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**THE BASIS FOR PROPHETIC DIALOGUE—
REMEMBERING THE SVD GENERAL CHAPTER 2000**

*The SVD General Chapter in the year 2000 formulated the Congregation's mission perspective under the concept of "prophetic dialogue." This article, based on the author's participation in the General Chapter, argues that the really important contribution of that General Chapter should be seen in its orientation towards the *missio Dei*, as the basis and foundation of "prophetic dialogue." The process of communitarian spiritual discernment is understood as essential to discover where God's Spirit is at work in world and society and to permit entering in the dynamic of *missio Dei* and in its movement engaging in prophetic dialogue.*

"Top-level planning and organization of our missionary activity are the responsibility of the general chapter and generalate. They set priorities and establish guidelines, taking into consideration the necessity and urgency of new undertakings on the one hand and the actual and foreseeable resources of the Society on the other" (Co 116).¹ This is the definition and declaration of the purpose of a General Chapter which is "celebrated" normally every six years. In the Society of the Divine Word, the General Chapters since the 1960s were dedicated first to the reformulation and adaptation of the Constitutions to Vatican Council II perspectives. Some of these General Chapters gave important inputs for the practice of the SVD missionary engagement, others did not manage quite that well. The General Chapter of 2000 was, in my view, a major event and probably the last one to contribute an important new perspective. In this article I offer some of my personal recollections of that General Chapter which I saw from an Assistant Moderator's perspective. Generally, this General Chapter is understood to have proposed mission as "prophetic dialogue," based on what I consider the hidden and forgotten pearl of *missio Dei*, as I shall explain.

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¹ Divine Word Missionaries, *The Constitutions of the Society of the Divine Word*, Rome: SVD-Publications 2000.

1. *Mission Perspectives of the General Chapters since 1982*

SVD historian at the Generalate in Rome Andrzej Miotk SVD lists the General Chapter (GC) 1982 as the last of the “renewal chapters” between 1967, where the actualised SVD Constitutions were adopted, and 1982, which took the “preferential solidarity with the poor” as its main topic.² The GC adopted “as priorities until the next Chapter: 1) Justice & Peace, 2) Poverty, 3) Brothers, 4) Vocation Ministry and 5) Evangelization. [...] The chapter asked for a more determined commitment to the promotion of justice and peace in solidarity with the poor without, however, dividing our communities. Capitulars produced a document on “The Promotion of Justice and Peace.”³

The following GC in 1988 discussed mission, spirituality and formation under the perspective of “passing over”: new situations, ethnic minorities, the poor and marginalized required the SVD to adopt a new spiritual and missionary model and attitude, to “pass over” the limits and borders of traditional approaches. It demanded that the SVD go beyond the “frontiers.” “Passing over” meant that

regardless of our fidelity to the Founder’s heritage and our tradition, we need the courage to open ourselves to new experiences of faith, to read the signs of the times and to find new ways of living out our SVD spirituality. [...] The *Trinity—Community, the Word—Communication, the Holy Spirit* who leads us to the *frontiers of our faith* and to the *margins of society*. [...] Our spirituality of *passing over* implies two essential attitudes: first, to follow the Lord means to be caught up with his vision for this world, which is the Kingdom of God. The missionary needs to share the Good News with others. Second, this attitude in turn demands the capacity to empty oneself.⁴

The perspective and the concept were fairly well accepted in content, but the expression was met with some resistance, particularly due to the difficulties of translating it into other languages.⁵ Both dia-

² Andrzej Miotk SVD, *The General Chapters of the Society of the Divine Word (1884–2012). The Historical Journey in the Footsteps of the Founder: The Response to the Challenges of the Times* (Studia Instituti Missiologici SVD 105), Siegburg: Franz Schmitt Verlag 2016.

³ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁵ See José Antunes da Silva, *Prophetic Dialogue. Identity and Mission of the Divine Word Missionaries*. Foreword by Stephen Bevans (Studia Instituti Missiologici SVD 119), Siegburg: Franz Schmitt Verlag 2021, 42f. In German, for example, “Hinübergehen” relates also to dying, death.

logue and the Trinity and its dynamic as future central perspectives for mission are already present in this proposal of “passing over.”

In 1994, the GC approached “Our mission at the service of communion.” I participated in this GC as a translator and thus got a somehow limited chance to observe the chapter developments. The capitulars did not want to produce a new document as an orientation for mission,⁶ but to discuss how in the given contexts of plurality in our world the SVD could contribute to communion and to ask “how to operate the Society as a *community*.”⁷ At the Chapter, there was an elementary confusion of *communion* and *community*. The capitulars did not want to discuss terms and question in their exchange what other capitulars expressed, they rather sought a fraternal sharing in peace and harmony. In my view, this attitude had to do with the meeting of all SVD provincials in 1992 in Brazil⁸ where they wanted to exchange on the new contexts: among them Pope John Paul II’s encyclical *Redemptoris missio* (1990), the 500 years since 1492 in America and most of all, the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989) and the new situations not only for European societies. These changes had already produced an important novelty in the European SVD with the “Roscommon Consensus” which demanded that the SVD understand also Europe as a missionary context and that missionaries from other continents be assigned to European provinces⁹ for new missionary engagements (and not to fill gaps).¹⁰ At

⁶ In some provinces there were opinions against ever new concepts, as SVDs considered “mission” elementary as a hands-on task and the General Chapters with the proposals of frontiers, passing over, etc. were basically considered a nuisance.

⁷ Miotk, *The General Chapters*, 134; my emphasis.

⁸ See da Silva, *Prophetic Dialogue*, 45-48.

⁹ The Congregation is constituted of administrative units which are called “province,” “region” and “mission,” with different levels of canonical etc. (in)dependence. I won’t distinguish here the particularities but refer with “province” to the local units of the Congregation. There are 13 units in EUROPE, 16 in PANAM (the Americas), 20 in ASPAC (Asia and Pacific), and 12 in AFRAM (Africa and Madagascar). In 2022, there are 5977 members of the Congregation (980 in EUROPA, 1149 in PANAM, 3191 in ASPAC and 657 in AFRAM), according to the *Catalogus SVD 2022*.

