

*Samuel N. Agcaracar, SVD**

TOWARD AN INTERCULTURAL MISSION
Tracking the SVD Missionary Trajectory in the Philippines

Since 1909, the Divine Word Missionaries (SVD) work in the Philippines and have advanced in the inculturation of Christianity. Their main interest lies in serving the church's needs. The perspective of interculturality places the SVD before the challenges of contributing to a universal face of the church, through the ministry of communion, in the field of dialogue and in the care for God's creation.

Introduction

For many decades, the SVD's understanding and praxis of mission in the Philippines have always revolved around "conversion" and "church implantation." An interview with a German confrere assigned in the country from the 1960s to the '90s brings light to this impression. He shared: "Our main concern was to engage with various evangelizing activities and traditional pastoral works, catechesis, sacramental concerns, etc.; hence, there was not much talk about any distinct SVD paradigm of mission."¹ This thought reflects the said missionary paradigms prevalent in such periods. But with the evolving exigencies of mission, religious congregations are beckoned to go beyond those commonplace paradigms to sustain their influence in the local church.

In light of the five hundred years celebration of Christianity in the Philippines, this paper attempts to appraise the SVD's contribution to the local church through the lens of interculturality. It aims to explore the SVD intercultural mission trajectory in the Philippines. It has a

* Samuel N. Agcaracar, SVD, is from the Philippines. He is presently teaching at the Divine Word Seminary and Divine Word Institute of Mission Studies in Tagaytay City, and also a guest professor at the Pontifical University of Santo Tomas in Manila, Institute of Consecrated Life in Asia in Quezon City, and St. Joseph University in Macau. He obtained his licentiate and doctorate in Missiology at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome.

¹ An interview with Fr. Herbert Scholz, SVD (January 15, 2017). At the time of the interview, Fr. Scholz was the librarian of the *Collegio del Verbo Divino* in Rome. Fr. Scholz was a missionary in the Philippines for thirty years before being called to Rome to serve in the Generalate.

threefold task. First, provide a historical context of the Philippine SVD mission—both in its beginning and today. Second, to lay down the missiological-ecclesiological grounds for the relevance of intercultural mission. And third, to establish horizons for intercultural mission and its relevance to the local church's mission of culture evangelization.

1. *The Philippine SVD Mission: Then and Now*

The SVD missionaries came to the Philippines when reforms and organization of the local church and missionary activities in the region were being pursued.² This turn of events at the dawn of the 20th century was remarkably due to the socio-economic and political changes that also impacted the Filipino people's religious-spiritual life.³

1.1. *Historical Contexts*

There are vital circumstances that necessitated and shaped the Philippine SVD mission. *First* was the Catholic clergy shortage caused by the Spanish missionaries' departure from the country that left most Catholic parishes without pastors. Various religious congregations responded to the bishops' call and stepped in to take care of the flocks that had been without shepherds for years and years. But what made the SVDs distinct was that, while the earlier Spanish missionaries were attached to the interests of their government, their presence in the Philippines was not to realize the interests of the German government. The SVDs responded to the bishops' urgent requests, which needed human resources to attend several parishes' pastoral care.⁴

The *second* was the introduction of Protestantism. The defeat of the Spaniards by the Americans in 1898 led to the establishment of a new colonial government. It also paved the way to a considerable number of Protestant sects from different countries but mainly from the United States, with their plan "to help the poor Filipinos to throw off the yoke

² The first Missionaries of the Society of the Divine Word arrived in the Philippines in 1909. They first settled in the Abra, in the northern part of the country. It was the last decision of St. Arnold Janssen before he died in terms of expanding the SVD's mission territories to various parts of the world. – See M. Layugan's contribution in this issue.

³ Leo XIII, *Quae Mari Sinico: Apostolic Constitution on the Reform and Organization of the Philippine Church*, Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana 1902. This document deals with the reorganization and reform of the Philippine Church after the Spanish friars' departure from the country.

⁴ See Bruno Hagspiel, *Along the Mission Trail*, Techny, IL: Mission Press SVD 1925, 258-259.

of the Roman Pope, to bring them the true Gospel, and to lead them on to liberty and freedom.”⁵ This compelled the church to counteract Protestantism in the country—all for the Catholic faith’s interest. The SVD, being a German congregation, was perceived by the hierarchy as more competent in dealing with the Protestants. The early SVD missionaries tried to live up to such a challenge and expectation.

