

**THE "ABBA EXPERIENCE" OF JESUS:  
THE MODEL AND MOTIVE FOR MISSION TODAY**

A PROJECT IN FORMATION FOR MISSION IN THE FUTURE OF ASIA

**INTRODUCTION**

Christian missionary activity remains a raw nerve in Asia. The leaders of the great Asian religions have not forgotten the colonial period, when Christian missionaries appeared to have the implicit support, if not active backing, of the Western colonial powers in their rush to convert all Asia to Christianity. Proponents of national and revolutionary ideologies reject Christians in Asia as being neither one thing or the other, neither fully with them nor against them. On the other side, authoritarian governments of both the left and right distrust the activities which follow from newer ideas about the mission of the Church. And, much more serious, Christians themselves remain divided and hesitant over the questions: "Why should there be Christian missionary activity at all?"; and, if there must be missionary activity, "What exactly should it be?"

This number of the *FABC Papers* describes an attempt—in theology and in practice—to respond to these challenges to mission. The report is published in the conviction—supported by others with whom the project was discussed—that the concerns expressed, the searchings experienced and the solutions, tentative though they may be, can be of help for all who are being prepared for mission in Asia. We were searching for a vision that will fit into the apostolate everywhere in Asia. What will differ from one place to another are the resources available; and the need of one calls for the sharing by another.

The first paper by James Knight, "Facing the Future: A Missiological Enterprise in Asia and the Pacific," describes the endeavor of one missionary institute to come to grips with the challenges of mission today in the area of education, formation and research. "The Abba Experience, the Model and Motive for Mission Today," by Jacob Kavunkal, offers an answer to the theological questions arising from the challenge of motivation. The following paper, "Missionary Institutes in the 1980's and 1990's," by Ennio Mantovani, outlines how one missionary institute can

choose to respond to the challenges today and in the future. Finally, we propose a plan, a strategy of formation and action, to help us to be faithful to Christ's call to mission.

The above papers were prepared for, or resulted from, a meeting held in Hongkong from January 31 to February 7, 1986 of the coordinating body of programs for missiological education and research undertaken by the Society of the Divine Word (S.V.D.) in the Asia-Pacific Region. There is the *Statement* drawn up by the meeting. The *Statement* is only one chapter in the ongoing efforts of a missionary institute to answer the difficulties and opportunities facing the missionary activity of the Church in Asia today. Although it is an initial chapter, rather than a concluding one, it grew out of the experience of the Church in Asia and the Pacific.

## I. FACING THE FUTURE: A MISSIOLOGICAL ENTERPRISE IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION \*

by  
James Knight

The island of New Guinea, which sits solidly at the foot of Asia, was formed during the last billion years by the collision of the earth's surface under the Pacific Ocean moving westward and the Australian continental surface of the earth moving northward. The surfaces of the earth move with about the same speed at which a fingernail grows; this slowness, however, is compensated by their sheer strength. The collision of the Australian and Pacific tectonic plates, as the surfaces are called scientifically, caused enormous slabs of the earth's crust to be broken off and thrust up from the ocean floor.

The result of this premordial collision is a mountainous spine running down the middle of New Guinea and rising at its highest peak to over five thousand meters. The mountainous spine is surrounded by a narrow, flat coastal plain, in places less than a kilometer but mostly ten to fifty kilometers across. No matter how wide, the coastal plain is everywhere scarred by barely healed furrows cut into it by flooded and out-of-control rivers. For millions of years, these furrows have carried the waters deluged onto the mountainous spine by incessant tropical storms to the sea. Most rivers, consequently, own a number of beds along which they have

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\* Within the Asia-Pacific region, Divine Word missionaries are working in India, Indonesia, Hongkong, Japan, Korea, Philippines, Taiwan, Papua New Guinea, Australia and of late New Zealand and Samoa.

run at one time or another, and between which they seem to make totally arbitrary choices.

Engineers who design bridges for these rivers do so with great hesitancy. More than once, an engineer has build a fine steel and concrete bridge over an obviously well-settled river only to discover a few months later that torrential rain in the mountains has caused the river to flood and divert into a channel that it had not used for perhaps hundreds of years. The bridge remains, a graceful structure over a dried-up riverbed. The river, once it has returned to its normal size, flows happily along a kilometer or so down the road.

Proposing strategies for the missionary activity of the Church is something akin to designing bridges for the coastal plain of New Guinea. The missiologist runs the risk of constructing a great and impressive strategy only to find that an unexpected storm has flooded the rivers of history, and the particular river over which he has built his strategy has chosen a different bed in which to flow. His strategy is left straddling, as it were, a dried-up riverbed.

But a road without bridges is of very limited use, and so is missionary activity without clear goals and objectives. Each, in its own way, leads to much wasted time and energy, mounting frustrations, and an eventual loss of interest. The missiologist, therefore, must risk stating goals and objectives for the missionary activity of the Church.

