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INTERCULTURAL FORMATION

“Interculturality is a distinguishing feature and an essential part of our identity....”¹ “As followers of the Divine Word we participate in God’s mission. Initial and ongoing formation helps us to grow ‘by the power of the Holy Spirit into unity with the Incarnate Word of the Father and into a missionary community comprising members from many countries and cultures’ (c. 501). Interculturality is thus a key dimension at every stage of our formation.”² These two statements of the SVD General Chapter of 2012 again underline the importance of “interculturality” in our life and mission. Thus, this article will deal with a few aspects of intercultural formation—starting with SVD formation “ad intra” and closing with an example of academic formation.

Today, SVD post-Novitiate (Juniorate) formation communities in Europe are international/intercultural. Since the General Chapter of 1994 endorsed the Roscommon consensus, the internationalization began by inviting formandi from other countries and the other SVD zones (AFRAM, ASPAC, PANAM).

1. SVD Formation

Looking at the reality of SVD formation, we see both continuity and change since the 1960s. Also today SVD formation is formation for mission. But the reality and the understanding of mission changed. This can be seen in numbers—the large formation communities today are in Asia: Indonesia, India, the Philippines, and Vietnam. There are growing numbers of formandi in the common formation centers in Africa. And there are decreasing numbers in almost all European provinces. But not only numbers have changed. Also contents, programs, etc. of formation have been updated and—at least in some situations—inculturated. Formation in Europe, for example, was in the past understood as preparation for mission outside Europe—in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Oceania. Today even European formation communities are international and formation is understood also as preparation for mission in Europe. Both learning internationality and attention to (even European) contexts pose new challenges to all stages of formation. Special attention has been given to the Brothers’ vocation and formation.³ There are many tasks and questions

ahead, for example about the requirements of the formation of future religious priests, as distinct from diocesan priests.

The direction and goal of all formation in our Society is growth by the power of the Holy Spirit into unity with the incarnate Word of the Father into a missionary community comprising members from many countries and cultures. In this way we become capable of carrying out the missionary task of our Society: to be witnesses of the Gospel of Christ to all by our personal lives, our community living and our inculturated proclamation of the Word of God. Formation must be integral, rooted in one's culture, community forming, directed towards missionary service, open to the needs of the world, and inspired by a spirituality rooted in our Founder and the founding generation.

The goal of formation is to achieve human maturity, committed faith and professional competence.⁴ Growth towards human maturity occurs in a progressive deepening of self-knowledge, in the unfolding of one's personal qualities and in the achievement of that inner freedom which makes responsible decisions possible. Religious formation should foster a committed faith that lives the Gospel and is a sign of Christ still at work today.⁵ Another aim of formation is to cultivate a listening ear for God's voice in the world.

The SVD General Chapter of 2000 introduced the term "prophetic dialogue": "Our discussions in the Chapter have confirmed that our understanding of *ad gentes* mission 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 frontier 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."⁶ The document continues: "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 constitutions⁷ 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.”⁸

A general chapter is the highest internal legislative authority of the congregation,⁹ and as such the documents published by such chapters also give direction to formation in the Society. Since 2000 SVD formation on all levels is challenged to deal with prophetic dialogue. The General Chapters before 2000 (mainly since 1988) had already prepared the understanding of prophetic dialogue.¹⁰

The General Chapter of 2006 focused on our “religious identity”: “There are many developments in the world today that demand a new and authentic missionary response.... Many of these developments relate to today’s process of secularization and globalization, which manifests itself in extreme forms of economic, social and religious deprivation. We therefore feel that we have to move along and concretize a little more the 2000 General Chapter Statement, in order to clarify and realize our missionary identity and to enhance the witness that is expressed in our own lives and in our communities....”¹¹ This poses also some challenges to formation. The statement of the XVI SVD General Chapter of 2006 has a separate part about formation that has been made the last chapter of the document. This was to underline that formation has to always also consider spirituality (part II, 1), community (part II, 2), leadership (part II, 3), and finances (part II, 4), if it wants to prepare formandi for the demands of religious-missionary life today. Therefore, formation is not only about acquiring skills and habits which are important for the work and life of a missionary. Already at the SVD General Chapter of 1988 a separate part of the final document was dedicated to formation. According to this, formation is “a contemplative-active journey to the Father, in the company of the Son, guided by the Holy Spirit” (Principle 1). This is also confirmed by Pope John Paul II’s *Redemptoris Missio* (RM) in the chapter on “missionary spirituality.” Such a spirituality is presented as the basis of all missionary activity which demands a specific spirituality, and it applies in particular to all those whom God has called to be missionaries.¹² The emphasis is on Christ the “missionary” of the Father who came to fulfill the plan of salvation for all humankind. Even though Christian spirituality has a missionary dimension, missionary spirituality in the specific sense is living the mystery of Christ as one “sent to evangelize.”¹³ In this sense, and applied to the SVD, speaking about missionary spirituality, we mean those who have a specific religious missionary vocation and who are “dedicated for life by this special vocation”¹⁴ to a life of participation in God’s mission, to witness to the Reign of God, and who are committed in

prophetic dialogue to solidarity with people who have no faith community or are faith-seekers, who are poor and marginalized, who are of different cultures or who are of different religions and ideologies.¹⁵