¹⁰ The provincials of the European provinces met at Roscommon, a town in central Ireland, in October 1990 and decided, among other things, that missionaries from outside of Europe should be invited to launch new missionary enterprises, beyond the established tasks of the provinces. There is a considerable amount of reflection on this development: Steyler Missionswissenschaftliches Institut, *Today’s Europe and the SVD. Reflections on Mission*, Sankt Augustin: Steyler Missionswissenschaftliches Institut 2007; Martin Ueffing, SVD (ed.), *Non-European Missionaries in Europe*, (Steyler Missionswissenschaftliches Institut Roscommon25), Sankt Augustin: Steyler Missionswissenschaftliches Institut 2011; Martin Ueffing, SVD

the meeting in Brazil, sharing and exchange were prominent and the option was for improvement in community life in order to contribute to communion.¹¹ However, at the GC, contrary to their earlier decision not to produce a document, at the end the capitulars felt a need to go home with something concrete at hand and thus, hastily put together a statement, which was not entirely satisfactory. As far as I can see, a more appropriate articulation of the relationship between *communion* as an ecclesial dimension and characteristic, and the *community life* of SVDs was formulated by the Generalate in a circular letter several months after the GC.¹²

These three GCs emphasised mission in engagements towards justice and peace, the option for the poor, in “passing over” traditional limits and views in a deeper faithfulness to God active in the world, and grounded mission in a Trinitarian spirituality.

2. Towards the General Chapter of 2000

The Mission Secretary at the Generalate, Tom Ascherman SVD,¹³ tried to foster academic reflection and research on mission through the establishment of a “Mission Research Network.” This network was an expansion of the collaboration and exchange that had been established among the universities in different SVD provinces in Asia. The idea was to invite all SVDs who had done further studies and acquired academic titles (licentiate, doctorate and the like) to engage in reflecting on mission and its challenges. In the background there was the experience that many of those who had completed further studies did not work in their fields but had taken up administrative and other tasks which did not allow them to develop in their academic engagements. This extended Mission Research Network intended to trace those

(ed.), *Interculturality* (Steyler Missionswissenschaftliches Institut Roscommon25), Sankt Augustin: Steyler Missionswissenschaftliches Institut 2013; Martin Üffing, SVD, 25 Years Roscommon: *Verbum SVD* 56 (4.2015) 439-445. – For the fascinating gap in understanding mission as a territorial concept referring to countries outside of Europe and the application of mission as “essential” to the church everywhere—as formulated by Vatican II already 25 years earlier—, see Christian Tauchner SVD, Europe, terre de mission?: *Spiritus* 221 (Dec. 2015) 489-495 (Spanish: Europa, ¿tierra de misión?: *Spiritus* 56.4 [#221, 2015] 126-133).

¹¹ See Miotk, *The General Chapters*, 131.

¹² SVD Generalate, *Toward a Fuller Communion*, Rome: Generalate SVD 1995, in: *Nuntius SVD* 14 (2.1995) 192-204.

¹³ From the USA. He was appointed Mission Secretary at the Generalate in October 1994 and held the office until 2006.

SVDs on “zonal” levels and to urge them to work in their respective fields of research.¹⁴

Due to engagements as the editor of the Spanish version of the missiological journal *Spiritus* since 1996¹⁵ and as the communication coordinator in PANAM, I was invited to coordinate the Mission Research Network for Latin America (a task with rather small results, I must admit). I think it was in this context that I was invited to collaborate in the second commission to prepare a draft working document for the GC 2000.¹⁶

2.1 Work on the Draft Document

This preparation had started in 1997 with the Superior General’s invitation to all provinces to suggest topics and central themes for the GC. The first round of responses was collated and summarised by a first commission in August 1998 and circulated under the title *Listening to the Spirit: Our Missionary Response Today*, together with a “guide for reflection.” The provinces were invited to study and discuss this document and submit their comments by March 2000. Practically all provinces responded.¹⁷

With the comments and perspectives from the provinces, the second preparatory commission convened in Rome (April 26 to May 10, 2000). We were a group of eight members.¹⁸ Our task consisted in reviewing

¹⁴ “Zones” in the SVD are larger regional coordinating structures, according to continents: AFRAM (Africa and Madagascar); ASPAC (Asia and Pacific, including Australia); EUROPE; PANAM (the Americas and Caribbean): “The system of zones is an appropriate means for animating and coordinating the communion and mission of the provinces in the same geographical area” (Co 635).

¹⁵ Carlos Pape SVD, the first Latin American missiologist with a PhD, had collaborated with *Spiritus* in Paris (see <https://www.revue-spiritus.com>). As the Generalate’s Mission Secretary in the early 1990s, he urged the Latin American provinces to think of a specific SVD contribution to the continent, beyond the service in parish ministry and formation. In the aftermath of the 1994 GC, a Spanish version of the French journal was established in Quito, Ecuador (see <https://www.spiritus.com.ec>).

¹⁶ On the preparatory process see da Silva, *Prophetic Dialogue*, 52-84; Miotk, *The General Chapters*, 148f.

¹⁷ See da Silva, *Prophetic Dialogue*, 68. There, da Silva also presents an overview of the reactions in the extensive footnotes of this section (67-73).

¹⁸ From the Generalate: Leo Kleden (Chairman) and Thomas Ascherman (Secretary/Coordinator); Gabriel Afagbegee (AFRAM), Ireneo Barreto (AFRAM/PANAM); James Knight (ASPAC), Thomas Malipurathu (ASPAC); Ennio Mantovani (EUROPE/ASPAC), Christian Tauchner (EUROPE/PANAM); Miotk, *The General Chapters*, 149; da Silva, *Prophetic Dialogue*, 74.

the contributions from the provinces and to prepare a *draft* for a Declaration of the GC.¹⁹

In the first round, we dedicated some time to study the reports by the provinces. There was quite a wide consensus on the centrality of the kingdom of God, the importance of spirituality and on evangelisation. There were also some critical observations referring to the biblical basis for the positions in the first summary, the presentation of reality and the issue of cultures. The concept of “frontiers” and the corresponding “passing over” were seen critically, as they were understood to imply a militaristic conceptualisation and language.

2.2 See: The Context

For our work in the group and the basic structure of the document we were to produce, we agreed on a fundamental methodology of see—judge—act, as some of us were used to work this way. It had also to do with the insight that any theological perspective necessarily is set within a context.²⁰ The Generalate approved of this methodological decision and we started working in this perspective.²¹ Together with Ireneo Barreto, a Paraguayan confrere working in Kenya at the time, we formulated the first section on “seeing.” We noted several *trends*: globalisation, urbanisation, migration and refugees as well as a longing for liberation. From my perspective, these trends were quite prominent at least in Latin America. Globalisation was still a fairly recent topic in analysis and sociological discussion, in Quito I had collaborated in an issue on it for *Spiritus*.²² Similarly, the phenomenon of urbanisation

¹⁹ If I ever had a copy of this *draft* document we prepared, I don’t have it any more. Thus, I am relying a lot on my memory.