The *third* was the rise of *Aglipayanism*. The Founder, Gregorio Aglipay, only initially intended to withdraw the church from the Pope’s primacy. However, the group he had founded acquired the character of a clear-cut sect by professing heretical doctrines. The *Aglipayans* (the group’s followers) tried to attract the poorly instructed Christians and pagans by deception, lies, and calumnies.⁶ While the Protestants capitalized on their stable financial resources, the Aglipayans exploited the traces of the Revolution. Hence, aggravated by the growing anti-friar sentiments of the intellectuals and elite groups, Aglipayanism became a rallying point for the Filipino people to express their grievances against colonialism. This often resulted in spates of violence, usually at the expense of the Catholic Church. Deprived of its priests, the church became vulnerable, which led to its members’ apostasy on a large scale.⁷

After more than a century, the above contexts have been eclipsed by changing circumstances that called for various responses from the church. The SVDs also adapted to the call of the changing times.

1.2. *Reading the Signs of the Times*

There has been an emerging direction of turning over established parishes to the diocese’s custody in recent years. This trend is due to the increasing number of the local clergy, which contrasts with the universal tendency of declining vocations in religious life. It may sound negative on the side of the religious congregations; however, seeing it through the lens of inculturation, this should benefit the local churches since it would mean more local pastors that would take care of the needs of the people.

Undoubtedly, such development has some repercussions on the future of these congregations, especially on their “institutionalized ministries” such as parishes, schools, hospitals, etc. And so, one may be tempted to ask: When religious-run parishes and other institutions will be given to the dioceses, what other missionary works are in store

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 226.

⁷ Ibid., 227-228.

for them? Without these special ministries, will they still be relevant in the future? If yes, what missionary trajectories lie before them?

For the SVDs, their mission in the Philippines is anchored on two considerations: the Society's charism and the second is the local church's needs. This means that their relevance hinges on the Society's openness to exploring new mission opportunities, faithful to its heritage. For the SVDs, their relevance is primarily dependent on a clearly defined sense of mission to contribute to the local church's growth.

Through the lens of interculturality, the SVDs might discover new missionary horizons that bring about a more authentic expression of their congregation's charism and a more distinct contribution to the local church. However, while interculturality's relevance as mission dimension is greatly based on the contingencies of multicultural societies, it should also respond to the theological urgency and necessities of the present times. Thus, we posit: What local ecclesiological frameworks behoove the practice of interculturality in the Philippines? How does such a framework justify its peculiar contributions?

2. Faces of the Philippine Church: Ecclesiological Considerations

In light of the above concerns, I propose two arguments: First, an "inculturated church" serves as the "local face" of the church; and second, an "intercultural church" serves as the "universal face" of the church. This proposal provides a holistic view of inculturation and interculturality as mission dimensions. It also lays down the distinction between the two concepts and points out their complementary roles towards culture evangelization in the Philippines.

2.1. An Inculturated Local Face

Inculturation in the Philippines had sought to strengthen the local church's identity. The perceived compatibility of the Gospel culture and the Filipino culture indicates a relative success along this trajectory. This claim has been articulated by no less than the Philippine hierarchy. In its Pastoral Exhortation on the Philippine Culture, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) contends:

... We can honestly say that our values are, in their unvitiated state, high human ideals, and to the extent that the authentically human is also authentically divine, we can in all truth say too that our values as a people are reflections of the divine, are seeds of the Gospel already

present in our culture. So the work of conversion, both personal and social, that we speak of here, if we are faithful to the best of our own native values and conscientiously act from them, has already firm grounding in our culture.⁸

The discernable symmetry between fundamental Filipino values and those of the Gospel is a signpost of a truly inculturated church. Thus, the above assessment proves the success of inculturation in the Philippines. The Filipino sense of piety and religiosity further reflects such a success. The CBCP describes it clearly:

