for an African American clergy among the Divine Word missionaries in the United States. However, no Bishop would accept them after ordination into their diocese. Many bishops loathed to change the established social order. There was prejudice and outright racism amongst a few and outright indifference from the majority. The only conclusion one can draw from the opposition is the influence of racism and segregation.

## Welcoming the African Americans with Open Arms by the SVD

As 1934 drew closer the SVD's knew that dioceses did not want the priests from St. Augustine. So where would they go? The final word came from the SVD generalate in Rome: African Americans would be received into full membership as Divine Word missionaries.

On 23 May 1934, the first four priests were ordained as Catholic priests at Bay Saint Louis. They were Anthony Bourges; Maurice Rousseve; Francis Wade and Vincent Smith. They were welcomed into the Diocese of Lafayette, Louisiana by Bishop Jules Jeanmard. The Bishop created the parish of Immaculate Heart of Mary in the city of Lafayette where the new priests would minister with success.

The ordinations of the first four opened doors in the American Catholic Church for other African American men to become priests and brothers. For years the only place that accepted African Americans would be Saint Augustine Seminary, Bay Saint Louis. However, with the competency the ordained men from the seminary exhibited, the walls began to crumble amongst other religious orders and dioceses. African Americans would now be able to become diocesan priests.

Many students from Saint Augustine went on to be successful men in society. They became professionals in society and in the parish churches they attended. They became part of diocesan offices and were instrumental in combatting institutional racism in the American Church.






Saint Augustine provided nine African American SVD Bishops: Joseph Bowers of Accra in Ghana and of Saint John's in Virgin Islands (Antilles), Harold Perry of New Orleans in Louisiana (the first African American Bishop in modern times); Carlos Lewis of David in Panama, Raymond Caesar Bishop of Goroka in PNG, Joseph Francis of Newark in New Jersey, Terry Steib of Saint Louis and of Memphis, Curtis Guillory of Beaumont in Texas, Dominic Carmon of New Orleans in Louisiana, and Leonard Olivier of Washington in the District of Columbia. All these men were products of St. Augustine who proved that the early missionaries were correct in their belief that African American men were capable of becoming priests and they are God's children.

The Society of the Divine Word played an important role as a catalyst in building missions, schools, and clergy for Black communities. They worked to solve the political, administrative, financial, and social challenges in the midst of Jim Crow segregation to establish the St. Augustine Seminary and obtain the first diocesan assignments for their priests in the United States. Its priests set examples to bravely desegregate the Catholic Church. St. Augustine Seminary stands as a testament to the many people who followed the encouragement of Saint Arnold Janssen, the Founder of the SVD who in the darkest days of Merigold in 1905 encouraged his missionaries to proceed "gently, prudently, and courageously."

Here we are 100 years later. Saint Augustine is proud of the past 100 years. Times have changed and our missionaries come from many countries. However, racism still exists in America, hence the Church and the Divine Word missionaries have to walk with the Spirit and the Word to promote justice for all.

**James A. Pawlicki, SVD (United States of America)**
***Former Provincial Superior, now Editor of "In a Word"***







# 1909/1913/1932: New Waves of SVD Mission to and from Asia: The Philippines, Indonesia, India



Nearly 30 years ago a well-experienced missionary from the Netherlands asked the following question during the plenary session of the 14th SVD General Chapter in 1994: "Now that SVD members from Asia constitute the majority in our Society, what distinctive contribution can confreres from Asia make to the mission of the Society of the Divine Word?" This question is very important to reflect on as we celebrate the 150th Anniversary of the Society of the Word of God.

This short article wants to look back with gratitude at what pioneer missionaries from Europe to Asia have made, especially to the Philippines, Indonesia, and India, and then examine what unique contribution the missionaries from Asia could give. These three countries were chosen because the SVD members in these three countries amounted to 3,114 or 54.1% of the total number of SVDs in 2024.[107] They also sent most missionaries abroad with a total of 1,000 (560 Indonesians, 308 Indians, 132 Filipinos) in 2024.

[107] *Catalogus 2024*, 470.



Group of SVD Missionaries in Abra. Names unknown





**Left:** Msgr. Petrus Noyen, the first Divine Word Missionary to Indonesia

**Right:** Peter Janser, Prefect Apostolic of Indore 1939

## 1. First Wave of SVD Mission from the West

The SVD pioneer missionaries from Europe were very instrumental in proclaiming the Good News in Asia. They came with a western work ethic characterized by rationality, discipline, hard work and perseverance. This work ethic was strengthened by a missionary zeal because according to the view at that time, "there was no salvation outside the Church." This was a motivation for them to work as hard as possible in order to save as many people as possible, following the example of St. Francis Xavier, apostle to the peoples of Asia.

However, the cultural, social, political, economic and religious situations in these three countries are so complex that they cannot be summarized in this short article. Likewise, the rich history of SVD missionary work cannot be described in detail. Therefore, what is recorded here is only some important works that were initiated by missionaries from the West.

### 1.1. Mission Approach from the Periphery

The first two SVD missionaries to the Philippines were Frs. Ludwig Beckert and Johann Scheiermann. They arrived in Manila on 15 August 1909 and a week later they began their mission work in Pilar, Abra.[108] They gave primary attention to the indigenous population who were still heathens in the mountainous areas and at the same time served the pastoral needs of the parishes left behind by the friars from Spain,[109] after Spain lost the war against the United States. These two young missionaries started their work in very humble circumstances. There were no church buildings or rectory yet. However, Beckert had worked for six years in mainland China. He had learned important lessons from Joseph Freinademetz, who diligently visited people, studied the local language and culture, and collaborated with lay partners. However, the initial challenges were very heavy, both from the schismatic Church of Aglipay and from the Protestant sects that entered with the American occupation of the Philippines. But with the help of new missionaries who came from Germany, they tried to provide the best service possible to win back the hearts of the people who had strayed to the Aglipayan group and Protestant sects.

When the SVD planned to come to Indonesia they were offered by the Jesuits to work either in Sumatra or in Flores and Timor.[110] The SVD General Leadership chose the Lesser Sunda Islands with special attention to Flores and Timor, the areas that were poor and left behind. It should be re-

[108] *History SVD,* 329.
[109] There were 700 parishes throughout the Philippines that lacked priests as shepherds of the flock. See: Alt, *Journey,* 894.
[110] Antonio Camnahas, *The Catholic Mission in the Lesser Sunda Islands – Indonesia under the Society of the Divine Word (SVD) From One Apostolic Prefecture to Two Apostolic Vicariates (1913-1942),* AN SVD-99, Romae 2020, 61.

membered that until the beginning of the 20th century, Flores and Timor were completely insignificant on the Dutch colonial map. Fr. Petrus Noyen was the first SVD missionary who came to this mission country. He arrived in Atapupu, Timor on 20 January 1913. One year later, he moved his mission home base to Ndona, near Ende, in Flores. At that time there were still no roads for cars or motorbikes, no electricity, no clinic and hospital. The missionaries visited the people in villages on foot or on horseback and had to adapt themselves to simple living conditions.

In India, the SVD mission started in 1932. Fr. Peter Janser (1878-1959) was one of the pioneers. He was appointed Superior of the new mission. He came with ten priests and two brothers. The mission area entrusted to SVDs was very vast in Madhya Pradesh state, where 300,000 Catholics live among 39 million Hindus and 2 million Muslims. At the beginning it was very difficult to do mission work among the Hindus. So, they started to work among the tribals and the untouchables. Slowly they came in touch with some Hindu families by strictly observing their caste rules.[111]

### 1.2. Collaboration with Lay Partners

From the very beginning SVD pioneers collaborated with lay partners, especially the catechists. There were two kinds of catechists. The first group was village catechists, in Flores and Timor they were called *guru agama* which literally means the teachers of religion. They learned the Catholic catechism and got special instruction from time to time from the parish priests. Village catechists were acquainted with the local situation, and they knew practically every person in the village and the surroundings. The second group was academically trained catechists who had studied theology at the seminary/college. They became close partners of the priests in pastoral work. Both priests and academically trained catechists have to rely upon the help of *guru agama* or village catechists because they lived with the people in the village and knew best their conditions. Later when the parish structure was developed well, then there was a parish council, that became the pastor's co-workers.

[111] *History SVD,* 363.



Pioneer Missionaries Visiting a village in central Flores





**Left:** Bp Frans Simons in conversation with Fr. Leonardus Jungblut

**Right:** Mhow - Sacred Heart High school, new building

### 1.3. Establishing Schools

In the Philippines, missionaries were encouraged to establish Catholic schools because the American colonial government prohibited religious instruction in public schools, while Protestant sects also opened their schools with financial donations from America. In subsequent developments, Catholic schools in the Philippines became extraordinary apostolic facilities. Apart from primary and secondary schools, currently the SVD in the Philippines has three colleges in the Philippines Central Province, three in the North Province and two Universities in the South Province, namely San Carlos in Cebu City and Holy Name University in Tagbilaran. These schools produced many graduates who became prominent figures in the social and political life of the country.

In Indonesia, missionaries initially established three-year primary schools. Graduates from these schools went on to *Schakelschoo*l, a five-year school in Ndao/Ende which was founded in 1925 by Fr. Gerrit van Velzen, SVD.[112] Smart children who finished school could continue their studies at the secondary schools run by Jesuits in Java. After the Indonesian independence in 1945, van Velzen founded San Pankrasio Middle School in Larantuka in 1951. Then in 1953, Syuradikara Senior High School was opened, which to this day is one of the best middle schools in Nusa Tenggara. In 1959, the Catechetical Education Course began which later became the Catechetical Academy in Ruteng, West Flores. This institution continued to grow and has now become St. Paul's Catholic University, run by a diocesan foundation. In 1982, Widya Mandira Catholic University in Kupang was founded in collaboration with four Indonesian SVD provincials and the Bishops of Nusa Tenggara.

In India too our missionaries gave importance to erecting the schools. Bishop Simons especially promoted the construction of schools. The small Hindi boys' school in Mhow developed into an important school of higher education. To this was added a large boarding school which gave gifted boys from the mission area an opportunity to study. A Hindi girls' school was established there as well under the direction of Franciscan Sisters. In the same way, the Hindi School in Khandwa evolved into a high school with boarding facilities for boys and girls. Father Mocha opened a catechists' school, and it was he who trained them to become capable catechists. On individual mission stations initial small schools were extended to middle and junior high schools.[113]

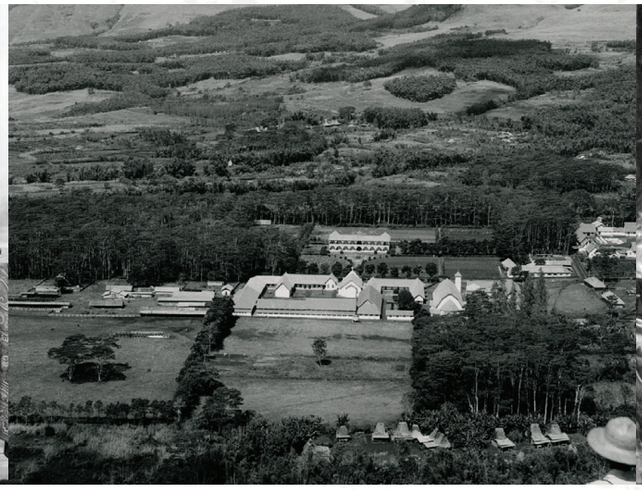
In 2018, the four SVD provinces and one region in India together had 96 schools. [114] This shows, how the education ministry had grown rapidly in India and most of them are established in the previous 25 years. Apart from the middle and secondary schools, there is a Degree College in Mumbai (INM).

### 1.4. Research on Culture, Language and Religion

From the very beginning, our predecessors in mission paid much attention to the study of language, culture and religion. Fr. Paul Arndt did a lot of ethnographic studies on culture and indigenous religions in Flores. Fr. Bernard Vroklage did the same

[112] John Dami Mukese, dan Eduard Jebarus (eds.), *Indahnya Kaki Mereka: Telusur Jejak Para Misionaris Belanda,* Vol. 3, Ende: Percetakan Arnoldus 2008, 18-19.
[113] *History SVD,* 365.
[114] *SVD Mission 2018,* 134-167.







**Left:** Fr. Paul Arndt did ethnographic studies on culture and indigenous religions in Flores

**Center:** Seminary in Todabelu 1957

**Right:** Ordination of Gabriel Manek, SVD, 28 January 1941

in Timor. Fr. Jilis Verheijen researched the Manggarai language for decades and published an Indonesian-Manggarai Dictionary which received international praise.[115] Fr. Stephen Fuchs in India did most valuable research among the tribes, while Fr. Georg Proksch was very instrumental in inculturating the liturgy and translating biblical stories into typical Indian songs and dances.[116] Indian SVD scholars have done many research projects over the years, two Specialized Research Centers namely Ishvani Kendra Missiological Institute in Pune and Institute of Indian Culture in Mumbai have contributed much research on culture and religion. There are three Sanskrit Institutes in India, actively engaged in research and study on Indian culture and religion.

In the Philippines Fr. Antoon Postma made anthropological research among the Mangyan tribe in Mindoro, Philippines. He is the first to decipher the Laguna Copperplate Inscription, and for documenting the Hanunóo script, paving the way for its preservation and understanding.[117] These SVD scholars laid the foundation for our current specialized research centers in different provinces.

### 1.5. Fostering Social-Economic Welfare

Missionaries also developed community welfare by promoting agriculture, health service, building water tanks and installing pipes, introducing credit unions, establishing cooperatives for farmers and fishermen, and so on. But all these were done not just as humanitarian work, but as part of Christ's mission to save humanity physically and spiritually.

### 1.6. Seminary and Formation of Local Clergy

In 1926, Fr. Franz Cornelissen, SVD, opened the first Minor Seminary in Sikka, Flores, with the goal of educating prospective priests on an equal footing with education in the Netherlands. St. Paul Major Seminary in Ledalero was founded in 1937. The first two SVD priests who graduated from this Major Seminary were ordained in 1941, namely Fr. Gabriel Manek and Fr. Carolus Kale Bale. It was Gabriel Manek who later became the first Bishop in Nusa Tenggara (the second Bishop of Indonesia), and later became the first Archbishop of Ende.

Ledalero Major Seminary was then officially recognized by the government of the Republic of Indonesia in 1969 as the Catholic Philosophy and Theology College. This Major Seminary, which was initially established only for SVD candidates for the priesthood, also educated candidates as diocesan priests from six dioceses, and in the last 20 years there have been 12 religious orders who send their candidates to study there. This educational institution has produced 21 Bishops and more than 1,700 priests, and about 6,000 lay missionaries and scholars. Since June 2022 this school has been developed into an *Institute of Philosophy and Creative Technology.* In 1981, the second scholasticate was begun for clerical students in Malang, later known as the Major Seminary of *Surya Wacana*. However, for studies of philosophy and theology, our confreres joined another Major Seminary founded in 1971 by the Carmelite and Vincentian Fathers.

[115] Jilis A. J. Verheijen, SVD, *Kamus Indonesia-Manggarai,* The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff 1970.
[116] *History SVD,* 373.
[117] "Antoon Postma," [In:] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antoon_Postma [Accessed: 30 December 2023].



Christ the King Mission Seminary, in Quezon City, Philippines

In the Philippines the SVD started the first formation house in Vigan in 1925. Nine years later, the Mission Seminary of Christ the King was established in Manila. As the number of students kept growing, the Major Seminary of Tagaytay was founded in 1963. At present, Tagaytay has become an international major seminary that receives students from many countries.

In India the first SVD formation was started in Palda-Indore on 21 December 1951 with four clerical novices and five brother novices. Since 1956 we have our formation house in Pune, which was serving as a central place to study philosophy and theology. Now, only the theology students study here, and the SVDs have their own philosophy house in Bhopal. Although the SVDs in India do not have their own theological seminary like in Indonesia and the Philippines, formation houses in Pune and lately Sason (INE) have produced many qualified missionaries, serving in their home country and abroad. Beside what has been said, the missionaries have also done many valuable things in mass media, Bible translation, erecting spirituality centers, founding local Sisters' Congregations and so on.

## 2. New Waves of SVD Mission from Asia to Other Countries

The extraordinary dedication of the pioneer missionaries from Europe has succeeded in growing local Churches which are now thriving in Indonesia, the Philippines and India. To all of them, we will always be grateful. But consciously or unconsciously, they come from a position of superiority. *First*, political superiority, because they came from the colonial nation to the colonized. *Second*, cultural superiority, because according to the opinion at that time, they came from a high culture to a low one. *Third*, socio-economic superiority, because they came from rich countries to poor people. *Fourth*, religious superiority, because according to the theological view of that time, outside the Church there was no salvation. That is why, with extraordinary missionary zeal and militancy, these pioneer missionaries sacrificed their lives for the salvation of people who were still in the "dark night of unbelief."

Now when young missionaries from Indonesia, the Philippines and India are sent to Europe or the Americas, to Africa or Pacific islands, what superiority do they bring? None. So, 30 years after the important question in the SVD general chapter hall in Nemi 1994, we can better formulate answers based on our own missionary experiences and collective reflection on the last three decades.

### 2.1. Empty-handed Mission Approach

In comparison to the former missionaries from Europe, the Asian missionaries today seem to be sent "empty handed." This fact is their weakness and should be their strength as well. First of all, it is their weakness. Many of them come from a rural background with their cultural heritage in the pre-modern worldview. Then very soon they enter the modern world through education and schools. Now they are further confronted with the postmodern condition. They live in tensions between three worldviews which are not easy to harmonize. These missionaries need much more time than their predecessors, not simply to learn another language and culture, but also to orient themselves within the tensions and conflicts between those worldviews.

And what can they concretely do in their mission? Former missionaries have done valuable things as mentioned above. All these were considered an integral part of their mission. Today many of these jobs have been taken over by the state or secular institutions. When new missionaries are sent from Asia to Europe or the Americas they cannot get involved in these fields. Even in teaching catechism or preaching many local people can do better than they. From the religious perspective, former missionaries went to the countries where mythic-religious values were still predominant, whereas new missionaries are thrown into a secularistic society. It is much more difficult to preach the Gospel in the post-Christian situation.

On the other hand, this kind of weakness can and should be the strength of the new missionaries. Here is a golden opportunity to follow the example of the first disciples of Jesus who were sent empty-handed

but who were inspired by the Spirit of the Crucified and Risen Lord. The empty-handed approach is therefore possible if their heart is full of faith, with the willingness to serve others as the Lord Jesus. Through the Spirit of the Lord human weakness (in a socio-political sense) is transformed into evangelical *kenosis*. This approach becomes efficacious and fruitful on two preconditions. First, it presupposes that the missionaries believe in the people to whom they are sent. If you have nothing in your hand (especially economic resources), and if you do not have any kind of superiority, then you have to rely on the people to whom you are sent. Missionaries are expected to work not simply *for* the people (from a position of superiority), but to work with the people. Above all, this approach presupposes that missionaries believe in the One who calls and sends them. "I am with you always to the end of time" (Matt 28:20).







### 2.2. Mission from a Contemplative Presence

The rabbis in Israel, the Gurus in Hindu and Buddhist traditions, the spiritual leaders in the Islamic pesantren in Indonesia, do not teach their disciples like modern teachers or professors in the classroom. They attract their followers by their life before inspiring them with their wisdom. Actually, this is what happened with Jesus and his disciples and later with the spiritual and religious movements in the history of the Church. Now if missionaries have nothing in their hands, then they have to carry out their mission from a contemplative presence. By contemplation we do not mean simply a method of prayer or meditation. Contemplation means living in intimate union with God. Since missionaries have to witness to the Reign and to proclaim the Word of God, they need first of all to experience the presence of God in their lives and listen to the Word addressed to them through the Bible and through others. Every authentic mission flows from contemplation, just as every poetic word is born out of silence. Mission without contemplation would be empty; contemplation without mission would be lame and mute.

### 2.3. Dialogue as the Way of Mission

Dialogue has become a common vocabulary and habitual praxis in our Society since the 15th General Chapter of 2000. But when the draft document regarding dialogue was presented for the first time at the plenary meeting of the general chapter, two groups raised objections.

The first objection coming from a European missionary saying that there is a priority of preaching the Good News. In other words, we have to proclaim the Gospel first and then dialogue. This objection tends to reduce the meaning of dialogue to discussion. If dialogue is the basic attitude of being open to others, or, to be more

precise, an attitude of "solidarity, respect and love" (GS 3), then dialogue does not contradict the proclamation of the Gospel at all. What is necessary is that we proclaim the Good News in a dialogical way, not primarily by words but by our life. As St. Francis of Assisi used to say: "Always preach, if necessary, use words." If God respects human freedom in his act of salvation, how can we pretend to proclaim the Good News without respecting the other or without listening to their experience?

The second objection comes from South American confreres: "We cannot dialogue with the oppressors." If this were true, what would be the alternative? Either you submit yourselves to the oppression (which is an immoral act) or you take arms to kill the oppressors, which means using violence against violence. I believe that we ought to dialogue even with the oppressors in order to break the circle of violence. In politics, we have some shining examples of people like Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, etc. Their lives have become a prophetic affirmation that only dialogue can transform the vicious circle of violence into a virtuous circle of justice, forgiveness, reconciliation and peace. Dialogue is another name for the Gospel message and appeals to love even your enemy. Dialogue as the way of mission is an Asian contribution to our Society.

The missionaries from Asia have carried with them these two important aspects to the mission fields in other continents. Thus, their contribution is not on economic growth, but more on spiritual growth with the missiological orientation of today.

### 2.4. Asians' Contribution Worldwide

Today missionaries from Asia to the EUROPA, PANAM and AFRAM zones are engaged in various ministries. Wherever they are sent, they take along with them the rich experiences of their personal and communitarian dimensions of life. They are given appropriate entry and exit programs for their fruitful missionary endeavors. Asia is known for its cultural heritage and interreligious harmony. It is the cradle of the world's major religions and birthplace of many spiritual traditions. The Church has the deepest respect for these traditions and seeks to engage in sincere dialogue with their followers. The people of Asia take pride in their religious and cultural values, such as love of silence and contemplation, simplicity, detachment, the spirit of hard work, and discipline. They hold dear the values of reverence for life, compassion for all beings, closeness to nature, respect towards parents, elders and ancestors, and a sense of community. The missionaries from Asia live their missionary charism with these spiritual insights and moral wisdom of 'being Asian' in other zones.





Human mobility is one of the signs of our time. Migration is one of the important ministries in which the confreres are engaged, in various parts of Europa and PANAM zones. It is to be noted that a number of Bishops from these zones request the Society for confreres to be involved in this ministry. Many are engaged in work among the youth, refugees and migrants, separated and broken families, the displaced, the undocumented and victims of human trafficking.

A number of confreres from Asia hold responsible positions in the Society as PRM superiors and councilors, rectors and novice-masters and heads of various institutions. For the second time in the Society, the superior general is from Asia. Lack of vocations to religious life in EUROPA and PANAM is a matter of concern for the Society. However, we continue the formation programs in these zones, as a number of Asian confreres are engaged in the formation ministry in all the zones. Due to their formation training and commitment to religious life, many of them excel in the formation ministry including AFRAM. Several of them are pastorally oriented and are engaged in pastoral activities with enthusiasm and zeal. Name any ministry in any of the zones, we find Asian confreres actively engaged in all these ministries. As in the words of Pope Paul VI, "Contemporary man listens more willingly to witnesses

than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi,* 41), missionaries from Asia continue to bear witness to their religious life and mission in all the zones of our Society. The Asian missionaries continue to insert themselves in the local culture and show the values of the Kingdom of God through their life of witness and missionary commitments.

## Conclusion

As Divine Word missionaries we look back to the past with gratitude, we live the present with enthusiasm, we embrace the future with hope.[118] The new generation of missionaries from Asia (not only from Philippines, Indonesia and India), will continue the work of our predecessors with joy in this complex and rapidly changing world. They need to rediscover the empty-handed approach of Jesus, living his contemplative presence along the road of mission, telling the story of God's love in dialogue with others.

**Leo Kleden, SVD (Indonesia)**
***Former General Councilor, now Lecturer at the Institute of Philosophy and Creative Technology, Ledalero***

[118] Pope Francis, *Apostolic Letter to All Consecrated People on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life* 2014, [In:] https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_letters/documents/papa-francesco_lettera-ap_20141121_lettera-consacrati.html [Accessed: 31 December 2023].





Fr. Nicolaus Blum,
Superior General,
the successor of the
Founder (1909-1919)

# 1909/1947/1967: Leadership in Challenging Times:
## Nicolaus Blum, Alois Grosse Kappenberg, John Musinsky



Three superior generals among twelve in the overall 150-year of our history seem to have faced fascinating yet challenging times when much was at stake for the Society of the Divine Word. All were confronted with demanding situations caused by external and internal circumstances. The first Superior General after the Founder was Fr. Nicolaus Blum, caught in the uncertainty of the future after the death of the Founder in 1909. Fr. Alois Grosse Kappenberg faced the external, challenging consequences of World War II; and Fr. John Musinsky, the calls for Modernity and renewal of *Vatican Council II*. An interesting question arises: due to what qualities or factors did they successfully live up to these challenges?

### Nicolaus Blum (1909-1919): Consolidation vs Externalization

On 15 January 1909, the Founder, Fr. Arnold Janssen, orphaned his sons and daughters after thirty-three years of leadership. God abundantly blessed the undertakings of this inconspicuous yet great man. Serious concerns arose about continuing his legacy under the new successor to be elected at the 4th General Chapter. Who would succeed him? And will he lead the Society in Arnold's spirit?  At the Founder's funeral on 19



Participants of the 4th General Chapter in Steyl, 1909-1910, from left to right
First row (sitting): Joannes Bodems, Hermann Bücking, Hermann Wegener, Nicolaus Blum, Johann Weig, Hermann auf der Heide, Joseph Schmitz

Middle row (standing): Joseph Schmid, Johann Reidick, Theodor Vilsterman, Eberhard Limbrock, Michael Colling, Theodor Kost, Franz de Lange

Upper row (standing): Heinrich Heering, Peter Noyen, Hermann Löcken, Theodor Bücker, Heinrich Neuenhofen, Heinrich Giese, Franz Vormann, Ludwig Köster

January 1909, Bishop Drehmanns of Roermond reiterated that his work will never die provided that his spirit remains alive in the Society.[119] On the same day, the general council assembled with the rectors of the European houses and appointed Fr. Nicolaus Blum as the Administrator General of the Society until the General Chapter. He seemed to be the main candidate to succeed the Founder.

The following February 1909, Blum, after 26 years handed over the office of Procurator General to Fr. Peter Schmitz. He wrote in his diary: "I do not want to remain in the generalate. I realized today that I am unable to. May the Lord bless me and let me find some rest after the chapter."[120] However, Blum had been the right-hand man of the Founder in every business matter for all those years. The exemplary man of order and regular spirit had invented the prudent new system of ownership for the Society. Even if he felt frequently bypassed by the Founder, still Arnold had admired his punctuality, quick work tempo, and efficiency. On 19 March 1909, Nicolaus Blum convoked the 4th General Chapter for 1 November 1909, and emphasized: "It is certainly the most important election in the history of our Society that must be handled in a way that the work of our Founder is continued in his spirit."[121] He hoped that the new Superior General would be after God's own heart, but he also cautioned: "I see how much we must pray that God selects the right man on the first of November 1909. It was certainly hard for the Founder and now it will be one hundred times more difficult for his successor. I do not envy him."[122] According to his understanding of matters, "the task of the next twelve years will be so difficult that no one with common sense could desire the office. Only courage to sacrifice can persuade someone to accept the position."[123]

Not surprisingly, the capitulars overwhelmingly gambled on 52-year-old Fr. Nicolaus Blum (19 of the 22 votes) as the new leader of the Society on the anniversary of the Founder's birth on 5 November 1909. The elected General thanked Bp. Hermann Dingelstad of Münster for his congratulations and confessed: "The choice did not go my way and I would have preferred to decline rather than accept. It seemed to emerge from the circumstances that this was God's will. (...) There is still a lot of work to be done because the statutes must be finalized in this chapter and many suggestions and requests from every country are coming to light."[124]

[119] Fritz Bornemann, *Arnold Janssen - Founder of Three Missionary Congregations 1837-1909. A Biography,* Manila 1975, 515.
[120] Blum, AG SVD: *Tagebuch*, No. 413, 28 February 1909.
[121] Hermann Fischer, *The Trusted Companions of Saint Arnold Janssen,* Epworth 2012, 47.
[122] Fischer, *The Trusted Companions,* 48.
[123] Blum to Erlemann, Techny, 24 June 1909, AG SVD Blum-Letters (BL): 2-744/745.
[124] Blum to Bp. Dingelstad, 11 November 1909, BL-3-375.

Nicolaus' spirit of leadership crystallized through prolonged times of anxiety and inner struggles within the short period before the chapter. He pondered on the true motivation necessary to guide the Society at the background of another likely scenario for the direction of the Society. A group of confreres wanted a Bishop from China at the helm of the Society so that he could impart certain prestige to the Society with his episcopal dignity. Nicolaus noted in his diary:

> As I am told, the Society is making a lot of propaganda for the election of Henninghaus as Superior General. It would be a good choice. Monsignor is a capable man. Whoever he may be, I do not envy him. Of course, my vanity also wants my election. My mind tells me that this is not for you and even less for the Society. I doubt whether I would have the courage to turn down a choice that favored me. I doubt it. I will ask the good Lord that he will not let the voters think of me.[125]

In the challenging month of August 1909, Nicolaus Blum was alarmed at the agitation against him among the lay brothers in the house. Behind the campaign stood Fr. Schwager who even attempted to influence a voting member.[126] Also, some China missionaries were engaged in partisan propaganda for Bp. Henninghaus. Blum concluded: "If the Society sees its task as wanting to impress the outside world, then it would probably have been better not to be founded."[127] Besides, it is not in line with the spirit and tradition of our Society to place a Bishop at its top and then humbly admit: "I do not wish to become superior at all, because if I wished I would have to be great or holy. I am not holy and do not want to be vain."[128] The first successor of the Founder needed to be a man with a wide view and a lot of experience, great mildness, and no less firmness. Indeed, Blum was far from settling for only exterior appearances including the beginnings of promoted external veneration of the Founder.[129] He also cautioned: "Lord, save us from wealth, scholarship, and reputation before the world."[130] But later he reaffirmed: "I have firmly decided to belong completely to the banner of Christ and to use all means to achieve my goal. I renounce all wealth and all honor before the world - not only for myself but also for the Society - because that is the only true way to follow Jesus."[131]

Blum, the Superior General, did not complete his term of office due to his premature death. Nevertheless, his leadership strengthened the organizational stability of the Society with the papal confirmation of the rule on 5 April 1910.[132] He extended and consolidated the spirit of the Founder, the founding tradition, and observance of the *Constitutions*. He provided many instructions and guiding principles for the most diverse affairs of the Society and familiarized himself with practical missionary work during his visits to Togo (1911) and the United States (1912). The external expansion of the Society was restrained because of the First World War (1914-1918). New houses were established only in the Netherlands and Germany and two new missions were initiated in Dutch India (Indonesia) and Mozambique. Finally, Blum passed the difficult period of wartime, mobilizing and protecting the Society affected financially by the currency devaluation and heavy human and material losses.[133]

## Alois Grosse Kappenberg (1947-1957): Uniformism vs International Diversity

In the aftermath of World War II national tensions were exacerbated also in the Society in the course of which emerged an important and pivotal leader Fr. Alois Grosse Kappenberg, born in Lippramsdorf in Münsterland on 21 October 1890. He came from a German farmer's family of pious Heinrich and Maria Katherina née Feldmann with five boys. At the age of fourteen, Alois followed his oldest brother Heinrich to secondary school in Steyl and was ordained in St. Gabriel in 1915. His keen mind, calm and mature judgment, and religiously dependable character drew the attention of his superiors. He was assigned to higher studies. Towards the end of the First World War, he served for a few months as a medic in a prison hospital in Forbach, Lorraine. Then, he lectured philosophy in St. Gabriel and obtained a doctorate in theology at the University of Vienna with a thesis on Church law for the missions in the new codex. Foreseen for *Anthropos,* he was interested in comparative

[125] Blum, *Tagebuch*, No. 422, 30 April 1909.
[126] Blum, *Tagebuch*, No. 439, 31 August 1909.
[127] Blum, *Tagebuch*, No. 431, 30 June 1909.
[128] Blum to Erlemann, Techny, 24 June 1909, BL-2-744/745.
[129] Blum, *Tagebuch*, No. 814, 14 January 1914.
[130] Blum, *Tagebuch*, No. 1080, 3 March 1918.
[131] Blum, *Tagebuch*, No. 1134, 11 October 1918.
[132] Blum, *Tagebuch*, No. 921, 15-16 August1915.
[133] General Blum repeatedly visited Berlin to obtain from the Reich government in Germany paper and coal for the printing press.



Alois
Grosse Kappenberg,
Superior General
1947 - 1957

religions and Mexican studies at the university in Berlin. In 1923 after one semester, he fell ill, diagnosed with a dangerous loss of heart muscle. Afterward, the sick man was back at St. Gabriel to teach dogma. He became director of studies in 1926 and prefect of the theology students in 1930. As a prefect, he exercised profound influence on the formation of a whole generation of 300 SVD priests from various countries. He also became rector in St. Gabriel Mission Seminary (1935-1938) and then the provincial of the Austrian Province in the turbulent years of the Nazis' annexation of Austria and World War II (1938 -1947).

World War II triggered inner tensions against the German "domination" in the Society in the general world situation. It sharpened national differences not only in Europe. Several American missionaries in China expressed their bitter sentiments against Germans who, because of their overwhelming majority, developed a certain sense of superiority.[134] The issue surfaced at the General Chapter of 1947 in the report of Fr. Franz Bouma, Regional from Dutch India (Indonesia). With frankness and out of sincere love for the Society, he did not consider it good to hide such things.[135] Already in 1946, he had complained to Fr. General Grendel about the war psychosis and too little love for the Society. "It is easily said that the Rule is too German, that the Society wants to be too German, the generalate is composed one-sidedly of Germans and are German-oriented and interested in Germany."[136] Fr. Bouma also wrote confidentially to the new General, Fr. Alois Grosse Kappenberg, about "the insufficiently international attitude of the Society, especially at its headquarters,"[137] and noticed similar bad feelings in all non-German provinces and regions because of an unconscious overestimation and exaggeration of German characteristics and a certain involuntary disregard for the value of confreres from other nationalities. Too much emphasis is placed on external discipline and judgments based on it, but too little attention is paid to the supernatural and inner development of the personality. Open-heartedness is easily perceived as arrogance or rebellion against authority, and the relationship with the superior is not fatherly enough. "Too much officialdom, not enough fatherliness."[138] There were voices advocating a larger international composition of the new generalate. It truly happened during the Chapter with the surprising appointment of Fr. Alois Grosse Kappenberg and an international general council (German, Dutch, American, and Polish).

Upon learning about the election results, Grosse Kappenberg turned pale but accepted the thorny burden despite his greatly weakened state of health. Just before the chapter the Vatican Congregation for Religious had issued completely new election regulations and took the outcome of the elections into its own hands. As a result, only one official ballot for all offices was to be held and the sealed voting was sent to the Vatican which would decide on the composition of the new leadership of the Society. The straw vote of 29 September revealed that Bishop Noser re-

[134] Riberi to Grendel, 14 May 1947, AG SVD 626/1936–1957.
[135] Regional's Report on the Lesser Sunda Islands, AG SVD 15 (1947), 1192-11933.
[136] Bouma to Grendel, Ende, 23 September 1946, AG SVD 27 (1942-1950): Bel-Büt.
[137] Bouma to Grosse Kappenberg, Rome, 21 October 1947, AG SVD 27 (1942-1950): Bel-Büt.
[138] Bouma wrote "I have repeatedly heard condemnations and contemptuous and distrustful statements from German confreres in great generalizations regarding the North American, Polish, and Slovak confreres. One had the impression that interest is concentrated too one-sidedly on the German provinces and German conditions." Ibid.





ceived the most votes (29), followed by Grendel (12), and Grosse Kappenberg (10). After eight days, on 8 October 1947, the Congregation communicated that the last on the list Fr. Grosse Kappenberg would be the new Superior General of the Society. He had international experience, holding a dominant position in St. Gabriel for over a decade, where the community of brothers and scholastics was made up of around ten nationalities. He had many good qualities to perform this important task: excellent intellectual gifts, and many years of experience in administration, teaching, and education in the largest and most important scholasticate of the Society. His collaborators soon realized his clear sense of goals, clear-sighted vision and calmly pondering attitude, as well as his remarkable willpower, a strong sense of responsibility with complete surrender to God's guidance.

The new Superior General was not nationally biased. He went on his first visit to the Netherlands where there was deep bitterness against the Germans. "I know that the most important thing I have to do now is to listen carefully." Indeed, his meeting with almost everyone tranquilized and reconciled the turbulent moods. The post-war period was extremely difficult with the many side effects that inflicted deep wounds on the Society, both in Europe and the mission territories. The war had brought about a weakening of the religious spirit and discipline due to the abolition of SVD houses, dispersion of the confreres, and direct contact with the outside world during military service or in work camps. Thus, many things had to be rebuilt internally as well as externally, both at home and in the missions.

**Above:** Grosse Kappenberg with seminarians

**Below:** Superior General on visitation in Argentina. From left: Frs. Johann Wiesen, Adolf Spreti and General Große Kappenberg at the waterfalls of the Iguaçù, 27 November 1952

The new General made two long visitation trips: 1948-1950 (the Netherlands, England, Ireland, East Asia, USA) and 1951-1954 (South America and Africa: Gold Coast (Ghana and Congo).[139] He was the last Superior General who had known the Founder personally in Steyl and their meetings had left a lasting and deep impression on him. Grosse Kappenberg was deeply concerned about the observance of the *Constitutions*, the Society's devotions, and good spirit, especially in vocational propaganda and vocational training. In his Spiritual Testament, he confessed: "I fear much for the Society. If one does not work sincerely for the good spirit of the Society, much will go to ruin. But who will have the courage to stand up for it?"[140]

Despite Grosse Kappenberg's absence from Rome, his was the last word in all decisive matters. His authoritative bearing made him unshakeable once he decided regardless of all objections. For health reasons, he traveled only by ship and used the long journeys for answering correspondence. The great achievement of his leadership and the fruit of the visitations were countless personal conversations for which every confrere was free to come to him. He gained everyone's trust because with his genteelness and consideration, he was able to soften hurt feelings. His manner was a great act of reconciliation that eased the tensions left by the war and the administrative style of his predecessor, Fr. Grendel. The Society had 16 provinces as of 1947 whereas the regions increased from 14 to 21 with seven new regions in Spain, Portugal, Argentine-East, Timor, Bali-Lombok, Sambalpur, and Australia. The Society established its presence in Canada and a new region in Belgian-Congo was planned.

Unfortunately, the Society was struck by a heavy blow in the Communist Eastern Bloc of Central and Eastern Europe and China, which expelled 336 of our missionaries between 1949 and 1955. Grosse Kappenberg traveled to Shanghai in 1949 to meet the missionaries who were leaving China. He knew how to bring order into the chaos through his clarity and strength. He was a good father and a conciliatory leader in the difficult post-war time. In a circular letter to all confreres, he emphasized that God calls all members of the Society to live true love and true unity, which find human expression in mutual understanding and interest for the entire community and every single confrere.[141] He allowed the free development of national elements in the Society. The correspondence of the generalate was no longer carried on exclusively in German but in English, Dutch, and Spanish as well. The internal paper, *Arnoldus,* appeared in both German and English. He started to publish *Yearly Practices (Exercitium annuum*) also in both languages. In other cases, he replaced German with Latin. Fr. Grosse Kappenberg showed a strong sense of responsibility profoundly rooted in the Founding tradition. He died of leukemia on 27 August 1957, two years before the end of his term of office.

## John Musinsky (1967-1977): Reformism vs Essentialism

In a period of growing Church and Society crises, the Extraordinary General Chapter[142] elected American Fr. John Musinsky as Superior General on 15 December 1967 (re-elected in 1972).[143] The first non-German leader of the Society came out with his well-timed responses in nine circular letters *The Divine Word Missionary in a Time of Change* (1969-1976), in which he framed the Society's crisis within the larger crisis of Church and missions in the modern world of great progress in science and technology.[144] The deep change of consciousness led to the crisis of the mission idea to the point of questioning its validity. It was said that God could save people outside the Church and the world religions had a salvific significance. This undermined the holy zeal of the past for saving souls from being eternally dammed for not receiving the Good News. The crisis affected the Society with a sharp drop of vocations. The number of SVDs was steadily dropping from 5,773 in 1965 to 5,216 in 1976. Despite the increase of students in minor seminaries, the number of novices was dwindling[145] but also the perseverance rates went down with a significant increase of those leaving the Society in perpetual vows. The whole Church experienced similar confusion.

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[139] His secretary meticulously reported on these visitations and characterized Fr. Grosse Kappenberg as a physically impressive, awe-inspiring figure marked internally by a certain shyness and insecurity; a man of prayer living his life as a sacrifice to God through tireless zeal for work and fidelity to the spirit of the Founder, Adolf Spreti, *Erinnerungen an P. Alois Grosse Kappenberg*, Ingolstadt 1990, 85-89 (AG SVD).

[140] *AN,* 1958, 49.

[141] *The Letter of the Superior General to all members of the Society*, Rome: 25 March 1948.

[142] This chapter was caused by the Second Vatican Council that called all religious congregations to adapt and renew their *Constitutions*.

[143] John Musinsky, an American of Slovak descent was born on 19 October 1918 in Farrell, an industrial town in Pennsylvania. His good parents, Stephen, and Anna, nee Fertal had three sons and two daughters. His mother did not know English so well and Slovak was spoken in the house.

[144] "The Divine Word Missionary in a Time of Change" (1/1969), *Nuntius SVD*, Vol. IX, 1969, fasc. 1, 37-42.

[145] Karl Müller, *Report of the Secretary of Studies,* AG SVD 15: *Capitoli Generali SVD 1967-1968.*

Fr. Musinsky, the "unlikely" candidate for the role of Superior General to follow Johann Schütte, quite early drew the attention of some capitulars who thought that the man in the background just recently elected provincial of the US Eastern Province would make a good leader. In fact, in the second ballot, he prevailed over Fr. Karl Müller (49 votes) with an absolute majority of 56 out of 106 voting. The 49-year-old, modest, and shunning publicity General elect played a pivotal role during the post-conciliar most turbulent time for the Society. Straight away, he called the Society to "enter that same period of change (as in the Church) and to undergo its *aggiornamento*."[146]

Musinsky, the calm, unassuming, warm-hearted, and profoundly spiritual new leader of the Society differed in his style from his dynamic and externally oriented predecessor Fr. Schütte.[147] Due to inner integrity and spiritual focus on an intimate relationship with Christ, he diagnosed incisively the essential challenge of the modern world. He claimed that we "drifted from the spirit and the values of the Gospel to the values of the cultures about us (…). I feel that the Lord is no longer the vital center of our lives that he should be, of our communities, of our apostolate."[148] He frankly argued that the future of the Society would not depend on the large numbers of members but on members who would be on fire with the Society's vision and its charism. Musinsky guided the Society through a deeper intimate relationship with Christ and attentiveness to the inner guidance of the Spirit. He followed the way of the saints who allowed God to work through them.

> During the time of my administration, I was frequently struck by the following observation: Most of the time when our Society was approached to take over a mission or a special task, we would take up the request in the general council and deliberate about it. The normal questions to be asked should have been three: Does the Holy Spirit want us there? Do we have the people to do the job? And thirdly: is the money available? But I must admit most regretfully that very often we reversed the order. We asked first: whether we had the persons and the money, before we asked whether the Spirit wanted us to go there. While all three are essential, do not reverse the order.[149]

Musinsky's leadership was dialogic and focused on the spiritual core of the missionary vocation, which he regularly shared in brief messages in *Arnoldus Nota*. He saw the panacea for the growing sense of discouragement and frustration in the return to Christ: "In him we can do all things. But the accent must be on Christ. If our renewal does not begin in Him, does not center around Him, it can only come to naught." That is the right way to find the light and grace to meet the situation and solve problems.[150]



Fr. John Musinsky,
Superior General
1967-1977

[146] *AN*, 1968/1, 7.
[147] But not only Schütte's strong involvement in extra-Society affairs related to Vatican II and development aid in Germany, but also his health with possible morphine dependence worked to the detriment of his re-election as Superior General. E. Kühne's confidential letter to General Schütte, 19 May 1967, AG SVD 25.
[148] John Musinsky, *Report of the Superior General for the General Chapter of 1977*, 7, AG SVD 15 (1977).
[149] John Füellenbach, "It is the Spirit who gives visions to the young and dreams to the old (Joel 3:2-5)," [In:] https://www.adgentes.net/SVD%20Nemi%20Web%20reflections%20spirit%20b.html [Accessed: 15 December 2023].
[150] *AN*, 1972 March, 1.





**Above:** Members of the Second Preparatory Commission for the General Chapter of 1977 in Rome, February 1977. From left sitting: Frs. Erasio Flores, Kees Maas, John Musinsky, Almiro Werle and Berly Pallan; standing: Frs. Antolin Uy, Karl, Müller, Werner Prawdzik, Br. Vicente, L. A. Felix, Martin Martinez, Antoon Verschuur, Marcus Moa, Adolf Spreti, Paul Zepp, John Donaghey, Peter McHugh, Heinrich Barlage, Jose Gallinger, Gerard Bus and Leonardo Estioko

**Below:** Canonization Ceremony of Arnold Janssen and Joseph Freinademetz. SVD ex superiors general before the audience, 06 October 2003. From left: Frs. Heinrich Barlage, Superior General Antonio Pernia - in office; John Musinsky and Heinrich Heekeren

According to a former general superior, Fr. Heinrich Barlage, Musinsky is probably the greatest among the general superiors of the Society. He was able to lead the Society during one of the most difficult periods immediately after Vatican II. "The reforms introduced by Vatican II were meant to renew the Church and religious life. But these reforms also had the potential to divide religious communities and the Church itself – progressives against conservatives, the young against the old, the left against the right, reformists against traditionalists."[151] In Germany, the debate came so close to an actual split, that the German provincial requested the General to come and try to calm the tumultuous waters (9-20 October 1971) and to overcome the serious difficulties in communication between the older generation and the younger, especially in formation houses.[152] Musinsky with his quiet, spiritual, and peaceful way calmed the turmoil.

John Musinsky was the right Superior General at the right time who renewed the Society and kept it united after Vatican II. He lived up to the twofold major challenge: to be open to the world and to be rooted in the Spirit, "(He) was directed by the General Chapter not to start new missions but to concentrate on the *aggiornamento,* specifically, the renewal of the *Constitutions*. In my understanding, his love for our Society inspired him to use his American democratic tradition to transform the administration of our Society and to lead us towards a deeper understanding of our missionary calling."[153]

His leadership style was people-oriented and convincing. He acted "with genuine sincerity in a very kind but also very determined way, one could also say with a great heart for others."[154] He was open to some "revolutionary" changes at the generalate College in Rome. For example, the merging of various dining rooms into a common one for all, and the introduction of English as the official language of the general council. He governed openly in the spirit of service to brothers and based his action on principles of collegiality and subsidiarity;[155] alertness to the signs of the time; and priority to visit all parts of the Society to acquaint himself with reality on the spot. He was open to all that is good in the modern world and could enhance our "attractiveness" for young people.[156] He never pretended to be a prophet but his close intimacy with Jesus and listening to the Spirit made his statements visionary.

As a good motivator, he demanded excellence in the missionary service based on discipline and tenacity of purpose. He claimed that when an institution, organization, or nation loses its capacity to evoke high individual performance, its great days are over. He never got tired to repeat that as SVD we needed an "*inspiring vision* that would move all of us with enthusiasm and zeal." He would often quote from the writings of Sandra Schneiders on *Religious Life Today:*

> It is not the loss of institutions that religious must fear; it is the loss of the fire of the charism itself... Where passion is lacking, life is dead. When religious life is routine, life

[151] Barlage to Superior General Fr. Antonio Pernia, 6 March 2006. Fr. Pernia made use of it for the funeral homily at Techny for Fr. Musinsky on Wednesday, 8 March 2006, [In:] https://www.svdcuria.org/public/infonews/curia/20nn/200n/0603jm.htm [Accessed: 12 December 2023].
[152] The then student Fr. Joachim Piepke claimed that the "student revolt" at St. Augustin's had a lot to do with the fact that the students' formators and the community's leadership were overwhelmed by the demands of coming to terms with the new theology, the religious life, and the creative relationship to Society along the lines of the Second Vatican Council," "Die 1968er - Studentenrevolution in St. Augustin," *Verbum SVD,* 2018, fasc. 1-2, 82.
[153] Barlage to Pernia, 6 March 2006.
[154] Barlage to Pernia, 6 March 2006.
[155] Fr. Musinsky continued the key issues raised in the 9th General Chapter. So in the 10th General Chapter (1972) there were 115 capitulars including 15 brothers. This Chapter elected the first Brother to the General Council (Max Staudinger) and recommended Zonal Assemblies.
[156] "The Divine Word Missionary in a Time of Change" (3/1970), *Nuntius SVD*, Vol. IX, 1971, fasc. 2, 139.

> is dead. When religious life is bent on being socially safe and legally proper, life is dead. When religious life is more an ember than a fire, life is dead. When religious communities marginalize their weary prophets, life is dead. Then, religious may pray and may fast and they may withdraw from the fray, but they will not sound a single note in a cacophonous world in search of harmony. Jesus had this vision.[157]

Musinsky efficiently addressed the religious and mission identity crisis by pointing to the essentials of SVD vocation and missionary vitality grounded in the original inspiration and charism of the Founder. He stressed the urgency of ongoing formation to enhance vocational motivation in today's world[158] and made use of a controversial systematic and scientific examination of the Society and its apostolate – the SVD Self-Study. The beatification ceremony of the Founder and Fr. Freinademetz in 1975 was a joyful event for more than 400 confreres invited to Rome. It proved a good way of furthering the unity of the Society. After his term as Superior General, Musinsky served humbly and with dedication as spiritual director for the tertiate renewal courses in Nemi (1978-2003). He died in St. Louis on 2 March 2006.

## Conclusion

Caught in challenging times the three top protagonists of the Society's leadership showed deeply the same religious motivation: a strong sense of religious identity drawing from the spirit and charism of the Founder. Father Blum, the successor of the Founder, was a formidable worker and a capable administrator, able to secure and consolidate the founding spirit in the Society. Even though not the Founder's confidant, he was the only one endowed with the necessary knowledge and experience to fill his shoes. His way to the top leadership position led through an inner struggle that purified his religious motivation against enticing worldly ambitions of externalization.

Fr. Grosse Kappenberg, the appointed Superior General, turned out to be a providential solution in times of tensions exacerbated by the nationalism of World War II. His involvement in the international formation community in St. Gabriel and his experience of illness forged his conciliatory approach and helped to defuse the internal tensions and weaken national uniformity in the Society. His fatherly approach and capacity for listening facilitated his desire to encourage the Society toward international diversity.

Fr. Musinsky was the choice of the Society to address the post-conciliar identity crisis and conciliar renewal. His American background and profoundly religious and balanced personality helped him manage the difficult process of transition. He knew how to address difficulties by focusing on the spiritual core of the crisis that is the lack of intimate relationship with Christ and openness to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. He advocated a wise essentialism based on a personal spiritual life and missionary excellence as opposed to superficial reformism.

**Andrzej Miotk, SVD (Rome)**
***Historian at the Founder's Archive, Rome***

[157] John Füellenbach, "Our Group-charism as individual responsibility," [In:] https://www.adgentes.net/SVD%20Nemi%20Web%20reflections%20group%20charism%20b.html [Accessed: 15 December 2023].
[158] *AN*, 1976 June, 1.

I

10 December 1884 - 12 May 1886
**The"Foundational" approval of the Constitutions**



II

3 Novemeber 1890 - 27 April 1891
**The Foundation of a Congregation of Sisters**



III

29 September 1897 - 4 May 1898
**Government and Administration of the Society**



V

25 September 1920 - 25 November 1920
**The Adjustment of the Constitutions**



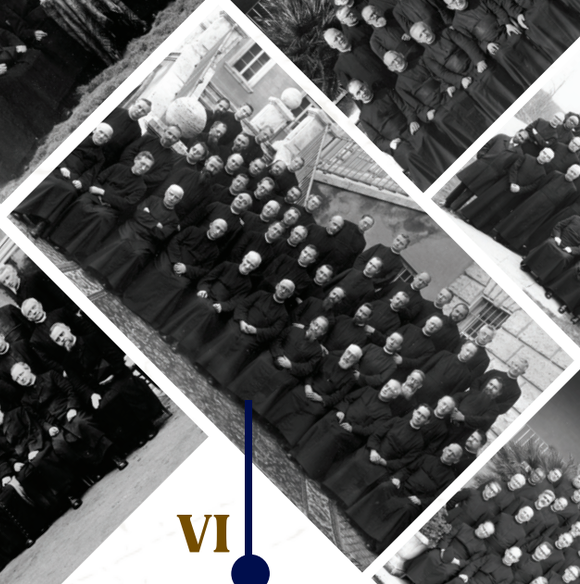
IV

3 November 1909 - 15 January 1910
**In the Footsteps of the Founder**



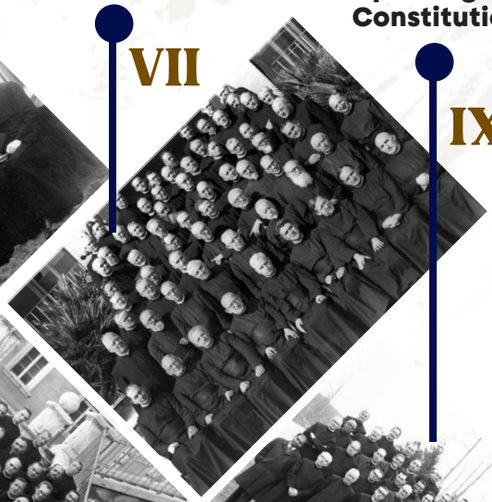
VI

26 September - 14 October 1932
**Religious and Missionary Life in the Society**



VII

22 September - 21 October 1947
**Unifying Chapter**



VIII

17 March - 23 April 1958
**Extraordinary with Modernizing Missionary Emphasis**



IX

8 November 1967 - 22 January 1968
**Renewal and Updating of the Constitutions**



X

2 November - 20 December 1972
**Chapter of Spiritual Renewal**

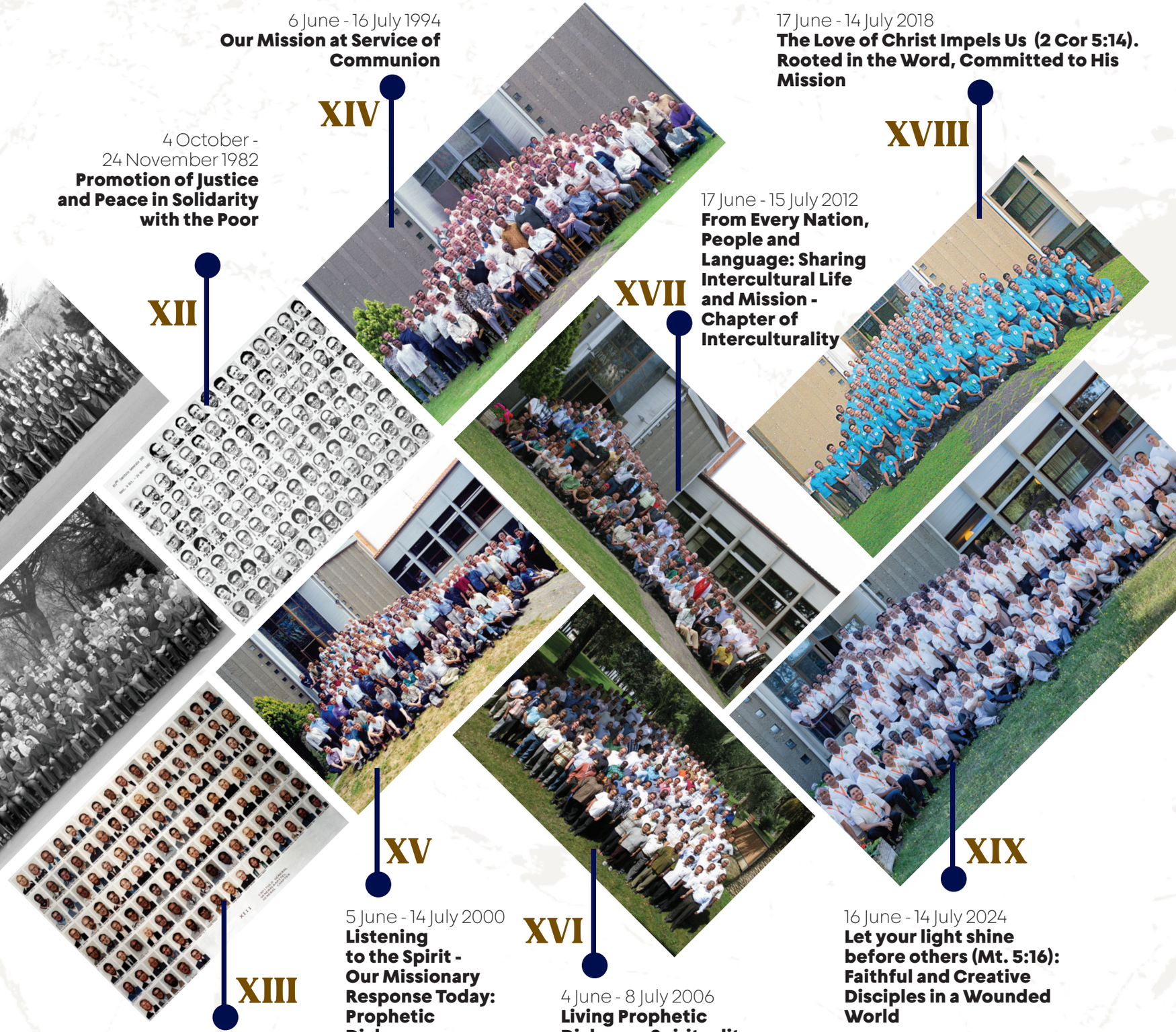


XI

4 October - 26 November 1977
**Revision of Constitutions, The "Brothers' Chapter" of Unity**



# Development of the SVD Life and Mission through its General Chapters



4 October - 24 November 1982
**Promotion of Justice and Peace in Solidarity with the Poor**

**XII**

4 June - 20 July 1988
**Our Missionary Activity, Spirituality and Formation "Passing Over"**

**XIII**

5 June - 14 July 2000
**Listening to the Spirit - Our Missionary Response Today: Prophetic Dialogue**

**XV**

6 June - 16 July 1994
**Our Mission at Service of Communion**

**XIV**

4 June - 8 July 2006
**Living Prophetic Dialogue: Spirituality, Community, Formation, Leadership, Finances**

**XVI**

17 June - 15 July 2012
**From Every Nation, People and Language: Sharing Intercultural Life and Mission - Chapter of Interculturality**

**XVII**

17 June - 14 July 2018
**The Love of Christ Impels Us (2 Cor 5:14). Rooted in the Word, Committed to His Mission**

**XVIII**

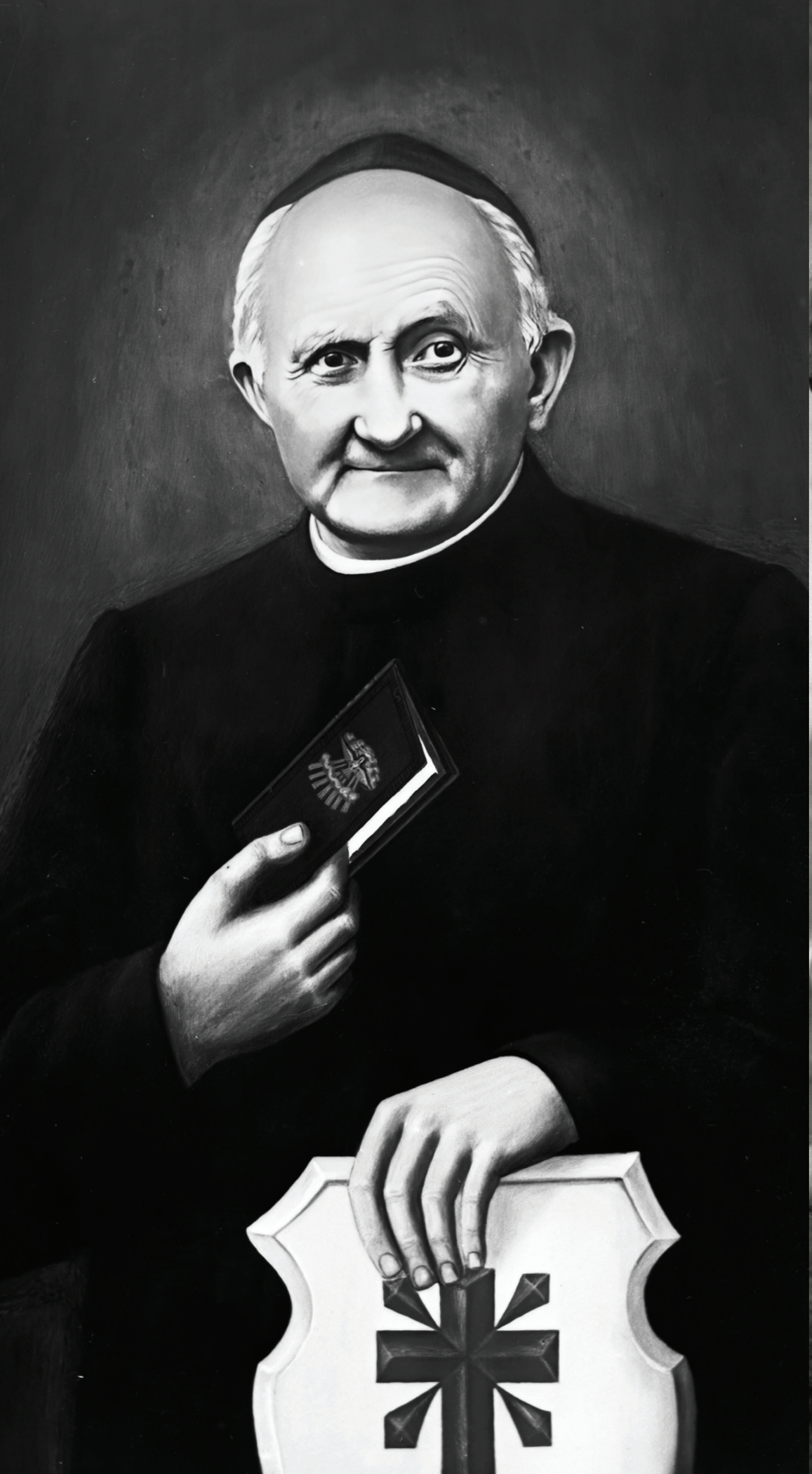
16 June - 14 July 2024
**Let your light shine before others (Mt. 5:16): Faithful and Creative Disciples in a Wounded World**

**XIX**



Chapter II

# SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE SOCIETY





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HEFT. / FASC.: 1.

REVUE INTERNATIONALE D'ETHNOLOGIE ET DE LINGUISTIQUE

# ANTHROPOS

EPHEMERIS INTERNATIONALIS ETHNOLOGICA ET LINGUISTICA

RIVISTA INTERNAZIONALE D'ETNOLOGIA E DI LINGUISTICA

REVISTA INTERNACIONAL DE ETNOLOGIA Y DE LINGÜISTICA

INTERNATIONAL REVIEW OF ETHNOLOGY AND LINGUISTICS

INTERNATIONALE ZEITSCHRIFT FÜR VÖLKER-U. SPRACHENKUNDE

The first issue of the Journal *Anthropos* of 1906

IM AUFTRAGE DER OESTERREICHISCHEN LEO-GESELLSCHAFT
MIT UNTERSTÜTZUNG DER DEUTSCHEN GÖRRES-GESELLSCHAFT
HERAUSGEGEBEN:

UNTER MITARBEIT ZAHLREICHER MISSIONARE
VON P. W. SCHMIDT S.V.D.

DRUCK U. VERLAG
ZAUNRITH'SCHE BUCH-, KUNST- UND STEINDRUCKEREI, AKT.-GES.
SALZBURG, OESTERREICH

# Anthropos Enterprise



The "Enterprise *Anthropos*" directly involved only a handful of the members of the Society of the Divine Word (SVD), but its influence can be detected throughout the history of the Society in several ways. Through focusing on the people in their cultural context, the work of the members of the Anthropos Institute contributed to the fact that the SVDs were becoming more conscious of the importance of the riches of the local cultures. That being said, the existence of a certain parallelism has to be admitted. On the one hand, a need for learning the local language and accommodating to the local lifestyle (which involved appreciation of at least certain features of the local culture) were taken in the SVD as almost self-evident.[1] On the other hand, the inherited modes of missionary work in their often proselytist understanding (not necessarily friendly to the local cultures) were carried out. Resolving the tension between these two attitudes has not always been easy and often left to individual decisions.

## The Historical Outline

As the ups and downs of the history of the journal and the Institute were already described a few times, only the basic facts will be recalled here as orientation points.[2]

[1] Their practical applications were determined by individual confreres in their current context of life.

[2] See e.g., Karl Josef Rivinius, *Die Anfänge des Anthropos,* Sankt Augustin 1981; Fritz Bornemann, *P. Wilhelm Schmidt S.V.D. (1868-1954)*, Romae 1982; Ernest Brandewie, *When Giants Walked the Earth. The Life and Times of Wilhelm Schmidt SVD*, Fribourg 1990; Stanisław Grodź, Sebastian Maria Michael, Roger Schroeder (eds.), *Giants' Footprints. 90th Anniversary of Anthropos Institute (1931-2021)* (Collectanea Instituti





**Left:** Wilhelm Schmidt, SVD, world known anthropologist and linguist

**Right:** The Anthropos Institute at Posieux, Froidville in Fribourg (1938-1962)

Wilhelm Schmidt (1868-1954) launched *Anthropos* journal at St. Gabriel in Mödling near Vienna in 1906. The journal was intended to be an academic forum of the exchange of recent findings and discussions in the field of cultural anthropology and linguistics. It was also meant to be a medium for publication of linguistic and ethnological material gathered by missionaries. The journal quickly gained recognition in academic circles.

As the group working with Schmidt was never numerous, he strove to secure an institutional backup for the publication of the journal. Following his request, the SVD General approved the newly written *Statutes* in November 1931 and Schmidt announced the launching of the Anthropos Institute.[3]

Because of the political situation in Austria, Schmidt had to leave the country and after a short period of uncertainty found a new home in canton Fribourg in Switzerland. Schmidt and later some of the Institute members were also welcomed at the University of Fribourg as lecturers. The Institute functioned in Posieux (Fribourg) until the beginning of the 1960s, although its last years were marked by a profound crisis.

A new chapter of the history of the Institute opened with the nomination of Wilhelm Saake, SVD (1910-1982), as the new director of the Institute in 1962 and its relocation to Sankt Augustin near Bonn in Germany. In the new place of a vibrant SVD presence – St. Augustin was a major SVD formation house in the German-speaking area at that time – the Institute gained a new life force but tried to secure as much independence as possible. The Institute was never incorporated into the structures of the developing SVD Missionary Major Seminary (which was eventually upgraded to a state recognized theological college – *Philosophical-Theological Hochschule*) but the Institute members actively participated in the educational process of the students. They also worked hard to mark the presence of the Institute in German Academia. The already existing editorial contacts were sustained, and new academic ones were initiated. That did not prevent further crises (in terms of staff and mode of operation) but the Institute withstood them all.

Anthropos, 53), Baden-Baden: Academia Verlag 2021.

[3] See: Schmidt's note announcing the launching of the Institute, *Anthropos,* 27 (1932), 275-277.