### **Facing the Needs**

For this reason, ultimately, the Society of the Divine Word in Asia and the Pacific has established a missiological enterprise, a consortium or network for missiological education and research. The actual impulse for launching the enterprise, however, sprang from two very immediate needs. The first was the need for greater co-operation amongst S.V.D. missiologists, in order to equip our young people in training with the missiological education they need to handle the challenge facing the missionary task of the Church in Asia and the Pacific. A missiological education that will enable them, if you will, to negotiate with confidence the deep rivers of history that are reshaping the social, economic and cultural contours of the Asia-Pacific region. But at the time, it was simply a matter of how to make the best use of very scarce professorial resources in the face of a growing body of young people who want to commit themselves to the missionary life.

The second need was to answer a challenge handed out to us Divine Word missionaries, by Father Edward Malone, M.M., the Assistant General Secretary of the Federation of Asian Bishop's Conferences (FABC). In April, 1983, Father Malone urged the Society of Divine Word to consider setting up a "Pan-Asian Center for Missiology." He saw the necessity of a systematic investigation, analysis and evaluation of the goals and actual programs of the Church's missionary activity in Asia. In response to these two needs, our Superior General, Father Henry Heekeren, called a meeting of S.V.D. missiologists, which was held from December 11-18, 1983, at our major seminary at Tagaytay in the Philippines.

The meeting tackled both needs. The missiologists dealt with the education of Divine Word missionaries during the first three days of the meeting and the proposed Pan-Asian Center for Missiology during the remaining three days. It was surprising how the discussion on the two topics overlapped and found broad principles on which all could agree. It was found necessary, for instance, to fine-tune the missionary education of our young people; but to do that, more constant and systematic research must be carried out on the opportunities and difficulties facing our missionaries in the field. Furthermore, specialists had to be trained to do the research, and structures developed which will ensure that their findings are fed into the education of new — and old — missionaries. It was even recognized that the training of specialists, whether in theology, missiology, religion, anthropology, or any related field, must be done as far as possible within Asia.

Much more difficult to reconcile was the multiplicity of questions and needs arising from the diverse situations of the Church and the Society of the Divine Word in the different countries of Asia and the Pacific. This diversity caused the concept of one centralized missiological institute for the Asia-Pacific region to be abandoned in favor of the idea of a consortium or network of smaller, national missiological institutes located in the various countries in which Divine Word missionaries work.

By establishing a variety of links in different directions, the national institutes could become so many nerve-centres in a missiological network across the Asia-Pacific region. A national missiological institute must, therefore, have strong links to the S.V.D. seminaries and houses of formation of the country in which it is; and it must have equally strong links with missionaries in the field. The national institute will have to conduct educational and research projects in partnership with missionaries in parishes, schools, universities and social action projects. It must also build up working partnerships with other national and local institutions

with similar aims and programs. Finally, there will remain the task of developing the links with all the missiological institutes in the Asia and Pacific-wide network.

### **Strategy for the Future**

As a first step in setting up the network, the missiologists at Tagaytay recommended that a co-ordinator be appointed in each country and that all the co-ordinators acting together form a co-ordinating body. Each coordinator would be responsible, not only for improving the quality of missiological education and research in his own country, but for the growth of the whole network as well. Moreover, the missiologists at Tagaytay recommend that one full-time coordinator be appointed who would work with all the coordinators to develop the Asia-Pacific network.

The Superior General and his council considered these recommendations and accepted them. In April, 1984, he appointed me as the full-time co-ordinator of the undertaking. Because I had to complete a teaching commitment at the Yarra Theological Union in Melbourne, Australia, I was not able to take up fully the new appointment until September. Since September, 1984, however, I have been able to discuss our endeavor with Divine Word missionaries in Japan, Taiwan, Hongkong, India, Indonesia, Australia, Papua New Guinea, Korea and the Philippines. In all these countries, I have found some scepticism for our endeavor but much more support and enthusiasm. In each country, I found confreres who felt the need to develop programs for missiological education and research; yet one question kept repeating itself: how do we do it, especially in view of our lack of trained personnel?

The next step was a meeting of the co-ordinating body, held from January 31 to February 7, 1986, in Hongkong (which had also become the base from which I worked). The co-ordinators began the meeting by reporting their successes, difficulties and failures, and their expectations of the meeting. The most urgent priority to emerge from the reports and expectations was not the shortage of trained personnel, nor the organizational and methodological framework for our various undertakings — even though these were considered important — but the theological vision that stood behind the whole enterprise.