²⁰ By that time, I had become well acquainted with Steve Bevans and had taken on his adage of all theology being contextual. See his seminal *Models of Contextual Theology* (Faith and Cultures Series), Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 1992 (2002). Eventually, we published the revised and expanded edition of the book in Spanish (Stephen B. Bevans SVD, *Modelos de teología contextual*. Edición revisada y aumentada [Misión y Diálogo 6], Quito: Spiritus/Grupo Editorial Verbo Divino/Abya Yala 2004).

²¹ Later on in the process, there was a little confusion regarding this method: At some stage, the Generalate handed the team a set of “conclusions” to be incorporated into the document. Now, according to the method, conclusions (“act”) would respond to aspects analysed in the moment of “seeing” and should not come out of the blue.

²² “La globalización. Nuevos desafíos para la misión”; “La mondialisation, nouveaux défis pour la mission”: *Spiritus* #146 (38.1, 1997). The issue was considered quite up-to-date, at least in church and mission circles. Around the time, also Schreiter’s text on this topic arrived, among many others:

gained more visibility with the fact that more than half of the populations in many Latin American countries were seen as living in urban environments and this fact required a different pastoral approach. I had become aware of this development during the Latin American Missionary Congress (COMLA 5) at Belo Horizonte (Brazil) in 1995, where I took part in workshops on urban sociology and pastoral challenges.²³ Similarly, migration had received a lot of attention in Ecuador in those years, as there were high numbers of Ecuadorians migrating to the USA and soon also to Spain and efforts particularly in the Archdiocese of Cuenca (Ecuadorian highlands) to work with those migrants showed how complex the topic was.²⁴

These *trends* have several *consequences*: there are *socio-political effects*—mechanisms of marginalisation and the growing gap between the rich and poor are mentioned, as are groups who seek solidarity; there are *ecological* and *cultural* consequences in the closer contact between different cultures and the phenomenon of a consumerist culture. Among the *religious* consequences, there is the search for religious meaning within the context of secularisation and tendencies towards fundamentalisms. The point of presenting this context with trends and consequences was to show both difficulties and chances. This option responded also to a method that at that time was introduced in social movements in Latin America, to list problems and difficulties and to seek possibilities into transform them into chances and challenges.

Robert J. Schreiter, CPPS, *The New Catholicity. Theology between the Global and the Local*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 1997.

²³ “Carioca” sociologist Andréa Damacena Martins of CERIS (a sociological research unit related to the Brazilian Bishops’ Conference) offered this workshop (see Andréa Damacena, *Pentecostalismo, renovação carismática, comunidades eclesiais de base*, Rio de Janeiro: CERIS 1997). Soon afterwards, in *Spiritus* the same topic was discussed in an issue of a book series related to the journal: Jean-Luc Brunin, *L’Église des banlieues. L’urbanité: quel défi pour les Chrétiens?* (Questions ouvertes 5), Paris: Les Éditions de l’Atelier/Éditions Ouvrières 1998. See also José Comblin, *Viver na cidade. Pistas para a pastoral urbana*, São Paulo: Paulus 1996; J. B. Libanio/Benjamin Bravo/José Comblin, *La Iglesia en la ciudad* (Pastoral Urbana), Mexico DF: Dabar 1999.

²⁴ Around that time, there was such a massive movement for example of teachers who went for a “holiday” to Spain (legally) and tried to settle there (as “illegal” immigrants) and simply did not return; the Ministry of Education had difficulties in assuring the opening of schools for the new school year, as they had no data on teachers actually available for work. Diocesan efforts to curb migration because of the dangers on the routes, of human trafficking and the exploitation in the USA or in Spain did not succeed. See for example Cristian Tauchner, *Algunas piezas del rompecabezas – La migración ecuatoriana: Spiritus* 42.2 (#163, June 2001) 164-170.

2.3 Judge: Spiritual and Theological Criteria

In the meantime, another part of our group worked on the aspects related to considering the context in light of the Word and of theology. They formulated the criteria for judging the contextual data of the first act of seeing. To this part of our group certainly belonged Jim Knight, Ennio Mantovani, Thomas Malipurathu and probably also Leo Kleden, as far as I remember. Interestingly—and maybe surprisingly—they set out with a sort of profession of faith: It is the conviction that God holds the entire world in his hands and leads it to a positive fulfilment. This is an expansion of the vision of the kingdom of God which had been basically accepted by all the provinces as a fundamental perspective. It implied also the view that God is acting through a vast variety of subjects and that the Spirit cannot be limited to acting only within church borders and conceptions. Thus, there are actors within and outside of the church who follow the Spirit's guidance (as there are actors resisting the Spirit, within and outside of the church). Thus, this draft statement introduced the perspective of the *missio Dei*:

At the beginning of this part, in paragraph 32, it was made clear what was the fundamental conviction of the SVD mission, that is, mission understood in the first place as the work of God and the missionary vocation as a call to participate in this mission of God. It was clear in the minds of the members of the second commission that the church and the members of the Society of the Divine Word were called to participate in God's mission, so the material was organized in three sections, treating of *missio Dei*, the participation of the church in the mission of God, and the SVD participation in the same mission.²⁵

This universal divine dynamic involves the entire world and includes into this movement the church and within the church also the SVD. Our mission, then, consists in sharing in this movement, together with others inside and outside of the church. And the mission and sharing refers to actors inside and outside of the church, it is a universal witness to the Kingdom of God. In graphic representation, it looks like a movement that fans out from God into the universe, and in the return movement concentrates and takes along the church and the SVD as well as many other actors in the world.

The conversation about this act of “judging”—looking at reality and the context with the eyes of faith—led to demand a step of *communitarian discernment of the spirits* as the first condition of entering into

²⁵ Da Silva, *Prophetic Dialogue*, 79.

this process of seeing, judging and acting. I shall return to this central task later.

In the conversations about an appropriate understanding of “frontiers,” “passing over,” mission and conversion, the view of *dialogue* became prominent. This perspective was well established in Asia, as the Asian Bishops had explained the task of evangelisation in Asia as fundamentally a dialogue. They developed this dialogue perspective at the foundational meeting of FABC in Taipei in 1974 and spoke of a triple dialogue with the poor, with the religions and with the cultures of Asia.²⁶ In view of the growing SVD membership particularly from Asia, our group considered this FABC perspective of a dialogue with the poor, with religions and with cultures as an important attitude for mission. However, we came to the formulation of a *fourfold* dialogue:

The SVD missionary commitment was classified as dialogue for communion and liberation. A “fourfold dialogue” was spoken of, in place of four “frontier situations” [of previous General Chapters]. This dialogue should be made concrete: 1) with people who have no faith community and with faith-seekers; 2) with people of different faith traditions and secular ideologies; 3) with people of different cultures; 4) with people who are poor and marginalized. For these four situations, the document provided indications for making concrete the practice of this missionary commitment to dialogue.²⁷