Since formation is the process of growing in communion with God, our image of God is vital. The prologue to the SVD Constitutions quotes Jn 3:16 to affirm that God's love is the motive and the content of Jesus' mission and its aim is that we may have life. *Ad Gentes* of Vatican II states: "The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father."¹⁶ The Triune God is a missionary God, always going beyond himself and reaching out in dialogue to humankind. Jesus came "to reveal the Father's name and to proclaim the Kingdom of his love." The Father's name which Jesus reveals is love and compassion. The Father's love for us is both limitless and unconditional.¹⁷ This love is the motivation for God's self-revelation in his Son and the Holy Spirit; this same love is also the reason for dialogue.

The 1988 Chapter further talks about "passing over and communion." P. McHugh comments that the Spirituality document "sees our lives as taken up into the paschal mystery of Christ which for us finds concrete expression in the process of Passing Over, the three special moments when we must imitate the Lord's 'Passover.' We are called to pass over when we enter another culture, when we become one with the poor, and when we engage in dialogue (51-52)."¹⁸

Formation, finally, must prepare our formandi for this threefold passing over. Preparation for this passing over means more than simply the imparting of suitable skills and abilities which will enable formandi to participate in the passing over process in the future. True, formation must provide the theory and the professional skills which are required. Yet the three passings over are not so much activities which we engage in and which we as SVDs do, but rather they express the inner mystery of what we as SVDs are. What has been said about passing over since the 1988 Chapter can also be applied to formation for prophetic dialogue. It is true, skills, abilities, theoretical knowledge, etc. are necessary for missionary work. Preparation in theology, spirituality, social sciences, etc. is needed. But formation has also to help already at present to progressively assimilate and actualize the key values of both the threefold passing over and prophetic dialogue. McHugh said in 1996: "Hence these three

passings over determine and shape all our SVD formation processes, they set its direction; they provide its chief characteristics.”¹⁹

In 1956, Fr. Schütte said: “...The goal of formation is the missionary priest! We are called to form missionaries of the Society of the Divine Word. Each one of these young men shall in future be a *Missionarius Verbi Divini*.” The goal of formation is the religious missionary. Now we can say that prophetic dialogue has to be or to become the essential factor in SVD formation. The goal, the challenge and also the way of SVD formation today is learning to live prophetic dialogue. Applying McHugh’s formulation to the new vocabulary we can say: “Prophetic dialogue determines and shapes all our SVD formation processes, sets its direction and provides its chief characteristics.”

This concerns initial as well as ongoing formation. Initial formation—the period from Novitiate until Final Vows or the end of studies/professional training—is intended to provide not only specific requirements for becoming priest or brother, but also to introduce formandi to the history, charism, and reality of the Society. Ongoing formation is intended, among other things, to update members about developments in the understanding of religious life and of mission. “It is important to note that formation is not a mechanical program. It is a process of answering God’s call. All aspects of missionary life need to be implemented properly. Formation should provoke enthusiasm for the Reign of God, set us on fire for community life, and encourage a spirit of dialogue. Therefore, formation programs at all stages should be renewed in the light of witness to the Reign of God, prophetic dialogue and the characteristic dimensions.”²⁰

While the General Chapter of 2000 dealt with our missionary call, the main focus of the 2006 chapter was our religious identity. The 2006 chapter statement “Living Prophetic Dialogue”²¹ presents the results in the five parts already mentioned above: Spirituality, Community, Leadership, Finances and Formation. These are “five aspects of our life together... (cc. 200-600). As the idea of prophetic dialogue has helped us to read anew the first section of our Constitutions (the 100s), we want to read the rest of our Constitutions from the same perspective.”²² Prophetic dialogue helps us to understand both our mission and our consecrated religious identity as SVDs.

Looking at formation, it is probably correct to say that few aspects of contemporary religious life have been as radically affected by the cultural and ecclesial upheaval of the past four decades as initial formation. *Vita Consecrata* is very clear about the primary objective of formation. It says that “since the

very purpose of consecrated life is conformity to the Lord Jesus in his *total self-giving*, this must also be the principal objective of formation.”²³ Thus, the formation process is to prepare people for the total consecration of themselves to God in the following of Christ, at the service of the Church’s mission. It adds that to say “yes” to the Lord’s call implies the person’s inescapable duty to take personal responsibility for maturing in his/her vocation.