When we had taken a theological inventory of the Asian situation, because our vision must respond to that situation, we searched for a foundation on which our vision could be set. The search was aided by paper given by Father Jacob Kavunkal, titled: "The Abba Experience: The

Model and Motive For Mission Today.” After much discussion, all agreed there are two incontestable faith realities on which we might build our vision. The first is the simple but devastating fact: for thousands of years before the first Christian missionaries arrived here, God was in dialogue with the peoples of Asia and the Pacific and, even though the human response was often damaged by sin (as with all human responses), these divine-human dialogues were expressed through and are embodied of the cultures and religions of the region. From these long divine-human dialogues, moreover, the cultures and religions of Asia and the Pacific have derived great strength. We can compare their strength to the slow but sure tectonic force that moves the surfaces of the earth. Missionaries will ignore it to their own peril, especially when it comes into collision with a seemingly equal force for modernization and even westernization. The second faith reality is what Jacob Kavunkal termed “the Abba Experience.” At the center of the Kingdom of God is Jesus’ relationship to his Father, which under the Spirit he embodied in and expressed through his whole earthly life. Jesus’ response to his Father is the perfect human response to the divine-human dialogue and is now the archetype and goal, albeit hidden, for every human response.

The great challenge to missionaries today is to learn the languages, the symbolic universes of the past and present divine-human dialogues. With these languages, missionaries will be in a position to recognize the “seeds of the Word” and the distortions of sins embedded in the societies, cultures and religions (including Christianity) of Asia and the Pacific. Recognition will still require deep spiritual discernment of missionaries and missiologists. Yet, if they succeed, they will be able to preach the Gospel of Christ in a way that the on-going divine-human dialogues in the region will be challenged and broken open to new and greater developments.

But how can this theological vision be translated into the goals and programs of our missiological enterprise? The co-ordinators felt that a first step was to raise the awareness of missionaries in the field of the theological vision and the possibilities of our missiological enterprise. They recommended that within the next two years “all our members in the Asia-Pacific region be given the opportunity to attend a workshop of no less than two days in which the purposes, structures, and possibilities (especially for them) of our missiological education and research would be explained ...” The co-ordinators set, in addition, five long-term and eight short-term goals for developing programs of missiological education and research. It is not possible to deal with all those goals here, but what can we say about the place of missiologists and missionaries in such missiological endeavors?

## A Missiology Both Academic and Pastoral

In trying to answer this question, it is helpful to go back once again to the engineers who design bridges for the coastal plains of New Guinea. In their earliest attempts, the engineers had only their own calculations and the information provided by land surveyors to go by. Then the engineers obtained the help of instruments that measured the flow of a river, from which the volume of water in a river at given time could be calculated. A more accurate estimate could now be made of the volume of water the banks of the river could contain at a given point. Next came aerial photographs of rivers, which allowed map makers and engineers to plot the courses, and possible courses, of rivers more accurately; and today, engineers can have an assortment of satellite photographs and images that give even broader and more detailed information of the river basin from its source to its mouth. But talk to an engineer, who is designing bridges on the coastal plains of New Guinea, and he will tell you there are still more than enough challenges, not the least of which is how to use all the available information correctly.

Similarly, early missionaries in Asia and the Pacific had little information and even fewer scientific tools at their disposal when they came face to face with peoples whose languages, cultures and religions they did not know. In fact, missionaries usually wrote the first grammar of the language and the first descriptions of the culture and religion of the people among whom they worked. But gradually, the professional linguists, anthropologists and religionists have taken over from them and produced a profusion of works, so that today there is hardly a people or tribe in Asia and the Pacific on whom there is not a body of literature. Like the modern engineer, the challenge which the modern missionary faces is what to do with all the information available to him.

The first function of the missiologists and the national missiological institutes, therefore, is the acquisition, organization and communication of information in a way that it is available and useful to the missionaries in the field and in training. This process, however, requires its own original research. What are the problems in the field? How are they understood by Non-Christians, by Christians, and by the missionaries? How are they understood and evaluated scientifically? What are the possible long and short-term effects and solutions? How can these solutions be communicated to the missionaries, to Christians and Non-Christians? The whole process may bring new insights to other disciplines — theology, comparative religions, anthropology, etc. — but it will certainly bring new insight and knowledge to the discipline of missiology, the proper

scientific focus of which is the faith encounter between Christians and the believers of other religions and ideologies.

### **A Network for Research and Communication**

The second function of the S.V.D. missiologists and national missiological institutes is to contribute to and receive from the Asia and Pacific-wide network of national institutes. While the obstacles and opportunities for the missionary activity of the Church differ greatly from country to country, they are not so different that there is nothing for the institutes to learn from one another. On the contrary, each local Church and institute needs the experience of other local Churches and institutes, if it is to develop an effective mission and missiology for the country and society in which it finds itself. Hence, the need for the national missiological institutes to sponsor joint programs that exchange information and personnel and do research on common problems. It will be these combined programs of the network, or consortium, that will constitute the "Pan-Asian and Oceanian Institute (not center) for Missiology," to serve all the local Churches and all who are in mission.

