

PROLOGUE

Throughout history, individuals come forward to play an important role in events when the need or opportunity arises. In certain circumstances they can exert a significant influence on the historical change in the life of people and communities. This biographical research is concerned with one such figure: Fr. Johannes Schütte (1913–1971), Divine Word Missionary, in view of his successful leadership role in the drafting of the conciliar Decree on missions *Ad gentes*. Adolf Bolte, bishop of Fulda and member of the Vatican II Commission for Missions, attributed to him in the first place the approval with an overwhelming majority of the final missionary document *Ad gentes*.¹ Moreover, this episode coincided in time with his equally significant leadership role in the Society of the Divine Word as its Superior General (1958–1967).

This biographical study focuses on the shaping of the missionary leader who in the critical moment of the conciliar debate on missionary activity was ready to take the lead in the sub-commission for drafting a complete missionary document worthy of a missionary Council. Nonetheless, Fr. Johannes Schütte was a multidimensional figure that, beyond wide recognition, at the same time met with rejection as well. His life has proved that the tall tree also casts a long shadow. Schütte with his great capacities and stormy character was credited with worldly ambition. Therefore, the present investigation seeks for his genuine motivations and mission understanding in various activities he performed with determination for the missions. This research penetrates both his relevant missionary experiences which molded his missionary heart and his missionary ideas which underpinned his forceful mind, asking how both heart and mind became the driving force for effective action. In one word, the biographical study intends to highlight the significance of Schütte's capacity to combine complementarily missionary deeds with ideas, praxis with theory. The exploration of his ideas is based on an extensive analysis of his writings. In the last resort, the research indicates the composition of many factors that substantially contributed to his decisive role in the genesis of the missionary document of the Second Vatican Council which gave a new impetus to the church's mission in modern times.

This biographical research design is comprehensive and qualitative. It aims to tell the life of Fr. Johannes Schütte from the perspective of a missionary leader by evaluating many closely related factors such as

¹ Fritz Bornemann, *In Memoriam: Father John Schuette 6th Superior General SVD* (Verbum Supplementum 23), Romae 1972, 160. The original volume in German was translated into English and Spanish in the Series *Verbum Supplementum*, later *Analecta SVD* 23 and 24.

family background and natural abilities; defining experiences and missionary ideas; leadership activities and spirituality. All these aspects aim to develop a deeper understanding of the very nature of his missionary leadership role and assess his contribution to the conciliar Decree *Ad gentes*.

This case study pursues largely a chronological order with a focus on the key moments in Fr. Schütte's life. It appreciates abundantly the biographical memorial volume by the late SVD historian, Fr. Fritz Bornemann, published in 1972, just a year after his fatal accident.² Unfortunately, Fr. Bornemann finishes his biographical account in 1958, the year he became the elected Superior General of the Society. This present research endeavors to complete the biographical account and analysis beyond 1958 based on his literary legacy and archival sources to compose a comprehensive biography of the missionary leader up to his death in 1971. The complete listing of the events of his life by his long-time private secretary Fr. William Witte greatly facilitated this task.

The ultimate purpose of this study is to investigate the claim of a universal missionary leadership of Fr. Johannes Schütte by examining the evidence that shows his capacity to combine forceful activity with intense and substantial reflection for the benefit of the missionary church.

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² Ibid.