## Significance of the *Anthropos* Enterprise for the SVD

Although what we call today the "Anthropos tradition," marked the SVD from the very early time of the Society's existence, the Anthropos' influence was not always directly acknowledged. The so-called *Anthropos Patres* were perceived as people disrupting the daily routine of large house communities. Schmidt as a person-confrere and his scholarly work were contested also internally (apart from the external scholarly critique of his theories and academic and political engagement).[4] The work which the Anthropos Institute members conducted was sometimes ignored, or ridiculed, or questioned as wasting of resources that should have been used for "proper missionary work". Nevertheless, most of the SVD superiors general (beginning with Arnold Janssen himself) supported the journal and (later) the Institute as an important field of the SVD engagement.[5] Over the years, more than a hundred SVDs were assigned to be a part of the Anthropos team.[6]

Despite all odds, Schmidt and other Anthropos Institute members were able to instill interest in some of the young SVDs in cultural anthropology, linguistics and the study of religion, or other related disciplines. The fact that the SVD seminary teaching *curriculum* included the basic introductions to to some of these disciplines became gradually taken as a matter of course. The *Constitutions*[7] urged the SVDs not only to learn local languages but also to gather information and collect material evidence of aspects of local cultures. Members were encouraged to send these objects to the headquarters of the Society. In consequence, many SVD houses built up collections of objects from foreign lands and displayed them for visitors. The reasons for doing that were a combination of various factors but the SVD candidates from the very moment of their entry into the Society lived in an environment to some extent permeated by the presence of art and everyday objects from foreign cultures.[8]

Although the achievements of the Institute members on the external fora were named on many earlier occasions, they should not go unnoticed.[9] Above all, the uninterrupted publishing of an academic journal since 1906 is not a small achievement.[10] Co-organization by Schmidt and his early collaborators of *Semaines d'Ethnologie Religieuse* (Louvain 1912, 1913, Tilburg 1922, Milan 1925, Luxemburg 1929) in order to make the Western Churches aware of the need to treat the local cultures seriously and engage with them is, perhaps, mainly of historical value. But the publication of the results of field research of the members of the Institute is being found as meaningful still today.[11] Pope Pius XI entrusted Schmidt with the organization of the International World Mission Exhibition in Rome in 1925. Schmidt involved several of his collaborators in that endeavor. One of them – Michael Schulien, SVD (1888-1968) – became the director of the *Pontificio Museo Missionario-Etnologico Lateranense*, which developed from that exhibition.

The existence of the Anthropos Institute encouraged the launching of other new scholarly institutions. The Institute itself started its local branches in India, Japan and Brazil.







Matin Gusinde - the only anthropologist who had been capable of conducting an in-depth study of the Selk'nam, Yamana, and Kawésqar under took four research trips to *Tierra del Fuego* (1918-1924)

[4] Bornemann mentioned it on several occasions.
[5] Schmidt perceived the Academia as particularly his "missionary field."
[6] See the Appendices in Grodź, Michael, Schroeder (eds.), *Giants' Footprints*.
[7] See especially: No. 285 of the *pre-1983 Constitutions* (e.g., *Constitutiones Societatis Verbi Divini*, Steyl 1957).
[8] This refers primarily to the European or "Western" formation houses.
[9] See for example: the SVD jubilee books.
[10] Some of the volumes appeared as combined ones but the continuity of the publishing has not been broken.
[11] See for example: the results of a recent linguistic research referring to the findings of Paul Schebesta: Christa Kilian-Hatz, *The Linguistic Link between (Western) baMbenga and (Eastern) baMbuti Pygmies,* Studia Instituti Anthropos 58, Baden-Baden 2019. The new interest in Martin Gusinde's photographs from his trips to *Tierra del Fuego* (1918-1924): Christine Barthe, Xavier Barral (eds.), *L'esprit des hommes de la Terre de Feu*, Paris: Éditions Xavier Barral 2015 (also in German, English and Spanish). A new interest in "purely ethnographical" material gathered and published by Hugo Huber during his stay in Gold Coast (present Ghana) (work is in progress and may appear in print in 2025).



The community with our Anthrpologists of Froideville late 40s

But there were several other initiatives which developed over the years. Some withered away, others developed into independent local units adjacent or integrated into the local academic establishment. The Institute members played key roles in launching and running ethnological institutes at the universities in Vienna (Austria), Fribourg (Switzerland), Nagoya (Japan) and Cebu City (the Philippines). These actions were not taken "on the margins of the SVD" or only as own initiatives of the Institute members but involved the Society itself.[12]

A tension between two basic trends within the SVD has been present throughout the years and sometimes erupted in debates and disagreements. The adherents of the first one opted for "a more practical" application of the research results of Anthropos members (and generally of social sciences) for the missionary work of the SVD. The followers of the other one wanted to remain "on the purely scholarly level" of researching, publishing and debating without any direct "enmeshing" into the theological realm and missionary actions. The debates which led to the creation of Anthropos Institute International were also marked by that tension.[13] They were not completely futile, as shown by the example of Louis Luzbetak's contribution, or the engagement of the Anthropos members in shaping such concepts as cross-culturality, or current involvement in developing the concept and practicalities of interculturality.[14]

## Present Challenges

The history of the Institute was marked by two "geographical crossing-overs" – from Mödling to Posieux and from Posieux to St. Augustin – and a "virtual one," i.e. the restructuring of Anthropos Institute into Anthropos Institute International (AII) in 2001.[15] The AII was to be a worldwide network of SVD scholars trained in the Anthropos tradition who were to cooperate in a new mode, while the old office (center) of the Institute became the publishing unit of the new network. There were, however, serious problems to make that network function, leading to the conclusion that the last change was formally made but has not been really put into practice, yet. A clinch of two different visions of how the Institute should function and what were its main goals paralyzed the development of that network. A personality clash remained somehow in the background of all those changes. In the retrospective view, these difficulties had not only negative results. It is highly probable, that because of that clinch, we still have the journal, while the supporters of the network-only idea considered the journal a blast from the past era that should have been abandoned.

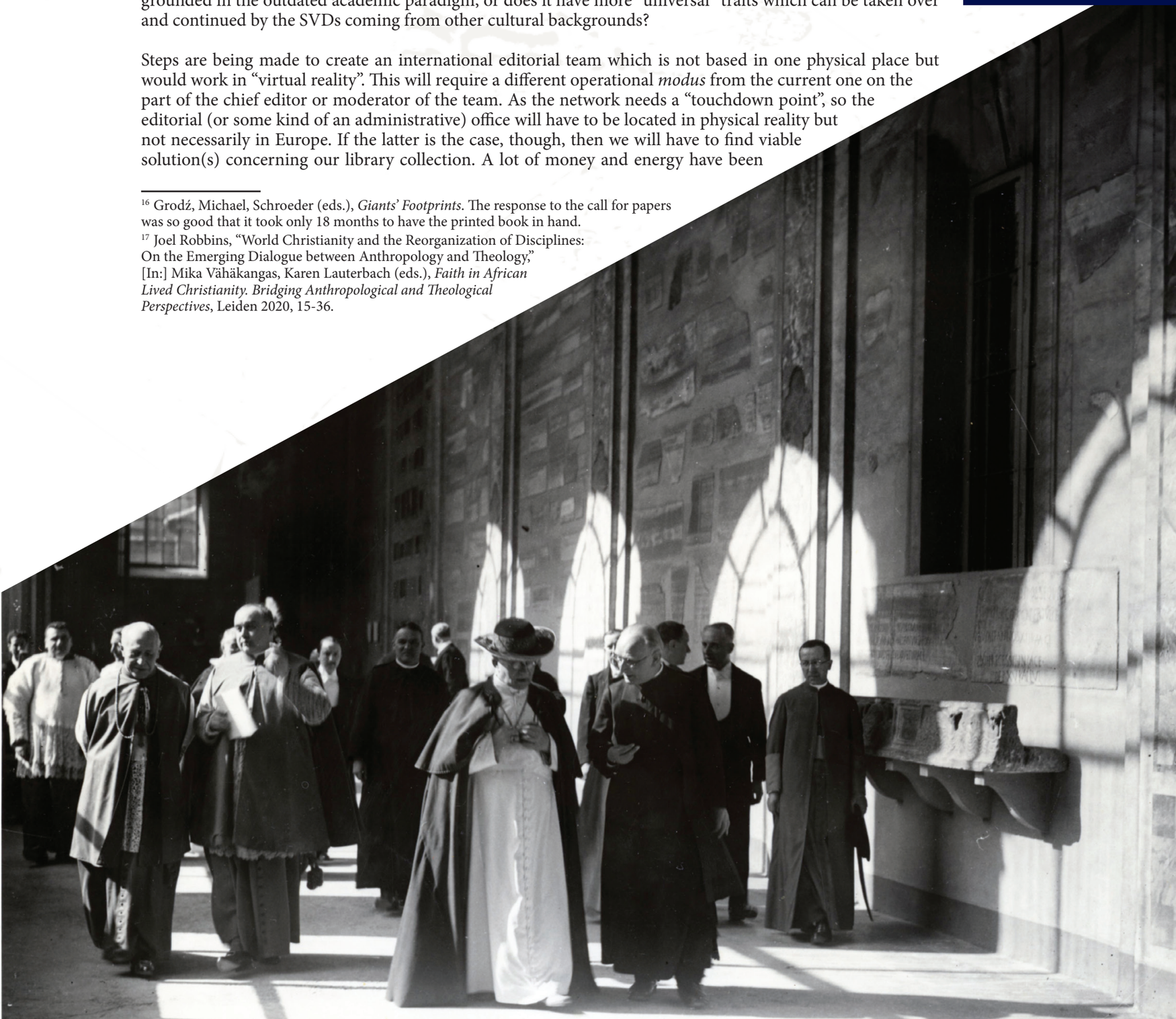
Steps to invigorate the network have been taken recently. The edited volume on the past and present

[12] Josef Salmen, in his obituary of Stephen Fuchs (1908-2000), *Anthropos,* 95 (2000), 538) remarked: "The General Chapter of the SVD in 1947 decided that every mission region should have someone trained in ethnology to help in the work of the mission."
[13] See: Stanisław Grodź, "Anthropos Institute – An Institution in the Background," [In:] Grodź, Michael, Schroeder (eds.), *Giants' Footprints*, 25-26. See also the views of Ennio Mantovani on the matter: "Towards a New Vision for the Anthropos Institute," *Verbum SVD,* 45 (2004), fasc.1, 39-55; "Anthropos Tradition in the SVD Yesterday and Today", *Verbum SVD,* 46 (2005), fasc. 2, 207-223.
[14] Louis Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures. New Perspectives in Missiological Anthropology*, Maryknoll, NY, 1988 (1st ed. with the subtitle "An Applied Anthropology for the Religious Worker" appeared in 1963). Stanislaus T. Lazar, Martin Üffing (eds.), *Intercultural Living* and *Intercultural Mission*, New Delhi 2015. Stanislaus T. Lazar, Christian Tauchner (eds.), *Becoming Intercultural. Perspectives on Mission*, New Delhi 2021.
[15] "Virtual" not in the sense of moving into the cyberspace but moving from a center-oriented structure to a network. Stanisław Grodź, Sebastian Maria Michael, "Introduction," [In:] Grodź, Michael, Schroeder (eds.), *Giants' Footprints*, 9-10. The new Statutes of the Institute were approved by the generalate in 2006.

of the Institute was published in English on the occasion of the 90th anniversary of the Institute.[16] Apart from treating the history of the Institute, the book also gave glimpses into the impressive recent research carried out by the AII members in various parts of the world. Out of three online consultations held by the AII members, which took place in the years 2021-2023, two dealt with organizational issues but the third one, attended by 13 members spread from California through Africa and Europe to Papua New Guinea, focused on a chosen topic of touchpoints between anthropology and theology.[17]

The challenge concerning the identity of the Institute is still to be tackled. The journal *Anthropos* determined the Institute's identity from the very beginning and a lot of activities of the members were conducted "in the shadow" of running the journal. Can the Institute reshape its identity in such a way that the journal would not need to be its focal point? And if so, what could it be? The question has almost immediate implications because the current editorial team consists of the "last" Europeans. Is the journal only a "European endeavor," grounded in the outdated academic paradigm, or does it have more "universal" traits which can be taken over and continued by the SVDs coming from other cultural backgrounds?

Steps are being made to create an international editorial team which is not based in one physical place but would work in "virtual reality". This will require a different operational *modus* from the current one on the part of the chief editor or moderator of the team. As the network needs a "touchdown point", so the editorial (or some kind of an administrative) office will have to be located in physical reality but not necessarily in Europe. If the latter is the case, though, then we will have to find viable solution(s) concerning our library collection. A lot of money and energy have been



The Director of the Missionary and Ethnological Museum in the Lateran Palace in Rome, Fr. Wilhelm Schmidt, guiding Pope Pius XI during his visit to the Museum on 20 December 1929

[16] Grodź, Michael, Schroeder (eds.), *Giants' Footprints*. The response to the call for papers was so good that it took only 18 months to have the printed book in hand.

[17] Joel Robbins, "World Christianity and the Reorganization of Disciplines: On the Emerging Dialogue between Anthropology and Theology," [In:] Mika Vähäkangas, Karen Lauterbach (eds.), *Faith in African Lived Christianity. Bridging Anthropological and Theological Perspectives*, Leiden 2020, 15-36.




*Haus Völker und Kulturen* (HVK – the House of Peoples and Cultures) in St. Augustin

invested in building it up. Scholars and students who visit it are amazed at its size and contents. Digitalization seems to offer a solution nowadays, but it is not devoid of dangers because the texts are accessible only through increasingly complicated technology which is not flawless.[18]

Still another challenge appeared recently in St. Augustin. Apart from a constantly growing library, the Institute also owned an expanding collection of ethnographical objects from various parts of the world illustrating the richness of various local cultures. Initially, the collection was displayed at the ground floor of the new building of the Institute in St. Augustin. In the late 1960s, director Wilhelm Saake took an offer of some SVDs working in Papua New Guinea to purchase ethnographic items for the collection in St. Augustin. The purchase was made and shipped to Germany with the financial help of the donors. Efforts to acquire a more appropriate space for displaying the newly purchased objects were crowned with the construction of a new building on the SVD campus at St. Augustin. It has been named *Haus Völker und Kulturen* (HVK – the House of Peoples and Cultures) since the name and the concept of an "ethnographical museum" were already then problematic. The collection, enhanced by new acquisitions made in various places in Africa, grew to several thousand objects. All who visited the HVK know how rich the collection is. Currents of life led to changes that the Institute and the HVK drifted apart, but new currents of life brought both institutions recently together.[19] The SVDs gathered an impressive collection of objects and artefacts of ethnographic significance, presented them proudly to the public, and used it as expressive means of acquainting its members with foreign cultures. In the current context of easy accessibility of information and pictures, and quick travel possibilities, the collection (partly) lost its significance. The recent pressure for an almost compulsory restitution of ethnographical objects makes the situation additionally difficult. Are these objects only a ballast from the past? Should they be returned to their original locations, or can they find another role? And is it only an issue for those SVDs residing in the Western world?

Apart from the above-mentioned challenges, Roger Schroeder, the Coordinator of AII, named still other ones: a long and expensive process of preparing the potential staff for the Institute and a need for a more clearly

[18] At some point people may be left with useless reading tools but no texts to read. Many "wonder-solutions" (apart from instant advantages) brought about new problems which were discovered only much later.
[19] The HVK remains closed, but the current director of the Institute in St. Augustin was given a task of exploring possible ways of making use of the HVK collection.

spelled-out link between the AII and the missionary preparation and practice of the SVD.[20] Although the first one has been known for years and the SVD has been able to tackle it with some success, it does pose a constant challenge to the SVD. Searching for answers to the second one is linked with our understanding of "mission" – in what ways do the SVDs make known/proclaim God's Kingdom among the people and peoples?

The work of the Anthropos Institute International may not be easily classified as a "missionary" one. Still, it has been leaving its imprint on the functioning of the SVD – a missionary society – and hopefully will do so in the coming years with mutual benefits.

**Stanisław Grodź, SVD (Germany)**
***Director of Anthropos Institute, Sankt Augustin***

[20] Roger Schroeder, "Conclusion," [In:] Grodź, Michael, Schroeder (eds.), *Giants' Footprints*, 321-323.



The current location of Anthropos Institute in St. Augustin since 1962





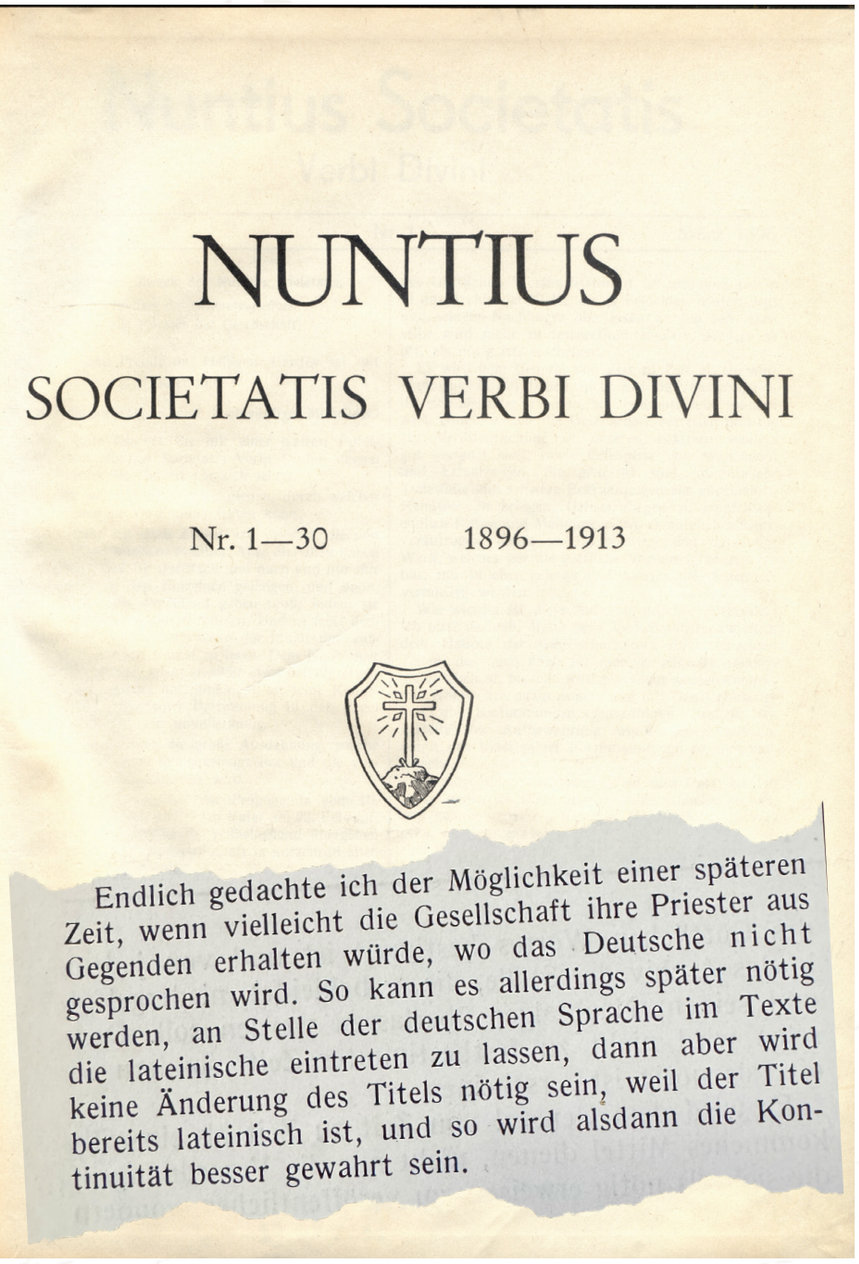
# Diverse is Beautiful, Diverse is Divine: From Internationality to Interculturality



It is interesting to note that, while Arnold Janssen referred to the national mission societies of some countries in Europe (e.g., France, Italy, England) in order to gain support from German Catholics for his project of a mission house in Germany,[21] the mission congregation he actually founded was not national but international. Indeed, the three men who joined him at the start of the Society in 1875 were from three different nationalities: German, Austrian and one from Luxembourg. Internationality may, therefore, be considered a fundamental characteristic of the Society of the Divine Word (SVD) from the very beginning - a feature which has marked its 150 years of existence.

In its history, however, a transition may be discerned from the emphasis on "internationality" (or the mere fact of the Society being composed of members originating from various nationalities) to the focus on "interculturality" (or the sustained interaction of members of different cultural backgrounds leading to the transformation and enrichment of each one and everyone).[22]

[21] Alt, *Journey*, 916.
[22] Stanislaus T. Lazar, SVD and Martin Üffing, SVD (eds.), *Intercultural Living*, Vol. 1,


NUNTIUS

SOCIETATIS VERBI DIVINI

Nr. 1—30 1896—1913

Endlich gedachte ich der Möglichkeit einer späteren Zeit, wenn vielleicht die Gesellschaft ihre Priester aus Gegenden erhalten würde, wo das Deutsche nicht gesprochen wird. So kann es allerdings später nötig werden, an Stelle der deutschen Sprache im Texte die lateinische eintreten zu lassen, dann aber wird keine Änderung des Titels nötig sein, weil der Titel bereits lateinisch ist, und so wird alsdann die Kontinuität besser gewahrt sein.

## 1. Internationality

As a feature characterizing the Society, internationality may be said to be rooted in the intention of the Founder and, as such, may be seen as a defining mark of its history.

### 1.1. Rooted in the Intention of the Founder[23]

From early 1875, the Founder wrote about a "German-Austrian," and later a "German-Austrian-Dutch," mission house. From the start, he had hoped that representatives of different nations would become members of his congregation, and thus thought of Rome as its headquarters. "In this way all national quarrels and tensions within the Society would be nipped in the bud."

Already the very first General Chapter in 1885 sought to "liberate the Society from its national limitations, provide it with far more members and helpers, and thus ensure a greater development within a short time." The February Rule which resulted from the Chapter contained a strict prohibition against criticizing "the nationality of a confrere or promote one's own at the expense of others." The September Rule developed this further, stating that confreres should "avoid false pride in their own nation. For that contradicted not only the goal of the Society but also the spirit of the Church and the Spirit of God. God wants all nations to be as brothers of the one Christian family without arrogance and without contempt for other nations."

And then, when the Superior General's official gazette was introduced, it was given a Latin name, *Nuntius Societatis Verbi Divini*. Thinking of the future internationality of the Society, the Founder remarked: "Finally the possibility came to my mind that later, perhaps, the Society will recruit priests from places where German is not spoken. Maybe later it will be necessary to replace German with Latin in the text. In that case, there would be no need to change the name because the name would be in Latin already and in this way continuity would be ensured."

### 1.2. A Defining Mark of the Society's History

A consequence of the observation above is that, wherever the Society established itself, it was always ready to accept into its ranks, members from the indigenous population. Thus, by the time the Society celebrated its 85th year in 1960, it had members coming from about 35 nationalities. The biggest group, the Germans, comprised a little less than 40%. Then followed the Americans, the Dutch, the Poles, and the Argentinians.[24] Today, the Society's more or less 6,000 members come from some 76 nationalities. And the biggest groups are now the Indonesians, the Indians, the Poles, the Filipinos.

XXIV.

[23] Alt, *Journey*, 916ff.

[24] Fritz Bornemann, „Die Gesellschaft des Göttlichen Wortes - Ein internationaler Orden," *StMChr*, 1960/61, 183.

In the Society's history, however, two phases of its experience of internationality may be identified, namely, "geographic internationality" (or simply, internationality) and "intercultural internationality" (or simply, interculturality).

***Geographic Internationality***

The first phase coincided largely with the period before Vatican II. It entailed nothing more than the presence of the Society in several countries and the presence in the congregation of members coming from various nationalities. During this first phase, little attention, if any, was given to the specificity of the cultures of members originating from other countries or continents. Instead, the expectation was that these members learn, and adapt themselves to, the dominant culture of the Society, which was European (specifically German). Indeed, at this stage, what happened was that what was done in Europe was largely repeated in such places as Argentina, the USA, Brazil, the Philippines, Indonesia, India, etc. The formation program of the "mother province" in Europe was simply transported and copied in the "mission provinces" in America, Asia, Africa and Oceania. Thus, during this phase, while the Society was present in America, Africa, Oceania and Asia, it was present as a largely European congregation.

During this phase, what was at work was a certain centralized uniformity rather than genuine interculturality. While this gave a strong sense of unity to the Society, it did not take into account the particular richness of each specific culture. Only one kind of SVD was being created, and obviously only one way of living the religious life and doing missionary work, based on the Society's dominant culture. Indeed, at this stage, one had the feeling that in order to become an SVD one had to learn to be European and set aside being an Indonesian, Japanese, Brazilian or African.

***Intercultural Internationality***

The second phase came with Vatican II and its positive evaluation of the cultures of peoples. Theology began speaking of inculturation and the building up of the local Church. There was no longer just one way of being Church or being Christian in the world. There are as many modalities as there are cultures. Similarly, in the SVD, the insight began to develop that there was not just one way of being SVD and that the charism of the Founder could find different expressions among the various cultures of different peoples. Like the Gospel, the original charism of the Society not only could enrich but also could be enriched by the cultures in which it incarnates itself. This led to a situation whereby the Society came to be seen as being composed no longer of members from different nationalities all learning the one "SVD culture" (based on the dominant European culture) but of members from different nationalities sharing the richness of their cultural diversity. Gradually the Society became not just the home of one culture but the place for the interaction of various cultures.

Two developments in the Society led to this fuller experience of internationality. The first was when what used to be "mission-receiving" provinces and regions began to regularly send missionaries to other parts of the world. This turn of events took place among the main Asian provinces in the mid-1980s. This led to a situation whereby more than 1,000 Asian SVDs








**Above:** Divine Word Missionaries in the world, part of an exhibition at the Divine Word Biblical Centre, Quito

**Center:** SVD Bishops at the Vatican II

**Below:** Members of the Second International Preparatory Commission in Rome, 16-24 April 2018






**Left:** BRN Participants of Interculturation Course with the Secretary General of CNBB - Bp. Joel Portella Amado

**Right:** Logo for the 17th General Chapter

are working outside their own countries. These and around 250 African and Latin American SVDs working outside Africa and Latin America have given "color" to what was heretofore a white man's domain and has led to the internationalization of the Society's provinces and regions around the world.

The second development was the so-called "Roscommon Consensus," the statement of the provincial superiors of the European zone gathered in Roscommon (Ireland) in 1990 which declared secularized Europe to be also a "mission territory" analogous to the mission situations in Africa, Asia, Oceania and Latin America. Thus, it was felt that Europe also had the right to ask for and receive missionaries from elsewhere. A practical consequence of this was that the older European provinces, which used to receive "first assignments" only from their own formation houses, were now receiving missionaries from Asia, Africa, Oceania and Latin America. This led to the internationalization of the formerly largely homogeneous provinces of Europe.

## 2. Interculturality

The shift to the focus on "interculturality" received official recognition at the 17th General Chapter of 2012 whose theme was "From every nation, people and language: Sharing intercultural life and mission." This Chapter acknowledged that "Interculturality is a distinguishing feature and an essential part of our identity" (IDW 2012/11, No. 26, 23). Interculturality received a further boost at the 18th General Chapter of 2018 which declared that "interculturality is part of our DNA" (IWD 2018/6, 31, 32). This Chapter further stated that interculturality is "the way we live and do our mission as individuals and as communities" (IWD 2018/6, 31, 32).

### 2.1. Intercultural life

Our Constitutions underline the need to promote interculturality in our community life in the conviction that it is a value that enriches our community living (see: for instance, cc. 113.1, 504.1, 303.1). Intercultural communities, however, do not come about automatically by simply putting together under the same roof confreres from different nations or cultures. True intercultural communities "need to be consciously created, intentionally promoted, carefully cared for, and attentively nurtured" (IDW 2012/11, No. 30, 25). Sharing intercultural life with culturally diverse confreres, therefore, requires some essential attitudes, among which the following three seem to be fundamental.[25]

***Recognition of other cultures*** – the attitude of allowing minority cultures to be visible in the community and resisting the temptation to ignore or disregard them. This will entail not just tolerating but valuing their pres-

[25] Robert Schreiter, "Ministry for a Multicultural Church," [In:] http://www.sedos.org [Accessed: 15 December 2023].

ence and role in the community. Often this will require that elements of the minority cultures are allowed to be used for certain community activities, e.g., meals, worship, recreation.

***Respect for cultural difference*** – the attitude of allowing the different to be different, and therefore of avoiding any attempt to level off cultural differences by subsuming minority cultures into the dominant culture, or expecting that minority cultures conform to the ways of the dominant culture. This will mean that the search for unity in the community will be based not on unity as uniformity, but on unity as unity-in-diversity.

***Promotion of healthy interaction among cultures*** – the attitude of actively creating a climate whereby the various cultures of the community can be made to interact with each other. This requires the openness of each culture to be enriched and transformed by others, as well as the confidence about the value of one's culture, and a sense of security that is not threatened by the encounter with difference and diversity.

### 2.2. Intercultural Mission

Because of its interculturality, the Society today feels particularly called to respond to the missionary challenges of an increasingly multicultural world, by engaging in various ministries to migrants, refugees and other displaced people. The larger goal, however, of sharing an intercultural mission with the poor and marginalized is the mission of promoting a truly intercultural Church – that is, a Church characterized by, among others, the following three features.

***Home for people of different cultures*** – a Church seen by strangers and foreigners not just as a tolerant but also as a welcoming Church. The Church will be more welcoming if it promotes in itself (*ad intra*) the three essential attitudes mentioned above, namely, recognition of other cultures, respect for cultural difference, and healthy interaction among cultures. With these characteristics, an intercultural Church will be a community where people of various cultures feel they belong.

**Left:** The largest ever General Chapter in Rome, 2006

**Right:** Fr. Anthony Le Duc, SVD, Intercultural Liturgy in action, Thailand









***Instrument of intercultural dialogue in society*** – a Church that does not limit itself to just caring for those who belong to its community, i.e., strangers and foreigners who are Christians or Catholics, but one which also looks beyond itself and ministers to non-Christian migrants, refugees and other displaced people by being an instrument of intercultural dialogue in the larger society. The Church will need to work towards creating in the larger human community (*ad extra*) the conditions whereby the three essential attitudes mentioned above can be realized.

***Sign of the all-inclusiveness of God's Kingdom*** – a Church that fosters genuine interculturality within itself (*ad intra*) and promotes intercultural dialogue outside itself (*ad extra*) will be a credible sign of the all-inclusiveness of the Kingdom of God. It will be witness to the universality and openness to diversity of God's Kingdom. It will be a proclamation that the Kingdom includes everyone and excludes no one, and that in it there are no strangers or foreigners but only brothers and sisters. It will be an image of the universal gathering in the end time "of people of every nation, race, tribe and language ... standing in front of the throne and in front of the Lamb, dressed in white robes and holding palms in their hands" (Rev 7:9).

## 3. Conclusion

The transition in our Society from "internationality" to "interculturality" may be seen as a shift from the search for "uniformity" to the promotion of "diversity," or a shift from aiming at "sameness" to fostering "difference." It is a transition which, inspired by the Holy Spirit, responds to the signs of the times. The way we share intercultural life and mission in the Society can mirror to the world at large what it means to transition from mere "multiculturality" (the mere co-existence of various cultures in the world) to genuine "interculturality" (the enriching interaction among different cultures).

Our interculturality can be a powerful witness to the fact that, if inspired by the Gospel, our cultural differences are not necessarily a cause of tension and conflict, but a source of mutual enrichment and growth. Multiculturality, or the diversity of cultures in the world, does not have to be a danger or a threat. It is, indeed, a challenge and an opportunity. It is not something to be opposed or rejected, nor only to be tolerated or accepted. Rather, it is something to be welcomed and embraced.

Multiculturality in the world can be seen as the fruit of God's creative act, reflecting God's own being. For, as we know, our God is not a solitary monad but a koinonia of three divine persons. Patristic theology used to speak of the things in creation as "*vestigia Trinitatis,*" "traces of the Trinity." Similarly, multiculturality can be regarded as a "*vestigium Trinitatis*"—a "trace of the Trinity." Thus, sharing intercultural life and mission can be a uniquely SVD way of encountering the Triune God. Indeed, interculturality in the Society is nothing else but a necessary implication of the Society's Trinitarian spirituality.






In the debate in the 1980's about sustainable development and appropriate technology, the slogan was "small is beautiful." Today, in the context of an increasingly multicultural world, we can recast this slogan into "diverse is beautiful," or even "diverse is divine," for diversity is a characteristic of the One and Triune God. *Vivat Deus Unus et Trinus in Cordibus Hominum.*

**Antonio Pernia, SVD (Philippines)**
***Former Superior General (2000-2012), now Lecturer at the Divine Word Institute of Mission Studies, Tagaytay City***




*Vivat Deus Unus et Trinus in Cordibus Hominum.* The Founder's Chapel in St. Gregory House



# Option With the Poor: An Imperative of Evangelizing Mission



The *Prologue* of the *1983/1995 Constitutions* of the Society of the Divine Word states:

> The Holy Spirit repeatedly raises up communities which place themselves at the disposal of the church to help accomplish its missionary task… In response to the call of the Holy Spirit and the needs of peoples, Blessed (Saint) Arnold Janssen founded our Society as a missionary community. We see our special dedication to the Divine Word and his mission expressed in our name. His life is our life, his mission our mission.

The above encapsulates *who* the Divine Word missionaries are and *what* they do - a religious missionary congregation dedicated to participating in the Church's missionary task of proclaiming the Word of God (Cons. 102). This missionary task is the end and aim of the Society thus, all activities of its members, diverse though they be, are ultimately intended to contribute to accomplishing the Church's missionary task (*Prologue*).

The phrase, *'His life is our life, his mission our mission*' echoes the phrase *The confreres shall, through a life of poverty, chastity, and obedience, take on the life of Jesus Christ….*[26] The two phrases suggest that the core of '*who*' the SVDs are and their '*what*' – the task they carry out in their mission work have remained *constant,* though there have been circumstantial changes over the years since the foundation of the Society. The occasion of the Society's Sesquicentennial Celebration – the 150th Year since its foundation, is an opportunity to ponder on the SVD mission (which flows from its identity) in

[26] *The Common Constitutions and Statutes of the Society of the Divine Word from the Year 1891*, Rule, No. 1, [In:] https://www.svdcuria.org/members/histtrad/docs/consten1897.pdf.






**Above:** The poor beginnings of the Society

**Below:** Verbo Divino outreach to the poor during Covid-19 pandemic in Rome

a quest to answer the question: Has the Society remained faithful to its identity and mission as the Founder, Saint Arnold Janssen had envisaged? As part of answering this question, I place some reflections on a core intrinsic characteristic of the SVD identity and mission, that is, what is today referred to with the phrase, "Option with the Poor" – concern/attention for the poor, the marginalized and the oppressed in society.

The article is divided into two main points. The first point deals with the anchor – that is, the source and foundation of the SVD option with the poor in mission service; the second point is a brief pondering on how in the SVD's implementing of the option with the poor in its mission service, there has been a radical shift of perspective in the understanding of the option with the poor and how this shift in perspective has affected the Society's praxis of the option.

## 1. Source and Foundation of the Option for the Poor

Through profession of the three evangelical counsels - chastity, poverty, and obedience, SVDs take on the life of the Divine Word (Cons. 201-220). This they do in view of participating in the missionary task of the Church. The profession of the evangelical vow of poverty, which attaches an SVD to Jesus Christ, is a choice, a commitment, "like Christ to be one with the poor" (Cons. 207) by professing the vow of poverty in the Society therefore, it is deemed that one has freely opted for/with the poor; has made a public declaration to follow the example of the Jesus Christ, who himself took such a stand for the poor as is evident in his choice of biblical text to express his mission – a declaration of purpose, content, and manner of carrying out that mission:

> The spirit of the Lord is on me, for he has anointed me therefore to bring the good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives, sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim a year of favor from the Lord (Luke 4:18-19).

It is surmised from this declaration that, embedded in, intrinsic to, and forming a constitutive and indispensable dimension of Jesus Christ's mission of proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom is the *option with the poor*. Hence, one who professes the vow of poverty as an SVD, *takes on the life of Jesus Christ* and incorporated in the profession of the vow is a public declaration/commitment to act like Jesus on behalf of and with the poor for/with them to find release and set free from their situations and conditions of captivity due to poverty and marginalization. It is thus, to be appreciated that embedded in and forming an integral-intrinsic and indispensable part of their vowed life and mission in the Church is the option with the poor. This is because the option with the poor takes place in the very act of the profession of the vow of evangelical poverty. For, as stated in the *Constitutions* of the Society, "Poverty as lived by Christ demands of us solidarity with the poor and oppressed. We work with them to defend their rights and overcome their misery" (Cons. 209). And this is a choice that has implications for the mission work – a choice from which the mission work flows (or should flow) and is sustained. For as a missionary community, the SVDs pledge through their vow of poverty, individual and communal responsibility, and to give witness to it (Cons. 210).

The option with the poor, for SVDs is thus rooted, anchored, and embedded in their vow of evangelical poverty, which is a public declaration, a means, and a sign of taking on the life of Jesus Christ; his life becoming their life and his mission their mission.

## 2. From Addressing Symptoms to Tackling Root Causes

Having reflected briefly on the anchor of the SVD option with the poor, in a bird's-eye-view, attention is now turned to the practice of the option in the mission work of the SVD within the broader context of the mission service of the Church. It is important to keep in mind that the SVD has no mission of its own but shares in the








**Left:** Pact of the Catacombs signed in Domitilla Catacombs, 1965

**Right:** Fr. Leo Krzeminski, SVD, distributing alms to beggar after Sunday Mass in Ratlam, India

mission of the Church. The Church's mission is not of its own either, but the mission (*missio*) entrusted to it by the Triune God (*Dei*). For, by its very nature the Church is missionary and has its origin in the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit (AG 2); and being "a people brought into the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" (*Redemptoris Missio* 20), its missionary nature derived from the overflowing of the trinitarian life "is effectively and concretely at the service of the kingdom" (RM 20). The implementation of the SVD option for the poor in mission service therefore is not in isolation or detached from the missionary service of the Church. But rather incorporated in it and affected by it. The reflection in this part has two aspects. The first aspect sheds light on the implementation of the option with the poor in SVD mission work before Vatican II. The second aspect deals with the implementation after Vatican II.

### *Option for the Poor Before Vatican II*

The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that the Church has a special love and concern for the poor, which is a part of her constant tradition – a special love and concern "inspired by the Gospel of the Beatitudes, of the poverty of Jesus and his concern for the poor."[27] In light of this *constancy* of the Church's special love for the poor and its implementation in its mission service through concrete acts of charity and care, Bevans and Schroeder write, "Down through the ages the church has been noted for its care of the poor and those on the margins of society, and this has always been seen as part of the church's missionary outreach."[28]

In consonance with the Church's implementation of the option with the poor in its mission service, in the case of the SVD mission work, da Silva, points out that in its history, its concern for the poor has been demonstrated in the mission work of its members "by their combating all kinds of destitution and promoting ways and means of creating better living conditions for the population by promoting education, health, progress and development of the people."[29] The numerous SVD-initiated or run educational institutions and facilities from kindergartens, primary and secondary schools through to universities; trade and technical/engineering schools, clinics, hospitals, orthopedic centers and the various socio-economic ventures spread across the globe support the assertion of da Silva. Then there are the special social funds that run into millions of dollars distributed annually by the Society to assist the poor and needy, and a variety of SVD-initiated development programs and projects geared towards improving and raising the quality of life of the poor.

[27] *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Revised Edition, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa 2010, No. 2444.
[28] Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder, *Constants in Context – A Theology of Mission for Today*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 2008, 369.
[29] José Antunes da Silva, *Prophetic Dialogue: Identity and Mission of the Divine Word Missionaries,* Studia Instituti Missiologici SVD 119, Siegburg: Franz Schmitt Verlag 2021, 313.



Through the years the Society has undertaken various actions in its mission service around the world, which are tangible indications of its implementation of the commitment to the option for the poor. Laudable though the various practical works of charity are, without which, if not all, some of the beneficiaries of these works would have found themselves in seriously desperate conditions of hunger, lack of shelter, medical care, illiteracy, etc., these practical works of charity are today considered inadequate measures. For, while they certainly provide some measures of relief, they do not tackle the core of the problem – the root cause/s of poverty and marginalization. The *core* of the problem being *injustices* of diverse types: sociocultural, economic and/or political, which have not and/or are not being dealt with sufficiently. In this regard, da Silva has noted that, "the mentality in missionary service was predominantly "assistantialist," that is, organizing practical help for the poor but not challenging the actual roots of poverty and injustice."[30]

### *Mission Approaches After Vatican II*

With the advent of Vatican Council II, the Church was provided the opportunity to critically self-examine and appraise its nature and mission in the modern world. This opportunity engendered a shift in perspective on the Church's option for the poor. This is evident in the following statements from the Council's document, *Gaudium et Spes*:

> In no other age has mankind enjoyed such an abundance of wealth, resources and economic well-being; and yet a huge proportion of the people of the world is plagued by hunger and extreme need while countless numbers are totally illiterate (4).

[30] José Antunes da Silva, *Prophetic Dialogue,* 313.





**Left:** Lay partner leader's work among the poor

**Right:** Relief operation during the Covid-19 pandemic

> Excessive economic and social disparity between individuals and peoples of the one human race is a source of scandal and militates against social justice, equity, human dignity, as well as social and international peace (29).

Significant to note in the quotations are the words - *justice and peace*, which are now the popularly used terms to characterize and designate the option for the poor agendas and issues, and express the Church's awakening to the need to confront the core underlining causes and issues of injustice in society head-on and commit itself to look at the causes and issues of poverty, marginalization and oppression through the prism of 'justice'.[31] It can therefore be said that with Vatican II, a new Church stance of boldly confronting social, political, economic and related illness began. Since then, the Society has kept abreast with developments in the understanding and praxis of the option for the poor in the Church and the world at large. Thus, for instance, in its Constitutions (WTW 1981/7, 318) drawn up by its 9th General Chapter of 1967-68 (the years immediately after the deliberations of Vatican II) it was stated: "We consider our efforts toward a more widespread recognition and appreciation of the dignity of the human person and of his inner values to be of greater importance than of any material help we can give" (Cons. 115.1), and "As apostles of the Lord we stand obligated to all men, but we wish to devote ourselves especially to the poor and those who are held in low esteem" (Cons. 115.2). This can be seen as a renewed and revamped recommitment of the Society to the cause of the poor. Unlike before, it was not enough for the SVDs in their mission work to provide the poor with aid in the form of practical material help. More importantly and crucially is to ensure that the dignity and the inner values of the poor are not trampled upon.

From the time of the Second Vatican Council through the subsequent years, the Society has kept in focus issues of the option for the poor. Thus, at its 10th General Chapter of 1972, it was emphasized that the Society as an entity and the members as individuals have the duty to continue to work tirelessly in their mission service for the total liberation of man, especially by working for the change from unjust and oppressive structures that are glaring and deplorable root causes of poverty.[32] And at the 11th General Chapter of 1977, the delegates in their deliberations chose '*the task of expressing our solidarity with the poor and the underprivileged and of speaking out in witness for love and peace based on justice*' as one of the priorities of the Society. (WTW 1978/1, 12) In Rome in March of 1981 a Mission Commission set up by the Society, stated emphatically that faith in Christ calls and demands of his followers the discovery of his presence among the poor in a world deeply scarred by injustice and to work for the establishment of his Kingdom through the healing of social relationships. To this end the Commission affirmed that the SVD commits itself to a preferential option for the poor and to social justice. (WTW 1981/7, par. 4) At its 15th General Chapter, the Society, adopting the term 'dialogue' as the deepest and best expression of its call to mission, declared the poor and the marginalized in society one of its four dialogue partners. Justice, peace and integrity of creation has become one of our four characteristic dimensions of the Society. We continue our mission with the prism of prophetic dialogue to guide our missionary activities today.

[31] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 1829.
[32] "The Relationship between Evangelization and Human Development," [In:] *Tenth General Chapter Document*, *Nuntius SVD,* Vol. IX, 1972, fasc. 4, 418-419.

The 17th General Chapter had drawn up ten Congregational Directions as guiding principles for our missionary activities, five of them belong to JPIC concerns in society. The 18th General Chapter made the choice of our mission as "putting the last first," and this was stressed even before the chapter itself. The chapter underlined: "The emphasis on missionary service to the poor is not an option since this is where we find the presence of the Word in the world. ***This mission is non-negotiable***" (IWD 2018/6, 42). Thus, over the years, the SVD have opted to work with the poor and especially concentrate on justice-oriented concerns, asserting human rights and human dignity, and establishing peace and harmony among the people**.**

The examples are numerous in this aspect. Every PRM has a JPIC coordinator, to work with the confreres coordinating various activities. The booklet *Faithful to the Word* on "Healing a Wounded World through JPIC" (FW 2022/4) has numerous examples that testify to our commitment.

## Conclusion

By professing the three evangelical vows, an SVD takes on the life and mission of Christ. Like Christ through the vow of poverty, the confrere commits to putting the concerns and aspirations of the poor at the center of his mission service after the example of the Divine Word. This concern for the poor is not limited to the provision of material aid, which are necessary and important, in certain cases. While not ignoring that, there ought to be concern and action toward dealing with and uprooting the root causes of poverty as is evidenced in the mission service of the SVDs wherever they work.

Since the option with the poor is embedded in, intrinsic to, and is a constitutive part of the vow of poverty professed by SVDs, we conclude that it is an imperative of their evangelizing mission. For by the very act of the profession of the vow, they make a commitment to those considered *last* in society, to put them *firs*t in their mission service.

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***Former Provincial Superior, and now***
***Apostolic Administrator of Francistown Diocese***











Roscommon - SVD Mission House - Donamon Castle, Ireland



# The Roscommon Consensus of 1990: Europe as Continent of Mission



The Word from the Leadership Team in the March 2012 edition of *Arnoldus Nota* started with the question "What's new in the SVD?" and talked about a "New Face" of the SVD in Europe. It states that (1) the face of the SVD in Europe is no longer just turned outwards toward the world, but also inwards toward Europe itself. The "Roscommon Consensus" of 1990 has taken root in the European SVD, and confreres are becoming more and more aware that mission exists not only outside Europe but also inside Europe, and that there is an urgent need to respond to the missionary situations in the zone. (2) The faces of the people we work with, the face of Europe itself, have also changed. Europe is secularized, multi-cultural, pluralistic, post-modern, post-Christian. "Both the changed situation of Europe and a new understanding of mission require new ways of carrying out our mission in the continent. There is need to enter into prophetic dialogue with different groups of people, particularly those involved in and affected by the changes arising from globalization, secularization and migration."[33] (3) Also the faces of the confreres working in Europe changed. No longer exclusively Europeans but also Asians, Africans and Latin Americans. For the SVD it all started with "Roscommon."

[33] *AN*, 2012, March, 1f.



Fr. Xavier with SVD community in Steinhausen, Switzerland, during his General Visitation

## Roscommon and SVD Mission in Europe

It was a conference of the European SVD provincials held at the end of October 1990 in Roscommon, Ireland, that marked a significant turning point in the history of the European SVD with regard to its understanding of mission[34]. Among the themes discussed were the following: 1. The unrelenting secularization process and the militant secular mindset that claimed to be the only legitimate worldview system on which a new world order could be constructed. 2. The consequences of the opening up of Eastern Europe for the SVD and new areas of work there.

The following very important resolution was taken at Roscommon, "The Society of the Divine Word in Europe sees its missionary function no longer exclusively in the mission *ad gentes* to other continents because there are many missionary situations in Europe itself which deserve the missionary services of the Society."

An intensive information and argumentation campaign was required to persuade those who had reservations or were critical of this new concept of SVD Mission in and from Europe, which was not definitively adopted until the 1994 General Chapter. This declared, "The Society of the Divine Word in Europe is challenged with the process of secularization, the opening of the East Bloc, migration and the drop in spiritual vocations. The following request is addressed to the whole of the Society: In order to appropriately cope with the missionary situation in Europe [....] we request the other Zones of the Society to collaborate on an international level" (FTW 1994/5).[35] The feedback from the provinces and regions was immediate.

Consequences from the so-called *Resolution of Roscommon* include the following:

- The identification of missionary situations in Europe relevant to the SVD.
- The development of plans for the SVD mission in Europe (depending on contexts): basics, paths/priorities and goals of the SVD mission in Europe.
- The planning and preparation of the mission of SVD missionaries from all parts of the world in Europe.
- The missionary training of SVD missionaries for mission in Europe.
- The preparation of European SVD missionaries for the new reality of interculturality in Europe.
- Understanding mission in Europe as both intercultural and inculturated.

Referring to the resolution of the Roscommon Conference, the General Chapter 1994 requested the general council "to recognize the importance of missionary work in Europe and to make known to the whole Society the need for international personnel to be appointed for the European zone." The European provinces were to specify "for which precise area of work confreres from other continents are required." This information "should be given to the generalate and the other provinces in the entire Society..." in order to make the right choices of appointments. The representatives of Europe at the general chapter on their part made the following request to the whole Society, "...in order to appropriately respond to the missionary situation in Europe and the priorities of the SVD, we ask the other Zones of the Society for cooperation on the international level. That would be an excellent witness for the internationality of the Society and the multi-cultural character of the Church" (FTW 1994/5, 12).

## Further Developments

The 15th General Chapter of 2000 introduced the term "Prophetic Dialogue" as the "deepest and best understanding" of the SVD mission (IDW 2000/1, 53). It has been stated that discussions at the chapter confirmed

[34] Steyler Missionswissenschaftliches Institut, *Today's Europe and the SVD. Reflections on Mission*, Sankt Augustin 2007, 11-27.
[35] *Nuntius SVD*, Vol. XIV, 1994, fasc. 1, 62ff, here: 68f (The European Zone).

that the SVD understanding of the mission *ad gentes* has shifted from an exclusively geographical orientation to one that includes missionary situations. "From our constitutions, the work of recent Chapters, as well as the broader context in which our mission is carried out today, we identify four situations where we hear a special call to respond: primary evangelization and re-evangelization, commitment to the poor and marginalized, cross-cultural witness, and interreligious understanding" (IDW 2000/1, 52). This understanding confirmed – from a European perspective – the "Roscommon Consensus," while at the same time challenging the SVD presence and mission in Europe and making it a concern of the whole Society. The tasks following from this were many: missionary situations to which the SVD feels called to respond were to be identified, ways for SVD-specific responses to be explored, the concept of Prophetic Dialogue to be translated into European contexts and the internationalization of the European SVD to be continued.

In his circular letter "In Gratitude and Hope"[36] to all confreres of Europe Fr. Superior General Antonio Pernia stressed the need for a "missionary spirituality." Based on the understanding of mission as prophetic dialogue, missionaries are called to be in dialogue with God as the very foundation of their mission. "Although many Europeans no longer consider themselves Christians, they still have a hunger for spiritual values… But today they 'put more trust in witnesses than in teachers, in experience than in teaching and in life and action than in theories' (RM 42). And if they listen to teachers, it is only because these teachers are first witnesses (cf. EN 41)." Pernia calls the mediation of our experience of God to others the purpose of our religious missionary life. As the SVD Constitutions put it: "We propose to make the goodness and kindness of God visible in our life and service" (*Prologue*). "Indeed, we need to become missionaries who proclaim 'what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands' (1 Jn 1:1), the Word of Life, Jesus Christ." Or, in other words, to let "our light" shine before others – the focus of the 19th General Chapter.

Since "Roscommon" there have been important developments in the European SVDs. The fact that we were no longer able to continue some of our traditional activities has forced us to close or find new purposes for some of our houses and to consider merging some of the provinces. All of this means saying Goodbye to a certain model of religious life and missionary presence in Europe. Where we once saw the recruitment and preparation of missionaries for other continents as more or less our sole reason for existing in Europe, we have now come to understand that Europe, too, is as much a mission territory as any other corner of the world.

[36] Antonio Pernia, Circular letter *In Gratitude and Hope*, 15 April 2003, [In:] *SVD Mission 2006*, 225-230.







**Left:** SVD European zonal Assembly in Dueñas in Spain, October 2023

**Right:** Communication Coordinators Assembly of the SVD Europe Zone in Zakopane in Poland, May 2023

Today, in all our provinces and formation houses we have confreres from all over the world. In Eastern Europe our confreres have great opportunities to engage in fruitful dialogue with our Orthodox brothers and sisters as well as with the world of Islam. In Western Europe it is urgent that we draw near to the lukewarm Catholics, believers and those not belonging to the Church, to the world of faith seekers and migrants. While the number of local confreres is decreasing in most European provinces, the number of SVD missionaries, especially from Africa and Asia is growing. The younger and active confreres, and increasingly also the superiors in Europe, come from other countries and continents. In future Europe will need missionaries who are able to enter into dialogue with people and realities far from the Church, at the margins of society, or from other cultures and countries.

European provinces began to identify new missionary situations. Fitting responses to these situations are the results of research projects by the Missiological Institute in St. Augustin. "Project Europa," launched in 2001, "Survey for non–European SVD confreres in Europe" conducted in 2008, as well as the current "Roscommon 25" series of publications, offer not only evaluations and reflections on the topics around SVD mission and missionaries in Europe but also a look at challenges and possibilities for the future.

In 2015 we read in *Arnoldus Nota*: In the meantime, the face of Europe, as well as our SVD identity has changed significantly. It seems redundant to enumerate all the characteristics of European society that broke away from traditional Christian values. In his speech at the European Parliament in Strasbourg in November 2014, Pope Francis described the situation of contemporary Europe, comparing it to a tired, aging grandmother who is no longer fertile or vibrant. Consequently, the great Christian ideals that once inspired Europe have considerably lost their power of attraction in Europe itself. [37]

As seen, the face of SVD in Europe has also changed. Some see the SVD in a "time of crisis." This is reflected in symptoms like aging confreres, lack of new local vocations, diminishing number of benefactors, and our traveling brothers, closing our printing presses and big houses, queries on the current set up of our academic and research institutes, loss of influence in the Church milieu and a leaning towards rather "being insignificant" in the general public, lack of enthusiasm, restructuring and merging of provinces, etc. However, it would be more appropriate to see this time of crisis with the eyes of our Founder Arnold Janssen, who was told by Archbishop Paulus Melchers of Cologne: "We live in a time when everything seems to be shaking and sinking. Now you are coming and want to start something new!" From this perspective, we may perceive the SVD in Europe as living in a "time of transition," resembling a construction site. What has already fulfilled its purpose ends, many good projects will continue and new projects will come to life. Over the years, non-European missionaries have come to all the provinces and regions in Europe. In 2024, there are 333 non-European SVDs working in Europe, coming from 23 countries.

[37] *Address of Pope Francis to the European Parliament*, Strasbourg, 25 November 2014, [In:] https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/november/documents/papa francesco_20141125_strasburgo-parlamento-europeo.html [Accessed: 15 December 2023].

## Mission in Europe?

Although the term "mission" remains difficult in Europe, there have been important developments in a new direction since the publication of the booklet *La France pays de mission* by Henri Godin and Yvan Daniel in 1943.[38]

Today we talk about mission in a wounded world of deep transformation. This can be identified in a three-fold way also in Europe:

- First, by naming the wounds and transformations, past and present, which haunt European societies and Christian mission – and re-examining their complex entanglements and complicities in today's wounded and vulnerable world.
- Second, to revisit theologies of mission, foremost "mission *ad vulnera*," and to rethink them in new perspectives, especially in light of recent shifts in theology and contexts where vulnerability and deep transformation have long been reflected.
- Third, in this way, distinct areas of vulnerable missions and commitments as resources of healing, renewal and challenges for living and believing in today's world come to the fore (ecclesial futures; engagement for religious freedom; practices of deep solidarity, etc.).

The perspective – a wounded world in deep transformation – may be able to give some orientation in our search for ways of mission in diverse European countries. The theme of the 19th SVD General Chapter (2024) poses special challenges to SVD mission in Europe: "'Your Light Must Shine Before Others' (Matt 5:16): Faithful and Creative Disciples in a Wounded World." Today Europe is aware of being part of this wounded world, and mission means to give witness and make aware of responsibilities and possibilities resulting from the message of Jesus Christ in his Gospel.

> Today we know that all Local Churches that are rooted in their cultures have a missionary mandate which they are indeed carrying out. For this reason, … as Europeans, we must ask ourselves what challenges we face in the globalized world and in the Universal Church. Missionary activity in our own country and in the community of nations can only grow if it is shared and will be mutually enriching in an exchange between the experience of the Local Churches and the countries of the South, in particular. The more we open our eyes, hearts and hands to the Universal Church among the nations, the more richly will we be rewarded and strengthened in faith as individuals and as congregations.[39]

Together with other Christians the Bishops say that "the most important task of the churches in Europe is the common proclamation of the Gospel in both word and deed, for the salvation of all."[40]

In her essay in the *Atlas of Global Christianity*, Kirsteen Kim writes about missionaries and Europe.[41] With the exception of the Oriental Orthodox churches of Asia and Africa, in 1910 Christian churches across the world were led by Europeans or people of European descent.

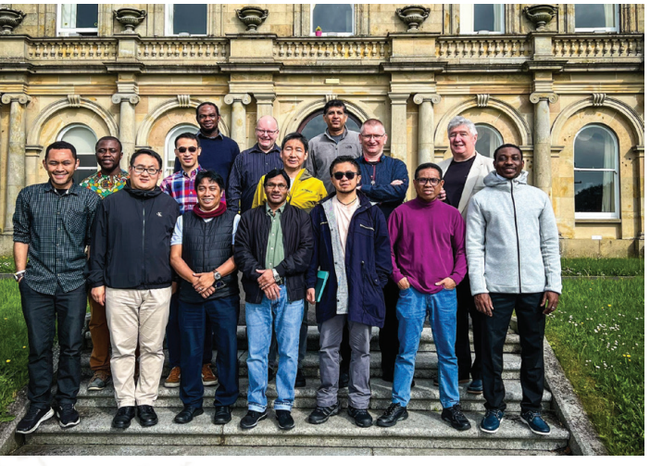
> The greatest change since Edinburgh 1910 is the transformation in the perception of Europe from sending continent to mission field, and with it the assumption of responsibility for mission by local churches. In what is recognized as a post-Christian society, western European churches have sought new ways of reaching out to an unchurched generation.[42]

Christianity has become a vastly pluralistic and diverse religion. The demographic shift in Christianity, brought about by the missionary movement, has created two new realities today: a post-Christian West and a post-Western Christianity.[43] "Christianity began the twentieth century as a Western religion, and indeed *the* Western religion; it ended the century as a non-Western religion, on track to become progressively more so."[44] That's one of the reasons to talk about mission or missionary situations in all continents and as a task for all Christians everywhere – always to be lived in a concrete context.

[38] Yvan Daniel, Henri Godin, *La France Pays de Mission*, Lyon: Les Éd. de l'Abeille 1943.
[39] Die deutschen Bischöfe, Vol. 76: *Allen Völkern sein Heil. Die Mission der Weltkirche*, Bonn: 23 September 2004, 9.
[40] *Charta Oecumenica*, 2.
[41] Kirsteen Kim, "Missionaries Sent and Received, Europe 1910 – 2010," [In:] Todd M. Johnson, Kenneth R. Ross (eds.), *Atlas of Global Christianity 1910-2010*, Edinburgh 2009, 272-273.
[42] Kim, "Missionaries Sent and Received, Europe 1910 – 2010," 272.
[43] Kim, "Missionaries Sent and Received, Europe 1910 – 2010," 272.
[44] Stephen Bevans, Roger Schroeder, *Constants in Context – A Theology of Mission for Today*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 2004, 242.







**Above:** Meeting of young SVD missionaries in St. Gabriel, September 2023

**Center:** Meeting of 23 young SVD missionaries of Portugal and Spain from 12 nationalities in Leiria, Portugal, November 2023

**Below:** SVD Confreres from the Irish and British Province

What do these developments or prospects mean to Christianity? Is it losing the West, the former heartland of Christianity, forever? Kenneth Ross puts it the following way:

> It could be readily argued that it is quite typical of Christianity that, when its long-time European home is becoming inhospitable, it has already set off on a fresh journey and has been embraced by the people of the great Southern continents on an unprecedented scale. On this analysis it could well be that modern Europe will share the fate of such earlier centers of Christian influence as North Africa or Turkey, which nurtured the faith in its early centuries but which today are largely bereft of Christian presence.[45]

But there is still another possibility: It is also possible that vitality experienced in the Global South will become contagious. In other words, if Christianity is becoming predominantly non-Western, then what happens in Africa, Asia, and Latin America will have a growing influence on what Christianity will be like worldwide. Something of this can already be felt in today's European SVD. The number of missionaries in Europe from the Global South, and most of all many concrete experiences with confreres from Africa and Asia show that they are the source not only of the rejuvenation of membership, but also of new mission ideas and ways of mission in today's Europe!

Missionary initiatives today encounter the double challenge of increasing secularization and religious privatization. For many Europeans Christian faith has become peripheral, sectarian, and irrelevant. In Great Britain, only about one million of the twenty-six million members of the Church of England attend Sunday services. The church loses 1,500 people every week, losing not only people on the edge, but also those at the heart of the Church, leaders and those involved for twenty or thirty years. A new genre of Christian literature during the last decade is all about why people are leaving the Church. How long can someone believe without belonging to a specific faith community? Some of these people end up in the emerging Churches. What is said about the United Kingdom is true of the other Western European nations too.[46] The decline of Church-related spirituality is also in Germany shown by attendance at Sunday services. Regular attendance has dropped considerably in recent decades. Many people – both, Catholics and Protestants – are leaving the Churches while at the same time a market for religious and philosophical ideas has developed, indicating an ambivalent religious revitalization and constituting for the Churches as great a challenge as secularization. New forms of religiosity, charismatic and Pentecostal groups are also entering Europe and attracting people. There is not only an increasing pluralism of religions, but even growing pluralism inside Christianity. Modernization and culture change do not necessarily lead to the end of religion, but often to a new search for the origins and sources of one's own identity, for new forms of community and for values giving orientation. Present-day missionary efforts of the Church have to take the new religious situation of the people into consideration.[47]

In addition, in recent years, various scandals – especially the scandal of sexual abuse - have also shaken the Catholic Church in its foundations. The

[45] Kenneth R. Ross, "Blessed Reflex: Mission as God's Spiral of Renewal," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research,* 27 (2003), No. 4, 163.
[46] Peter Vethanayagamony, "Mission from the Rest to the West," [In:] Ogbu Kaluu et al. (eds.), *Mission after Christendom*, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press 2010, 59-70, here 62.
[47] Die deutschen Bischöfe, Vol. 76: *Allen Völkern sein Heil*, 19-20.

credibility of the Church and Churches in general is at stake or already lost. There seems to be no change for the better in view. People continue to turn their back on the Churches.

Important impulses to understand our mission may come from the idea of synodality in our Church, that has been highlighted by Pope Francis since the beginning of his Pontificate. In his own words, synodality is the path "which God expects of the Church of the third millennium" because it is "a constitutive element of the Church." That is why Pope Francis called for the Synod on Synodality from 2021 to 2024.



Pope Francis' call for us to focus on synodality is a call to restore and deepen our roots as the people of God journeying together in a common mission as followers of the Way, Jesus Christ. Synodality means journeying together as people of God. It indicates a way of listening to each person as a member of the Church to understand how God might be speaking to all of us. In this way, synodality reminds us of the work of the Holy Spirit through each of us and through all of us working together for our common mission.

## Conclusion

Looking at the situations of the Church and Christianity in Europe, we find them "in a wounded world of deep transformation." As Divine Word Missionaries, we understand mission first and foremost as God's own mission – *missio Dei*. We participate in God's mission when we listen to God's word and to the people to whom we are sent. "A disciple is one who responds to God's call and seeks to imitate everything that Jesus did, so that his life becomes our life, his mission our mission. A Christian is both a disciple and a missionary; he/she is called and sent out into the world" (GC 2018, 13).



Together with a few companions Arnold Janssen started the SVD 150 years ago in Steyl, in Europe, for mission work outside Europe. Since "Roscommon," the mission is not only *ad gentes* but also *inter gentes*. The challenge is to find our way in God's mission in today's Europe, to be deeply rooted in the Word and the love of God and to be prophetic in secularized societies.

This will require identifying our dialogue partners in Europe. To the "traditional" partners of our fourfold dialogue we may also add all the new forms of poverty: aging people, broken families, prisoners, the homeless, asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants.

The presence of missionaries from abroad has become existential for the Society in Europe. We will continue to work on building international and intercultural teams in our mission and to find ways to acquire intercultural competence skills and to live in communion.

**Martin Üffing, SVD (Germany)**
***Former Provincial Superior, Director of Missiological Institute in St. Augustin, now Researcher***



The Sending Altar in
Sankt Gabriel



# Prophetic Dialogue



Clifford Geertz says that we need poems and road maps when we cross territories emotionally or topographically unknown.[48] He says that if one has to live in a foreign or unknown culture, whether by choice or for professional reasons, one needs to know its symbols and rites. These are like a road map or a compass that allows orientation in a strange land. The same image can be applied to those who go on mission to a place different from their own, as is the case of missionaries *ad gentes*. Applying this image to the Society of the Divine Word, we could say that, at the turn of the 21st century, it found itself in a new territory – cultural, social, religious – and felt the need to identify the theoretical and practical instruments to continue carrying out its mission of witnessing to the Kingdom of God in today's world. The concept of prophetic dialogue, coined at the 15th SVD General Chapter in the year 2000, can be compared to the poem that identifies and inspires its mission and the road map that provides the most appropriate and relevant guidelines in the various contexts where our Society is present.

At the beginning of the third millennium, three elements stood out in the composition of the contemporary world: (a) a religiously plural world, where the many religious traditions coexist, sometimes peacefully, sometimes in conflict, also with new forms of religiosity on the margins of churches and institutional movements which we can translate with the expression "believing without belonging"; (b) a culturally plural world, where different cultures assert themselves as spaces that seek to give meaning to the lives of individuals and communities; and (c) a globalized and at the same time fragmented world, where poverty and social exclusion continue to grow. Moreover, the 15th General Chapter identified some major challenging trends in the world, the Church,

[48] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York: Basic Books 2017, 218.

and the SVD that needed to be taken into consideration: globalization, urbanization, migrants, refugees, and displaced people, a quest for liberation in political and economic areas. At the same time, the SVD membership composition was also undergoing major changes, being more diverse than ever. Most of its members no longer came from the countries of ancient Christianity, but from the Global South, notably from some countries in Asia and Africa.

The changing cultural, social, and religious context, the new perspectives in the theology of mission and the new composition of the members of the Society required an urgent and profound reflection on the SVD identity and mission. In this new context, the Society of the Divine Word understood that in order to navigate safely and in the right direction, it was not enough to rely only on the traditional understanding of mission that placed the accent on the salvation of souls and the implantation of the Church. It felt it was necessary to find a new vision that could give a new meaning to its mission. The members of the Society of the Divine Word wondered how they could build a common vision capable of embracing their ethnic and cultural diversity, welcoming the different spiritual, theological and pastoral sensibilities of their members, and serving as inspiration for their missionary work in the different contexts and countries where it was present. Besides, confronted daily with situations where religious and cultural pluralism are an integral part of social reality, and where poverty and social injustice are recurrent, it was necessary to find the appropriate methods to proclaim the Gospel in these specific plural contexts. The concept of prophetic dialogue was the answer that was found at that historical moment.

## Evolvement of the Concept 'Prophetic Dialogue'



Participants of the 15th General Chapter

In a letter officially announcing the theme of the 15th General Chapter and the various phases of its preparation, Fr. Heinrich Barlage, the Superior General wrote that the Chapter would be an occasion to: 1) discern the will of God for us and for our mission, 2) clarify SVD mission today, 3) develop concrete and practical ways to renew our missionary service.[49] Two years later, when the capitulars approved the final chapter statement, it seemed that in their minds the concept of prophetic dialogue corresponded to the objectives set for the Chapter. The almost unanimous approval of the final document would seem to corroborate this view.

In the final statement of the 15th General Chapter, the concept of prophetic dialogue stands out as an identifier of the SVD life and mission in the context of the Church's mission. Through prophetic dialogue, we bear witness to the Kingdom of God. This witness requires the assumption of some characteristic dimensions, understood as attitudes that are fundamental for the missionaries of the Divine Word to be faithful to their vocation and mission.

Considering the social, cultural, and religious context of the time, the general chapter identified four dialogue partners: people who have no faith community and faith-seekers, people who are poor and marginalized, people of different cultures, and people of different religious traditions and secular ideologies. Prophetic dialogue with the four dialogue partners takes place through the characteristic dimensions (Biblical Apostolate, Mission Animation, Justice & Peace and Integrity of Creation, and Communication). These dimensions, however, are not understood in a functionalist way, that is, as simple functions or activities, but are considered fundamental attitudes that must be inherent to all SVD missionaries. Therefore, all SVDs are called to have God as the center

[49] Heinrich Barlage, "Theme of the General Chapter 2000," *Nuntius SVD,* Vol. XIV, 1998, fasc. 5, 554.



