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RESEARCH ON A NEW WAY OF BEING CHURCH-IN-MISSION: A Personal Missiological Inquiry in the Indonesian Context

This article tries to highlight some points concerning being religious-missionaries. It is based primarily on my personal experience in the religious formation houses and a research centre in Indonesia. This experience would describe the prevailing theological discussion and mission formation expected to support missionaries and the future missionaries in their compassionate commitment towards others. Secondly, the article will emphasise some missiological concerns within the mission context of the multi-cultural and multi-religious Indonesia, where Christians are just a small minority and dispersed people (diaspora). The two points which are defining anew missionary identity and our role in the changing mission context affect each other.

“So you too, when you have done everything you were commanded to do, should say, ‘We are slaves undeserving of special praise; we have only done what was our duty’”
(Luke 17:10).

1. A Life’s Story

1.1 Being in Mission Concerns

When I joined the Society of the Divine Word in mid-1979, for me “being an SVD” simply meant working outside one’s own place of birth and outside one’s own country. It was the dream and ideal of most candidates to take part in the mission of the Church of Jesus Christ. In the course of my formation, I have become more aware and have gone through a kind of “purification.” I realized that “mission” and “doing mission” do not have to mean travelling to far-off lands or

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crossing the geographical borders of culture, ethnicity, language, nationality, etc.

Now and then my students and I come to discussion regarding the terms “mission,” “doing mission,” and “being missionary” in our present situation—you may call it “the signs of the times.” We believe that today’s world has challenged us to reformulate our understanding of ourselves, the Church, mission, and the like. Our contemporary world has opened up new frontiers of ministries, even within the same geographical locality, in urban areas or in a particular ethnic culture, etc. Hence, “doing mission cross-culturally” could also mean crossing into new areas of ministry, such as ministry to prisoners, to the unemployed and exploited workers, to people suffering from HIV/AIDS, and the like within a particular locality. This diversity of ministries can cover activities of preaching or celebrating sacraments, building community, promoting health, educating adults, saving the rain-forests, working in the media, working among indigenous people, supporting gender equality, participating in interreligious dialogue, etc.¹

Being a religious missionary, then, should signify a mode or style of living (*modus vivendi*) that concerns engagement with other people. Since our basic formation we have been frequently reminded by our formators—and also by many senior confreres—of this ideal of consecrated life. The SVD Constitutions, for example n. 501, describe the goal of all formation and education in the Society. It addresses the personal and integral growth, guided by the power of the Holy Spirit, into unity with the Incarnate Word of the Father and into a missionary community, which is comprised of intercultural members. This integral growth is surely a lifelong task, a shared responsibility of individuals as well as of the community. A certain mature growth will make a missionary capable of carrying out the missionary task of the Society (and of the Church), namely to be witness of the Gospel of Christ to all by his personal life, the quality of community living and preaching. The goal of missionary task, then, among other things, is building up not only Christian communities but also, even first and foremost, a new world with a new humanity—in short, the Reign of God.

¹ Cf. John C. England et al. (eds.), *Asian Christian Theologies: A Research Guide to Authors, Movements, Sources. Volume 2: Southeast Asia*, ISPCK/Claretian Publishers/Orbis Books 2003; Jan Sihar Aritonang and Karel Steenbrink (eds.), *A History of Christianity in Indonesia*, Leiden/Boston: Brill 2008; Donald Dorr, *Mission in Today’s World*, Dublin: The Columba Press 2000, 167, 203.

We find that this idea for basic and ongoing formation in the Society of the Divine Word seems to be very evocative, innovative, and transformative. Everybody is called to have a committed life to engage in the communal problems, either the problem of internal community of the Society, of the Church, or of the present world. The concern is not only the world in itself for its own sake, but mainly to find God in relational ways and to find God in this rapidly changing world.

Honestly I would admit that the idea of “being for and with others” or “engagement with other people” or “being in dialogue and collaboration with others” has become a kind of super-consciousness. The terms of “mission,” “doing mission,” and “being missionary” have as main objective the betterment of our world. Theologically speaking, the ideal of “the betterment of the world” should be energized by the transforming values of the Reign of God proclaimed by Jesus Christ in his sermon on the mount (cf. Mt 5-7). “Doing mission” means to participate in social action, community involvement, global justice and sacrificial hospitality in an effort to know and share God’s grace. The Church is God’s instrument. The Church is not the goal of the Gospel in herself, for the core of her very existence is being-in-mission. The Second Vatican Council assures: “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” (*Ad Gentes*, 2; cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 1).

In the concrete mission practice which is cross-cultural by nature, missionaries have to cope with various experiences, not only the fulfilling but also frustrating aspects of living. To be able to successfully face the negative experiences, of course missionaries should have a strong commitment to Christ and to missionary tasks besides a deep “spirituality of passing-over.” Since the XIII General Chapter (1988) the so-called passing-over spirituality has been described as growing out of deep respect for and contact with people, particularly the poor and marginalized. This spirituality is fundamentally nourished by Sacred Scripture, the Word of God.² The SVD Constitutions state: “It is by listening to the Word of God and living it that we become co-workers of the Divine Word” (n. 106).

The XIII General Chapter approved again that the word of God (the Bible) is the very heart of the Society of the Divine Word. There-

² Cf. AJSC (Arnold Janssen Spirituality Center) Newsletter # 2, Steyl, January 7, 2005, <http://www.svdcuria.org/public/ajsc/newslet/steyl/0502en.htm> (accessed on June 28, 2011).

fore, the Chapter resolves that the biblical apostolate be recognised officially as a priority of the Society. The consequence is quite clear, namely, the SVD Provinces and Regions should prepare adequate funds and personnel for the biblical apostolate and that the biblical apostolate should be integral to the missionary evangelisation, which is in accord with the SVD Constitutions as well (cf. nos. 106, 108, 109, 407).