One of the future functions of the network of institutes will be to train missiologists in Asia and the Pacific. This is a long-term goal and is dependent not only on the growth and maturation of the network but the growth of a body of missiological knowledge dealing with the Asia-Pacific context. The growth of missiological knowledge has been particularly difficult, and has been nurtured mostly by the dedication of Western missiologists, working largely from a Western context and orientation. Slowly, missiologists from Asia and the Pacific are taking responsibility for the growth of their discipline in their part of the world and the training of missiologists could be the next logical step. The growth of missiology, however, will remain slow, and we do not expect it to be other than difficult. Of first importance is, it remains useful to the missionary in the field.

The missionary in the field is the true bridge builder. He or she is the one who will reach out to the believers of other religions and ideologies, who will enter into a dialogue and faith encounter with them, and reveal to them their common Lord. For better or worse, the missionary will be stuck with the designs for his work that the missiologist has come up with. Hopefully, the missiologist will design strategies that will stimulate creativity and innovation, for they are sorely needed. And, hopefully, the missionary will be a creative innovator and challenge the missiologist to improve his designs.



## II. THE "ABBA EXPERIENCE" OF JESUS: THE MODEL AND MOTIVE FOR MISSION TODAY

by  
Jacob Kavunkal

### INTRODUCTION

How to relate the universality of God's salvific activity and self-revelation among all nations and peoples to the particularity of his saving action in Israel and Jesus Christ has always been an issue for the theory and practice of Christian mission. For centuries the Christian missionary movement anchored itself on God's particular salvation and revelation in Israel and Jesus of Nazareth to such an extent that in practice it appeared to deny the universality of his salvific action and love. Salvation for those without hope — "to open the way to those hurrying to the flames of eternal fires," as *Maximum Illud* put it — fired the imagination of generation upon generation of missionaries. It was seemingly a bedrock motive and source of missionary zeal. But the "bedrock" could not carry the weight placed upon it; it eventually cracked.

From the time of Max Mueller's great series, *The Sacred Books of the East*, which appeared from 1875 onwards, this "indestructible" salvation motive began to weaken. We have only to recall that the first large missionary meeting, held at Liverpool in 1860, did not have a word about other religious traditions, whereas it was a major issue at Edinburgh in 1910. Slowly but surely the balance of weight shifted. The first official Catholic document offering a clearly positive approach to other religions did not come until the First Plenary Council of India in 1950.<sup>1</sup>

Vatican II accepts the fact of salvation for the followers of different religious traditions, without entering into a detailed discussion as to how this is realized. The salvation of those outside the Church is seen as a part of God's overall plan. Thus, the Jews are shown to be a people dear to God and hence included in his plan of salvation. The Council goes on to say that the plan of salvation embraces also all those who acknowledge the Creator (*Lumen Gentium* 16). Creation and salvation are coeternal. The Council insists on the oneness of the human race (*Nostra Aetate* 1). Further, the Council affirmed the existence of a revelation in these religions when it affirmed the existence of a law placed by God in every human person's heart, whereby he or she becomes aware of God's demands (LG 16; *Gaudium et Spes* 16). The ethos and the language of the Council are such that we can say the Council's mind was that these religious traditions are means of salvation for their followers, in so far as these religious traditions enable their followers to make a self-gift to God, the Ultimate

Reality. This surrender, in so far as it transcends the self, is a faith — a faith that saves. The Council did not demand an explicit faith in Jesus Christ in order that salvation become a reality outside the boundaries of the Church. Again, the idea that the Church is a sacrament of salvation clearly admits the fact of the availability of salvation outside itself, for a sacrament does not exhaust that which it signifies.

The Church has a mission: bringing the Good News to the world. However, it cannot be that unless the Church is involved the followers of different religious traditions would perish. After so positive an evaluation of these religions, the Council cannot give as the motive for mission the idea that without Christianity people of other faiths would simply be lost, although it may be pointed out that some of the conciliar texts do speak of “opening up to all men a sure path to salvation.” (*Ad Gentes* 5) Such texts, we may say with Gayyaba, are like “trying to have one’s cake and eat it”.<sup>2</sup>

### **A Theology of Mission for Today and Tomorrow**

In the context of this growing inadequacy of past and present theoretical models of conversion and salvation of “infidels,” we have to articulate a theology of mission which will take account of the secular reality, of the beliefs of other peoples, and the vast cultural differences which each continent presents. This new theological model, however, should not be at the expense of the integrity of the Gospel or the quality of Christian commitment, much less the vitality of Christian mission. What Paul Knitter suggested to test the authenticity of Catholic theologies of religions holds good also of any justification of Christian mission: Does it enable Christians to hear more adequately the witness of Scripture? Does it lead the Christian to a deeper commitment to Christ and the Gospel? And above all, does it inspire the Christian to carry out more effectively his or her essential mission of advancing God’s Kingdom by witnessing to God’s Christ?<sup>3</sup>

In contrast to our priority of baptizing and saving peoples, we see in the mission of Jesus a call to be converted and believe in the Gospel, i.e., the arrival of the Kingdom (Mk 1:14). The Kingdom is made manifest in the life of Jesus. That was the model for his mission and that has to continue to provide the model for the Church’s mission today.