Harking back to the 1988 statement we read in the final document of 2006: “Responding to Jesus’ invitation to discipleship, we are invited to remain with him and to take up our cross in a total commitment to the Reign of God, which is both demanding and rewarding. Special attention is required to cultivate a spirituality that can cope with imperfection and failure. As Jesus’ disciples we participate in his paschal mystery, we have a share in his joy and suffering, in his cross and resurrection. As Divine Word Missionaries we ‘pass over’ as we engage in prophetic dialogue.”²⁴

In 2010 the SVD Generalate published “Re-imagining the Pathways of Our Common Vocational Journey”²⁵ as an attempt to update, in the light of the understanding of our mission as Prophetic Dialogue, the general Principles of SVD Formation. After some introductory points the publication deals with the “changing landscape of the religious-missionary call” and “emerging challenges—required responses.” Among the “Guiding Principles of SVD Formation Today” the following points are mentioned:²⁶

1. SVD formation is formation for mission.²⁷ This implies that our formation programs take into consideration (the) SVD understanding(s) of mission as well as missionary challenges and situations of the contexts in which formation is located.
2. Mission as prophetic dialogue means reaching out to our dialogue partners in solidarity, respect and love. It is important that the essential practical skills for participating in and promoting dialogue are acquired during the years of initial formation.²⁸
3. The four-fold Characteristic Dimensions or SVD “family traits” need to be consciously cultivated and constantly nurtured through appropriate learning processes.²⁹
4. Formation is to be carried out in a spirit of dialogue. This concerns relationships *ad intra* (e.g. formators—formandi) as well as relations with the context through apostolates, exposure programs or simply every-day contacts with people in the context.

5. Harmonious living in inter-cultural communities is a way of practicing prophetic dialogue. It renders more effective and appealing our witness to the inclusiveness of God's kingdom and its openness to diversity.

Missionaries living in international or intercultural communities become, through the example of their life (dialogue of life), more credible witnesses of the universality of God's Reign and its openness to diversity. Kisala identifies three areas of intercultural living that need to be addressed through appropriate programs during initial formation: intercultural competence, knowledge of different cultures, and acquiring behavioral skills. "Our formation for intercultural living and mission must be based on the principle of mutuality emphasized by the word 'intercultural' and needs to be specific, not left to chance. Where they do not already exist, programs for understanding interculturalization and enhancing intercultural competency should be introduced, both in initial formation and in ongoing formation."³⁰

The General Chapter of 2012 again stressed that interculturality is a key dimension at every stage of our formation.³¹

2. Intercultural Formation in Europe

At present the intercultural SVD formation community in St. Augustin (Germany) has 28 members. 10 are studying the German language (1 among them is a priest), 13 are in their theological studies (11 in St. Augustin and 2 at the university of Munich), there is one brother in temporary vows, 2 newly ordained priests in their pastoral exposure and 2 formators. These confreres are from 10 nationalities: 6 from Indonesia, 4 from Vietnam, 4 from India, 3 from the Philippines, 2 from Ghana, 2 from China, 1 from Poland, Mexico and Togo and 4 from Germany. Of the language students 3 are preparing for their OTP in Austria, 3 for OTP in Germany, 3 for ESP in Germany, and 1 got his first assignment for Austria.

Looking only at these numbers, one can get an idea of challenges to formation. In addition some facts about the context of this formation community are of importance: (1) the formation community is the Juniorate community of the German-speaking SVD subzone, Europe-Central; (2) it is part of the larger SVD community of St. Augustin, a complex international/intercultural community with confreres in diverse tasks and assignments.

The multiculturalism of our formation context is not in itself a problem, but it does bring some problems. Only three examples may be given here—everyone can add to this list own experiences:

- Language: The language of the country where our formation community is located, is to be learned by all and will be the main means of communication in community, of formation and of exposure to missionary situations. If there are 10 nationalities in a community of 20, with very few local people, we may ask how deep the language can really be learned. Experience teaches that the best way of language learning is a combination of classroom situations and every day encounters with native speakers. We have to check our formation realities to evaluate the conditions of language learning.
- Local Culture: Our mission is about people. Looking at our “dialogue partners” (as we call people, who do not belong to any faith community or who are searching for the faith, people who are poor and living at the margins of society, people of different cultures and diverse faith traditions or secular ideologies) who belong to the local culture, we have to learn the local culture, also the contexts in which our formation communities are located. This means challenges also for intercultural formation communities.
- Intercultural community: Is profound intercultural exchange and mutual enrichment really possible in a formation community made up of persons from many different cultures? The General Chapter of 2012 had the following to say: “As a community of brothers from different nations and languages, we become a living symbol of the unity and diversity of the church. Intercultural communities need to be consciously created, intentionally promoted, carefully cared for and attentively nurtured. However, consciously or unconsciously, tensions and conflicts inevitably arise among confreres due to generation gaps, racism, ethnocentrism, personality differences and stereotyping. Confreres may be tempted to avoid the challenge of enriching intercultural experiences—either by imposing a uniform lifestyle, or by living in mutual indifference...”³²