So, when we look at the Church as it has developed in the Philippines over all those years, we cannot but come to the conclusion that it is much, much more a “local Church” (in the sense the term has developed since Vatican II) than we think. There has been a real wedding of faith and culture as we have been defining inculturation here and their integration is quite substantial. Thus, when we consider our people’s deep religiosity and its manifestations in popular devotions, rituals and celebrations, we see that enough integration of our faith and our culture has taken place. And this only means the work of inculturation is quite advanced.⁹

As implied above, the Philippine Church has already achieved its vision of inculturated communities that echoes the same FABC’s (Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences) vision of a local face of the church. And since the success of an inculturated church depends on the local church’s agency, the Philippine Church has succeeded in empowering its people to take responsibility for such an evangelizing task.

Such perceived success has twofold implications. First, it means the local church has succeeded in realizing and fulfilling its sense of identity. Borrowing the FABC’s thought, we can say it has attained its vision of a “Filipino Church.” It reflects *Gaudium et spes*’ vision of a church that is sensitive and grounded on the joys and hopes and the grief and anxieties of its peoples.¹⁰ Second, this self-identification should beckon the local church to distinguish itself from others and

⁸ Catholic Bishops’ Conferences of the Philippines, *Pastoral Exhortation on Philippine Culture*, 1999, part III, no. 3.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ See Vatican II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes*, 1964, no. 1.

grow into its fullest capacity for communion, participation, and mission.

In such a sense, inculturation should not only aim at strengthening the local church's identity. It allows the Filipino culture to be penetrated, transformed, and recreated by the transforming power of the Gospel. More importantly, it empowers the local church to become an agent and an icon of communion that contributes to the building of the universal church. This sense of communion has to be seen both in the local and universal spheres. Nonetheless, for the local church to become an agent of communion, it must first promote unity within its fold. A more crucial challenge then is how to empower the local church to become an agent of unity amid a multicultural and multi-ethnic nation like the Philippines.

2.2. *An Intercultural Universal Face*

Inculturation aims for the communion of churches within a communion of peoples. This communion is realized within the world and the cosmos. It is redeemed by Christ and indwelt in its unity-in-diversity by the Trinitarian life and blessing. The FABC echoes this thought recognizing the church's place as a small flock journeying among Asia's vast multitudes. It says: "Our special contribution in this journey is our striving towards a 'Communion of Communities' beginning with the family, a New Way of Being Church that brings the new face of Christ into the workings of Asian Society."¹¹

Such an objective captures the essence of the Catholicity of the church—that Catholic unity—which is progressively realized and enlarged in history in the expanding communion of local churches within the unity of the one, holy and apostolic church.¹² Furthermore, this communion allows local churches to find their place in the catholicity that defines the church. As Arevalo, a prominent FABC theologian, writes:

Every local Church can only contribute to this dream of catholicity when it is given a status of equality—a local Church helps to bring forth the catholic communion as the ultimate aim of being Church. Unless every local Church shares in the *koinonia* that is the Church universal, in

¹¹ Final Statement of the FABC International Theological Colloquium, "Being Church in Asia: Journeying with the Spirit into Fuller Life," no. 24 (Thailand, April 16, 1994), in: Franz-Josef Eilers, SVD, *For All the Peoples of Asia*, vol. 2, Quezon City: Claretian 1997, 221.

¹² CBCP, *Pastoral Exhortation on Philippine Culture*.

true equality, in authentic participation, in the interchange of gifts and blessings, the dream of catholicity has not yet been realized. It is part of our deepest duty, as Catholics especially, to help bring this to pass.¹³

Such a call of communion demands an act of mutual engagement among members of the church—be it individually or collectively. However, since human encounter is always culture-based, the road to communion also beckons navigating multiple cultural patterns. A local church that sits in a highly multicultural and multi-ethnic society cannot ignore the importance of this assumption. The local church should not even dream of authentic communion if the intricacies of sub-cultures are not being recognized and addressed with all the tensions they imply. In this regard, interculturality can reinforce communion through multicultural encounters. However, this encounter only becomes transformative when the Gospel culture permeates the participating cultural groups, without which no culture evangelization is possible.