### **The Kingdom and the “Abba Experience”**

It is my thesis that the Kingdom, whose arrival Jesus announced and which was the heart of his mission, was the explicitation and the realiza-

tion of his “abba experience.” Joachim Jeremias has convincingly pointed out that Jesus’ address to God as “abba” expresses the ultimate mystery of the mission of Jesus.<sup>4</sup> It indicates the consciousness of an intimate relationship, as well as the authority to communicate God’s revelation, because God made himself known to him as Father (Mt 11:27, par.).<sup>5</sup>

It denotes an appropriation of a relationship—the relationship proclaimed and lived out by Jesus. The probability is that he employed the word “abba,” a term which must have sounded familiar and disrespectful of God to his contemporaries, not merely when it is expressly attested, but in all cases, and particularly in addresses to God where the evangelists record him as saying “Oh, Father,” “My Father,” etc.<sup>6</sup> We have a clear distinction in Jesus’ use of “Father” in reference to God. Thus, he uses “my Father,” when he wants to refer to God in the context of his relation to God, and “your Father,” when he wants refer to God in the context of his disciples’ relation to God. But he does not use the common denomination of “our Father” to mean his as well as his disciples’ relation to God. Similarly, he does not speak of “your Father” outside the circle of the disciples. All these enable us to capture the central significance of the “abba experience” in Jesus’ mission.

In Mt 11:27, and par., Lk 10:22, Jesus speaks of the Father’s intimate revelation to him and its purpose. Jeremias has paraphrased the verse as “because only a Father and a son truly know each other, therefore a son can reveal to others the innermost thoughts of his father.”<sup>7</sup> The father-son comparison as an illustration of how revelation is transmitted was familiar in Jesus’ times. For instance, in the third book of Enoch, we have: “Every secret did I reveal to him as a father.”<sup>8</sup> So, Jeremias claims, Jesus interprets the theme “all things have been transmitted to me by my Father” with the aid of this everyday experience: “as a father who personally devotes himself to explaining to his son the letter of the Torah, so God has transmitted to me the revelation of himself, and therefore I alone can pass on to others the real knowledge of God.”<sup>9</sup> This saying in which Jesus bears witness to himself and to his mission appears also in other texts.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, speaking about the Johannine use of “pater,” Shrenk points out that, in adopting the message of Jesus concerning the divine fatherhood, the Johannine author has developed it as an interpretation of the concept of revelation.<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, when Jesus spoke of God as “my Father,” he was referring not just to a familiarity and intimacy with God available to anyone, but to a unique relationship and revelation which was his alone. He is basing himself on the fact that God’s full revelation was given to him as only a father can reveal himself to his son. “Abba” then is a word which conveys

revelation. It represents the center of Jesus' awareness of his mission (*Sendungsbewusstsein*)<sup>12</sup> Thus, at the center of Jesus' mission stands the experience and revelation of God as the Father. "This one word 'abba,' if it is understood in its full sense, comprehends the whole message of the Gospel."<sup>13</sup> The "abba experience" of Jesus is so pervasive in all the testimonies about him that, in the context of his intimacy with God as Father, nothing could be more natural than to think of Jesus primarily as the Son of God. All the Gospels demonstrate how, through his life, his deeds and his words, Jesus revealed himself to be the Son of God (Mk 1:1), and this revelation culminates in the assertion by the Roman centurion "in truth this man was a Son of God" (Mk 15:39).

Jesus is the Son. The whole force of this word is that it has meaning only in relation to the Father and can be applied only to one person, only in relation to the Father. But at the same time, this force makes a formidable demand: lest this word remain a hollow sound, lest it be lost in the multitude of secret names mysteriously communicated to a few initiates, what it expresses has to be lived — Jesus has to show himself forth as the Son he claims to be. His life, in other words, was a living out of this sonship, thus revealing the Father. All that he said and did has to be seen in this unique relationship. In fact, the moment he appears, the moment he starts talking about the Kingdom of God, the moment he brings the Father's generosity to the poor and his forgiveness to sinners, Jesus speaks and lives like the Son he is. This must have been perceptible to anyone with eyes to see, as is shown by Peter's acknowledgement of his belief in Jesus as the Son of God, at Caesarea (Mt 16:16).