Participants of the Prophetic Dialogue-Workshop, 26 April to 05 June 2004

of their life (Biblical apostolate), to commit themselves to the transformation of society and the world (JPIC), to reach to others in dialogue (communication), and to involve them in the mission (missionary animation).

It is not an easy task to track down the origin of the expression "prophetic dialogue." Throughout the discussions in the plenum and working groups, two lines of thought emerged which sought to identify the SVD identity and mission. The delegates from ASPAC insisted on the idea of dialogue as central to defining our identity and mission. This was somehow expected as most of them came from countries where the variety of cultures and religions necessitate attitudes of dialogue. It is also important to underline some statements of the Federation of Asian Bishops Conference (FABC). Ever since 1974, the Bishops of Asia had been insisting on the importance of a threefold dialogue with the poor, cultures, and religions. From their perspective, dialogue in Asia needs to be developed in three interrelated spheres: Asian religions, Asian cultures, and the immense multitude of the poor. Naturally, the delegates from ASPAC insisted on the importance of putting dialogue at the forefront of the Chapter's resolutions. For their part, the delegates from Latin America emphasized the prophetic dimension of mission. They came from a continent where liberation theology had shaped ecclesial communities and served as a framework for the Church's social and missionary intervention.

During the general chapter, it soon became evident that dialogue would have an important place in the final statement, but there was a feeling that this was insufficient, and it would be good to qualify it to avoid understanding dialogue as mere peaceful coexistence and tolerance between people and groups. The proposal to qualify the concept of dialogue with the adjective prophetic emerged during the group work, but the Minutes of the Chapter are inconclusive as to its provenance, only mentioning that it appeared in one of the three Spanish-speaking groups. The group was not satisfied with the term dialogue used to identify missionary experience. Most of them came from Latin America and preferred the expression "frontiers," which had sound support in the SVD since the 1988 General Chapter. They argued that if the chapter decided to keep the term dialogue to identify SVD life and mission, then it would be necessary to find an adjective to qualify it. Two adjectives were suggested: "liberating" and "prophetic," with a preference for the second.

After the 15th General Chapter, the concept of prophetic dialogue was gradually propagated and the process of its reception by the grassroots proceeded slowly. However, through the discussions and reflections that led to the 16th General Chapter in 2006 and the theological and missiological research on the theme, the concept of prophetic dialogue was widely disseminated not only in our Society, but also in other religious missionary congregations and the universal Church. It became a missiological "tool" to articulate the SVD mission and a "vision" to inspire SVD missionary action at the grassroots.



Photo: Maciej Malicki, SVD

The second paragraph of the final document of the 16th General Chapter states that prophetic dialogue helped to reread the first section of the Constitutions, that is, the one that deals with the origin and purpose of missionary service, its concretization, organization, and spirit. It is therefore more likely that the 15th General Chapter of 2000 wanted to affirm the priority of dialogue, not by saying that the SVDs are prophets, but that the mission is a dialogue with prophetic characteristics. For the Society, in the current context of history, dialogue is the best way to portray Christ's missionary mandate. This dialogue is understood as a conversation involving our dialogue partners in an attitude of mutual respect, and intellectual and affective openness to listen to what they want to convey as well as what they believe and proclaim.

The final statement of the 15th Chapter says: "Dialogue is an attitude of 'solidarity, respect, and love' (GS 3) that is to permeate all our activities" (#53). Thus, dialogue is a process that, more than systems, involves people, and its primary goal is to achieve mutual understanding since ignorance feeds prejudices. For example, a sincere dialogue between religions can only be cultivated if the following attitudes are present: respect for others, fidelity to one's own religious tradition, and openness to the truth.

There are two complementary actions in mission: proclamation without imposition and dialogue without renouncing what one believes. Dialogue and proclamation are intimately united; both are necessary and legitimate. In today's context, mission *inter gentes* cannot bear fruit without dialogue. Consequently, announcing Jesus Christ is to be made in the evangelical spirit of dialogue.

## Understanding Prophetic Dialogue

The prophetic dimension of Christianity is deeply rooted in the Old Testament prophets and the life and mission of Jesus Christ. Often misunderstood, persecuted, and even physically eliminated, prophets are both messengers of hope and visionaries of a new time and defenders of justice that destabilizes unjust structures. Prophets receive from God the ability to observe the world in which they live and interpret its events. Prophecy is an integral part of the Church's mission, even if its expressions have taken different forms throughout history. Being an attitude that does not conform to the maintenance and persistence of situations of oppression, prophecy denounces what is wrong and proposes alternatives aimed at overcoming injustices. In this sense, the prophetic dimension of Christianity has an eminently political element in the sense of intervention in society. The prophets are also known for their capacity for renunciation. They must renounce many things to remain faithful to the word of God and to persevere in the mission entrusted to them. Thus, there is a spiritual element too.

Although there are many dimensions to prophecy, the three main dimensions are the following: denouncing what diminishes the dignity of persons and the abuses committed against the poor; mobilizing energies to promote initiatives or support existing ones that create just and fraternal alternatives, and renouncing privileges, pointing to the continuous renewal and transformation that the Church must undergo.

Steve Bevans and Roger Schroeder have done extensive work deepening the concept and praxis of prophetic dialogue. They argue that mission should be done through prophetic dialogue, embracing two dynamics. First, Christians have something to announce; concretely, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, his message of God's love and mercy, as well as the challenge to all to welcome his Kingdom. This proclamation is made, for example, through the witness of life, liturgical celebrations and prayer, commitment to justice and peace, and confession of one's faith in dialogue with people of other religions. Secondly, Christians, like the prophets of the Old Testament, must denounce any form of injustice and oppression that exists in the world or in the Church. This can be accomplished through a counter-cultural testimony in terms of lifestyle, direct participation in actions and movements putting into practice the dialogue of

life.[50] They argue that mission should be a dialogue, for it has a duty to proclaim one's faith in each particular context; but it is also prophecy because the Church has an obligation to proclaim the Good News in its entirety.[51]

Dialogue can be called prophetic when two elements are present: first, faith itself as the foundation of dialogue; secondly, listening to the voice of the Spirit together with our interlocutors. The concept and practice of prophetic dialogue is a contribution to emphasize that dialogue and proclamation are not incompatible, and that dialogue is rooted in reciprocity.

## Mission as Prophetic Dialogue in the Society

Since the 15th General Chapter, the concept of prophetic dialogue has been a major topic for discussion and reflection in diverse initiatives like retreats, seminars, publications, local and provincial chapters organized by our Society. Nevertheless, its reception by the SVD membership has been slow. There is always resistance to new ideas and fear of the unknown. Also, there are different understandings of mission if not in official documents at least in the mind of many Christians. Then, for some people, the concept "prophetic dialogue" gives the impression of being self-contradictory and reveals a tension between dialogue and proclamation.

At the same time, we notice that prophetic dialogue has been cultivated at the grassroots, for example, through the integration of JPIC concerns in the programs developed by the other characteristic dimensions or the activities promoted by our media and Bible centers. Following the 17th General Chapter (2012), each PRM was tasked to select some congregational directions as its priorities. A good number of PRMs chose priorities where prophetic dialogue is involved, for example, ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue, indigenous and ethnic communities, reconciliation and peacebuilding, social justice, and poverty eradication.

Still, the reception of prophetic dialogue is an ongoing process. Besides its implementation in our mission activities, there is a need to articulate it in the context of the theology of mission. Furthermore, there is a need to further deepen the spiritual foundations of prophetic dialogue. The theme of the 19th General Chapter (2024) invites us to be faithful and creative disciples to face the challenges of today's world. Faithful, never forgetting that dialogue is the path of mission; creative, offering prophetically new solutions to old problems. Prophetic dialogue remains relevant for our mission in today's world context because it starts from the convictions of one's own faith, is based on the witness of life, but at the same time is profoundly respectful of the convictions of the other and of their existential and spiritual journeys, as well as of the presence of God in history and in the world.

**José Antunes da Silva, SVD (Portugal)**
***Former Vice General (2018-2024),***
***now Researcher***

[50] Stephen B. Bevans, Roger Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue. Reflections on Christian Mission Today,* Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 2011, 19-55.

[51] Stephen B. Bevans, Roger Schroeder, *Constants in Context. A Theology of Mission for Today,* Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2004, 350. In another passage (p. 398), Bevans and Schroeder write: "Mission must by all means be *dialogical,* since it is nothing else finally than the participation in the dialogical nature of the triune, missionary God. But it must be *prophetic* as well, since, at bottom, there can be no real dialogue when truth is not expressed and clearly articulated".



# Building the Local Churches: A Historical Sketch of Indore and Sambalpur Mission, India



"A people without the knowledge of the past, origin and culture are like a tree without roots," says Marcus Garvey, the founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association. These pages of history are not for adulating the undaunted courage of heroes who dared to take on inclement weather and who mastered the multiplicity of languages and cultures but to look at their sacrifices and the way they worked to build a just and humane society.

Here in this short article, an attempt is made to retrace the history of the Indore and Sambalpur missions that were entrusted to the Divine Word Missionaries in India: Indore mission was part of the French Capuchins' Malwa-Rajpoutana mission and Sambalpur (Gangpur) was part of Chotanagpur mission of the Belgian Jesuits.

## Invitation to Serve in India

After having witnessed the performance of SVDs as missionaries in foreign lands, the Congregation for the Propagation of Faith requested the Superior General as early as 1913 to take up a mission territory in India.[52]

[52] The mission offered to SVDs was probably Patna. Cf. Augustine Kanjamala (ed.), *History of the Divine Word Mission in India (1932-2007). A Platinum Jubilee Special*, Indore: SVD Provincial Superiors of India 2007, 59-60.

The general administration gave serious consideration to the proposal and the Propaganda of Faith was informed of the Society's readiness to take up mission work in the eastern part of India.[53] Msgr. Edward Mooney, Apostolic Delegate, consulted the Capuchin Bishop Caumont, who recommended the separation of Malwa Mission from Rajpoutana-Malwa Mission. The newly created Malwa Mission was to be given to the Divine Word Missionaries with **Indore** as their headquarters on 20 December 1927.[54] Due to the scarcity of personnel and finance, the general administration did not respond positively but the Propaganda of Faith renewed its offer on 6 February 1931.

In response to the letter of *Propaganda Fide*, Superior General Fr. Wilhelm Gier expressed his willingness to send missionaries to the new mission. Frs. Peter Janser, Leo Krzeminski, Gerard Schoenmakers and Aloys Kanski were appointed. With the arrival of Frs. Peter Janser and Leo Krzeminski on 5 November 1932, a new chapter began for Malwa mission.

**SVD Presence in the Bhil Mission:** Ernest Schlappa, a pioneer in Bhil country was appointed to assist Charles Pleumeur, OFMCap in 1932. This was followed by a regular influx of SVD missionaries in Indore mission, especially to the Bhil Tribals area as Charles moved to southern Rajasthan on 20 November 1933.





**Left:** Fr. Wilhelm Koppers

**Right:** Beginning of Lota pani, carrying of boy and girl in Hamirpur, 1955/56

**Anthropology at the Service of Mission:** Right from the beginning the missionaries gave priority to anthropological and missiological studies. This was visible when scholars like Stephen Fuchs (+ 2000), Wilhelm Koppers (+ 1961), Leonard Jungblut (+ 1979) and Matthias Hermanns (+ 1972) were in the field. Their immediate attention was directed toward the welfare of the small Catholic community but during their spare time, they concentrated themselves on the study of culture, language and art forms. Fr. Jungblut mastered the Bhili dialect and wrote the first Bhili grammar book.[55] Koppers and Jungblut made themselves friends with the tribesmen who furnished the missionaries with detailed information regarding their customs, practices, etc.[56]

As the mission was taking slow strides, the outbreak of World War II in September 1939 proved to be disastrous as German and Austrian missionaries were either repatriated or interned in camps. With difficulties, some missionaries carried on the work. -

As soon as the missionaries were able to take up their task, they were sent to different places. They opened new stations and extended their service to a multicultural Christian community, with British, Irish, Anglo-Indians, Eurasians, Goans, Tamils and locals. The SVDs took care of mission stations in Nimar region (like Khandwa, Sirpur, Aulia, Harda, Itarsi, etc.) which had been visited earlier by Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales.

**Catechetical Training Center:** To effectively carry out the mission work, they sought the help of catechists by starting a Catechetical Training Center for the Bhil mission at Ishgarh. This initiative of Joachim Mocha proved to be beneficial. Similarly, Ernest Schlappa opened another one in Sirpur for the Christians of East Nimar. Though these centers continued to supply trained catechists, the centers could not withstand the tide of times as they faced a shortage of trainees. They were closed gradually but new centers sprang up over time.

**Biblical Apostolate:** Biblical apostolate was an important venture undertaken by the mission. Early missionaries had undertaken word-based mission through *Bhajan Manalis* (singing hymns to folk to music), folk the-

[53] Cf. Protocol No. 1687/913 Rome, 16 September 1913 and Protocol No. 1687/914 Rome, 1 August 1914.
[54] Kanjamala (ed.), *History*, 61.
[55] Thomas Vellappallil, *History of the Bhil Catholic Church*, Vol.1: Indore: SVD Central Indian Province 1999, 327.
[56] Anthony Poruthur, *Glimpses of Mission History: Central India*, Indore: Sat Prachar Press 1993, 108.





**Left:** View of Seminary in Palda 1955/56. Brother with ducks near duck pond behind seminary

**Right:** SVD-novitiate in Khurda, 2004

atres, films, slide shows, etc. Later, Catholic Enquiry Center (*Masih Vidya Bhavan)* belonging to the Diocese of Indore took up the task of quenching the thirst for the Divine Word. It circulates biblical information among the followers of other religions in the northern Hindi belt. At one time it counted around 14,000 people participating in the Bible Correspondence course. The Center for Biblical Pastoral Ministry in Bhopal, known as *Divya Vani* (Divine Word*),* promotes Bible-related studies through seminars and publications on the Bible.

**Apostolate of Healing:** Continuing the Capuchins' healing ministry, the SVDs also promoted the medical apostolate. Heinrich Kettler was respected by all for his medical service. Others were actively involved, such as priest-doctor Patrick Pais, Br. Cunibertus Theunissen, Br. Redemptus Collet, Br. Ignace (Gnanarul) Rex Regum, and Br. Henry Dunk. Br. Aidan Courtney opened St. Patrick's Dental Clinic in Indore in 1972, which continues to serve the people of Madhya Pradesh with dedication.

**Bhilala Mission:** The establishment of the Church in Barwani is attributed to Fr. Charles. Franciscans visited villages around Barwani and Sendhwa in 1923. Wilhelm Wüllner spent his entire life in the service of Bhilalas.

## Expansion to Sambalpur (formerly called Gangpur Mission)

The request to take over the Gangpur mission (Orissa state) from the Jesuits came in 1948. Stanislaus Wald was asked to begin the mission on 11 July 1948. At that time the Jesuits were working in five parishes[57] which covered the semi-independent states of Gangpur, Bonai and Bamra. The Tribals and Dalits[58] who responded positively to the preaching of missionaries are Munda, Kharia, Oraon, Kisan, Ho, Santhal and Gondas. Besides

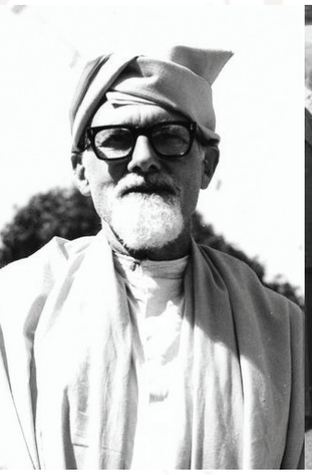
[57] At the arrival of SVDs there were five parishes in Gangpur, namely Kesramal (1908), Hamirpur (1919), Gaibira (1922), Jhunmur (1925) and Kusumdegi (1935).
[58] Untouchables who are considered to be outside the Indian caste hierarchy.





**Left:** Bhagor - hospital. Fr. Jerome Ziliak anointing dying patient

**Right:** Mission station Fr. Wilhelm Wüllner with group of schoolgirls carrying stones gathered from the field in Barwani, India, 1955/56





Bp. Hermann Westermann with his family

tribal languages, the missionaries had to learn Hindi, Sadri,[59] and the state language Odiya.

Having noticed the improvement in the quality of life of their brothers and sisters, the people of the neighboring kingdom on their own requested the missionaries to start parishes, schools and religious institutions, so that they too might avail of the privileges their comrades had on the other side. The people sent a delegation to persuade the missionaries already in 1898, but due to the unfriendly policy of the king of Gangpur, the missionaries could not establish themselves.[60]

## Arrival of SVDs in Gangpur Mission

Though the Jesuits were anxious to cede their beloved mission to a new congregation, they felt gradually consoled as it was in the safe hands of the Divine Word missionaries. The newcomers also gave assurance of continuing the legacy left by the Jesuits. Veteran missionary Anthony Fleming writes:

> On our side, Jan Jamrich from Slovakia slipped in and went to Jhunmur where he became a Sadri (lingua franca of Tribals in Gangpur state) pundit at short notice. From Argentina came Basilio Martynik and Brother Stephanus Rivero the builder. Fathers Bernard Bona, Michal Slivka, Marianus Żelazek and Bernhard Keller arrived from three different countries… 1950 saw a great invasion of SVD men from Germany – Fathers Peter Speicher, Eduard Sawatzki, Karl Ritz, Paul Barusch and Ludwig Wieczorek and a lone but powerful Dutchman, Herman van Burgsteden.[61]

One can note that Marianus' work among the lepers in Puri has brought a great transformation among them. He has been elevated to a Servant of God.

A start was made along the railway, first in Jharsuguda, then in Birmitrapur, and later in Kalunga. Jharsuguda was made the headquarters of the missionaries and Clemens Beck was made the district superior with the authority of a regional with two consultors to assist him.

## Erection of the Diocese of Sambalpur

On 14 June 1951, the Diocese of Sambalpur was bifurcated from Ranchi with Rev. Hermann Westermann, SVD, as its first Bishop. The Bishop set up his residence in Kalunga.[62] Within a short time, nine new parishes were opened. This is the first time we see the missionaries working among Dalits, thanks to the amiable approach of Aloys Kanski, William Dohman and Jan van de Weijgaert, etc. Besides his administrative work, Bishop Hermann was also taking care of the nascent Congregation called Handmaids of Mary started by Edmund Harrison, SJ, in 1944.[63]

**Mission Methods:** The opening of schools, dispensaries, hospitals, orphanages, maternity centers, vocational institutions, cooperative societies and other social works were the methods usually adopted. Though it is said that these institutions were primarily meant for Christians, non-Christians have also benefitted from these institutions. Valentin Zimmermann, veteran missionary and regional wrote: "The main rule for the present: keep faithfully to the traditions of the experienced and so successful Jesuit missionaries."[64]

**Education Apostolate:** One of the most important and effective mission methods was education. Jesuits had left a well-established network of schools with, "1 High School, 6 Middle English Schools, 125 Primary Schools, 2 Training Schools and 2 Industri-

[59] Sadri is the *lingua franca* of the Tribal people. Edgar Blain, SVD, was the first one to compose an English-Sadri Dictionary.
[60] Jesuraj Rayappan, *The Original Fire and New Flames: History of the Catholic Church in Orissa: 1850-1922*, New Delhi: ISPCK 2018, 97.
[61] Rayappan, *The Original Fire*, 176.
[62] "Sambalpur Diocese," [In:] https://sambalpurdiocese.org/cms/pages/history [Accessed: 12 March 2024].
[63] Kanjamala (ed.), *History*, 178.
[64] Mathew Poovanpuzha, *Diocese of Sambalpur: A Silver Jubilee Perspective*.

al Schools."[65] Aloys Kanski, Andreas Topol, Marian Żelazek, etc., as Inspector of Schools, worked hard to get the grant-in-aid and make it affordable for Tribals and Dalits. The SVDs introduced *School Punji* – handful of uncooked rice as local contribution for the maintenance of school.

**Economic Development Programs:** Since the Jesuits aimed at the integral development of the neophytes, they started some sustainable programs that worked for the economic development of Catholics. Having seen the effectiveness of these developmental programs started by the Jesuits, the SVDs also kept alive some of the institutions, such as, Catholic Cooperative Credit Society or Catholic Cooperative Bank of Chotanagpur,[66] *Nisha Sangat*, Temperance Society,[67] and *Dhan Gola* or Granary. These were started to enable the Tribals /Dalits to become independent economically at the most critical time of the year.[68]

**Annual Retreats and Other Spiritual Activities:** Annual retreats were an effective way to impart knowledge about Christianity and to bring about a qualitative change in the lives of the people. The missionaries used to gather the Christians in two groups, men and women separately for three days at the center.[69] The missionaries also organized what they called *Dharma Schools*, where young and old would gather together for instruction and where they witnessed Christian life.

**Christianity and Social Change**: The missionaries instilled in the minds of the people to maintain their catechists and pastors, which actually helped them to be self-reliant. The encounter with Christianity led to a transformation in traditional beliefs and customs and the process of transformation created a new outlook. The leap from *Sarna* or sacred grove to *Girja* or Church, from *Sal* tree to educational institutions, from traditional to modern and from old to new, necessarily involved sacrifice.[70] Christianity acknowledged and adapted the role of the tribal structures such as the *Panchayat* and village assemblies in their administrative system.

## Mission Expansion

On 16 July 1979 the Diocese of Rourkela was carved out of the Diocese of Sambalpur and Msgr. Alphonse Bilung, SVD was appointed as the first Bishop. After the bifurcation Sambalpur diocese was guided by Bishop Raphael Cheenath, SVD who started schools, parishes and institutions and established institutions such as Regional Pastoral Centre, Regional Communication (both at Jharsuguda) and Inter-Diocesan Regional Theologate at Sason, Sambalpur.[71]

**Dalit Mission:** In 1953 Peter Malik, a Baptist catechist from Madhupur, had requested Aloys Kanski, then parish priest of Jharsuguda to establish a mission in Madhpur.[72] Kanski's towering personality, amiable nature, and dramatic style of talking and preaching impressed the people. Soon parishes were established in Bargarh, Bolangir, Titlagarh, Bhodra, Sonepur and Tangarpali. Weavers Cooperative Society was also established to provide steady income to the weavers who initially responded to God's word.

**Ho Mission:** The mission among the Hos opened in 1978 when nine families were baptized by Shilanand Kamath. Unlike other tribes in the region, Hos are not economically badly off as they possess enough land for cultivation. Missionaries have to provide a credible and convincing Christian message. There are a few parishes where Hos live, such as Gopinathpur (1985), Jajpur Road (1989) and Duburi (1993).





**Above:** Fr. Aloys Kanski and schoolboy Robert Ekka in Jharsuguda, India, 1955/56

**Below:** Episcopal consecration of Fr. Raphael Cheenath, SVD. Bp. Hermann Westermann, SVD, performed the consecration in Sambalpur, India, 18 May 1974

[65] Kanjamala (ed.), *History,*180.
[66] In order to register themselves as members each one had to pay 5 francs. Cf. Alary to Superior General, Kesramal, 14 July 1917, ARSI Calcut. 1005 - XIII, 23, 2-3.
[67] Medard Vermeire, *Biru Mission History: Common Subjects*, Vol. I, Part II, APBS India 1 – Box 4, 63.
[68] Alary to Superior General, Kesramal, 11 July 1916, ARSI, Calcut. 1005-XIII, 8, 3-4.
[69] Alary to General, Kesramal, 14 July 1917, ARSI Calcut. 1005 – XIII, 23.
[70] Philip Barjo, "The Religious Life of the Sarna Tribes," *Indian Missiological Review*, 19 (1997), No. 2, 78.
[71] Kanjamala (ed.), *History,* 182-183.
[72] Kanjamala (ed.), *History*, 194.





**Santhal Mission:** The Santhal tribe is the third largest tribe in India. They are found in the states of West Bengal, Jharkhand, Odisha, Assam, etc. Like other tribes they are characterized by music, dance and singing. The mission began in Bezda among the Santhals in January 2007. Today the SVDs are involved in the pastoral and educational apostolate.

In addition to those mentioned above, we have a few specialized apostolates like Dialogue Center and (*Karunalaya* - abode of mercy) Leprosy Care Centre, both at Puri, Dinabandhu Technical and Vocational Training Institute, Jharsuguda; Adivasi Sangathan, Tangarpali; Legal Aid Center, Rajgangpur; Upaya, Rambahal; Community Welfare Centre, Rourkela; Vikas Deepti, Bargarh, etc.

## Conclusion

The preceding pages attempt to identify the people, issues and events that implanted the Catholic Church in Madhya Pradesh and Odisha. The history recounted so far was an encounter of the Dalits and Tribals with Christianity. It attempted to describe the circumstances in which the Catholic missionaries proclaimed God's word, the means they employed and the response of the people. The Catholic Church in Madhya Pradesh and Odisha grew as a result of the inadequacy of the old religions to liberate the Dalits and Tribals from the rapacious spirits and insatiable moneylenders. Radicalizing the Gospel values ensured the implementation of human rights.

A mere look at the terrain the missionaries traversed, the languages they learned, the cultures they adapted, and the schools and institutions they established with the view of bringing social transformation speaks volumes about their work, all of which they did with unwavering commitment to the cause of Christ.

**Jesuraj Rayappan, SVD (India)**
***Professor at Jnana Deepa,***
***Rector of the Divine Word Seminary, Pune***



# The SVD Bishops: The Dynamic Relationship Between the SVD Charism and the Ecclesial Institution of Episcopacy



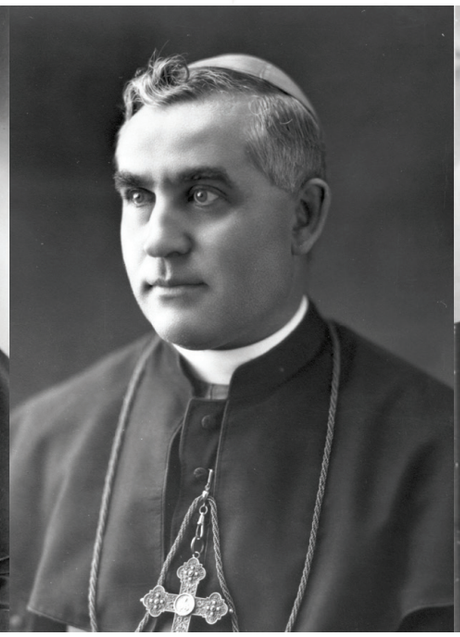
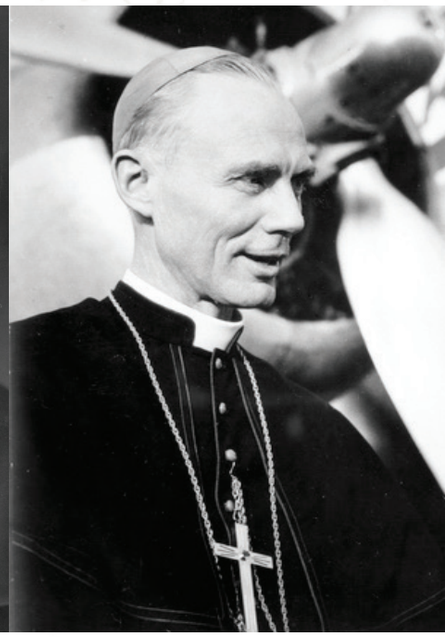
## Introduction

In 2024, there are 48 SVD Bishops, 21 of whom are native to their country of appointment, the others are working in other countries; many are active, some retired. Since the appointment of Bishop Johann Baptist Anzer, SVD (16 May 1851 – 24 November 1903), to the Vicariate Apostolic of Southern Shantung (December 1885) there have been 130 SVD Bishops from the Society of the Divine Word.[73]

Some of these Bishops have made a considerable impact on the life and history of the Church, such as Cardinal Thomas Tien Ken-sin, SVD (1890-1967), the first Cardinal from China, Archbishop of Beijing from 1946 until 1967, but forced to live in exile from 1951. Bishop Harold R. Perry, SVD (1916-1991), is recognized as the first and for some time the only Black American Catholic Bishop. Some have been Apostolic Nuncios, such as Archbishop John Bukovsky, SVD (1924-2010), the first apostolic nuncio in post-Communist Romania, and a papal delegate in post-communist Russia, and Archbishop Michael Blume, SVD, who served in Benin, Togo, Uganda, and Hungary until he retired in 2021. Some were real pioneers and became well known for their exploits, such as Archbishop Leo Arkfeld, SVD (1912-1999), the "flying Bishop" of PNG.

[73] This includes two who left the Society, one living, one deceased.



**From Left to Right**
- The First SVD Bishop Johann Baptist Anzer of Southern Shandong, 1886
- Card. Thomas Tien, Archbishop of Beijing
- Bp. Gulielmus Finnemann of Manila
- Bp Arkfeld Leo, of Madang, 1960
- Msgr. John Bukovsky, Apostolic Nuncio to Romania (1990-1994) and Russia (1994-2000)
- Bp. Wilhelm van Bekkum, of Ruteng
- Bp. Gabriel Manek, of Ende
- Bp. Joseph Oliver Bowers , of Accra

From the beginning, there has been a degree of tension between the charismatic identity of a religious missionary and the institutional identity of a Bishop. When Fr. Arnold Janssen wrote on 1 June 1900 to Fr. Joseph Freinademetz informing him of his appointment as provincial superior of South Shantung, replacing Bishop Anzer, following an earlier general chapter decision, and apparently on the instruction of Cardinal Ledóchowski, Prefect of *Propaganda Fide*, he said,

> It is now up to me to explore which rights you as a provincial have and which the bishop as the ecclesiastical superior has. I have already taken several steps to find this out, and later on I will give you more detailed information. I do not doubt that everything will be sorted out well; but a bit of time and patience will be necessary for it. Therefore, go courageously trusting the Lord God.[74]

It was the task of the religious superior to ensure that there is "a solid religious foundation which is for the individuals." To achieve this Freinademetz would have to "forget all the unpleasant things which you have experienced from the Most Reverend Bishop over the years. He was an instrument in God's hands to perfect you, and that is the very best thing for us. Therefore, do not become discouraged if he again says harsh things to you in the future."[75]

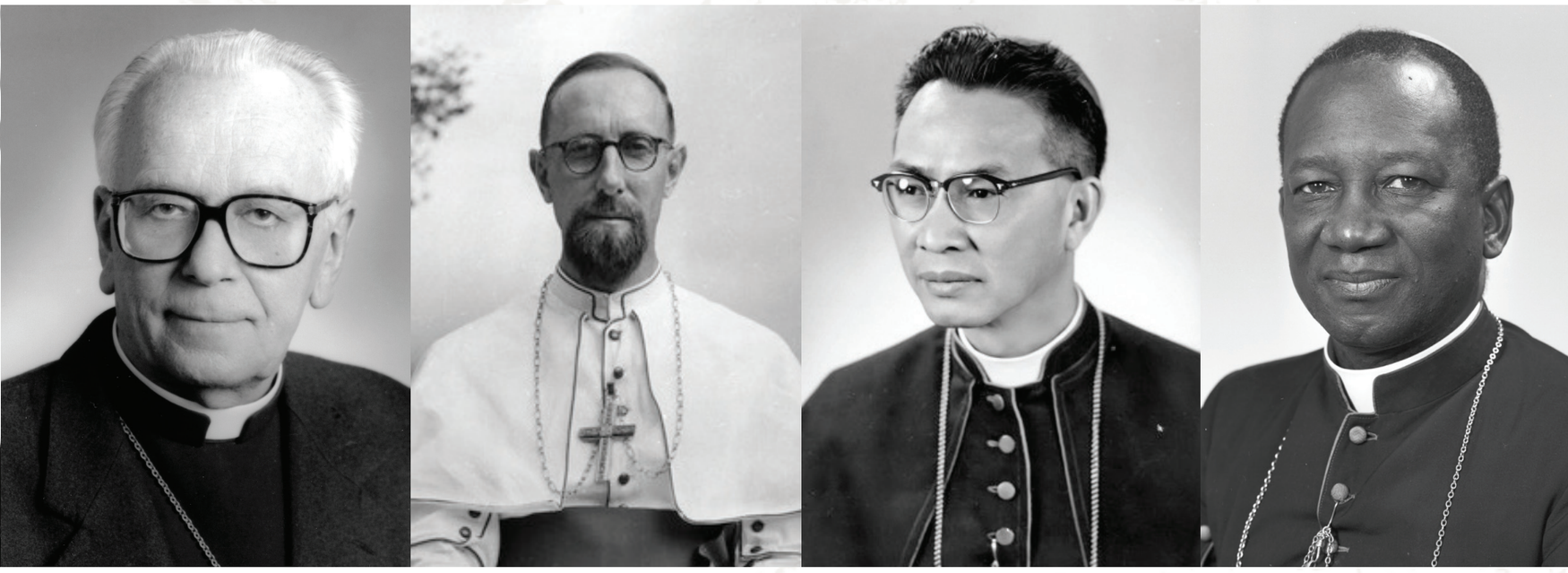
It seems that the institution/charism tension was unfruitful when the same person was religious superior and bishop. Now it seems that the tension, if any, is fruitful when the role of bishop enriches the religious missionary charism, and the religious missionary charism enriches the role of the bishop. We also no longer seem to have the situation where there is an SVD bishop overseeing a mainly SVD presbyterate. With the decline of missionary dioceses canonically entrusted to religious, most bishops have several congregations working in their dioceses and are obliged to limit their jurisdiction to matters pertaining to the diocese and not the congregations.

I consulted with as many SVD bishops as I could for this article, though I did not get many responses, I am due sure to the fact that the SVD bishop, like any bishop, is incredibly busy, with not a lot of time left for questionnaires. However, the responses that I did receive were very rich and reinforced my own experience.

## What Does the SVD Identity Bring to the Role as Bishop?

I think I can safely say that no one these days seriously nurtures an ambition to be a bishop! We are all well aware of the challenges this ministry faces in the modern world. As a religious missionary there is also a sense

[74] Josef Alt, *Arnold Janssen SVD, Briefe nach China*, Vol II: 1897-1904, AN SVD-82/II, Romae 2001, 88-89.
[75] Alt, *Arnold Janssen SVD, Briefe nach China*, 90.



that this is not quite what we signed up for. We note that our confreres and superiors also have mixed feelings about such announcements. On the one hand, they are proud that a confrere, and the Society, can be recognized in this way. On the other hand, there is a sense of loss, as those appointed as bishops are also seen as potential leaders of the Society and its apostolates. Many times, such an appointment even generates some alarm as some major rethinking has to be done to accommodate the "loss". As good Catholics and religious it is very hard to say "no" to the Holy Father and so we take it on and try to make the best of it for as long as we are needed.

The respondents felt that their SVD formation and identity influenced their approach to the role. The identity is so meaningful and internalized that it cannot be dissociated from the task. The charism, centered on the word of God and the Trinitarian spirituality comes through in teaching and pastoral practice, notably intercultural dialogue, the promotion of justice and peace, and the relationship with creation.

Although by their appointment they bonded with the diocese, analogous to a marriage, they felt that the SVD continued to be supportive through financial and personnel assistance. It was like a marriage where the original family continues to provide love and support and is even there when the marriage is over. The generalate makes a one-off donation at the time of the appointment, and the bishops have the opportunity to apply for diocesan programs for social concerns and for children. Either the province or the generalate considers the situation of an SVD bishop assigned to a diocese without confreres, often assigning at least one SVD companion.

One felt that maintaining a missionary identity was essential when a bishop lives among diocesan priests. All bishops are expected to bring a missionary spirit to their office. If one already has that in his blood, the responsibility is even greater. Now that the distinction between "sending" and "receiving" Churches is gone, and there is a good chance that the SVD bishop with the others, or at least a major ethnic group, he can foster an openness to the other, especially refugees and migrants, forming intercultural communities. We also have from our Founder a charism of openness to new ideas that will further the mission. An SVD bishop can bring that dimension also to a diocese that might be tempted to settle into maintenance at the expense of mission.

One felt that the pastoral emphasis on Basic Christian Communities came out of an SVD identity, getting new ideas and directions from SVD renewal themes and even Chapter resolutions and action plans. Our religious life has already paved the way for what is now called the "synodal way."

This would appear to be what was envisaged by the Second Vatican Council, that a Bishop should have a missionary spirit, concerned about other churches, especially those struggling with financial or personnel issues.



> As legitimate successors of the Apostles and members of the episcopal college Bishops should realize that they are bound together and should manifest a concern for all the churches. … They should especially be concerned about those parts of the world where the word of God has not been proclaimed or where the faithful, particularly because of the small number of priests, are in danger of departing from the precepts of the Christian life and even of losing the faith itself.[76]

The Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of the Bishop, *Apostolorum Successores*, of 2004 mentions this missionary dimension of the Bishop's ministry 40 times.





**Above:** Rome CVD community with the PNG Bishops, May 2023

**Center:** 12th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, 5-26 October 2008

**Below:** Informal Meeting of SVD Bishops in Lisbon, 2024

## Relationship Between SVD and Episcopal Obligations

Some Bishops have a large number of SVDS in their dioceses, but some have only a few. An SVD Bishop visits and gets to know his SVD priests and brothers at least to the same extent as other priests and religious. But the pastoral or canonical visit to an SVD priest or community will always have a different feeling about it, more of a meeting of brothers and of coming home and it has a more familiar flavor. For most of us the traditional SVD feasts maintain their significance and are celebrated in a special way, and we are usually invited to take part as much as possible. These occasions enable us to meet the SVD confreres and strengthen our SVD spirituality and community.

In many cases the SVD Bishops were active members of the presbyterate in the dioceses, or a similar one for many years before the appointment. We grew up with the other young clergy and religious and have many friends among them.

Here also the Second Vatican Council describes the task of mission as evangelization and planting the Church. The work of planting the Church in a given human community reaches a certain goal when the congregation of the faithful, already rooted in social life and somewhat conformed to the local culture, enjoys a certain firmness and stability. That is to say, it is already equipped with its own supply (perhaps still sufficient) of local priests, Religious, and lay men, and is endowed with these institutions and ministries which are necessary for leading and expanding the life of the people of God under the guidance of their own Bishop.[77]

On the anniversary of the promulgation of the decree *Ad Gentes*, Pope Benedict XVI visited us at Nemi in 2012, where Superior General Schütte hosted the team working on the document and where it was substantially drafted. In an anecdotal address to those of us who were there he mentioned that some wished to make a distinction between the task of evangelization, preaching the gospel (charism) and planting the church (institution). He said that he could never understand the distinction, as they were part of the same process.

It would seem that an SVD Bishop imbued with the charism of preaching the Word and given the task of planting and "watering" the Church also fulfills this vision.

[76] Decree concerning the pastoral office of the Bishops in the Church, *Christus Dominus*, 28 October 1965, 6.
[77] Decree on the mission activity of the church, *Ad gentes*, 19. See also: 6, 15, 18, .28 and footnote 14.

## Retirement

Some SVD Bishops are retired or plan to retire in the diocese where they ministered, and some have returned or will return to their original home diocese. In the former case, the retired Bishop can be a reference point and an ongoing support for the clergy they shared the mission with for many years. Recent Vatican guidelines recommend that a missionary Bishop (from another culture) should not retire in the diocese of his appointment, especially if he is succeeded by a local diocesan Bishop. Most wish to "return to the Society" where they hope that their experience can still be of great benefit to the Society. And some have returned to the Society and enjoy the community and religious life.

## Conclusion

Several Bishops mentioned the possibility of an encounter of SVD bishops at the continental or congregational level to exchange or broaden the ecclesial horizon. I believe that some other congregations, such as the Salesians,[78] do this regularly. I notice that at our Conference or Federation (continental) level, or even at the Synod of Bishops, for us to meet "as SVDs" is something of a quaint afterthought where we can shift gears to discuss (or innocently gossip about) congregational matters!

The task of the Bishop in these times is very challenging, especially maintaining the pastoral and evangelical focus which Pope Francis insists on. The demands of administration are always there and the temptation to lapse into maintenance and abandon mission. I believe that the SVD Bishops, with their solid formation in Trinitarian spirituality, their interiorization of the spirituality and vision of the Founder, and the practical skills they have acquired along the way is well placed to fulfill the missionary mandate that belongs to both the Church and the Society.

**Archbp. William Young Douglas, SVD**
***Archbishop of Mount Hagen, Papua New Guinea***





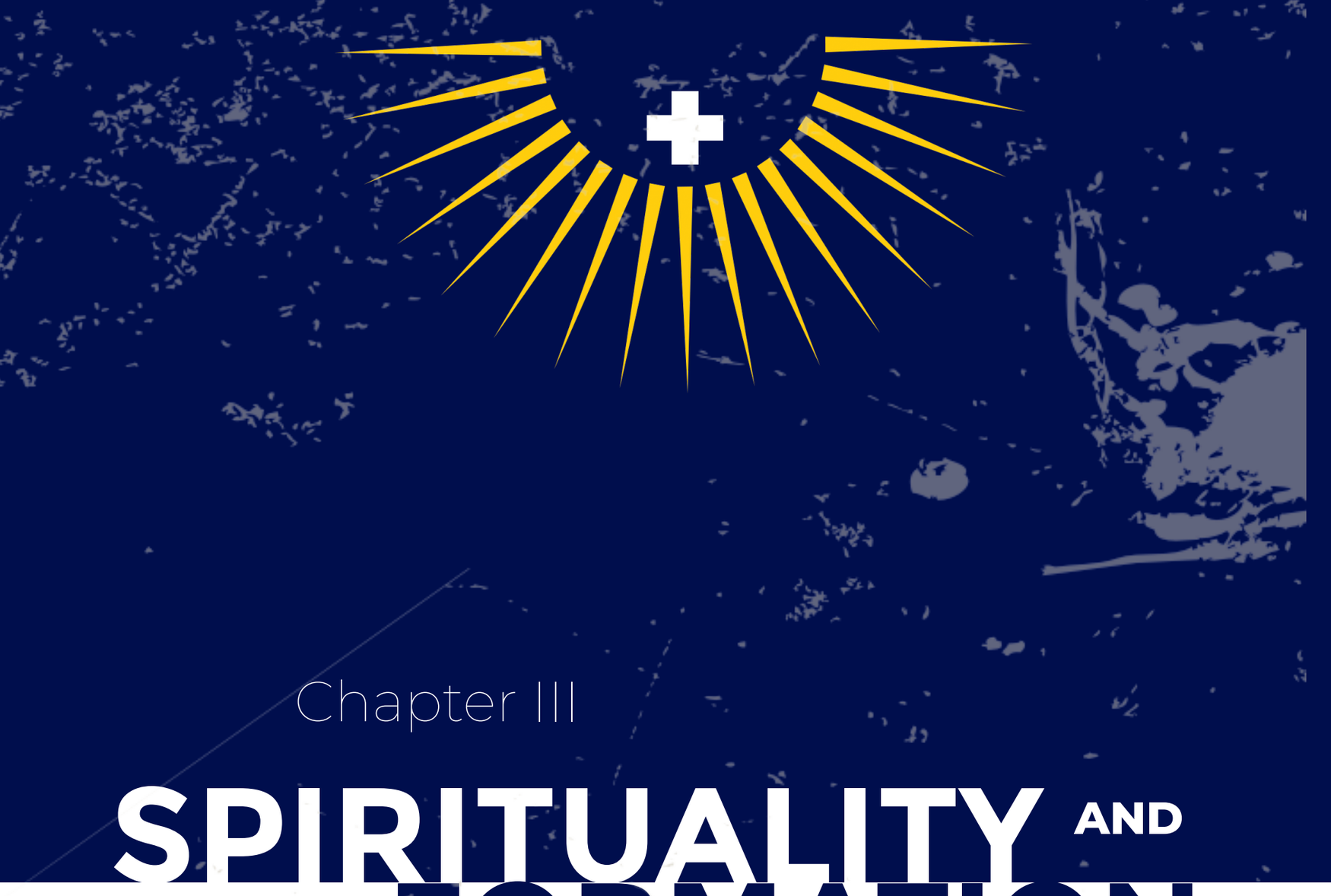
**Above:** SVD Bishops attending the Synod on Synodality. From Left to Right: Bp. Edgardo Cedeño, Tarcisius Isao Kikuchi and Ladislav Német (both appointed cardinals on 6 October 2024), and Bp. Emmanuel Fianu

**Center:** Rome - SVD Bishops during II Vatican Council in *Collegio del Verbo Divino* with the Superior General Fr. Johann Schütte

**Below:** Bp. Wilhelm Duschak playing Mangyan violin in Mansalay, 1954

[78] Louis Kumpiluvelil, "Meeting of Salesian Bishops" (17 May 2010), [In:] https://donboscosouthasia.org/News-Info?title=Meeting-of-Salesian-Bishops&id=3809.





Chapter III

# SPIRITUALITY AND FORMATION


Veni Sancte Spiritus
Et Verbum Caro Factum Est.




The room of St. Arnold at St. Gregory House in Steyl where he spent his last days and died

The simplicity of the room reflects so much of the deep spirituality of St. Arnold





# The SVD Charism and Spirituality in our Wounded World Today




Our "world today is suffering from many serious - often mortal wounds."[1] Therefore the 2024 General Chapter's theme speaks about "discipleship in a wounded world". To write about our world today can only mean to write about the wounded world. For that reason, I will develop the theme: The SVD charism and spirituality in our wounded world. My starting points are the words Fr. Arnold spoke in his sermon during the opening Eucharist of St. Michael's Mission House on 8 September 1875: "A celebration, in its kind unique and rare, has gathered us around the altar. It is the beginning of a holy enterprise, dedicated to God which – even if it reaches its goals only partially – cannot fail to be a spring of salvation and blessing for many thousands of people."[2]

When Arnold spoke these words, nothing looked like them ever becoming a reality. Yet 50 years later, at the Golden Jubilee celebration in Steyl, the then Archbishop of Cologne, Cardinal Schulte, said: "There is something very singular, something altogether unique about the missionary society of Steyl. It is common knowledge that its beginning was not at all promising for Fr. Arnold Janssen and his first associates. Yet, contrary to all human expectations and human predictions, how wonderfully the enterprise has proved to be the work of God."[3]

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[1] Stephen Bevans, "'Your Light Must Shine before Others' (Matt 5:16): Faithful and Creative Discipleship in a Wounded World. A Reflection on the 2024 General Chapter Theme," *Verbum SVD*, 2023, fasc. 2, 159-160.
[2] Hermann auf der Heide, *Die Missionsgesellschaft von Steyl, Ein Bild der ersten 25 Jahre ihres Bestehens*, Steyl 1900, 43 (transl. Jürgen Ommerborn).
[3] *Remembering AJ*, 381.

God at work in and through the SVD in our wounded world – that will be my guiding thought throughout this article.

## 1. God at Work in the Life of Fr. Arnold



Chinese art - Sending the Holy Spirit

### 1.1. Father Arnold, a Man Gifted by the Spirit

Six months before his death Arnold wrote a song–prayer in honor of the Holy Spirit, thanking him for his guidance throughout his life. In this song, he saw his whole life as one great gift of the Holy Spirit: "God of beautiful love, never can I praise and thank you enough. You gave me all I have on earth, even body and soul I owe to you…."

Besides the gifts concerning his personal life, we know of charisms which the Holy Spirit gave him for the good of the worldwide Church. There is firstly the charism of being the Founder of a house and community in the service of foreign missions, particularly, but not exclusively amongst non-Christians. Connected with this charism were the charisms of a rock-like faith and unshakable trust in God and perseverance in the face of difficulties, so great that he was tempted to give up. Then there were the charisms of total surrender to God through the charism of religious life, establishing the Society of the Divine Word as a religious missionary society and the charism of internationality for his foundation. On 8 September 1875, he did not, as originally intended, open a German mission house in Germany for Germans, but the German, Dutch, Austrian mission house in the Netherlands whose first members were a German, a priest from Luxemburg and an Austrian seminarian. He also received the charism of openness to the challenges of his time – for instance through accepting the mission in Latin America or taking over the Vienna Teachers' College to train Catholic teachers for Catholic Austria, even though work among non-Christians had been the SVD's first task.

## 2. God at Work Throughout the 150 Years History

### 2.1. The SVD Consecrated to the Holy Spirit – Gifted by the Spirit

Looking over the 150 years of SVD history, we notice that the Holy Spirit has never revoked the charisms he had given during our foundation time, for instance, the charism of being a religious missionary community, of internationality/interculturality or openness to the challenges of the day. In that way, the Spirit fulfilled a wish of our Founder who in the hymn to the Holy Spirit six months before his death also prayed: "And when my eyes have closed, let others stand in my place and let my sons, my daughters implore you in my spirit. Therefore, I consecrate them to your love; oh take them under your protection."

### 2.2. Prayerful Discernment to Let God Work through Us Today

Looking at the beginning of our history we can ask: Why did people see God at work in Steyl? One reason is that Arnold came to his decisions regarding his foundation in a process of prayerful discernment. In prayer to the Holy Spirit, he sought to find the will of God. Doing the will of God was all-important to him. And for us today walking in his footsteps, that means prayerful discernment to find the will of God which is of crucial importance for us as well. Only then can God work through us today.

### 2.3. The SVD – a Community of Disciples of Jesus

We are a religious missionary society whose name is "Society of the Divine Word". We are *Socii Verbi Divini*, that is, we are companions, disciples of the incarnate Divine Word. We are like the first disciples who did not choose Jesus as their Rabbi/teacher, but whom Jesus called and invited to follow him as his disciples and share his life and perhaps even his violent death, but certainly his resurrection. In short, to share his mission; and so we say: "Your mission, Jesus, is our mission".



Jesus and his disciples of Emmaus - painting in the chapel in the formation house in Juiz de Fora in North Brazil, 2006 Photo: Michael Heinz, SVD

Like the first disciples, we, disciples of Jesus in the twenty-first century, do not just follow him as individuals, but in communion with all the other *Socii* in our Society, including the lay partners. What that means, Fr. Superior General Budi Kleden, in his message to the Society on 8 September 2023, described in these words:

> Our communion expresses itself in the love and responsibility for the mission of our Society… As members of the same family, we are responsible for one another, live in solidarity with one another, are together connected with the people and put the last ones first. The mission entrusted to our Society becomes the heartbeat of each single one of us; it unites us and we belong to this enterprise. The promotion of such a feeling of belonging helps us to overcome all tendencies towards individualism, ethnocentrism and career thinking.

### 2.4. Our Mission as *Socii Verbi Divini*: to be Transforming Missionary Disciples of the Divine Word

As *Socii Verbi Divini,* we are disciples who share Jesus' mission. And his mission in the Gospel according to Mark was to proclaim the Good News (*Euangélion*, Latin: *Evangelium*): "Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'" (Mark 1:14-15).

And according to John 3:16 this Good News is: "God so loved the world that he gave his only son so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."

The front of the sarcophagus of Arnold Janssen encapsulates Fr. Arnold's spirituality.

In Jesus, God's love is present in our world – even if sometimes in a hidden way. Therefore, Jesus said then and says to us today: Repent, change your way of thinking, transform yourselves and believe the Good News that in Jesus, the Kingdom of God's love is near.

And when the missionary himself has changed, "a missionary disciple becomes an agent transforming the world, actualizing the Kingdom of God together with others. As Divine Word Missionaries, we are inspired and compelled to commit ourselves to carry out the work of the *missio Dei* to become transforming missionary disciples of Christ in each place, among every people, and for all cultures."[4] But to become such missionaries we have to remain in Christ and, in the words of Arnold, "in the contemplation … try to enter into the sanctuary of his heart."[5]

## 3. Transformative Religious Divine Word Missionaries in a Wounded World – in the Image of the Trinity

### 3.1. Father Arnold's Understanding of "Divine Word"

Our name "Divine Word" is to be understood in a threefold, Trinitarian way:

- The Word of the Father: that is the Son having become a human being
- The Word of the Incarnate Son: that is the Gospel of Jesus
- The Word of the Holy Spirit, that is Holy Scripture in its entirety; the Word of the prophets, apostles and priests, inasmuch as they wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.[6]

[4] *Documents of the 18th General Chapter SVD 2018*, IWD 2018/6, No. 13.
[5] Arnold Janssen, "The Spirit and Task of our Society," [In:] *AJyt*, 302.
[6] *Allgemeine Konstitutionen und Statuten der Gesellschaft des Göttlichen Wortes*, 1891, 6.



The Sarcophagus of the Founder after beatification in the Lower Church in Steyl



The Trinitarian mission spirituality of the Founder: The entry of the Son of God into the world

*The Wounded World*

The Triune God of Love created the world out of love and that means it was good and beautiful. Yet now, it has become a terribly wounded world. The 2018 meeting of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Arusha, Tanzania was attended by 1000 people from around the world, including our SVD confrere Steve Bevans, who actually chaired a plenary session, and Sr. Mary John, SSpS. The meeting described our wounded world in this way:

> We observed the shocking accumulation of wealth due to the one global financial system, which enriches few and impoverishes many (Isaiah 5:8). This is at the root of many of today's wars, conflicts, ecological devastation, and suffering (1 Timothy 6:10). This global imperial system has made the financial market one of the idols of our time. It has also strengthened cultures of domination and discrimination that continue to marginalize and exclude millions, forcing some among us into conditions of vulnerability and exploitation. We are mindful that the people on the margins bear the heaviest burden.[7]

And to this wounded world we, as *Socii Verbi Divini*, are to bring the Triune God's transforming, healing love. And how are we to do that? One way is through dialogue which "is at the core of the missionary activity of our Society."[8] Focusing on our name "Divine Word", we can see why that is so.

### 3.2. Our Name: Society of the Divine Word

With the help of the Jesuit theologian René Latourelle, I will show how our name helps us to bring the Triune God's healing and transforming love into our world, first concentrating on the human aspect of the term "word".

*The human word*

Each spoken word is an "interpersonal encounter." Whenever we speak, we address another person and hope for an answer. Our words establish by themselves "a circle of address and response, to become conversation, dialogue." The word which establishes dialogue is a sign of friendship and love. It is a "form of giving from one person to the other, offering him hospitality in everything that is best within himself. Each gives and gives himself in a communion of love."[9] Simply by having a conversation, we Divine Word missionaries are to be men of dialogue through which we are able to establish bonds of respect, friendship and love.

*The Divine Word and dialogue*

But then our name "Society of the Divine Word" points us to the Trinity and dialogue. For the Triune God is the loving communion of Father, Son and Spirit. They are "in eternal correlation, interpenetration, love and communion, which make them one sole God."[10] And that means: the Triune God is dialogue and we "have to imitate this dialogue of love between Father, Son and Holy Spirit"[11]

Reflecting on the terms "word" and "Divine Word" in our name we have to say that our name obliges us to be men of dialogue. The 2000 General Chapter added the word "prophetic" to dialogue; we are to be men of prophetic dialogue. Actually, we are committed to a fourfold prophetic dialogue: dialogue with people who have no faith community and with faith seekers; dialogue with people who are poor and marginalized; dialogue with people of different cultures; dialogue with people of different religious traditions and secular ideologies. This dialogue is carried out through four characteristic dimensions: Bible Apostolate, Mission Animation, Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation, and Communication.

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[7] Kenneth R. Ross, *Mission Rediscovered: Transforming Disciples. A Commentary on the Arusha Call to Discipleship*, Geneva: WCC Publications & Global.net 2020, 13.
[8] *13th General Chapter: Mission, Spirituality, Formation,* FTW, 1988/1, 17.
[9] René Latourelle, *Theology of Revelation,* Cork: The Mercier Press 1968, 316, 317.
[10] Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society*, London: Burns & Oates 1988, reprint 1992, 3.
[11] Jean Louis Tauran, "Christians and Muslims in Europe: a common journey," *Pro Dialogo*, June 2008-April 2009, Bulletin, 2009/1, 50.



*The Divine Word as revelation of the God of Love*

Our name "Divine Word" not only directs us to Trinity. The incarnate Divine Word is the Triune God's gift of love, as Arnold said. The Divine Word, therefore, is a word of friendship and love. Through speaking his word of love to us in Jesus, God makes himself "a God near at hand, God with us, Emmanuel" who aims at establishing communion and friendship with us.[12]

As we are missionaries of the Divine Word, we have to let God's healing and transforming love speak to our wounded world today. For instance, by practicing "the spiritual and corporal works of mercy…People are images of God, brothers and sisters of Christ, and temples of the Holy Spirit. Just as God cares for them out of the fullness of his love, endures their defects, and seeks to reform them, so we, too, will love them actively."[13]

### 3.3. The Divine Word is Light that Shines in the Darkness of the World

The *Prologue* of the Gospel according to John says of the Word: "In him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it" (1: 4-5). And in John 8:12 Jesus says: "I am the light of the world." Since we accept Jesus' mission as our mission and he was a missionary of light, so we are to be missionaries of light in our wounded world; concretely, we are "to care for the wounded and suffering, to light small lights where everything seems to be lost,"[14] being convinced that "when darkness is deepest, even the tiniest light makes a difference, and brings, even though with a certain fragility, light and hope."[15]

Therefore, in the words of Fr. Superior General Budi Kleden in his 2023 Christmas message: "Together, as one family, let us continue our journey as faithful and creative disciples, making a profound difference in a wounded world that awaits the light of compassion and hope."

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[12] Latourelle, *Theology of Revelation,* 318.
[13] Arnold Janssen, "The Spirit and Task of our Society," 304.
[14] Pope Francis, Vatican News/German ed., 24 November 1923.
[15] Alberto Joan Pari, *Advent als ein zerbrechliches Licht in der Dunkelheit*, [In:] Katholisch.de, 17 December 1923.

## Conclusion

Father Arnold envisioned his missionary foundation as a spring of salvation and blessing for our world and dedicated his missionary community to the Divine Word, naming it "after him the Society of the Divine Word." 150 years ago, on 16 June 1876, Arnold and Johann Baptist Anzer committed themselves to the mission of the Divine Word by promising for their whole life: "I want to be a servant of the Divine Word."

"Everything I do is to serve the Divine Word for the spread of his Word; my tongue is to serve Your Divine Word."[16] Living in an enormously wounded world 150 years later, we say something similar: His mission is our mission. His divine love is the light in the darkness of our wounded world, bringing the mission is our mission, and in order not to forget this, our motto is to be as it was at the time of our founding: "May the darkness of sin and the night of unbelief vanish before the light of the word and the spirit of grace. And may the heart of Jesus live in the hearts of all people." Hopefully at the 150 years jubilee, people will have reason to say what they said about Arnold's at the 50 years jubilee in Steyl: The Society of the Divine Word's work is God's work.

**Jürgen Ommerborn, SVD (Steyl)**
***Director of the Arnold Janssen Sekretariat, Steyl***



[16] "Serviant labores mei divino Verbo ad propaganda verba Eius; serviat lingua mea divinis eloquis Tuis (...)." *Formula Oblationis*, AdF: 3720-3721.



# Our Spirituality and its Promotion

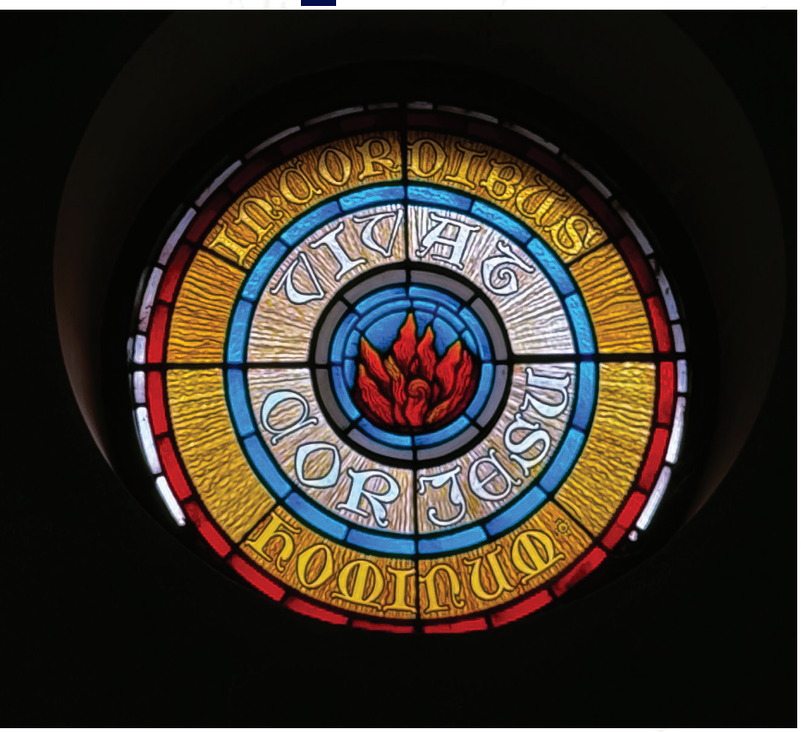



Our spirituality, left to us by Saint Arnold Janssen and further shaped by our experiences and reflections, can be characterized as trinitarian, missionary and incarnational. The Prologue of our Constitutions expresses clearly these aspects. “We see our special dedication to the Divine Word and his mission expressed in our name. His life is our life, his mission our mission. Guided by the Holy Spirit, we follow him, glorifying the Father and bringing the fullness of life to others.” According to Pope Francis, this is not an abstract spirituality but are roots that give life, for which they must be cared for and loved.

Like each Christian spirituality, our spirituality fulfills two basic functions: it stimulates growth in discipleship and love and animates commitment to mission.

At the core of our spirituality is the Holy Trinity, especially God’s love for humanity, revealed to us by sending the Word and the Spirit. Our Founder was rooted in this Trinitarian love and, in his contemplative attitude, was even able to experience it in his own heart. For him, the greatness of our missionary vocation consisted in bringing all people through faith to this experience of love and union with the Trinity.

How has this spirituality been handed down to us and promoted? I will try to answer that question shortly in this reflection, divided into four subtitles: Founder and Founding Generation, Publications and Writers, Teams and Animators, and Challenges.





Erster Jahrgang.
Zu bestellen an der Post, bei uns, den Agenten, oder im Buchhandel.

Steyl, 6. Januar 1878.
Jährlich in 12 Heften, oder 52 Nummern. Preis vierteljährlich 2 Mark.

Die heilige
Stadt Gottes
Illustrirtes Sonntagsblatt für das katholische Volk.

Nr. 1. Religiös unterhaltende Wochenschrift. Herausgegeben vom Missionshause zum hl. Erzengel Michael zu Steyl. 1878.

Inh. u. 1. Der Wächter auf Sion's Felsen, ein Gedicht auf den hl. Glauben von Johannes Janssen. 2. Was wir wollen. 3. Weltherlei Artikel wird die Stadt Gottes bringen? 4. Widmung der Stadt Gottes. 5. Die todte Hand, eine Novelle aus dem 15. Jahrhunderte mit Illustrationen von Victor Dedenter. 6. Sanct Franziscus predigt den Vögeln. 7. Aufruf zum Kampfe des Geistes. 8. Das Missionshaus zum hl. Erzengel Michael in Steyl. 9. Anfrage an bejahrte katholische Schriftsteller und Künstler Deutschlands. 10. Vermischtes. a) Hohes Alter. b) Durchschnittliche Lebensdauer.

1. Der Wächter auf Sion's Felsen.

(Ein Lied auf den heil. Glauben.)

Heil'ger Glaube, Gottes Engel,
Strahlend in des Himmels Licht,
Leuchtend klar im Land der Mängel,
Sag', was Dir bei uns gebricht!
Sprich, was ist Dein heilig Walten
Hier in unserm Thränenthal,
Hier, wo Alles muß veralten,
Und der Tod läßt keine Wahl?

„Gottes Thaten, Gottes Wesen
„Soll ich künden überall,
„Wie so gut Er ist gewesen
„Trotz des Menschen schwerem Fall,
„Der da thront auf Cherubinen,
„Und den Sonnen weist die Bahn,
„Er Jehova wollt' hienieden
„Tilgen selbst der Menschen Wahn.

„Und der Ew'ge kam auf Erden
„Als ein Kindlein schwach und klein,
„Daß die Menschen wieder werden
„Gotteskinder, wahr und rein.
„Wegzunehmen ihre Schulden,
„Litt Er Mühsal und Gefahr,
„Und Er ging den Tod zu dulden,
„Doch es starb am Holz der Schande
„Jesus nur für kurze Zeit.
„Dann Er sprengt des Todes Bande
„Und ging ein zur Herrlichkeit.
„Droben sitzt Er nun zur Rechten
„Seines Vaters ewiglich,
„Ist die Krone der Gerechten,
„Allen Helfer gnädiglich.

„Doch da Viele nicht ermessen,
„Was ihr Gott für sie gethan,
„Wandeln sie des Heils vergessen,
„Schreiten auf des Todes Bahn.
„Achtsam auf der Schlange Lügen
„Folgen sie des Trugen Wort,
„Und sie suchen ihr Genügen
„Auf dem Weg zum bösen Ort.

„Um zu warnen, um zu retten,
„Steh ich hier auf Sions Fels,
„Daß ich sprenge' die Sklavenketten,
„Daß die Schuld ich von dir wälz'.
„Willst du Licht und Kraft empfangen,
„Siegreich folgen meiner Spur,
„Mußt du hier das Kreuz umfangen,
„Durch das Kreuz wirst siegen nur.

„Sieh' dies Kreuz in meiner Linken
„Ist dein Stern in finst'rer Nacht,
„Vor dem Kreuz wird niedersinken
„Alle eitle Erdenpracht.
„Mit dem Kreuz will ich dich führen
„Hoch hinauf zu Gottes Höh'n.
„Laß dich nur von mir regieren
„Und du wirst Gott selber seh'n.

Heil'ger Glaube, Gottes Engel,
Sions Wächter stark und mild,
Ja, uns führ' im Thal der Mängel;
Leucht' uns vor mit Deinem Bild!
Geh' voran im Lebensstreite
Muthig mit dem Kreuzpanier!
Groß ist einst die Siegesbeute;
Dir vertrauend folgen wir.

Steyl, am Feste des h. Franz Xaver 1877.
Johannes Janssen.

Der Glaube

## Founder and Founding Generation

Arnold was a great spiritual animator. One bishop from Italy characterized his influence on the life of the Church: "What Don Bosco was in the south of Europe, Arnold became in the north." Already in Bocholt while teaching at the high school, Arnold engaged zealously with the Apostleship of Prayer and used his holidays to visit parishes and invite people to become "apostles" through their prayer.

It was also his piety that marked deeply the people, close to him. Fr. Hermann Fischer who observed the Founder during the Christmas night liturgy writes: "Anyone who has seen the priest kneeling on the bare floor before the Child lying on straw and has seen his face marked with devotion and holy joy cannot forget this sacred impression."

The well-known *Quarter Hour Prayer*, the two short *Vivat* prayers, and many other devotions as well as his talks, homilies and conferences were aimed to awaken a love for prayer, and a desire to serve and worship God. The form of many of Arnold's letters reveals also his deep desire to animate others. The initials of the *Vivat Deus* prayer VDUETICN *(Vivat Deus Unus et Trinus in Cordibus Nostris)* formed the heading of his letters, which were signed with the formula *your spiritual father and confrere*.

The same could be said about the content of his letters. In a letter to Fr. Reinke, Arnold writes: "The first task that always comes to mind is how I can best care for the spiritual growth in the house. A community can only amount to something if it is animated by a good spirit. Only then can it expect blessings from above. Only then can it share something with those outside itself."

Arnold believed in the power of the written word. Therefore, he started the printing press and animated a missionary spirit through various publications and also helped to quench the spiritual thirst of the readers. This was manifested in many ways. Thus, one of the objectives of the missionary magazine *Stadt Gottes* was to foster the faith of people. The editorials of his magazine *The Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart* always started and ended with a prayer.

Christian spirituality is however not identical with prayers and devotions only. It is a much broader term, comprising also attitudes and behavior of a person, who seeks the will of God and is sensitive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. How this "behavioral" part of the spirituality of Arnold affected others is shown in a statement of Fr. Wilhelm Gier, the third superior general. He was not an admirer of our Founder at the beginning, but later he said: "The more I get to know about other founders, the more I admire our own Founder." Nowadays, when more and more studies are published about his life and spirituality, we may say something similar: the more we know him, the more we admire him.

Yet, it was not only Arnold himself who promoted spirituality, but also members of his three congregations. Br. Christopher

narrates the following story. "The Founder was always visibly pleased whenever he heard diocesan priests say: 'That brother must be from Steyl; he talks so readily about the Holy Spirit.'" There were also thousands of lay people, who participated in the retreats in Steyl and returned home with a deep spiritual experience, which they shared with others.