Many religious orders or congregations have certain characteristics that make them known. As far as I can follow the development of updating a so-called SVD identity I was impressed by the term “characteristic dimensions,” which are four, namely the Bible, Mission Animation, Communication, Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC). The four dimensions characterise the life and service of the Society in general and of each member in particular. Each province and region in the SVD has adopted the four characteristic dimensions as very important for the apostolic service as well as for all SVD activities and lifestyle—including the internal life of each one and of the community.

With regard to the mission, what makes the SVD unique compared to many missionary institutes is that mission areas or regions are not the sole responsibility of individual provinces, but of the whole Society. The SVD Generalate in Rome may appoint members from any country to any other country with priority given to those places which are most in need. This also explains why many SVD communities are international in character.

On the eve of the new millennium, namely the 21st century which has been characterized as the “age of dialogue,” the SVD has succeeded in updating the formulation of its identity. The XV General Chapter (2000) chose the theme “Prophetic Dialogue.” We were informed that, historically speaking, “prophetic dialogue” has had quite a long history. By formulating mission as prophetic dialogue, on this 125th anniversary of the foundation of the Society, the General Chapter has actually renewed its *ad gentes* missionary commitment. Formerly, mission *ad gentes* connoted doing mission from a powerful position to conquer the others. The General Chapter has promoted, then, that members of the Society of the Divine Word are convinced that they were sent to a dialogue in which missionaries and their dialogue partners are on the same level.

At the 1988 SVD General Chapter, the key-word was “passing-over,” at the 1994 Chapter “communion,” at the 2000 Chapter “prophetic dialogue,” and at the last Chapter (2006) it might be “ongoing empowerment” (dialogue *ad intra*) with the theme “Living Prophetic Dialogue: Spirituality, Community, Formation, Leadership, Fi-

nances.” The coming General Chapter (2012) has chosen “Intercultural Life and Mission: One Spirit, One Community, One Mission” as its theme. Put together, all these themes indicate that the SVD worldwide has been struggling to internalize its dialogue *ad intra* and formulate anew its mission *ad extra*.

Generally speaking, missionaries are persons who cross multi-level borders. Since everybody has basically been enculturated into his/her particular roots, the first border to be crossed is his/her own culture, and then the wider ones such as the culture and tradition of their country, their way of interpreting Christian tradition, their way of understanding people of different socio-religious traditions, etc. Missionaries are basically border-crossers. They are bridge builders as well, since their way of life is mainly directed at connecting people of various backgrounds (social, cultural, economic, religious as well as race, gender, age, etc.). In this sense, mission is nothing else than a constructive religious enterprise, a work of promoting a new humanity, in which people compassionately cheer each other. Missionaries are people who promote the so-called “culture of life.”³

How to cross borders significantly is another challenging question. The very simple answer would be that of a positive attitude towards others which is far from being ethnocentric or colonialist behaviour. Since every culture has its own complex ideals, value system, and physical forms, every missionary is supposed to come into another context with eagerness to see how God’s work and grace has been operating there. In this attitude, dialogue between missionaries and people of the host culture could be started. Therefore, mission as dialogue rather than one-sided evangelisation is of great importance. This dialogical encounter conveys the impression that cross-cultural mission is not primarily a matter of *doing things for* people but rather *being with* people, *listening to* and *sharing with* them.

³ The Free Wikipedia Encyclopaedia describes: “The phrase ‘culture of life’ is a term used in discussion of moral theology, especially of the Catholic Church. Its proponents describe it as a way of life based upon the theological truth that human life at all stages from conception through natural death is sacred. As such, a ‘culture of life’ presumably opposes practices destructive of human life, often including abortion, euthanasia, research on human embryonic stem cells, contraception, capital punishment, unjust war, sadistic humiliation, narcissism, and excessive selfishness. Social conservatives in politics of the United States frequently use the term a ‘culture of life’ in opposition to abortion and stem cell research. Economic liberals sometimes support their efforts” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culture_of_life) (accessed on June 28, 2011); cf. Ioannes Paulus PP. II, *Evangelium Vitae*, Rome, March 25, 1995.

The very notion of mission as dialogue is basically a direct challenge to an assumption that a successful missionary is the one who gets many converts and builds up the institutional church. It was something of the past that we have left behind. On the other hand, in today's world mission, doing mission and being missionary must comprise four fundamental conversions. The idea of "four fundamental conversions" comes from the SVD Superior General, Fr. Antonio Pernia, and consists of "from activism to contemplation, from individualism to collaboration, from conquest to dialogue, and from only evangelizing to also being evangelized."⁴ These fourfold conversions may cover both "doing mission" and mode or style of "being missionary."

1.2 Area of Interest

In a strict sense I am not a practitioner in mission. Only less than two years in my early priesthood I have happened to work in a small parish, just two hour's drive from the metropolitan city of Surabaya. Most of my time I have spent in lecturing, doing research, participating in seminars, and discussing issues concerning the life of the Church in the Indonesian context, different ways of doing theology, different ways of celebrating the Christian faith, and the like with the students in the School of Philosophy and Theology in Malang, East Java.

The SVD term of "prophetic dialogue" with its fourfold dialogue partners has enlightened our missionary life, our discussion and research, and our ministry. The fourfold dialogue partners are faith-seekers or 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.⁵ My research articles, seminar papers, and lectures in the last ten years have been very much inspired by this particular mission theology. This new way of understanding mission in this modern and pluralist society has undoubtedly changed our life and ministry into a lifelong "school of dialogue."