Basic formation³³ in intercultural/international communities is one of the effective ways to form members into “internationality,” an essential part of the SVD charism.³⁴ One of the ways to promote internationality and inculturation is through exchange of formandi, especially at the theology level and to some

extent at the novitiate level. International formation communities were introduced by our founder himself who admitted candidates from different countries to mission seminaries that he opened. Currently, there are diverse international formation communities with formandi and formators from different countries in Europe.

We are starting with our own experiences, with the realities of our own life stories. But we want to go beyond, to cross boundaries and to learn new realities—both, from the others in our intercultural communities as well as from the context we are living in. Trying to learn interculturality we discover the importance of giving space to each nationality and/or culture, to go against the mechanisms of power and strength determining often international relations in politics, economy, etc. Each one, with his own national, cultural, individual and faith background has to be given and has to find his own space here. In addition, we want to learn the local culture—learning the language, meeting people, listening to their stories.

Former SVD Superior General Antonio Pernia presented some years ago consequences for SVD formation, resulting from developments in the Society. He stressed in a special way the need for a deeper spiritual formation “because the missionary of the future has to be a deeply spiritual person.” The spiritual formation, with emphasis on missionary spirituality, is the basis of religious missionary life in all its forms. For the SVD “prophetic dialogue” is more and more understood as a basic attitude, as spirituality: openness for others, both, inside as well as outside our communities with the emphasis on missionary situations in our context. We are not learning interculturality for the sake of community life only, but mainly for our participation in God’s mission.

Another point made by Fr. Pernia is about formation for interculturality. “Formation should help the formandi to grow by living the spirit of prophetic dialogue in a way that it shapes our basic relationships to God, to myself, to others and to creation. This relationship with God and other people is what helps to keep alive the enthusiasm for mission.”³⁵ The SVD is probably one of the most international religious congregations in the church. “We do not only allow internationality, we actively seek it. Internationality is a fundamental mark of the SVD. But internationality does not simply happen. Living in an international formation community requires the development of additional gifts, talents or skills than living in a culturally homogenous community.” A community is an event, not a given fact. It is not just there; it becomes an event which people try to achieve: a community as achievement of common meaning.

The common meaning entails that nobody should be excluded; all are part of the group. There are at least two conditions to gain “intercultural competence,” i.e., to learn internationality: to know and tell the own and the own people’s story, as well as to be interested in and to listen to other people’s stories.

Again and again there have been discussions about the structures of our formation community in Germany. We need to develop a keen awareness of the advantages and disadvantages of the structures that provide us with support during the years of initial formation. While big communities with elaborate infrastructure facilities provide us with stability, security and an atmosphere conducive to academic work, they can cut us off from the reality of the world outside. This in turn can engender within us a certain insensitivity to our surrounding reality. We are living in monastery-like structures with a more or less monastic lifestyle, while the “world out there” is moving into a totally different direction. It may often be the case that old structures are not adequate to take on the new challenges that we face in the area of formation. Especially with formandi from different parts of the world the introduction to local culture, lifestyles and situations remains extremely difficult if it is only happening as limited exposure, after which one can always return to the safety of the “monastery” (i.e. seminary). We have to give more serious and courageous consideration to our religious-missionary identity in today’s world in a European context.... It is true that small formation communities may not always and everywhere be a viable option, but our preference should be for programs that allow for interpersonal interaction and rootedness in the life of the people. Our choice of vocation as religious missionaries should instill in us the need to develop a keen awareness of the socio-economic reality that exists in our immediate surroundings and a sense for responsible use of the facilities offered to us.³⁶

We are an intercultural SVD formation community in the concrete context of Germany. Our interculturality is always supposed to be contextual. We are still striving to understand its meaning; what is the role of the context we are living in, how can we live our identity and charism as SVD formation community in this specific context?

“Proper attitudes towards cultural difference are perhaps most often seen as respect and appreciation for other cultures, attitudes that one could almost assume in someone who chooses to join an international community such as the SVD. Certainly this is essential, and having these attitudes goes a long way towards forming members with intercultural competence, but I sometimes get

the impression that we too easily leave the matter there, believing that if the heart is in the right place then everything else will follow...³⁷

3. SVD Formation: Learning to Live Prophetic Dialogue

“The goal of all formation and education in our Society is growth by the power of the Holy Spirit into unity with the Incarnate Word of the Father and into a missionary community comprising members from many countries and cultures. This growth is a lifelong task, a shared responsibility to be faced both by the individual and the community. In this way we become capable of carrying out the missionary task of our Society: to be witness of the gospel of Christ to all by our personal lives, our community living and our preaching so that Christian communities may be built up” (SVD Const. 501).