To the three dialogue situations formulated at the FABC—with the poor (4, in our draft), with cultures (3) and with religions (2)—a fourth was added, consisting of persons with no faith community and faith-seekers, probably in recognition of European and Western social contexts; the FABC reflection is set within the Asian context of strong and vital cultures and of religious identities in most peoples. I think it may have been Tom Ascheman who introduced this fourth category,²⁸ taking into account other continents and situations where there could be

²⁶ FABC: Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences. For this “triple dialogue” see FABC, *Evangelization in Modern Day Asia. Statement and Recommendations of the First Plenary Assembly*. Taipei, Taiwan, 27 April 1974, in: Gaudencio B. Rosales/C. G. Arévalo, SJ (eds.), *For All the Peoples of Asia. Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences Documents from 1970 to 1991*, Manila/Maryknoll, NY: Claretian Publications/Orbis Books 1992, 11-25; James Kroeger, MM, *The Faith-Culture Dialogue in Asia. Ten FABC Insights on Inculturation: Verbum SVD 49* (4.2008) 425-446.

²⁷ Da Silva, *Prophetic Dialogue*, 80.

²⁸ See Tom Ascheman’s interview on this point, in: da Silva, *Prophetic Dialogue*, 382.

such social groups without relation to religion and faith. Maybe it came up also in parallel to the four “characteristic dimensions” of SVD identity.

The “characteristic dimensions”²⁹ refer to the practice of SVD missionary engagement. These four “dimensions” are communication, Bible, missionary awareness (building), and justice, peace and the integrity of creation. For the SVD, mission is foremost related, first, to the witness to the kingdom—understood more widely as *missio Dei*—, which, second, takes the form of the fourfold dialogue—with the four groups—which in turn is practiced, third, in the four characteristic dimensions.³⁰

This draft for a final declaration of the GC was accepted by the Generalate and presented and discussed during the Chapter itself. The capitulars opted for taking this draft as a basis for their deliberations.³¹ A “drafting committee” of four capitulars worked on the integration of new perspectives, amendments and arguments as well as on the formulation of other proposals that were presented to the CG. This work produced the final version of the Chapter Declaration which was accepted virtually unanimously towards the end of the General Chapter.³²

3. The Chapter Statement

During the GC, discussions and deliberations led to several important changes of the draft, which is an obvious development to be expected. In my view, one of the most significant changes refers to the perspective of “dialogue” with the addition of “prophetic.” The term

²⁹ There is a fairly long process going back to the GCs in the 1980s to identify fields of preferential attention. At different instances, they were called “areas,” “priorities” and the like. The GC 2000 argued to call them “characteristic” in the sense of representing something like “family traits” whereby you would recognise an SVD missionary.

³⁰ See a summary by Tom Ascherman in this sense, in: da Silva, *Prophetic Dialogue*, 96.

³¹ The alternative would have been a wholesale rejection with the dramatic consequence of having to start to draft a new document (“You might well be sitting here still at Christmas,” the threat went in the chapter hall) or to opt against any declaration at all—an experiment that had failed already in the GC of 1994. See da Silva, *Prophetic Dialogue*, 90f.

³² See Miotk, *The General Chapters*, 159; da Silva, *Prophetic Dialogue*, 112f. The Document was published in the September circular letter of the Generalate, *In Dialogue with the Word* Nr. 1 (September 2000), Rome, Generalate: SVD Publications.

“prophetic dialogue” has become the keyword of the SVD mission perspective issuing from the GC 2000.

In their presentation of the Chapter Declaration, the outgoing Superior General Henry Barlage together with Superior General Elect Antonio M. Pernia emphasised the “prophetic dialogue” perspective:

First of all, *dialogue* is the center piece of the statement which the chapter spent much time and effort in working out. In it the chapter affirms that “the deepest and best understanding of our call to mission is expressed in the term ‘dialogue,’ or more specifically, ‘*prophetic dialogue*.’” Then the chapter goes on to identify the groups of people with whom we are called to enter into dialogue: people who have no faith community or religious affiliation, people who are poor and marginalized, people of different cultures, and people of different faith traditions and secular ideologies.³³

The Statement itself formulates the perspective this way:

There are several ways of articulating this specific call to mission. We believe that the deepest and best understanding of this call is expressed in the term “Dialogue,” or more specifically, “Prophetic Dialogue.” Since Vatican II, dialogue with other religions has been promoted widely as one aspect of the Church’s mission (RM 55). Our specific commitment to this dialogue is reflected in our constitutions (c. 114) and the Statement of the 1988 General Chapter. However, already in the Vatican II documents, the term “dialogue,” in all its richness, is used in a wider meaning to describe our proper attitude toward and relationship with all people. Dialogue is an attitude of “solidarity, respect, and love” (Gaudium et Spes [GS] 3) that is to permeate all of our activities. Limited as we are by our personal and cultural viewpoints, none of us has attained the whole truth contained in God and revealed fully in Christ. In dialogue we search together for this truth.³⁴

³³ In their “Presentation” in: *Statement of the SVD 15th General Chapter 2000 – Listening to the Spirit: Our Missionary Response Today* (In Dialogue with the Word 1), Rome, Generalate: SVD Publications 2000, 6; my emphasis.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, #53.

3.1 Dialogue vs. Prophetic

The shift from “dialogue” to “prophetic dialogue” is generally described as slightly confusing.³⁵ There were different proposals in the capitular discussion questioning the viability of “dialogue” alone, as it did not specify sufficiently the content of such a dialogue. Spanish speaking working groups had suggested the perspective of “prophetic.” Da Silva concludes from the study of the chapter records:

Even if there is no consensus regarding the paternity of the expression “prophetic dialogue,” it seems that Thomas Ascherman had a determining role so that the term “prophetic” be associated with the word “dialogue.” John Fuellenbach seems to argue that Ascherman was the author of the expression “prophetic,” when he says that “he [Ascherman] is the father of the child.”³⁶

Stephen Bevans is quoted with a different view:

Stephan Bevans, an eye witness of this event writes: “The Asians in our Congregation had proposed that we speak of doing mission simply as ‘dialogue,’ but the Latin Americans strenuously objected. For them, in the context of their commitment to liberation in the midst of Latin American poverty and political and cultural oppression, doing mission was closer to engaging in *prophecy*. As we argued about this, one of our Indonesian members suggested that, as compromise, we speak of ‘prophetic dialogue.’ Everyone seemed satisfied, and so we adopted the notion.”³⁷

In my memory, the perspective of “prophetic” came up as an explicit opposition to and rejection of the dialogue perspective and this was most outspoken in a working group which included delegates from Ecuador, thus a Spanish speaking group. To understand this opposition beyond what Steve Bevans recorded, I shall try to explain some of the reasons behind the fierce resistance against the “dialogue” perspective and the demand for a “prophetic” approach.