Culturally, Filipinos are inclined to seek mediators in various facets of their lives, such as courtship, negotiations, conflict resolution, and even the simple asking of higher authorities' permission. The Filipino cultural value of shame and their being non-confrontational often necessitate this need. More often than not, however, Filipinos only agree to be mediated by competent persons or credible personalities. Being a Catholic nation, the church is often regarded as a neutral party representative—thus, an ideal mediator. The priest or religious missionary often becomes the model and the desired bridge between the concerned parties.

Becoming bridge-builders mirrors an aspect or even the core of interculturality as a mission dimension. It harmonizes well with Schreiter's notion of "reconciliation as a paradigm of mission in our contemporary times."¹⁴ It also concurs with the "witness" dimension of mission as an antidote to marginalization and discrimination. It is a potent tool in promoting unity amidst various cultural divides. It could be a counter-culture to the disharmony and tensions that sometimes affect the sense of communion in the life and structures of the church due to cultural diversity.

¹³ Catalino G. Arevalo, *Yearbook of Contextual Theologies*, 1995, 34-35; quoted in Sebastian Karotemprel et al. (eds.), *Promoting Mission Studies: The Role of Missiological Studies*, Shillong: Vendrame Institute Publications 2000, 31-32.

¹⁴ Robert Schreiter, *Reconciliation: Mission and Ministry in a Changing Social Order*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 1992.

Viewing intercultural mission through the lens of “bridge-building” and “reconciliation” could also help the local church deepen its awareness of the reality of mission outside itself. Through inculturation, the local church strives to strengthen its own identity. But with interculturality, the church seeks to open its doors for the “Others”—both within and beyond its fold. Thus, the intercultural mission could help propel the local church in reinforcing its mission *ad gentes* as an expression of solidarity with the universal church.¹⁵ The CBCP is crystal clear in this regard:

We as Church are called to be in our part of the globe “the universal sacrament of salvation,” sent out by the Lord on a mission to the whole of the human race (*Lumen gentium*, no. 13). The Church universal is Catholic because of this mission. But each particular or local Church, being Catholic, shares in the same task. Hence, to each local Church, the mandate is also given to proclaim Jesus’ message and invitation to give living witness of God’s love in Christ Jesus and share the gifts it has received from the Lord. For the Church in the Philippines, there is a new insistence and a new urgency to fulfill this mandate for every one of our local Churches.¹⁶

Any failure to respond to the above call is defiance to the inherent call of the Church to mission as enshrined in the Great Commission (Matt 28:16). It is emblematic of what Pope Francis calls a “self-centered church.” It is an utter display of parochialism and ethnocentrism. In this regard, interculturality as a mission dimension could be a living reminder to the Filipino people of the universal character of the church, where peoples of various races and nations can come together despite differences and some obstacles. It could both challenge and inspire the Philippine Church to transform itself into a welcoming church that is transfigured into the all-embracing spirit of Jesus Christ. It could enrich the faithful’s joyful reliving of the Pentecost event where, despite language differences (Ilocano, Tagalog, Visayan, etc.), they can still come to understand each other in the power of the Holy Spirit. It could be a way of concretizing the life of the Trinity in the Filipino faithful’s lives.

¹⁵ One of the highlights of this year’s celebration of the 500th year of Christianity in the Philippines is the symbolic sending of 500 *ad gentes* missionaries to various parts of the world. This symbolizes the local church’s commitment to the universal mission of the church. It formalizes a shift from understanding herself as a mission church to a missionary church.

¹⁶ CBCP, *Pastoral Exhortation on Philippine Culture*.

Thus, the challenge of making interculturality an integral part of the church's evangelizing mission in the Philippines is real. We now take a glimpse into the SVD's understanding and practice of intercultural mission in the country.

3. Toward an Intercultural Mission: Charting the Horizons

Faithful to the thrust of the local church, inculturation has been a basic element of the SVD missionary praxis in the Philippines. Contrarily, interculturality as a new mission dimension is yet to develop. This section explores horizons for the relevance of interculturality in the country. We then proceed with a recapitulation of the SVD intercultural mission in the Philippines—both *ad intra* and *ad extra*.