With the sending out of missionaries, it became clear that the spirituality lived in Steyl could be practiced differently in other parts of the world; inculturation and contextualization were needed. Thus, missionaries had to discern what was the core of our spirituality and what was only its historical and cultural expressions. This remains a challenge for each SVD missionary, even today.

## Publications and Writers

After Arnold's death his spirituality started to be systematically studied. Several publications appeared which helped to understand and spread his spiritual legacy. I will mention only the most significant ones.

Fr. Hermann Fischer wrote the first study on the spirituality of Arnold entitled: *You are the Temple of the Holy Spirit* (1996).[17] The next one was Fr. Hermann Sandkamp with the book: *owards the Holy Sources* (1947).[18] In view of the beatification of our Founder, Fr. Peter McHugh prepared: *The Spirituality of Our Society* (1975). Fr. Pietro Sessolo wrote in Italian *The spirituality of Blessed Arnold Janssen* (1986).[19]

Two authors from the Arnold Janssen Secretariat in Steyl should be mentioned: Fr. Jakob Reuter with his book *Proclaiming the Word in the Power of the Spirit* (1994),[20] and Fr. Jürgen Ommerborn with his talks, newsletters, articles, and the development of spirituality for our lay partners. Both contributed greatly to the promotion of our spirituality.

Br. Friedbert Ewertz wrote *God´s Holy Will Alone* (1995),[21] thoughts of our Founder, and Fr. Josef Alt in his two publications *Journey of Faith* (2002) and *Arnold Janssen Reader. Guidance in Challenging Times* (2017) shared a lot about our Founder and his practical wisdom. On the occasions of the beatification (1975) and canonization (2003) of Arnold Janssen and Joseph Freinademetz many articles, reflections and publications appeared concerning the life and spirituality of our new saints.

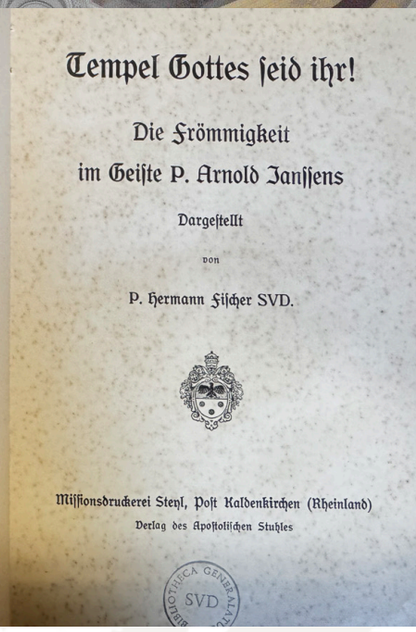
Among authors, those writing in Spanish could be mentioned: Fr. Luis Liberti, Fr. Fernando Villanueva Cilveti, Fr. José Luis Corral, Fr. Roberto Díaz and in Polish: Fr. Józef Tyczka.

Sr. Franziska Carolina Rehbein, SSpS, a member of the AJSC Team, contributed greatly to spiritual animation through her many publications on our Founding Generation. Credit should be given also to Fr. Andrzej Miotk for his many articles, talks as well as his two-volume historical-spiritual study on Arnold Janssen: *Untiring Missionary of the Word and the Spirit* (2022).

From the latest resource materials for spiritual animation could be highlighted (1) *Vademecum SVD* (2009) a devotional book based on our spirituality, (2) Website on spirituality *vivatdeus.org* (2020) which is a joint






**Above:** Our Trinitarian Mission Identity set in stone in the Holy Spirit Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Buenos Aires (1907). It was carried out accorging to the indications of the Founder

**Below:** Hermann Fischer, *Tempel Gottes seid Ihr* (You are the Temple of the Holy Spirit) - first book on the spirituality of the Founder (1932)

[17] *Tempel Gottes seid Ihr. Die Frömmigkeit im Geiste P. Arnold Janssens*, Steyl 1932.
[18] *An heiligen Quellen. Aus der religiösen Gedankenwelt des Dieners Gottes*, Steyl 1947.
[19] *La Spiritualità del Beato Arnoldo Janssen. Fondatore dei Missionari Verbiti*, Roma 1986.
[20] *Vom Geist erfasst und gesandt. Charakterzüge des seligen Arnold Janssen*, AN SVD-72, Romae 1994.
[21] *Allein Gottes heiliger Wille - Worte des seligen Arnold Janssen*, Steyl 1992.

venture of the SVD, SSpS and SSpSAP, where many of the above-mentioned publications and new materials can be found, (3) *The Spirituality of Interculturality* (2017) and (4) *Reflection Guide for Mutual Enrichment in Spirituality* (2021) prepared by teams of spirituality and interculturality.

## Teams and Animators

A significant milestone in advancement of our spirituality was the establishment of the *Arnold Janssen Spirituality Center* (AJSC) in Steyl. It was a fruit of the 13th General Chapter of 1988, which recommended to "establish at Steyl a center both for research into the spiritual heritage of Arnold Janssen and the Society and for the spiritual animation of our members" and invited the cooperation of the SSpS and the SSpSAP in this endeavor. The AJSC was inaugurated on 15 January 1990 in Steyl as a joint venture of all three congregations of the Arnoldus Family.



AJSN with Nemi renewal program in Steyl, 2022

Among its many activities could be mentioned: organizing workshops for leaders and formators, offering retreats on our spirituality, training teams and animators in PRMs, collaborating with the Nemi renewal courses, etc. Due to the undertakings of the AJSC, the promotion of our spirituality gained new intensity, and much interest has been generated in our Founder, the Co-foundresses, and the whole Founding Generation. In our three Congregations there was a stronger sense of being one Arnoldus Family, sharing much in common in spirituality and charism, yet with distinct and mutually enriching approaches. But the most important development over these years was the growing conviction of spiritual animation as a top priority.

From 2018 to 2020, AJSC was suspended, later, in 2021, the AJSC was transformed into the *Arnold Janssen Spirituality Network* (AJSN) to better respond to new developments and challenges. The AJSN besides its Core Team (2 SVDs and 2 SSpS) has also an Extended Team representing each of the Zones. Currently a process of establishing local teams of spiritual animation is going on.

Up to now, there were 24 members in the AJSC and the AJSN Core team: 14 SSpS and 10 SVDs (Heinrich Heekeren, Anthony Bon Pates, Jos Vazhail, Peter McHugh, Cyprianus Setyawan, Mike Somers, Simon Bata, Renato Gnatta, Peter Dušička and Dennis Manzana).

The AJSN collaborates closely with the Resource Committee on Interculturality – a joint SVD-SSpS group, chaired on behalf of the SVD by Fr. Roger Schroeder. Concrete fruits of this collaboration are workshops for training in spirituality and interculturality as well as preparation of various materials like modules for retreats, recollection days, and so forth.

Among animators could also be counted some of our confreres, who show a great interest in our spirituality and are now promoting it on social media (Dixson D'Souza, Eric Lacandula, Dariusz Pielak, Saju Aruvelil, etc.). Many of our benefactors, distributors of our magazines, ex-alumni of our educational institutions, ex-SVDs as well as our lay partners not only benefit from our spirituality but also help to keep it alive.

## Challenges

Some of the major challenges are the following:

- *Contemplative attitude*. Many understand, spiritual animation is only organizing spiritual activities like devotions, days of recollection and so forth. Yet, the contemplative attitude, which leads one to be in touch with oneself, and see everything and everyone with the eyes of God, is so often neglected. How to cultivate it?

- *Ecological spirituality*. Care for the environment is a part of our spirituality. The Word speaks to us also in creation, which is the sign of God's love for us. A call to *ecological conversion*, which flows also from our vow of poverty, needs to be practiced more.
- *Interculturality and Spirituality*. Both these areas have started collaboration on the congregational level. How to extend this collaboration to the level of the Zones and PRMs for the benefit of our mission?
- *Formation and involvement of our lay partners*. Lay partners are already members of spirituality teams in some PRMs. How can we increase their participation and involvement?
- *Vivat Deus* website on spirituality. Even though it was launched in 2020, it remains unknown to many. How do we change it and use this resource better for animation?
- In line with the theme of the 19th General Chapter 2024 we can ask: How can our spirituality help us to let our *Light shine before the world* and better respond to our own woundedness and the woundedness of our world? What are the elements, and attitudes that should be stressed more?

## Conclusion

"Our world will be poorer without the SVD missionaries," said Fr. Heinz Kulüke, (Superior General 2012-2018) after receiving many positive reactions from the laypeople on the work of our missionaries. Behind these words of appreciation, we can find our spirituality, which nourished not only their missionary life and service, but also their efforts of "bringing the fullness of life to others" *(Prologue)*. Now, it is our turn.

**Peter Dušička, SVD (Slovakia)**
***Generalate Coordinator for Spiritual Animation and Member of AJSN***








**Above:** AJSC Team in Steyl 2010
**Center:** 25 years of AJSC Team in Steyl 2015
**Below:** AJSN Core Team 2021

Sts.
Michael,
Gabriel,
and
Raphael,

Promote
the
Kindgom
of God
on Earth






"The importance of the Archangels as individual patrons of the Society was demonstrated as the first three houses of the Society were dedicated to Archangels: Steyl to St. Michael (1875), Rome to St. Raphael (1888), and Mödling near Vienna to St. Gabriel (1889). Thus, each community received an Archangel as its protector and intercessor."

- Fr. Andrzej Miotk, SVD ,
*Untiring Missionary of the Word and the Spirit* , Vol. 1, p.311

Photos: Stained glass in the Upper Church of St. Michael Mission House in Steyl taken by Heinz Helf, SVD






# St. Gabriel and St. Augustin:

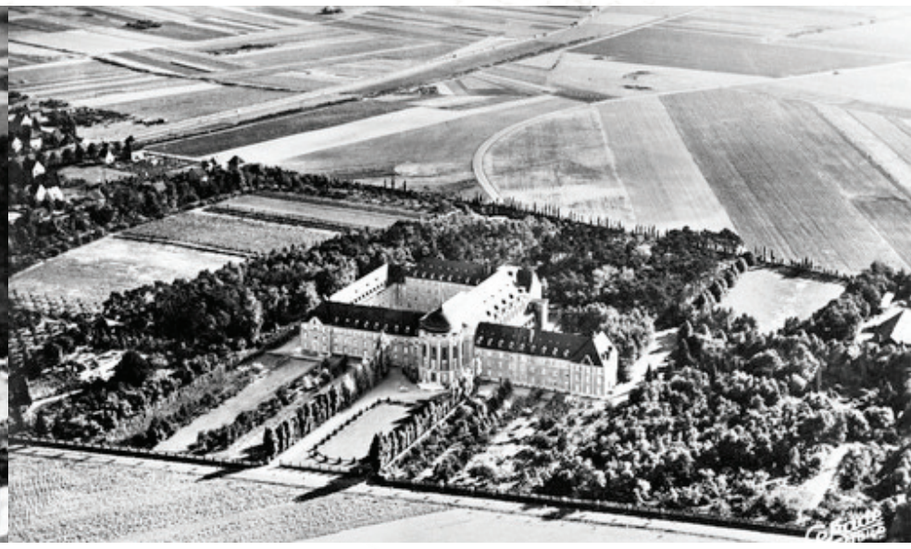
## Mission Formation Centers in the Society of the Divine Word Before World War II

For a long time, St. Gabriel in Austria (established in 1889) was the only German central scholasticate in the Society. However, in 1925, a new German-speaking scholasticate offering philosophical studies was opened in St. Augustin, Germany. Subsequently, theological studies were also introduced there, which caused displeasure at St. Gabriel. The central initiative to combine these two scholasticates faced resistance and never fully succeeded for various reasons. St. Gabriel, the first-born scholasticate, proud of its illustrious history, was known as *Mater et caput omnium scholasticatuum* SVD. This article sheds light on the nature of their functions and differences.

From the very beginning, the Society of the Divine Word (SVD) had the task of profoundly and thoroughly studying and researching peoples of other cultures. It was an important requirement for the missionaries' training not only to complete the study of philosophy and Catholic theology but also to devote themselves to the different cultural contexts in order to know them. Through the initiatives of the SVD anthropologists, Wilhelm Schmidt (linguist and ethnologist) and his confreres of the "Vienna School" for cultural theory,[22] ethnological

[22] The Divine Word Missionaries as members of the Vienna School of Cultural Theory: Wilhelm Schmidt (+1954), Martin Gusinde (+1969), Wilhelm Koppers (+1961), Paul Schebesta (+1967), Georg Höltker (+1976).



**Left:** Compound of Mission Seminary in St. Gabriel, Austria

**Right:** The bird's-eye view of St. Augustin, Germany

research became a very important aspect in mission activities, a kind of orientation point that helped to train mission-ethnographic work and contributed to the encounter of cultures.[23]

## 1. St. Gabriel: The Establishment of the Mission Formation

Father Arnold Janssen expressed his guiding principles thoughtfully at the laying of the foundation stone of the Mission House St. Gabriel in Mödling (1889). From the beginning, the house was intended as a mission seminary for the Society of the Divine Word; therefore, the entire teaching took missionary objectives into account. The following aspects, according to Fr. Arnold Janssen, are fundamental: 1. All lecturers and all students are members of the Society (and therefore religious). 2. The mission house is at the same time a monastery. 3. Formation is directed toward the same goal for all, namely the priesthood and the missionary vocation. Up to 30 years later St. Gabriel was primarily the center of missionary training. It was a continuity of the missiological tradition in the Society of the Divine Word in the service of faith and science, with the aim:

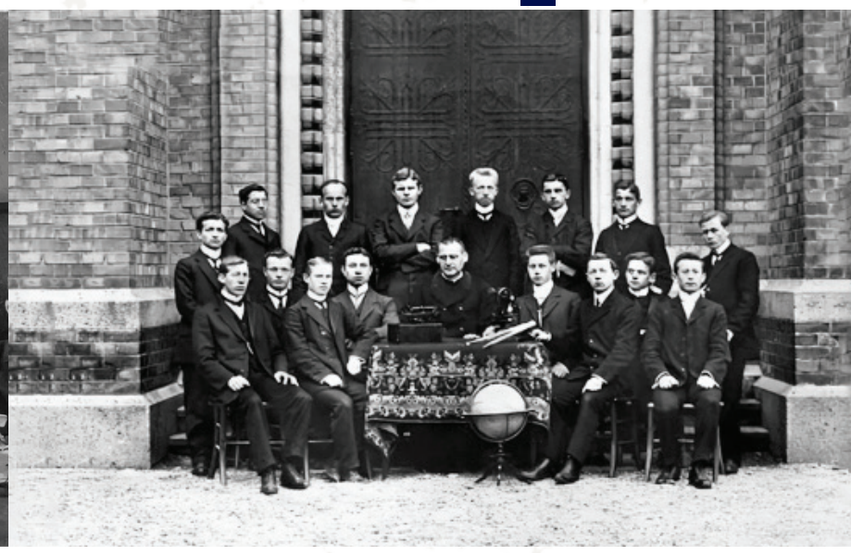
- to serve the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ;
- to help people in the world to create a more humane life;
- to advance the scientific research of peoples.

With such a formation and education program St. Gabriel became the mission center and the starting point for the global engagement of the SVD among a wide variety of peoples and cultures. The academic-scientific education and training were mainly cultivated in two directions, namely in mission studies and secondly in ethnology with its related areas (linguistics, sociology, history of religions), so that the entire formation instruction was carefully aimed towards missionary objectives.[24] Because of the importance of these sciences for the mission, these instructions naturally grew into compulsory subjects and filled several years with one hour per week. Thanks to Schmidt's initiative, general linguistics and phonetics were introduced as necessary subjects in St. Gabriel in 1900 and ethnology and history of religion in 1912, which were held until World War II.[25]

In addition, missiological interests were also cultivated outside of the classroom, such as mission-friendly efforts through lively correspondence with missionaries already working in different places. In 1906, Wilhelm Schmidt founded the journal *Anthropos*, where theology was documented based on the diversity of cultures,

[23] Jerzy Skrabania, „Höltkers ethnologische Sammlungen in HVK, Sankt Augustin," [In:] Francois Rüegg (ed.), *Ethnographie und Mission. Georg Höltker und Neuguinea,* Studia Instituti Missiologici 110, Siegburg: Franz Schmitt Verlag 2018, 127.
[24] Hertha Firnberg, „Im Dienst von Glaube und Wissenschaft," [In:] *Festakt zur Eröffnung des Missionsethnographischen Museums St. Gabriel,* 3.12.1979.
[25] Harald Grauer, *Georg Höltker SVD (1895–1976): Eine biografische Darstellung und Analyse seiner Bestimmung des Verhältnisses von Ethnologie und Missionswissenschaft,* Studia Instituti Anthropos 61, Baden-Baden: Academia 2022, 75.





**Left:** The students of the Lyceum at St. Gabriel in 1902

**Right:** Fr. Damian Kreichgauer with SVD students at St. Gabriel, 1912

religions and worldviews, as it was an ethnographic collection. It is to the credit of the academic tradition of this formation house that theology has never been pursued in isolation, but rather in a global discussion of the diversity of cultures that has always existed in the academic circles.[26]

## Structure of Higher Studies

The structure of the studies has not always remained the same over time. In the course of academic development, it was necessary to move and adapt to universal progress. Generally, the academic training included two years of philosophy, followed by four years of theology.[27] The purpose of studying philosophy is to form a defensive (apologetic) "world view" through appropriate instruction and through independent reflection and research. Theology goes a big step further. It complements and perfects natural knowledge with new insights brought to the world by God's supernatural revelation.[28] In addition to this main subject of philosophy, including the history of philosophy, there were a number of minor subjects. They covered science and languages. The introduction to life and nature was not only to enrich knowledge but above all, as already mentioned, to deepen philosophical insight.

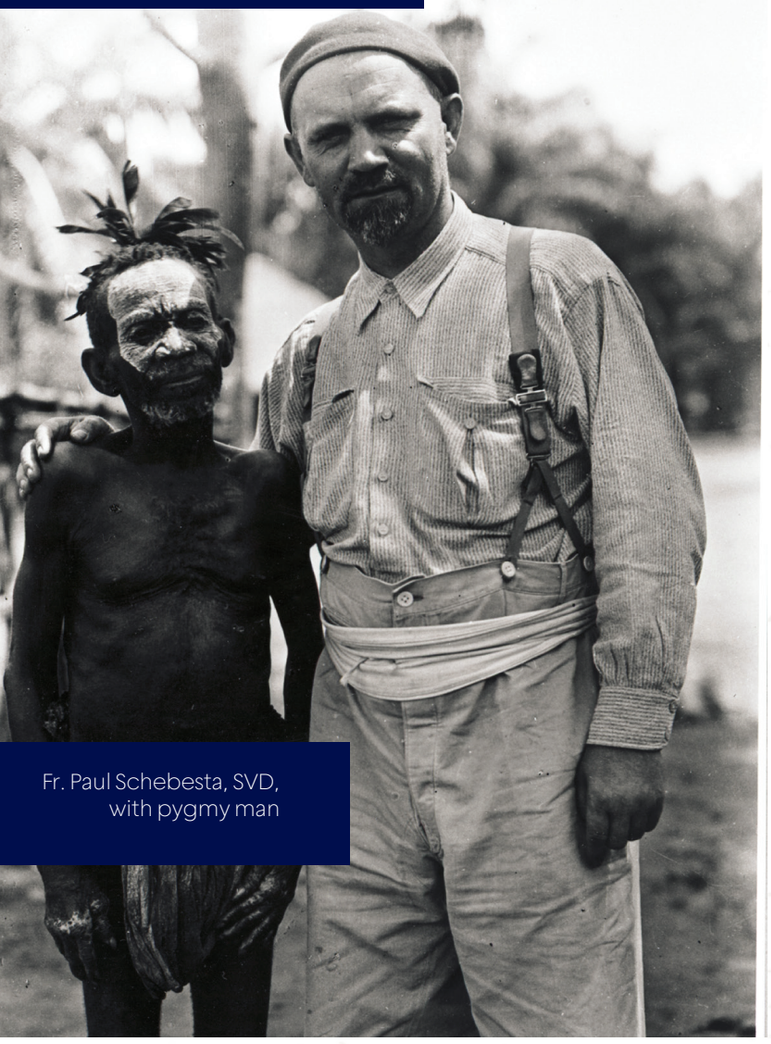
In addition to lectures in the natural sciences, practical sessions were arranged for those interested where the graduates learned how to work independently and experiment under the guidance of the lecturer. There was a botanical and a zoological internship, where remarkable work was done and an entire zoological museum with taxidermy animals. A mineralogical and geological internship was also created with a rich collection of minerals, some of which were collected on excursions made for the purpose. Not to be forgotten are the general introductions and practical exercises in pathology and medicine, which were valuable for the future missionary.

Practical purposes for mission work were taught, which also served as instruction for architectural drawing and provided an elementary introduction to construction work. With the missions in mind, agriculture was also taught for those interested. The missionary must learn the economics of a household and to be as independent and self-sufficient as possible. Therefore, he may have to prepare himself to become his own servant, gardener and craftsman. Also, languages were taught as obligatory subjects: German, Latin, English, and sometimes Spanish. Greek, Hebrew, French, Italian and later also Polish and Czech were available as optional subjects. Philosophical studies only have a preparatory character for the future student of theology

[26] Firnberg, „Im Dienst von Glaube und Wissenschaft."
[27] The number of students to priesthood was high and still growing. Already in the years 1901/1902 there were 179 including Novitiate, Philosophy and Theology; additional were 76 gymnasium students as candidates. Before the World War I, 1914, there were already 220 SVD-students. After the World War I, again the number of missionary candidates was high and growing, from 230 in 1923 to 349 in 1938, including 164 Theology, 134 Philosophy students and 51 first novices. Josef Alt, *Die Geschichte des Missionshauses Sankt Gabriel, der Gesellschaft des Göttlichen Wortes*, Mödling 1990, 97-99, 190-194, 224, 257, 277.
[28] *50 Jahre St. Gabriel: Gedenkblätter zum goldenen Gründungsjubiläum des Missionshauses St. Gabriel, Wien-Mödling 1889 - 4.0ktober 1939,* Wien-Mödling: Missionsdruckerei 1939, 55, 57ff.



The missiologist Fr. Horst Rzepkowski with Fr. Hermann Hagenmaier in Rome 1987



Fr. Paul Schebesta, SVD, with pygmy man

(*ancilla theologiae*). The Bible and many other subjects were taught in theological subjects according to the Catholic priesthood studies. The ethnological subjects (ethnology, linguistics, religious studies) were also continued and maintained throughout the theological study years.

## Missiology

From the founding of the Mission House, the students were taught the subject of mission science. One of the students, Friedrich Schwager, SVD (+1928), was the one who continued his education through his own research and earned a name as a specialist in the field of missiology. He introduced the Strasbourg private lecturer Dr. Josef Schmidlin to missiology; in 1911, he was the first to hold the chair of Catholic Missiology at the University of Münster and founded the *Journal for Mission Studies*.[29]

In a missionary seminary, the entire formation was concerned with missionary objectives. For this purpose, a missionary association was founded in 1909, and a year later the "Mission Academy" of the scholastics under the title *Regina Apostolorum*, a working group that dealt with relevant questions in various groups. The head of the mission academy and at the same time the lecturer of the missiology studies in St. Gabriel was Fr. Johannes Thauren, SVD.[30]

Under his leadership St. Gabriel became a strong support for the flourishing missionary movement in Austria. The first International Academic Mission Congress took place in St. Gabriel in 1924, and the sixth in 1929 had around 1,000 participants. Since 1900, St. Gabriel had a small mission museum, which has been expanded over the years into an ethnological museum.[31]

## Ethnology

Ethnology and related subjects became specific to St. Gabriel. In 1900, Wilhelm Schmidt began to present the results of his research to an optional audience, initially in a narrow circle, afterwards in the journal *Anthropos*, which gained an international reputation over the years. At the suggestion of Schmidt, several ethnological expeditions were carried out: research trips in *Tierra del Fuego* by Fr. Gusinde; research trips by Fr. Schebesta to the pygmies in Malacca and in the Central African jungle as well as the Negritos in the Philippines; Fr. Höltker's three-year research trip in New Guinea; Fr. Köppers' research trip in the Indian subcontinent among the indigenous Bhils and their neighbors. The flourishing mission movement in Austria in the 20th century had a strong base in St. Gabriel, which was concentrated in international academic mission congresses until World War II.[32]

[29] Hans Brunner (ed.), *100 Jahre Missionshaus St. Gabriel 1889-1989*, Mödling: Verlag St. Gabriel 1989, 25.
[30] Alt, *Die Geschichte des Missionshauses St. Gabriel*, 237.
[31] *50 Jahre St. Gabriel,* 65.
[32] *50 Jahre St. Gabriel,* 65.







**Above:** The courtyard of the Mission House of St. Augustin

**Below:** The Priestly ordination in St. Augustin, 17 September 1938

## 2. Sankt Augustin: The Reason and Development of the Mission Seminary

Already in 1923, Fr. Joseph Grendel, the Provincial of the West German Province and former rector in St. Gabriel, thought about using St. Augustin as a place for the training of missionaries, the study of philosophy and then theology.[33] He wanted to create a mission training center for the German province in case St. Gabriel alone was no longer able to accept all the graduates for theological studies. In 1924 it became impossible for St. Gabriel to accept all its graduates. The best solution would be that all of philosophy would be in the one house, in St. Augustin and all of theology in St. Gabriel.

Because of its proximity to Cologne, St. Augustin would be particularly suitable for philosophy, because the Albertus Magnus Academy was built there: a special institute for higher studies in scholastic philosophy, similar to that previously founded in Leuven. With the approval of the general council, the *Biennium philosophicum* was organized in St. Augustin - and the *Quadriennium theologicum* in St. Gabriel.[34] On 21 September 1925 the philosophy lectures began with 65 students of the second year as well as 64 novices; one year later there were already between 180 and 190 students living in the house.[35]

### Establishment of Theological Studies in St. Augustin

There was always a need to build a fully developed scholasticate in St. Augustin. Meanwhile, it took a full decade for theology to be established at that Mission House, despite strong objections and resistance from St. Gabriel.[36] In June 1930, the general council made the decision to allow theology to be taught in St. Augustin, beginning with the winter semester of 1932. Therefore, all necessary teaching staff was put together and a decision was made about the distribution of subjects. After some discussions, it was clear at the end of August 1932 that theology studies could begin. The *curriculum* was similar to other seminaries in Germany at that time. Eight months after theology was added to the philosophical *curriculum*, there were one hundred and thirty scholastics living in St. Augustin.[37] Already on 21 September 1935, the first ordination of 31 deacons to the priesthood took place in St. Augustin.[38] This meant the full seminary formation and education was established in this Mission House. Because of World War II the complete mission formation took place here from 1945 onwards.

## Conclusion

The formation of the SVD missionaries was a very important requirement for their effective mission work; the regular education for the priesthood (philosophy and theology - according to all church requirements) as well as studying different cultural contexts or various people's worldviews, before they could proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ with mutual understanding. That was their first and real task. What the missionaries had to know thoroughly was

[33] Karl Josef, Rivinius, *100 Jahre St. Augustin*, Sankt Augustin: Steyler-Verlag 2014, 101f.
[34] Rivinius, *100 Jahre St. Augustin*, 113ff.
[35] Joachim G. Piepke, *Steyler Missionare St. Augustin*, St. Augustin 1999, 34.
[36] Rivinius, *100 Jahre St. Augustin*, 100, 143.
[37] Rivinius, *100 Jahre St. Augustin*, 153.
[38] Piepke, *Steyler Missionare St. Augustin*, 34; Rivinius, *100 Jahre St. Augustin*, 159.

the ethnicity and native language of the groups entrusted to him. Thus, they stand in their mission field as a learner from the day they arrive until their last breath.[39]

As a result, many missionaries dedicated themselves to an intensive study of the local and indigenous cultures in the area they worked in, because being a missionary means being committed to the mission, a mission that does not come from just anyone, but from Jesus Christ, and in this sense the SVD missionaries tried to find access to all people around the world. The study of non-European cultures has led to many collections of valuable cultural and ethnological resources, which were then exhibited in mission houses and formed an essential part of them.[40]

As we can notice, the character of the two formation centers was quite different. St. Gabriel was more connected to the spirituality and human sciences worldview of Fr. Arnold, in particular on culture and the history of religion, which supported the mission-ethnological training. St. Augustin was just preparing itself for the theological and mission formation. Therefore, the formation system of St. Gabriel would be more fitting in our time; it focused more on inculturation training.

**Jerzy Skrabania, SVD (Germany)**
***Former Director of Museum in Sankt Augustin, now Lecturer at KHKT, Cologne***



[39] Martin Gusinde, *Die völkerkundliche Ausrüstung des Missionars,* Steyler Missionsschriftenreihe 1, Kaldenkirchen: Steyler Verlagsbuchhandlung 1959, 11, 102.
[40] Jerzy Skrabania, „Unvergessliche Zeugnisse besonderer Kulturen. Ethnologische Sammlungen im Museum Haus Völker und Kulturen in Sankt Augustin," [In:] Olaf Zimmermann and Theo Geißler (eds.), *Kolonialismus-Debatte: Bestandsname und Konsequenzen*. (Aus Politik & Kultur 17), Berlin 2019, 70.


CHAPELLE

# Nurturing Local Vocations in D. R. Congo



On 10 October 1951, the first three SVD missionaries set foot on the soil of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Bandundu, which was their first place to stay, became the genesis of our mission in Congo. Undoubtedly, upon their arrival, the new SVD missionaries first launched into the pastoral ministry. They were appointed to do pastoral ministry in four parishes: Ngi Catholic Mission (1951), St. Hippolyte Parish in Bandundu, Beno Catholic Mission, and Kimbau Catholic Mission which were Jesuit missions. These parishes of the SVD mission were subsequently born into "Bandundu Big Region." We worked in the region of Kwango, which had become the Apostolic Prefecture of Kwango in 1903 and the Apostolic Vicariate of Kwango in 1928. It became the Apostolic Vicariate of Kikwit in 1955.

The Kenge part was structurally transformed into the Apostolic Prefecture of Kenge in 1957, with Msgr. Johann van der Heyden, SVD as Prefect Apostolic, and later the Diocese of Kenge with Msgr. François Hoenen as first Bishop.

## Formation of the Young Local Candidates

In Congo, the Congregation of Propagation of the Faith gave priority to beginning the formation of the secular clergy. Among the Jesuits' first members, several became the first secular priests, because the religious congregations were not allowed to recruit members. When this prohibition was revoked, some secular priests chose to become Jesuits (Fr. Pasupasu, Fr. Munzihirwa, Fr. Landa, etc.).







**Above.** Juniorate formation house for brother candidates at Kalonda in Congo, 1969

**Center:** Before entering the classes in a village in Congo, 1969

**Below:** Fr. Gaspar Mudiso, SVD, greeting people in Bandundu, 1969

## The Beginnings of SVD Formation in Beno and Kalonda

We can say that the SVD thought very early (many said 'too early') of recruiting its own members. In 1957, the SVD Mission had become a Region and Fr. Hubert Finken was the regional superior (1958-61). The region began to recruit brother candidates in 1959. Unfortunately, the candidates they recruited had a low education level because of the local situation. Among 14 candidates, eight entered the novitiate in Beno in 1960. In 1961 the novitiate was transferred to Kalonda, where Msgr. van der Heyden had opened a minor seminary. Four of the eight novices pronounced their first vows in 1962, only one of them Br. Adalbert Muntete pronounced his perpetual vows in 1968. But he left the SVD in 1974. He got married in 1980 and died in 2002.

A big group of eight novices joined in 1961; in 1962 there were still two novices and in 1963 only one. They all left during the novitiate. From 1964 to 1967 there was no novice. Even the system of a juniorate for candidates for brotherhood which had up to 28 candidates produced only one novice, Bernard Mabulu in 1968. One or two years after his first vows he left the Society. Hence, in 1971 the SVD closed the juniorate.

## Candidates for the Society

Jean Pierre M'Lopo who had finished his philosophy studies in the Major Seminary of Mayidi and Jean Gaspard Mudiso who had finished the humanities in the minor seminary of Kinzambi, were the only candidates for priesthood who began their novitiate in Kalonda in 1962.

They pronounced their first vows in 1963. As M'Lopo had already finished his philosophy studies, he went immediately to continue for theology in Rome, but left the SVD in 1965. Mudiso, in spite of his first vows, continued for one more year the novitiate in Padua, where he studied also philosophy. Matthieu Musey entered novitiate in Padua in 1963, pronounced his first vows and began his philosophy studies there. He continued his theology studies in Rome but left the Society in 1969 before his perpetual vows.

Only Gaspard Mudiso pronounced his perpetual vows in 1968 and was ordained priest on 8 December 1968. He was appointed to Congo and worked first in Bandundu, where he founded - together with Dieter Skweres - the CAB (Center of Biblical Apostolate) and then he was chaplain in the parish Christ-Roi of Kinshasa. He was the first SVD priest of Africa. In 1972 he continued biblical studies in Germany and came back to Congo in 1982. He was a professor in the Catholic Faculties in Kinshasa, prefect of our scholastics, provincial councilor, vice-provincial, general councilor and finally Bishop-coadjutor of Kenge (1998) and Bishop of Kenge in 1999. Since 2018, he has become emeritus.

## A General Crisis of Vocations

The Region of Congo never took a decision to stop formation. But after independence in 1960, there was a general vocational crisis. Other religious congregations also like Scheut (Belgium) and Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate had closed their formation houses. Even in the dioceses, there were only a few ordinations. Fr. Alphonse Müller, SVD, was appointed to be novice-master in an inter-congregational novitiate together with OMI. The problem was that there were no novices.

It should be noted that both before and after the independence of Congo, the political situation was very volatile. Therefore, the confreres who knew the political glitches that accompanied independence thought and said to themselves, "Now, we are going to be chased away and we are going to close the missions like in China. What is the point of continuing the training of the youth? What will they become? Where do we put them?" This idea was certainly the fundamental reason why the training suffered a long-term shutdown.

In 1969, during the long vacation time, three candidates came for an "experience" in Kimbau. One of them was told to begin first his studies of philosophy in a seminary. Then he did a practical year in Kalonda. In 1975, he left, but up to now he has contact with the SVD.

This general vocational crisis became more serious when the political regime led by President Mobutu Sese Seko did not favor religious vocations in 1972. Only in 1978, did the situation become more or less normal. So, in 1980 our province appointed a vocational director and like other congregations, we re-opened the formation of young Congolese.

## Restarting the Formation Program and Formation Houses

It took at least 20 years of waiting to restart the formation programs in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The SVDs were already known in the Bandundu area, so a new recruitment of local candidates was organized. In 1980, the Congo province received new clerical and brother candidates. After a year of postulancy, they completed a one-year novitiate in Bandundu under the guidance of Fr. Bernard Schweizer as the novice master.



Scholasticate in Kinshasa, Congo, October 1989

The first group in this new phase included Gommaire Kebomine, Sébastien Kiwonghi, and Frédéric Nsangi, all clerical candidates. They studied philosophy at the religious consortium at St. Augustin, Kindele, while their theology studies were with the Oblates at the Institute of Saint Eugène de Mazenod in Kitambo, Kinshasa. Among these three pioneers, two took their final vows and became SVD priests. Sadly, Fr. Frédéric passed away in 2021, and Sébastien recently became a diocesan priest in Kenge.

Following them were Fr. Willibrord Kamion Bhia, Dositthé Katuka Muntumosi, Br. Raoul Mayulu, Br. Guy Mazola Mido, Br. Fidèle Muzia Meli, and Fr. Omer Ngaway Mutondo. Among the three brothers, Br. Guy Mazola served as a general councilor for 12 years.

The SVD did not have a formation house in **Kinshasa** for philosophy and theology studies. From 1983 to 1985 the students and their formators Fr. Mudiso and Fr. Weiland, lived in Righini, Kinshasa in a house together with young people of other religious congregations.

## Lemba (MAJ 1)

In 1983, the SVD was able to find a plot of land in Lemba on Avenue Lulo No. 2 to build our own scholasticate "*Maison* Arnold Janssen" (MAJ 1), where the philosophy students and the brother candidates stayed and those who studied theology.

The philosophy students followed their philosophy course at the religious *consortium* at St. Augustin, Kindele. The students of theology followed their cursus with the Oblates at the Institute of Saint Eugène de Mazenod in Kitambo, Kinshasa. The brother candidates went to specialized schools of their profession, and most of them preferred to go to the schools administered by the Christian Brothers.

In 1990, theology students from other countries joined our Arnold Janssen House. They were António Jaca, an Angolan who also did the novitiate in Congo, the current Bishop of Benguela in Angola, José Alfredo Escobar from Paraguay and Erasmus Norviewu-Mortty from Ghana. Both were ordained but left the Society. It was a practical thing as planned by the generalate which I find as a sort of prelude to the Common Formation Center in Kinshasa.

## CFC in Kinshasa

The first two joint CFCs are located in two English-speaking countries – Kenya and Ghana. There was the idea to open another CFC in a French-speaking country. In the case of Congo, the hesitation to open a CFC was due to the socio-political instability and insecurity which were causing problems in the country, because of the political unrest after Mobutu's era in 1990 (inauguration of the multi-party system in Zaire).

It was only in 2001, after listening to the advice of his predecessor the late Fr. Charles D'Souza (+ 2005) that Fr. Xene Sanchez decided to open the doors to a CFC in Kinshasa and to welcome students from other countries of AFRAM. For practical reasons, the students resided first in the premises of the brothers of the Christian Schools, and then in a rented house in Kitambo to allow them to be close to their place of study with the Oblates. Fr. Kazimierz Szymczycha was the prefect, and Fr. Willy Overmars, rector, who at the same time was the Rector of the Arnold Janssen House on 12th Street, where our philosophers lived. The first CFC batch included three Congolese and two Togolese, who already knew French.

## Novitiate after philosophy

It must be mentioned that between 2000 and 2003 we had no novices. Until 2000, our candidates had their novitiate before philosophy. In order to be in harmony with the rest of the AFRAM Zone and perhaps the SVD in general, we changed, so that our candidates after the propaedeutic year have three years of philosophy studies, before they enter novitiate.

So, actually, training in Congo begins with the aspirant level (still in the family context, attending a recollection organized once a month in our selected centers, at CFC and Bandundu). After recruitment, one year of the propaedeutic period gives them some orientation. Three years of philosophy studies for clerical candidates and around three years of professional studies for brother candidates. Then follows, one year of novitiate, four years of theology interspersed with a year of pastoral training and then perpetual vows and sacred orders. The young brother members have some years to practice their profession and community life before they pronounce perpetual vows.

## 12th Street (MAJ 2)

In the meantime, the Congo Province bought a bigger plot of land in 12th Street, Limete, because the house in Lemba seemed to be too small to receive all our students of Kinshasa. In 2000, we entered this house, which took the name of Lemba "*Maison* Arnold Jansen" (MAJ 2). It was foreseen for the philosophy students but soon became a CFC. In 2002, when the CFC was still functioning in Kintambo, Fr. Godéfroid Manunga-Lukokisa, who had just defended his thesis in missiology in Rome, was appointed rector of this house and Fr. Bernard Ilunga, returning from Zimbabwe was the prefect. In 2005, Fr. Xene Sanchez became the rector, and in 2011 Fr. Godefroid Naniakweti. Since then, formation continues at the CFC – Kinshasa, where I am personally experiencing wonderfully the formation of our young brothers. Formed at the CFC, I became myself a formator, a prefect at the CFC. Here, on the one hand, our *formandi* get training as they come together with a particular accent of internationality or interculturality. On the other hand, the CNG province remains open and keeps the possibility to send students to other countries of the AFRAM Zone and even outside of it either for OTP or for theological studies abroad.

## 15th Street (MAJ 3)

When the CNG Province agreed to open a CFC in Congo, it looked for another place and found a big plot of land in the 15th Street for the philosophy students. There were already some houses that we were able to accommodate quickly. So, in 2003 our students of philosophy and the candidates for brotherhood moved over to the house in the 15th Street, which took the name "*Maison* Arnold Janssen" (MAJ 3) and the students of our CFC took over the house in the 12th Street. Fr. Michel Bandowa was rector and Fr. Davy-Jean Khaneno became prefect.

## Records on Students

In the 2023-2024 academic year, we have a total of 14 candidates in the **propaedeutic**, among whom there are brother candidates. The **novitiate** has nine candidates; all are clerical candidates from three nationalities. "*Maison* Arnold Janssen**"**, the philosophy house, has 34 students, 30 of them are clerical candidates and four are brother candidates. The four candidates reside together with those who study philosophy. Two brother candidates in








training are in temporary vows and continue their studies in their chosen fields while being pastoral agents in different communities.

The **CFC in Kinshasa** has 34 students of nine nationalities, including eight Congolese. Three CFC students are on a pastoral year in their respective countries, reckoning two Angolans and one Congolese. Each house and stage of formation maintains its training program while accentuating the aspects of SVD spirituality and community life, religious and missionary life according to the charisma and characteristic dimensions specific to the Society of the Divine Word. Bible sharing, meditation, community prayer and the Eucharist are very valid pillars for the daily life of formation.

## Difficulties of Expansion

The current observation is that we receive many requests from young people who want to join our Society, but how to discern authentic and genuine vocations? Obviously, we need continuous discernment to bring together colleagues capable of carrying out the SVD mission as our Founder Arnold Janssen wanted. Far beyond this, even if we can accommodate as many young people as they request, we will not be able to have them because of lack of facilities or infrastructure. The only alternative would be to send them to other provinces or build new infrastructure or to add some rooms in the formation houses in CNG province. We must not forget that most importantly we must apply adequate discernment and assessment for these young vocations.

## Counting the Fruits

Since we began formation in Congo, the statistics are as follows: 103 Congolese professed perpetual vows, ten left the SVD, five died as SVDs, five are *nulli stationi adscripti*. We thank God who granted to our province many vocations. In 2024, 45 Congolese confrères are working outside their own country. We cannot measure how much they contribute to serving the Kingdom of God, but certainly, everyone is trying his best to be at the service of the Kingdom and the Church.

**Jean-Marie Kikasidi Ebul Bul, SVD (Congo)**
***Prefect of the scholastics at the Common Formation Center, Kinshasa***



# Formation for Mission in Ledalero, Indonesia



First of all, it is important to underline at the beginning that formation for mission needs to be reread, interpreted, updated, and to be done faithfully in the light of the charism of the foundation, creatively providing answers to today's needs and challenges in the world. Therefore, in this article, dedicated to the Major Seminary of Ledalero on the occasion of celebrating 150 Years of the Foundation of the Society of the Divine Word, I would like to describe this formation house which was built by European missionaries, and which is still maintained faithfully by the missionary priests, brothers and seminarians. This article presents its foundation, early history, developments over the years, current challenges, and present-day priorities.

## Description of the Place

Ledalero has a special meaning in the local language. This actually influences the way missionary formation takes place here. Prior to the coming of the SVDs, the hill, Ledalero, was considered to be a strange and dangerous place, haunted by spirits and ghosts. No one would have imagined that it would be home to one of the largest priestly formation houses in the world, sending messengers of the word of God throughout the world! It is located on the island of Flores in Indonesia. For a long time, no one lived in this place, inhabited by spirits, and wild animals and covered with large trees. It was said that sometime in the past a local boy named *Lero* died. His body was not buried but was placed on the hill or hung on a tree there. In the local language, *Leda* means hill.





**Above:** The Chapel of Ledalero

**Below:** Deaconate Ordination in Ledalero, 2023

So Ledalero in this sense was identified with the hill on which *Lero*'s[41] body was hung.

There is still a second meaning, which is more widely believed. According to the local language (Sikkanese), *Ledalero* means, literally, a place where the sun rests (*leda* = to lean on; *lero* means the sun). So *Ledalero* in this case means hill or place for the sun to rest or lean on. This name is very symbolic and very rich in meaning. *Ledalero* is known as a wonderful hill from which people can enjoy the sunset from everywhere.

There is also another deeper significance. It can mean a bright beacon that attracts everyone to itself and like a beacon guides everyone towards a bright house. Starting from this last meaning, the former Superior General Antonio M. Pernia explained during his sermon, on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the seminary, on 15 August 2007, "In the last seventy years Ledalero has become a source of light for many people in the region, in Indonesia and in the world at large, through the work of men and women." To continue to become a beacon, more than ever, the Major Seminary of Ledalero must continue to progress on its path facing the challenges of today's world.

## The Reality of Religious Vocations

Looking at the reality of so many vocations to the priesthood and religious life, both female and male, one can ask why there are so many vocations in Flores and its neighboring islands in the Nusa Tenggara East Province, especially since the Catholic Church only began about 120 years ago here. Until then, the vast majority of people were animists.[42] There are two main factors.

*The first* is the environment in which Ledalero is located. The island of Flores, on which the SVD formation house is founded, is predominantly Catholic. However, the other great religious traditions, Islam, Protestantism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, which have many adherents throughout Indonesia, are influential in the neighborhood too. Indeed, Indonesia represents a particular example of peaceful coexistence between religions. Even if the majority of the population is Muslim, in general, there is respectful coexistence in the country. There are very few extremist acts and religious intolerance. There is essentially a climate of harmonious institutional integration, involving the small Christian communities. All these positive aspects are motivated by a sense of belonging to Indonesia. "Unity in Diversity" the national motto, *Bhineka Tunggal Ika,* is a really good motivation. This national motto is a source of enrichment for everyone in the country. It is a basic ideal that unites and binds diverse peoples together. The basis on which the plural society in Indonesia is founded is called *Pancasila.* It is not difficult for Indonesians to recognize and accept each other on the base of these fundamental principles, namely: divinity, humanity, unity, democracy and social justice.[43]

[41] Servinus Haryanto Nahak and F.X. Wigbertus Labi Hallan, „Menyusuri jejak Sejarah: Tapak-Tapak Bermakna," [In:] Paulus Budi Kleden *et.al.*, *70 Tahun Seminari Tinggi Santu Paulus Ledalero – Setia Menggemakan Suara, Berkanjang Memantulkan Cahaya*, Maumere: Penerbit Ledalero 2007, 15.
[42] Cfr. Kurt Piskaty, *Die katholische Missionsschule in Nusa Tenggara (Südost-Indonesien – ihre geschichtliche Entfaltung und ihre Bedeutung für die Missionsarbeit*, Studia Instituti Missiologici Societatis Verbi Divini 5, Steyl: Steyler Verlag 1964, 113.
[43] Cfr. Pandji Setijo, *Pendidikan Pancasila perspektif sejarah perjuangan bangsa*, Jakarta: Grasindo 2010, 10-13.

Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, during the visit, was struck by these principles promoting harmony in diversity. He saw how this affected the lives of the people throughout the Indonesian archipelago. He spoke of some notable proofs of this, including the fact that the fifteen Catholic universities are exemplary. They enriched the Indonesian educational panorama and they are considered a flagship. He was also able to see directly the good will to work together which is demonstrated mutually, on both sides.[44]

The island of Flores and nearby islands, whose population exceeds one million inhabitants with 70% Catholics, finds itself on the one hand in this climate as a minority, and sometimes it feels like a small flock or diaspora in the national context, in the midst of the Muslim majority.[45] On the other hand, it is located in a climate of coexistence and harmony in diversity. Therefore, it is seen as a "promised land" for vocations.[46] It has also been defined as the small "missionary Vatican" of the Indonesian Catholic Church. In fact, there are hundreds of religious men and women from these small islands who work today as missionaries in various countries around the world. In Flores, it is said that every family is proud to offer at least one vocation to a religious institute or seminary.




*The second* factor lies in seeing the vocations of those parts as the fruit of hard work in the past by missionaries from outside. The history of the Church in Flores was strongly marked by the presence of many missionaries from different countries of Europe and America.[47] Franz Magnis-Suseno, a Jesuit priest originally from Germany and famous in Indonesia as a professor and priest, has noted the reality that there are no longer Western missionaries under 70 years old in the country. This is not a major issue because the Indonesian Church everywhere has many religious and priestly vocations. Furthermore, lay people are very enthusiastic to get involved in today's mission.[48]

In addition to sowing the faith in the people from Flores and nearby, including founding the Church on the basis of the people, their cultures and resources, the missionaries also managed to raise the standard of living in the area. The great institutions in education, mass media, healthcare and Christian social affairs were born at the hands of missionaries who intended to care for the poor and marginalized. Their goal was to bear witness to the values of following Jesus, not only with words but with deeds. This left a very deep impression on the lay people who since then have become protagonists of the local Church in various fields. Many of these, feeling called to dedicate their lives totally to the Lord Jesus, have been choosing the religious and priestly way of life. This heritage of the past is well preserved and gratefully developed by today's SVDs, in collaboration with local Churches and other congregations. Hence, the local Church remains alive and attractive to youth seeking the meaning of life.

Ledalero attracts the youth seeking the meaning of life

Surrounded by this environment and having a favorable past, the formation house, Ledalero has had great success and looks confidently to the future. In this present moment, there are 318 candidates divided into nine units. There are two formators present in each unit. Since it was founded Ledalero has produced 6,324 alumni, including 21 bishops, 1,962 priests and 4,383 (69.3%) lay people. More than 500 of them are working as missionaries abroad.[49]

From a clerical house of formation, Ledalero has evolved into the Institute for Philosophy and Creative Technology (IFTK). Its many graduates occupy important positions in society, as teachers, professors, journalists, politicians, entrepreneurs and so on. It is considered the largest philosophical and theological seminary of

[44] Mario Ponzi, "Libertà e reciprocità alla base del dialogo tra le religioni", *L'Osservatore Romano,* 4-5 January 2010, 1.
[45] Petrus Dori, *Dipanggil untuk ramah dalam keberagaman,* Maumere: Penerbit Ledalero 2021, 65.
[46] Luigi Galvani, "I Camilliani in Indonesia dopo nove anni," *Banglanews*, 7 January 2024, 370.
[47] Cfr. J. S. De Brito, "Krisis Besar Misi Abad ini," *Mingguan HIDUP*, 3 July 2011, 12.
[48] J. S. De Brito, "Krisis Besar Misi Abad ini", 13.
[49] Ade Riberu, "Resmi! STFK ledalero beralih nama jadi Institut Filsafat dan Teknologi Kreatif", [In:] <https://www.-iftkledalero.ac.id/public/detail/resmi-stfk-ledalero-beralih-nama-jadi-institut-filsafat-dan-teknologi-kreatif>, 1.





**Above:** 100 Years of the mission carried out by the SVD in Indonesia

**Below:** Inauguration day of the new Campus of IFTK Ledalero, 2022

the Catholic Church in Asia. IFTK Ledalero was inaugurated as an institute of higher learning on 14 September 2022. It now has 1,882 students, who come from many parts of Indonesia. They follow five study programs, namely Philosophy, Catholic Religious Teaching, Visual Design Communication, Entrepreneurship and MA in Theology.

Pope John Paul II visited Ledalero in 1989. While there, he said that the students are "an eloquent tribute to the Catholics of Indonesia, especially those who come from the islands of Flores and Timor, who for centuries have professed their faith with perseverance and great fervor."[50] These words were encouraging for the small flock, to see it as a grace and blessing to live among the Muslim majority.

## Challenges of Formation in Ledalero

In 1992, there was a devastating earthquake in Flores. The physical structure of Ledalero was destroyed almost completely. A positive effect of this, though, was to initiate a big change in the formation program. It moved from a mass approach to a personal and smaller group one. This was discussed at the Asia-Pacific Zonal Workshop held at Ledalero in 1996,[51] where two great challenges facing the formation house were noted. Starting from the results of the last IDE Province General Visitation (14 August – 10 September 2022), I would like to reiterate those challenges:

The *first* challenge is how to personalize the formation process within a system characterized by an imbalance between a shortage of formators on one side and many candidates on the other. It is a fact that today's missionary formation is not perceived solely as a transmission of the cultural values of a past generation or having a degree, but above all as the need to educate in "creativity and personal initiative"[52] on one side, and on the other, the need to educate with a more "personal approach."[53]

The *second* challenge is connected to the first one: the increasing number of confreres working elsewhere requires first and foremost a typical formation for mission, intended now as interculturality, spiritual mortification, animation skills, and so forth, that help the *formandi* to be able to enter other different cultures, easy to adapt themselves, interact mutually with others and be willing to learn from others,[54] and so forth.

According to current data published in the *Catalogus*, the number of native Indonesian missionaries sent abroad to different zones around the world between 1982 to 2022: 1033.[55]

[50] Giovanni Paolo II, *Incontro con i seminaristi nel seminario maggiore dei Verbiti*, Ledalero, Wednesday, 11 October 1989, [In:] <http://www.vatican.va/> [Accessed: 28 December 2023, 1].
[51] Leo Kleden and John Mansford Prior, "Formation in Asia – Pacific," *Verbum SVD,* 1997 fasc. 1-2, 19.
[52] Kleden, Prior, "Formation in Asia – Pacific," 19.
[53] SVD IDE, *Protokol Visitasi Jenderal SVD IDE,* 14 Augustus – 10 September 2022, 32.
[54] Petrus Dori, *I Verbiti e l'interculturalità. Formarsi a progettare l'educazione all'accoglienza delle differenze in Indonesia,* Bandung: Feniks Muda Sejahtera 2021, 492-502.
[55] *Catalogus 2022.*



Inauguration of a new campus by Ewaldus Martinus Sedu, Bishop of Maumere, 25 March 2023

***SVD from Indonesia sent to the World from 1982 to 2022***

| ZONE | Confreres |
|---|---|
| **AFRAM** | 126 |
| **ASPAC** | 562 |
| **EUROPE** | 103 |
| **PANAM** | 242 |
| **TOTAL** | **1033** |

This number of priests and religious brothers is significant. Each year, about 17 missionaries have been sent abroad over the past 60 years. How does this affect the missionary formation program at Ledalero?

The formation program has been successful, which can be seen by the number of missionaries worldwide, in the four zones. The biggest number remain in ASPAC Zone. About 400 missionaries have been sent to the four SVD Indonesian provinces. These results really tell us that the missionary formation applied so far bears fruit not only for Indonesia, as expected by the pioneers at the beginning of the foundation of the seminary[56] but for the whole world, for the universal Church, as foreseen by *AG* 20 regarding the responsibility of the local Church to the universal mission.[57] This number will continue to increase in the coming years. Therefore, a past formation program, which was characterized by the notion of the "Mother Province"[58] in Europe, is no longer relevant. It must be interpreted, elaborated, reformed and transformed well in a new way, more suited and adapted to people in different cultures, including the culture of the person in formation. Also, the real problem is how to introduce an education as a process to help the subject to enter their own culture (inculturation) in a way as to be open and able to interact with others and learn from other cultures (interculturality). Formation for mission, understood today as intercultural living and mission is urgent.[59]

[56] Piskaty, *Die katholische Missionsschule*, 117.
[57] The Second Vatican Council, *Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church. Ad gentes,* No. 20.
[58] Antonio M. Pernia, *Sfide ed opportunità per la vita religiosa dal mondo e dalla Chiesa di oggi,* [In:] http://www.consolata.org [Accessed: 14 January 2024, 1].
[59] Stanislaus T. Lazar and Martin Üffing (eds.), *Intercultural Living,* 2 vols., Siegburg: Franz Schmitt Verlag; Delhi: ISPCK 2015 (Vol. 1: 362 pp and Vol. 2: 446 pp).





**Above:** Helping people affected by volcanic Lewotobi eruption

**Below:** Performance of Ledalero Choir in Jakarta visiting Presidential House, 2023




## Some Suggestions for Formation in Ledalero

In an increasingly open and constantly changing world the call to renew missionary formation is very urgent. Every act of renewal should be done with openness to the Spirit and with a broad perspective.

Regarding the call to renewal in the field of formation, the *SVD Constitutions* urge formators to "evaluate our methods of recruiting, ready to adapt to circumstances or introduce new ways" (Cons. 510.2). The latest guiding principle of SVD formation today reminds us that it is necessary to "evaluate our methods of recruiting, ready to adapt to circumstances." [60] The call to renewal sounds like a "mantra" for those in a formation house. It is therefore important to find, create and develop new models that connect to the new situation and needs of those in formation and today's mission. But the real question is: how do we restart?

In my opinion there are at least two points. The *first* concerns the experience gained in the past. The formation house is rich in formation experience gained over many years. We can learn from the past, what others or we together have done in formation. In the past, the formation seemed limited to "preparing or producing" missionaries available for the local Church to address a lack of priests, rather than to prepare missionaries to go around the world. It was intended to educate good and holy missionaries, priests, religious men and women, but it is not enough. Today's world needs more missionaries who have an open outlook to others, a vision of the world in which one is destined to work, capable of living together with others and willing to learn from them.

The *second* point is regarding a missionary formation that is well-integrated and implemented. A lack of formators can result in different aspects of formation not being well integrated. It is necessary to integrate the different aspects in formation that sometimes look separate and often in contrast with each other. This is necessary to avoid the thinking that formation is only about the spiritual or intellectual aspect, that is, to absolutize only one aspect, but on the contrary trying to put in dialogue and bring into harmony the divisions, fragmentations and tensions between the formation aspects.[61] In short, we need to have an integral formation to create a balance between different aspects of formation and to integrate them in harmony: human, spiritual, intellectual and missionary aspects. In fact, the integration helps and strengthens the community aspect in accompanying persons in formation and strengthens unity and a shared common attitude between formators in doing and looking at things in formation together, reducing possible separation and division.

[60] Generalate SVD, *Re-imagining the Pathways of Our Common Vocational Journey: Some Orientations*, Rome: SVD Publications 2010, 8.
[61] Amadeo Cencini, *I contenuti di corso della Formazione integrale e maturazione vocazionale*, Roma: l'Università Pontificia Salesiana (UPS) 2011-2012, 110.




## Conclusion

As many vocations come from Indonesia, there are three novitiates: Nenuk (IDT), Kuwu (IDR), Batu (IDJ), and two major seminaries: Malang (IDJ province) and Ledalero (IDE province). All of them matter a lot for our Society today.

The formation house in Ledalero is large and significant. To realize and implement missionary formation at Ledalero, I personally agree with those who affirm that formation in an increasingly open and constantly changing world should be inspired and animated more by the Spirit of the Second Vatican Council with its positive evaluation of the cultures of people. The recently published SVD *Ratio Formationis Generalis*, 2024 could assist in forming religious missionaries.

Formation in such a situation therefore will be realized in the following tasks: helping the person to discover their own identity both personal and social-cultural, their talents and abilities, educating them in openness to the world, in the ability to relate and experience true sharing with different people and their cultures. The focus is to be educated and accompanied in today's situation in this formation house, therefore one should have passion for mission, and especially love of other cultures.

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# Common Formation Centers in AFRAM



It is frequently said that, behind huge trees lies a little seed and a caring hand that nurtured it in its early phases to become what it is. This might be a representation of the AFRAM Zone's common formation centers, the image of its origins and subsequent growth in Africa.[62]

In the past, many disturbances affected some regions of the continent, for example, the situation in Rwanda and the escalation of violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo (then known as Zaire) which led to the first Congo war, 1996-97. However, there were also great signs of hope expressed, for example in the life of Nelson Mandela in South Africa with the end of apartheid and his commitment to a better society, or the efforts to reach an agreement and end the war in Angola. Those were tangible signs that the rest of the continent could experience growth and development soon, along with the rise of young people. The preparations for the first African synod, which took place in 1994, had a significant influence on the lives of Christians, bringing new hope to the continent in the midst of a severe social and political atmosphere (FTW, 1995/6, 7-37).

The early missionaries, members of the Society of the Divine Word who came to the continent, were largely Europeans from Western Europe and America. Eventually, by the eighties the configuration of the SVD religious communities began to change with the arrival in the continent of confreres coming from Asia and the increasing number of African

[62] Thinking about this paper was a challenge because little, if anything, has been published on the history of these centers. Fortunately, I had access to the minutes of several zonal meetings, which provided me with some insight into how conversations took place and gave life to this zonal initial formation project.



Formation Community in Langata, Kenya

vocations, representing a unique opportunity to reflect and develop something beneficial for all (FTW, 1995/6, 27). There were dedicated and visionary missionaries who were unsure of how to go about it, but were passionate and open to embrace a new reality.

The primary phases of the Common Formation Centers (CFCs) began with the establishment of AFRAM as one of the Society's four zones. The dream of coming together and working as a zone, utilizing our own forces, strengths, and possibilities in various countries, soon found the initiative of some pioneers who thought that the initial formation could be a wonderful project to prepare our own missionary candidates, while also being open to receiving *formandi* from other zones. As a result, the zone formally began in February 1992, and one of the first and tangible projects that drew the PRMs together was to embrace a common formation program, using the good educational institutes where our *formandi* were already undergoing their academic training. Consequently, Kenya and Ghana were considered as potential locations for this joint venture. Research and evaluations were carried out to determine which places would be more suitable for the new project.

The late Brendan O'Reilly, an Irish confrere who was the regional in Kenya, was impressed by the development of formation in Nairobi with diverse institutions and religious congregations that were establishing themselves in the area. He was one of the early pioneers in promoting a common formation.[63] He was a true visionary and Nairobi was quickly becoming an important center in East Africa. Nonetheless, in Ghana and Congo there were also important centers for formation, and envisioning something new was quite stressful.

Among the challenges, two factors made it more difficult for the project to take off. First, Kenya was very questionable because the SVD presence was just ten years old, compared to Ghana and Congo, where the congregation had been established for many years with greater experience in developed projects and communities. Secondly, the social and political instability in Congo, was not the best moment for the province to take such a risk in a zonal project, due to all its implications.

After the initial challenges, the main task was to find suitable places to build the formation houses near educational centers that met the Society's expectations. In Kenya, the chosen place was Lang'ata, about 16 kilometers from downtown Nairobi and within walking distance of Tangaza University College, a consortium run by various religious congregations.

[63] *Silver Jubilee Magazine 1994-2019: Formation for mission. Common Formation Center, Langata,* Nairobi, Kenya, 2019, 8.

In Ghana, the chosen place was Tamale in the Northern region, a predominantly Muslim area. The Society was already established there with a formation house, sending the *formandi* to study at the diocesan seminary, Saint Victor, built by the Missionaries of Africa for training local clergy.

When Congo joined the zonal initiative, the CFC house was established on a property in what is now a major district of Kinshasa. Initially, the *formandi* attended Saint Eugene de Mazenod Theologate, which belongs to the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate Congregation. Later, they shifted to Saint Augustine University, part of a consortium of missionary congregations.

From the very beginning, it was agreed that it would be a project involving all the PRMs in the zone and that the three centers would have the same number of *formandi* from different PRMs. Therefore, the formation houses were built with the capacity to accommodate around 30 students each plus the staff. The CFC community in Kenya began in 1994, with Gerard McCarthy (Irish) as rector, John Rock Serrao (Indian) as prefect, and Charles Ashun (Ghanaian) as house bursar. The *formandi* were from Angola, Congo, Ghana, and Kenya.[64] In Ghana, the CFC community began in 1995, with rector Vincent Kwame Owusu (Ghanaian) and first prefect Joachim Zok (Polish). The *formandi* were from Zambia, Togo, and Ghana. The CFC community in Congo began in 2000, with Willy Overmars (Dutch) as rector and Antony Puthumana (Indian) as prefect; the *formandi* were from Togo and Congo.






## Broadening the Zonal Project

With the increasing number of vocations and new PRMs like Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Mozambique, who began with the initial stage of formation, it was proposed that the novitiates also should be part of the common formation project in the zone. For many decades novitiate took place in the continent and sometimes also young men were sent to do novitiate in other countries outside of Africa. After some years and upon the positive experience of bringing *formandi* from various PRMs together in the CFCs, the PRM superiors concluded that the novitiate should also fall under the common formation program in the zone. Thus in 2006, the AFRAM formation board recommended to explore the possibility of having three common novitiates in the zone.[65] It was foreseen that the common novitiates would have the advantage of bringing our resources, such as personnel, structures and finances together from various PRMs and forming a team of formators engaged in formation. It took time to explore and discern on this new proposal because the practice of distributing *formandi* for novitiate within the zone had been ongoing for many years and some novitiates were closed while others were opened. As a result of the discernment, the zonal assembly in Congo in 2019 resolved that the novitiates in the zone (Angola, Congo, Ghana and Zambia) were given the status from 2020 onward.

Common Formation Centers in Langata and Tamale

With the novitiate and the theological studies in common, a new concern was raised in the zone about the formation of brother candidates. Thus, taking the positive experience of the common formation, particularly the CFCs, and to improve the formation of the brothers a new initiative finally materialized after some years of discussion and discernment. It was decided that in addition to the common novitiate, the brothers in temporal vows should have a common religious theological formation in one of the CFCs in Congo or Kenya.

## Functioning of the Common Formation

As usual, like in any organization, the beginning of the common formation was not without tension and crisis caused by misunderstandings which also helped to improve the program by finding new ways of doing things. On the one hand, the presence of formators and *formandi* from different PRMs in an intercultural community was a way to build strong bridges and support among the PRMs, as well as the *ad intra* and *ad extra* activities

[64] *Silver Jubilee Magazine 1994-2019*, 29-30.
[65] 6th AFRAM Zonal Formation Board meeting, Appendix 3 - Recommendations, 30.





of the formative community. On the other hand, the experience that began taking place in those days helped to develop a better understanding of the common formation, putting the emphasis on the basis that the common formation is a project of the zone, in which all the PRMs are involved without any excuse. A formation handbook was written, and the agreed policies began to take effect by the end of 2001.[66]

The CFC is a project of the PRMs in the AFRAM Zone administered and managed by the provincial superior where the center is situated.[67] The *formandi* become members of the PRM where the common novitiate or CFC is located. This style of formation becomes an opportunity to enhance personal growth, to know confreres with whom to have a solid academic foundation and with whom we realize the SVD mission together in Africa and other parts of the world. That requires personal discipline and maturity of the *formandi* in order to discover oneself in building one's personality within a framework of an SVD international community.[68] There is no question that this early cross-cultural experience also helps in molding one's spiritual life with awareness of our SVD spirituality and helps to build an intercultural community. People gathered from different countries in a common formation make possible the dream of living and working together, not only after the perpetual profession of vows but begins already in the formation period.

## Significance of the Common Formation in the African Context

The common formation program gave the possibility for the members in the AFRAM Zone to be formed in their own continent and prepare themselves to contribute in the zone but also to be open to the worldwide mission of the Society and the Church. The fact of having our own centers for living and studying together in an intercultural set up, gives the chance for the Africans themselves to understand better their roots, diversity and richness of their culture, thus overcoming ethnocentrism and prejudices.

Interculturality as the trademark of the Society of the Divine Word and the experience of the centers, have an impact on the life of many people who become brothers and priests. For the majority it is the first multicultural living experience, making it the first and most significant life experience during initial formation of an SVD. The houses also become transforming spiritual centers for those neighbors living around the formation houses. For instance, the liturgy is where the internationality of the Church also is alive. Having lively prayers and Eucharists not only in the common language of the center but also in other languages, songs and different cultural expressions from different countries, make the formation centers an expression of the richness of the Church, animated by a multicultural fraternity.

For those undergoing common formation, the opportunity to engage in pastoral activities in diverse settings, such as parishes, slums, rural areas, towns, prisons, hospitals, schools, and orphanages, offers a wide range of learning experiences. Interacting and learning reciprocally with local people encourages everyone to apply their theological knowledge to real human existential dilemmas encountered on the ground. Consequently, academic studies become more meaningful in the lives of young missionaries.

[66] 2nd AFRAM Zonal Formation Board meeting, 5-6.
[67] Cf. *SVD Formation Handbook 2001*, *Common Formation Centers in the AFRAM zone,* 1-2.
[68] Cf. Responses from formators, evaluation of the program 2009.

## Challenges of the CFCs

Looking back at our Founder Arnold Janssen's life and the humble start of the first community in Steyl, we realize that the notion of common training for missionaries existed in the mind of our courageous Founder. Actually, Steyl was the Society's first common formation center. I embraced the task of being a formator at the CFC in Nairobi, inspired by our Founder's goal to form missionaries. I feel it is an ongoing invitation to continue deepening the Society's religious heritage, giving everyone the opportunity to self-form, focusing on making good use of the program's time and possibilities given by the initial formation. I consider myself fortunate to be part of the AFRAM Zone's common formation centers, and I am very grateful to the Lord of the mission for bringing people from various backgrounds and cultures together to carry out his work.





From the humble beginnings of the CFCs to the present day, in all these years the growth has been truly amazing. A large number of confreres have been formed in our missionary centers in the zone. Many of them are working in the worldwide mission, making a valuable contribution to the universal mission of the Church, while others are working within the zone serving in different capacities in the Society.