In some Latin American countries, the ecclesial atmosphere did not favour at all any dialogical attitude, as bishops kept a hierarchical position of domination and would not have any conversation at eye level

³⁵ See da Silva, *Prophetic Dialogue*, 92-94.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 93 in footnote 34. Fuellenbach was not a participant of the Chapter and Ascherman comes in as the “usual suspect.”

³⁷ In Miotk, *The General Chapters*, 159f., with reference to a text somewhere (sadly not traceable).

with anyone, particularly not with religious. If one was invited for a “dialogue,” it meant mostly receiving orders and having to accept pre-formulated decisions of bishops etc. Or dialogues were a mere exchange of opinions without concrete consequences.

Another reason lies precisely in the growing awareness of our religious identity at that time. The Latin American Federation of Religious (CLAR) had prepared for the last years of the millennium a reflection process which was supposed to become a “council of the religious.” At the sound of “council,” all alarm bells in the Vatican went off—never again would there be such a “disaster” as a council, the policy of the powerful in the Vatican³⁸ read—and the entire process was forbidden. However, CLAR managed to organise the process of “re-founding” religious charisms, very much in line—and in creative fidelity and adaptability, so characteristic of particularly Brazilian approaches—with John Paul II’s *Vita consecrata* (1996). The main interest in this reflection process consisted in reviewing the charismatic inspiration of the founders and foundresses of the different congregations and in perceiving what the Spirit had intended in that time.³⁹ Then, an analysis of the actual social and religious context would highlight present challenges and each congregation could opt in creative fidelity to the founding spirit for tasks and commitments the Spirit indicated now.

The fundamental metaphor for this process was the story of Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35). The programme was organised under the title “On the Road to Emmaus” and used different elements of the Gospel story: the two disciples, the retelling of their experience and frustrated expectations and hopes, the interpretative moment, leading finally to the invitation and the breaking of bread with the recognition and the possibility of a return to a transformed community. An important concept in this process was “liminality”: the place of the religious is at the margin of society and church, and such a commitment was understood as a prophetic stance, particularly in a creative tension to the institutional layout of the church. It meant also a closer relationship to the

³⁸ Beyond Card. Ratzinger and Pope John Paul II himself names like Cardinals Alfonso López Trujillo, Angelo Sodano or Jorge Mejía stand for these times of the “ecclesial ice-age,” as João B. Libânio called this time.

³⁹ See for example: CLAR, La vida religiosa en América Latina frente al cambio de época. XIII Asamblea General de la CLAR: *Alternativas* 4 (Nº 8, 1997) 213-235; id., XIII Asamblea General de la CLAR. Lima, Perú, 12-21 de junio de 1997: *Alternativas* 4 (Nº 8, 1997) 237-249; Simón Pedro Arnold, Pensar la fe como religiosos/as. Claves hermenéuticas: *Boletín CLAR* 35 (3.1997) 7-37; Ignacio Madera Vargas SDS, La vida religiosa en América Latina: Hacia el nuevo milenio: *Boletín CLAR* 35 (6.1997) 9-27.

poor and marginalised social groups as well as a more public, maybe also political stance. This implied a critical view of the engagement of the religious in central institutional spaces of the church—such as parish priests or the running of schools for the higher classes in society. In this process of the Road to Emmaus, the SVDs—at least in Ecuador—were quite actively involved in different spaces of the Ecuadorian Conference of Religious. Therefore, a “prophetic” discourse was readily at hand when talking about the identity and engagement of religious in Latin America.

Finally, there was a further reason for the strict opposition to “dialogue” in these working groups, and it has to do with the experiences and their interpretation with missionaries from Asia. Since the 1980s, the SVD provinces in Latin America started to receive growing numbers of missionaries first from the Philippines, then also from India and Indonesia. This process required a new articulation of the missionary work of the established teams which were composed of Europeans and some Latin Americans. In principle, there was nothing new in the fact that some of the young missionaries experienced difficulties in their relationship to the new language and culture—sadly such problems appeared ever so often. With “the Asians,” the same difficulties were perceived in a different manner. Some of them were perceived as too much dedicated to electronic gadgets—the Internet was just beginning and offered the first possibilities of e-mailing and chats—, lacking in their option for the poor or in pastoral commitment; maybe, this was also attributed to a sort of “dialogical” easy going response in the face of social conflicts. Nevertheless, in fact there was a problem with “early returnees” which was discussed particularly in and with Asian provinces.⁴⁰

This was also a time when there was no discourse on interculturality yet and much of the work was done in European traditional manners and perspectives.⁴¹ Increasingly and in this process, different questions started to arise and to demand that all missionaries relate

⁴⁰ The meeting of provincials in Brazil in 1992 and the GC 1994 were spaces for the exchange on these questions. For a report and reflections on this topic see Robert J. Kisala SVD, Three Generations of Missionaries. Final Vows in the SVD 1951–2010: *Verbum SVD* 53 (2.2012) 199-218; John Mansford Prior SVD, Learning to Leave: The Pivotal Role of Cross-Cultural “Conversion”: *Verbum SVD* 53 (2.2012) 219-235.

⁴¹ Carlos Pape, El papel de misioneros de Asia y África en América Latina: *Spiritus* 39.2 (#151, 1998) 117-125; id., Misioneros de África y Asia en América Latina: ¿Por qué y para qué?: *Verbum SVD* 41 (2.2000) 305-314; Cristian Tauchner SVD, Invasión desde Asia. Un falso diagnóstico de un cambio real: *Spiritus* 43.22 (#167, 2002) 83-88; Leo Kleden/John Mansford Prior, Formation in Asia-Pacific: *Verbum SVD* 38 (1-2.1997) 19-23.

to the local culture and context. There, the discovery was that maybe Filipino missionaries were closer to Latin American cultures than Germans, Polish or Spaniards, to put an example. Under these circumstances, even if the perception of “problematic Asians” was grossly superficial and incorrect, it becomes understandable for me that any reference to the Asian view of “dialogue” as a fundamentally positive and gentle attitude towards the others and as a missionary attitude was unacceptable.