3.1. A Recapitulation

Interculturality *ad intra* best serves the church's mission as a „universal sacrament of salvation.” It witnesses the inclusiveness of God in the world. To be faithful to the same mission, the SVDs themselves need to understand first and be convinced that their intercultural living is a concrete expression and participation in the same mission of the church, particularly in witnessing the unity and diversity of God's reign. Such a distinct contribution is reflected in their missionary approach as expressed in one of the Society's documents:

[Our mission] is not to form people to our own image but to be close to them just as they are, appreciating their culture, traditions, language, customs, way of thinking, and way of life. Our task has been to build bridges not only between them and us but also among themselves. We have to recognize this great tradition of ours and continue to build on it. We are called to be bridge-builders among different groups.¹⁷

Humanly speaking, the “bridge” is considered as the mediator between two parties. The SVDs, being bridge-builders, bring to the fore interculturality's relevance in the Philippine setting. For the SVDs, their experience of handling tensions in an intercultural environment warrants their further involvement. It parallels well with the intercultural profile of the SVDs in the Philippines, which should be deemed a testimony of unity in a divided society.

¹⁷ SVD Curial Publications, *Guidelines for SVD Ministry with Migrants and Refugees* (In Dialogue with the Word, no. 12), October 2012, 16-17.

Nonetheless, while interculturality has been a feature of the Philippine SVD communities through the years, there is no guarantee that the members themselves have been explicitly aware of the missionary dimension of their intercultural living. Hence, this question: How knowledgeable have the SVDs been of the missionary dimension of their interculturality *ad intra*?

For the *ad extra* aspect, the varieties of their missionary engagements would suffice to give us a glimpse. For instance, their involvement in the diocesan clergy formation was a response to the clergy's indigenization, besides their acceptance of Filipino members to their fold. Such ventures reflect their utmost respect and esteem for the local people and their culture. This respect for the local culture is also embodied in their commitment to the indigenous communities and the apostolate of the press, such as catechetical materials, using the local languages.

Furthermore, one can also view the SVD's contribution from the CBCP's thrusts,¹⁸ particularly its vision of a "church of the poor" and "Integral Evangelization." The offices of Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) in the three Provinces have been spearheading various projects of this nature. This contribution can be also gleaned from the Society's commitment to work among the frontier parishes and their widespread educational apostolate, especially in the countryside. All this proves the SVD's unrelenting commitment to the local church's culture evangelization project.

3.2. Horizons for Intercultural Mission

Despite the above, we can still deduce that interculturality as a mission dimension is not explicit in their missionary theories and engagements. Neither has it ever become part of a conscious and well-defined policy. Hence, we can safely deduce an apparent gap between the *ad intra* and *ad extra* aspects of the SVD intercultural mission in the country. For this, we suggest that horizons should be explored to concretize this missionary dimension in the Philippine Church context. Without intending to be exhaustive, we propose three areas: ministry of *communion*, *dialogue*, and *care for God's creation*.

¹⁸ The threefold tasks of the PCP II are the following: Church of the Poor, Integral Evangelization, and Community of Disciples. See Second Plenary Council of the Philippines, *Acts and Decrees*, Manila: CBCP 2016; henceforth, called PCP II.

3.2.1. Ministry of Communion

This horizon sits well in a highly personalistic culture like the Philippines. It is an ideal habitus for the “church of communion” that was equally envisioned by the Second Vatican Council, the FABC, and the Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP) II. One case in point is the proliferation of Basic Ecclesial Communities (BEC), commonly known as the *Pamayanang Kristiyano*—an icon of “a new way of being church.” The BEC puts efforts on the family level of grassroots communities, namely, on the cluster of families that make up such a faith community. In the BEC, the focal point of evangelization is, indeed, the family.

If the church wants to succeed in culture evangelization, it should always include the family. Nonetheless, this should be done in the context of the wider Christian family; otherwise, it will just be a reinforcement of the value of extreme familism. When inserted into a BEC, a family should find in that bigger community an experience of the Christian family that transcends the individual human family dynamics. Thus, transforming the Filipino’s extreme allegiance to the family into an ideal state can only be realized within the Christian family’s purview, or in concrete terms, the BEC. Every BEC, in this case, serves as the breeding ground to transform every family into a Christian family. Seen through the lens of an interculturality that promotes the values of mutual enrichment, openness, and respect for others, the BEC becomes an icon and reflection of a transformed human family. It builds a church of communion that is home to unity and solidarity amid diversity.