We are grateful to the Lord of the vineyard for the many blessings and missionary vocations that He is still sending to us. It is our duty to continue providing the space and creating a conducive atmosphere for the new vocations that come to us, so that they may be able to respond with generosity to the missionary call from the initial formation. To reach that goal, first and foremost, we need to continue training formators who are fit for the purpose, to meet the current demands of the initial formation with all its implications. Confreres are motivated to work and are called to sustain this common project in the zone, without losing the original inspiration on which all the PRMs are active participants. Secondly, it is high time for the PRMs in AFRAM, to find ways for the financial self-reliance of the formation houses in the zone and not to depend on resources from the generalate, which are diminishing.

In conclusion, as we can see and judge from its development, there is no doubt that the small seed sprouted into an enormous tree in which many in the initial formation are nurtured for life, becoming passionate missionaries of the Divine Word.

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***Prefect of scholastics***
***at the Common Formation Center, Nairobi-Langata***



# Beauty of Our Vocation and Vocation Promotion




We celebrate 150 years because of the beauty of our missionary vocation. Starting from our founding generation to date, many have discovered the beauty of our vocation and gave their life to Jesus in the Society of the Divine Word. We look back with gratitude to God, the Lord of the harvest, and we look ahead to the future with the hope of blossoming new vocations to our Society.

Father Arnold Janssen perceived vocation as a gift from God and it was only God who could supply new vocations. Even though he found himself in the critical atmosphere of the *Kulturkampf* in Germany, that kind of environment became the ground of attraction for more vocations to the Society. Arnold was very much convinced indeed that God inspires vocations even in the most difficult situation. As he was struggling to establish the mission house in Steyl, he was also confronted with the reality of the need for new vocations for the foreign missions. He stressed for the first members of the Society the need to pray for vocations. "It was not I, but the Lord who inspired the vocations and helped individuals persevere in their decisions."[69] At the inauguration of the Mission House a sign in the choir loft of the church read: "Beg the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers." In Arnold Janssen's view, the promotion of prayer for missionary intentions in the families was the best way to awaken, preserve and cultivate mission vocations.

Arnold intended to get vocations both for the home base and for foreign lands, but the missionaries were to help themselves in practical ways.

[69] Fr. Arnold to the confreres of South Shandong, Steyl: 28 May 1886, [in:] *Arnold Janssen SVD. Letters to China*,Vol I: *1879-1897*, AN SVD-83/1, Romae 2002, 179-180.



Brothers in India, February 2016

The unexpected number of persons in the seminary was due to the rising influx of vocations from year to year, mostly from the large Catholic families of farmers and laborers. For example, 25-year-old Jacob Steger worked on his father's farm; 22-year-old Johann Holthausen, Steger's longtime friend, came also from a farmer's family; the student John Hardes was an artist and painter. In the following years 1876 and 1877 young vocations kept increasing while the number of late vocations dwindled. Arnold's zeal for vocations is seen when he welcomed Johann Baptist Anzer, his own brother John, and Hermann Wegner.

Fr. Arnold, before opening the Mission House in Steyl was advised to start a separate section for brothers but initially, he hoped to manage the tasks around the house with the help of students. However, the increasing workload in Steyl revived the idea of lay brothers in early 1876. The Founder already was interested in accepting apprentices interested in becoming brothers. He especially welcomed young men who had learned a trade and could help with the construction. He thought of brothers for the work to be done in the seminary and in the missions. His love for brothers was seen in his struggle to establish a special group of brothers whom he called in his magazine as "servants and workmen."

Arnold saw a possible brother candidate in Joseph Althoff even if he was already 55 years old. In 1877, he started accepting applicants who had their sight set on the brotherhood and the brother's novitiate started with two candidates on 8 December 1878. There was a period in the Society's history when the brothers surpassed in number both the priests and the scholastics. For Arnold, personal qualifications, where each individual decides his own vocation, were paramount. He believed that God allows those who sincerely seek Him to find the true path to heaven, and that obedience is a means by which people can partake in the greatest blessings.

## Statistical Cross-Sectional Insights

The Society under the Founder recorded a steady growth surpassing 1,000 members in 1903. This number doubled in 1922 (2,036). The interwar period brought a remarkable numerical increase with 3,084 members in 1929 and 4,149 in 1935. World War II continued this upward tendency, so that the milestone of 5,000 members coincided with the death of Fr. General Grosse Kappenberg in 1957 (5,001 members). The following increase ceased with the post-conciliar crisis. The number of SVDs was steadily dropping from 5,773 in 1965 to 5,216 in 1976. The following slight increase was accelerated on the eve of the second millennium and the barrier 6,000 was reached in 2001 (6,004) with the zenith of growth reached in 2008: 6,138 members. Currently, the Society shows a decreasing tendency with 5,754 members on 1 January 2024.[70] Even the traditionally richest at vocations ASPAC zone noted dwindling of vocations. But the most drastic dropping in vocations was noted both in EUROPA only three novices and PANAM six novices (4 USA) in 2024.

A promising tendency is noted in Africa. This data must be highlighted by a plausible analysis with regional characteristics. In general, secularization, crisis of faith, disintegration of family and so forth affect the number of vocations. Some SVDs indicate the following: lack of clear and unambiguous definition of our religious identity; lack of personal encounters and experiencing intimate love with the word of God. Vocation is a mystic reality, an encounter between two persons – God and man. All the techniques we try to implement in the work of the so-called "vocation" are important, but this is not the essence. The joy, creativity and enthusiasm of religious life with the word of God and union with God, as well as the clear and unambiguous definition of our SVD-identity, are the essence of "success" in the SVD apostolate of vocations.

[70] According to the *Catalogus 2024*, 473. In 2018, the three US provinces had 26 scholastics (2005: 48). The number of novices in 2024 is as follows: EUROPA 3, PANAM 6/4, ASPAC 220 and AFRAM 26. Respectively the numbers of novices in the years 2000-2008-2016 were as follows: EUROPA 23-21-4, PANAM 27-24-17, ASPAC 296-278-276, AFRAM 28-24-31.






Vocation Promotion activities in the Philippines and United States of America

## Significance of Vocation Promotion

Vocation promotion aims at giving young people true dignity, true transformation and the true joy of the Gospel. Vocation promoters aim at helping the youth to make the right choice. They assist the young to discover their mission in life. Promotion and care of vocations is very significant. Today just as it was during the foundation of our Society, we need vocations to the Society of the Divine Word. Even as we thank God for calling each one of us in the Society; we strive to get more vocations to join us to support the missionary work of our Society.

"How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them" (Rom 10:14-15). This text always reminds me of the importance of attracting vocations. Jesus chose his apostles to be with him and to be sent out. Our Founder made every effort during his time to attract vocations to the missions. He placed a lot of emphasis on school activities for vocations to the priesthood and religious life. He organized retreats for laypeople and promoted the apostolate of the press and publication as ways of getting vocations.

As we mark 150 years of the foundation, our invitation is to embrace a culture of vocation promotion that goes beyond the work of vocation promoters alone. It is a culture that invites each member of the Society to take responsibility for attracting men through prayer each day for vocations and giving witness to a life that inspires and attracts the youth. There are best practices that can have a positive impact on attracting new vocations, such as working in vocational teams, making strategic use of social media, collaborating with district superiors, collaborating with our SVD lay partners and religious sisters. The use of social media is becoming one of the major tools to reach young people, through WhatsApp, Facebook, etc. The internet can have a huge impact on vocation promotion where online promotion materials are shared. Above all, the members' community life and prayer life mostly attract new vocations.

## Vocation Promotion Insight and Experience

Promoting religious vocations is a challenging but a rewarding experience. "… as he passed by, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting their nets into the sea. He said, 'Come follow me, I will make you fishers of men;' they abandoned their nets and followed him" (Mark 1:16). As vocation promoter in Kenya, I wish it was that easy. This sentence from the Gospel is challenging for those of us who are vocation promoters. What Jesus could see in those people sadly we do not have the same powers of vision. Hence, we always try to find a human solution.

My love for vocation promotion in the Society of the Divine Word was inspired by my vocation directors with whom I had my first contact in getting to know the Society. Even though there was no advanced technology like today they would still reach out into the village to seek vocations. Through letter writing, family visits, and "come and see" programs they became the best practices to reach out.





**Left:** Participants in the Formators' and Vocation Promoters course 2022, Nemi

**Right:** Young aspirants from Kenya-Tanzania fruit of vocation promotion

I first establish contacts with aspirants who may have read about the Society of the Divine Word online or even have come across our vocation promotion brochures, etc. Aspirants are very eager to know about our Society.

Interestingly, some aspirants are well-versed in the various congregations and even inquire about our charism, while others are less informed and eager to learn more about us. Establishing contacts requires a great deal of patience to understand them and respond to their questions. Over time, I have learned to be patient and am always ready to answer any inquiries they may have. I also ask them numerous questions regarding their vocational discernment and plan to meet them in their families and parishes. Often, this involves a tight schedule and significant sacrifice, traveling long distances to unfamiliar places. Despite the challenges, these moments are always exciting.

My greatest joy is visiting the families. Saint Arnold recognized that his vocation stemmed from his own family, as the family is the seedbed and first seminary where vocations are nurtured. My experiences are particularly enriched by interactions with the mothers of the aspirants. The families I visit warmly welcome us, eagerly awaiting my arrival and sharing meals together. One memorable experience was when I visited an aspirant's home, and the mother, in gratitude for my visit, gave me freshly laid eggs. While I might have expected a tray or crate of eggs, her gesture of giving all she had was profoundly touching.

What really encourages me in vocation promotion is that we still have many young men who desire to serve the Lord as religious missionaries. We must really appreciate that even during this time as our Founder believed it is God who initiates the vocations. We must never tire of reaching out to young men wherever they are in search of new vocations for our Society.

## New Aspects in Vocation Promotion and the Challenges

Young people are searching for their purpose in life, and their sense of happiness. They are trying to experience God in daily life and as you interact with them it is a blessing to listen to their stories. One of the aspects is vocation awareness. There is a great need to develop vocation awareness in schools and parishes where the youths interact with a priest for discussion about vocations. Vocation camps and vocation seminars should be held regularly and SVDs are encouraged to preach on vocations. It is a great opportunity to interact with the youth in our parishes, schools, etc.

Vocation discernment is another aspect where there is a personal dialogue between the vocation director and the aspirant. During the vocation discernment, the vocation promoter is in a position to go beyond checking written correspondence and e-mails, becoming a mentor to help the aspirant enter into a process of self-discovery. The personal dialogue helps the vocation promoter to get the real desire of the aspirant. During this

dialogue, the vocation promoter can get some clarification on the aspirant's level of motivation, ability to resist discouragement, and enthusiasm to reach out to the less fortunate in society. Listening, mutual trust and openness are the basic aspects.

The "Come and see" program is another aspect. It is important to invite candidates to experience religious life and exercise their freedom to choose. Many young people have an idea of what religious life is from the movies they watch. Many young people go to church and say the rosary, but they do not realize that there is a God who has a plan for them or loves them. There is a God who wills a greater good in them. Through the "Come and see" program, they can encounter God and they are open to whatever God is calling them to do. That is the only way to get anyone to even consider religious life.

Vocation is God's calling to live a life to the fullest that God has planted in our hearts. There is a great temptation to think of vocation as an ambition or career that one wants to pursue. This has been brought out by the great threat of globalization and neo-liberal capitalism. Many young people want to take up professions that will get them easy jobs or dream of freeing their families from the shackles of poverty. Therefore, the pursuit of materialistic and career-oriented goals takes precedence over spiritual considerations.

A decline in moral values related to the family is a challenge. There is an absence of a strong family and faith community to support individuals to discern and pursue a vocation. Families and a faith community are the effective means to awaken and preserve vocations. It is in a Christian family that we meet praying mothers or fathers. Arnold experienced an intimate bond with his parents, especially his mother. The decline in the number of children in a family is another cause for declining vocations.

There is a need for visible and inspiring examples within the SVD vocation. Young people are looking for models/mentors. They look for them around where they are. Models and mentors not only inspire but they show a sense of direction. This does not apply only to the outside world but also in the Church, especially in choosing a vocation. They are looking for the one who can inspire them in their religious life.

There is a demand for new vocations in the Church and more so in our Society. Let us continue to cultivate good vocations for the Society of the Divine Word. Let us be inspired by the Founder's zeal for mission vocations.





**Above:** Vocation Jam in Christ the King Mission Seminary, Philippines

**Below:** Parents' joy of giving their son aspirant to the Society of Divine Word

**Geoffrey Ndungu Kamau, SVD (Kenya-Tanzania)**
***Former Vocation Promoter,***
***now at the Divine Word Boys High School, Katani***



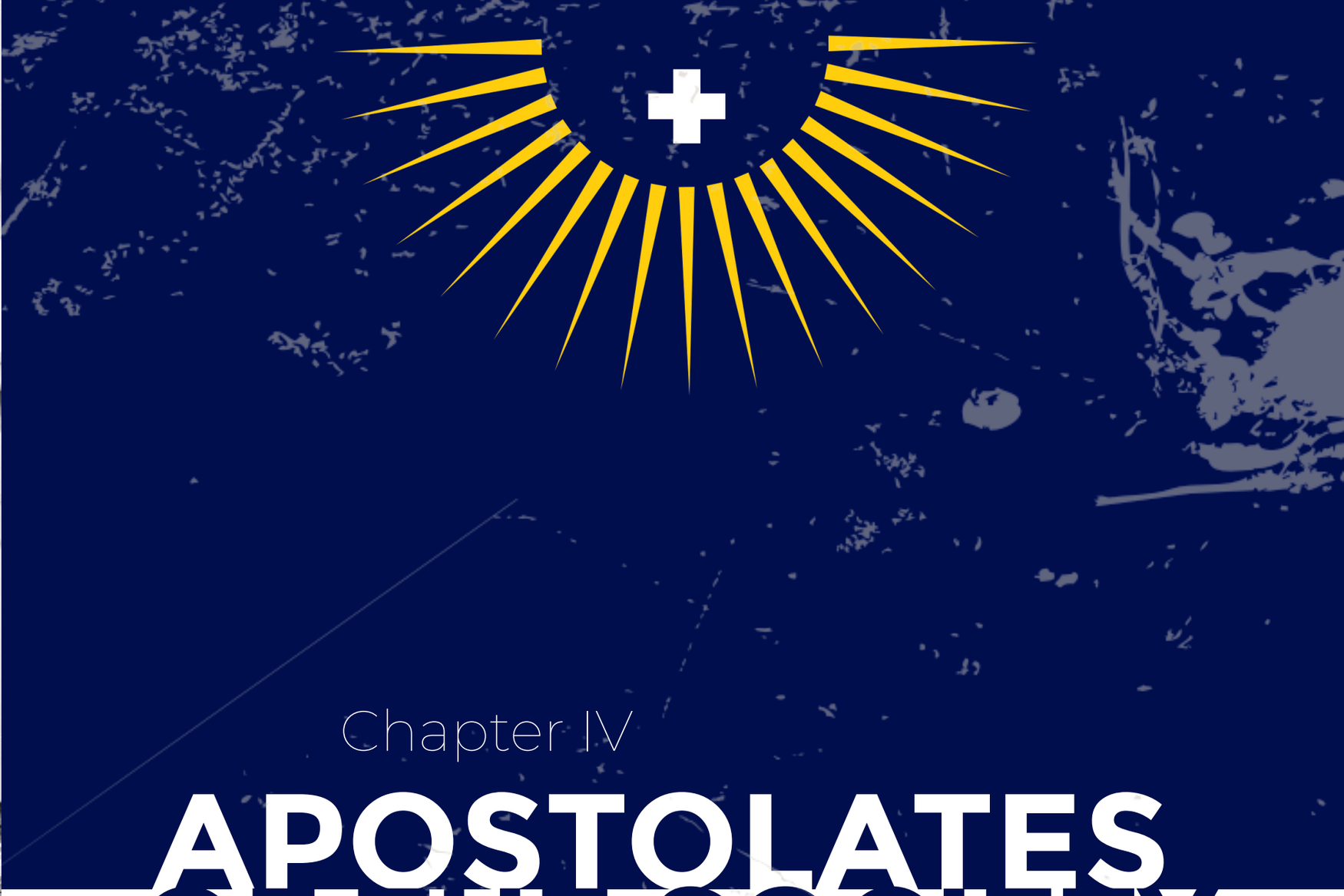







Reflecting
on the way of
the cross helps us
to grasp the meaning
of his redemptive
suffering and
**to walk with him**
along the way of self
surrender Cons. 405.1





Chapter IV

# APOSTOLATES OF THE SOCIETY




ojo pala nene nido mesa
ajo sala dedo vaso niño
ala pelo tapa uva bote
faja taza
o, jo, a, la, pa, sa, pe,
lo, ne, de, do, ta, ni,
va, so, u, me, ño, bo, te, fa, ja, za



# Biblical Apostolate – Mission Expressed in Our Name

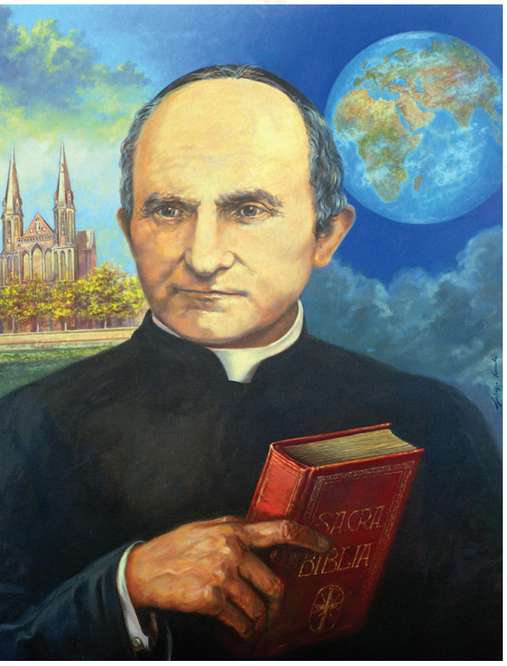



The Word of God is intrinsic to the religious congregation bearing its name: *Society of the Divine Word – Societas Verbi Divini* (SVD). While this was expressed clearly by its Founder Saint Arnold Janssen (1837-1909) in such words, objections were raised when he applied for papal approval of the congregation's name at the offices of the Roman Curia. Card. Satolli suggested adjusting it to *Society of the Worshipers of the Divine Word*. Known for his tenacity in matters he believed to be in accordance with God's will, Fr. Arnold insisted on the name *Society of the Divine Word*. Ultimately, he succeeded in obtaining approval – as Bornemann remarks[1] – from the Pope himself.

The Biblical apostolate opens paths for the word of God and its message to reach a person who desires to recognize more deeply God's active presence in the history of salvation and in the circumstances of his or her own life by listening to the voice of the one who "speaks in Sacred Scripture through men in human fashion" (*Dei Verbum*, 12) and offers a correct understanding of what He reveals in human words. Therefore, the Biblical apostolate finds itself at the heart of the SVD mission, since – as the *Constitutions* affirm – "Our foremost obligation is the proclamation of the word" (Cons. 107).

In this paper, I will briefly present the role of the Word of God in the life of Saint Arnold Janssen with regard to the Society he founded, then I will focus on the "Biblical apostolate" itself as the fruit of the reflection

[1] F. Bornemann even records the supposed statement of the Pope expressing approval with the above-mentioned title pronounced at the turn of the year 1900/1901: *Stet titulus ut stat, et nihil immutetur*, Fritz Bornemann, *The Papal Approbation of the Constitutions of 1905,* "Verbum – Supplementum," No. 3, Romae 1967, 34.






**Above:** Arnold Janssen depicted with the Holy Scripture in his hand (used for canonization in 2003)

**Below:** Fr. Heinrich Heekeren emphasized the importance of God's Word for the life and apostolate of Divine Word Missionaries

of the Society after Vatican II, and finally, I will touch on some challenges facing the Biblical apostolate today.

## Founder's Rootedness in the Word

Arnold Janssen's biographers point to his family background as an important element that shaped his relationship to God's word, especially to the *Prologue* of John's Gospel (John 1:1-18) that his father along with the members of the family used to pray during the winter months every evening after their dinner.[2] It is no surprise that the *Prologue* found an important place in Arnold's heart and influenced his entire perception of his mission.

Shortly before the opening of the first mission house in Steyl in 1875, Arnold presented his theological vision to his associates with the following words: "Of the three persons of the Blessed Trinity, we wish to venerate the Word of God in a special way. He lives among us in the most Sacred Heart of Jesus present in the Holy Eucharist and in the tabernacles of our churches. The Word wishes to give himself to us, to reside in our hearts, and to enliven our souls."[3]

Deeply devoted to the spirituality of worship of the Sacred Heart, typical for his time, Arnold understood its natural connection with the Word of God: the Sacred Heart is the tabernacle of the Incarnate Word. His inner reverence was essentially focused on the Word.

Love of the word of God became not only a valuable resource for the personal life of the Founder but also the content of his many conferences and spiritual retreats. Reviewing his writings during the beatification process, one theologian noted: "Concerning his spiritual conferences, the knowledge of scriptural texts which he continuously carried in his heart and on his tongue, must be emphasized with praise…"[4]

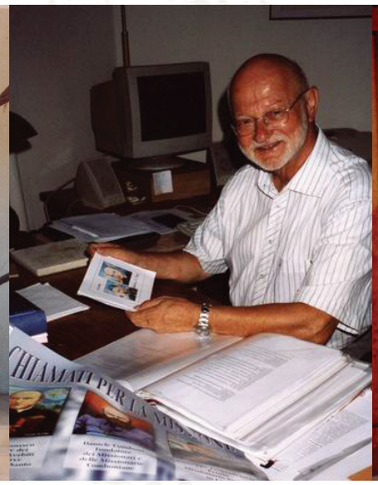
"How meaningful are the words of Holy Scripture. Let our brothers therefore value them very highly...,"[5] with these words, Arnold, a man who let himself be shaped by the power of the Word, opens in his personal notes, seen as his "spiritual testament," a note dedicated to the need for regular reading and study of the Holy Scriptures.

## Milestones of Establishing the Biblical Apostolate in the Society

The key impetus for reflection and conscious engagement in Biblical apostolate at the institutional level came from Vatican II, thanks to the Constitution *Dei Verbum* (DV).[6] The enthusiasm of the Church – manifested, among other ways, in the founding of the *Catholic Bible Federation* (CBF) in 1969 – also found its expression in the SVD. Fr. Heinrich Heekeren, a Biblical scholar, was elected superior general in 1977 and, along with the revision of the *Constitutions* (1983), he advocated opening the gates wide to the Biblical apostolate, especially through the booklet *Living by the Word* (1987) published on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the birth of Arnold Janssen. There is an explicit reminder that our name has to be reflected in our mission: "We are compelled by our name."[7] The same reminder returned during the 18th General Chapter: "Our name is our mission" (GC 2018, 17).

[2] In his memoirs, Arnold's brother William, who as Capuchin used the name Br. Juniper, says: "Father could discourse with great eloquence on the beginning of John's Gospel. He said it was the most efficacious of all prayers and had a great power with God. Whenever there was a severe storm, a candle would be lighted and then father would kneel and pray aloud the beginning of John's Gospel. When one of the cattle fell sick, father and mother would pray it together." *Remembering AJ*, 18.
[3] Fischer, *You are the Temple,* 18.
[4] Albert Rohner, *Die Vortragstätigkeit P. Arnold Janssens*, Vol. 1: *Exerzitien*, AN SVD-30, Romae 1974, 11.
[5] Arnold Janssen, *Personal Notes, 56.*
[6] Chap. 6 especially highlights the importance of "the table both of God's word and of Christ's body" (DV, 21), as well as the encouragement to study the Scriptures to provide nourishment for the people of God (DV, 23).
[7] *Living by the Word,* "Witnessing to the Word," No. 11, Rome: SVD Publications 1987, 3.





**Left:** Visit in Indonesia

**Center:** Fr. Ludger Feldkämper, Rome 2004

**Right:** During the meeting with the coordinators

It was during this period that the first biblical coordinator of the Society (Fr. Wim Wijtten) was appointed. In the spiritual-formation center in Nemi, near Rome – in today's *Centro Ad Gentes* – the idea of a biblical-pastoral course *Dei Verbum*, inspired by Fr. Ludger Feldkämper, involved in the CBF, was realized. The first biblical course began in Nemi on 9 August 1987 under the leadership of Fr. John Füllenbach; it lasted 18 weeks and 28 participants from different parts of the world took part in it. Since then, the *Dei Verbum Course* has become a trademark of the SVD in the field of the Biblical apostolate at the Church level[8]. Similar initiatives have also arisen at the local level, especially in the form of biblical centers organizing Bible courses or publishing houses[9] focused on dissemination of Bibles and biblical material. It is worth mentioning as a representative from each continent: John Paul I Biblical Pastoral Center in Vigan (PHN), *Centro Biblico Verbo Divino* in Quito (ECU), *Editorial Verbo Divino* in Estella (ESP), *Verbum Bible* in Kinshasa (CNG).

Three years after the 13th General Chapter (1988) which confirmed the Biblical apostolate as an integral part of the SVD heritage and recommended the practice of Bible sharing in communities, as well as placing the book of Scripture in a place of honor, the document *Listen, my People* (1991) appeared. In the spirit of the recommendations of that general chapter, the third part develops the dimension of the relationship to the word of God as the center of one's life and mission, presenting SVD spirituality in the perspective of being "rooted" in the word of God, and the resulting fact that "To evangelize we ourselves need to be evangelized first."[10]

The initial launch of the Biblical apostolate in the late 1980s and in the first half of the 1990s built significantly on the roots dating back to the figure of the Founder, but at the same time, along with encouraging the mission of the word of God, it stressed the importance of building a personal relationship with the Incarnate Word through the words of Scripture, as verbalized in Cons. 108-109.

At the turn of the millennium, there was a kind of stabilization of the Biblical apostolate. The 15th General Chapter (2000), along with the emphasis on "prophetic dialogue" as a way to realize the mission *ad gentes*, "institutionalized" the biblical apostolate as one of our four "characteristic dimensions". A year before the next general chapter, the leadership of the Society invited all members to active spiritual preparation through the announcement of the *Year of Reading the Bible*. A manual was published[11] containing twelve texts with commentary prepared by confreres from different missionary and geographical contexts, which was intended to help communities share together inspired by the words of Scripture. It offered a certain palette of practical examples of ways to read Scripture (*lectio continua*, *lectio assidua*, *lectio divina*, *lectio dialogata*, *lectio liturgica*). At the 16th General Chapter itself (2006), the emphasis on the characteristic dimensions, which are not the exclusivity of a few, continued as well as the process of institutionalization emphasizing the need for personal internalization of God's word.

[8] Over the years, to 2015, there were 27 sessions of the *Dei Verbum Course* (DVC) with a total of 616 participants from all over the world. Initially, DVC was organized yearly and lasted three to four months; after being reshaped, now it is organized every 3 years lasting 60 days. So far, there were two "new" sessions of DVC in 2019 (25 participants) and 2023 (23 participants).
[9] For example, centers in: Vigan (PHN), Quito (ECU), Estella (ESP), Kinshasa (CNG).
[10] *Listen, my People. Journey with the Divine Word,* FTW, 1991/3, Rome: SVD Publications 1991, 72.
[11] *A Year of Divine Word Missionaries Reading the Bible,* IDW, 2005/5.

We see our special dedication to the

# Divine Word

and his mission expressed in our name.

Prologue, SVD Constitutions


















**Above**
**Left:** *Dei Verbum* Course in Nemi, 2019

**Right:** Meeting of the *Grupo Editorial Verbo Divino* in Barcelona

**Below**
**Left:** Fr. Manolito Barona, SVD (on the right), Director of the Biblical Center in Vigan, in conversation with Br. Valentin Grüner, SVD, from Bangued

**Right:** SVDs and SSpS sisters at the meeting of CBF in Rome, 2019

## Present Challenges in Biblical Apostolate[12]

The Biblical apostolate met perhaps its most significant marginalization within the practical impact of the 17th General Chapter (2012), based on the concept of "sharing intercultural life and mission" with the intention of presenting practical guidelines for the Society. Even though "primary and new evangelization" was mentioned as the first congregational direction,[13] (GC 2012, 6-7) the overall emphasis – especially in practice – was more socially oriented. The dominant space was given to social engagement, while the Biblical apostolate seemed almost to dissolve in the fog of marginality. However, the following 18th General Chapter, intended as a return to spirituality and renewal, both personal and communitarian, brought back the importance of rootedness in the Divine Word in our life. There is still the challenge of deepening the *ad extra* aspect of the "proclamation" of the Word of God.

Cooperation between individual institutions within the Society – biblical coordinators, biblical centers, publishing houses, etc. – but also externally,[14] is becoming imperative. Now, when the majority of confreres engaged in the Biblical apostolate are aged and the "formation" of the younger ones in the area of Biblical apostolate needs to be reinforced, the involvement of the laity is decisive, too. Thus, in addition to the aspect *ad extra* and *ad intra*, we can start to talk about the aspect *cum aliis*, "together with others." The actors are no longer only the consecrated (or their immediate associates). It is not just one-way from "us" to "them", but an active participation of all involved in the spirit of "we with them," as joint participation in the mission of the disciples.

Taking into consideration that more than half of Divine Word Missionaries in perpetual vows work in parish ministry, the challenge is to transform the parishes entrusted to us to be more "missionary" and to carry out what the exhortation *Verbum Domini* (73) already underlines when it presents the recommendation of the Synod to give more importance to the Biblical apostolate "not alongside other forms of pastoral work, but as a means of letting the Bible inspire all pastoral work" (cf. also *Dei Verbum*, 24).

[12] For a more comprehensive picture see the recent presentation of perspectives in the generalate's publication on Biblical apostolate, *The Word of God in Our Life and Mission,* FW, 2020/2, 90-106.
[13] IDW, 2012/11, 6-7.
[14] As an example, can be mentioned the workshop on *Scriptural Reasoning* that took place in Nemi in May 2015.

## Conclusion

The Biblical apostolate, rooted in the devotion of our Founder, Arnold Janssen to the Incarnated Word which flourished in our Society in particular from the '80s, remains the priority of our life and mission as Divine Word Missionaries.

Efforts to continue and further develop the concrete implementation of the biblical dimension of missionary life and activity not only correspond to an essential element of our identity, but also to the call to shape the pastoral involvement in the spirit of the post-conciliar process, as reflected in the exhortation *Verbum Domini*, and recalled from the beginning in the magisterium of Pope Francis who affirms in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*: "The sacred Scriptures are the very source of evangelization. [...] It is indispensable that the word of God 'be ever more fully at the heart of every ecclesial activity'" (174).

**Marek Vaňuš, SVD (Slovakia)**
***Former Generalate Biblical Apostolate Coordinator, now Provincial Superior***







**Above:** Meeting of the *Grupo Editorial Verbo Divino* in Estella, Spain, 2017

**Center:** Meeting of EUROPA Biblical apostolate coordinators in Bratislava, Slovakia, 2017

**Below:** Scriptural Reasoning in Nemi, 2015


STEYLER MISSIONS CHRONIK
1985/86
MISSIONARI VERBITI
2003
2017
fasciculus 2
volumen 64
2023
Faithful and Creative Discipleship in a Wounded World. A Reflection on the 2024 SVD General Chapter Theme
Preferential Option for the Poor: Human Rights and the Ecclesiastical Approach to Sustainable Development Goal 1
Formation of an Ecological Conscience:
The National Synod of 1924 in Shanghai and the Catholic View of Chinese Culture
Maximum illud in Communication Perspective

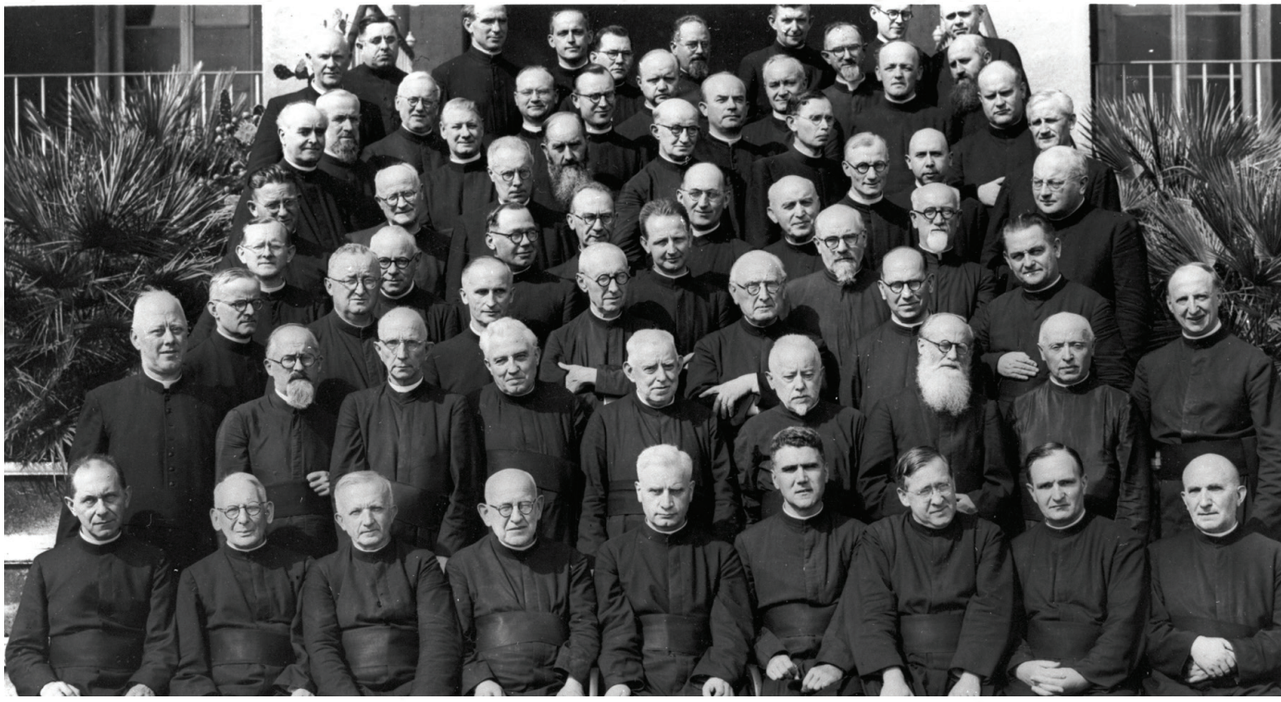


# Mission Animation and Lay Partners

As a missionary Congregation, *missio Dei* is our focus, goal and our life. This was clear to our Founder Saint Arnold Janssen, and he placed the whole thrust towards guiding the members to realize this goal. His inspiring talks, letters and work were aimed at spreading the word of God and actualizing the Kingdom of God in far lands. The starting of the mission press for printing *Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart* in 1876, *City of God* in 1878 and *St. Michael's Almanac* in 1880 was keeping the focus of mission and spreading the Good News to the people. In a way, the publications were animation tools, and later, the Society incorporated the way and the method of bringing mission awareness in subsequent general chapters. From 1910 to 1967, among the nine general chapter reports, which had nearly 40 chapters, only one had concentrated "On the Missions," though the whole orientation was toward mission.[15] However, the 6th General Chapter of 1932 discussed as one of the topics "home propaganda for the missions."[16] The concept of a missionary congregation, the determination to spread the faith and spread mission awareness existed always while drawing numerous rules for the Congregation. A more profound shape came for mission animation through Fr. Johann Schütte. The traveling brothers of Steyl played an important role in the distribution of the mission press publications. They visited families, spoke about the missions and encouraged mission vocations.

[15] *History SVD*, 47.
[16] *History SVD*, 41.





**Left:** First Mission Secretary of the Society at the Generalate, Fr. Johann Schütte (1955-1958)

**Right:** Participants of the 7th General Chapter in Rome

## First Mission Secretary and the Growth

Knowing the importance of strengthening the spirit of mission, Superior General Alois Grosse Kappenberg and his council appointed Fr. Johann Schütte as the first mission secretary of the Society on 8 July 1955. At the very start, he was mainly occupied with the formulation of the *Statutes for Mission Propaganda in the Home Countries* and *Regulations for Missionaries on Furlough* as requested by the 7th General Chapter of 1947.[17] Keeping the growth of the mission and for its support worldwide, Fr. Schütte particularly recommended the establishment of a centralized office under one procurator.[18] The procurator would exercise overall authority over local mission procurators and over all forms of mission propaganda. The role of the mission secretary took shape as time passed.

Subsequent mission secretaries have shown similar enthusiasm in mission animation, each one working in his own unique way in promoting the mission of the Society. The following are the generalate mission secretaries appointed till 2024: Matthias Schneider (1958-1961), William Hunter (1961-1971), Karl Rühling (1971-1977), Karl Müller (1977-1982), Carlos Pape (1982-1994), Thomas Ascheman (1994-2006), Pio C. Estepa (2006-2012), Stanislaus Thanuzraj Lazar (2012-2024).

The *Constitutions of 1967*/68 pointed out the importance of the mission secretary's role as "providing stimuli and encouragement for mission interest on the home front…" (Cons. 118.1). The *Constitutions of 1983/2000* point out that the PRMs' mission secretaries are entrusted with three tasks of "fostering mission awareness, (showing) particular interest in the personal welfare of the missionaries from other provinces, and raising funds for the missions" (Cons.117.2). Also, there should be a mission secretary in every province or region (Cons. 631). This shows how over the years, the Society has shown the importance of stressing the significant role of fostering mission awareness and enhancing a missionary spirit in the Church.

As a way of doing mission, one of our characteristic dimensions is to animate others to realize the mission of God. The Society's commitment is "to make the local churches mission-minded, aware of their responsibility toward the whole church and ready to spread the good news they have received" (Cons. 110). Therefore, mis-

[17] *The Regulations for Missionaries on Furlough* were approved on 2 March 1956, and *The Statute for Mission Propaganda in the Home Countries* on 11 December 1956.
[18] At the suggestion of Fr. Schütte the Central Mission Office was created in the early 60's, with satellites in other provinces, under the leadership of Fr. Francis Kamp.

sion animation is directed to all the people of God, including our confreres, the religious, and the clergy, who belong to their respective local churches, and more particularly the lay people.

Fostering mission awareness is a characteristic dimension of the life and work of every SVD. The expression "characteristic dimension" is practically a standard expression from the 15th General Chapter of 2000, before that expressions like, "priorities," "areas," and "essential dimensions" were used (IDW 2000/1, 72).

The 16th General Chapter of 2006 said that each of the characteristic dimensions implies a basic attitude in our missionary life. "Our basic attitude in *Mission Animation* is to *involve others*, to animate them with our enthusiasm for the journey to the Kingdom and to be animated by them, rather than falling into the temptation to think that we can do it all ourselves" (9). We animate others, especially lay people, to live their faith and to give witness to the Reign of God in concrete ways.

The mission secretary is appointed by the Superior General. It is important to note, in the age of decentralization of offices, this is the only office in the provinces and regions that the Superior General makes the appointment. To function systematically, the Society brought out "Directives for Mission Secretaries"[19] in 1999. This serves till today as a pivotal guide for mission secretaries to do mission animation as well as other tasks in the PRMs. The 18th General Chapter resolution (1.2.7) on "Establishing a structure for mission animation and fundraising" was another step to strengthen the role of the mission secretaries.





**Above:** Fr. Zdzisław Grad, SVD, visiting for the first time during the Holy Week the village Mahela on the east coast of Madagascar, April 1993

**Below:** Ghana Animation Group

After many years of evolving various ways of working in the missions, a clear direction exists today on how the mission secretary could function, motivating the confreres and lay people in continuing God's mission with much fervor and dedication. Fostering mission awareness is in fact the responsibility of every missionary; this is our way of doing mission. The mission animation of confreres, lay people and promoting lay partners as co-missionaries are part of our service. Efficacy depends on how one plans, organizes and executes animation programs.

## Moving Ahead

Mission animation is carried out in various ways according to the context. The mission secretaries and others have taken a lot of initiatives in animating people and collecting funds for the missions. The booklet on "Pathways of Mission Animation"[20] narrates various activities in which confreres are involved today: stimulus of mission among the confreres, making aware of the missionary discipleship among lay people, guiding youth, publications on mission, fostering mission mindedness among the people, promoting missionary parishes wherever we work and raising funds for the missions.

Creative work, innovative methods, social media, publications, celebrations and networking with other ministries play a great role in fostering mission awareness. Celebrating "SVD Day/Weekend/Week" in every parish, institute and house expresses the spirit of mission.[21] Other than organizing seminars, workshops, discussions, exhibitions, group meetings and role plays, giving the people experience of the missionary situation by visiting

[19] *Handbook for Superiors SVD*, Rome: SVD Curia 2002, Appendix X 3.
[20] *Pathways of Mission Animation*, FW, 2021/3.
[21] *Documents of the 18th General Chapter SVD 2018*, IWD, 2018/6: Recommendation 2.2.1.









**Left:** Missiological Institute in Malang, Indonesia

**Center:** Ishvani Kendra Missiological and Communication Center, India

**Right:** Divine Word Institute of Mission Studies, Tagaytay City, Philippines

the areas of indigenous people or poor settlements or refugee camps. At the same time, the mission should not be considered as something far distant; people should pay attention to the local realities - the poor, elderly, migrants and their own faith life in their locality. Social media play a vital role in molding thinking, creating awareness, and calling for action. In this context, forming a mission team – with both confreres and lay people – is of paramount importance for effective functioning. A few provinces have mission teams now to work efficiently.

## Mission Institutes and Scholars

One of the effective ways of animation is doing research and publication on mission. The Society had shown keen interest in this area in the early years. Some of the Mission Institutes are continuing this legacy now.

The institute *Monumenta Serica* was established in Beijing in 1935, but was subsequently located in Tokyo and Nagoya, Japan (1948-1961) and in Los Angeles, USA and finally, it came to St. Augustin in 1972. It publishes studies on Chinese culture. In cooperation with Chinese and Western scholars, it promotes a deeper understanding of China in the academic world. To further this aim, the institute holds or co-organizes various conferences and exhibitions on different sinological topics.

*Steyler Missionswissenschaftliches Institut* - SVD Missiological Institute - was established in 1962 at St. Augustin, Germany, to promote mission research for effective mission animation and work throughout the world. The Institute's tasks are research in missiology and mission theology, the publication of research, the promotion of young mission scholars, the organization of courses and congresses in mission theology, and the care of their library (around 35,000 volumes). The publications of this Institute include the editing of *Verbum SVD* (four times a year, since 1959), the book series *Studia Instituti Missiologici SVD* (since 1962) and a yearly chronicle basically for benefactors, *Missionschronik* (since 1959). Over the years, the Institute has served its purpose of reaching out to many people to reflect more on mission theology, mission methods, dimensions of mission, and so forth.

*Ishvani Kendra*. This Missiological and Communication Center was established in 1976 by Fr. Engelbert Zeitler in Pune, India. At that time, this was the only missiological institute in India; later a few more centers came up. *Ishvani Kendra* organizes periodically research conferences and publishes books, besides its regular journal, *Ishvani*: *International Journal of Mission Studies*, (its earlier name *Ishvani Documentation and Mission Digest)*. The center also conducts renewal programs and media courses for priests, religious and laity.

*Candraditya*, Research Center for the Study of Religion and Culture, at Maumere, Indonesia was established in 1987. Research and other activities are carried out to fulfill the goals of promoting the formation of missionaries in Indonesia and helping to support the local churches in their pastoral work. *Aditya Wacana* is a missiological institute established in 1999 in Malang, Indonesia. This institute researches various topics, especially on the in-



digenous people in Indonesia. It has regular publications and occasionally conducts courses. In Rome, the *Freinademetz Centre* began in 2007, but was temporarily closed in 2022. Its main purpose was to provide academic assistance regarding China.

*Divine Word Institute of Mission Studies* (DWIMS), Tagaytay City, Philippines is born out of the longer discussion in the ASPAC Zone with the PRM superiors, mission secretaries and the local leadership teams. It was established in 2013. The Institute is an academic and research institution that offers degree programs (Licentiate and Doctorate in Sacred Theology major in Missiology) and non-degree (Certificate in Mission Studies). It also conducts seminars and courses for lay people.

Other than these known institutes, many SVD scholars have done higher studies in missiology and mission studies and they serve the Church and the Society not only as teachers but also helping in many ways animate confreres, the local Church and lay people for effective mission. They publish books and articles which are very significant for the universal Church. A scientific approach and reflective orientation help to discover new ways of doing mission and to find answers to the challenging questions that arise in the local context.

## SVD Lay Partners

Right from the beginning, our Founder Arnold Janssen sought the cooperation of lay people to continue missionary activities. Many collaborated with him. Some of the prominent persons are Miss Helena Wolters, the owner of a large store in Venlo; Mrs. Biber, a widow from Vienna; the Cleophas family in Steyl; Anton Craghs, a widower from Walbeck, Germany; Miss Wolters who supported the China mission; Josef Stute who helped to set up the new printing press in Steyl in 1876, and many others. Knowing the value of lay collaborators in the growth of the Society, Arnold even had the intention of starting a kind of "SVD Third Order."[22] During the first General Chapter of the Society, the






Various Formation/Workshops/Encounter organized for SVD Lay Partners held in DWIMS (center) and Nemi, Rome

[22] Alt, *Journey*, 214.

capitulars discussed an "institute of secular cooperators to help the missions" (27-28 January 1885).[23] But in the final report before the episcopal approbation, it was dropped. Probably they thought that it was better to concentrate on the religious community and this could be taken up later.

Over the years, although the mission continued with lay partners, not much emphasis was given to creating an association or a group. The 15th General Chapter called the members to share our spirituality with lay people, especially those with whom we work (94). More lay partner cooperation was seen in many PRMs in the subsequent years. The 16th, 17th and 18th General Chapters made recommendations on collaboration with the laity in mission and called for promoting the participation of the laity in SVD assemblies and chapters, initial and ongoing formation, and in the administration. More importantly, the 17th and 18th General Chapters passed resolutions on the "Official Recognition of Lay Associate Groups". Over the years, many lay associate groups have emerged, cherishing the charism of our Society and Arnoldus spirituality. The Society has discovered lay associates as a genuine treasure in doing mission. In 2024, there are approximately 79 officially recognized associate groups, 160 not yet officially recognized groups; and a total of about 27,500 members enrolled in these groups.[24]

Most of the groups are very vibrant, zealous and involved in various activities. A number of proactive measures are undertaken to be really co-partners and co-responsible people in the missions. Their activities and programs are reported in their *SVD Lay Partners Newsletter*, which was started in 2016 and published by an editorial team led by Susan Noronha, Mumbai (Chief Editor). By the end of 2024, they have published 26 newsletters. This is a vital channel that connects all the SVD lay partner groups together and more importantly, the various news and views inspire, encourage and motivate one another.

Although many more associate groups are growing, giving formation and continuously animating them is a big challenge. The lay partners have potential and passion for mission. This can be tapped only when an organized group is formed with proper statutes and a concrete action plan for engaging in mission.

## Lay Missionaries

Although lay missionaries were present in the missions over the years, systematic recruitment and sending of lay missionaries was done in 1956. After a careful study of the nearly 150 applicants, 17 were chosen for the New Guinea mission. Later, many lay missionaries went to other countries too. The *Constitutions of 1967/68* and those of 1983/2000 recognized the important role of indigenous and foreign lay missionaries in the missions (Cons.116 and Cons. 111 respectively). Although some lay missionaries are working in various PRMs today, there are not many. Truly, the Society could pay more attention to this aspect, and encourage and promote them in the missions.

To conclude, for the future of the Society, fostering mission awareness is one of its significant components. The role of the mission secretary at the generalate as well as in the provinces and regions is very vital for our effective way of actualizing the Reign of God. Using digital media, organizing systematic programs, accompanying the lay partner groups, giving formation to the laity and energizing them to realize the richness of mission and their Christian vocation are some of the important tasks that the Society has to continue with fervor and dedication. Continuity, constancy and commitment are the key components for mission animation.

**Stanislaus Lazar, SVD (Rome)**
***Former Provincial Superior,***
***now Generalate Mission Secretary***

[23] Alt, *Journey*, 213.
[24] The Statistics are from the Report of the Mission Secretary for the 19th General Chapter of 2024.











Mission Procure in St. Augustin, Germany



# Mission Office: Historical Developments and its Importance for our Missions

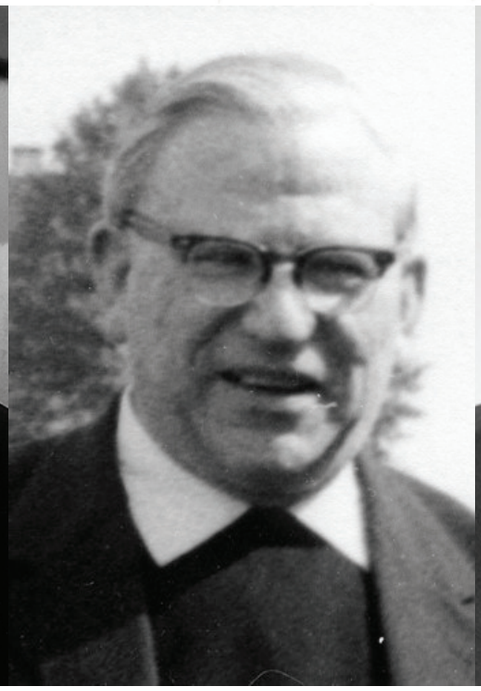
## Beginning of Mission Offices

The oldest SVD provinces to send out missionaries were the German-speaking and US-provinces. Therefore, from the beginning, the help for the missionaries who left their home base came from the confreres of these provinces. Looking back Fr. Xavier Alangaram, the mission secretary in St. Augustin, writes:

> Arnold Janssen recognized the need for missionary work that truly embodied the Word of God. This paved the way for the very first mission office in Steyl, with the vision of not only raising funds but also promoting mission awareness in the country. Our brothers were very active in this area. As early as 1880, when the first missionaries went to China, Arnold Janssen himself financially supported them and later entrusted other confreres with this task. Among the first names are Nicolaus Blum and Johann Schaaf.

The help from Steyl during the Nazi era became very problematic for missionaries from Germany. Then in St. Augustin, a mission office was established not only for financial help of the missions but also for passport and visa issues for missionaries traveling abroad.






**From Left to Right:**

Fr. Bruno Hagspiel, Mission Secretary in Techny

Fr. Francis Kamp, Director and Treasurer of the Mission Office in Techny promoting interest in the overseas missions and raising funds for missionaries

Fr. Adam Nottebaum, Mission Procurator in St. Augustin since 1959

Fr. Gerhard Huth, Mission Procurator in St. Augustin for 28 years since 1971

Regarding the Mission Center of the North American provinces, Br. Dan Holman, Mission Office Director, writes:

> Its origins reach back to the mid-1920s, partly as a response to the American hierarchy's unsuccessful attempts to bring all mission fund-raising efforts directly under its control. However, its establishment was owed at least as much to the structure of the SVD community and the need to coordinate the fund-raising efforts of the Bishops in missions from around the world. In terms of inner-SVD operation, a special organ for mission fundraising was needed because human nature being what it is, each house and province habitually maintained that the money they had raised could be spent best at home. The mission office, by contrast, would raise money only for overseas missions, and it would have a special obligation to raise mission consciousness.

After the shock of World War II with the many losses of young confreres, the SVD increased in members again. The generalate sought to streamline the support on the one hand and to animate others to do it similarly and issued guidelines. On 21 December 1956, Fr. Superior General Alois Grosse Kappenberg published the statutes for the mission offices, which should be established in Europe, America, the Philippines and Australia.[25]

After this, we find assignments of mission procurators (*procurator missionum*) in US-provinces, Germany, Austria, Netherlands, Switzerland, Brazil and Philippines. In the US local procurators are named besides Fr. Kamp being the head of all (*procurator primarius missionum*).

On 8 December 1962, Fr. Superior General Johann Schütte set the norms and economical administration into action. It includes juridical and common norms and economic commitments such as fundraising, administration and care for the missionaries. It lists the support of new missionaries, help for the missionaries in the missions and care for the missionaries on home-leave. The personal attitude of a mission procurator was to be led by a spirit of co-operation.[26]

In Europe, mission offices started small. In St. Augustin in Germany Fr. Adam Nottebaum was appointed mission procurator in 1959. When he arrived, the existing mission procure was in a two-room cottage in the park. When Fr. Nottebaum stepped down, the procure had become a two-storey office building, and a service com-

[25] *Statutum de opere missionali interno a sodalibus in terris originis exercendo*, *Nuntius SVD*, Vol. VI, 1956, fasc. 3, 282-291.
[26] *Der Missionsprokurator* (Part V), [In:] *Richtlinien für die Verwaltung der zeitlichen Güter SVD*, *Nuntius SVD,* Vol. VII, 1963 Supplementum, 128-138. English revised edition: *Guidelines for the Administration of Temporal Goods in the Society of the Divine Word*, Rome: Tipografia S.G.S. Pio XI 1984, 105 pp.



pany for the missions, registered in the local court as *Gemeinnützige Gesellschaft für auswärtige Missionen mbH* (Non-profit foreign mission company with limited liability). Nottebaum provided the impetus that has characterized the work of procure ever since, with modern technology, contemporary public relations, and awareness raising. He was also the actual founder of the Steyler Bank, who since then has been supporting the mission offices in Germany with their profits. In addition, many bank customers would give part or all of their profits to the mission offices. Fr. Gerhard Huth was mission procurator for 28 years, including evenings and Sundays, until the day before his death at the age of 66. The actual man now in charge, Xavier Alangaram, writes:

> The business graduate developed the mission-procure into the most energetic of the entire order. The Catholic San Carlos University in Cebu (Philippines) honored him in 1979 with an honorary doctorate in human sciences. Fr. Konrad Liebscher succeeded Gerhard Huth in 1999. The former Angola missionary headed the mission procure, which since 2005 has been located in the premises of the former Moeller College, until he handed it over.

In St. Gabriel, Austria, the mission procure started also in a small way. Fr. Otto Haag was appointed in 1959 and built up the mission procure to support the missionaries and the generalate. The Austrian missionaries were not so many, but as St. Gabriel was a formation house, many did their studies and were sent out from there. They came from Hungary and other countries. Fr. Haag handed it over to Fr. Johann Resch in 1986 who built up a fundraising department. A great help to gain benefactors was our magazine *Stadt Gottes*, where projects were presented regularly. It helped to increase the number of benefactors quite well. The mission procure holds the Austrian donation quality seal and the deductibility from income tax for benefactors. This requires annual auditing not only of bookkeeping but also of the appropriate use of donations.

In Switzerland, first, the missionaries were supported in a similar way. *Stadt Gottes* helped also to make the work of the missionaries known. From the mission houses the confreres could go into parishes for mission appeals. Therefore, a register of benefactors could be built up who also received donation letters four times a year. Since 1977 the mission procure has been in Steinhausen and it is a registered charity organization. That means that with donations tax can be deducted.

From Poland Fr. Andrzej Danilewicz, mission secretary, writes:

> The establishment of the mission office in the Polish province is linked to the first departure of a large group of Polish SVDs to Indonesia in 1965. Since then, more confreres have gone on mission every year. This led to a greater interest in the missions in Polish society and gave rise to the need for spiritual and material support for the missionaries sent. In each mission house a mission coordinator person was appointed, whose work was coordinated by

**From Left to Right:**

Fr. Otto Haag, Mission Procurator in St. Gabriel since 1958

Fr. Johann Resch, Mission Secretary in St. Gabriel since 2001

Fr. Bronislaw Pocwiardowski - first Mission Procurator in Poland







**Above**: Mission Procure in Steinhausen in Switzerland

**Center:** Office Room of the Mission Procure in St. Gabriel

**Below:** Mission office in Techny

> the chief coordinator in Pieniężno. He was Fr. Antoni Koszorz. From 1976 the mission coordinator was renamed as mission procurator. A confrere was appointed to this post by the Superior General. The first mission procurator in Poland was Fr. Bronisław Poćwiardowski. Up to now, six confreres have held this position.

In Portugal, the first confrere who held the office of mission secretary full-time was Jorge Fernandes from 1979 to 1989. He remembers that after an inquiry in Rome, he was told to emphasize missionary animation and financial contribution for our mission work in the poorest countries. The emphasis should be on raising awareness among our Christian communities of the missionary dimension of the Church. He visited parishes, schools of religious congregations, and other schools whose teachers of religion and moral invited him. To raise awareness among our own family and friends spread across the country, he then created the newspaper *Contacto SVD*, which continues today, fortunately, to reach the hands of a few thousand readers. The aim of the newspaper is to provide information about our activities and form missionary awareness among readers. To promote economic aid to the missions and make an annual contribution to the generalate for this purpose, the *Mãos Unidas* campaign is launched during Lent, which survives under the new title *Mãos Missionárias* and is being organized every year.

## Growth and Change of Understanding in Supporting the Missionaries

As an example, I quote again Dan Holman:

> The ways of gathering funds for the missions and increasing mission awareness have changed over the years. At one time 'ransoming pagan babies' was an attractive target of appeals in a day when missions in China were overwhelmed by the number of abandoned babies that they felt an obligation to care for. Today this approach would be viewed both as the result of bad theology and paternalistic as well. It is no small part of the fundraiser's art to be tasteful in what he highlights while casting appeals in ways that generate the help needed. That art was no small part of Fr. Kamp's success, but even more, was owed to the self-evident concern he had both for the people among whom the missionaries worked and for the missionaries themselves. Ask any SVD who has worked overseas during the years of Kamp's tenure as national mission director, and you will find a long list of acts Kamp and the mission office performed that go beyond mere efficiency and physical resources to a spirit of kindness and concern with which the office has been imbued.

The example of Kamp is also valid for us in the German-speaking provinces. Fr. Albin Strassmann from Switzerland put a lot of effort in the cooperation of the three mission procures – Steinhausen, St. Augustin and St. Gabriel. He was the motor behind the development of a common database as well as for the common emergency relief operations after catastrophes or Covid-19 pandemic in co-operation with the generalate.

## Challenges

The age structure of our donors and the connected decline is worrying. In the current crisis of faith and Church in Europe, especially in Switzerland, Germany and Austria, it is hardly possible to find new and younger donors. We must prepare ourselves for the fact that donations from private individuals will decline significantly in the next few years.

On the other hand, the above-mentioned common database of the three procures should help to build up new forms of fundraising via tools, which are applicable on social media.

Most support to the confreres goes through the four subsidy applications in March, September, December, and Emergency Fund. The generalate approves the applications and allocates them to the mission procures according to the funds available.

However, it is important to improve the quality of the project documentation. There is hope to be able to receive more support from foundations and aid organizations or from Church communities in the future too. With this goal, discussions have begun with the generalate on project criteria and quality standards and how our project partners can be led to further professionalize their project management.

The number of fundraising organizations has increased massively in recent times, and we do not anymore enjoy the advantage of being unique. Above all, a large number of smaller organizations, often with one clear project and goal, have come up. Competition to raise funds is therefore fierce and it is important to impart a clear understanding of the SVD mission. We must tailor our message to modern society's need for understanding of SVD mission and spirituality. Therefore, quality seals for charitable organizations have become more important. This means that whether we carry a donation quality seal of approval or not, we must follow its legal and ethical standards.

When good information about projects and the work of the confreres and their partners is provided, we can convince our donors as well as the auditors that an SVD parish-priest is seven days around the clock equivalent to a Social Development Worker. He puts effort into community building, social awareness including health, education, gender, and developing livelihood, offered to everyone, regardless of faith.

We know that this is true, we have seen it in many places, it is the simple consequence of reaching out to the neighbor, living the message of our Lord, and following him.

**Franz Pilz, SVD (Austria)**[27]
***Former Director of the Mission Procure,***
***now Rector of St. Gabriel Mission House, Mödling***

[27] To write this article I had to rely on the confreres who supplied me with information, and I am grateful to Xavier Alangaram (St. Augustin, Germany), Andrzej Danilewicz (Michałowice, Poland), Matthias Helms (Steinhausen, Switzerland), Dan Holman (Techny, USA) and Antonio Leite (Fátima, Portugal). Partly, I shall quote them and also summarize the content due to the limitation of space.





# Educating for the Future with the Best of Tradition

On the 150th Anniversary of our Society, I have been tasked with contributing an article on our education apostolate, because of my dedication to educating youth throughout my missionary life. It is rather impossible to give the whole statistics of the educational institutions we have in Chile, six high schools and colleges.

I am pleased that education is included because it has been somewhat neglected in our Society's identity and projects. While there have been some guidelines, such as Fr. Heinrich Heekeren's pastoral-missionary orientation in 1981[28] and the edition *SVD Education Ministry as Mission of Dialogue: Our Educators' Perspective*[29], we have not fully integrated mission and prophetic dialogue into our schoolwork. However, there is a better balance now, with the education apostolate recognized as fertile ground for the Kingdom.

This article aims to ground major guidelines in concrete terrain and daily school life, focusing on practical experiences and suggestions. It addresses critical aspects for enriching our apostolate in education and sparking meaningful discussions. I draw from reference literature and personal insights to stimulate dialogue and deepen our educational commitment.

[28] *Nuntius SVD*, Vol. IX, 1981, fasc. 3, 367-376.
[29] IDW, 2010/10, 108 pp.







**Left:** Further training course offered by Fr. Herbert Becker on the SVD identity

**Right:** Eucharist celebration to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the foundation of the Liceo Alemán in Santiago, Chile

I will not discuss the formation of SVD vocations here, as that falls under formation, which is distinct from the education apostolate of schools and colleges. While these concepts are similar, I separate them to clarify their respective roles, similar to distinguishing between seminary and college.

## Our Founder and Education

Father Arnold's visionary leadership profoundly influenced the foundation of schools across Europe, particularly in the Netherlands, Germany, and Austria. These institutions served a dual purpose: nurturing vocations for the budding Society and educating local communities. While the primary goal was to attract prospective SVD members, the schools also welcomed students from the broader community. However, despite hoping to foster future religious vocations, only a tiny percentage of students pursued this path.

Despite this, the impact of these educational institutions must be balanced. Many missionaries sent from Europe to various parts of the world received their education in SVD schools. This educational background not only equipped them with academic knowledge but also instilled in them the values and principles of the Society.

Today, the landscape of SVD schools varies significantly across different regions. In Europe, where the Society's presence has waned over the years, the remaining schools continue to offer quality education to all students, irrespective of religious affiliation. In contrast, in countries like Indonesia, the educational establishments still maintain a seminary-like character, reflecting the Society's origins and historical context.

In India, Ghana, and South America, SVD schools have adapted to their respective regions' diverse religious and cultural landscapes. While upholding their Catholic identity, these schools welcome students from all faiths, emphasizing inclusivity and diversity. This approach reflects the Society's commitment to education and its mission of fostering dialogue and understanding among other faith communities.

Father Arnold's emphasis on education is evident in his numerous letters to missionaries across Argentina, Brazil, and Chile and challenged the traditional model of pastoral parish work.[30] Recognizing the pivotal role of education in shaping society, he advocated the establishment of various types of schools, including regular schools, parish schools, primary schools, secondary schools, and even universities.[31] His vision extended beyond mere academic instruction; he emphasized teachers' formative role and the social contribution of educational institutions.

[30] Fr. Arnold to Fr. Colling (1899): "With mere preaching and religious services, one cannot convert the present world." In another letter to his confreres in Argentina, he states: "It seems to me that educational activity is the most important in South America." IDW, 2010/10, 7.

[31] From the beginnings of our Society, Fr. Arnold himself founded schools: St. Wendel in Germany, St. Rupert in Bischofshofen, Austria, Nysa in Poland (previously in Germany), Guadalupe in Buenos Aires, San José in Esperanza, Roque González in Posadas, the last three in Argentina, Cristo Redentor in Juiz de Fora, Brazil, in Chile: the German Lyceum in Copiapó, and the Seminario Conciliar de La Serena (not founded by the SVD, but taken over by the SVD), and in Togo.






**Left:** Athletes from Divine Word College, winners of the 1992 Interscholastic Boys' Athletics Competition

**Right:** Further training course on SVD identity for teachers at Colegio Verbo Divino de Las Condes in Santiago, Chile

Moreover, Fr. Arnold's perspective on education extended beyond individual growth to societal impact. As an experienced teacher, he believed schools played a crucial role in shaping practical Catholics who could positively influence public life. In today's world, where societal disorientation is rampant, the importance of education in shaping ethical leaders and fostering social cohesion cannot be overstated.

SVD schools in different countries and regions continue to uphold the legacy of Fr. Arnold's vision, providing quality education and nurturing future leaders. Their commitment to inclusivity, diversity, and social responsibility underscores the enduring relevance of the Society's educational mission in today's world.

It is significant to note that in a few countries, we started with the education apostolate in the early years of beginning a PRM, but in many countries, the education apostolate started rather late. Like India, even though SVDs had some schools in the rural areas in the beginning, the education apostolate in the Indian provinces grew faster in the last 15-20 years both in rural as well as in urban areas. Similarly in Indonesia, Ghana, Angola and other countries in Africa, SVDs have more schools now compared to 20 years ago.

## Concrete Challenges for the Future

I want to highlight some key issues and practical proposals regarding the education we provide in our Society. At the core of our approach is "prophetic dialogue," infused with an experience of God, which should underpin all aspects of our educational efforts.

Firstly, I want to address the perception of education as merely a tool for evangelization. Instead, I propose viewing education itself as an inherently pastoral and mission-oriented activity. Education becomes a vital aspect of our mission by nurturing curiosity, fostering values, and building communities, regardless of religious affiliation.

In considering the evolving religious and cultural landscape, especially in the context of pluralism and increased understanding of diverse traditions, we need to reassess our approach to religious education. Fr. Heekeren's directive of 1981 emphasizes the importance of religious education in Catholic schools, but ensuring a respectful engagement with students of other faiths is essential.[32]

Fr. Pedro Arrupe's (SJ) insight into the apostolic nature of education resonates deeply. Our teachers are indeed ministers of education tasked with shaping young minds and hearts in alignment with our values and principles.[33]

[32] "Every Catholic school will seek to make religious education and Christian guidance of students its fundamental objective" (No. 4).
[33] Superior General Pedro Arrupe, S.J., "Our Secondary Schools Today and Tomorrow, 10, 1980, No. 17 (Published in *Acta Romana Societatis Iesu*, Vol. XVIII, 257- 276.



Astrophycist Fr. John Koster, SVD, at work at Fu Jen University.
(SVD Word in the World 1994/95)

Furthermore, I suggest distinguishing between Church schools, prevalent in South America and Europe, and mission schools, more common in Asia and Africa. However, we must also address the challenge of secularization in the West, which raises questions about maintaining the Catholic character of our institutions while respecting freedom of conscience.

As we navigate these complexities, it is crucial to engage in ongoing dialogue and reflection to ensure that our educational mission remains relevant and effective in the world's ever-changing landscape.

## The Family

Students often blame their parents for their lack of involvement in Church activities. This highlights the challenge of supporting families who entrust their children to us. The influence of family on students is profound, complementing their formal education. To address this, we must educate families by offering classes and growth opportunities. A pressing issue is sexual education, best suited for the home but essential to include in the school *curriculum*.

## Our Teachers

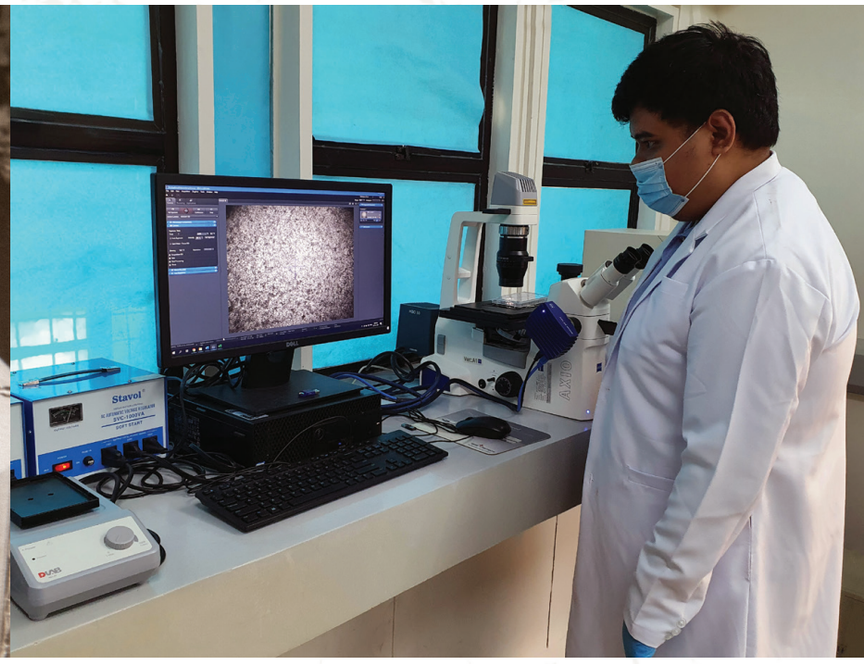
Training our teachers is a significant challenge. We rely on them to spread our mission, often serving as our extended arm in reaching students. Finding dedicated teachers can be challenging, but it is crucial for creating an environment aligned with our educational goals. We must prioritize ongoing teacher training and integrate it into our annual plans. This training should involve collaboration with other educators and include all subjects. We aim to instill in our teachers a synthesis of professional competence and lived faith, fostering a sense of vocation in service to students. This aligns with Fr. Arnold's emphasis on normal schools and Teacher Training Colleges.