“Our formation for Brothers and clerics must be integral, lifelong and dialogical; addressing concerns related to SVD mission, spirituality, community life, leadership and finances”³⁸—this statement of the XVI SVD General Chapter underlines the central role of prophetic dialogue in SVD formation. Frequently the mission is not the principle articulating the whole process of formation. It is usually thought that, before any personal implication in the mission, each candidate in the period of initial formation has to solve his own personal problems, or conflicts. To a certain extent that is true; but to try to solve personal conflicts outside of the mission and the vocation to mission is to deprive ourselves of the best resource to solve them. In the measure in which the vocational-missionary spirit does not work, the formation process goes astray, becomes narcissistic, too sensitive to the individual horizon.³⁹

Formation includes different aspects and areas. The essential or determining factor of SVD formation today is prophetic dialogue. Religious missionary SVD formation is about learning to live prophetic dialogue. As examples we may take a look at the areas of “spirituality” and “community.”

Sandra Schneiders⁴⁰ stresses that formation programs were fairly standard across congregations at the close of Vatican II and had been for centuries, evolving superficially to some degree in terms of the type of candidates who were entering in a given time and period but changing very little, substantively, in philosophy, theology, spirituality, or even actual practice. Things changed radically within a few years when congregations began to revise their constitutions following renewal chapters in the 1960s and 1970s. In fact, even someone convinced that the council and its implications for religious life were the

most important and positive ecclesial events of the modern period would probably agree that formation was in serious disarray within a few years of the close of the council. In the meantime, 45 years after Vatican II, directions have been found, formation programs have been formulated and put into practice in many places. The document of the 2006 Chapter says:

- *Initial/basic formation* encourages a respectful “passing over” to live and work with our dialogue partners, and fosters a missionary spirituality. OTP/CTP/EIP[exposure and immersion programs]/regency emphasize the capacity for living and working in multicultural settings and confront the participants with the situation of misery, deficiency and the wounded human condition. The years of theological reflection are a time for inculturation and contextualization.
- *Introduction programs* for new missionaries stress culture and language learning, and initiation into the local SVD missionary commitment.
- *Ongoing formation* deals with the spiritual and professional needs of all the confreres to remain updated and in touch with the concerns of the Society and the Church. We also pay special attention to accompanying the First-5s [confreres in their first five years after the final vows] and retirees.⁴¹

Being mainly interested in “*initial/basic formation*” here, the statement poses some challenges to present formation programs. Prophetic Dialogue calls for a spiritual basis, if it is understood as a missionary attitude. This spirituality is grounded in the mystery of Incarnation and will be a continuous challenge to listen to God’s Word. “As Missionaries of the Divine Word, we need to be in regular contact with the Word of God.”⁴² “We do not live our mission spirituality alone; we live it as members of an SVD community, embedded in the universal Church and in dialogue with the people with whom we live and work. Thus our spirituality embraces more than our devotional prayer life; it permeates and enlivens every aspect of our relationships, with God, other people and all of creation. And so we participate in building up the life of the Church, the Body of Christ, to its full maturity (Eph 4:13; c. 523) and we reach out as members of the Church to all humanity.”⁴³ But with all general goals and programs being formulated we have also to keep in mind that formation programs must be individualized in terms of the candidate’s background. This may be a contextual concern—in certain contexts there may be a greater variety of backgrounds and a stronger emphasis on the individual than

in others. In addition, there are contexts where (male) candidates follow more or less the same path—starting in minor seminaries and going on from there. But in many contexts there is a growing number of “late vocations,” i.e. of candidates who have already finished professional training or studies in a field different from theology and religious life. For example no one’s prayer life should be retarded or reversed to fit some standard program of formation in meditation. Because the candidate’s prayer life is of utmost importance, if he wants to discern his vocation before God, the selection of a competent spiritual director is necessary. In addition to personal prayer life and accompaniment, participation in the liturgy of the church and in community prayer is integral to the formation process.⁴⁴ All this should be supported by the process of introduction into the congregation’s spirituality—programs for this should be developed for the different stages of initial formation. If prophetic dialogue is the essential factor in SVD formation today, there will be introductions into a missionary spirituality of prophetic dialogue, based on the congregation’s heritage and charism as well as on the signs of the times, on the context of formation (culture, country, etc.) and on the life realities of those we call “our dialogue partners.” In addition, the formation community itself is important: is it a small or a large community? Is the community international, intercultural, or are all members of the same context? Is the community a “school of dialogue”?