The novelty of the above insights can be tested by the reality of cultural differences and conflicts among families within a Christian community. The writer’s experience with Filipino migrant communities in Rome could be a case in point. In fact, of the various Filipino Christian communities in Rome, some have been formed based on the said affiliations. Ironically, however, most of these Christian communities’ conflicts are due to ethnic, cultural, and family affiliations.

Undoubtedly, intercultural sensitivity could strengthen the fraternal bond among the faithful within the church. Given the solid ethnocentric tendency among Filipinos, such sensitivity is necessary to understand better and accept cultural differences, which are often neglected or taken for granted as a cause of tension and division. It will help them transcend their relationships beyond human affiliations. In this regard, interculturality as a mission dimension develops in the members the power to regard the others as co-journeymen to the Kingdom, thereby recognizing everybody as brothers and sisters sharing in

the one gift of the Trinitarian communion. Such a relationship can further overflow beyond the church's confines where members could relate with others more healthily and genuinely regardless of ethnic, language, and family affiliations. In this sense, these BECs could become themselves schools for meaningful intercultural engagement. Again, this is only possible when, within these Christian communities, the transforming power of the Gospel is maximized to dispel cultural animosity.

3.2.2. Ministry of Dialogue

The ministry of *dialogue* also resonates well with a multi-ethnic society like the Philippines. A rich cultural heritage shapes the country from a mixture of the East and the West, particularly the Spanish and American influence. The Spanish influence is most evident when it comes to religion and religious practices. The American impact is evident in urban life that buzzes and thrives with imported fast-food chains and brands. It has also permeated Filipino pop culture and impacted younger generations who are quite familiar with Western trends and ideals. Added to this colonial influence are the eighteen recognized regional languages and over 180 indigenous languages, besides the Tagalog language, not to mention the geographical landscape that shapes the people's multiculturalism and multi-ethnicity. This fusion of cultures results in the factionalization that social scientists say is characteristic of Philippine Society.¹⁹ Consequently, what is "lacking is a more universalistic outlook that would put as much stress on the good of wider groupings, the community, the nation, humanity and the world at large."²⁰

Through their intercultural mission, the SVDs could offer a template for intercultural dialogue. A case in point: The Philippine Northern Province (PHN) is working among ethnic groups inhabiting various regions—Ilocanos, Pangasinenses, Tinguians, Igorots, Ibanags, Isnags, and Negritos. Each ethnic group has its distinct dialect, customs, and traditions. The lowland population generally belongs to the mainstream Filipino groups such as Ilocanos, Pangasinenses, and Tagalogs, while those of the upland are mainly indigenous Filipinos. This microcosm of multi-ethnicity and multiculturalism reflects the Philippine scenario. This scenario explains why even in most Christian communities, one culture feels superior over another culture, such as

¹⁹ PCP II, no. 21.

²⁰ Ibid.

Tagalog versus Ilocanos, Ilocanos versus Visayans, the highlanders versus lowlanders, the urban vs. the rural dwellers, etc.

Imbued with an intercultural living experience, the SVDs can serve as prophets of intercultural dialogue. They, in return, will also enhance their skill of handling inter-cultural differences that will help them grow in their intercultural life *ad intra*. Impelled by the incarnate Word's all-embracing power and inspired by the Trinitarian communion's spirit, the SVDs can become authentic instruments in solving intercultural conflicts and creating a meaningful and enriching engagement among various ethnicities and cultures, even with other religious traditions and denominations.

In interreligious and ecumenical dialogue, as the SVD's arrival in the country was perceived to handle well the Protestants, this call should remain pertinent in today's milieu where various ecumenical groups continue to mushroom within the ambit of contemporary Christianity, not to mention the growing Muslim population all over the country. These affiliations and denominations, in their multicultural compositions, can also be opportunities to witness and practice intercultural mission. The SVD's propensity for prophetic dialogue can contribute to a more open and welcoming environment among various religions and confessions in the country.