## Faster, Higher, Stronger

I avoid the word "excellence," commonly found in educational missions, as it can be presumptuous and unrealistic. Instead, I prefer encapsulating it with comparative adverbs in Latin, not to be taken literally but to signify striving for improvement. What should be the driving force behind our educational institutions? It is not about settling or barely meeting standards; it is about surpassing mediocrity, aiming high, and fostering a culture of achievement.

An excellent academic standard is imperative. Schools should provide more than just passing grades; they should equip students with relevant skills for life and further education. This includes practical application, language proficiency, and emphasis on music and sports to foster a well-rounded education. Education should be infused with love and trust, focusing on eradicating bullying and nurturing resilience. Victor Frankl's notion of a "Statue of Responsibility" resonates, highlighting the importance of teaching responsible freedom.





**Left:** Fr. Frank Budenholzer, SVD, teaches Physics at the Fu Jen in Taiwan. (SVD Word in the World 1994/95)

**Right:** Research on Microplastics that are characterized using high-powered microscopes and infrared spectrometers in the laboratory - University of San Carlos, Cebu

Discipline is crucial, not in a militaristic sense, but as a means of fostering respect, shaping character, and promoting the common good.[34] It is about pedagogical discipline, applied with wisdom and respect for authority, echoing the principles of our Founder. Value education is fundamental, emphasizing respect, responsibility, solidarity, honesty, service, simplicity, humility, strength, and perseverance. These values reflect the essence of our school's ethos, stemming from the legacy of our Founder, Fr. Arnold.

In conclusion, our Education must be comprehensive, but the essence lies in understanding what "comprehensive" truly entails.

## Faith and Science, Faith and Culture, Faith and Life

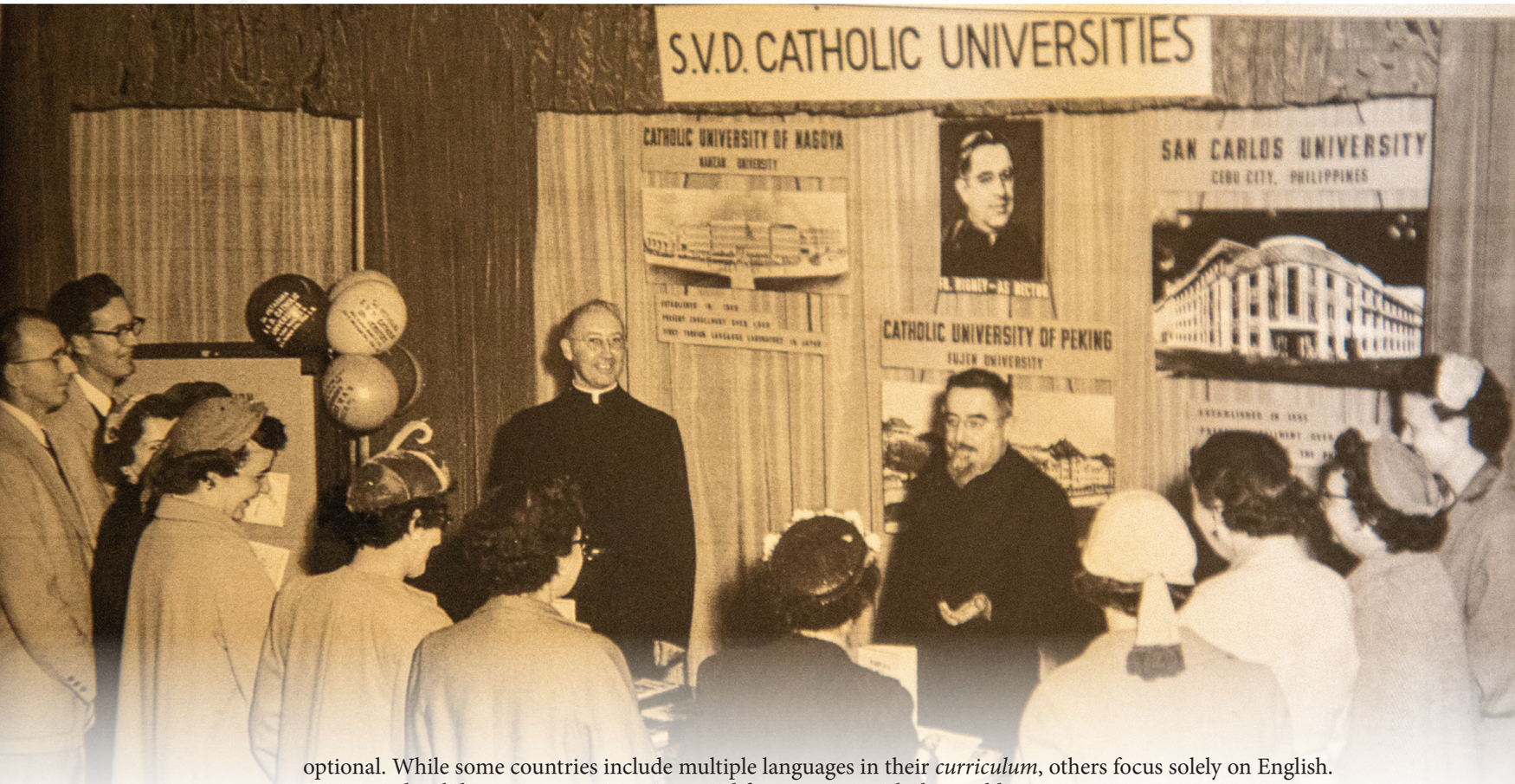
The conjunction 'and' signifies integration, not separation. Faith and Science, once seen as adversaries, now complement each other. As Einstein has expressed it, our schools should embody this unity: "Faith without science is blind; science without faith limps." This integration should be a key focus in the school's Annual Plan or Strategic Plan, fostering dialogue and prophetic engagement. Similarly, faith and culture are intertwined, as emphasized by Pope John Paul II. Faith is not confined to the sacristy; it enriches society, culture, and politics and promotes peace and human rights.

Moreover, faith must permeate daily life to be meaningful. Theological discourse must connect with concrete existence, echoing K. Rahner's call for an "anthropological turn." Sermons, catechesis, and teachings should be relatable, employing synonyms, examples, stories, and native sayings to embody the message of the Kingdom. This ensures that doctrine is not abstract but resonates with lived experiences.

## Inclusiveness in Educational Apostolate

I will not reiterate what is already well-stated in the booklet, "SVD Education Ministry as Mission of Dialogue: Our Educators' Perspective," *In Dialogue with the Word*, No. 10, 2010. Instead, I highlight and suggest some practical applications for school life. Firstly, alongside the native language and English, I propose emphasizing learning additional languages. Even if the *curriculum* has limited time, language learning can be offered as

[34] Josef Alt (ed.), *Cartas de Arnoldo Janssen, SVD a América del Sur*, AN SVD-66/II: 1900-1902, Romae 1992, 104.




optional. While some countries include multiple languages in their *curriculum*, others focus solely on English. However, the ability to communicate is crucial for engaging with the world.

Student exchanges to other countries offer valuable experiences in language acquisition and cultural understanding. While acknowledging the associated costs, schools should explore the feasibility and organization of such exchanges. Alternatively, employing one or two native-speaking teachers could be considered.

Furthermore, effective communication is essential, both in the local language and with foreigners. Clear pronunciation and articulation ensure the Word of God is understood by all. Language proficiency is a continual learning process, not a one-time course.

Given the influx of immigrants, our schools must welcome and integrate students from diverse backgrounds without racism or discrimination. Like national days, schools could acknowledge and celebrate immigrant national days, fostering cultural enrichment and identity formation through intercultural exchange.

In essence, we witness the possibility of peaceful coexistence among nations, cultures, philosophies, and perspectives. While globalization has made strides, interculturality champions the unity of the world amid its diversity as our creed.[35]

## Dimension of Communication in Education

I want to highlight two critical values that challenge our schools in today's highly technologized era: Freedom and the pursuit of Truth. We are well aware of the allure, even addiction, that modern communication tools hold, exerting a literal hold over children, youth, and adults alike. While these technologies offer immense advances and aids, we must maintain our freedom in their midst. We must educate people about this freedom and humanize technology.

[35] Cfr. IDW, 2010/10, 91.

Similarly, the quest for truth is paramount. Amidst a barrage of media sources, opinions, and trends, maintaining composure, consulting one's conscience, seeking credible sources, and engaging in constructive dialogue are skills that must be taught in classrooms and seminars. In a world plagued by fake news, it is vital that our graduates embody a fervent pursuit of truth, echoing Jesus' words: "I am the Truth and the Life."

In closing, let us remember that our mission, entrusted by the Risen Jesus, is to "Go to all peoples," inviting them to join in building the Kingdom of God. This mandate encompasses all aspects of our work, including our educational institutions. Reflecting on the insights shared here, I believe the educational apostolate should hold a higher position among our priorities, a sentiment I am sure Saint Arnold would endorse.

**Herbert Becker, SVD (Chile)**
***Educator,***
***former Rector of Liceo Alemán (CVD),***
***teacher of religion,***
***now assistant parish priest***




Students of *Collegio Verbo Divino* in Chile - forming them to take care of our common home


JANSSEN



# New Communication Technologies Offer Opportunities and Challenges for Evangelization

The sesquicentennial celebration of the foundation of the Society of the Divine Word in 2025 provides a wonderful opportunity for us to reflect, evaluate and re-found one of our primary activities, social communications, as a missionary congregation.

During our Founder Arnold Janssen's time, the printed word was the only mass medium available. His publications were well-designed, printed and published by good publishing houses that provided the widest possible circulation. He also negotiated with different publishers the copyright and royalties fairly. He enunciated his attitude to the print medium at the inauguration of the Mission Press at Steyl in the Netherlands. Referring to Jesus, Arnold said: "In his time the printed word was still unknown, but it is known now and the devil uses it to do much evil. Therefore, the servant of Jesus must also use it to do good."[36] Later he started a secular pictorial family magazine, *Stadt Gottes*. He outlined his plan for the magazine, "To help the reader to spend a leisure hour in a pleasant and, if possible, profitable way by learning something at the same time…, it should be a source of spiritual inspiration and religious instruction."[37] "Together with Brother Clemens Lanze he developed the system of traveling brothers and lay promoters. They were largely re-

[36] *Founder AJ*, 78.
[37] *Founder AJ*, 118-119.





Indian classical dance group of Fr. Georg Proksch, SVD, (1904-1986)

sponsible for the phenomenal rise in subscriptions which made the *Stadt Gottes* so unique in its field. By the time of his death, the circulation had risen to 220,000 and later reached over one million."[38] Thus, the Founder laid a strong foundation for the SVD in the use of the media.

## The Use of Traditional Media

As Divine Word Missionaries encountered people in traditional societies, they quickly learned local languages – symbols, and stories that struck a chord with their audience. Fr. Georg Proksch in India wrote biblical stories in the local epic style that combined music, epigrams and discourses called *Khrist Katha* (life of Christ) which held the people's attention for long hours. He prepared dance dramas to tell the story of salvation. He also pioneered writing and composing devotional hymns in Hindi. In his footsteps, Fr. Charles Vaz and several other SVDs continue to write and compose hymns for liturgy and para-liturgical services. *Ishvani Kendra* in Pune and *Satprakashan* in Indore have made significant contributions by producing and promoting them in several languages.

SVD social activists in India effectively used group media, like puppet shows, pictures, cassettes, slides, short films and street plays to inspire the people to reflect on their life situations. The street plays did not require elaborate costumes, stages, make-up, etc., to awaken the people to their actual life situations and encourage them to work for justice, peace and integrity of creation.

## Significant Contribution of Publishing Houses

The SVD personnel in almost all the provinces have been active in the use of print media. Prominent were German, Spanish, Polish and Hindi publications. *Editorial Verbo Divino* (EVD) in Estella, Spain in collaboration with Portugal and *Verbum Bible* in Congo have been contributing immensely with their biblical publications among the Spanish and French-speaking people! Mention should be made of their success in publishing the *Children's Bible* in 148 different languages and the *Youth Bible* in 24 languages in collaboration with the Funding Agencies. Today, EVD is recognized as one of the most prestigious publishing houses in the Spanish-speaking world.

The Society of the Divine Word has also an enviable record of publishing monthlies. Outstanding performances have been of monthlies like *Stadt Gottes*, with its two distinct editions for Germany and Austria. The Irish-British province published *The Word* monthly. The Central Indian Province publishes, *The Word Among Us*. Here, it is good to note the contribution of *Sat Prachar Press* (1947), India, which rendered huge service in publishing a lot of the research that the SVDs did in the beginning stages and later other materials.

[38] Heinrich Heekeren, *Communications Media and the SVD*, WTW, 1979/4, *Nuntius* SVD, Vol. XI, 1979, fasc. 1, 83.

## The Use of Film, Radio and Television

*Verbo Filmes* in São Paulo, Brazil founded by Fr. Konrad Berning won several national and international awards for his feature films. *Verbo Filmes*' productions have become prominent in Church communities, especially in Latin America.

*Steyler Medien* founded in Munich, Germany by Fr. Johannes Rzitka, SVD, telecasts a series of programs titled, "Ways of Life" through DoK-TV, Bible-TV, K-TV and on social media. *Steyler Medien* has produced more than 100 videos for schools and parishes.

*Kairos* in Maynooth, Ireland produces the daily "slot" for the *Angelus* and Night Prayer for RTE television channel in Ireland. *Kairos* also transmits 28 Sunday Masses throughout the year.

*Wordnet Productions* in California, USA shares the Good News on a national-international basis through a weekly half-hour television program, and a daily Scriptural message on smartphones through an App called *Igod* Today and the production of documentaries and other television programs for transmission. These initiatives are part of the legacy of Fr. Michael Manning, SVD.

Several provinces are involved in broadcast and telecast ministries. In almost all the provinces of ASPAC and AFRAM, members produce programs for radio and television. The PANAM Zone too has some important radio stations. Some of the significant contributions are made by the following: Pass-Word TV, Manila by making documentaries and short films for TV, *Transiet Verbum*. *Satprakashan* in Indore produces Hindi programs, *Satyaswar* for Radio Veritas Asia, Manila. Lumen 2003 FM in Ruteng, Indonesia fosters brotherhood and development of the peoples in the Manggarai area to be democratic, independent, and just.

## Deepening of Social Communications

Already before Vatican II, the SVD was aware of the importance of social communications. The call of the Second Vatican Council to religious to go back to the original charism was heard also by our Society which immediately helped our renewal through the general chapters. Discovering the important dimension of communications, the SVD 9th General Chapter of 1967/68 enshrined in its Constitution a deeper insight, "Communication at its most profound level is the giving of self in love and consequently a basic attitude necessary for us Divine Word Missionaries" (Cons. 115).

Since then, practically every Chapter has had something important to say about social communications for evangelization. At the 15th General Chapter of 2000, the capitulars enunciated that "the deepest and best understanding of our call to mission is expressed in the term "dialogue" or more specifically "prophetic dialogue" (GC 2000; IDW, 2000/1, 31). That Chapter affirmed that "dialogue is an attitude of solidarity, respect and




ce carne
nezzo a noi"
(Gv 1,14)
SONY
E-IMAGE





love," (IDW, 2000/1, 31). that should permeate all our activities. Dialogue presupposes a listening attitude to hear the cry of the people as Yahweh did. That Chapter also identified communications as one of the four characteristic dimensions of the SVD.

After Vatican II, Fr. Franz Josef Eilers functioned as Secretary for Social Communications at the generalate. From 1980, the generalate decided to have an office of communication coordinators at various levels in the Society. The first general coordinator for social communications was Fr. Thomas Luiz. Since his days, generalate coordinators have informed and encouraged communication institutions and personnel to collaborate among the provinces to minimize expenses and bring about the effective use of the media for evangelization.

## The Call of Jesus to be Light and Salt: Challenges and Opportunities

Jesus himself very succinctly used several metaphors and parables to describe his own identity as well as the identity of his followers. In preparation for the 19th General Chapter, the members reflected on Mathew 5:16, where Mathew highlights the metaphor of light. Like Jesus, we too are the light of the world. The mainline secular media consistently promote materialistic and consumerist values and goods. In this context, how can we become faithful and creative disciples in a wounded world?

As bearers of light, despite being wounded healers, we have the prophetic mission to reveal and awaken people concerning the wounded realities of the world. To do so effectively, we need to express solidarity with people by being present in their life situations. Generally, our programs should focus on the various wounds even to the extent of shocking the audience! Only then, can we awaken them from the slumber and inertia that have crept into the lives of many, both Catholics and others. Solutions should be presented from the alternative value system we have inherited in Jesus Christ. We have to be compassionate as he is. Once we hear the cries of the poor and the marginalized who live in the peripheries, and prepare our programs to highlight their plight, trust is formed between us and them.

This prophetic ministry should be carried out faithfully, credibly and consistently. The metaphor of light is also a background reality. "Whoever walks in the daytime does not stumble, for he sees with the light of this world. But if anyone walks by night, he will stumble for there is no light to guide him" (John 11: 9-10). Light is noticed only in its absence. While the SVD have a role to play to attract people to Christ, they should not become the center of the programs and activities. Their presence ought to be implied by the way the story unfolds. Our presence should make a difference in the lives of people. To be the light, therefore, requires a solid revolution in the way we function as Divine Word communicators by pointing out through our lives Jesus Christ.

The challenges also dawn on the missionaries not only from the vision and aspirations of the SVD but also from the context of the people. Though we have defined all missionary activities in terms of dialogue, the attitude of dialogue has not become an integral part of the mission, less definitely *prophetic* dialogue. Our attempts have








SVD communication personnel from Brazil, India, and Colombia.







been less than satisfactory. We have compromised. The content of most programs on radio, television, film and Internet are geared to proclaim the message of the Gospel like in the past. Rarely are programs made to assist the people to critically look at their ground realities or to begin a process of dialogue. Therefore, the challenge before us SVDs is how to implement these imperatives realistically to become credible media practitioners.

In the past, facts were never questioned. Today, people look at reality from different perspectives. Today's youth are more familiar with the Internet, smartphones and social media. Their attention span is also limited. Small is beautiful. They are not only sharers of ideas and information but also equally producers of programs. Programs are shared worldwide along with comments. Therefore, it is important that the programs are true, credible and suited to the audience.

Lately, new technological revolutions have shaped the emergence of new mass media – digital cinema, radio on Internet and 3D television, smartphones and finally the digital space that will be enhanced strongly with Artificial Intelligence (AI). The Internet is democratizing the accessibility of media to all. The vast networks of soft media focus on a culture that addresses well-being – happiness to be had here and now rather than seeking deferred eternal happiness. Many young minds easily get lost in the process. Digital space is a new community that needs to be addressed by the messengers of Good News.

In the so-called democratic countries, ideologies have been polarizing the people into conservatives and liberals. In many countries, there is a growth of regionalism, and linguistic or racial chauvinism that threatens the very foundations of the post-World War democracies that had set great ideals of inclusive structures for the development of all. Polarization is visible in the way misinformation and fake news are continuously presented by the vast network of internet as truth. Mass media is diverting the attention of the people from reality and catering to entertainment rather than information. As a result, truth is the casualty. Where do we stand? Our Channels should publicize the truth and stand by Jesus the Way, the Truth, and the Life!




Street Play by Jan Vikas students, India

## Formation and Animation

The SVD emphasized the formation of its personnel at every level of communication. Fr. Franz Josef Eilers, SVD, contributed immensely to the formation and animation of SVD and non-SVD personnel worldwide. In the SVD formation program, social communications have been introduced to suit each level of formation. Today, we need to gear these studies to make our programs effective and relevant in keeping with our vision and aspirations.

While the Church and SVD media cannot be identified with any of them, still, prophetic dialogue demands that our programs offer the word of God in the context of the people and provide them with an alternative worldview. Therefore, the challenge before SVD communication practitioners is to critically look at the programs in all SVD media channels and gear them to suit the worldview presented by Jesus Christ and His Spirit so that we can become credible and relevant witnesses of the word of God for the world of today.

**Clarence Srambical, SVD (India)**
***Former Director Satprakashan Sanchar Kendra,***
***Rector of Khrist Premalaya Theologate, Ashta; now Researcher***





# Heroes of the Monday Mission: Past and Present Ministries among Indigenous People in Paraguay



## Mission's Foundational Past among the Indians

In 1902, the Bishop of the Diocese of Asunción, Monsignor Juan Sinforiano Bogarín, wrote a letter to Fr. Arnold Janssen asking that his religious congregation, the Divine Word Missionaries (SVD), agree to establish a mission among the Guarani Indians. The Bishop's letter was favorably received by Fr. Janssen and his advisors. Vogt, the parish priest of Posadas, made a detailed report on the area planned for the mission, its inhabitants, the difficulties that might be encountered, the means of communication, transportation, and the upkeep of the missionaries. Before Fr. Arnold's death in 1909, the opening of the new mission among the Indians in Paraguay had his approval.[39]

On 28 January 1910, the first missionaries arrived at their new mission. On 2 February, they celebrated Mass for the first time in the mission and that date came to be considered the date of the official beginning of the

[39] Juan Bockwinkiel, *Los Héroes del Monday: Historia de la Misión Verbita en el Monday 1910-1925*, Asunción: Editorial Salesianito 1993, 67.







Fr. Nicolau Servulus da Cunha (+ 1977)

mission of the Society of the Divine Word in Paraguay.[40] Fr. Franz Müller was appointed superior of the mission. The first missionary community was composed of priests: Franz Müller, Joseph Kreusser and Heinrich Rohling, and brothers: Philippus (Gerhard Schmitz), Gotthardus (Josef Weyer), Agathan (Joseph Grothe) and Emilian (Emil Verhaegen). Later, other priests and brothers came.[41] In 1920, the Sister Servants of the Holy Spirit arrived at the Monday mission (along the Monday River).

On 26 July 1924, the general administration in Steyl, Holland, decided to suspend the two mission stations in the jungle of Paraguay. The decision took two months before it reached the Provincial in Buenos Aires: "Mission impossible. Suspended." On 15 January 1925, on the anniversary of the death of their Founder, Arnold Janssen, the missionaries celebrated Holy Mass for the last time in the Monday church. On 21 February 1925, Fr. Francisco Müller and the confreres from Caruperá arrived at Puerto Bogarín, which meant that the second foundation was closed.[42]

## Back to the Roots

Almost forty years have passed since the closing of the Monday mission for the SVDs to resume direct work with the indigenous peoples. The SVD missionary spirit of opting for the indigenous peoples was never extinguished and the "Prometheus" of rekindling the fire of love for the indigenous people was Fr. Nicolau Servulus da Cunha. At the beginning of the sixties, the situation of the indigenous people of the Alto Paraná and Canindeyú area became desperate. Nicolau da Cunha, who had been working in the parish of Hernandarias since 1961, became aware of their tragic situation. While traveling on horseback through the Alto Paraná area, he realized that without securing the land, not much could be done for the indigenous people.[43]

On the other hand, some indigenous priests (Ñanderu, Shamans) were aware that they could no longer continue as before, so Ñanderu Simeón Delgado from the tekoha of Ykua Porã, asked the SVD priests for land. On 23 November 1964, Fr. da Cunha wrote a letter to the manager of *La Industrial Paraguaya* requesting the purchase of 10,000 hectares to be used as the seat of an indigenous mission. The answer to this letter came only on 13 May 1965 when the president of *La Industrial* gave an option to buy 1000

[40] Paul Scott, Huberto Wooning, *One Hundred Years of Presence and Life in Paraguay 1910-2010,* Asunción: Imprenta Omega 2010, 35-36.
[41] Bockwinkiel, *The Heroes of Monday,* 67-68 and 140-145.
[42] Scott, Wooning, *One Hundred Years of Presence,* 157-158.
[43] Henryk Gąska, "A Brief Historical Account of the Indigenous Divine Word Mission in Akaraymi." Manuscript. Akaraymi, 1995. SVD Archives, Asuncion, 2.

hectares in the area of Mbaracamoa. On 27 December 1966, the purchase of 1128 hectares was made for the value of 432,250 Gs, paid in cash.[44]

In 1970, they began to organize the mission by looking for teachers and catechists, organizing agricultural work and health care. According to the teacher Juana Eva Benitez Cespedes in 1970, Fr. Nicolau da Cunha took her to Akaraymi, where she tried to teach under a tree with 35 children until the school was finished.[45] Since 1970, the mission had the permanent presence of the Divine Word Missionaries. Fr. Da Cunha had his headquarters in Pikyry. However, Br. Gabriel (Pedro Pinto Rabello) lived in the community of Akaraymi. In the same year, the official registration began and in February the classes began in Spanish. They were written in Spanish but explained in Guarani.

With the arrival of Br. Josephus (Giovanni Dal Molin) in May 1973, the mission began a strong agricultural promotion. In the same year, the mission had an elementary school with 70 children, an adult literacy school, and a school of arts and crafts (teaching mechanical carpentry, agriculture, and animal husbandry). Ten people worked in the mission, paid by the Prelature, among them three teachers. The Indians themselves worked as day laborers cultivating mint, corn, beans and rice, on a total of more than 70 hectares, and each family had its own farm. There was also a pottery workshop to promote handicrafts and a tractor managed by an indigenous person.[46]

In the 1970s, other SVD missions also began working among the indigenous people of Alto Paraná and Canindeyú. Fr. da Cunha founded the missions of San Francisco de Arroyo Mokoi (1971) and San Francisco Javier de Cerro Campi (1972) in the Yvyrarovana area of Canindeyú. In 1976, Br. Gabriel moved from Akaraymi to a new mission in Kirito, near Pikyry. The new mission quickly suffered the impact of the Itaipu enterprise, and the community was moved in 1980 to a new place near Mbaracayú with the same name of Kirito. The community in its new location was also accompanied by Fr. Arnoldo Marquart.[47] The land for the new settlement was purchased by CEP (Conferencia Episcopal de Paraguay) for the communities affected by Itaipu.

In 1973, Fr. da Cunha made the first contacts with three Aché families who began an interaction with Paraguayan society. In 1974, the San Agustín Mission was founded in Manduvi, with a group of eighty Aché, found in the Gasory-Laurel area. The mission among the Aché was transferred in 1978 to its new location in Chupa Pou, in the department of Canindeyú and was accompanied by Frs. Alejando Pytel, Lucio Godoy, Beniamin Remiorz, among others. In 1993, another mission was opened among the Aché of the area, the Ypetymi Mission, in the department of Caazapá, where Fathers Lucio Godoy and Dariusz Piwowarczyk, have started their new mission.

## Diocesan and National Indigenous Ministry

At the end of the 70's, the indigenous pastoral team was created at the level of the Prelature of Alto Paraná and later of the diocese of Ciudad del Este. Also, the SVD missionaries participated in the meetings of the indigenous







**Above:** The Baptism, Frs. Lucio Godoy and Jan Krajza (baptizing)

**Center:** After the Holy Mass in Akaraymi

**Below:** Ache students today

[44] Gąska, «A Brief Historical Account,» 3.
[45] Gąska, «A Brief Historical Account,» 4.
[46] Gąska, «A Brief Historical Account,» 4.
[47] Henryk Gąska and Serafina Ferreira, *Presencia Misionera Junto a los Pueblos Indígenas: cuatro décadas de pastoral indígena de la Conferencia Episcopal Paraguaya*, Asunción: Coordinación Nacional de Pastoral Indígena de la Conferencia Episcopal Paraguaya, CONAPI 2012, 67-68.



General visitation of Fr. Gier of the Indian mission in Monday, Paraguay in 1913. From right sitting Frs. Joseph Kreusser, Wilhelm Gier, Joannes Bapt. Bodems, Hermann Löcken, Bernard Müller, Richard Mütsch, standing are brothers





pastoral at the national level of the National Team of Missions, an organ of the CEP. At the beginning of 1977, the Missionary Sister Servants of the Holy Spirit were incorporated. Srs. Mariblanca Barón and Angelmara Martínez began the work in an itinerant way but from the middle of the year, they took charge of the indigenous mission of Arroyo Guazú, Alto Paraná. In February of the same year, Bishop Agustín Van Aaken and the SVD provincial superior, Fr. Carlos Istúriz, called a meeting of all those who worked among the indigenous people of the Prelature of Alto Paraná to begin the regular meetings of the indigenist team. In this meeting the areas of work were distributed where Fr. Alejando Pytel oversaw the mission among the Aché in Manduvi and of direct evangelization; Fr. Nicolau Da Cunha, parish priest of Pikyry and Fr. José Scaratti of the Akaraymi mission oversaw the development projects.[48]

The long journey of accompaniment by the Paraguayan Church of the indigenous peoples began half a century ago. The institutional accompaniment began in 1969 with the foundation of the Missions Department as an organ of the CEP. Later, in 1976, it became the National Missions Team and finally, in 1994, it was transformed into the National Coordination of Indigenous Pastoral (CONAPI). The first executive secretary, Fr. Bartomeu Melià, assumed the direction of the Missions Department in very turbulent times, at a time of discrimination and persecution by the dictatorial regime of Stroessner.[49]



Bishop's Pastoral Visit to Akaraymi, Fr. Gąska first from right

During these five decades on behalf of the indigenous peoples, numerous missionaries have walked with them, such as the presidents of CONAPI, Monsignor Alejo Obelar (1968-1986), and Monsignor Lucio Alfert (1986-present).[50] Fr. Bartomeu Melià, SJ (1969-1976), Fr. José Seelwische, OMI (1976-1983), Fr. Wayne Robins, SVD (1983-1993), Fr. Roberto Chaparro (1993-1994), Serafina Ferreira de Álvarez (1994-2005), Sr. Raquel Peralta MSSpS (2006-2014) and Fr. Henryk Gąska, SVD (2014-present).

## Mystique and Challenges of Our Accompaniment

The spirit of accompaniment is based on the Gospel "I came that they may have life and life in abundance" (John 10:10) in accord with the Pastoral Missionary Plan of the CEP. It is based on the initiative of the indigenous peoples and the guarantee of indigenous rights, respect for their culture, their ethnic-cultural plurality, their systems, and traditional knowledge. Starting from respect for self-determination and self-management,

[48] Gąska, Ferreira, *Presencia Misionera Junto a los Pueblos Indígenas*, 68.
[49] Henryk Gąska (ed.), *Medio siglo caminando junto con los Pueblos Indígenas,* CEADUC (Biblioteca Paraguaya de Antropología, Vol. 113), 2020, 12.
[50] Gąska, *Medio siglo caminando junto con los Pueblos Indígenas*, 12.



we accompany them in their self-management process, healthy and disinterested relationships with a mystique oriented to an interreligious and intercultural dialogue. We try to discover the indigenous face of God through the dances, prayers, in their expressions, in their rites.

Since the foundation of the SVD mission, the missionary-pastoral work covers four dimensions: a) Land and Ethno-Development, b) Education, c) Health, d) Evangelization. The land itself is the basis of life and all the activities of an indigenous community. For indigenous people, the land is not only a physical space for development, but also a place of cultural and religious creation. Up until the creation of Law 904 in 1981, the lands assigned by the Church to the indigenous people were in the name of the Prelature of Alto Paraná. It was not until 1986 that the first land title was granted to the Akaraymi community. The struggle for the land was and is an important part of our missionary work. Supported by the National Missions Team and now by the National Coordination of Indigenous Pastoral Service, the SVD missionaries follow the land cases of other indigenous communities such as Ka'aty Miri, Ka'aguy Roky, Yvy Moroti, Ypetimi, among others.[51]



Teacher graduation
Arroyo Guasu

In the field of education, the Akaraymi indigenous mission played a very important role. In 1970, one of the first indigenous schools in the area was established. Classes began in February 1971. The school named after Arnold Janssen not only promoted primary education but also strengthened Avá Guaraní ethno-education. Today most of the teachers who teach in Guarani schools are natives. The Arnold Janssen School is also the head school of an educational area with eleven indigenous schools in the area. One of the great achievements in the field of education at the regional and national levels was the Centro de Formación Indígena Avá Guaraní de Arroyo Guasu where one of the first indigenous secondary schools in Paraguay has been operating since 1995 and it was the only indigenous distance teacher training program. From the beginning, the institution has been accompanied by the Blue Sisters (CIC)[52] and the Divine Word Missionaries.[53] In March 2003, the distance education classes began with 40 students and its first graduation took place in March 2007.

[51] Gąska, Ferreira, *Presencia Misionera Junto a los Pueblos Indígenas*, 147.
[52] Congregation of French origin, founded by Emilie de Vileneuve in Castres (South of France) on 8 December 1836.
[53] Henryk Gąska, *Constructing Ava Guarani Ethnic Identity: The Emergences of Indian Organization in Paraguay,* VDM Verlag Dr. Müller 2010, 171-173.

Graduates from UCA



Fr. Janusz Dzieniszewski celebrates the Mass in the Shamanic temple, 1990

Improving health in the indigenous communities has been one of the most important challenges since the creation of the Divine Word Mission of Akaraymi. The SVD missionaries not only offered assistance by taking the sick to health centers, but also, together with the SSpS Sisters, focused on the formation of indigenous health promoters. One of the important experiences in the health area was the training of indigenous nursing professionals and the construction of two health posts with the support of Itaipu. It also continues to support traditional and shamanic medicine, promoting the self-management of the natives in health.

Our evangelization or interreligious dialogue is expressed with the work and testimony of life accompanying the Guarani people in their full life. All our work in the field or land area, ethno-development, health, and education are forms of evangelization. As a privileged form of our evangelization, it is the interreligious dialogue that leads mainly to the strengthening of the culture and, if it is God's will and the desire of the community, to the sacraments. Today the indigenous communities of Alto Paraná and Canindeyú are going through a religious crisis. Many indigenous communities no longer have their priest, shaman, (*Oporaíva*), many still have their *Oga Guasu or Jeroky Aty* (place of prayer, temple). But because of divisions, alcoholism, aggressive influences of the Protestant Churches or sects, they do not frequent this place of worship. That is why we try to support religious and political leaders, their organizations, and associations. It is worth mentioning that there is a group of indigenous people, who have received the sacrament of baptism and participate in our Mass (in Guarani), also frequently celebrate their rites of *jeroky ñemboʼe*, dance-prayer, as part of their Christian formation.

## Conclusion

The Monday mission's heroes of the present, starting from the 1960s, were confreres from different nations such as Argentina (1), Australia (1), Austria (1), Brazil (3) Germany (2), Italy (2), Japan (1), Papua New Guinea (1), Paraguay (3), Poland (9) and Switzerland (1).[54] Br. Thomas Hasler was in the urban pastoral in Ciudad del Este, and Fr. Henryk Gąska in Conapi in Asunción. The message of Aparecida (2007) gives us a clear mandate:

> As disciples and missionaries at the service of life, we accompany the indigenous and native peoples in the strengthening of their own identities and organizations, the defense of their territory, a bilingual intercultural education, and the defense of their rights. We also commit ourselves to create awareness in society about the indigenous reality and its values, through the media and other spaces of opinion. Based on the principles of the Gospel, we support the denunciation of attitudes contrary to the full life of our native peoples, and we commit ourselves to continue the work of evangelization of the indigenous people, as well as to procure educational and labor apprenticeships with the cultural transformations that this implies.[55]

We hope to continue to work with and for indigenous peoples in our area of Latin America.

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[54] Dariusz Piwowarczyk, *Coming out of the Iron Cage, The Indigenists of the Society of the Divine Word in Paraguay, 1910-2000,* Studia Instituti Anthropos 52, Fribourg: Academic Press 2008, 251.
[55] CELAM (Latin American Episcopal Council), *Aparecida Documents*, Bogotá 2007, 530.


VIVAT
International
Together for Life,
Dignity and Human Rights

# VIVAT International: Serving the World in the Spectrum of New Areopagus




*Vivat Deus Unus et Trinus in Cordibus Nostris!* This programmatic prayer of Saint Arnold Janssen envisioned a big dream, and at the same time, expressed his deep conviction, awareness, and understanding of God's mission which is rooted in the spirituality of the heart of Jesus and centralized in the Kingdom of God. The prayer inspired him to do apostolate works and respond to social concerns, justice, and peace in his lifetime.

The programmatic prayer inspired the missionary works of Arnold and his early missionaries, not only in the parish ministry but also in the specific missionary engagement just as in education, media apostolate, and social-political organizations. In early 1994, some Indonesian students and I came to visit the Mission House in Steyl. As we visited the tomb of Saint Arnold Janssen, my friend Irianto Jou, suddenly began to cry. Irianto was a Catholic student coming from Ende-Flores, Indonesia. He got a scholarship from the government of Germany to study nuclear energy at a university in Germany. I asked him, "Why did you cry?" And he replied, "When I see the tomb of Fr. Arnold, I come to realize that because of this man and from this very place, we, the Flores people, got to know about modern civilization and open to a new civilized world." Also today, this concern continues inspiring and energizing the missionary zeal of the SVD and SSpS missionaries worldwide through various apostolic ministries, including JPIC and VIVAT International.

## The SVD Involvement

The Society of the Divine Word has been involved since the establishment of VIVAT International. In June 2000, Superior General Fr. Antonio Pernia, SVD, signed the *Earth Charter*. When signing the Charter, he remarked on the significance of the *Earth Charter* for the SVD spirituality and mission. For us, Divine Word Missionaries, he wrote, "Care for the Earth is a question not only for our world's survival but for own spirituality and mission. Taking care of the Earth is seeing to it that creation continues to be the Word that speaks to us about God and sustains life to all humanity."



A few months after launching the *Earth Charter*, in a special joint meeting on 18 November 2000, the SSpS Leadership Team and the SVD general council decided to establish NGO VIVAT International. On that day, the two congregational leaders, Sr. Agada Brand, SSpS and Fr. Antonio Pernia, SVD, sent a joint circular letter to announce the establishment of VIVAT International to all members of the Society respectively. The letter said, "We anticipate that this will give us the opportunity to witness at what Pope John Paul II has called 'the new Areopagus.'"



VIVAT International is the name given to the new NGO. The name VIVAT is derived from the Latin verb *vivere*, meaning "to live," and expresses the deep wish for all that exists: "may she/he live, may all persons live, may all creation live." The name naturally flows from and resonates with the prayer and vision of Saint Arnold: *May the Holy Triune God live in us and through us make all creation live!*

We believe that the goals of the humanitarian United Nations consistently align with the goals of our Society. In the circular letter, the two congregational leaders further asserted:

> Because of our faith, commitment and the experience and expertise of so many of our members in so many different situations in the world, we believe we do have something to offer. We have a long-term presence with the poor and the marginalized in many parts of the world, a high level of education, and an effective international network. We have the resources to bring the voice of the poor and marginalized to the decision-making levels of world bodies.[56]

[56] Letter of 18 November 2000.

Therefore, we collaborate with the United Nations to serve the world in the spectrum of "new Areopagus" through VIVAT International.

Since the establishment of VIVAT International, the SVD Society has actively engaged and always supported in terms of leadership, management, implementation, and financial matters. The SVD superior general along with some of his general council members periodically become the president and members of the Board of Trustees. Further, the SVD JPIC coordinator or general secretary periodically alternates with the SSpS Sisters to be appointed as VIVAT Executive Secretary.

Moreover, the SVD also is one of the executive teams to manage and maintain the VIVAT office in New York. Since the beginning, we have had some SVD conferees assigned to be (co-) executive directors, now called the VIVAT team: Laurence Correa, Felix Jones, Robert Mirsel, and Paul Rahmat. In terms of finance, the SVD and SSpS are responsible for 70% of the VIVAT annual budget which is shared equally among the two founding Congregations. Since the beginning of its establishment, the SVD has played a critical role in leading, maintaining, supporting, and financing VIVAT International.

## The Recent Development

VIVAT International has recently been developed both in structure as well as its status accredited to the United Nations. On the occasion of the 20th anniversary of VIVAT International, the Board of Trustees, under the leadership of Sr. Maria Theresia Hörnemann, SSpS, decided to make a comprehensive evaluation regarding the performance of VIVAT International. Some *ad hoc* committees were formed to work on proposals and recommendations concerning six critical areas of how VIVAT International functions: structure, membership, strategic planning, communication, and finance.

The *ad hoc* committee on structure proposed a new model of the VIVAT structure and leadership with two tiers of the board of directors, which comprises the Board of Trustees and the Executive Board. The Board of Trustees consists of the superiors general of the founding and member congregations. The Presidency of VIVAT periodically alternates with the SVD superior general and the SSpS leadership team, while the vice president is chosen from one of the superiors general of the member congregations. The Executive Board has four members with the task of accompanying and giving advice to the VIVAT team and offices.

In early 2021, the Board of Trustees formed a team of four to facilitate a process for designing VIVAT's strategic planning and action plan. After having intensive










**Above: Fr.** Felix Jones and Sr. Zelia Cordeiro in the VIVAT office in New York

**Center:** Fr. Robert Mirsel meets VIVAT members in Kenya, 2009

**Below: (Left)** Fr. Paul Rahmat, current Executive Director Vivat International in New York. **(Right)** Fr. Lawrence Correa at JPIC Zonal Meeting in Porto Alegre (VIVAT New York), 2005


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nternational
r Life, Dignity and Human Rights
Pèlerins de l'Espérance
en Communion





**Above:** VIVAT Board of Directors meeting in Roman *Collegio* SVD, 07 January 2009

**Below:** World Social Forum in Nairobi: VIVAT conference in 2007. From left: Fr. José Boeing (Brazil), Sr. Mary John (Rome), Br. Lawrence Kithinji (Kenya), Sr. Gretta Fernandes (VIVAT-NY), Fr. Norbert Mushoff (Germany), Fr. Michael Heinz (Rome), Michael Seigel (Japan) and Fr. Bernard Espiritu (VIVAT-NY)

discussions and broad consultation for two years with contact persons, national branches, and national groups, in January 2023, the Board of Trustees approved VIVAT's five-year strategic planning and action plan (2023-2027). The strategic planning focuses on four core commitments: to develop VIVAT as a prophetic movement, strengthen advocacy at the United Nations, increase capacity building, and create effective communication.

Fr. Paulus Budi Kleden, SVD, served VIVAT International as its President and Sr. Veronique Wiedower, CSC, was the Vice President from 2021 to 2024. During the regular meeting of the Board of Trustees on 25 January 2024, Sr. Miriam Altenhofen, SSpS, and Fr. Alain Mayama, CSSp, were appointed as the President and Vice President of VIVAT International, respectively, from 2024 to 2027.

VIVAT International has two types of membership. One is the founding congregations which are the SSpS and SVD. The others are called member congregations which are all congregations joining VIVAT International. Now, 12 religious congregations have joined VIVAT International with more than 20,000 members working in 130 countries. Besides congregations, VIVAT International is grouped by countries, called National Branches and National Groups. Today, there are seven national branches (Argentina, Bolivia, Indonesia, Kenya, India, the Philippines, and Belgium) and five national groups (Brazil, Mexico, Spain, Ireland, and the United States).

In recent years, VIVAT International has advanced its status in the United Nations. Besides having a special consultative status with ECOSOC and accreditation to the UN Department of Global Communication (DGC) in 2004, VIVAT International was granted accreditation as an observer to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 2021 and United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) in 2023. With that, VIVAT members have the opportunity and access to participate in UN events and conferences.

## The SVD Contributions

The SVD conferees have significantly contributed to the cause of VIVAT International. They addressed a range of social and environmental issues, from mining, poverty, and education to water and sanitation, indigenous peoples and tribal groups, the environment, and climate change. In doing this, they not only work locally, but also share information and raise their voices at the United Nations. They participated in some UN events or conferences, for example, Commission for Social Development (CSocD), United Nations Peoples' Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), Voluntary National Review (VNR), and High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development, Universal Periodic Review (UPR) on human rights, and Conference of Parties (COP) on climate change.

Mining and extractive industries caught the attention of VIVAT International, the New York Office in particular, when the SVD members in Flores, Indonesia raised the issue of mining in 2009. Since then, mining has constantly become a discourse and concern of the NGOs at the UN. VIVAT International was one of the NGOs that founded the NGO coalition on the Mining Working Group. We have to acknowledge the key role of Felix Jones, SVD, and Zélia Corderio, SSpS, the New York executive team at the time in bringing the issue of mining to the United Nations and among civil society organizations. In recent years, VIVAT International has raised issues of mining in Brazil and the Amazon through several UN conferences, i.e., the Commission for Social Development, the UN Peoples Forum on Indigenous Issues, and the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26).

Eradication of poverty is one of the focus areas of VIVAT International. The SVD missionaries worldwide have addressed the issue of poverty in many ways. As an example, here are some very significant Asian initiatives. In India, Nicholas Barla, SVD, addressed poverty eradication by defending the rights of indigenous people to their land and water, while Richard Quadros, SVD, introduced affirmative programs for tribal communities by creating productive employment and decent work. In the Philippines, Ben Beltran, SVD, initiated a Billion-Bamboo Project that created jobs for many peasants and indigenous people. In Indonesia, Simon Suban Tukan, SVD, introduced organic farming to small farmers in village communities to produce food, fruits, and vegetables by using a Barsha hydropower.

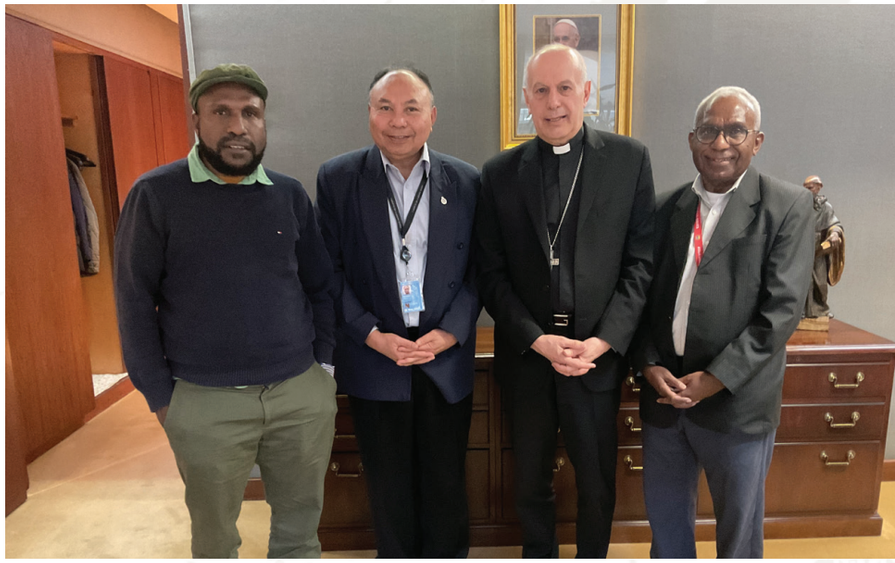
There are also many initiatives in the AFRAM and PANAM Zones which are very notable for bringing changes in society, for example, plastics waste management in Ghana, and caring for refugees in Uganda. VIVAT International has taken up the cause of the indigenous people of the Ava Guarani community in Paraguay in their struggle to defend their collective rights to their ancestral lands and territories. For decades, their land has been under occupation and eviction by agribusiness companies that are planting soybeans for the global market. Working with the SSpS Sisters and Cerrito community leaders in Paraguay, VIVAT International has brought this issue to the attention of the United Nations through the Human Rights Mechanism in Geneva and the People's Forum on Indigenous Issues in New York. VIVAT has also raised concerns about the Eritrean people who have been displaced in Sudan and South Sudan due to political conflict and civil war in the region. In consultation with Fr. Paul Shiju, SVD, working for refugees in South Sudan, VIVAT International made a statement to be delivered at World Refugee Day in 2023. It urged the Eritrean authorities to guarantee a full amnesty with accountability for the many Eritreans returning to their homeland. It also urged the UNHCR to improve the living conditions of the newly arrived Eritrean refugees.

These initiatives are based on the local context. While working on poverty eradication, they also simultaneously address other issues like decent work, food security, indigenous peoples, the environment, and climate change. On the other hand, the SVD confreres raised their concerns and shared best practices at the global forum within the United Nations platform and mechanism, for instance, through the UN Commission for Social Development and the Indigenous People Forum. VIVAT members work and act both locally and globally as well. Other issues that SVD missionaries contributed to the















United Nations are education, water, and sanitation. From 2018 to 2022, the SVD and SSpS missionaries in Timor Leste engaged in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process. UPR is a UN mechanism to review a country's track record on human rights. Led by Fr. Gregory Minz, SVD, VIVAT Timor Leste participated in the second Timor Leste UPR in 2022. They submitted a UPR report and intervened in the UPR session in Geneva, in which they raised the issues of quality of education and drinkable water and sanitation in Timor Leste. In July 2023, Gregory also participated in the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development in New York. He raised the same concerns on drinkable water and sanitation and delivered an oral statement on behalf of NGO Major Group during the VNR session of Timor Leste.

## Difficulties and Challenges

While recognizing the significant contributions of the SVD members, there are some difficulties and challenges we face in these missionary endeavors. One is the lack of participation of VIVAT members. Those who are involved in VIVAT activities can be counted as just a few. It seems that VIVAT is a business of a few people only. Thirteen years ago, superior general Fr. Antonio Pernia, SVD raised this concern when he wrote in *Arnoldus Nota* in Jan-Feb 2011: "This belated celebration of an important date is largely due to the fact that VIVAT International's 10th anniversary went by *almost unnoticed* by everyone..." (*italics* mine). This remark is still valid even today, as we are going to celebrate the 25th anniversary of VIVAT International next year (2025). The "unnoticed" becomes a reality of VIVAT life, even though we know that every SVD confrere is a member of VIVAT International.

Another challenge is maintaining administrative work at VIVAT offices. Administrative work requires certain skills and knowledge, for example, keeping a finance book and effective communication in writing, speaking, and listening. More important is how we work together at the VIVAT offices as a team.

Working in the United Nation environment and engaging with member states, UN agencies, and Civil Society organizations are another great challenge. It requires a high standard of performance, skills, and effective communication. The UN itself is the world's highest political body that makes a lot of political decisions through negotiations and lobbies. This demands knowledge and understanding of international politics and the process of making political decisions in the UN system. Access for civil society organizations to participate in the UN forum and events is limited. We need to build effective collaboration and strategic networking with other NGOs and constantly conduct diplomatic approaches with UN member states, i.e., through mission visits.

## Conclusion

The indigenous communities in Manggarai, Flores-Indonesia, to which I belong, have a saying, *saung bembang ngger eta wake celer ngger wa*. It means the more profound a tree is rooted in the soil, the broader it branches in the air. Similarly, the more







profound and more faithful the Society of the Divine Word is rooted in the spiritual heritage as well as the social concerns of its Founder, the broader it develops. The establishment of VIVAT International indicates the truth of the local wisdom.

VIVAT International reflects on the timeless legacy of Saint Arnold's spirituality. It is one of the missionary endeavors of our Society, along with the Arnoldus Family, to be faithful toward his precious heritage and be more creative in response to the signs of our time in the local and global context of the United Nations. As we celebrate the 150th Anniversary of the foundation of our Society, may Saint Arnold's prayer always inspire us to be more faithful and creative in serving the Kingdom of God and be more responsive to serve the needs of people and our common home in a wounded world.

*Vivat Deus*… May the Holy Triune God live in us, and may the Holy Triune God make all creation live through us!

**Paul Rahmat, SVD (United States of America)**
***Director of VIVAT International, New York***





Chapter V

# VALUABLE EXPERIENCES




KATORI MARU



Photo: Maciek Malicki, SVD

# *Ad Gentes* Center, Nemi: A Crowning Haven of Renewal and Reflection



Nemi, meaning grove or wood, is a small and lovely town nestled in the Alban Hills, overlooking a quiet lake, about 32 km southeast of Rome and 521 meters above sea level. For the SVD, however, Nemi is the location of its International Renewal Center, later renamed as *Ad Gentes* Center because the final draft of the decree on the missionary activity of the Church (*Ad gentes*) of Vatican II, was prepared at this very Center under the leadership of Fr. Johann Schütte, the SVD Superior General. Another reason is that *Ad gentes* also conspicuously reflects the charism of the SVD.

Long before 'ongoing formation' became common parlance among religious and priests of the Catholic Church, Saint Arnold Janssen, the Founder of the SVD, was already convinced of the importance of periodic religious-missionary renewal for his priests and brothers. In 1898, he prescribed a spiritual renewal program, which, much later, came to be called the 'Tertiate Renewal Program' and became a regular feature in the Society with the construction of the Nemi International Center in 1962. The first tertiate course was given in May-December 1962 in Nemi. The house was blessed on 21 October 1962 by Fr. Schütte himself in the presence of Cardinal Thomas Tien and 23 SVD Bishops who were in Rome for Vatican II.

Nemi Center was honored with the visit of Pope John XXIII on 23 August 1962 and Pope Paul VI on 6 September 1965. Joseph Ratzinger, a member of the drafting committee of the *Ad gentes* document, visited Nemi as Pope Benedict XVI during the 2012 General Chapter.



Father General Schütte hosted the plenary meeting of the Commission for conciliar mission document in Nemi, 29 March - 3 April 1965

## *Ad Gentes* Center: Treading the path of Vatican II

In the echoes of Vatican II, the tertiate program was an 'aggiornamento,' or updating in theology and pastoral practice, for religious missionaries with a pre-Vatican II formation. The emphasis was on getting familiar with the reforms introduced by the Council through the traditional method of class lectures. Much later, when the missionaries who came to Nemi began to be those who had a post-Vatican II formation, the tertiate program took the form of a personal and spiritual renewal of one's religious-missionary vocation through a process-oriented approach.

The first "*Dei Verbum* Biblical-Pastoral Course" was launched on 9 August 1987 in collaboration with the Catholic Biblical Federation (CBF). This course is meant for those already engaged or preparing themselves to be engaged in the biblical-pastoral ministry or the Biblical apostolate worldwide. It is open not only to SVDs but also to non-SVD priests and religious and the laity.

## *Ad Gentes* Center: A Universal Wellspring

The 2006 General Chapter decided to streamline the Center's activities and keep its door open to non-SVD groups. In January 2009, Nemi Center began to get a facelift with more rooms and better facilities. Together with the physical renovation, it rethought its purpose so that its potential might be exploited more profitably. Since then, the Center has been extensively used as a venue for the ongoing formation of Divine Word Missionaries, members of the Arnoldus Family, their mission partners, and lay people, religious, and clerics. Towards the end of 2021, the Schütte House, situated just down from the main building, also underwent a renovation,

adding 25 rooms. Now, the Center can host about 130 occupants at any given time.

In 2022, *Ad Gentes* Center began operating under two entities: *Fondazione Centro Ad Gentes* and SVD community. The Foundation, animated by the local executive committee, handles a significant part of the activities at the Center – general chapters, workshops, retreats, programs for laity, and so on. The SVD community, assisted by the course team, organizes SVD and SSpS related courses and other special courses according to the signs of the times. Throughout the year, there are also small groups and individuals availing the facilities of the Center for their personal retreats and spiritual renewal. Coordinated by the spiritual director, the SVD community guides the retreats and counseling services.

## Achievements of *Ad Gentes* Center over the years

From 1962 to 2023, the Center has been organizing many types of courses – for renewal groups, *Dei Verbum* groups, formators, third-age groups, new provincials, biblio-drama facilitators, 21st Century missionaries, lay partners, courses on Eastern European Dialogue, Prophetic Dialogue, on *Inter Gentes* Sabbatical Renewal and so on.

From 1962-2023, 90 SVD tertiate renewal programs with 2,938 participants top the list of programs and workshops organized at Nemi, followed by 28 *Dei Verbum* courses with about 650 participants. The increasing number of English-speaking confreres in the Society necessitates organizing annual tertiate renewal programs in English lasting three and a half months. Once in six years, we have a combined SVD-SSpS tertiate renewal program in English, and once in six years, an SVD-SSpS joint tertiate renewal program in Spanish. A tertiate renewal course is organized every six years in Bahasa Indonesia. Considering the importance of formation for mission, every three years, an intense two-month workshop is organized for the SVDs in English and Spanish, respectively.

The *Centro Ad Gentes* Nemi is a vital hub for our Congregation and others, hosting numerous general chapters where important discussions and decisions are made; general assemblies of all provincials and regionals (1970) and SVD treasurers (1993). These gatherings highlight its significance as a place for dialogue and collaboration among different groups.

In addition to these formal meetings, the center buzzes with activity thanks to the regular presence of groups like the Catechumenate group. Their involvement adds to the diverse and dynamic atmosphere of the center, fostering a sense of community and shared purpose.

Moreover, Nemi serves as a spiritual haven, offering both private and guided retreats. This aspect of the center has become increasingly popular, indicating its role as a sanctuary for individuals seeking reflection, renewal, and spiritual growth.







**Above:** Tertiate course in English

**Center:** *Dei Verbum* course in Nemi, July-August 2023

**Below:** Course SVD-SSpS



Furthermore, Nemi has played host to two international lay partner workshops, marking significant milestones for our Society. These workshops demonstrate our commitment to engaging with lay partners and fostering collaboration beyond our immediate community.




Third Age Spanish Course in Nemi

The impact of Nemi extends far beyond the Arnoldus Family, reaching out to various groups and individuals. The international staff of SVD confreres from different countries enrich the experience, highlighting the center's internationality and intercultural character.

## Impact of the *Ad Gentes* Center

Most participants return to their missions with their expectations fulfilled – some related to the renewal of their religious-missionary commitment, an unexpected personal discovery, finding some ease from the burdens of the past, or just simply some temporary but needed relief from the pressures of being always a missionary on-call. Most of them acknowledge that the programs provide much-needed ongoing formation for busy people who would not otherwise be able to acquire a coherent update on theological issues related to Christian and missionary life.

Recognizing the significance of interculturality for SVDs, international religious and lay partners today, Nemi periodically organizes an 'Interculturality Workshop' to facilitate a smooth transition from multicultural to intercultural living. Incidentally, a two-week workshop on 'Interculturality: The power of diversity in Mission' was organized on 27 November - 9 December 2023, with an overwhelming response from the participants.

## *Ad Gentes* Center: Beacon of Light

No doubt, over the past 60 years, *Ad Gentes* Center, Nemi, stands vibrant and tall, making a commendable contribution not only towards the renewal of the religious-missionary vocation of the members of the Arnoldus Family but also of thousands of priests, religious missionaries, and the laity all over. In the words of the former superior general, Fr. Antonio Pernia, SVD, "More than anywhere else in the Society, it is in Nemi that a confrere experiences our internationality and comes to appreciate our unity in diversity, our being 'one heart, many faces.'" This has been a characteristic of the Nemi courses throughout the years.

The missionaries who come to Nemi bring their different cultures of origin and the various cultures of the people among whom they work in the missions. In Nemi, interculturality is seen as a value rather than a problem. Thus, the atmosphere is created to make it an experience that enriches, rather than impedes, community life and personal renewal. Whatever the specific objective of a course in Nemi, the enduring goal is always renewal – renewal of following the Lord and sharing in His mission.

In the context of rapid changes experienced in the Church and world today, one obvious question is: What is the future of *Ad Gentes* Center? Although no one can give a definite response now, the Center has a tremendous potential to continue to serve the Society and the Church, responding to the signs of the times as Saint Arnold did. Maintaining the substantial physical structure of the Center and equipping it with trained, committed, and dedicated staff is a big challenge, yet no one can undermine the relevance and importance of the Center in today's times.

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# Ministry among the Marginalized of Cebu



It all started some 30 years ago with encounters of people living and suffering in one of Cebu's garbage dumping sites. Something had to be done, we felt we needed to help these people and particularly the children, the elderly and the sick.

Over the years, we got to know more and more poor communities, families, and individuals. Among them were those in other garbage dumping sites, in impoverished fishing and farming villages, in city slums, those living along rivers, in cemeteries, people in the streets, and then hundreds of children and young women suffering in Cebu's red-light areas as victims of human trafficking. Also, a steadily growing number of people living with HIV/AIDS and more recently those suffering from the Covid-19 pandemic became a genuine concern.

It was trying "to step into the shoes" of these people, making friends, journeying with them in their day-to-day lives and miseries that opened our eyes. The people themselves taught us what they needed and then also educated us on how meaningful and relevant help had to be given.

Like everybody else getting involved with the poor, we soon realized that we could really help only those who were willing to help themselves. The poor had to do their part and become protagonists in working on their own development. Having friends on their side who showed genuine interest in their plight worked wonders and encouraged many of the poor to change.

We experienced too that journeying with the poor would not only slowly improve their situation, but it would also transform us. We learned

that human-made suffering can be changed by humans, if they join hands, enter into dialogue, are willing to learn from each other, and partner with others. We realized that even in seemingly hopeless situations and in the face of enormous challenges, despite our limitations, we could contribute and make a difference in the lives of those who suffer; and this is independent of our age, profession, background, language, culture, and color.

Daily encounters with the poor in more and more communities made us reflect on what better ways there could and should be to help them. In 1999, we organized an NGO, named *Justice, Peace & Integrity of Creation – Integrated Development Center* (JPIC-IDC) as a faith-based Non-Government Organization (NGO) registered with the Philippine Securities and Exchange Commission.

We wanted to do more and this more systematically in partnership with the poor and also to give a chance to ever-more volunteers to put their faith into action. Thanks to the generosity of so many people of goodwill in the Philippines and in other countries around the world extensive aid programs were developed and implemented over the years. Today, after many years, it is very encouraging to see all the good things that these people "in partnership with the grassroots" have made possible.




JPIC-IDC has been focusing on four major programs in which education always played a crucial role. In past years, hundreds of children of poor families were sent to school on all levels and benefited from JPIC-IDC scholarships. Special emphasis was put on early childhood and care development programs. What we learned in the garbage dumping site of Cebu City was multiplied in many other communities. In coordination with various partners, by now more than one hundred pre-schools were built in the Province of Cebu and Agusan del Sur, Mindanao. Numerous young people managed through scholarships to finish their education and professional training, and now have stable jobs and incomes that can sustain their families.

Educating adults in frequent seminars and workshops became ever more important too; not only to make them aware that learning is a lifelong process from which the poor cannot be exempted but also to help them realize that their bad habits and vices contribute to their poverty. Genuine development would require making special efforts to change oneself as well.

We learned that it would be crucial to concentrate not just on the economic and financial aspects of the people's needs. Instead, to organize communities holistically; to address at least five areas in order to rehabilitate families and develop self-reliant and self-sustaining communities (in a way similar to SVDs preparing their own communities for the mission).

(a) Crucial is a **spirituality** beyond traditional piety and worship where faith is put into action and where biblical stories can be imitated in their daily lives; where, as in the Good Samaritan, passing by those in need is not an option and where, as in the story of the woman accused of adultery, before throwing stones, one needs to reflect on one's own faults as well.

(b) We further realized the importance of animating a **community** spirit of generosity, where people look beyond their own selves and their immediate family. We experienced that only what we have and do in common, will allow us to form a genuine community.

(c) We became aware that good **leadership** in our communities is crucial, uncorrupted leadership that takes responsibility, and makes sure that other community members do take responsibility too, and that challenges those irresponsible.

(d) We found out how difficult it is to address the **economic and financial situation** of the poor and to generate a workable livelihood in spite of our cooperatives and micro-lending endeavors, not wanting to spoil people with dole-outs.

(e) We also learned to spend time, efforts, and funds to **educate members of our communities on all levels including ourselves**; to better understand the needed present and future interventions as well as economic and political structures responsible for the sufferings of so many people.

Our concern for education would also include allowing volunteers to learn from the poor in our projects. In past years, among these volunteers from around the world were future religious, sisters, brothers, and priests as well as young people who would later on hold key positions in national and international NGOs and GOs, or as managers, medical doctors, nurses, lawyers, businessmen and women, and political leaders, for example. Having volunteers requires good accompaniment and extra work. However, the impact these exposures have on these young peoples' lives promises many learnings and benefits for the future.

The extremely inhuman living conditions of many of our people prompted JPIC-IDC to work on Human and Community Development Programs. This would include several housing projects for numerous families in various settlement sites on Cebu and neighboring islands. The programs would further include medical, health, and nutrition services benefitting numerous children and adults in the provinces of Cebu and Agusan del Sur. Cooperative development with all its ups and downs became an essential part as well. For the sake of securing long-term sustainability partnering with LGUs and various government agencies as well as other NGOs has become important too.

With the generous help of international partners, including the German government and the European Union, JPIC-IDC managed to address the plight of many young women and children who have become









victims of exploitation and horrifying crimes. Steadily growing cases of Trafficking in Persons (TIP), Violence against Women and Children (VAWC), and Online Sexual Exploitation of Children (OSEC) in the communities needed to be addressed with ever greater urgency. Among the interventions are awareness workshops for NGOs, GOs, LGUs, (police, military, prosecutors, barangay and town officials, and transport and tourist industry managers, for example). A Cinemobile Project where, in impoverished places in the Visayas and Mindanao, rehabilitated former victims would very authentically relate the stories of those abused, became a very successful tool. Drop-In, Recovery, and After Care Centers were put in place for the rehabilitation of the victims. Much more still needs to be done not only for these victims but also for those living and also dying with HIV/AIDS. For elderly people and children in our streets, a unique center (Balay Samaritano/House of the Samaritan) was established where these special people can help each other. A mobile school with two buses addresses the needs of the children left behind in the streets.



The conservation of our natural resources and the protection of our environment has become an essential concern for JPIC-IDC as well. Thanks to international partners such as the German government and LGUs, a substantial coastal rehabilitation project has been implemented in Bogo Bay (the northern part of the province of Cebu). Advocacy in our communities, tree planting, and other interventions such as cleaning of rivers and community surroundings are happening as well. Besides that, all partner communities and staff are being prepared to respond to natural calamities (earthquakes, fires, typhoons, landslides, and flooding, for example).




It is probably not merely these numerous projects and all those hundreds of people who have benefitted from that count. Equally important, what cannot really be measured, is that all of this has given meaning to so many lives, including those who shared so generously; and that many others have been inspired to also get involved in helping the poor with creative projects on their own. For a faith-based NGO like JPIC-IDC, all the achievements serve as "testaments to God's love for humankind" and the credit is due to Him.

With not too many words, but in deep gratitude, it was a simple message that I tried to convey also to younger readers: "If you feel that things are not right and that something should be done, talk with friends, and start to do something about it. You will be amazed and surprised to see how many people feel the same and will get involved."




I once asked myself, "What has been important in all these years?" "What is important now?" "What will continue to be important for the future?" I found three incomplete answers that kept me and also others going in difficult times with those at the margins:

- It was, is, and will be important not to restrict one's faith to religious customs and rites alone; to give one's conscience room to see and think differently – especially from the perspective of the poor, people on the margins of society – and then, together with others, to put one's faith into action in new ways.
- It was, is, and will be important not to lose courage; not to give up right away, even when there are unsolvable problems when the decision-makers in the state and also in the Church are hesitant to push urgently needed changes, and then to become

bearers of hope for all those who live in hopeless situations and need the accompaniment and challenging presence of courageous people.

- It was, is, and will be important to know that there are people all over the world who share this commitment to the poor and Mother Earth; to resist the temptation to be indifferent, to do nothing, or to do everything alone; to walk the path together with people who are not afraid to ask questions and who are not satisfied with untrue answers, who remain seekers on a path accompanied by the one who has walked it Himself, with the goal of experiencing a new and better life.

In this way, the vision of Saint Arnold Janssen and the Founding Generation, manifested in unconditional and dedicated service to the Church and God's people, especially the poor, oppressed, marginalized, sick, and suffering will continue to be alive.

**Heinz Kulüke, SVD (Philippines)**
***Former Superior General (2012-2018), now lecturer at San Carlos University and involved in JPIC ministry***

***Photos:*** **Karl Fliuch**




INRI





# Missionary Parish in Mississauga, Canada: Share the Good News. Be the Good News




We are Divine Word Missionaries, our mission is to **share Good News**, the **Divine Word** with the people we serve. One of the effective ways in sharing the Good News is **becoming** the Good News in the way we put life in our mission.