⁴ These "Four Fundamental Conversions" were presented by Superior General, Fr. Antonio M. Pernia, SVD, when he gave his address to his SVD conferees in Indore, India, in 2007. See SVD Generalate, *Vademecum: A Source Book of Prayers for the Members of the Society of the Divine Word and for their Associates*, Rome: SVD Publications 2009, 391-393.

⁵ SVD Generalate, "Prophetic Dialogue," *In Dialogue with the Word*, n. 2, September 2001.

Our 21st century has been characterised as the age of dialogue which has been prepared by theological development during the last four decades of the 20th century.⁶ Many times it has been mentioned that and how the church can respond to this cultural change worldwide. Therefore, we describe our mission as dialogue, while the people we work with or serve are called our dialogue partners. The SVD General Chapter held at the beginning of the Third Millennium (2000) differentiated our dialogue partners in four groups as mentioned above. At the same time, to our mission as dialogue has been added the word “prophetic.” In dialogue we are supposed to engage in constant conversion, namely to substitute for prejudice, violence, hatred, etc. honesty, gentleness, love, etc. Together with our dialogue partners we open our heart and mind to listen to the voice of God calling us forward. Dialogue entails listening to God’s voice as well as talking from the stand-point of each participant. Precisely in this way SVD mission as dialogue can be called prophetic, because as Christians we listen to the Word of God, in the first place, and then listen to God’s presence in the Church’s tradition as well as in that of our dialogue partners.

Many times in discussions with my colleagues, I come up with the issue of “being authentically Christian within one’s particular culture.” Just an example, a Javanese or a Balinese is not supposed to live out his/her Christian faith in “a European way” or “an American way” and the like, but he/she will spontaneously express his/her faith, in terms of worship and witness, in ways that are authentic to his/her own culture and idiom.⁷ In short, mission is basically a dialogue between missionaries and their partners exercising a humble presence, respect and love towards the others under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

In 1991 the Vatican issued a document entitled *Dialogue and Proclamation*. In paragraph 42 the document distinguishes four forms of dialogue, namely dialogue of life, dialogue of action, dialogue of theological exchange, and dialogue of religious experience.⁸ The

⁶ Cf. Timothy Yates, *Christian Mission in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996.

⁷ Cf. Raymundus Sudhiarsa, Ketuhanan Yang Mahaesa, Jagat Spiritual Bangsa Indonesia, in: Mateus Mali (ed.), *Perjumpaan Pancalisa dan Kristianitas*, Yogyakarta: Lamalera 2008, 221-271; Raymundus Sudhiarsa, Gereja, Keindonesiaan, dan Pentakosta Baru: Berjalan Bersama Kristus bagi Kemanusiaan Sejati, in: A. Eddy Kristiyanto (ed.), *Semakin Mengindonesia: 50 Tahun Hierarki*, Yogyakarta: Kanisius 2011, 413-445.

⁸ Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, *Dialogue and Proclamation. Reflection and*

document, then, explains that *dialogue of life* happens when people strive to live in an open and neighbourly spirit, sharing their joys and sorrows, their human problems and preoccupations. The *dialogue of action* is the way in which Christians and others collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people. The *dialogue of theological exchange* is particularly for specialists who seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages and to appreciate each other's spiritual values. And, the *dialogue of religious experience* could happen meaningfully among persons who are rooted in their own religious traditions, share their spiritual riches, for instance with regard to prayer and contemplation, faith and ways of searching for God, the Absolute.

1.3 Being Missionary and Doing Missiological Research

For me, being an SVD first of all means being a Christian. This is very basic, it means being a member of the community of believers called the Church of Jesus Christ. At the same time, I do believe that by nature every Christian belongs to manifold communities, such as family, tribe, ethnic group, nation, religious congregation, etc. Belongingness to these various and multiple communities could become problematic as well as be very enriching. Ethnicity, for example, could pose some challenging questions for the so-called identity of the Church. Christian communities of different ethnic backgrounds tend to formulate their particular way of being Church and a new way of understanding "mission," "doing mission," and "being a missionary Church." Ecclesiologically speaking, on the one hand, this cross-cultural experience is supposed to enrich the universal Church. On the other, however, it may create to some extent a heated problem to be considered among theologians, clergy, and lay people. Also, the four characters of the Church which are unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity should be reinterpreted contextually. These issues are relevant not only within the academic level but also among people at the grassroots.

Within the Divine Word Missionaries across the globe the intra-dialogue goes this way: we are called by the local Church from all corners of the world to live among the people and listen to their needs. We are called to help everyone hear the voice of God through various modes of ministry such as evangelisation, formation, biblical pastoral ministry, mission animation, communication and works of justice and peace for the integrity of creation.

Orientations on Inter-Religious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Rome, 19 May 1991.

Our missionary way of living is formed according to the mystery of the Most Blessed Trinity. We are called by the Father. His Word enables us to see, hear, touch and feel. His Word enables us to read and share, in openness to the guiding Spirit, to do the will of the Father to be disciples of Jesus Christ. Through the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty, and obedience we immerse ourselves into the life of the Triune God. Like St. Arnold Janssen we are called to imitate the Word made flesh in self-emptying and to follow Jesus Christ through the cross and resurrection, in suffering and joy. As brothers from many cultures we are sent by Jesus to pass over to be with others, to offer and receive good news with respect, understanding, compassion and love. Then, led by the Spirit we joyfully and full of hope serve, share and become one with all people, especially with those on the frontiers of our Christian faith and the margins of society. In this way we bear witness and help to build a loving communion of humanity with the Triune God who loves us all.⁹

In the Indonesian context, we frequently discuss ideas on doing theology from the margins, since Christians are a small minority, with the related issues such as gender equality, conflict and violence vis-à-vis harmony in a shared world. The sad story of conflicts and violence that continually reoccur in this large archipelago have been described by observers as a humanitarian tragedy. R. Tockary, the director of RUJIA (The House of Ru) Institute at the Centre for the Study of Dao Confucianism in Bogor, for instance, describes his experience as follows:

Indonesia has a very long history of social conflicts involving ethnic and religious groups. Sadly, since independence, conflicts have not receded but instead are becoming more frequent and complex. Reasons for these conflicts may be some trivial matter but may also be due to very delicate socio-political factors involving formal and informal leaders.¹⁰

If we examine the series of incidents mentioned above, we may gain the impression that this story will never come to an end. Years of violence seem to form an integral part of the struggle of the Indonesian nation to build up a prosperous life together. Azyumardi Azra,¹¹ a leading Muslim scholar in Indonesia, once lamented that

⁹ Cf. XIII SVD General Chapter 1988, *Following the Word*, no. 1, 44.