There are different charismatic forms of understanding community, which underscore, for example, its aspect of religiosity or fraternity, as expressed in terms such as “religious community” or “community-fraternity.” What defines our own communities in their particular make-up and identifies them in the church is our Society’s charism. The frame of reference, when we talk about community, is not just the local community, but the congregation or the congregational community. The designation *religious community* applies first and foremost to the *congregational community*. It is the subject par excellence of our charism, and the subject of our mission. “We are a community of brothers from different nations and cultures and we strive to be a living symbol of the unity and diversity of the Church and the Reign of God...”⁴⁵ M. Scott Peck states: “In and through community lies the salvation of the world.”⁴⁶ One will have to read the whole book to understand this statement, but Scott Peck writes his book as a contribution to “peacemaking” in our time. Instead of stopping at Huntington’s “Clash of Civilizations” he interprets the signs of our times as a challenge to community building among people. José Cristo Rey García Paredes speaks about “Religious Community as a Parable of Love.”⁴⁷ He writes:

“Mission is not an exterior dynamism that is somehow super-added to an already constituted community. The very event of missioning is what originates or is at the origin of our apostolic communities. Without co-occurring and co-working in the same charismatic project of mission, there would be no such thing as a religious community. Mission constitutes us as a community.”⁴⁸

As stated above, SVD communities are to be international communities.⁴⁹ The 2006 Chapter underlines this, when it says that as communities “together we build a home, one that is faith-filled, fraternal, international/multicultural and welcoming. Such life-giving community has often served as ‘a genuine school of dialogue’ (GC 2000, 102) and gives countercultural witness in today’s world.”⁵⁰ Living such international/multicultural community life needs to be learned in formation (initial and ongoing formation) and remains a challenge to each member of the community. Fr. Pernia presents five points about the experience of internationality in the SVD.⁵¹

- (1) We consider internationality as an essential element of our charism and thus also a fundamental feature of our identity as a congregation. The idea is enshrined in our constitutions and is considered a value which is to be sought after and actively promoted in all our communities.
- (2) Our highly centralized system of governance fosters the promotion of internationality. Despite some steps taken recently toward decentralization, the distribution of personnel and finances has remained in the hands of the central administration. First assignments are given by the superior general and his council. Likewise transfers from one province to another are made by the general administration. And both first assignments and transfers are usually done according to the principle of relative internationality.
- (3) Some programs of formation for internationality have been developed in the course of time. The Overseas Training Program (or Cross-cultural Training Program) allows students to spend two to three years working or studying in a culture other than their own. Common Formation Centres or International Formation Houses with an international staff is another attempt. The Exchange Student Program is an even older practice.
- (4) There are, of course, some places that have become impervious, so to speak, to internationality—largely due to government restrictions. Examples are India and Indonesia. In these cases, we try to give first as-

signments outside the country to as many as possible, in the hope that some of them would return to their home countries and share their international experience with the rest of the confreres.

- (5) We also have an international renewal programme in Nemi where those who never had any exposure to the foreign mission can have an experience of internationality.

Internationality is already mission, if a religious missionary family of brothers coming from different nations and cultures gives witness to the universality of the church and the universality of God's love. "Missionaries are called to especially stress the 'universal inclusiveness' and the 'openness to diversity' of God's love. Like the first disciples and with the entire church, we pray to the Father, as Jesus taught us, that 'thy Kingdom come.' We oppose exclusion and oppression..."⁵² This may pose challenges to the many forms of "ethnocentrism"⁵³ (like paternalism, triumphalism, racism...) that are present even in religious missionary communities and that have to be addressed in formation, because usually these ethnocentrisms are not helpful or even oppose the understanding of mission and religious life as prophetic dialogue.

José Cristo Rey García Paredes⁵⁴ states: When mission is at the heart of consecrated life, its government or service of authority, formation and theology have the same ample horizons of the mission of God: the One governing is the Father, the One forming and shaping the future missionaries is the Spirit and the One who inspires this missionary life with his Word is the Son. According to *Dei Verbum*, the Constitution on Divine Revelation of Vatican II, all started with God taking the initiative and entering into dialogue with humanity: "In His goodness and wisdom God chose to reveal Himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of His will by which through Christ, the Word made flesh, man might in the Holy Spirit have access to the Father and come to share in the divine nature. Through this revelation, therefore, the invisible God out of the abundance of His love speaks to men as friends and lives among them, so that He may invite and take them into fellowship with Himself" (DV 2).