Share the Good News. Be the Good News. This has become a byword to all our parishioners both young and old. I would always end my Sunday homily with this statement. For indeed, as we have received the Good News, so we are invited to share the Good News by becoming the Good News.

The community of faith at *Cristo Rei* parish, Mississauga, Canada, became the center of our mission to share the Good News when, in 2010, we embraced this pastoral task as Divine Word Missionaries.

The Archdiocese of Toronto decided to elevate what was then Christ the King mission to a territorial/personal parish. Christ the King mission was attached to *Ss. Salvador do Mundo* parish, which is a personal parish for the Portuguese community here in Mississauga and Etobicoke in the Province of Ontario. At that time, the Divine Word Missionaries were already working at St. John Bosco and St. Matthew in Toronto with the Portuguese, Italian and English faithful. The archdiocese was very impressed with how effectively we work with multicultural groups (Portuguese and Italians) that they have asked us to work at this new multicultural parish in Mississauga.




The transition from being a mission to the Portuguese community to being a territorial parish was not an easy one. There were fears and anxieties, especially among the Portuguese community that they were about to lose the Church they helped build with their own resources. They were afraid that the "English community" would take over their Church.

I was conscious, when I took over here, that my primary mission was to build the new community of *Cristo Rei*. This became our missionary priority: to reinforce the community dimension of the faithful. And *Cristo Rei* parish relived a renewal in spirit and a rebirth of newer values based on the (Divine) Word-in-our-midst, Jesus. My predecessor built a beautiful and magnificent Church and established a faithful and energetic Portuguese community. My initial work was to bring together the Portuguese community and the English community. We also had to work with the four elementary schools and one secondary school that have been entrusted to our pastoral care.

In my fourteen years of pastoral ministry, humbly, I offer to you these fruits and signs of the Divine Word's guiding Light - the Spirit of Wisdom and Light - which now serve as an ongoing inspiration for the next phases in the ecclesial history of *Cristo Rei* parish. Here are some of the pastoral activities that we have in the parish:

**Sharing Good News with the Elderly and Retired Parishioners**: We have a growing number of retired parishioners who are not certain of what to do with all the time they have and still want to continue to be productive and active. Several of these retired and elderly parishioners are also widows and widowers who have lost loved ones and find themselves living alone. Responding to this need, we established the University of Third Age. The University is open to all our retired parishioners and friends who look for community where they can feel a sense of belonging and where they will continue to be active. The members meet once a week. The first week focuses on education & formation, the second week is more on spirituality and prayer life; the third week is for physical and health development and the fourth week is for leisure and fun.

**Sharing Good News with Young People.** The future of our community depends on how well we take care of and accompany our young people. We take a different approach in forming our young people to take an active role in serving the Church and the parish community. We invest in our Altar Servers Ministry. Young children who have celebrated their First Holy Communion are invited and welcome to join the ministry. We meet with all our altar servers once a month for education, formation and leisure. They also serve at different masses and participate in various parish endeavors like "Live Nativity Story." "Passion Play", "Ministry Fair", etc. We have at least 80 altar servers ranging from 9 years old to 20 years old. Our university and college students who continue



to be part of the ministry also act as mentors and coordinators for younger altar servers. Another program we establish for younger people (mostly 15 years old and above) is the **Youth of the Word** whose members are called *Yowers*. This program is our version of Bible Study/Reflection with young people. The members of this group meet once a month and discuss, share and pray together about the Sacred Scripture. This program is also attracting older parishioners.




**Sharing Good News with Young, Migrant & New Families.** More and more young families are joining our parish community. Most of them are from India and Sri Lanka via the Middle East. We also have been welcoming young families from Nigeria and from the Caribbean. Most of them do not know anyone in the country and so the parish has become not only a community and family for them, but has become a resource for meeting other parishioners. To accompany and walk with them, we have our **Early Catholic Family Life** (ECFL), which is a program from the Archdiocese of Toronto that was piloted in our parish many years ago. We have decided to continue this program since it has become instrumental in strengthening the faith life of those who have participated in the said program. We also have the **Couples for Christ** (CFC) who also welcome and accompany young families through Christian Life Program and monthly household prayers and gatherings. The newest initiative that we have is the **Family Enrichment Encounter**, which is a monthly gathering of young and new families in the parish. This monthly meeting provides an opportunity for families to share their joys and concerns with one another; it also gives us a venue where we could do cross-cultural orientation for the newcomers.

**Sharing Good News on Vocation and Mission.** We established the SVD Partners in Mission in 2015. This group is made up of parishioners whose primary mission is to pray for vocations and for the mission. They meet once a week to pray before the Blessed Sacrament using the prayers from our *SVD Vademecum*. Through this regular meeting, we are also able to promote the SVD mission and charism with our parishioners and friends. Lately, we have seen more interest from our retired parishioners in becom-





ing part of this group. I am proud to say that our parish community has already produced two priests (one for the Archdiocese of Toronto and one for the Society of the Divine Word). We have one more parishioner who is in formation with the Franciscans in the US. In addition, we also have one permanent deacon who was ordained several years ago and another who will be ordained next year. Prayers do work!

**Sharing Good News with the Poor and the Needy**. I have to admit that our parish is not a poor parish, but neither are we a rich parish. We are just blessed to have generous parishioners. Even in the early years of the SVD involvement in this parish community, we have been planting the seed for social outreach not only in Canada but also out of Canada. One of our prides is raising funds to establish *Cristo Rei Village* in Mindoro, Philippines. It is a 30-housing unit and a school built for the Mangyans of Mindoro. We collaborated with ANCOP International (ANCOP stands for *Answering the Cry of the Poor*) the social arm of Couples for Christ. One of our Portuguese groups, *Irmandade do Espirito Santo* (Confraternity of the Holy Spirit) organizes three major fund raising initiatives every year for funding various projects for the poor and for the victims of natural disasters anywhere in the world. We have our own Saint Vincent De Paul Society that reaches out to the poor in the community regardless of their faith denomination. Every year, we support the local food bank, Good Shepherd Ministry which provides food, clothing, and shelter for the poor in downtown Toronto; the Franciscan Soup Kitchen, etc.

**Sharing Good News of Healing for the Sick and Downtrodden.** In 2015, we started An Evening of Praise and Healing which became Family Healing Rosary at the height of the pandemic. This is a monthly gathering of parishioners and friends whose mission is to pray and offer comfort to those who are sick, including their caregivers. During this Healing Rosary, we would also bless and distribute "Prayer Shawls of Mercy and Comfort" to the sick with the assurance of our continued prayers for them. These prayer shawls are made by our elderly parishioners and are given to the sick for free. To date, we must have distributed close to 700 prayer shawls even to non-Catholics who would attend our healing service. Since we started this healing service, we have received numerous **Good News** of healing and recovery from those who have received the prayer shawls.







**Sharing Good News on Faith and Spiritual Life.** Our parish is known as the Church of processions as we have monthly processions. It is also intentional on our part since processions bring together the different ethnic groups as well as the different age groups in the parish and from other parishes as well. We have a good number of new parishioners who have moved to our parish because of our processions. More than just walking and praying, being together is the element of faith formation. We use processions as vehicles for people to deepen their understanding of faith, which includes the different ways to celebrate it. Being a multicultural parish, we also highlight the different ethnic celebrations and make them available to all. A good example is our *Simbang Gabi*, a popular novena of Masses for Christmas from the Philippines. During the *Simbang Gabi*, we would open the doors of the Church at 4:00 a.m. for the Mass at 5:00 a.m. followed by breakfast in the parish hall. The liturgical celebration is multicultural as well: in three languages (English, Portuguese and Tagalog) and involves the different ethnic groups in the parish. Every day for the past ten years of our *Simbang Gabi*, we would have at least 500 to 600 people joining us at 5:00 AM with close to 20 altar servers on the altar. The breakfast for nine days is sponsored and organized by the different parish groups that include the Filipinos, Portuguese, Indians, Sri Lankans, Pakistanis, Vietnamese, and Latin Americans.

Because of the positive and creative approaches that we took to transition from a mission (center) to a territorial parish; from a Portuguese Church to a multicultural parish, we have become a resource for other parishes/communities in transition. We have been asked several times to assist other diocesan and religious priests in dealing with parishes that are becoming more and more multicultural.

In closing, I would like to share some of my realizations:

- Be not afraid to **share the Good News**. There is no doubt that people are hungry for **Good News**. The key components are, know your people, learn what their needs are, assess what you can offer, and work together.
- Be not afraid to **work**. I have been called by my priest friends and other SVD confreres as the "crazy priest" of Mississauga because of the many programs and activities that we have. They have been telling me to slow down. Indeed, we have so many activities and programs in our parish but that is exactly one of the reasons why people continue to come and join our parish. They feel at home here at *Cristo Rei*.

They are nourished by our faith community which also deepens their own faith and spiritual life.

- Be not afraid to **collaborate**. I am not afraid to share the Good News and I am not afraid to work because I am not afraid to collaborate with others. The success of our initiatives depends on our faithful and committed volunteers and ministers. They are the ones who make all these programs possible. As Divine Word Missionaries, we do not only work to make this parish a missionary parish because of our programs and activities but more so to prepare and form our parishioners, our collaborators in mission, as true missionaries, bearers of **Good News**!

- Be not afraid to **leave** and **move on**. I am finishing my 14th year as Pastor of *Cristo Rei*. As I prepare to leave the parish, I feel a deep sense of gratitude to God for blessing me with this opportunity to work with such a diverse, committed, and faithful missionary community. I hope in my own little way, I was able to share the Light of Christ with the people of Cristo Rei. Now, I have to allow others to let their initiative shine.

**Carlos Macatangga, SVD (United States of America)**
***Parish Priest of Cristo Rei Parish and***
***Ss. Salvador do Mundo Parish, Mississauga,***
***Toronto, Canada***







Frs. Łukasz, Tomasz and Cireneu covering the synod for Amazon in Rome

# Verbo Filmes, São Paulo: Bridging Faith Through Communication



In today's rapidly evolving world, communication is a dynamic force propelled by technological advancements and the swift dissemination of information. Rooted in our innate human nature, communication emerges as a divine gift from God, bestowed with imagination, talent, intelligence, and artistic creativity. Through these gifts, we become communicative beings par excellence.

The theology of communication underscores the Divine Word of God, who incarnates to better connect with His creation. Jesus conveyed the Kingdom of God to diverse audiences through simple and direct language, touching hearts through parables. Following His example, the Church employs various communication channels to proclaim the Good News of the Gospel, prioritizing communication within her mission and the development of her charisma.

## *Verbo Filmes*: A Testament to Faith and Creativity

*Verbo Filmes* is an audiovisual production center in the Brazil-Central province. It was founded in 1979 by Fr. Conrado Berning, SVD, a filmmaker trained at the German Film Academy. Berning managed the production company until 1994, when he handed over the coordination of the production company to Fr. Cireneu Kuhn, SVD. At the end of 2022, Kuhn was elected provincial of the SVD-BRC province and thus, passed the baton to Fr. Łukasz Herkt, SVD, current director of *Verbo Filmes*.








**From Left to Right:**

Founder *Verbo Filmes*, Fr. Konrad Berning

Fr. Cireneu Kuhn, former Director of Verbo Filmes and now the Provincial of BRC

Fr. Łukasz Herkt, current Director of *Verbo Filmes*, São Paulo

Due to their high technical quality and good content, *Verbo Filmes*' wide variety of productions has achieved a prominent place in ecclesial communities, dioceses, and schools. Several of its productions have gained awards at national and international festivals.

## Adapting to the Digital Era

*Verbo Filmes* has engaged with various audio and film formats throughout its history, including 8 mm, 16 mm, 35 mm, video, audio discs, tapes, CDs, and more. Over time, the organization has transitioned to digital platforms, where content is disseminated across internet platforms. *Verbo Filmes* operates across multiple genres, encompassing documentaries, fiction, cartoons, radio soap operas, educational videos, music videos, and more.

On the day *Verbo Filmes* was founded, Dom Ivo Lorscheider, then president of the CNBB (Conference of Bishops of Brazil), offered sage advice: "Try to create and evangelize with images that reflect us, Brazil and Latin America with imagery that people can easily understand and relate to, rather than importing and merely translating external concepts." To realize this vision, the *Verbo Filmes* team has sought guidance from numerous experts across different domains, individuals who, like us SVDs, believe in communication as a potent instrument in the service of life, justice, and hope.

## Meeting Challenges, Embracing Opportunities

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the widespread adoption of new media and the urgent need for evangelization highlighted the importance of Pastoral Care of Communication in various ecclesiastical organizations. This period brought forth opportunities for the involvement of new individuals, many needing more technical or pastoral training. In response to the local situation of the pandemic, live broadcasts commenced on parish web pages to address the prevailing needs.

*Verbo Filmes*, recognizing the significance of fostering unity amidst isolation, embarked on a project to produce videos featuring testimonials from the people, each centered around a chosen biblical phrase. These recordings, made using mobile phones, adhered to technical guidelines provided by the *Verbo Filmes* team. Furthermore, *Verbo Filmes* extended its services by providing editing support for virtual celebrations and courses, including those hosted by Churches of other denominations.

While the media offers myriad opportunities for the Church to engage with her faithful and the broader world, it also presents several challenges. One such challenge is the lack of communication skills and training among many members of the Church. Effective communication necessitates proficiency in writing, public speaking, and modern communication technologies that ensure the message resonates with the audience.

Recognizing this need, *Verbo Filmes* expanded its scope to establish a training program for laymen and women dedicated to the Gospel. This comprehensive training initiative encompasses writing skills, content and video production, and social media usage. Commencing in May 2023, the course also serves to identify talented individuals, predominantly youths, to contribute to the production company's endeavors.

## Forging Partnerships, Achieving Recognition

*Verbo Filmes* and the Verbo Bible Center have been in a partnership for at least two decades. The productions aim to present the biblical books in a popular, attractive, and accessible way. Along these lines, several videos on biblical archeology have also been made, but these are more academic.

*Verbo Filmes* undoubtedly achieved high recognition by the Church in Brazil and Latin America. Many more titles could be translated into Spanish. This, however, takes a long time, and the *Verbo Filmes* technical team, especially in the last twenty years, has always been small, with about four people. The production company's equipment is also the minimum of the minimum. Those who visit *Verbo Filmes* often marvel at the volume of production achieved with so few people and such limited equipment.

## Looking Ahead: A Call to Action

In the preparation for the 19th General Chapter of the Society of the Divine Word (2024), we were challenged to enhance our growth in authentic discipleship, strengthen our identity, and creative proclamation and witness to Christ in a wounded world.

Being faithful and creative in evangelization has been in the DNA of *Verbo Filmes* since its foundation. Social networks and other digital tools are excellent resources for evangelization. Nowadays, expensive equipment is no longer needed to produce, for example, a documentary. We have several affordable and high-quality communication tools. Let us use them to our advantage. Let us be faithful to the Divine Word made flesh, made history, and use our creativity to share the message of the Gospel to the ends of the earth in this Global Village.

**Cireneu Kuhn, SVD (Brazil)**
***Former Director of Verbo Filmes, São Paulo; now Provincial Superior***

**Łukasz Herkt, SVD (Brazil)**
***Director of Verbo Filmes, São Paulo***











Pache Square, Nanzan University
- named after the first university
president, Fr. Alois Pache, SVD



# Mission Through Higher Education: Nanzan University



Divine Word Missionaries currently have six universities, in the Asia-Pacific Zone: 1. Nanzan University, Nagoya, Japan (1949); 2. Fu Jen University (1933-1952 in China and (1961-) in Taipei, Taiwan; 3. San Carlos University, Cebu, Philippines (1948); 4. Holy Name University, Bohol, Philippines (1947); 5. Widya Mandira Catholic University, Kupang in Timor, Indonesia (1982); 6. Divine Word University, Madang, Papua New Guinea (1980/1996). Each university is unique and administered according to the local situation. In this article, I would like to share the growth of Nanzan University.

Japan was one of the last mission territories chosen by Saint Arnold Janssen himself, followed only by the Philippines. One of the reasons why the Founder was interested in Japan was that it presented possibilities for mission through education, something very dear to the Founder.[1] The work of the Society in Japan began in the northwest of the country, originally centering in Akita, but eventually reaching the other provinces on the Japan Sea side of the country. Already in 1909, two years after arriving in Japan, a school for the education of women was established in Akita, under the direction of the Holy Spirit Sisters. In 1922 the SVD began to work in central Japan, in the area around Nagoya, and ten years later the SVD educational apostolate was finally initiated, with the establishment of Nanzan Middle School in Nagoya.

[1] Alt, *Journey*, 866.

Nanzan University traces its foundation back to the establishment of the Nanzan Foreign Language College in 1946. At that time, the postwar education reform was still in progress, leading to a proliferation of two-year college programs. Of the 72 colleges established in the postwar period, five were foreign language colleges.[2] On the part of the SVD, it was felt that precisely in the midst of the destruction and chaos following World War II, there was a need to train young Japanese who could play a significant role on the international stage.




As a result of the education reform, laws governing education were passed the following year, 1947, leading to efforts to develop the college into a university, which was established in 1949. The university had one faculty, Literature, and four departments, English, French, German, and Chinese.




From this modest beginning, the university was quickly expanded to include Humanities (Philosophy and Education), Law and Economics (Law, Politics, Economics) and Social Sciences (Sociology, Social Welfare, Ethnology, Anthropology, Journalism). Sharing a campus with the former Nanzan Middle School, which as a result of the postwar reform became the Nanzan Junior and Senior High School, was no longer practical, and in the early 1960s work began on a new campus, about one kilometer from the original campus. The new campus was designed by the Czech architect Antonin Raymond, a disciple of Frank Lloyd Wright, and the university moved to the new campus in 1964. At the time of the move, there were three faculties, Humanities, Foreign Languages, and Economics. A Business Faculty was established several years after the move, in 1968, and a law faculty about ten years later, in 1977. It is worth mentioning that a Theology Department had been started in the Humanities Faculty in 1961.

There was a major reorganizing of the faculties in the year 2000, and at the same time two new faculties, General Policy Studies and Science and Technology, were established at a second campus in Seto, about 25 kilometers from Nagoya. The second campus was made necessary by a law enforced at the time, which made it impossible for universities to expand in any of the major cities in Japan. The law was reversed just a couple of years after the new campus was built, leading to the consolidation of the seven faculties on the Nagoya campus, and the establishment of an eighth faculty, Global Liberal Studies in 2016.

[2] Kiyoshi Aoki, "Tanaka Kotaro to Nanzan" (Tanaka Kotaro and Nanzan), Nanzan Hogaku 2022, No. 45, 3-4, 9.









University president and
vice presidents of Nanzan




Divine Word Seminary Chapel in the background, university campus

At present, there are about 10,000 undergraduate and graduate students studying at Nanzan.

Since its foundation as a Foreign Language College an emphasis on intercultural learning has been a part of the Nanzan identity. In addition, when the university was established, *Hominis Dignitati* - "For Human Dignity," was chosen as its educational motto. The concept of human dignity was attracting much attention in the postwar period, being identified in the preface to the United Nations Charter as one of the pillars, along with human rights, of world peace; similarly enshrined in the first clause of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; and its preservation was specifically mentioned as the primary duty of every state in the postwar German Basic Federal Law, or constitution. No doubt, this postwar emphasis on human dignity contributed to its being adopted as the educational motto of the new university, but the concept of human dignity was also meant to be used as a way to present the Christian worldview that was the foundation of the educational and research activities at the university in the overwhelming non-Christian cultural context of Japan.

Christians are a very small minority in Japan, comprising less than one percent of the total population, with Catholics accounting for about one half of all Christians. Most people in Japan think of themselves as non-religious, with typically only one-third of the population identifying themselves as belonging to any particular religious group. Most people, however, do actively participate in what would normally be considered religious practices, such as memorial services for the dead and New Year's visits to shrines and temples, with the latter attracting more than ninety percent of the population every year. The situation could be described as one where religion and certain basic religious beliefs continue to have a significant influence on society, on a level that is not often brought to consciousness. These two characteristics of education at Nanzan, the emphasis on interculturality and diversity that is traced back to the Foreign Language College and the presentation of human dignity as the educational motto of the university have proven to be an effective way to present what could be called the core of the Christian message in an overwhelmingly non-Christian, secular society.

The university also has three research institutes, which reflect these aspects of Nanzan's identity, as well as adding one more important element. The Nanzan Anthropological Institute was founded practically at the same time as the university, reflecting one of the important characteristics of the SVD. The Anthropos Institute, founded by Wilhelm Schmidt, embodies the focus on the study of diverse cultures that has been the foundation of the missionary work of the SVD from the time of the Founder. Schmidt himself was instrumental in the establishment of the Anthropological Institute at Nanzan during a visit

to Japan early in the postwar period. The second president of the university, Numazawa Keiichi, was a disciple of Schmidt, and organized fieldwork in Papua New Guinea while he was president.[3] An Anthropological Museum associated with the institute is found on the university campus, and it is open to the public.

The Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture was founded in 1974, to promote research of Asian, particularly East Asian, religions as well as interreligious dialogue. The institute has been instrumental in organizing exchanges between Buddhist and Christian monks, as well as holding joint symposia with similar institutes in Japan founded by the various religious groups, Buddhist, Shinto, as well as some of the new religious movements.

The Nanzan Institute for Social Ethics was established in 1980, to promote research into current social problems, as well as to identify and support practical efforts to alleviate these problems. Members of the institute have been involved in ecological issues, human rights, peacemaking activities, and, more recently, sustainability.

The first and the last of these, the Nanzan Anthropological Institute and the Nanazan Institute for Social Ethics, reflect the two aspects of Nanzan's identity that were identified previously, interculturality and diversity, and the promotion of human dignity. In addition, the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture, adds the promotion of dialogue, which recent popes, namely Benedict XVI and Pope Francis have described as being a common search for a better grasp of truth.[4] Education and research at Nanzan, and the Catholic identity of the university, can be summed up in terms of these three characteristics: diversity, dignity, and dialogue.







**Robert Kisala, SVD (Japan)**
***Former Vice General (2012-2018),***
***now President of Nanzan University, Nagoya***

[3] Robert Kisala, "The Anthropos Institute in Japan," [In:] Grodź, Michael, Schroeder (eds.), *Giants' Footprints,* 148.
[4] Robert Kisala, "Relativism and Interculturality in the Thought of Popes Benedict XVI and Francis," *Missio Inter Gentes* (Divine Word Institute of Mission Studies, Vol. 7), Manila 2021, No. 1, 60-79.





# Intercultural Communities in Australia Province



Over the Australia Province's 100-year history, the Divine Word Missionaries have effectively shifted from a monocultural group of European descendants to a heterogeneous blend of confreres from different racial, socio-economic, and cultural backgrounds. The diversity of a growing multicultural 'Asia-Pacific', reflected in the demographics of the province, is a special heritage, gift, and challenge. While offering unique opportunities to further God's mission there are significant challenges for our intergenerational group of 94 confreres from 25 nationalities. We work in four countries: Australia, New Zealand, Thailand and Myanmar.

As province numbers grow, the project of maintaining healthy interculturality has amplified a hundredfold. Two-thirds of the province members are from communitarian cultures which prioritize human relationships, whilst others are from individualistic cultures which value both principle and law. While both worldviews are vital toward integration in pastoring a parish or leading a province, it should not surprise readers that intercultural headaches have surfaced across all seven SVD districts in the province.

## A Conscious Choice to Multiculturalism

Australia's early history of immigration policy was hampered by a racist view of the world under the 1901 white-Australia policy. The legislation was specifically designed to limit non-British migration to Australia. It was reported that our early German SVDs who arrived from Papua






New Guinea post-World War II, experienced strong hostility from Anglo-Saxon Australians. Likewise, the plight of First Nation Australians today is a direct result of these unresolved intercultural issues which continue to undermine the future of reconciliation in this country.

However, multiculturalism in general has not been on Thailand and Myanmar's official agenda. Both countries known for their stunning landscapes, rich in history and warm hospitality have been known as homogenous countries, but at times remain suspicious of foreigners. New Zealand, however, allows its citizens to hold multiple citizenships which is strong evidence of a commitment to cultural diversity. Before we explore further our contribution to interculturality, the starting point is to understand the socio-political background where the bulk of our members come from.

## Postcolonialism Baggage

Many members of the province born in Thailand, Vietnam and Myanmar continue to carry with them wounds of communism and patterns of widespread abuse of power. They had to abandon their homes and sought to escape the country on boats, becoming known as "boat people," in Australia. On the journey, they faced language differences, violence, and culture shock.  Why is this context important?

In our attempt to work towards intercultural living as a mission, a huge effort must be made to find ways of attending to the scars of large-scale conflicts. Often, province leaders are called to work on First-Aid actions, to first stop the bleeding before questions are asked about culture. "It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol… You must heal his wounds. Then we can talk about everything else."[5]

A few Vietnamese confreres have shared their stories through an organized community ritual. They spoke of their painful memories. Truth-telling then became a form of healing for the storyteller, and through shared vulnerability brought confreres together.

If interculturality touches on cultural identity, it is critical that appropriate strategies are designed towards healing those identities. Healing and reconciliation must be two positive outcomes of *ad intra* intercultural living.

## Obstacles to Interculturality

Approximately 30 percent of confreres are of Vietnamese heritage, followed by Indonesians and Indians. Other confreres are cultural minorities.

On the surface, a healthy intercultural community sounds like a great idea, but like so many things, great ideas in theory often struggle to adapt to life in practice. Obstacles to genuine intercultural communication were noted by the 17th General Chapter of 2012. Ethnocentrism, stereotypes, prejudices, and racism were identified as a constant struggle facing SVDs across the world.

Many Vietnamese brothers still hang out with Vietnamese families. White Australians will never openly admit to being racist yet are unwilling to allow people of color into their social circles. The Australia Province had to withdraw its members from Queensland due to undesirable treatment by Australian-born Anglo-Saxon priests.

[5] Pope Francis, Reported at "A Big Heart Open to God," *America Magazine,* 2013 September, 19.

## Honesty or Truthfulness

I have observed that many confreres are resistant to dialogue respectfully to keep "dignity" intact and to avoid embarrassment. It is the tension between honesty and truthfulness without losing face, especially in the Asia-Pacific region. We pretend that we understand their values and bend the truth. When it comes to personal conflict, members resort to either silence or a blaming game. On many occasions, the finger is pointed at the provincial administration for not resolving intercultural headaches in local communities. When it happens, we tend to lose credibility with regard to an inclusive and truthful message of salvation.



Nonetheless, when confreres learn to sit together for Bible sharing and well-organized community meetings, they discover, by empathetic listening, a deep bond with people of a different culture and individual differences tolerated. In practice, it means that everyone is not expected to agree on the same mission proposal, believe in the same stuff, or even worship in the same style. It simply means the flow of ideas and the different ways of doing and living in a community are just interesting and stimulating. But it could also mean a community losing its own cohesion and fostering an "us and them" mentality.




## Intercultural Activities and Formation

Here are some helpful province activities to promote intercultural living among confreres and ethnic groups:

***Multicultural Masses:*** Many SVD parish priests in Australia have started celebrating multi-cultural Masses calling parishioners to be bridge-builders, not wall-builders, between people of different cultures and ideologies. In 2016, many onshore refugees in Inala, Queensland, put their hands up to get involved in multicultural Mass for the first time which was highly appreciated by the local government.



**Acculturation courses:** We have been organizing acculturation courses for new arrivals into Australia for more than 20 years. The idea is to dive deep into Australian life and history, an opportunity to grow further as enculturated missionaries. During the course, there would be opportunities for a cultural presentation to bear any preconceived prejudices they bring with them.

***Immersion into Australian families:*** We experimented with a supervised immersion experience for newly ordained confreres and scholastics with Australian families in regional areas. The goal was two-fold, namely, to have diocesan Aussie families to be with people of a different culture, and to acquire the capacity to build effective relationships.

***Formation team:*** We made sure that our scholastics' formation program at Dorish Maru College is not a one-man band but involves working as a team. Our formation staff are from Vietnam, India, the Philippines and Indonesia. Similarly, our student body is a good mixture of seminarians from ASPAC, AFRAM and PANAM Zones.

***Interzonal cooperation:*** For several years our novices have been able to go to the Philippine Central Province for the canonical year of novitiate. So far it has been successful, and it seemed good for us and for intercultural formation from day one. The cross-cultural and spiritual experiences have been very positive.







**Above:**
**Left:** Under Fives in AUS Province, Intercultural & Accultural Workshops, Central Coast, 2022

**Right:** Installation Mass of SVD fathers: Yanuarius Baku Salu (Rius) and Daniel Moruk Polla (in the middle with Bp. Charles Gauci of Darwin) in the Daley River Aboriginal Parish, Northern Territory of Australia, Dec. 2023

**Below:** Bp. Tim Norton, SVD, at Fr. Bonefasius Buahendri, SVD, 25th Anniversary of priesthood - Multicultural Mass in Inala, 2023

***Embracing everyone:*** One of the distinguishing features of our ministry in Melbourne, Victoria, is the hospitable Arnold Janssen Spirituality Centre, founded in 2008. The vision is *karuna* a Sanskrit word for embracing everyone with unconditional love. The SVD institution is centered on prophetic dialogue based on the SVD General Chapter of 2000 and *Gaudium et Spes* (3) – to interact respectfully and truthfully with people from other cultures and faith traditions.

***Multicultural SVD Mission Day:*** Recommendation 2.2.1 from the 17th General Chapter regarding the SVD Mission has been an ongoing event. Every year, the province holds the extraordinary Month of Mission with the annual SVD Mission Day in Melbourne. The day includes input from three keynote speakers, a celebration of the Eucharist and a shared multicultural meal. Our annual SVD Mission Day has attracted thousands of migrants and locals since we began.

***Carols By Candlelight:*** Our annual Carols by Candlelight in Marsfield and other SVD parishes has brought people of various cultures together to celebrate. Christmas Carols were sung in various languages, and these evenings concluded with a shared multicultural banquet. We value all contributions towards a world inclusive of all God's children.

**Episcopal ministry:** It is worth mentioning that an increasing number of bishops are recognizing the SVD's strengths in intercultural mission and are appointing confreres to multicultural parishes. Brisbane Auxiliary Bp. Tim Norton, SVD, is busy in Australia teaching the importance of interculturality as a way of building a powerful new discipleship. Through his many engagements, people have become strong intercultural advocates, to break down cultural ideologies that isolate peoples and anti-immigrant rhetoric abroad and at home.

> Our challenge is to move from labeling to embracing - to grow in the consciousness of our own ethnocentrism in the remarks we make, in the attitudes that we have, to try our best to understand that other people have a history, a place in the world from which they have come. And sometimes that place is a place of great trauma, of famine, of war. Let us drink together of a new world order of intercultural communities of disciples of Jesus.[6]

[6] Bishop Tim Norton, SVD, "Summit, Brisbane," 5 June 2023.



## Conclusion

It is a demanding ministry to prepare for an ever-growing multicultural reality, embracing and inducting our confreres and others in the critical process of integration. Many forms of discrimination today relate to the movement of globalization and secularization. The province would not have it any other way but must become intentionally intercultural and enhance the witness of what we believe to be true – all lives matter! Otherwise, the Australia province dedicated to life by this special vocation will not be viable in a fast-growing region where racist or xenophobic violence is surging into the open. God of interculturality, attune us to your Holy Spirit, Amen.

**Iosefo Asaeli Rass, SVD (Australia)**
***Provincial Superior***


Misioneros
Auxiliares
del
Verbo
Divino

# SVD Lay Partners in Mexico: Journey with the Divine Word Missionaries



It all began, on 21 February 1982, motivated by Fr. Manuel Myvett, SVD, after some meetings with several people involved in different apostolates, we formally started in the Expiatory Temple of the City of Guadalajara, the Lay Movement that today is known as Auxiliary Missionaries of the Divine Word (MAVD), Mexico. As it stands, this is the oldest organized SVD lay partners group in the Society.

A Movement where everyone fits; entire families, children, teenagers, young people, and adults, without age limit, just eager to share and bring the Gospel to life. As a result of our personal journey and group commitment, we assume a specifically missionary apostolate in the indigenous areas and in other regions or realities of our Mexico, where another language is spoken, where there are different customs and ways of living, and it is there that we lovingly share life together. There, in those mission areas, God allows us to see it more clearly; people talk to you about God, with their gaze, their smile and their simplicity.

The members of the lay movement, MAVD, understand ourselves as "auxiliaries" of the Divine Word himself. Recognizing that in Christ and with him alone our service and sending have meaning and consistency. We have been invited to "do something" for the mission of Jesus; but this






Fr. Manuel Myvett, SVD, inspirator of Auxiliary Missionaries of the Divine Word (MAVD)

does not entirely express our feelings: rather we feel ourselves "summoned and invited" by the Divine Word to "be something": missionaries together with Him and with all those who, in the family of Saint Arnold Janssen, are already trying to give their own answer.

We are organized in base groups, and in turn in regions. We hold during the year regional meetings, a national meeting of coordinators and a national meeting of all the members. These change headquarters and thus each group is the host. Our Missions are mainly during Holy Week and two weeks in summer. We work throughout the year in our communities and parishes.

By God's grace, in 2025, we will celebrate 43 years of collaborating with the SVDs in doing our missionary activities.

After having lived as a child, the beginning of the movement, and accompanying my parents (+ Macario Meneses and Alicia Cibrián) in the different activities in support of the seminary, living with seminarians and priests, and seeing them participate in the mission of Oaxaca, the restlessness of being a missionary was born in me. At that time, I was coordinator of the Youth Ministry together with Leti Flores my girlfriend (now my wife) that is when we were invited to form a missionary youth group of the MAVD movement.

I lived my first mission experience in 1995 in Huejutla de Reyes, Hidalgo, and there, God conquered my heart. From that moment Leti and I knew we would dedicate our lives to being missionaries. The first five years we were engaged, each one to a different community. On 21 May 1999, we got married, and we continued to collaborate in the mission, over the years our four children were born: David (23 years old), Arantza (22), Sophia (15) and Karol (9). The mission marked our lives from the beginning. That is why we did not hesitate to share it with our children and at three months old David was already living his first mission with the Huichols, in the Sierra de Nayarit.

Going on family missions is a spiritual retreat, where we "stop time" leaving behind all our usual activities. We go to unknown places with new people and become acculturated with them and we share who we are, learning from them and willing to do what God has prepared for us. Now, after 30 years, we are proud to be part of the MAVD as a missionary family. It is a blessing that each member of the family collaborates in different ways for the movement and building of the Kingdom.

By God's grace, we have had the opportunity to go on missions to the states of Hidalgo, Nayarit, Chiapas, Sinaloa, Sonora, Oaxaca, as well as in our own state of Jalisco. Throughout this journey, there have been countless experiences, through which we have grown as individuals and as a family, discovering the face of God in the mission, inviting us to be a living witness to Him every day. God has entrusted me to be part of the National Coordination in various periods, as well as in the regional and group coordination, currently support in the Communication and Choir of the Movement.

In 2012, we were invited to participate in the 17th General Chapter in Nemi. In 2018, my logo proposal for the 18th General Chapter was chosen. We have collaborated in provincial assemblies, support to the SSpS, meetings, Masses, celebrations, special events, raffles, etc.

Currently, our son David belongs to the National Coordination, and was invited to participate in February 2024 in the 2nd International Meeting of Lay Partners. I thank God for calling my family to be part of the MAVD and the Arnoldus Family.

I was once asked on a mission why I left everything and took my young children to places so far away from civilization and without communication, and I simply answered: "Because I believe in God!"



Leti and Arturo

## MAVD[7]

The first missionary field for the members of MAVD is the family and the relatives with whom we live daily. In the second place are the indigenous communities of their country, and the mission *ad gentes*. We meet periodically in different base groups to prepare themes, to be enriched spiritually, and thus to be able to give the example of their life.

## Formation

In MAVD, we commit ourselves personally and formally to the mission, by forming "Base Groups" in various locations in the country. In these groups the missionaries are responsible and dedicate themselves:

- To form, evangelize, and deepen their faith with regular meetings, in the place and time that each one accepts.
- To promote everything related to the missions in local and/or parish communities.
- To pray for the mission of the Church throughout the world.
- To write or to be in contact with the Mexican missionaries who work abroad.
- To go for mission at least once per year, either during Holy Week or summer.
- To assume during one year, a concrete social-missionary commitment in the realities of each base group.

## To Be the Mission

An important part of our charism is to visit the most distant and needy communities. We are going **to be the mission** and **not to do the mission**. The main thing is to share life and respect all that is to be visited. During the year, two mission experiences are carried out at the national level: during Holy Week and the Summer Mission. We go for mission in Holy Week and during summer to the indigenous communities of the State of Hidalgo in the Diocese of Hujeutla de Reyes and to the Parish of Santiago Apóstol de Anaya, in Chiapas. In Ch'oles, we visit communities of the parish of San Fernando de Guadalupe in Salto de Agua and San José in

[7] The following section on MAVD was published in Stanislaus T. Lazar, "Lay Partners in Mission," [In:] Stanislaus T. Lazar, SVD and văn Thanh Nguyễn, SVD (eds.), *Missionary Discipleship in Glocal Contexts*, Siegburg: Franz Schmitt Verlag 2018, 308-310.




The entire Family of the Auxiliary Missionaries of the Divine Word (MAVD)

Playas de Catazajá, in Oaxaca, also in the highlands of Juarez in the parishes of San Juan Yaeé and Santa Cruz Yagavila, where we started our mission in 1983. Finally, we go to Sonora, in the parish of Tubutama, diocese of Nogales, and to the 12 communities of Camotlán which belong to the parish of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Manzanillo, Colima.

**The Holy Week Mission:** It takes place every year during Holy Week where we enculturate, share life, encourage sharing of the Word of God through Lectio Divina, give different themes for reflection, introduce various dynamics, conduct games and help in the celebrations of Holy Week. We have a missionary medical-dentistry team which is totally dedicated to give free health services and medicines during the whole week.

**Summer Mission:** During the last week of July and in the first week of August of each year, the mission experience is organized in a specific selected and previously evaluated place in any field of mission. At this time different activities are carried out such as catechesis, biblical circles, preparation for the sacraments, formation of choirs, liturgy, youth groups, etc., according to the needs of each place. Also, we help to teach embroidery, tailoring, vegetable gardening, music, literacy, crafts, electricity, plumbing, etc. After 42 years, we are aware that God wants something from us. We have made our journey with the missionary family of Saint Arnold Janssen, a family that loves One Triune God, who embraces the world with its many faces, to form through them a single heart in His name.

## Collaboration with the SVD

The principal objective of the group is to help in the personal and group commitment of faith through being a lay missionary with a universal perspective. By being aware of God´s invitation to holiness and a complete fulfillment of their lives, they live their vocation in Christ.

We find a special motivation in the spirituality, in the commitment of the missionaries of the Divine Word and in the missionary Family of Saint Arnold Janssen. Together with them, we seek to support animation and missionary cooperation in our country and the world. We support missionary tasks and works of the MAVD group to which we belong, on a national level and within the framework of our time and possibilities, and the apostolic works of other missionary organizations and movements.

Parishes are the ideal places where we really incarnate our missionary commitment. It's very important to have a deeper and a reliable missionary commitment, by feeling greatly responsible for the missionary realities which no one thinks of or where no one wants to go. We are very sensitive to everything that has to do with **mission *ad gentes***, and we raise awareness about the missionary ***ad gentes*** vocation of the Church.

We accept a specifically missionary apostolate among the indigenous people's areas and in other regions or realities of Mexico that cry out for the arrival of the Kingdom of God. We are keen to support constantly in prayer and in material needs the missionaries of the Divine Word and the Sisters Servants of the Holy Spirit, but in a very special manner with the newly consecrated missionaries. We contribute to SVD/SSpS formation houses through prayers, donations and other means by being aware of the fact that all our help contributes to the future missionaries of Mexico for the world.

**Arturo Meneses**
***Lay Associate,***
***Misioneros Auxiliares del Verbo Divino (MAVD),***
***Mexico***







The *witness* of a truly christian life on the personal and community level is the first step in the realization of our missionary service

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HOHNER



Chapter VI

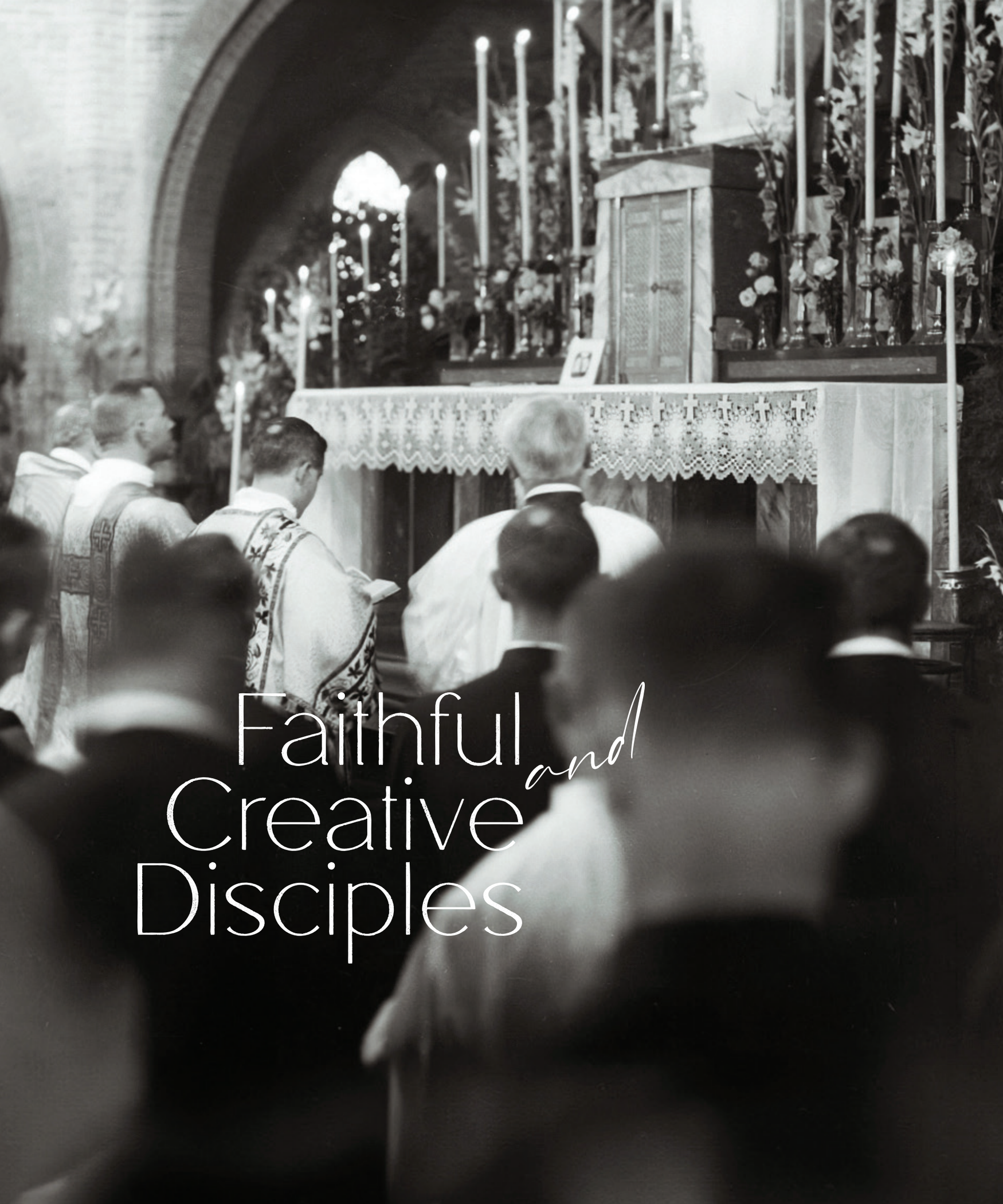
# SOME INSPIRING MISSIONARIES





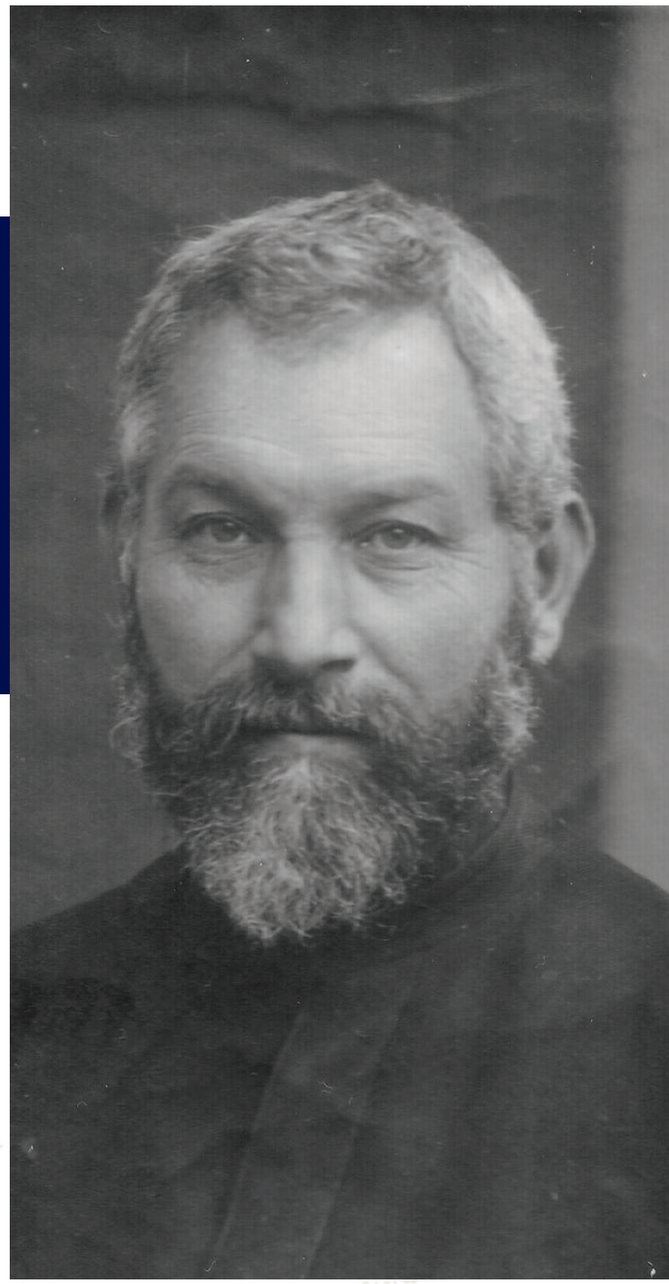





Faithful and Creative Disciples


JESU·AMATOR·NOSTER

# Br. Lucas Kolzem, SVD (1859-1945) : Art at the Service of the Divine Word



## Early Life and Vocation

Br. Joseph Kolzem was born in 1859 in Bad Godesberg, now a district of Bonn. His father was a locksmith, his mother a midwife, and he was the eldest of eight children. Even as a teenager, Joseph showed a unique talent for drawing and painting. It gained the notice of a wealthy neighbor who enabled him to study at the Academy of Arts in Düsseldorf.

Joseph entered the newly opened Mission House as an academic artist at 24. Soon, he taught art at the mission school and worked for the printing press. In February 1886, he took his first vows and received the religious name Lucas, the patron saint of artists. For more than 60 years, he put his artistic know-how at the service of St. Michael's in Steyl and its worldwide mission. He died in 1945.

## Contribution to St. Michael's Mission House

It is astonishing that only 12 years after the founding of the Mission House in Steyl, Arnold Janssen had a workshop built for the artists of the young community. It was called the 'Light House' because of its large, bright windows. It was here that the glass painter Br. Seraphim Patzak and his assistants found their workplace, as well as the sculptor and carver Br. Gentianus Meegen, and also the musician and composer Br. Valerian Bömer.





The photo studio and the brother's studio were also located in the 'Light House'. Lucas was once called the "Artist of Steyl." Witnesses of that time reported that sketches and paintings hung on the walls, and sketchbooks were piled on tables and in the cupboard. Here, Lucas sketched and painted and contributed with his talent to the budding apostolate of the Steyl missionary work.

## Artistic Contributions and Creative Endeavors

He created hundreds of headlines and vignettes for the magazines, calendars, and books printed in Steyl, with motifs of Christ and saints, motifs of nature, and references to the worldwide SVD mission. That was his contribution to bringing the world to the readers of Steyl's printed media. It helped to improve the products consistently. With the Founder's approval, he trained in lithography, so the first colorful pictures appeared in Steyl's print media in the 1890s.

In Kolzem, Arnold Janssen found a trained artist to translate his religious and spiritual ideas into drawings, figures, and paintings. The Founder provided the ideas, and Kolzem implemented them. In the upper church of Steyl, we find numerous paintings by Kolzem, and at the end of his life, he also set about painting the lower church. Parts of it have been preserved. He designed the windows for numerous churches, first for the upper church of St. Michael and later for the church of the SSpS Sisters in Steyl.

He also designed windows for St. Gabriel's near Vienna, the cathedral in Lomé, and other places in Togo and China. One curiosity should be mentioned: In 1929, Br. Kolzem painted a picture of the Last Supper. In it, he portrayed confreres whom he grouped around Jesus as apostles. A confrere who worked in Moscow was so impressed by it 70 years later that he had the painting printed on foil and installed as choir windows in his Moscow church of St. Olga. Thus, the Last Supper painting by Kolzem comes into its own in the church that had once been a discotheque in earlier times.

## Paintings of the Founder: A Legacy

Lucas Kolzem designed the first logos for the three Steyl communities. Arnold Janssen came up with the ideas. Interesting: in 1891, Kolzem also designed the first religious dress of the Steyl Missionary Sisters. So, he even became a religious fashion designer.

What has made him famous in Steyl are the oil paintings depicting the Founder. The most famous is the one that today hangs in the entrance of St. Michael's Mission House in Steyl. Kolzem painted it a year after the death of the Founder. It shows Arnold Janssen at his desk, the Superior General, caring for his missionary work. The world map in the background speaks for itself. Another large painting depicts Arnold Janssen praying. On the Founder's stole Kolzem portrays St. Thomas Aquinas's sentence: "Deity deeply hidden, I approach you in prayer." Kolzem knew Arnold Janssen better than many others: his countenance, spirituality, and deep trust in God.






Arnold Janssen profoundly influenced Lucas Kolzem, whose demeanor, spiritual depth, and unwavering faith in God were particularly notable. Under Arnold's guidance, Kolzem internalized Arnold's spiritual essence, endeavoring to reflect it in his artistic endeavors throughout his life. In his obituary, it is remarked that Br. Lucas Kolzem, alongside his companion Br. Martinus Jürgens, epitomized the rich tradition of our Society. They served as conduits for passing down the legacy of our founding Fr. Arnold, bestowed upon us as a divine blessing.

This leads to a pertinent question: How can the members of the Arnold Janssen parish in Goch, within the specific context of their community, embody the tradition of the SVD and perpetuate the heritage of their revered patron Saint?

**Manfred Krause, SVD (Germany)**
***Parish Priest of St. Arnold Janssen Parish, Goch***



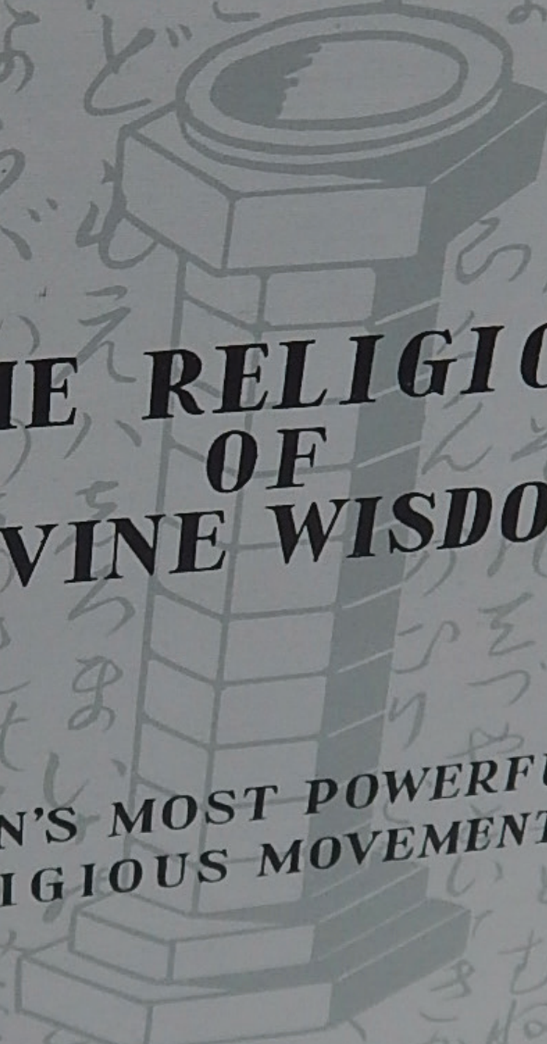


THE RELIGION OF DIVINE WISDOM

H. VAN STRAELEN

天理教

# THE RELIGION OF DIVINE WISDOM

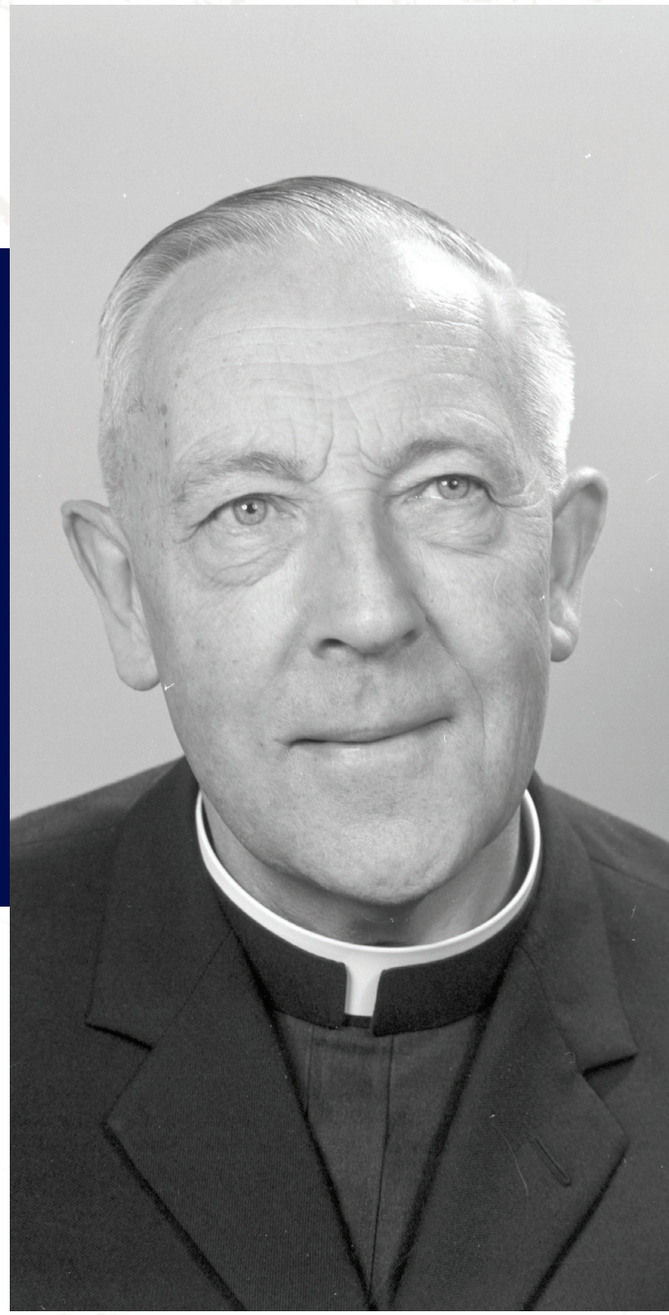


## JAPAN'S MOST POWERFUL RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT

HENRY VAN STRAELEN



# Fr. Henry van Straelen, SVD (1903-2004): Committed to Dialogue and Interreligious Understanding

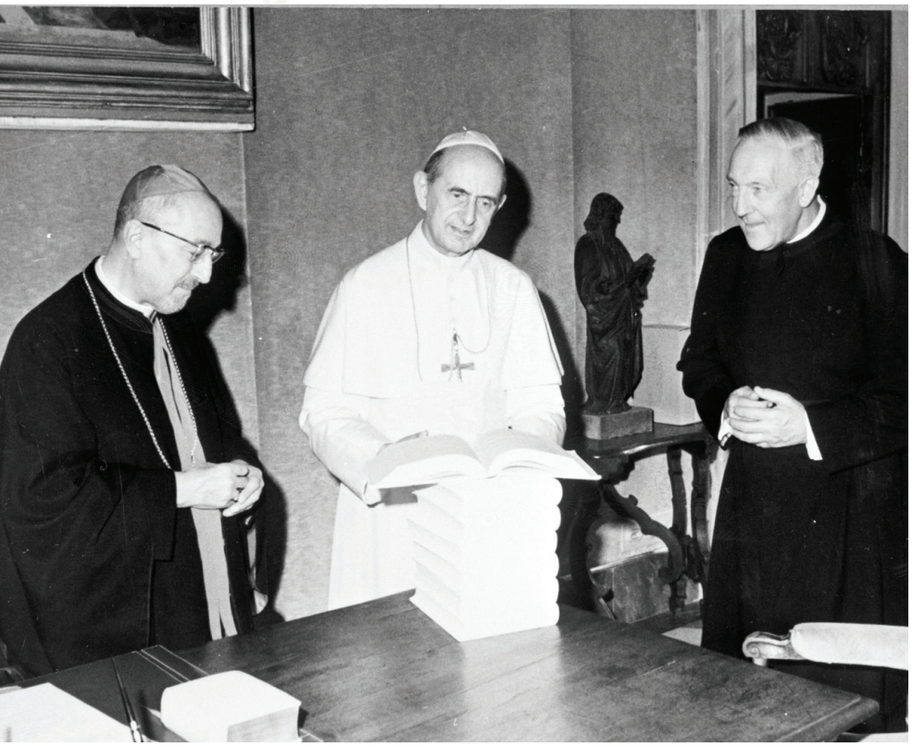


Born on 12 November 1903, in Utrecht, Henry (Henri) van Straelen was the youngest son of Bernardus and Pauline (née Verlegh) van Straelen. After studying law at Nijmegen, he entered the SVD in 1926 and was ordained to the priesthood on 31 January 1932. In 1935, he received his missionary assignment to Japan. He immersed himself in the Japanese language, culture, and society there.

A prisoner-of-war for eight months, he was deported to England in 1941; after getting a Ph.D. in Comparative Religions at Cambridge, he returned to Japan in 1951, where he was a Professor of Philosophy and Christian Doctrine at Nanzan University, Nagoya, up to his retirement in 1973.

## Publications and Intellectual Contributions

Pope St. Paul VI appointed him *Peritus* at the Second Vatican Council, after which he edited a seven-volume Commentary on the Conciliar documents in Japanese. He read papers at conferences in Japan, Germany, France, Russia, Netherlands, Belgium, England, and the US. After his retirement, he continued to publish in England. In 1993, he trans-



Papal Audience, Paul VI and Fr. Henry van Straelen, SVD, 15 November 1969

ferred to Steyl, where as a centenarian he died on New Year's Day, 2004.

One of his first publications was a collection of lectures on the status of women in Japan (1940). Because of his family background (one brother became a Vice-Admiral of the Dutch navy, the other a Captain), he saw the political significance of what he had learned in Japan as a young missionary.

This was expressed in *New Diplomacy in the Far East: A Blueprint for the Training of Future Diplomats* (1944). In his introduction, Professor J. A. Veraart, President of the Association of University Professors, endorsed the book for alerting politicians to the fact that:

> The awaking of a powerful Far East means much more than economic progress. People with an ancient and valuable culture are rising to take a prominent place in a new world. Our diplomats will, therefore, be wide off the mark if they understand only the commercial and economic relations with a country such as China. They must know the language and culture of such a great people (…).[1]

This, too, became van Straelen's missionary aim.

## Vision for Dialogue and Interreligious Understanding

The relationship between Christianity and the World Religions was his primary preoccupation. He engaged in extensive dialogue with representatives of Japanese and Indian Religions, paying particular attention to Eastern mysticism and modern sects such as Tenrikyō. Related publications included *Yoshida Shōin: The forerunner of the Meiji Restoration; a biographical study* (1952), a prominent historical figure whose influence, he claims, can be felt today, and *The Religion of Divine Wisdom - Japan's Most Powerful Religious Movement* (1957). With Clark B. Offner, a Protestant, he coauthored *Modern Japanese Religions with Particular Emphasis upon their Doctrines of Healing* (1963). He was alarmed at how Zen replaced Christian spiritual exercises in the West.

Given his prodigious literary output – over 70 publications in Japanese, German, Dutch, Italian, French, and English – and considering the vast spectrum of topics he covered (from Abortion to Zen), it is impossible here to do justice to the man. No study of his life and work has yet been undertaken. He was and remains a controversial figure. He was forthright in his views, perhaps sometimes too honest. Though always informed and not without insight, his writings after Vatican II became increasingly controversial. He was preoccupied with how the Second Vatican Council's statements on the relationship between Christianity and the World Religions were interpreted.

*The Church and the Non-Christian Religions at the Threshold of the 21st Century: A Historical and Theological Study*, translated by Robert Nowell (London, 1998), was his most important work. It covers Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Japanese Amidism, Zen Buddhism, Christian and Eastern mysticism, and African religions. It concludes with a theology of non-Christian religions as a basis for dialogue.

[1] Henry van Straelen, *New Diplomacy in the Far East: A Blueprint for the Training of Future Diplomats*, London: Luzac & Company 1944, 7.

## Legacy and Enduring Influence

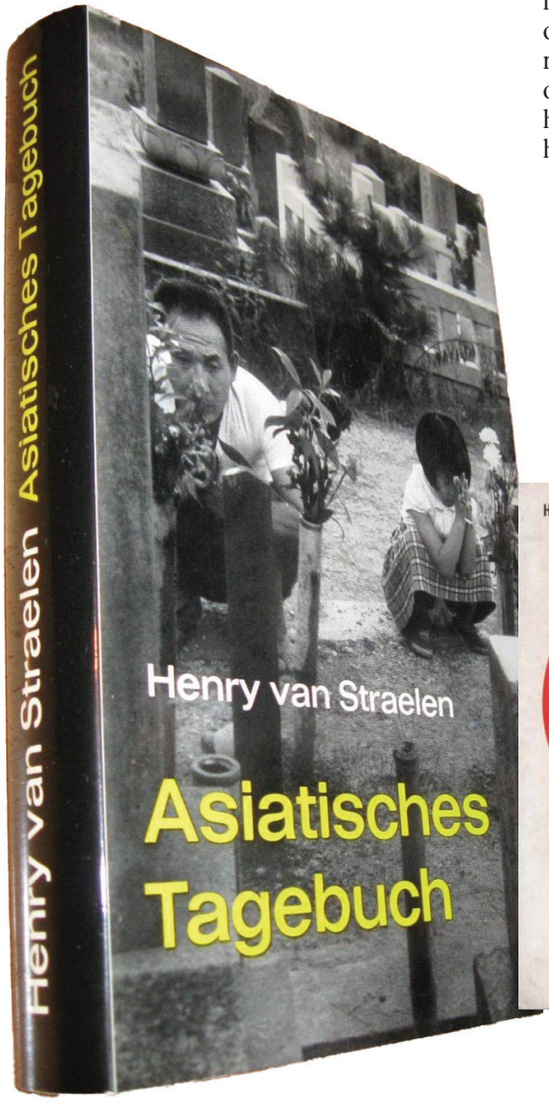
His underlying conviction was articulated as early as 1944:

> Which way the Church will develop is not for a European to forecast. It can only be said that without denying anything of the essential teaching of the Church, the only repository of the truth, a new tradition will develop; a new ecclesiastical discipline will grow, theological science will go quite different ways, and, above all, the ascetic and mystical life will tread paths hitherto unknown and untrodden. Therefore, it will not merely be a superficial outward accommodation. Even virtues will get an Oriental color, and special virtues will be especially stressed.[2]

He was acutely aware of the richness of the cultures and religions of Asia. He also knew they were in constant flux and change, not least due to encountering Christianity and Western secularism. Of note are his analyses of European Islam and the influence of the post-colonial world on African Religions. He deeply respected all religions as expressions of human beings' search for God.

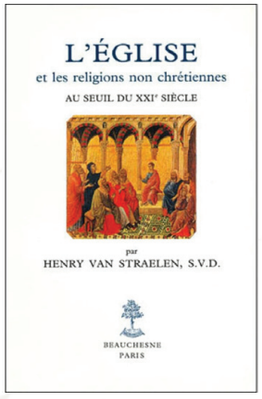
But he was also acutely aware of their need for the purifying and transformative power of the Gospel. His engagement in dialogue brought home to him its limitations and its dangers. The latter included the unintended effect of confirming the dialogue partners of the superiority of their religion. He recognized that one of the central values of dialogue is how the insights of other religions could challenge the Church to develop, deepen, and enrich her truths rooted in the historical fact that the Word became flesh to redeem humanity. Henry van Straelen devoted his life and writings to that end.

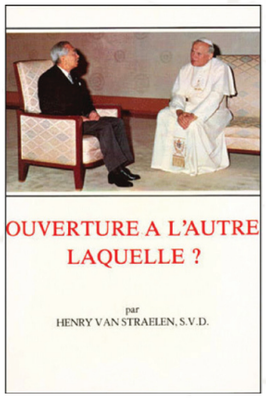
**Vincent Twomey, SVD (Ireland)**
***Professor Emeritus of Moral Theology at the Pontifical University, Maynooth; Researcher on the legacy of Benedict XVI***









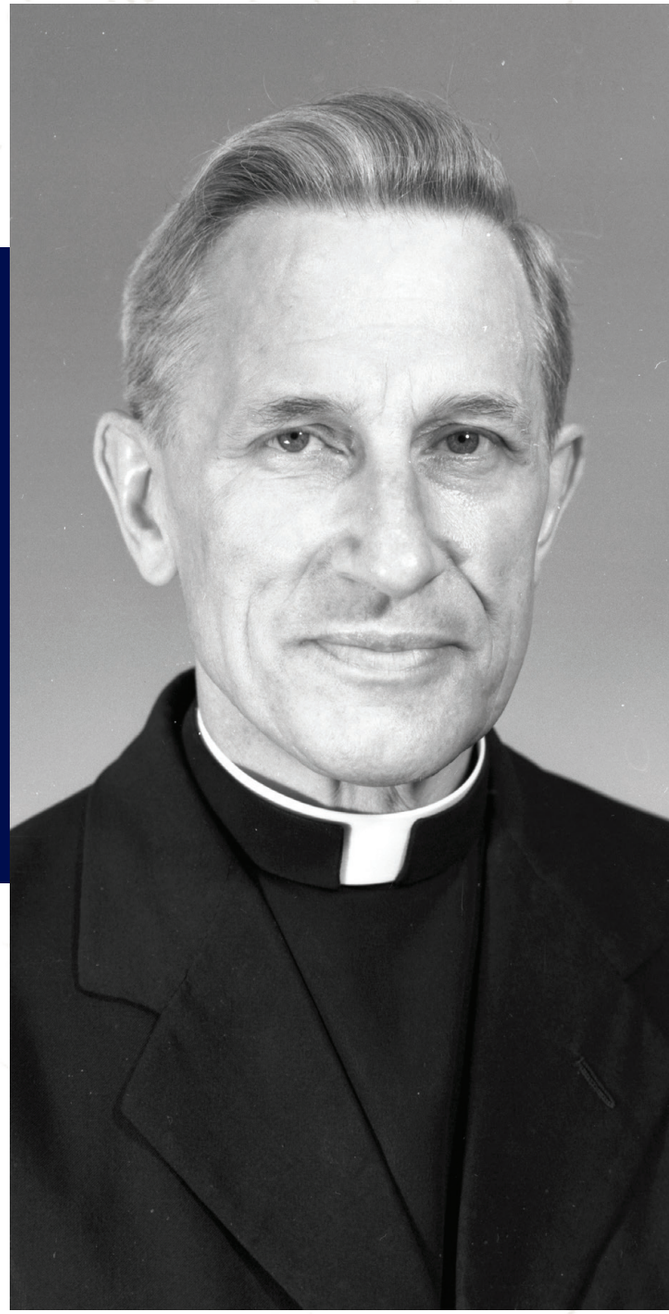




[2] Henry van Straelen, *A Missionary in the War Net*, Hadzor: The Word Press 1944, 54.