¹⁰ R. Tockary, A Short Note on Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Indonesia, in: Chaider S. Bamualim et al. (eds.), *Communal Conflicts in Contemporary Indonesia*, Jakarta: IAIN Syarif Hidayatullah 2002, 67.

¹¹ Azyumardi Azra, Communal Riots in Indonesia: Decline of Indonesian Nationalism and the Rise of Separatism, in: Bamualim et al., *Communal Conflicts*, 78.

the country, which contains vastly different ethnicity, religion, social systems and the like, seems to have become more and more fragile for the fact that communal riots have taken place more often, with an increasingly larger scale of people involved. Another observer writes:

Human rights groups such as Amnesty International say intolerance is on the rise in the country. The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, an autonomous board that advises the American government, has called for a review of regulations seen as persecuting minorities, such as a 1965 blasphemy law.¹²

Another big problem the Indonesian people have to face is a rapid urbanization and migrant people. A researcher writes: "Rapid urbanization is new; vast urban space is new; urban anonymity is new; massive migration is recent; massive schooling only developed since the late 1960s; most members of the middle classes have just arrived in that position."¹³ On the other hand, since the last two decades, there is another phenomenon in some places that we call suburbanization.¹⁴ It seems there is a tendency of decreasing numbers of people living in the cities. People prefer to live in the suburban areas, such as the periphery of Cosmopolitan Jakarta or Surabaya. Therefore we see a rapid growth of suburbia, which may called "bedroom suburbs" for the daily commuters of the city centres. Jakarta is the centre of government and corporate offices, commercial, and entertainment enterprises. Immediate effects of urbanization and suburbanization are traffic congestion, urban poverty, and limited employment opportunities for most people with few skills and little education, decreasing green areas which make spaces less sustainable and less livable, and many other social problems.

Theologically speaking, these facts have challenged the Church to give significant responses. In these signs of the times people need not only some psychological guidance but also spiritual healing and growth. Through interfaith dialogue and our pastoral ministry many common problems of the urban and suburban people could be handled meaningfully. The Divine in all faith practices would be honoured to walk with anyone on their spiritual journey.

¹² John L. Allen Jr., Anti-Christian violence in Indonesia especially alarming, <http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/anti-christian-violence-indonesia-especially-alarming> (accessed on October 31, 2011).

¹³ Niels Mulder, *Indonesia Images: The Culture of the Public World*, Yogyakarta: Kanisius 2000, 217.

¹⁴ Cf. Winny Astuti, Patterns of Suburbanization and Urbanization Generated by Development of RS/RSS in Subosuka Region Indonesia, <http://eprints.ums.ac.id/1018/> (accessed on October 31, 2011).

Urban people in this pluralist society may be eclectic or syncretic in their way of thinking and believing. Their spiritual growth could develop quite harmoniously through encounter and exchange of values from diverse religious traditions. In accordance with the growth of shopping centres or malls which attract people to somehow spend their money quite easily, even though they really do not need the things they buy, many urban people behave in the same way towards their faith. They may not fully obey the Church's authority with regard to Christian ethics or dogma. They might be indifferent to some points of Christian doctrine. This attitude might be the direct effect of urban anonymity. Urban people are exactly the opposite of those in small towns where everybody knows everybody. A good example for this anonymity is a crowded elevator where everyone is staring in any direction except at another person or a crowded space where no one makes eye contact. There is no more than a mere physical proximity.

The anonymity of the city can lead to feelings of alienation, of not belonging, which on the other hand could raise primordialism or religious fundamentalist groups which are exclusive in their character. Psychologically speaking, in this anonymity people experience a certain degree of insecurity and then find their security within their primordial groups. These primordial groups could be based on the same ethnicity, ideology, religious values or any other exigencies. All these social groups tend to have an *inward-looking* mentality that is suspicious towards others. Logically they can be very aggressive against people of other groups.

The urban setting could ideally be a good shared world, a home for everyone, no matter where one comes from or which social community one belongs to. People of diverse backgrounds should be citizens of the same community who consider the city as their shared world although most of them do not intend to stay for a long time. They are people on-the-move. Our question, then, first of all, is how the local Church takes the challenges of the urban setting and the complexity of rapid urbanization as her mission field. This awareness is of great importance. Secondly, how can the Church exercise her urban ministry meaningfully? Certainly, based on a strong biblical foundation, the Church could energize her ministry inspired by a so-called urban theology or a pilgrimage theology. Thirdly, the complexity of urbanization of course needs a careful research and planning.

With regard to Christians in Indonesia, the clear image is that they are just a small minority, except in some regions such as Flores and Timor in the eastern part of the country, North Sulawesi and North Sumatra. Mentioning these regions also means that Christians

are people of the margins. When John Paul II, in his apostolic exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* (1999), describes briefly the history of the Church in Asia, her past and present condition, it seems to apply to Indonesia as well. He puts it thus: “While some particular Churches carry out their mission in peace and freedom, others find themselves in situations of violence and conflict, or feel threatened by other groups, for religious or other reasons” (*Ecclesia in Asia*, 9).