His life revealed the sovereign exigencies of being the Son of God: the priority of the wretched and the sinful, the price of reconciliation and forgiveness and the precariousness of vested interests. From the very beginning, whenever he spoke about the Kingdom which has come, and as he went seeking out sinners, Jesus was manifestly indwelt by a presence. He was led by a oneness with and experience of God — as Father. "This was the immediate source and the perfectly clear meaning of his activity and his mission."<sup>14</sup>

Jesus is the revelation of the "Good News of the Kingdom" and brings it into being, because of his ineffable relationship to the divine King, his Father. The Kingdom is not an abstract idea, but a presence which anticipates the eschatological event — the perfect realization of the divine Fatherhood, when all human beings shall recognize each other as brothers and sisters in the common Fatherhood of God. The revelation of divine Fatherhood communicated by Jesus, from the beginning of his proclamation of the Kingdom as he understood it, was the revelation of

a unique love that not only is creative but also redemptive.<sup>15</sup> Jesus, as the revelation of the Father's love, reached out to all. No one was excluded from his ministry, though he had a preferential option for the marginalized and alienated of his society.

The decisive moment of this revelation was the passion. According to all the evangelists it was the passion which enabled the disciples to say who the risen Christ was. For once risen, he does not have to say much, and reveals nothing new about what he is; rather he refers the disciples to what he used to tell them before his death. If the resurrection proves anything, it proves the truth of what he had said till then, without managing to make himself understood. The revelation of Jesus Christ was not completed and did not take on its true configuration before the resurrection; but it was integrally expressed, in words and deeds the moment he drew his last breath.

### **Mission — A Call to be Converted to the Father**

In teaching his disciples to call God "abba," Jesus first and foremost authorizes them to follow him in saying "abba." It was equally an authorization to participate in his communion with the Father and in his sonship. "The gift of being a child of God stamps the whole life of Jesus' disciples."<sup>16</sup> Through participation in the sonship of Christ, the natural Son of God, the disciples participate also in the mission of Christ.<sup>17</sup>

Just as the mission of Jesus can be summed up as manifesting the Father (Jn 17:6,26), so must the mission of the disciples be: "As the Father has sent me so do I send you!" (Jn 20:21). This offers the key to the mission of the Church today. The Church, the community of disciples, all who have shared the sonship of Christ through his Spirit in baptism (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6), has the singular mission of making known the Father. Jesus enables the disciples to call on God as their Father, in contrast to the crowds, precisely because they have been chosen to continue this revelation (Jn 17:18).

This is true even today. The participation in the sonship of Christ through baptism is not a privilege but a mission. And this mission is precisely revealing God as the Father of all with all its implications.

Most people, whatever may be their religious affiliation, do believe in God, expressed in different forms. The Church's service is precisely revealing this God as a loving Father, as the Father of all men and women, concerned about all his sons and daughters. It goes without saying, that the acceptance of God as a the loving Father of all implies the acceptance

of equality and fraternity. The Church must challenge all people to make a decision for or against this Father and his will which can be summarized as "justice-love" (Mt 5:17-20).<sup>18</sup>

When the Church invites men and women to conversion, the point of departure would not always be a change from one religion to another, but from sin and self to love and justice; and thus the Church can lead the different religious traditions to a death and resurrection from within. In doing this, the Church will "look for new possibilities of dialogue and collaboration with believers of other religions and with all men of good will, in order that love and brotherhood may prevail over hatred and opposition among men."<sup>19</sup> This means the mission of the Church must come in no way as a depreciation of different religious traditions, just as Christ did not come to abolish existing religions. But the religions can profit from the Church by its witness to the active divine love inviting all to be converted to him as the Father. The community of the disciples will have to fulfill this mission in all humility, seeing itself as the servant of the Kingdom rather than the dispenser of light to those in a situation of sin and darkness. This means the mission of the Church is not so much to bring salvation as to bring an epiphany, not to win conversion to the Church as a necessary means of salvation, but to help the realization of the broader Kingdom of God as it unfolds within history, which also implies enabling the followers of other religions to be better followers of those religions.<sup>20</sup> This way of thinking was not foreign to the Second Vatican Council when it asserted: "Missionary activity is nothing else and nothing less than a manifestation or epiphany of God's will, and the fulfillment of that will in the world and world history" (AG 9).