The 2006 Chapter document concludes in the following way: "We are called anew to a radical transformation of our mentality, attitudes, and behavior in order to become better witnesses at the service of God's Reign. We renew our awareness that mission is not primarily our task; mission is first of all *Missio Dei*. We are participants in God's saving dialogue with humanity, and thus we confirm with our Founder that to proclaim the Good News is the greatest act of love for our neighbors. We believe that this love must also be

evident in our life together. Faithful and committed missionary service flows from our living together as brothers in communion with the Triune God. This is what we mean by ‘living prophetic dialogue,’ and in this way we strive to make real the words of the prologue to our Constitutions: ‘His life is our life, his mission our mission.’”⁵⁵

4. Academic Formation

As example for academic formation some points of the “Profile of the Philosophical-Theological Faculty SVD St. Augustine” from 2010 shall be quoted here⁵⁶:

1. Philosophical-Theological Faculty SVD St. Augustine

The Philosophical-Theological Faculty SVD St. Augustine is a School of Higher Academic Studies in the fields of theology, philosophy and social sciences...

Three special autonomous institutes of scientific research, the “Institute of Missiology,” the “Anthropos Institute” (anthropological institute), the “Institute Monumenta Serica” (institute of Chinese culture) as well as the ethnological museum “Haus Völker und Kulturen” and the “China Center” (for contacts with the Catholic Church in China) operate in close cooperation with St. Augustine’s Philosophical-Theological Faculty.

The Philosophical-Theological Faculty SVD St. Augustine at the town Sankt Augustin offers the required all round academic training to the students of the Society of the Divine Word, to students of other religious orders and communities and to members of the secular clergy and lay people as well. We address ourselves to all people interested in an encounter of and prophetic dialogue with other cultures and religions, main points of the program and self-understanding of the SVD, and in questions of worldwide solidarity. Various course programs prepare for the degrees of Magister, Licentiat, and Doctor in Catholic Theology to be conferred by our Faculty.

Among our study programs, the module “Missions, Cultures and Religions” introduces students to a field of research specifically elaborated at the Philosophical-Theological Faculty. This module resulted from the original mission program of the SVD and has no equivalent at any other academic institution in Germany. We emphasize solid information in the fields of missi-

ology, science of religion, and anthropology. This should enable the students to assess the worldwide missionary dimension of the Christian faith, the Church, and of Catholic theology. Along the road indicated, the students are led to approach various historical-cultural contexts in their face to face with other cultures and religions encouraged by solid standards of social and methodical competence to impressively convey the Christian message in word and deed.

Life at campus is visibly marked by the international milieu both of the student body and of the faculty members, a genuine training ground for life and dialogue in multicultural settings and for the interpenetration of both learned and lived theology. We may say that it is this link between spirituality and the endeavors of scholarship which has distinguished the Philosophical-Theological Faculty SVD St. Augustine as a center of a distinctive intellectual apostolate both within and on behalf of the local Church in Germany and the Church at large.

2. *“A pearl on the academic scene in Germany, yet all too little known”*

While faculty and student body well appreciate the unique qualities of our religious institution, it has to be said that the potential of this Catholic Theological Faculty has not yet found much attention, neither within the Church (even in the SVD, among other missionary orders and religious communities, among the German dioceses), nor in general social consciousness, nor among the academic public of the German intellectual scene.

The number of students in Europe registering for the study of Catholic theology has been decreasing in recent years. Research and teaching positions in theology have been more and more concentrated on fewer more prominent academic institutions. These circumstances indicate to us the necessity to engage in more public relations work in order to recruit those women and men who are interested in philosophical-theological studies with special emphasis on missiology, anthropology, and science of religion within a learning ambience of international flair and tastes.

To the members of SVD, we ought to get across what the types of services there are which the intellectual apostolate of the Faculty is capable of and ready to render to our religious congregation, to other religious orders, and for the Church and society as a whole. This we consider of primary importance, if the SVD-GER, with receding revenues and a present portion of just 20% SVD-

members of the overall student body, is to continue to assure the operation of our Philosophical-Theological Faculty in the long run.

We also have to see to it, to put into right perspective the importance of this academic training center for the local Church. We have to stress the contribution which our Faculty is capable of presenting both for the Church and society at large, which at the age of globalization have to rely on personnel competent in intercultural and interreligious thinking and initiatives. [...]

4. Approaching the future, guided by new vistas concerning worthwhile initiatives

All of us, teachers, students, and the German Province of the SVD as well, we are daring the engagement into this process of profiling our program, approaching at this point the centenary of our Major Seminary, benefitting from an even older tradition of openness for new challenges. Respectful consideration of new and foreign elements and circumstances, transcending of borderlines and mature sensibility for people and the contexts wherein we live, have taught us not only persistence but also genuine joy at discovering the truth of the Good News, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and his redeeming presence to all peoples and cultures.

Called by him, we invite all those prepared to offer us valuable contributions to assist us in the process of developing our Faculty into a center of intellectual outreach in the exercise of the apostolate of the German Province of the Divine Word Missionaries across the German territories and their local Churches, and the worldwide Church all across the continents, peoples, cultures, and languages.