2. Reading the Context

Generally speaking, issues of dialogue with the fourfold dialogue partners are quite clear in the Indonesian context. This multi-cultural and multi-religious society has given the government as well as the Church plenty of work to do. What do these challenges mean missiologically? How should we deal with them?

As a matter of fact, the pluralist society has triggered a lot of problems both within the Christian community as well as between the Church and non-Christians. We have now and then experienced conflicts and violence in the country. We have problems coping with the dichotomic way of thinking (insiders-outsiders, majority-minority) and issues of conversion. However, the Church is still convinced of the necessity to promote interfaith dialogue and dialogue with the local cultures.

2.1 Base on Ongoing Mission Formation

Mission is the goal and objective of our SVD formation which takes the living Word of God as source of our personal, community and apostolic life. The SVD Constitutions state: “People must be able to recognise that we have experienced in our own lives the kingdom that we proclaim to others” (n. 106). Living by the Word is our basic attitude to the Word, as Saint Paul says: “Make your own the mind of Christ Jesus” (Phil 2:5).

Our formation houses, namely the “Surya Wacana” SVD Major Seminary in Malang, Indonesia, and also the next-door “Widya Sasana” School of Philosophy and Theology, where I have spent my ministry for the last two decades do, I believe, have mission in their heart. The alumni of these formation houses have been working not only within the country but also have been sent to mission worldwide. The future missionaries are conditioned to, first of all, have an experience of the Good News, for proclamation needs a personal experience of the missionary. Secondly, the students have gradually been made aware of our Christian faith which is inculturated and ex-

pressed in human languages and cultures. Thirdly, in the pluralist society of today, our Christian faith is always seeking to dialogue. We train ourselves to have a true understanding of our rich Christian tradition and faith which then helps us to be respectful to our partners of dialogue.

In today's age of dialogue, the exclusive theologies have given way to theologies which are intercultural in character. A fruitful intercultural theology needs an intercultural spirituality, namely a mind open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who also works outside the institutional Church. As the very Agent of mission, the Holy Spirit has guided the community of Jesus' disciples to go out of themselves and their Jewish context to pagan worlds, to all nations as narrated by the Acts of the Apostles (cf. Mt 28:19-20). We have to acknowledge, however, that

Those who are not sufficiently equipped with regard to the history and nature of other religions or religious traditions will find themselves in difficulty to interact with "the others." Intolerances, conflicts, and violences of all kinds, which are fundamentally evil, are just "understandable consequences" that occur throughout our human history.¹⁵

The fact of religious pluralism has become our actual experience in everyday life. However, we have to admit as well that religions have been the very basic reason of separation between people. Instead of bridging people of different religious groups, religions have been made the basis for intolerant fanaticism. In the Indonesian case, according to some analysts, this intolerance is frequently conditioned by the government's policy and their being incapable to handle the violence demonstrated by certain fanatic and fundamentalist groups in the country.¹⁶ The same separation and intolerance could happen between people of other cultural backgrounds.

In the last ten years, I have been participating in the concerns of the Indonesian Bishops' Conference, primarily as a member of its

¹⁵ Raymundus Sudhiarsa, *Spiritualitas Interkultural: Berselancar dalam Era Dialog Antarperadaban: Studia Philosophica et Theologica* 9:2 (2009) 167.

¹⁶ Cf. Jan S. Aritonang, *Religion and Legislation in Indonesia*, in: Freek L. Bakker and Jan Sihar Aritonang (eds.), *On the Edge of Many Worlds*, Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij Meinema 2006, 128-133; Andy Fuller, *Freedom of religion and Islam in Indonesia* (Jakarta, Saturday, 02/19/2011), <http://m.thejakartapost.com/news/2011.02.19/freedom-religion-and-islam-indonesia.html>; Elwin Tobing, *Religious intolerance and Indonesia's future* (California, Monday, 08/16/2010), <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2010/08/16/religious-intolerance-and-indonesia%E2%80%99s-future.html> (accessed on June 28, 2011).

Theological Commission (Office of Theological Concerns) and Mission Work Commission (Office of Evangelization). I have been trying to take part in the concerns of the local Church of Indonesia, such as making theology helpful to energize mission of this small flock. The main question is how these scattered Christian communities can participate in building up this constructed pluralist society in a more humane way.

We honestly acknowledge the fact that religions to some extent promote exclusive theologies that segregate and discriminate people living in one and the same place. Based on their particular truth claims and their own existence, these exclusive theologies have actually dehumanized the shared world.¹⁷ It might be true that the archipelago of Indonesia has unwittingly contributed to a so-called “bunker mentality” of the people. We realize that “Indonesia is not a pluralistic nation state that is ethnically, religiously or culturally integrated. What we have is a country with a large territory which is still fragmented according to each ethnic, religious and cultural grouping.”¹⁸ Taking this issue in a wider scope, we have the following analysis which says: “Tragically, religions have often split rather than unified humanity, have oppressed rather than freed, have terrified rather than inspired. Institutionalization of religion is part of the problem. As institutionalized religions spread the teaching of their founders, there is the danger that more energy will go into preserving the outer form of the tradition than into maintaining its inner spirit.”¹⁹

To be sure, the context has given the Church a challenging agenda for mission, such as the challenges of religious pluralism, the challenges of a new civilization of this modern world, etc. Since our multicultural and multi-religious society of today has its mammoth problems—Indonesian people used to say “multi-dimensional crisis”—we surely have no time to rest. How to respond to these problems missiologically? Honestly we acknowledge that many times we feel powerless before this “multi-dimensional crisis” of our world. In faith I am convinced that we should first and foremost consult Christ’s response.