This was the situation in the discussions at the GC 2000. In my recollection, the addition of “prophetic” to the perspective of “dialogue” was by no means a “friendly amendment” but an oppositional position against dialogue. The juxtaposition of the contracting concepts in “prophetic dialogue” was probably a suggestion for a compromise from Asian participants at the Chapter that somehow satisfied also the Latin American opponents and thus became the central concept for the understanding of SVD missionary engagement.⁴²

3.2 Context—*Missio Dei*—Prophetic Dialogue

The GC 2000 finally released its *Statement of the SVD 15th General Chapter 2000—Listening to the Spirit: Our Missionary Response Today*.⁴³ I still find it interesting to look at the content and structure of this Statement:

The *Introduction* speaks of gratitude and hope towards the Spirit who is seen as having inspired the GC. The Chapter marked also the 125th anniversary of the foundation of the congregation. Then there is a section on “ongoing discernment,” with the demand of constantly listening to the Spirit: “We believe that it is the Spirit who both enables us to recognize signs in the contemporary world and empowers us to probe their positive and negative import for mission” (*Statement* #5). This discernment is a communitarian task: “We believe that community is the ideal context for discernment” (#7).

⁴² Neither Miotk nor da Silva describe the discussion in such conflictive terms. For the documented negotiations at the Chapter, based on the minutes and records, see da Silva, *Prophetic Dialogue*, 94-116.

⁴³ *Statement of the SVD 15th General Chapter 2000 – Listening to the Spirit: Our Missionary Response Today* (In Dialogue with the Word 1), Rome, Generalate: SVD Publications 2000. For summaries of the Statement see da Silva, *Prophetic Dialogue*, and Miotk, *The General Chapters*, 161f. I am aware that sadly, this Statement—as many other sources from SVD General Chapters and Society documents—may not easily be accessible for anyone outside of the Congregation.

This early insistence on a communitarian discernment of the spirits relates to a contemplative perspective in the sense that mission is not an individual activity and action but a communitarian task on the basis of looking at the context from God's perspective.

The *first section* deals with the "*Context of Mission Today*." The "signs of the times," as a major contribution of Vatican II, "both positive and negative [...] demand serious and specific responses" personally and from the missionary community. There are (1) the trends of our world today (globalisation, urbanisation, migration, liberation) and the consequences; (2) our church today (worldwide, institutional problems, new approaches to mission and theology, martyrdom in many countries); (3) our society (= SVD) today with different shifts in developments.

The *second section* refers to "*Our Call to Mission*": This is (1) the "Mission of the Triune God: From Creation to New Creation"—the *missio Dei* perspective. Creation is seen as God's communication and call to share in his life and love (#35). This "creation is groaning and in labour pains (Rom 8:18-23) until all is transformed into a new Creation" (#36). With the incarnation and Jesus the Christ, the kingdom of God becomes central (#37). (2) "The Church: Called to Share in the Mission of the Triune God" relates to the essentially missionary nature of the church (#43). "Because mission is the work of the Triune God, and the Spirit blows where it wills, the Church carries out its service to the Kingdom in collaboration with other faith communities and all people of good will" (#44); thus, mission happens in the world, also beyond the church limits. (3) "The SVD: Called by the Spirit to Share in the Church's Mission" as witness to the kingdom of God in universality and openness. It is the commitment to the fourfold prophetic dialogue with the four groups. #54 specifies that "it is in dialogue that we are able to recognize 'the signs of Christ's presence and the working of the Spirit' (RM 56) in all people, that we are called to acknowledge our own sinfulness and to engage in constant conversion, and that we witness to God's love by sharing our own convictions boldly and honestly." In this dialogue, the SVDs are called to conversion, and they relate to others who are doing what the Spirit moves them to do towards the new creation. In the manner of realising their mission, the four characteristic dimensions come into play, to practice dialogue communicating, biblically, in justice and peace, and missionally related.

The *third section* presents "*Our Missionary Response*" with specific tasks and in relation also to commitments from previous general chapters.

4. On the Reception of the GC 2000

As mentioned before, the practice of mission as prophetic dialogue has been regarded as the central contribution of the GC 2000. There is a considerable body of research and reflection on this perspective. Particularly Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder have written extensively on this topic.⁴⁴ The Generalate's yearly circular for 2001 deepened the topic: "Prophetic Dialogue,"⁴⁵ with some additional reflection on church documents relating to dialogue and mission, and testimonies of Divine Word Missionaries from all over the world. The Generalate expanded on the topic in 2007 from a biblical perspective.⁴⁶ José Antunes da Silva published his PhD thesis on the development of the prophetic dialogue and thus offers a magnificent study of the perspective

⁴⁴ The concluding chapter 12 in their seminal *Constants in Context* deals with "Mission as Prophetic Dialogue": Stephen B. Bevans/Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context. A Theology of Mission for Today* (American Society of Missiology Series 30), Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 2004, 348-398; id., *Prophetic Dialogue. Reflections on Christian Mission Today*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 2011; Roger Schroeder, SVD, Mission as Proclamation and Dialogue, in: James H. Kroeger (ed.), *The Gift of Mission. Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow. The Maryknoll Centennial Symposium*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 2013, 125-129; Stephen Bevans, SVD, Prophetic Dialogue and Intercultural Mission, in: Lazar T. Stanislaus, SVD/Martin Ueffing, SVD (eds.), *Intercultural Mission*, Vol. 2, Sankt Augustin/Delhi: Steyler Missionswissenschaftliches Institut/ISPCK 2015, 201-214; id., *Essays in Contextual Theology* (Theology and Mission in World Christianity 12), Leiden: Brill 2018; id., *Missio Dei and Missio Ecclesiae: Trinitarian Mission, Theosis, and the Missionary Nature of the Church*, in: Jacob Kavunkal, SVD/Christian Tauchner, SVD (eds.), *Mission beyond Ad Gentes. A Symposium* (Studia Instituti Missiologici SVD 104), Siegburg: Franz Schmitt Verlag 2016, 17-30; id., Theological and Missiological Reflections, in: Lazar T. Stanislaus, SVD/vanThanh Nguyen, SVD (eds.), *Missionary Discipleship in Global Contexts* (Studia Instituti Missiologici SVD 112), Siegburg: Franz Schmitt Verlag 2018, 137-150; id., Committed to His Mission, in: Lazar T. Stanislaus, SVD/Christian Tauchner, SVD (eds.), *Becoming Intercultural. Perspectives on Mission*, Delhi/Sankt Augustin: ISPCK/Steyler Missionswissenschaftliches Institut 2021, 36-55; id., The Shift of Mission Paradigm in the Church and SVD: *Verbum SVD* 62 (1.2021) 21-33; Roger Schroeder, SVD, Enriched by the Spirituality of the "Other," in: Stanislaus/Tauchner (eds.), *Becoming Intercultural. Perspectives on Mission*, 75-89. Several contributions deal with prophetic dialogue in the *Festschrift* for S. Bevans: Dale T. Irvin/Peter C. Phan (eds.), *Christian Mission, Contextual Theology, Prophetic Dialogue. Essays in Honor of Stephen B. Bevans*, SVD (American Society of Missiology Series 57), Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 2018.