Card. Giovanni Battista Enrico Antonio Maria Montini (later Paul VI) with Fr. Charles Erb in Akosombo, Ghana, July-August 1962

# Fr. Charles Gerard Erb, SVD (1906-2002): A Missionary with Innovative Evangelization Methods



## Early Life and Missionary Journey

Fr. Charles Gerard Erb could be numbered among the early SVDs in Ghana. His pioneering roles in developing the Catholic Church in Ghana, especially in the Tamale Archdiocese, need special recognition.

Charles Erb was born on 3 August 1906, to William Joseph Erb and Helen Esse Erb in Rochester south of Lake Ontario in the state of New York (US). Belonging to the diocese of Rochester, he entered the SVD novitiate in 1926 in East Troy, professed First Vows in 1928 in Techny, and Final Profession in St. Gabriel, Austria in 1932. Charles Erb was ordained to the priesthood in 1933 in St. Gabriel.

During World War II, he served as a military chaplain and was one of the first to enter the Dachau concentration camp with the Rainbow Division. After the war, he studied at Harvard and the University of London, but it was too boring and after a year he was on the way to Ghana.[3]

[3] *25 Jahre Priestertum 1933-1958*, 14.





Fr. Erb utilized his innovative tools to captivate attention especially in addressing the youth

Before Erb reached the Gold Coast (Ghana) Province in 1947, he had taken a course on African Languages. This prepared him for his missionary task. His missionary activities were focused first in the southern part of the country. In the 1960s, he was reassigned to the Yendi Mission.

Charles Erb was a person with extraordinary talents. Erb's missionary zeal was his most significant contribution to Society. The post-WWII world was challenging, but zealous men and women endeavored to make substantial impacts. Charles Erb served in different challenging places in the province and demonstrated his "SVDness."

## Leadership and Innovative Evangelization Methods

Under Erb's leadership, the Yendi Mission experienced rapid expansion and growth. His strategic vision and organizational skills enabled the SVDs to establish a strong foothold in the Yendi area within a remarkably short period. As a result, the Church's presence and influence in the region flourished, touching the lives of countless individuals.

One of Erb's most inspiring contributions lies in his innovative approach to primary evangelization. Unlike his peers, who predominantly relied on the written word to spread the message of Christianity, Erb embraced a novel method: Pope John's Mobile Cinema. Traveling throughout the Yendi District, Erb utilized this innovative tool to showcase films, captivating audiences and sparking curiosity about the Church among the local populace.

The decision to employ a mobile cinema for evangelization was particularly ingenious given the high illiteracy prevalent in the region. Erb transcended linguistic and educational barriers by presenting the Gospel visually, making the message accessible to all. His pioneering use of film as a means of evangelization engaged the community and fostered a deeper understanding and appreciation of the Catholic faith.

## Legacy and Leadership Development

Charles Erb's legacy extends far beyond the confines of the Yendi Mission. His innovative spirit and unwavering dedication to spreading the Gospel serve as an enduring inspiration for future generations of missionaries. Through his pioneering efforts, Erb demonstrated the transformative power of creative evangelization, leaving an indelible mark on the history of the Church in the Tamale diocese and beyond.

Erb had a passion for developing the local Church. This was evident as he established the catechetical school, named after St. Martin de Porres in 1962, and became its first director. This foresight made him exceptional in the Tamale diocese because he saw the necessity to use the lay faithful to develop the local Church.

## Challenges and Reflections on Missionary Preparation

We can point out that Charles Erb was prepared by his home province to serve as a missionary. Reflecting on this, confreres need adequate preparation before they are sent out. The conversation surrounding this topic does not go well with some of today's missionaries because their output in the missionary field does not demonstrate their preparedness for the mission.

In our view, a missionary, as showcased by the pioneers, needs to be innovative, self-motivating, ungrudgingly delving into the mission, and creatively building bridges in the wounded world, and this is lacking in many places. Formators must stress the creativity of the *formandi* and take an interest in their efforts to solve problems.

## Quality of Leadership Engraved on Rocks

The world needs leaders now more than ever. We live in a multicultural and challenging world; thus, people look to the Church for guidance and direction. Missionaries have always given this hope to the local Church. Wherever Erb evangelized in Ghana, the quality of his leadership has been engraved on rocks. The quality of his missionary life is a challenge and an inspiration to the local Church and the Divine Word Missionaries in particular.

In the context of the sesquicentennial celebration, the Ghana Province is happy to celebrate Fr. Charles Gerard Erb's legacy. His contributions, innovativeness, trailblazing leadership, and missionary zeal are infectious.

**Samuel Yaw Adu, SVD (Ghana)**
***Director of the Institute Cross-Cultural Studies, Tamale***





# Fr. Constante Floresca, SVD (1912-2000):

# Extraordinary Educator and Advocate for the Local Clergy and Filipinization of Schools



## Early Education and Formation

Fr. Constante Floresca was born on 27 October 1912, in northern Baguio, Philippines. His early education instilled in him the call to serve the Church and participate in its mission. His journey began when he entered Christ the King Seminary in Manila in 1934. He became one of the first Filipinos to complete their entire SVD priestly formation within these walls.

One of the defining moments in his early life occurred during his novitiate from 1935 to 1937 when he, along with his companions, had the privilege of participating in the International Eucharistic Congress in Manila in 1937. This event left an indelible impression on him, inspiring his future endeavors.

## Early Years as a Priest

In his early years as a priest (1943-1947), Floresca embraced the role of an educator with zeal. He became a teacher and mentor in two diocesan minor seminaries managed by the SVD in the Philippines. His dedication to shaping young minds marked this period and further solidified his commitment to the Church's mission.





Christ the King Seminary in Quezon City.
Fr. Constante Floresca with confreres (left) and with students 1957

In 1947, Floresca's life took a new turn when he was transferred to Cebu City in the southern part of the Philippines. His first assignment in the southern region saw him joining the University of San Carlos, where he became the acting director of the high school. During this time, he contributed to the educational ministry in Cebu and became a significant presence, bridging the gap between foreign and local educators.

## Significant Contributions to Minor Seminaries

Floresca's return to Manila in 1952 marked the beginning of twelve years of significant contributions at Christ the King Seminary. He wore many hats during this period, including that of the academic director, vice-rector, and teacher. His involvement in the administration of the seminary was coupled with a commitment to securing government recognition for the high school program in minor seminaries.

His dedication and efforts eventually extended this recognition to all minor seminaries, including those managed by various dioceses in the Philippines. This development laid the foundation for further government recognition in college-level and philosophy programs in seminaries.

## Floresca and the Filipinization of Educational Institutions

In the 1950s, the Philippines found itself at the center of a significant controversy known as the "Filipinization controversy," which had a profound impact on education in the country. This controversy revolved around the government's proposal to enact a law that aimed to reserve leadership positions in educational institutions for Filipinos, effectively excluding foreigners from these administrative roles.

The religious orders, who were responsible for the administration and operation of many of these schools, were confronted with a challenging decision. They were tasked with adapting to the requirements of the proposed law and potentially facing significant changes in their leadership and staffing structures.

One of the figures involved in addressing this issue was Constante Floresca. During his tenure as the academic director of Christ the King Seminary, he was deeply engaged in the complex terrain of the Filipinization controversy. He recognized that while preserving the Filipino identity in these institutions, leadership was essential; ensuring a smooth transition was equally crucial. Floresca's advocacy for a balanced approach was instrumental in the eventual resolution of the Filipinization controversy.

The outcome of this contentious debate was the introduction of a modified law that included a transition period to facilitate the change. The modification was a testament to the constructive engagement of individuals like Floresca, who worked to find common ground and ensure that all stakeholders' rights and needs were considered.

## The Period of Martial Law

During Martial Law in the Philippines under President Ferdinand Marcos, Floresca played a vital role as a mediator between the government and the Catholic Church. Initially, in opposition to the regime, he openly advocated for social justice, including land reform.

Rather than going into hiding when suspicions of being a revolutionary arose, he engaged directly with the authorities. He was a liaison between the government and the Church, working to find common ground and facilitate dialogue.

## Presence at DWS Tagaytay

In 1977, when Floresca made his significant transition to the Divine Word Seminary in Tagaytay, little did he realize how profound his presence would become in the seminary community. At first, he took on the roles of the head of the library and a teacher of Latin and Philippine history. However, what truly set him apart was his character and the missionary spirit that he carried with him.

Although his official role was that of the head of the library and a history teacher, it was as a spiritual guide that Floresca truly shone. He selflessly shared his wisdom, faith, and commitment with the seminarians. He became a mentor, a role model, and a guide for those seeking a deeper connection with their faith and a stronger sense of purpose.

## Floresca's Contribution and Legacy

Floresca was not merely an extraordinary educator and advocate. He was a pioneer and a trailblazer who played an essential role in developing the Catholic Church and the educational landscape of the Philippines. His character, commitment to education and tireless advocacy for the rights of Filipino religious and diocesan priests illuminated the path for future generations.

Perhaps the most significant legacy left by Floresca is his commitment to including local clergy and their leadership in the Church. This legacy serves as a roadmap for the SVD, emphasizing the importance of nurturing and empowering local leaders who can guide and strengthen the Church's mission.

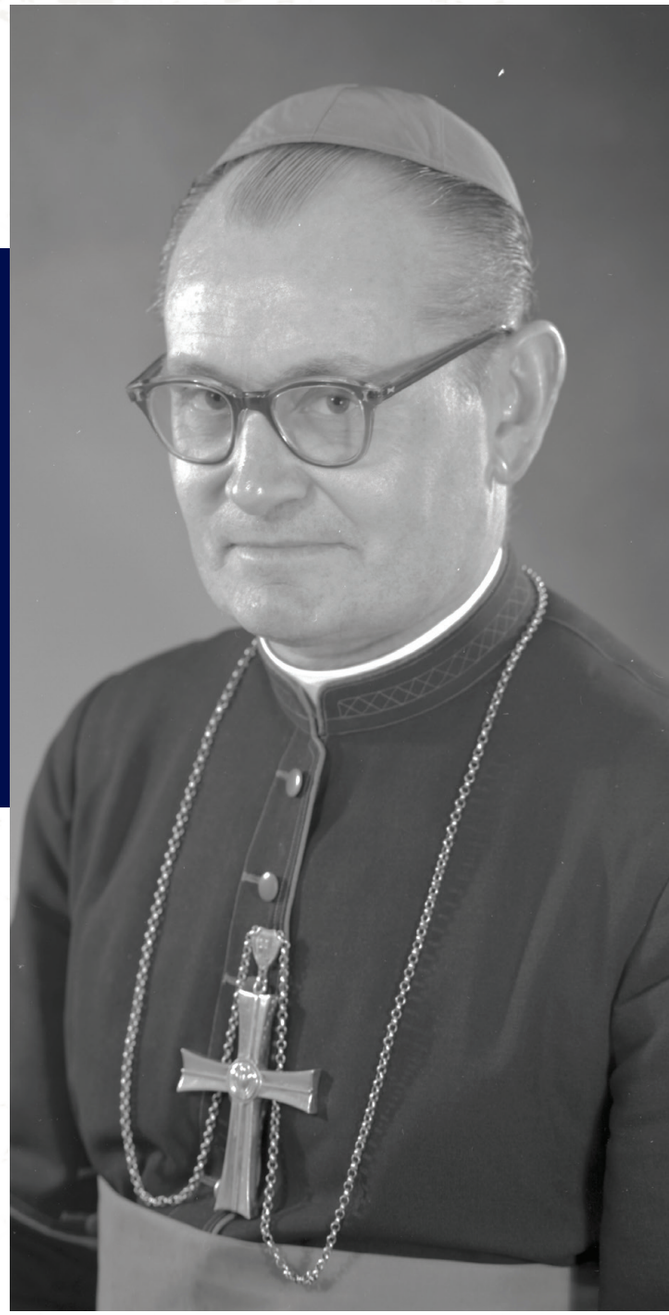
In conclusion, Fr. Constante Floresca counts among the many remarkable missionaries who dedicated themselves to the Society of the Divine Word over the last 150 years. In the spirit of the Founder, he moved forward without counting the cost, walking high and tall to carry out his mission.

**Herbert Scholz, SVD (Steyl)**
***Former General Secretary and General Councilor, now in Steyl***

**Crescente de Rivera (Sonny), SVD (Philippines)**
***Former Editor of* Arnoldus Nota, *Rome; now pastoral ministry***



# Bishop Jorge Kemerer, SVD (1908-1998): A Pastor for Life and the Compassionate Shepherd



## Early Life and Education

Bishop Jorge Kemerer was born in a peasant's home, diligent and humble at the same time, whose origins date back to the Volga Germans. He was born in San Rafael Village, the province of Entre Ríos, Argentina, on 13 September 1908. In total, there were 14 brothers. He studied at the Colegio Guadalupe in Buenos Aires and then in Rome, where he was ordained a priest on 30 October 1932.

He began his pastoral work in the province of Santa Fé. In March 1934, he was appointed parochial vicar of San José de Posadas parish. It was the year of the beatification of the Jesuit missionaries Roque González de Santa Cruz, Alonso Rodríguez, and Juan del Castillo. This fact, and reading the lives of the blessed, inspired him to propose changing the name of the San Miguel School to that of Roque González in 1937 when he was appointed director of that educational institution.

He later acted as rector of the Corrientes Seminary and finally parish priest of the Basilica Espíritu Santo of Palermo (Buenos Aires). He responded, moreover, to a solid religious training supported by his studies in Rome, which granted him the rank of doctor, revealing his knowledge of the Gospel as a sacred place of prayer and inspiration.





**Left:** Jorge with his parents, Juan Kemerer (on the right), Ana Jacob (on the left). Behind one of the aunts

**Right:** Msgr. Kemerer with John XXIII at the beginning of the Second Vatican Council (1962)

Fr. Jorge Kemerer, SVD, was chosen as the first bishop of the new diocese of Posadas in 1957, encompassing the entire province of Misiones.

## Compassionate Shepherd

He epitomized the diligent shepherd, traversing every corner of his community, determined not to overlook anyone. His advocacy extended particularly to marginalized groups, notably the blind and indigenous populations. Amidst the intricacies of the environment – bordering regions, communication challenges, and a rich tapestry of cultures spanning German, Polish, Ukrainian, and more, alongside diverse religions, and sects – he remained steadfast in addressing the needs of all.

Monsignor's commitment was unwavering; he lent an attentive ear to each one, irrespective of background or circumstance. His altruism knew no bounds, devoid of expectation for acknowledgment or praise. He operated with humility, focused solely on fulfilling his duty to his community and its diverse constituents. In his relentless pursuit of inclusivity and service, Monsignor embraced the multifaceted complexities of his environment, embodying the essence of a compassionate and dedicated shepherd whose actions spoke louder than words.

## Legacy and Advocacy

His concern for others is evident in the difficult times that our country has experienced. His efforts in favor of the freedom of political prisoners in times of evil saved many lives. In the narrative chronicling Bp. Jorge Kemerer's life, a collection of lesser-known episodes is unveiled, previously unrecorded until now. Collaborating with Monsignor Jorge's longtime companion, Mr. Carlos Alberto Fangano, who shared 39 years in his pastoral journey, sheds light on these moments.

In his second open letter to Msgr. Kemerer in 1998, Mr. Carlos recounts a poignant incident during the 1976 Military Dictatorship involving a close aide of Bp. Kemerer, Mr. Hugo Orlando Mathot. He recounts details relayed by Professor María Teresa Murciego. He describes Bp. Kemerer's persistence in visiting the prison despite obstacles, ultimately seeing Mr. Mathot in a harrowing state, bearing the scars of torture. Bishop's compassionate embrace symbolized his unwavering support for those oppressed during the dictatorship. Such acts exemplify Bp. Kemerer's character during the dictatorship, when many suffered or vanished, while courageous individuals like Bp. Jorge Kemerer risked their lives to safeguard others.

Education held paramount importance for Bp. Kemerer. He dedicated himself to nurturing the youth, emphasizing diligence and the value of labor. Additionally, he exhibited profound concern for indigenous communi-





ties under his care, securing resources to establish two Mbyá Guaraní villages, and respecting their traditions while offering vital support and education.

Bp. Jorge Kemerer passed away on 26 June 1998, at the age of 89. Mr. Fangano suggests planting a fistula tree, Bp. Kemerer's favored tree, in each school in his honor.

It is a poignant way of honoring Bp. Kemerer's legacy, evoking Francisco Luis Bernárdez's Sonnet: "What the tree has in flower/ lives from what it has buried." It symbolizes the enduring life and impact of Bp. Jorge Kemerer's work, resonating beyond his physical presence.

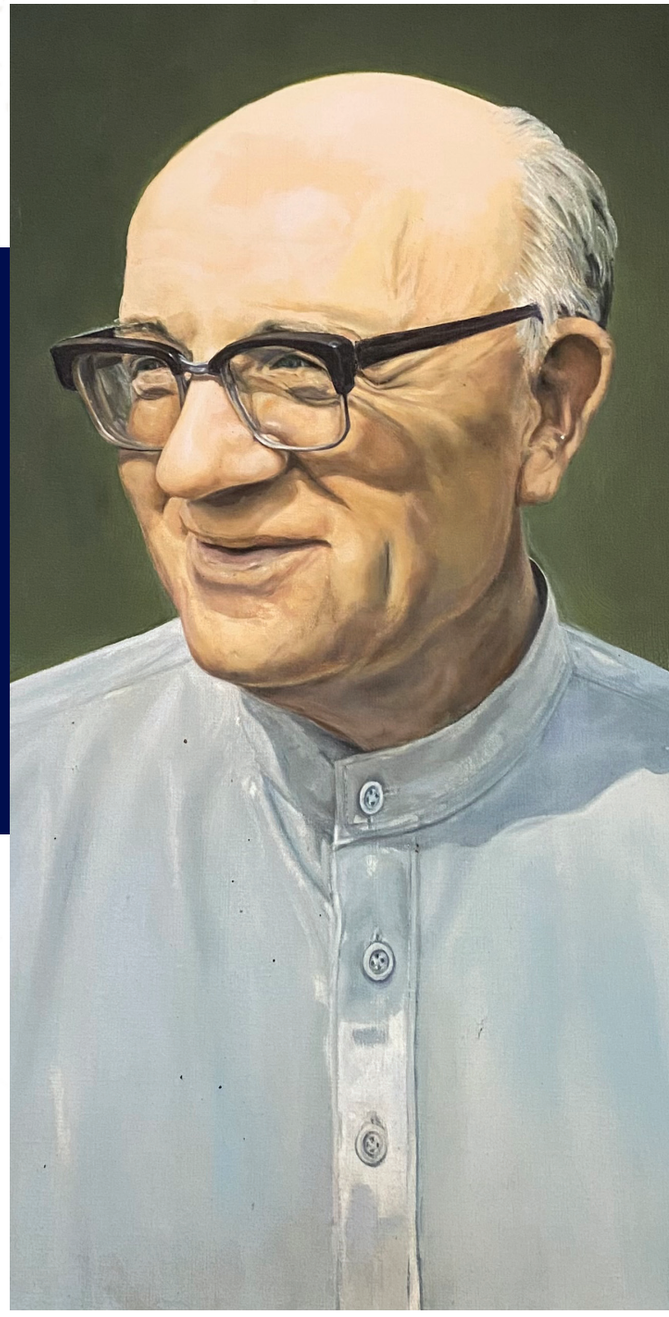
**Left:** Mass celebrated by Msgr. Kemerer at Camp Loreto, June 1988

**Right:** During the visits to the villages of his diocese of Posadas

**Wiesław Wiśniewski, SVD (Argentina)**
***Pastoral activity, lectures on Social Sciences, civil servant of the Municipality in the School of Nursing, Pilar***



Fr. Engelbert Zeitler with Indian Bishop meeting India's president, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, 27 October 1966



# Fr. Engelbert Zeitler, SVD (1919-1999): Missionary with a Far-Sighted Wisdom and Pioneering Initiatives

Fr. Engelbert Zeitler certainly belonged to the great men of this era. He is more powerful in his death than in his life. His views and ideas survive him. His greatness was on par with his sharp, farsighted wisdom because Zeitler had a large, loving heart. His love and compassion for people experiencing poverty and the needy found outlets in every conceivable way of social action and community services. He left out no one - people without housing, the invalids, children, students, women, the old, not even the lepers - from the vast and ever-expanding field of his generous love.

Fr. Engelbert Zeitler was born in Beidl near Tirschenreut in Bavaria (Germany) on 4 October 1919. He was the second of six children of master shoemaker Ludwig Zeitler and Maria nee Scharnagl. At the age of 12, he joined the SVD mission school in Tirschenreut and then continued in Ingolstadt. He decided to become a missionary and joined the novitiate in St. Augustin. But in the same year, when the war broke out, he was drafted into the German army to serve for six years in France and since 1941 in Russia and was awarded the Iron Cross of First Class. At the end of the war, he fled from Russian internment to finish his novitiate and his studies for the priesthood in St. Augustin. His desire was to become a China missionary. After his ordination in 1950, he obtained



his doctor's degree in Rome (1953) and for one year taught moral theology at St. Augustin before being assigned to India.

## Founding Significant Institutions

Zeitler landed in India on 24 December 1954. From 1956 to 1958, he served society as a professor, prefect, and Rector of the Major Seminary, Pune. He was the first Reginal Superior of the South Indian Region. He was one of the organizers of the All-India Seminar on Church in India at Bangalore in 1969. The Seminar strongly suggested to the Catholic Bishops Conference of India (CBCI) to establish a center for promoting and training priestly and religious vocations. He took up this challenge and founded the National Vocation Service Centre (NVSC) in Pune in 1973. Later, this was handed over to the CBCI to administer this institute, which is very relevant and impactful today.

Again, taking note of the absence of a missiological institute in India, he founded another significant center called *Ishvani Kendra* in 1975. He was always sensitive to the signs of the times. Accordingly, he responded again by establishing an office to coordinate the activities of Secular Institutes, thus starting *Ishvani Communications* in Pune. Again, he began a Center called *Streevani* (Voice of Women) 1982 as a secular branch of *Ishvani Kendra* to promote women's empowerment in transforming society. Because of his vision and hard work, he rose to the level of the Secretary of Evangelization of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC).

## Farsighted Wisdom, and Sign of Contradiction

Because of the vision and magnitude of his pioneering contributions, sometimes he became a sign of contradiction, for his vision was far ahead of his contemporaries, and his contributions were far above those of several other leaders. It was this uniqueness that made Zeitler a controversial figure. As G.K. Chesterton has remarked, people who redeem the world are the ones who contradict most. Our Lord was a man of contradiction, and he redeemed the world.

Zeitler strode like a Colossus of peace and goodwill who tried to free his fellowmen and women from society's prejudices and maintain the community's harmony and dignity. Zeitler was a man who never dared to sleep on his path of life, for he aspired to march miles ahead and fulfill promises laid on him by God and His people.

Zeitler was a visionary and missionary. He was blessed with sterling qualities of mind and heart. He held high positions in the Church and fulfilled his responsibilities with credit. Zeitler was a progressive pathfinder who approached intellectual, religious, theological, liturgical, and administrative problems with marked openness. He lived far ahead of his times. He was a prophet who looked into the future with discerning eyes.

## Pioneering Initiatives

Vast and varied were the fields of his activities – charitable, theological, missiological and Church organizations. During his long and eventful tenure in various offices, he made tremendous progress at all levels and in different fields. He had a



logical mind and the gift of intuition. He saw future possibilities in a confused present, like a sculptor who sees a beautiful statue emerging from an amorphous block of marble. He was able to translate many of his dreams into reality.

Bishop Valerian D'Souza of Pune praised Fr. Zeitler's remarkable vision and diverse contributions, spanning missions, vocations, priestly training, religious conferences, secular institutes, and more. Zeitler's impactful initiatives in areas like mass media, dialogue, and ecumenism have left a lasting imprint on the Church in India.

## Universal Vision and Approach

Rather than remaining insulated, Zeitler sincerely wanted to become an integral part of history, and indeed, he succeeded in doing so. He considered himself a milestone laid by Jesus in the long history of the Church in India, which has much to tell the passersby. As pastor, Zeitler tried to include all in his ministry and to exclude no one from his love. This universal vision and approach made him very eminent within the Church and society at large.

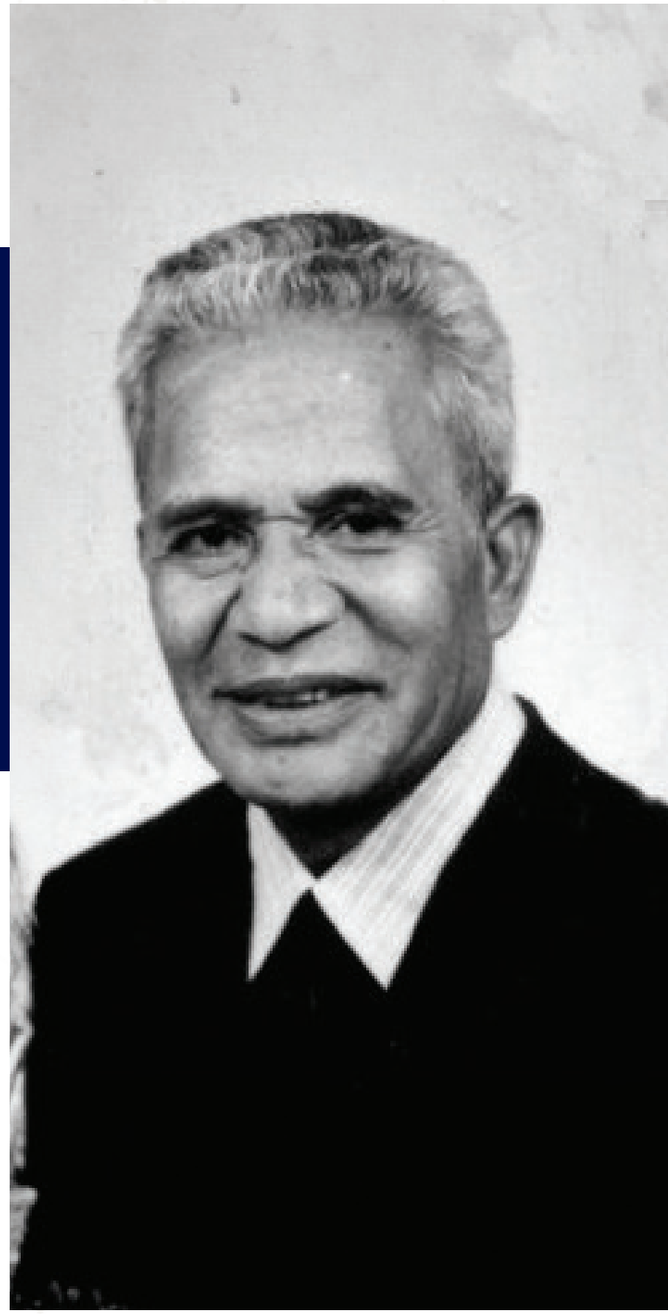
Zeitler was moved by a deep sense of gratitude to God for the gift of life, having survived through terrible war experiences and come out of it miraculously alive, while his companions on the right and left were killed. It was his deep conviction that God preserved him for a special mission. Without understanding his terrible war experiences for six years, one will fail to understand his complex personality. His life ended after a prolonged illness in Steyl on 22 July 1999.

Nevertheless, he remains as a beacon of inspiration, urging future generations to pursue meaningful causes with enthusiasm and dedication.

**Scaria Pannackal, SVD (India)**
***Director of the Institute of Indian Culture, Andheri, Mumbai***



# Fr. Herman Embuiru, SVD (1919-2001): A Courageous and Visionary Leader



Fr. Herman Embuiru, SVD, was a remarkable leader, whose journey unfolded across various domains, leaving an indelible mark on the institutions and communities he served. His legacy is a testament to visionary leadership, transformative initiatives, and collaborative efforts that shaped the landscape of education, religious authority, and missionary endeavors.

**Leadership Journey and Impact**

Embuiru was born on 15 December 1919 in Sika, Ende in Flores. In 1941, he joined the Society in Ledalero and was ordained priest on 25 January 1949. Embuiru's leadership trajectory commenced following his completion of doctoral studies in missiology at the Gregorian University Rome in 1952. Embracing roles of a diverse nature, he steered the *Swastyastu* Foundation (1952-1970), an SVD school foundation recognized for providing high-quality education accessible to non-Catholics in Bali, Indonesia. His tenure witnessed an era of inclusive education and community service, fostering goodwill and cooperation among diverse religious and cultural groups.

His multifaceted roles extended beyond education, encompassing military chaplaincy (1960-1975) and active participation in the Indonesian Parliament (1966-1971) as a representative of Bali's religious leaders.






Embuiru's commitment to service and advocacy reflected his deep-rooted values and dedication to fostering dialogue and understanding amidst societal challenges and political dynamics.

The insights gained from these experiences proved invaluable for his subsequent roles as the Rector of St. Paul Major Seminary, Ledalero (1978-1984) and the first President of Widya Mandira University, Kupang (1982-1992). His final leadership role was as the Director of Oemathonis Accountancy Academy, Kupang (1993-2001), an institution independent of the SVD.

## Transformative Leadership at Ledalero

Embuiru's stewardship as Rector of St. Paul Major Seminary Ledalero (1978-1984) heralded an era of significant transformation and growth. He embarked on initiatives aimed at modernizing the infrastructure, enhancing academic standards, and fostering a culture of intellectual inquiry and spiritual growth.

Ledalero needed a brave and forward-thinking leader, and Embuiru was the right choice. More SVD seminarians were joining, but the buildings stayed the same. So, Embuiru decided to build new structures. He built a two-story library, a big hall where Pope John Paul II met with religious leaders in 1989, a three-story building named Unit Mikael and Unit Gabriel, and a two-story building called Unit Fransiskus Xaverius. Without these new buildings, Ledalero could not teach and house many seminarians and brothers as it does now.

Embuiru also focused on getting more and better lecturers for the Seminary. In 1977, only six out of 19 lecturers were Indonesian. During his leadership (1978-1984) around 30 newly ordained priests were sent abroad for further studies.  Since then, his successors have kept the same policy by sending some newly assigned missionaries annually for further studies.

## Advocacy for Indonesianization and International Orientation

Embuiru's leadership was underscored by a commitment to Indonesianization and the promotion of international orientation in seminary education. Recognizing the need for local empowerment and global engagement, he prioritized initiatives aimed at nurturing indigenous talent and fostering cross-cultural exchange.

During his tenure, efforts were made to increase the number and caliber of Indonesian lecturers, ensuring representation and diversity within the academic faculty. Moreover, Embuiru advocated the expansion of international opportunities, encouraging seminarians to pursue Overseas Training Programs (OTP) and engage in missionary endeavors abroad.



Fr. Herman Embuiru, SVD, as the First President of Widya Mandira University, Kupang (1982-1992)

## Collaborative Support and Vision

The successful execution of projects under Fr. Embuiru's leadership owed much to the full support of Superior General, Fr. Heinrich Heekeren and his council with the first Indonesian Councilor, Fr. Anton Pain Ratu (1979-1982). Together, they tackled complex challenges and spearheaded initiatives that propelled Ledalero into a premier center for theological education and missionary formation. Fr. Heekeren's pivotal role, appointing Fr. Embuiru as Rector of Ledalero and advocating for the dispatch of Indonesian missionaries abroad, underscored their collaborative efforts. The alignment of Heekeren and Embuiru's visionary leadership ensured the timely execution of the Church's mission.

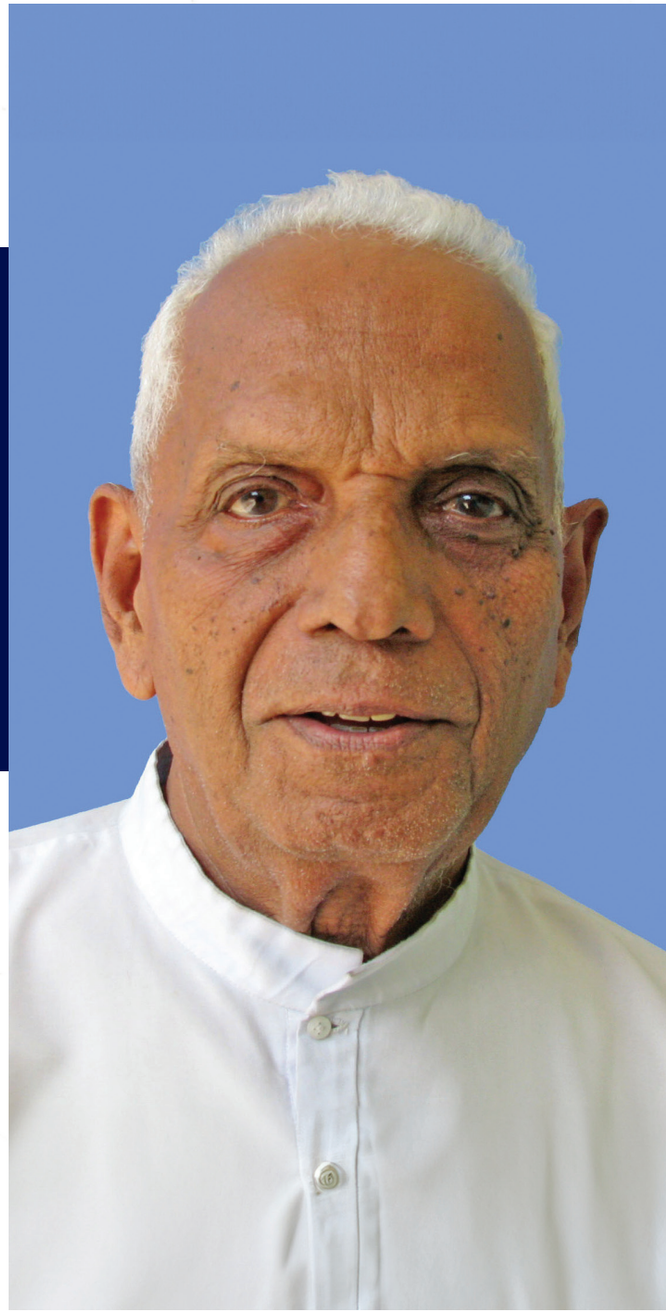
Their collaborative endeavors harnessed the transformative potential of visionary leadership and strategic partnership, exemplifying a shared commitment to advancing the Church's mission and fostering global solidarity. Embuiru's enduring legacy stands as a testament to the profound impact of collaborative leadership and innovative stewardship, shaping the destiny of the Church in Indonesia and beyond.

Herman Embuiru's leadership journey epitomizes the values of discipline, service, innovation, and dedication to excellence. His contributions inspire generations of leaders, guiding them to embrace their calling with passion and purpose. His legacy illuminates pathways for dialogue, inclusion, and transformative change in the pursuit of a more just and compassionate world.

**Lukas Jua, SVD (Indonesia)**
***Former Generalate Biblical Apostolate Coordinator,***
***now Lecturer at the Institute of Philosophy and Creative Technology, Ledalero***



# Fr. James Arackal, SVD (1927-2021): An Inspiring Missionary with Innovative Mission Contributions



Fr. James Arackal belongs to the first batch of ordination of the Indian confreres. His simplicity and disciplined life stand out as a great missionary. He was born on 26 July 1927, at Kappu, Kothamangalam Diocese, Kerala and he was ordained on 2 October 1959. He was appointed to the Sambalpur Mission, now the India East Province.

## Inspiring Pastor of the People

Throughout his life, Arackal worked as an inspiring pastor in ten parishes of three dioceses: Sambalpur, Rourkela, and Ranchi. He was a good shepherd who catered to the needs of the faithful. Along with faith formation, he emphasized education, social work, and skill development of the youth and school dropouts. The mission situations were tough, and they needed more modern facilities for communication and transportation.

He was a faithful confrere who promptly gave information about his life and mission activities to his superiors and asked permission to go on holidays, attend retreats, and go to different meetings by writing letters. He lived a well-disciplined life, was very simple in his lifestyle, had a humble approach, and was eager to learn new mission methods. Throughout his life, he loved and cared for his flock. He was always ready to attend to the sick calls from the parishioners, even at night. His entire life was filled with God's love and compassion, power, and spirit





**Left:** Fr. James Arackal with family members

**Right:** Fr. James Arackal attending an assembly

of Christ, which motivated him tirelessly to work for the spread of God's Kingdom in the interior parishes where he worked for 61 years.

## Innovative Mission Contributions

Fr. Arackal was a visionary whose mission methods in the 1960s and 1970s became defining characteristics of the Society later. His innovative contributions include fearlessness in his mission approach, where he embraced trial and error to learn and grow, seeing mistakes as opportunities for improvement. He emphasized the importance of humility and learning from errors, viewing them as steppingstones to victory.

He also pioneered biblical ministry, introducing a *Bible Path* booklet in the local language in 1979 to help spread Bible knowledge among villagers. He promoted ASIPA (Asian Integral Pastoral Approach) for Bible sharing and used creative methods like puppet shows to familiarize the faithful with biblical characters and events.

In his communication ministry, he leveraged mass media tools such as slide shows and Video Cassette Players (VCP) to teach catechism and showcase films on Jesus' life and other topics in rural areas. Additionally, he actively engaged in family and youth apostolates in the parishes, eventually focusing solely on the family apostolate after turning 75. During his visits, he met with families to pray, share Bible messages, offer encouragement, and distribute leaflets with Bible quotations and advice.

Arackal lived by the maxim "fill the years with life," encouraging others to embrace life gratefully and joyfully. He maintained an optimistic outlook, believing that challenges in life were opportunities for growth and blessings for others when approached with joy and faith.

## Legacy and Valuable Lessons

Arackal's life and missionary work offer valuable lessons applicable to today's missions. His dedication and determination enabled him to overcome hardships in his missionary journey, committed to serving the needy and poor despite challenges.

He creatively integrated empowerment programs like training village leaders and providing skill development opportunities such as carpentry and masonry training. Arackal's optimistic outlook enabled him to see the good in others and remain resilient in the face of negativity, fostering positive relationships in his mission.

Known for his self-discipline, he maintained regular prayer routines, faithfully adhered to religious vows, and prioritized his health with good food habits, contributing to his longevity and well-being. Arackal's life revolved






around kindness, love, and service, which he saw as acts of worship to God, emphasizing the importance of aligning thoughts, words, and deeds with the Divine.

Deeply spiritual, he sought to inspire others to integrate spirituality into their daily lives, exemplifying emotional balance and consistency between beliefs and actions, setting a high standard for priests and missionaries in his service areas.

Arackal dedicated his entire life to the service of God within the Society of the Divine Word, embodying the highest ideals of the priesthood. Revered among his peers, Fr. Mathew Mattappallil, SVD, acknowledges him as one of the finest Indian SVDs, a beacon of inspiration for all within the Society. Arackal's unwavering commitment to God was evident in his heartfelt prayer:

> Oh! God, loving Father, I offer my total life to your services. I will remember all my life what you are doing to keep me alive… I will never forget your presence in my life. My total life will be used to adore and praise you. God, my Father, help me in my weakness. Be with me always and help me grow holier daily.

Today, Fr. Arackal's legacy continues to inspire all who encounter it as a reminder of the power of selfless service and devotion. His exemplary life and relentless commitment to the INE province are a testament to the enduring impact of faith and service within the Society of the Divine Word.

**Left:** . Fr. James Arackal with his classmates

**Right:** Fr. James Arackal, Jubilee mass

**Luvis Ronald Pereira, SVD (India)**
***Former Provincial Superior, now Mission Secretary***



Good Habits

Obedience

Cleanliness

Respectfulness

Kindness

Patience

Cleverness

PRAYER TO TH

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# Br. James (Maurice) Djadou (1931-2016): The First African SVD Brother - Inspiring Future Generations



Br. James (Maurice) Djadou was born on 10 June 1930, in Amoutiévé, Lomé, Togo. He attended St. Augustin Parish School and received baptism and Holy Communion there. From 1951 to 1953, he studied at St. Thomas Aquinas Secondary School in Accra. Despite challenges, Maurice pursued his vocation with the Divine Word Missionaries, inspired by the legacy of Saint Arnold Janssen. His persistence eventually led him to a dramatic appeal to Fr. Alois Grosse Kappenberg, SVD, the Superior General, who accepted him into the SVD.

Maurice entered the seminary in the USA on 8 September 1954. He professed his first vows in 1956 and returned to Ghana, becoming the first African SVD Brother. His presence aimed to inspire others to embrace religious life. In 1964, he professed perpetual vows in Nsawam, Ghana, marking his lifelong commitment to the SVD mission.

## Service and Leadership

Maurice's missionary journey led him to various roles of leadership and service. He served as Principal of the Catechetical Institute in Tamale for five years and managed Catholic schools in Yendi. He attended renewal programs in Italy and hosted pilgrims during the 1975 Holy Year in Rome. From 1979 to 1988, he managed the SVD Guest House in Accra.





In 1988, Maurice offered to serve in Togo but was assigned to the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference. He worked as a Finance Officer until 2000 when he completed a Cultural Orientation Workshop in the USA. He returned to Ghana with a renewed focus on caring for older people, finding fulfillment in his vocation.

## Legacy and Recognition

Maurice's dedication to the mission left a profound impact. Despite health challenges, he continued his service until his passing on 29 June 2016. His funeral drew Bishops, superiors, priests, religious, and lay faithful, reflecting the recognition of his sacrificial life. Bishop Boi-Nai described Maurice as strict and generous, emphasizing his commitment to community life and care for others.

## Lessons Learned and Virtues Exemplified

Maurice Djadou's life story transcends mere biography; it encapsulates a profound narrative of resilience, service, and adaptability – a testament to the human spirit's capacity to endure and thrive amidst challenges.

Maurice's journey is illuminated by the unwavering flame of perseverance. In the face of numerous obstacles and setbacks, he remained steadfast in his pursuit of his vocation and mission with the Divine Word Missionaries. His resolute determination serves as a guiding light for individuals navigating their own paths amidst adversity, inspiring them to persevere despite the odds.

At the heart of Maurice's life lies a profound commitment to service and sacrifice. Throughout his tenure, he selflessly dedicated himself to the betterment of his community and the advancement of the mission. His actions emanated from a deep sense of duty and a steadfast commitment to the greater good, embodying the essence of servant leadership.

## Adaptability: Embracing Change with Race

Maurice's journey is marked by an extraordinary adaptability – an ability to embrace change with grace and resilience. He demonstrated a remarkable willingness to assume diverse roles and relocate to different locations in service of the mission. This adaptability not only showcased his versatility but also underscored his profound understanding of the dynamic nature of missionary work in an ever-evolving world.

In his varied experiences, Maurice embraced diversity as a cornerstone of his mission. He recognized the richness inherent in cultural and geographic differences, fostering unity amidst diversity. His inclusive approach to mission work resonated with the universal values of compassion, understanding, and mutual respect, transcending boundaries and forging meaningful connections with communities far and wide.

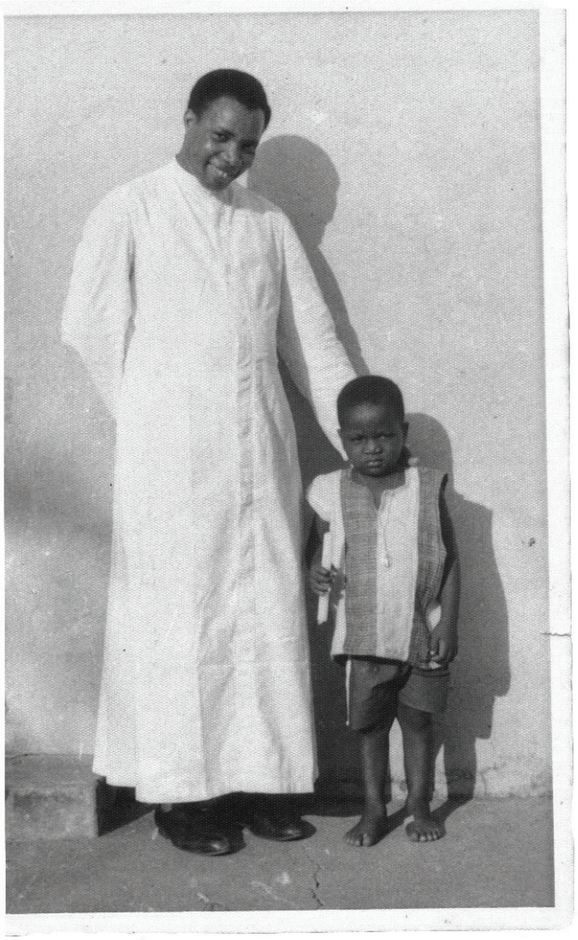
## Inspiring Future Generations

Maurice Djadou's life story serves as a beacon of inspiration for present and future generations of missionaries. His unwavering perseverance, selfless dedication, adaptability, and inclusive spirit embody the core principles of missionary service. As his legacy continues to resonate, it ignites a flame of hope and inspiration in the hearts of all those called to serve humanity and spread the message of love and compassion to the world.

Perhaps most notably, Maurice's dedication to caring for older people exemplifies the transformative power of compassion and empathy. His tireless efforts to ensure the well-being of the marginalized underscore the profound impact of compassion in fostering a more inclusive and caring community.

Maurice Djadou's life is a testament to the enduring virtues of perseverance, service, adaptability, and compassion. His legacy continues to inspire and illuminate the path for all who seek to follow in his footsteps, embodying the timeless principles of selflessness and devotion to the service of others.

**Seraphin Kpakpayi, SVD (Rome)**
***Praeses Centro Ad Gentes, Nemi***



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# Fr. Franz-Josef Eilers, SVD (1932-2021): Enriching the Academic Landscape of Communication and Theology

Fr. Franz-Josef Eilers, born on May 11, 1932, in Emsdetten, Germany, dedicated his life to bridging the gap between religion and social communication. As a member of the Society of the Divine Word, he embarked on a journey that has left a lasting impact on missiology, communication, and theology.

## Academic Pursuits and Founding Initiatives

Entering the priesthood on 8 December 1959, Fr. Eilers zealously pursued his academic interests. He earned a licentiate in missiology and a doctorate in communication, focusing his research on communications among non-literate cultures in New Guinea. These early academic endeavors laid the groundwork for his future contributions to the Church and society.

In 1968, Eilers co-founded *Communicatio Socialis*, a quarterly journal emphasizing media ethics and Church communication. This initiative reflected his commitment to fostering dialogue and ethical reflection in media and communication. He later co-founded the Catholic Media Council (CAMECO) in Aachen, serving as its director from 1971 to



1985. Through these platforms, Eilers championed the responsible use of media for the greater good.

## Global Engagement and Leadership

Eilers' influence extended beyond academic circles. He was actively involved with the World Council of Churches in Geneva and served as a consultor of the Pontifical Council for Social Communication at the Vatican. His global engagements underscored his dedication to fostering understanding and collaboration among diverse religious and cultural communities.

In 1985, Eilers began a new chapter of service in the Philippines. Alongside his priestly ministry, he shared his knowledge and expertise as a teacher of missiology and social communication. His commitment to education and mentorship extended to institutions such as the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome and the Pontifical Salesian University. Eilers' tireless efforts in teaching and scholarship inspired countless students and scholars to pursue excellence in their respective fields.

## Contributions to the Asian Church and Beyond

Eilers' impact on the Asian Church was profound. In 1995, he assumed the role of Executive Secretary of the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences' Office of Social Communication, a position he held until 2010. He facilitated dialogue and collaboration among Bishops and communication professionals during his tenure, empowering the Church to engage with contemporary challenges effectively.

One of Eilers' enduring legacies is the Master of Arts in Theology major in Social Pastoral Communication program, which he founded at the Pontifical and Royal University of Santo Tomas in Manila in 2001. This pioneering program equipped students from across Asia with the knowledge and skills to engage critically with the intersection of theology and communication.

## Scholarly Contributions and Collaborative Spirit

Fr. Eilers' scholarly contributions enriched the academic landscape of communication and theology. His publications, including articles, books, and manuscripts, became essential resources for scholars and practitioners. Fr. Eilers shed light on the transformative power of dialogue and understanding by exploring the communicative dimensions of religion in diverse cultural contexts. The Research Center for Religion and Social Communication (ARC) in Bangkok, Thailand was founded by Fr. Eilers in 1999. ARC focused on the Asian context and brought together Religion and Social Communication scholars.

Throughout his life, Fr. Eilers remained committed to collaboration and dialogue. He collaborated with scholars and practitioners worldwide, fostering networks of solidarity and cooperation. His visionary leadership and unwavering commitment to the Church's mission inspired others to strive for excellence and innovation in communication and ministry.

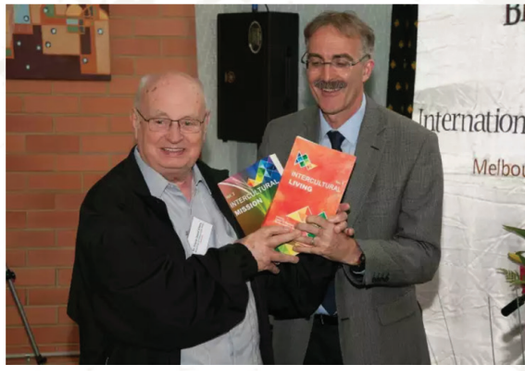


## Legacy and Remembrance

As Fr. Eilers' journey ended, his legacy resonated across continents. His contributions to communication and theology testify to his unwavering commitment to serving God and humanity. Though Fr. Eilers may have departed from this world, his spirit lives on in the lives of those he touched and the communities he served**.**

Anthony Le Duc shares, "Eilers invited me to continue participating in ARC, offering me the role of deputy director. I was also asked to serve as the assistant editor of the ARC scholarly journal Religion and Social Communication. Unbeknownst to me at the time, Fr. Eilers had been actively seeking an SVD to carry on the work of ARC as he approached retirement. This sudden change in my professional trajectory began a journey guided by Fr. Eilers' mentorship and wisdom." Along with academic achievements, Eilers was foresighted for continuity and thus promoted others to continue the thirst for communication, missiology and theology.



**Anthony Le Duc, SVD (Thailand)**
***Editor and Executive Director of the Asian Research Center (ARC)***
***for Religion and Social Communication, Bangkok***



# Fr. Carlos Pape, SVD (1933-2020): A Promoter of the Missions



## Formation, Mission and Communication Apostolate

Carlos Pape was born on 9 July 1933 into a large, simple family in Osorno, Chile. At eleven, he joined the SVD minor seminary, and entered the novitiate in 1949, taking his first vows in 1951. He was sent to study theology in Germany in 1954, where he was ordained priest in 1958. He was then sent to the Gregorian University in Rome, where he obtained a doctorate in missiology, with a study of the Protestant missionary movement.

From 1962, he worked in Chile in mission promotion through communication, by which he promoted the Bible and the ideas of Justice and Peace. Today one can say that we see them as part of our "four characteristic dimensions." The most notable in those first 15 years back in Chile was his work in *Ediciones Mundo*, together with the Claretian missionaries, who published many books and the monthly magazine *Mundo* on the political, social, and religious reality of the country and the world. The magazine was sold on newsstands, and thousands of copies were sold. The magazine ceased to function with the military coup of 1973.

He was a great communicator and a born journalist with an evident and entertaining writing style. He was also a great promoter of the word of God, particularly the Latin American Bible, a plain language edition



with notes connecting faith and life. This edition of the Bible started in Chile at the initiative of the French priest Bernard Hurault, his great friend.

He was also an active member of the ecumenical movement, making many friends in the Protestant churches and working together to unite Christians of different denominations. In 1977, he took over as novice master. He was very strict but very fair and close to the young people. Two of his four novices are Bishops, and another was dean of the Faculty of Theology at St. Andrew's University in Scotland.

## Leadership Roles, Missions and Contributions

He was elected provincial superior, a post he held until 1982. As provincial superior, he was very close to those in formation. He transmitted to the seminarians his enthusiasm for the mission. The Chilean Church received many foreign missionaries but had few outside its borders. Fr. Pape firmly established that our SVD seminary was to prepare missionaries to work outside our borders, which was a novelty in Chile. When he was transferred to Rome, the confreres in formation longed for him because they felt he embodied what an SVD should be.

In 1983, he became the General Secretary for Missions, and from 1992, he was a member of the general council. He traveled to many countries, and his reports describing the Society and Church of the countries he visited were remarkable. He played a vital role in the union of the Congregation of the Brothers of St. Joseph with the SVD in Vietnam. He was essential to the Society's entry into Cuba with missionary commitments.

He guided visitors to Rome through his monuments, skillfully narrating the history behind each one engagingly and insightfully. While possessing extensive knowledge, he humbly avoided flaunting his historical expertise, preferring to highlight the significance of the message rather than drawing attention to himself. Concurrently, he remained keenly observant of the evolving dynamics within the Church and the broader world.

## Return to Chile and Later Years

Returning to Chile in 2001, he worked in schools and the formation of future religious, in addition to research on the Society. In these years, he dedicated himself to writing an excellent book on the History of the SVD in Chile, which celebrated 100 years of presence in the country in the year 2000.

He spent time with schools and young religious people. One of his colleagues who lived with him in a community with many arguments says Pape brought calmness. Besides his intelligence and profound knowledge, what stood out about him was his strong affection for the Society. He admired the Founder and defended Bishop Anzer. He was also open to understand-

ing the signs of the times. He was very close to his large family. His nieces remember him fondly, saying he was like a father to them. He spent his last years in the central house of the Chilean province.

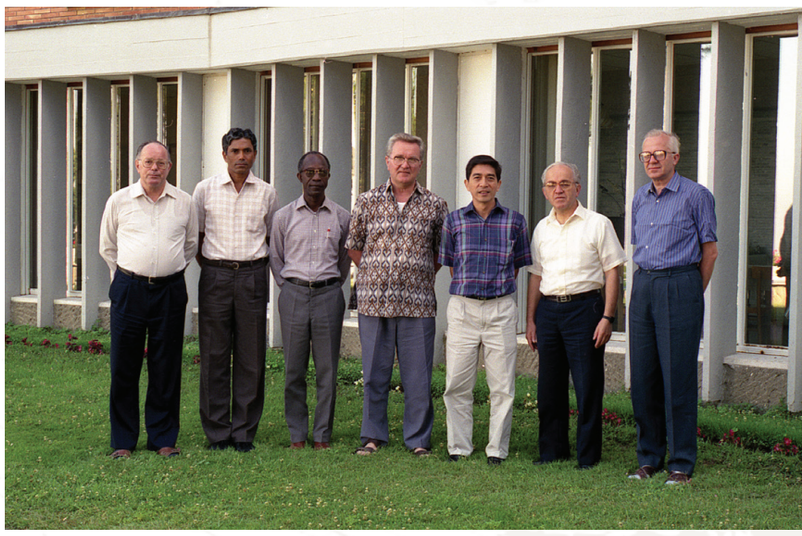
## Legacy and Contributions

In conclusion, Pape exemplified the principles of Saint Arnold Janssen by urging local Churches to embrace the Church's broader mission and by employing media, such as newspapers, to advance missionary endeavors. His life was marked by a profound commitment to the Society, a deep love for his family, and a keen awareness of the changing times within the Church and the world.

Father Carlos Pape left a lasting impact on those he encountered through his moderation, intelligence, and dedication, inspiring others to carry forward an authentic missionary zeal and service to humanity.

**Sergio Edwards, SVD (Chile)**
***Former Lecturer of Ethics at Fu Jen University, now Rector of Liceo Alemán (CVD), Santiago***







**Above**: Fr. Pape at the 50 years of Ledalero

**Center:** New General Council elected at the 14th General Chapter in Nemi, 1994. From left: Br. von Holzen; Fr. Cornelio; Fr. Mudiso; Fr. General Barlage; Fr. Pernia, Fr. Pape and Fr. Keler

**Below:** Fr. Carlos Pape (in the centre) during his official visit in district of Pangalana with the Christians in Ambohitsara, Madagascar, 1 October 1995


Fly
Emirates

# Fr. Juanito Banogbanog, SVD (1964-2016): A Humble Instrument of God's Love




Juanito Taypin Banogbanog was born in Busay, Moalboal, Cebu, Philippines, on 2 August 1964. His parents, Tiburcio Banogbanog and Senen Taypin raised him in a humble and simple family. He studied philosophy at Christ the King Seminary in Quezon City and graduated with a distinction of *Magna Cum Laude* in 1992.

The same year, he entered the novitiate in Calapan, Oriental Mindoro, and professed his first vows on 6 June 1993. After his first year of theology at the Divine Word Seminary in Tagaytay, he continued his studies at St. Augustine Seminary in Germany in 1994. He took his final vows in 1998. On 18 April 1999, he received his priestly ordination and was sent to Mexico as his first mission assignment.

## Juanito's Inspirational Presence

On 17 July 2001, he was assigned to the District of Cuba and worked in the Parish of Mayarí. He was elected District Superior in 2005. In 2011, he was transferred to the Parish of Yara and was elected as a delegate to the general chapter in the same year. Then, he was part of the Bible Center team in 2013. He also collaborated in the Parish of St. Lucia in Havana and worked in vocation ministry. In December 2015, he was diagnosed with liver cirrhosis with advanced first-degree portal hypertension. He departed to the Father's house on 30 January 2016, at the age of 51.

Father Juanito was known as the *Guajiro natural* (a person who comes from a rural area). People called him this way not only because he al-









Fr. Juanito with his parishoners, truly a pastor for his people

ways wore his peasant hat but also because of his simplicity, humility, and closeness to the people. He always left his mark wherever he went with his smile, unique applause, and close greetings.

## A Heartfelt Mission to Cuba

From the first day he arrived in Cuba, he knew how to respect and enter the life of the Cuban people. The complicated reality of life in Cuba was not a barrier for Fr. Juanito to devote himself entirely to the mission in this country. Fr. Juanito wrote in one of his letters: "What I carry inside me is my desire to give part of my missionary life in Cuba (but he served here till his death). I know that my efforts and apostolic zeal will not change things. However, I wish to be a humble instrument of God's love."

He was a missionary who transmitted God's love to others, so he won the sympathy of many, especially the poorest. Many appreciated his friendship and concern for the marginalized of society: drunkards, people with mental problems, the homeless, the lonely elderly, the prisoners, and their families, the sick, and the disabled. He visited, talked, and laughed with them, making them feel valued and appreciated. So much so that in his wake, many of these people have gone to show their respect and condolences, expressing the pain of losing their dear Padre Juanito.

## A Good Animator and a Down-to-earth Leader

Being a lively, simple, humble, sincere, and prayerful man, Juanito was valued by many, by both his confreres in the Society and the parishioners, and the people in general, believers and non-believers. He has been a good coordinator and animator for his SVD confreres and his way of encouraging, supporting, and guiding others. In all the parishes where he has been, he enthusiastically accompanied all age groups: adults, children, adolescents, young people, and senior citizens.

The Christian communities radiated life and joy with his way of calling and encouraging people. His prayer life was an inspiration to all his confreres and the faithful. Despite much pastoral work and time spent with the

people, Fr. Juanito always found time to be alone with the Lord. He liked to write down his little prayers and spiritual reflections in the pages of his bible and breviary. In one of these notes was a prayer that shows a man dedicating his life to the mission and trusting in God's love.

One prayer reads:

> Lord, you have looked kindly upon me from the generations of my people. Your precious gaze has come to me through my parents, your love. Amid my poverty, you have looked upon me with generosity; you are the richness and the pure truth. You call me to be a missionary of the Divine Word, and without looking at my weaknesses, you show me the Kingdom. Here I am, Lord, fill me with your grace to be an instrument of Mother Church.

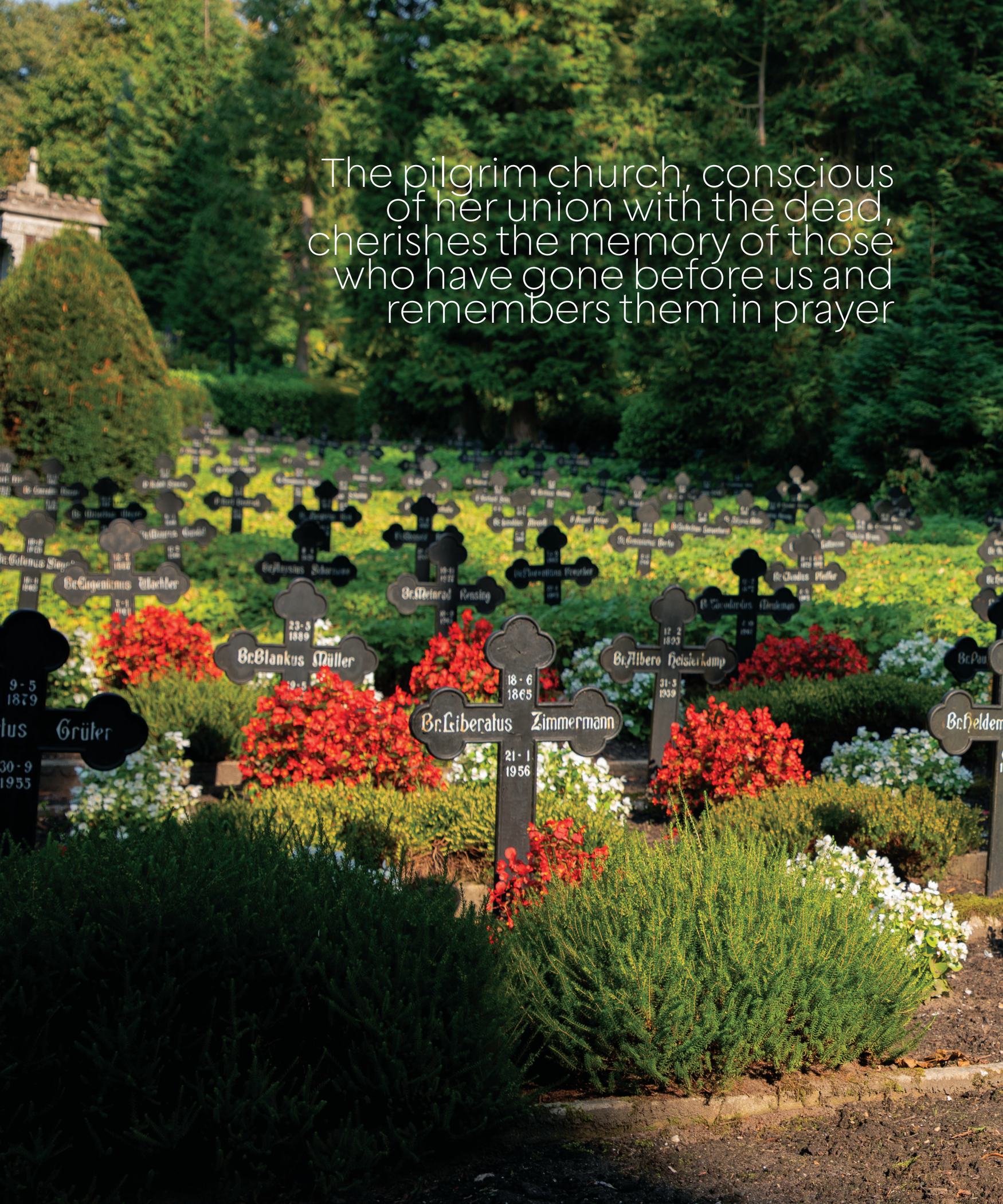
## A Holy Individual Who Brought Immense Joy

Juanito's life was beautiful because he dedicated it entirely to the Lord, being a missionary in a faraway country but close to his heart. With his departure, the District of Cuba lost a great missionary who trusted in the love of God and dedicated his life to the people.

Father Juanito serves as an exemplary figure, particularly for missionaries navigating challenging environments. His life demonstrates that through simple acts of love and closeness to the people, we can manifest the presence of God.

Reflecting on Fr. Juanito's impact, Bishop Juan de Dios Garcia, Bishop of Pinar del Río, remarked, "The Divine Word Missionaries should be thankful, for Juanito is a divine blessing to the Congregation. He was a holy individual who brought us immense joy. With Juanito's passing, the glory of God once again prevails, as a virtuous soul ascends to heaven."

**Francis Ylagan, SVD (Mexico)**
***District Superior of Cuba***




The pilgrim church, conscious of her union with the dead, cherishes the memory of those who have gone before us and remembers them in prayer


In this way
we remember
our dead with
Gratitude
Cons. 416
Br. Johannes Barking
Br. Reginald Geyer
Br. Sigismund Weiners
Br. Hieronymus Hellenbrock
11-6
1872
4-6
1954






Photo: Maciek Malicki, SVD

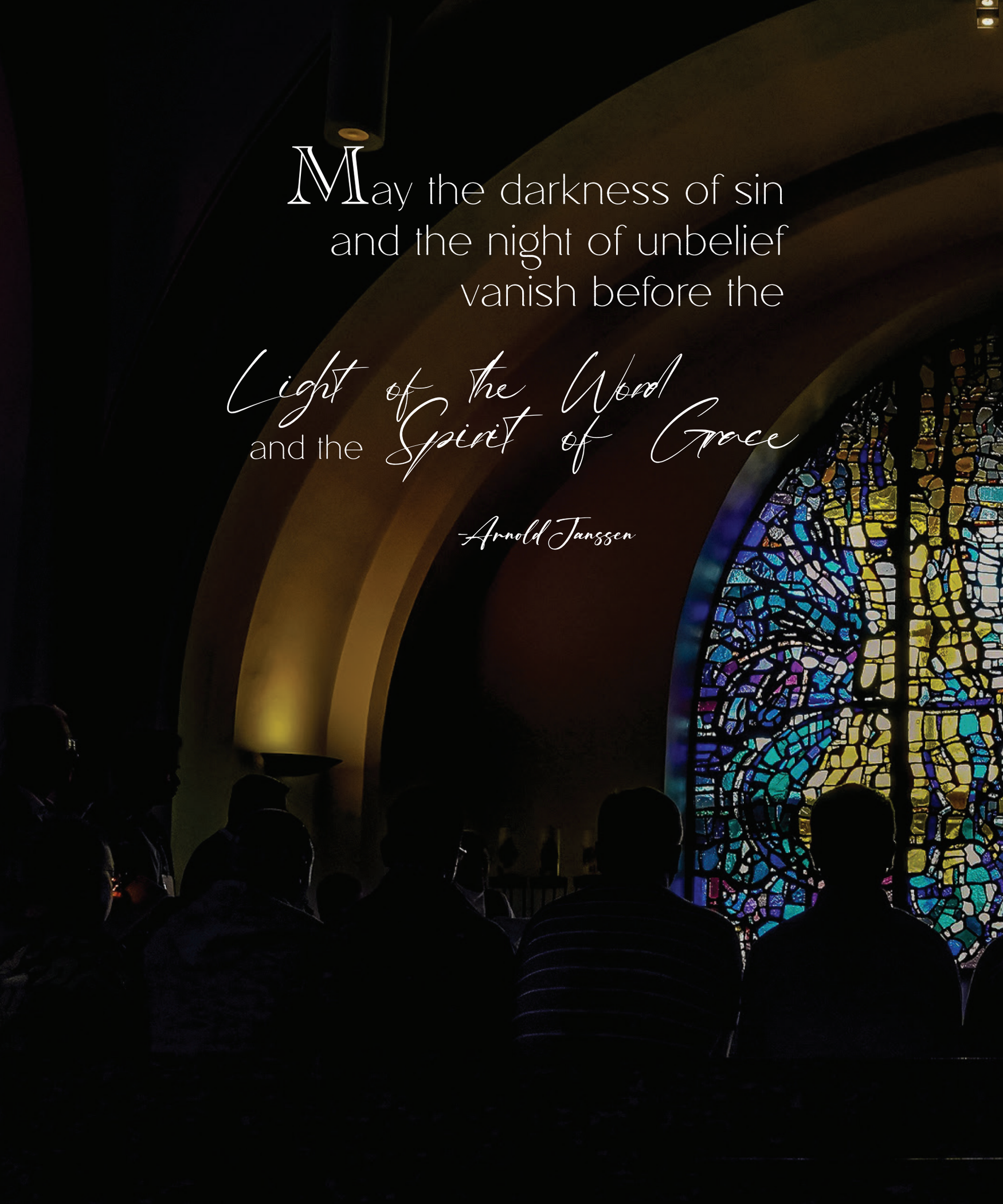

May the darkness of sin
and the night of unbelief
vanish before the
Light of the Word
and the Spirit of Grace
-Arnold Janssen



Photo: Maciek Malicki, SVD



#fromeverywhereforeveryone


150
Witnessing to the Light
From Everywhere For Everyone