On this road we feel motivated by intellectual vivacity and an enriching variety of interdisciplinary collaboration, by our community experience of productive diversity and by the undertaking of elaborating a theology sensitive to multiple contexts of contemporary humanity with pragmatic remedies cut to its needs.

Taking for granted that caring for people and genuine concern for the growth of the Kingdom of God make up the heartbeat of all our profiling efforts, we feel confident to be able to realize within about ten years from now the objectives proposed, expecting at the same time a relevant rise in communication and cooperation at our Faculty. Promising witness urges us on to get going.

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- ¹ SVD Generalate, *In Dialogue with the Word* (IDW) No. 11, September 2012, 26.
- ² *Ibid.*, 42.
- ³ See for example: “You are all brothers,” Orientations for Brother formation in the SVD, SVD Publications, Generalate – Rome 2005.
- ⁴ Cf. SVD Const. 503.
- ⁵ Cf. *ibid.*
- ⁶ IDW 1 (September 2000) 52.
- ⁷ SVD Const. 114.
- ⁸ IDW 1, 53.
- ⁹ SVD Const. 616.
- ¹⁰ See: P. McHugh, SVD Missionary Formation: *Verbum SVD* 38 (1997) 24-44.
- ¹¹ A. Pernia, in: IDW 6, *Documents of the XVI General Chapter*, September 2006, 11f.
- ¹² Cf. Redemptoris Missio (RM) 87.
- ¹³ Cf. RM 88.
- ¹⁴ Cf. RM 27.
- ¹⁵ In: IDW 6, 5.
- ¹⁶ *Ad Gentes* (AG) 2.
- ¹⁷ Cf. Prologue of the SVD Constitutions.
- ¹⁸ Cf. McHugh, 32.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 33.
- ²⁰ IDW 6, 99.
- ²¹ IDW 6, Part II.
- ²² IDW 6, 2.
- ²³ *Vita Consecrata* (VC) 65.
- ²⁴ IDW 6, 88.
- ²⁵ SVD Publications, Generalate – Rome 2010.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, 7f.
- ²⁷ See also: M. Üffing, The Essential Factor in SVD Formation Today: *Verbum SVD* 50 (2009) 173-197.
- ²⁸ See: Stephen B. Bevans/Roger P. Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue: Reflections on Christian Mission Today*, Maryknoll, NY 2011.
- ²⁹ See: IDW 3, *Characteristic Dimensions*, September 2002.
- ³⁰ See Kisala, 343.
- ³¹ IDW 11 (September 2012) 42.

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- ³² Ibid., 30
- ³³ See for the following also: Kurian T.K., Formation for Interculturality: *Verbum SVD* 43 (2002) 161-176.
- ³⁴ Cf. Antonio Pernia, Internationality and SVD Identity: *Verbum SVD* 38 (1997) 45-61.
- ³⁵ *Re-imagining the Pathways of Our Common Vocational Journey*, SVD Publications, Rome 2010, 18.
- ³⁶ See *ibid.*, 28f.
- ³⁷ R. Kisala, Formation for Intercultural Life and Mission: *Verbum SVD* 50 (2009) 331-345, 339f. See the whole article about formation for intercultural life and mission.
- ³⁸ IDW 6, 87.
- ³⁹ Cf. J. García Paredes, Mission: The Key to Understand Consecrated Life Today: *Religious Life Asia* 6, No. 1 (2004).
- ⁴⁰ S. M. Schneiders, *Selling All: Commitment, Consecrated Celibacy and Community in Catholic Religious Life*, New York 2001. On formation: 34-77.
- ⁴¹ IDW 6, 94.
- ⁴² IDW 6, 29.
- ⁴³ IDW 6, 15.
- ⁴⁴ Cf. Schneiders, 35.
- ⁴⁵ IDW 6, 34.
- ⁴⁶ M. Scott Peck, *The Different Drum*, London 1990, 17.
- ⁴⁷ Quezon City: ICLA Publications 1995.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.
- ⁴⁹ See about this topic Fr. A. Pernia's talk "Internationality and SVD Identity," published in *Verbum SVD* 38 (1997) 45-61. The talk was given at the second SVD Asia-Pacific Formators' Workshop in Ledalero, Indonesia, in 1996.
- ⁵⁰ IDW 6, 35.
- ⁵¹ Antonio M. Pernia, SVD, "International Religious Communities in a Multicultural World (The Experience of Internationality in the SVD)", text presented at the SEDOS Conference (13 February 2004).
- ⁵² IDW 6, 6.
- ⁵³ Cf. L. Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures*, Maryknoll, NY 1988, 64-66.
- ⁵⁴ Paredes, Mission.
- ⁵⁵ IDW 6, 107.
- ⁵⁶ The full text may be found at: <http://www.pth-augustin.eu/pth/profil/english.php>.