⁴⁵ *Prophetic Dialogue* (In Dialogue with the Word 2), Rome, Generalate: SVD Publications 2001.

⁴⁶ *Prophetic Dialogue: Biblical Stories, Images and Insights* (In Dialogue with the Word 7), Rome, Generalate: SVD Publications 2007.

in the context of the GC 2000, with abundant sources and material from the SVD Generalate's archives.⁴⁷

Among other contributions, I'd like to highlight E. Valle,⁴⁸ two issues of *Verbum SVD* in 2006,⁴⁹ R. Kisala,⁵⁰ A. Pernia,⁵¹ L. Stanislaus,⁵² and J. Kavunkal.⁵³ The Ishvani Kendra Institute in Pune (India) held a seminar on the topic.⁵⁴ Over the last decade, the perspective of prophetic dialogue has been taken up also in missiological reflection beyond the SVD: Stephen Bevans and Cathy Ross edited a volume using this approach to a variety of contexts like New Testament studies, ecclesiology, eschatology, soteriology, anthropology and culture.⁵⁵ Thus, the "prophetic dialogue" has become fairly well accepted in missionary circles.

⁴⁷ José Antunes da Silva's doctoral dissertation in 2014: *Diálogo profético. Identidade e missão da Congregação do Verbo Divino*, Fátima: Missionários do Verbo Divino 2014; the English version was published as *Prophetic Dialogue. Identity and Mission of the Divine Word Missionaries*. Foreword by Stephen Bevans (Studia Instituti Missiologici SVD 119), Siegburg: Franz Schmitt Verlag 2021.

⁴⁸ Edênio Valle, SVD (ed.), *Diálogo profético e missão*, Campinas: Komedi 2005.

⁴⁹ *Verbum SVD* 47 (1.2006) on "Prophetischer Dialog" (M. Üffing); Witness—Dialogue—Dimensions. Practical Dreaming about SVD Mission Today (T. Ascherman); Prophetic Dialogue in Religious Life in the Light of the Bible (T. Hughes); Lectio Divina and Prophetic Dialogue (T. Lenchak); *Dei Verbum* und wir Missionare des Göttlichen Wortes. Anmerkungen und Anregungen (L. Feldkämper). – *Verbum SVD* 47 (4.2006) on Prophetic Dialogue as Life and Mission (R. Kisala); "Living Prophetic Dialogue." A Historical-theological Reflection (C. Colaço).

⁵⁰ Robert Kisala, SVD, Why Dialogue?: *Verbum SVD* 52 (4.2011) 395-408.

⁵¹ Antonio M. Pernia, SVD, The State of Mission Today: *Verbum SVD* 55 (1.2014) 9-25; id., Prophetic Dialogue and the Formation of "Persons of Dialogue": *Missio Inter Gentes* 2 (1.2016) 17-32; id., Mission: Sharing the Gift of the Spirit: *Missio Inter Gentes* 4 (1.2018) 1-19.

⁵² Lazar Thanuzraj Stanislaus, SVD, Mission as Prophetic Dialogue and SVD Education. Ongoing Reflection and Pointers: *Verbum SVD* 57 (2.2016) 181-200.

⁵³ Jacob Kavunkal, SVD, *Extensio Dei—Mission as Divine Reaching Out*, Delhi: ISPCK 2020. For a rather doubtful reflection on prophetic dialogue see his The Discourse of "Prophetic Dialogue." An Asian Perspective: *Verbum SVD* 61 (4.2020) 479-486.

⁵⁴ L. Stanislaus, SVD/Alwyn D'Souza, SVD (eds.), *Prophetic Dialogue. Challenges and Prospects in India*, Pune/Delhi: Ishvani Kendra/ISPCK 2003.

⁵⁵ Cathy Ross/Stephen B. Bevans (eds.), *Mission on the Road to Emmaus. Constants, Context and Prophetic Dialogue*, London: SCM Press 2015. See also the Bevans *Festschrift* by Irvin/Phan (eds.), *Christian Mission*.

Things are different, however, with regard to *missio Dei* in the SVD. Often, it is not acknowledged that this perspective is the real novelty at the GC 2000.⁵⁶ In my view, this has to do with the lack of communitarian discernment of the spirits and the interest in discovering where God's Spirit is acting and moving things and persons. Instead of this contemplative stance, mission still seems to centre around the traditional activities in parishes, schools and administration. *Missio Dei* appears to be too much of a theological and speculative matter to be of any practical use. It may induce to believe that if God is doing whatever mission is supposed to achieve, then the missionaries are sidelined and have nothing to do.

However, the Superior General Elect at the CG 2000, Antonio M. Pernia, offered a recollection day during the GC and reflected on the Word of God, on dialogue and on mission as dialogue. Among the fundamental attitudes required of the SVD, he mentioned contemplation, respect of others and humility. The SVD community should be the space for sharing around the Word of God.⁵⁷

Contemplation and the discernment of spirits is, of course, a central feature of any discipleship and Christian spirituality. From a Jesuit I heard this metaphor for the process of discernment: Many situations of everyday life are like the scales the figure of Justice holds in her hands, with the two scale pans, weighing good vs. bad, right vs. wrong. Obviously, the disciple moves towards the side of the good. But it may not be that clear where the good and right are actually situated. That is the moment when the discernment of the spirits becomes vital: the disciples must move towards the centre (of the scales), in order to take their own weight out of the process and let God incline the scales to one side or the other.⁵⁸ Then it could become visible in which direction God wants to incline the scale, where the good is situated from God's viewpoint. Once that has become clearer, the disciples can move towards the correct side on the scales and put all their weight and engagement into play, "on God's side." This is an exercise to achieve

⁵⁶ In *Arnoldus Nota*, the SVD internal newsletter, usually the Superior General has the first two pages to draw the congregation's attention to developments and to emphasise important events, such as the canonisation of Arnold Janssen and Joseph Freinademetz. *Arnoldus Nota* is published ten times a year. In the issues between the GC 2000 and the following GC in 2006, there is virtually no reference to *missio Dei*. There are, however, references to "listening to the Spirit" and several times to the "prophetic dialogue," particularly in preparation to the GC 2006.

⁵⁷ The summary of this reflection was published in *Arnoldus Nota* July/September 2000, 7-10. See also da Silva, *Prophetic Dialogue*, 107-111.

⁵⁸ This is a central theme of the Ignatian spiritual exercises, e. g. with the meditation on the "two banners."

(spiritual) freedom, also with regard to one's own inclinations, traditions and preferences, and to attain the possibility of taking on a missionary engagement where considerations about success or utility are not important any more. Obviously, such a process of discernment, of stepping back from activity and engagement, has nothing to do with individualistic attitudes of self-contemplation and withdrawal from the world and society into the personal peace of mind. Quite to the contrary, such a practice of contemplation is extremely committed to reality and the context.