¹⁷ Cf. Khairil Azhar, *Religious Tragedies in Changing Indonesia* (Jakarta, Friday, 02/18/2011), <http://m.thejakartapost.com/news/2011/02/18/religious-tragedies-changing-indonesia.html> (accessed on June 28, 2011).

¹⁸ Raymundus Sudhiarsa, *Conflict and Peace as Missiological Issues in Contemporary Indonesia*, in: Bakker and Aritonang, *On the Edge of Many Worlds*, 195.

¹⁹ Mary Pat Fisher, *Living Religions*, London: Laurence King 2011, 28.

For the sake of humanity and a more civilized world, we have to liberate our way of doing theology. I believe that “every theology should be acknowledged a very wordy discipline, namely ideas about the divine in human words, which are determined by a particular cultural context and so are bound to be inadequate.”²⁰ Therefore, our theology should encourage people to go beyond our human formulations to the Absolute Truth which is universal and which covers all our particularities and partialities. A genuine dialogue between people of different faiths, then, logically leads them to recognize that God alone is the Absolute and all religions are just relative responses of men and women of this temporal world. In short, every participant in dialogue has to re-examine his/her own religion and to be ready for the discovery of new dimensions of the Absolute God.

Back to our formation for mission, we are supposed to be attentive to new missionary challenges arising around us and to discern God’s call to new missionary commitments in this pluralist and changing world. Responding to these challenging issues, for instance, our SVD Research Centre in Malang, East Java, tries to participate, particularly by its biannual journal *Perspektif, Jurnal Agama dan Kebudayaan* (Perspective, Journal for Religion and Culture). Our formation is basically an ongoing one in accordance with the Church’s tradition that corresponds to the changing cultural contexts. And, the most fundamental of all challenges is the one of ongoing spiritual renewal, since everybody is expected to give a personal response. This personal response also surely entails a genuine personal relationship with God, the world, and neighbours.

2.2 Church and State

As integral members of the local Church, every SVD is expected to participate fully in the life of the Church and the particular society and to collaborate in facing common problems and issues. Pastoral issues of the city, as described above, are surely different from the ones of rural areas. People on-the-move in urban areas such as migrant workers and migrant students have their particular stories different from people in rural areas. People in rural areas on the other hand may be fascinated by stories of city life and admire the appearance of those returning to visit the village. Pastoral ministry among migrant workers and migrant students is just one among many problems that the Church has to address in collaboration with the government and other social agents.

²⁰ Raymundus Sudhiarsa, Some Notes for a Liberating Theology of Religions: *Verbum SVD* 51 (2010) 176-177.

To energize her ministry in this context, the Church should understand fully the mystery of Incarnation, the Word of God made Man (cf. Phil 2:6-11). From this theological standpoint, the Christians' involvement in the living issues of their country is very much understood. Christians are surely integral citizens of their country, although most of them feel they are treated as second-rate citizens, not having the same access to any position in the government as their fellow citizens have. Nevertheless, they seem to be able to maintain their participation in many parts of the societal life, such as education, health, economy, politics, and social work, both in the remote areas as well as in urban areas. This involvement to some extent is the basis for doing a so-called "theology of participation," for our mission is but a sharing of the mission of the Divine Word, the "*missio Dei*." I understand "theology of participation" as follows:

Participation in this mission primarily means that it is not our mission but God's. This understanding also means that all groups, the dominant as well as the minority, have to be regarded as participants in the public life who pursue *bonum commune*, salvation of all and of everybody. In this way the people move forward beyond the reification of ethnic and religious differences and intensify the traditional practice of *gotong-royong* (co-operation) for the Divine Project, namely the Kingdom of God.²¹

On the other hand, the local Churches could also understand their existence and formulate their ministry based on a so-called "theology of the margins," since the Christians are very aware of their presence as a minority group and dispersed people throughout the country. To be precise, geographically and politically the Christians live in the periphery of the society. Aware of being an integral part of the local Church, SVDs in Asia and the Pacific have been very much involved both in the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences and in the Indonesian Bishops' Conference. For more than a decade, SVDs in this Asia-Pacific Zone have organized regular symposia to discuss theology contextually. Just a few examples with regard to ASPAMIR symposia. This Asia-Pacific Association of Mission Researchers has discussed issues of "urbanization and mission in Asia and the Pacific" in its symposium held in Mumbai, India in 2001, "mission and violence" in the Madang symposium, PNG in 2005, and "cross-cultural mission: problem and prospect" in the Ledug symposium, Indonesia in 2010. Much earlier than the ASPAMIR, the SVD MER (Mission, Education,

²¹ Raymundus Sudhiarsa, *Towards a Theology of Participation*, in: Robert J. Kisala (ed.), *Urbanization and Mission in Asia and the Pacific*, Manila: Logos Publications 2005, 154.

and Research) in this Asia-Pacific zone since 1993 has also held its regular meeting mainly discussing internal SVD issues as well as the regional and universal ones.²²

Whatever way to take in responding to the problems and issues of our contemporary world, we have to admit honestly that we should learn again and again Christ's way, for, as the Prologue of the SVD Constitutions states: "His life is our life, his mission is our mission." Theology of Incarnation and theology of the Cross are undoubtedly very basic for our way of doing theology contextually. The crucial task of contemporary mission might be formulated as "understanding different cultures and translating the Gospel into forms that are indigenous to or compatible with those settings."