The basic comprehensive goal of mission is to promote and serve the unification and healing of a divided, wounded humanity. To quote John Paul II again, "At a time of great tensions that affect the earthly body of humanity, the Church's most important service springs from the unity of the Spirit, so that not only she herself will not suffer division coming from outside but she will also reconcile and unite people in the midst of adversities that increase around them and within themselves in today's world."<sup>21</sup> The Church as a sacrament of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind (LG 1, GS 1), has to strive to promote the integration and unity of diverse movements of peoples and ideas in the world. The solidarity to which this unification leads may look different in each place: it may be a solidarity against oppression and domination in Latin America; in Africa it may be a fraternity within and across autonomous cultures; in Asia it may be predominantly a solidarity amidst the diversity of religions. The Church thus forges ahead "towards God's reign until its fulfillment in the perfect communion of all mankind as brothers in God."<sup>22</sup>

## Footnotes

1. Cf. Neuner & Dupuis, *The Christian Faith*, (Dublin, 1973), p p. 271-72.
2. Gayyaba, B.P ., "Vatican Second's Approach to Non-Christian Religions," in W.S. Forster (ed.), *Christianity Among Other Religions* (Pretoria, 1981), p. 99.
3. Knitter, Paul F ., "Roman Catholic Approaches to Other Religions: Developments and Tensions," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 8 (1984), 53.
4. Jeremias J., *The New Testament Theology* (New York, 1971), p. 68 ff.
5. Cf. Merchel, W., *La Priere du Christ et des Chretiens* (Rome, 1963), p. 154.
6. Cf. Kittel, "Abba," *TDNT*, Vol. I, p. 6.
7. Jeremias J., *The Central Message of the New Testament* (London, 1965), p. 22.
8. Enoch III, 48. C.7; cf. also 45. 1ff.
9. Jeremias, *Central Message*, p. 26.
10. Cf. Mk 4:11; Mt 11:25; Lk 10:23.
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17. Cf. Merchel, *op.cit.*, p. 177.
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19. John Paul II, Message at Istanbul on Nov. 30, 1979, *AAS* 71 (1979), 1604.
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21. *L'Osservatore Romano*, Feb. 24, 1984, p. 5.
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### III. MISSIONARY SOCIETIES OF THE 80's & 90's

by  
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In the 1985 orientation course for new missionaries, the Premier of the Morobe Province in Papua New Guinea, Mr. Utula Samana, told the missionaries "we do not want simple pastors. We need specialized people to help us become self-sufficient."

Utula expressed quite clearly the new role of the expatriate church worker, the missionary of today. The era of "implantation" from without is finished. Now we are in the era of growth from within, of growth into the home culture, of "inculturation." Mission societies must change and adapt to the new situation. They must update their theology and their training: not any more simple pastors but specialized helpers in the field of inculturation.

#### **The Era of Implantation**

Whether one agrees with the term or not, there was a time when the established Church, usually from the West, sent members, missionaries, to bring the Good News to those people who had not heard it as yet, to those people who professed different creeds, who were non-Christians. The missionaries had as a goal to convert and baptize the "pagan" and so to establish a Church where there was none before.

The missionaries as a rule did not work as individuals but as members of a so-called missionary society. Some societies worked in many different fields; one might say everywhere there was a need for committed people. So the Franciscans, Salesians, etc. Others specialized in the work to bring the Good News to people of other faiths who were living in the so-called "mission lands." The Society of the Divine Word is one of the latter societies. In this article I talk about these specialized missionary societies and I call them "professional missionary societies," because their profession, occupation or calling is to the "mission" in the traditional sense.

Today, Christians might be a tiny minority in some places but the Church has been established everywhere. Even if a minority, that indigenous Church is officially recognized and is supposed to be self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating.



As a matter of fact, though, these young indigenous Churches are similar to the Churches from which the missionaries came. They are Western in structure, theology, liturgy and spirituality. They are necessarily so, because the missionaries could only bring the Good News as incarnated in their own home culture. There is no meta-cultural Christianity in existence. The Good News is meta-cultural, but where it happens "to exist," it is experienced and transmitted only in a cultural language. On the other hand, catechumens and neophytes could not and often were not allowed to translate that cultural Good News into their own culture, to inculturate, to incarnate it.

### **The Era of Inculturation**

One reason for not being allowed to express their new faith in an indigenous cultural way was the mentality of the sending Church. Because of the lack of confrontation or dialogue, the Western Church was not conscious of being a very cultural Church. The sending Church took its own cultural expression in theology, liturgy, morals as absolutes, as part of revelation. In order to become Christian, one had to accept the Western way of being Christian. It was the attitude of the Judaizing Christians all over again, and there was no Paul to stop it. Officially the Church recognized for the young Churches the right to express themselves culturally but denied the same right when it came to applications of that right. The famous principle of Propaganda Fide is well known: "Do not make any effort or offer any argument to convince these people to change their rites, their manners or their customs unless they are obviously contrary to religion or morality, (*modo not sint apertissime religioni et bonis moribus contraria*). What could be more absurd than to transplant Spain or France or Italy or some other countries. What we must transfer is the faith, that faith that neither rejects nor offends against rites and usages of any people provided these practices are not completely objectionable (*quomodo prava non sint*). Quite to the contrary our faith insists that local usages be maintained and protected" (*Collectanea S.C. de P.F. T 1, No. 135, p. 42*).