Therefore, I consider it of the utmost importance to place this communitarian contemplative moment as the entry point for the design of a mission perspective. It allows to distinguish God's action in the context, from creation to the new creation, and how groups inside as well as outside of the church follow the Spirit—defenders of human rights may be a simple and evident case of such groups; and they don't need to be converted, as they are doing what God wants them to do. It is with them that a “prophetic dialogue” is in place (and there is no option for dialogue with groups who operate against human rights, even if they should belong to the church). Contemplation is the door to the ground floor of mission—*missio Dei*—on which the following floors are built, like the prophetic dialogue and the characteristic dimensions. Bypassing *missio Dei* to enter the second floor “prophetic dialogue” level requires a *salto mortale*, difficult to perform, as experience has shown.

José Antunes da Silva dedicates an entire chapter to the *reception* process of the GC 2000.⁵⁹ He explains:

Reception is “an event of living appropriation, of critical analysis and of conscious adherence.” This signifies a very slow, complex process whose results will necessarily be very diverse, depending on the diversity of the situations in which reception occurs. Reception includes, firstly, a moment of welcoming the documents which, at times, require a translation into the different languages spoken by the ecclesial body. There follows then, naturally, a phase of interpretation of the documents, and finally, acceptance by the group of believers. Reception does not have as its finality the creation of truth; its objective is to set in motion a process of clarification of the pronouncements and decisions, taken legitimately, thanks to a critical reflec-

⁵⁹ Da Silva, *Prophetic Dialogue*, 117-124.

tion which will cause the understanding of faith to progress as *mysterium Ecclesiae*.⁶⁰

There were several methods and procedures in the provinces to interiorise the new ideas. They “permitted the divulgation and the welcoming of the ideas of the XV General Chapter on the various levels of the Society: personal, community, provincial and zonal. [...] In general, all of the SVD provinces and regions implemented the orientation of the General Chapter and the Generalate in order to grasp and deepen the new understanding of mission. However, in spite of all these initiatives, the reception process was not linear. Even though it is not easy to obtain a complete vision of the negative reaction to the XV General Chapter, we can however note some signs of resistance which translate a sense of caution regarding the new ideas, specifically in relation to the changes in terminology, and reveal a suspicion that the new terminology could suggest a lessening of mission understood as the explicit proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ.”⁶¹ A. Miotk mentions difficulties in accepting the outcome: “The recently adopted paradigm of *Prophetic Dialogue* continued to meet with difficulties. Despite initial general openness to the new mission paradigm, the idea failed to capture the imagination of many, even if they did not openly object to the concept.”⁶²

This generally positive reception, however, refers to the *prophetic dialogue*, not to the more fundamental and theological perspective of the *missio Dei*. As far as I can see, *missio Dei* as the definitive basis for the entire architecture of the SVD mission perspective has not been received and accepted by the congregation. Mission work has largely gone on as usual on other tracks, as the themes of the subsequent General Chapters indicate which did not intend major theological and missiological innovations and perspectives for action in the congregation.

Concluding Thoughts

The General Chapter of the year 2000 has been a time of grace. In this report of my recollections of this event and process, I have tried to contribute some elements to the historical accounts of the Chapter and its main themes. For me, the major achievement of that General Chapter lies with the trust and profession of faith in a dynamic God who is active in the world and in history. It is good to see that, in a distinctive

⁶⁰ Ibid., 117f.

⁶¹ Ibid., 119f. Extensive footnotes there indicate some of the reactions.

⁶² Miotk, *The General Chapters*, 168. This is already introducing the topics for the GC 2006.

and refreshing manner, Pope Francis emphasises such dynamic perspectives like dreams and utopias—in the sense of wanting to get where we have not yet arrived: In *Querida Amazonia*, he speaks of four dreams—how interesting: again four: the social, the cultural, the ecological and the ecclesial dream.

To come up with creative and innovative mission perspectives—a continuing requirement for the congregation—I think it will be important to take reflection, faith and commitment seriously. In January 2022, in a circular letter to the provincials, the Superior General Paulus Budi Kleden SVD has encouraged the Society to return to the question of identity in order to find answers to the challenges we are facing: “Who are we really? What are the significant elements of our identity? The more we define or understand our identity, the better we will be able to answer the challenges of the world, since our *being* influences our *doing* (*agere sequitur esse*).”

Following the Spirit and letting ourselves be drawn into the divine dynamic as described in the *missio Dei* perspective will constitute the SVDs as beings (*esse*) who may bear (*sequitur*) valuable fruit (*agere*) that lasts, in line with Jesus’ parable of the vine (John 15:1-17).

ABSTRACTS

Das Generalkapitel der SVD im Jahr 2000 hat die Missionsperspektive der Kongregation unter dem Begriff des „prophetischen Dialogs“ formuliert. Dieser Artikel, der sich auf die Teilnahme des Autors am Generalkapitel stützt, argumentiert, dass der wirklich wichtige Beitrag des Generalkapitels in seiner Ausrichtung auf die *missio Dei* als Basis und Grundlage des „prophetischen Dialogs“ gesehen werden sollte. Der Prozess der gemeinschaftlichen Unterscheidung der Geister wird als wesentlich verstanden, um zu entdecken, wo Gottes Geist in Welt und Gesellschaft am Werk ist, und um in die Dynamik der *missio Dei* einzutreten und in ihrer Bewegung einen prophetischen Dialog zu führen.

El Capítulo General de la SVD del año 2000 formuló la perspectiva misionera de la Congregación bajo el concepto de “diálogo profético”. Este artículo, basado en la participación del autor en el Capítulo General, argumenta que la contribución realmente importante del Capítulo General debe ser vista en su orientación hacia la *missio Dei*, como la base y el fundamento del “diálogo profético”. El proceso de discernimiento espiritual comunitario se entiende como esencial para descubrir dónde actúa el Espíritu de Dios en el mundo y en la sociedad y permitir entrar en la dinámica de la *missio Dei* y en su movimiento entablar un diálogo profético.

Le Chapitre général SVD de l’année 2000 a formulé la perspective missionnaire de la congrégation comme « dialogue prophétique ». L’article, basé sur la participation de l’auteur à ce Chapitre, soutient que l’on devrait considérer comme la contribution réellement importante de ce Chapitre général son

orientation vers la *missio Dei* comme base et fondation du « dialogue prophétique ». Le processus de discernement spirituel communautaire est présenté comme essentiel pour découvrir où l'Esprit de Dieu est à l'œuvre dans le monde et la société et pour permettre d'entrer dans la dynamique de la *missio Dei* et son mouvement qui engage dans le dialogue prophétique.