Our approach follows the way of incarnation. The incarnational model is a decisive one from the Christian point of view. This is what really means *pendatang* ("incomers"), who share the life of the *asli* or *pribumi* ("locals"). Due to be regarded as "incomers," the Christians have no other choice except incarnate themselves in the midst of the *pribumi* (people of the soil, locals). This principle goes with the idea of "being in the world, with the world and for the world." In this case, Jesus' life, death and resurrection become imperative for every Christian and for the Christian incarnational mission, namely, mission from within a given culture. St. Paul argued that Jesus showed his mission by emptying himself from his lordship and becoming one with humankind in everything but sin (Phil 2:7). This is what really means enfleshment that the churches have to follow.²³

2.3 Missiological Contribution

As a matter of fact, we realize that since a few decades mission has been no longer a West-to-East enterprise. We have seen a lot of discussion with regard to the topic of mission in Asian ways. The Church as well as the Asian society are aware of that. Asia is characterized by a plurality of cultures and religions and mass poverty both in the cities and in rural areas. From this fact the Church in Asia has developed a so-called triple dialogue. Living Christian faith in an Asian way is basically building community by entering into dialogue with local cultures, local religions, and local peoples. Three issues

²² See Michael T. Seigel and Leonardo N. Mercado (eds.), *Towards an Asian Theology of Mission*, Manila: Divine Word Publications 1995; Kisala, *Urbanization and Mission in Asia and the Pacific*; Patrick F. Gesch, *Mission and Violence: Healing the Lasting Damage*, Madang: DWU Press 2009.

²³ Raymundus Sudhiarsa, *Towards a Theology of Participation*, 155.

then come up, namely an indigenous and inculturated church, inter-religious dialogue, and the option for the poor.²⁴ All this simply describes that the Church in Asia has taken dialogue as integral to her mission.²⁵

Being Church in this way is called an “inductive theology,” for the Asian Bishops “decided to seek out how to live and to proclaim the gospel in the new circumstances of Asian context.”²⁶ I do believe that the Christian faith in human cultures is still a great agenda to be done in our context, if the Church in Indonesia wants to be really authentic.²⁷ The local Church in Indonesia, however, has done quite a lot in expressing herself in the diverse ethnic cultures throughout the country.

The same enterprise has been exercised in the field of interreligious dialogue. I am convinced that interreligious dialogue could not be done significantly without fostering critical values of the gospel message.²⁸ Our particular concern in interreligious dialogue is promoting a more civilized society, harmony and tolerance, and a betterment of the quality of life. A research person gives his analysis as follows:

Religious harmony and tolerance should be based on acknowledgment of the validity of other faiths and on individualism whereby every person is free and authorized to make their own decision on which creed they want to follow, or to leave their faith and convert to another faith, or opt to have no religious affiliation at all.²⁹

²⁴ Cf. Thomas C. Fox, *Pentecost in Asia: A New Way of Being Church*, Bangalore: Claretian Publications 2004, 22-37; John M. Prior, SVD and Patrisius Pa, SVD (eds.), *Kongres Misi Asia. Kisah Yesus di Asia: Perayaan Iman dan Hidup*, Jakarta: KKI and KKM-KWI 2007.

²⁵ Cf. Jojo M. Fung SJ, “Dialogue as Integral to the Mission of the Church in Asia”, <http://web.me.com/cyirilveliath/Site/Dialogue.html>.

²⁶ Fox, *Pentecost in Asia*, 36.

²⁷ Cf. Raymundus Sudhiarsa, Iman dan Budaya dalam Agenda Misi Gereja, in: Komisi Teologi KWI, *Dialog Antara Iman dan Budaya*, Yogyakarta: Yayasan Pustaka Nusantara 2006, 123-155; Raymundus Sudhiarsa, Pastoral Budaya: Memaknai Lagi Identitas Gereja Indonesia, in: A. Eddy Kristiyanto OFM (ed.), *Spiritualitas Sosial: Suatu Kajian Kontekstual*, Yogyakarta: Kanisius 2010, 275-299.

²⁸ Cf. Raymundus Sudhiarsa, *Evangelisasi Berlanjut: Meneruskan Wasiat Sang Guru*, Yogyakarta: Kanisius 2009, 51-79; Raymundus Sudhiarsa, Kristus, Misionaris Lintas Batas: Pesan Soteriologis Kristus dalam Masyarakat Hindu, in: A. Eddy Kristiyanto (ed.), *Spiritualitas Dialog: Narasi Teologis tentang Kearifan Religius*, Yogyakarta: Kanisius 2010, 335-353.

²⁹ Tockary, A Short Note on Ethno-Religious Conflict in Indonesia, 72.

The same concern of paramount importance is dialogue with the local peoples, especially with the poor and the marginalized. In their “Pastoral Note 2006,” for example, the Indonesian Bishops have underlined their policy that the Church in Indonesia has to become more and more the Church of the poor.³⁰ Poverty in the country is largely due to pressure of population growth on scarce resources, the inadequate distribution of education, medicine, clean water and sanitation, the continuing problem in land ownership, and to some extent foreign investment. Option for the poor should be done hand in hand with the common concern about the ecological crisis. The so-called eco-theology or befriending the earth is also a major issue of ours.³¹ We need to promote a sense of the holy that permeates the created world, as the ancient Israel had according to the Hebrew Scriptures. Creation is not a created thing to be dominated by human beings at all, since “dominion” always tends to corrupt and implies a lack of responsibility toward the rest of the universe.

Doing mission theology from the Asian context of today is completely different from the one of the colonial era. That era has been of the past. In today’s Asia, the Church lives her Christian faith and mission from the position of being a minority and scattered (*diaspora*). Once Fr. Antonio M. Pernia, SVD stated that “despite the increase of the Catholic population in Asia, Christianity will, in all likelihood, remain a minority religion in the continent. And it is as a minority that the Church will have to carry out the mission entrusted to it by the Lord.”³² Doing theology from a powerful position is the opposite of that of the Church’s position as a “little flock.”³³ Mission theology in an Asian way will probably have to be characterized by powerlessness, contemplation, and stewardship.³⁴ Herewith I would like to give a summary of Antonio Pernia’s talk.