3.2.3. Care for God's Creation

In the Philippines, environmental destruction remains a crucial problem that confronts both the church and the government. The SVDs have been groundbreakers in ventures, namely, protecting local farmers and their traditional agriculture, accompanying the indigenous people, and learning their wisdom. This trajectory concurs well with PCP II's advocacy for the rediscovery of traditional Filipino values, their purification, and inclusion into a more incarnated catechesis and spirituality.²¹ The Council explicitly referred to the tribal Filipinos and their cultural values as potential starting points for culture evangelization in the Philippines.²² The indigenous peoples, being known as

²¹ See PCP II, nos. 10-17. A whole section of the third chapter is dedicated to the presentation of CBCP's reflection on the importance of traditional cultural values for inculturation. Strangely, though, this stance of the CBCP seems a contradiction to their subsequent stance as noted in their exclusion of indigenous peoples as dialogue partners. This, however, only shows both the problems and the dynamism as far as the CBCP's collective approach to indigenous ministry is concerned.

²² *Ibid.*

bearers and protectors of local tradition, have always been viewed as reservoirs of fundamental cultural elements.

Thus, conscious care for God's creation is a pivotal horizon to confront the root causes of the ecological crisis. By looking at these ventures as expressions of the Founder's charism and response to the urgent summons of Francis' *Laudato si'*, the SVDs should all the more deepen their perennial involvement with the indigenous ministry. From the very start, the SVDs have always regarded it as their contribution to the Philippine Church. This feature must have been greatly due to the Society's recognition that the indigenous peoples are authentic bearers and vanguards of traditional values, bearers of local traditions, lovers of nature, and protectors of creation. This ministry embodies the SVD's heritage of doing mission through culture or what the Society calls "missiological anthropology." If further enhanced, it could be another distinct and significant contribution of the Society to the local church. This challenge should compel the SVDs to continue integrating St. Arnold Janssen's propensity for nature in their missionary thrusts.

Conclusion

This article explored how intercultural mission could enhance the Philippine Church's mission of culture evangelization. We, thus, delved into the SVD missionaries' practice of interculturality in the country—both *ad intra* and *ad extra*. As a relatively new concept, interculturality is yet to be realized in the Philippine setting. Despite the conspicuous evidence of cultural sensitivity, the SVDs in the Philippines have yet to integrate it into the Society's missionary theories and praxis. We have identified critical horizons for an intercultural mission to address this lacuna: First is the ministry of building communion; second is the ministry of dialogue; the third is the care for God's creation. These horizons serve as fertile grounds for intercultural mission to flourish. They serve as points of convergence between fundamental Filipino values and missiological underpinnings of interculturality. Moreover, these loci also represent areas that resonate with the evangelizing thrusts of the local church today.

With the above insights, the SVDs, in collaboration with the local church, continue to be relevant mission agents amid the changing times. They will continue to harness their intercultural mission legacy and share it as a gift in the building of a church that is truly inclusive and universal.

ABSTRACTS

Seit 1909 arbeiten die Steyler Missionare auf den Philippinen und haben die Inkulturation des Christentums vorangetrieben. Ihr Hauptinteresse liegt darin, den Bedürfnissen der Kirche zu dienen. Die Perspektive der Interkulturalität stellt die Steyler vor die Herausforderung, zu einem universalen Gesicht der Kirche durch den Dienst der Gemeinschaft, auf dem Gebiet des Dialogs und in der Sorge um Gottes Schöpfung beizutragen.

Desde 1909, los Misioneros del Verbo Divino (SVD) trabajan en las Filipinas y han avanzado en la inculturación del cristianismo. Su principal interés es servir a las necesidades de la Iglesia. La perspectiva de la interculturalidad sitúa a la SVD ante los retos de contribuir a un rostro universal de la iglesia, a través del ministerio de la comunión, en el campo del diálogo y en el cuidado de la creación de Dios.

Depuis 1909, les missionnaires du Verbe Divin travaillent aux Philippines et ont fait avancer l'inculturation du christianisme. Ils cherchent surtout à servir les besoins de l'Église. La perspective de l'interculturalité met les SVD devant les défis de contribuer au visage universel de l'Église à travers le ministère de communion, dans le champ du dialogue et le soin de la création de Dieu.