³⁰ Indonesian Bishops’ Conference, Nota Pastoral 2006: *Habitus Baru: Ekonomi yang Berkeadilan*, <http://www.mirifica.net/artDetail.php?aid=3658> (accessed on June 28, 2011).

³¹ Raymundus Sudhiarsa, Merumuskan Tanggungjawab Iman dan Keberpihakan pada Lingkungan Hidup, in: A. Sunarko, OFM and A. Eddy Kristiyanto, OFM (eds.), *Menyapa Bumi Menyambah Hyang Ilahi: Tinjauan Teologis atas Lingkungan Hidup*, Yogyakarta: Kanisius 2008, 179-203.

³² Address of the Superior General, Fr. Antonio M. Pernia, SVD, in response to the conferral of the “Distinguished Alumnus Award,” Divine Word School of Theology, Tagaytay City, 20 August 2009, http://svdphc.org.ph/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=59&Itemid=431 (accessed on June 28, 2011).

³³ Raymundus Sudhiarsa, Theology of the “Small Flock” – Indonesia: *Omnis Terra* 369 (July-August 2006) 300-306.

³⁴ Address of Fr. Pernia, 2009.

Powerlessness. Much of Asia is characterized by the historical experience of colonization, where the Church is a small minority among the mass socio-economic condition of poverty. Therefore, mission in Asia could only be carried out from a position of powerlessness and humility. There is no proclamation of the Gospel from a powerful position but rather a passing over to the people and being genuinely one with them in their condition of oppression and poverty, discrimination and loss of identity, suffering and sin. Keywords in doing mission are genuine solidarity power of love, which is manifested in self-giving, and humility in mission, for mission is primarily God's mission.

Contemplation. Deep religiosity is another distinctive characteristic of Asia which is made clear in the contemplative spirit and the priority given to being over doing. Therefore, mission in the Asian context means being with the people and enabling them to do things themselves rather than doing things for them. The missionary does not explain the mystery of God by words but rather by contemplative presence among God's people. In so doing, mission means an encounter with the mystery of the Triune God who calls all of humanity to share in his life and glory, the mystery of God's salvific plan for the world, the mystery of the presence and action of Christ and the Spirit in the world. Keywords in this contemplative way of doing mission are to look, to listen, to learn, to discern, to respond, and to collaborate.

Stewardship. In the Asian context we have admitted that the Christian faith has come to it as something imported from outside. Despite the enormous efforts at inculturation both in liturgy and in Christology, the Christian faith in much of Asia has not really become its own as yet. However, the missionary approach to mission would be to share the faith as a gift received from God through others, conscious of oneself as merely its steward or servant and never its owner or master. Doing mission in this way is basically entering into the Triune God's ongoing dialogue with peoples, discovering God's agenda in this ongoing dialogue, respecting the freedom of God who is present and active among the people, and respecting as well the freedom of the people who are responding in their own way.

3. Concluding remark

The term "a new way of being Church" has come into our theological discussion since the early 1970s. In the Asian context in general and in Indonesia in particular this term covers very much the way the Church understands her being in mission. I have tried to discuss

this issue in this article as far as I can understand and be involved in it. With regard to the context of the Church in Indonesia and my being a member of the Society of the Divine Word, I have proposed some ideas that might not be new at all, particularly within the Society. As I have mentioned, the term “prophetic dialogue” as the way to formulate our mission in the 21st century has been very familiar for members of the Society. Then, to complete the theological idea of threefold dialogue (dialogue with the poor, the cultures and religions in Asia), the SVD, after the General Chapter of 2000, speaks about fourfold dialogue partners, namely faith-seekers or 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.

I do believe that the local Church in Indonesia has shared her experiences of pain and joy, her plans and her agendas with people in this country in their struggle for a more humane, non-violent, just, compassionate, free, and loving society. Following the mystery of Incarnation and the mystery of the Cross the local Church could do more in participating in God’s mission, for the Church comes into existence primarily for something beyond herself, namely the service of the world. Hence, dialogue is a favourable way of presenting the Church to the society. To some extent in doing mission *ad extra* the Church as small minority and dispersed people has to undergo a four-fold conversion, to cite Fr. Antonio Pernia’s inspiring theological insights, namely from activism to contemplation, from individualism to collaboration, from conquest to dialogue, and from only evangelizing to also being evangelized.

We humbly recognize that our way of doing mission theology should be based on our being participants in God’s mission. Missionaries are just instruments in God’s plan and work of salvation for the whole humanity. Being instruments in God’s hand, I am convinced, is one of the central ideas in Christian spirituality. Being instruments and participants in God’s mission is a new way of the Church’s self-understanding since the Second Vatican Council. On this spirit of service the Church has formulated anew its identity in modern times, namely to be with the others, whatever their cultural background and religious affiliation. This might be the spirit of ministry of the early Church, which was called and sent to serve as the Gospels frequently mention. Saint Luke, for instance, loves to narrate Jesus’ life and ministry based on his awareness of the call to serve (Lk 4:16-21); his commission and sending of the Twelve as well as the Seventy to minister to the world (Mk 6:7; Lk 10:1). Jesus underlined this call to serve, because it was essential for his ministry. Jesus said that “he

was among his disciples as the one to serve” (Lk 22:27) or “the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve” (Lk 12:37). Jesus came to promote the Reign of God in which the hungry would eat, the blind would see, and the deaf would hear (cf. Mt 15:31). Therefore, a missionary is no one else than a “person of dialogue” in the service of humanity. And, our life and ministry is basically a lifelong “school of prophetic dialogue.”