That's the ideal. The reality is the condemnation of Ricci and De Nobili in spite of this great principle by the Propagation of Faith.

Today the Churches are officially of age, but they must become what they are, e.g., truly indigenous Churches. The young Churches must reflect on the Christian tradition they received and try to understand it and re-express it in terms of the religious language God had been using with them in the past. That language can be found in the traditional religions which are the human cultural responses to the voice of the one we call

Love, who, because of being Love, cannot stop revealing and communicating himself to his beloved children in spite of their lack of trust and love.

Traditional religions are not God's revelation but the result of a dialogue filled with all the human inadequacies of expression, with all the human distortions caused by what we call sinfulness: the refusal to trust God. It takes serious study to rediscover the basic religious experience, i.e., that language God might have been using to reveal himself. One is helped and guided by the final and normative revelation in Christ, but even that biblical revelation is an "incarnated" one, and it has been accepted and expressed through various cultures.

While trying to reconstruct the language of traditional revelation and the message Christ came to correct, complete and perfect, one must challenge the Western cultural aspect of Christianity, so that Western theology might be able to go beyond the cultural symbol to the reality, which has to be understood and translated into traditional cultural symbols. This process is what I call dialogue. No dialogue is possible as long as the West does not admit to be limited in its understanding of Christianity and in its explanation of it, until it realizes itself to be cultural. Dialogue then will transform both partners, not in the sense that both will necessarily give up their faith, but that in accepting and reflecting on the challenge, one will go beyond the symbol to the signified and so grow in understanding. Dialogue will become a Cornelius event. Cornelius finds the one he was looking for and Peter understands better the one he knew "so well." Both were transformed, were different as a result. Peter was so different that the Church questioned his Christian identity. Cornelius became a Christian but changed the Apostolic Church in the process.

### **An All-Embracing Dialogue**

This study and dialogue should develop an indigenous theology: people will express the newness of Christ using the language God has been using for centuries or thousands of years in trying to speak to them. It will not remain only an academic theology but it will express itself in an indigenous liturgy. It will celebrate the mysteries of the faith; it will praise God using indigenous symbols and forms. Moreover, as the community of those called to witness to God's abiding love and mercy as expressed on the Cross, it will organize itself according to its traditional cultural forms. The new social forms will not be entirely traditional because the traditional social structures were often developed to care for an introverted clannish society, while today, whether one likes it or not, any society is

part of the world society, and the social structures must reflect and interact with this fact. Still, the new social structures will not be necessarily those of the Church of the missionaries. Within the new cultural and political context the young Church must find its mission, discover its specific prophetic role, which does not have to be the one of the "mother" Church, must decide what to do in practice in order to be a light in its context, a salt for the society it lives in, a yeast transforming the society from within.

A missionary society to be missionary today cannot concentrate in training pastors as it used to do up to Vatican II, which can be taken to be the watershed. To be up-to-date, to have a reason for existence today, a missionary society must train people who can help the young Churches become themselves. A missionary society today must be highly specialized.

### **Areas of Specialization**

The needs of the local Church are many and any missionary society will try to answer them as best as it can. But there are fields where a missionary society will be expected to do more, to be professional. E.g., there are many needs in the health sector, and nobody can say "I will not help." See the answer in Mt 25:43. But from the medical Sisters one could and should expect a top service in this field. There are a lot of problems in the field of education and no missionary society can say: "Forget about them." But one would expect true professionalism and top service from, let's say, the Christian Brothers or the Marist Brothers. It is their specialization.

My question is then: Which are the areas where the local Church could and should expect professionalism and top service from a professional missionary society?

It seems to me that there are three major areas which are essential for a professional missionary society today: new ministries, self-ministering communities and dialogue.

#### **a) New Ministries**

Realistically we see that in spite of being of age the young Churches are still short of ordained ministries. If that is the case, any missionary society worthy of its name should ask itself why the work of "implantation" did not fully succeed: the Church which has been implanted and de-

clared of age cannot well survive for lack of the necessary ministries. A missionary society today should have "ministries" as a top priority of research and practical action. The research must ask: How does it come that the young Churches are chronically short of ordained ministries and depend as a consequence on outside help? The professional or specialized missionary societies have a duty to analyze this strange situation they helped to create. Is it enough to study and analyze? Ought not a professional missionary society use its name and authority to obtain changes from the Holy See? And should not its bishops lead the experiment? To ask for a bishop from a specialized missionary society would mean to ask for action in this field!

### **b) Self-Ministering Communities**

Ministries are embedded in a community. The community must become part of the specialized study of the missionary society. There are theoretical and practical aspects to the problem. If a missionary society still has pastors, these pastors should be specialized in the building up of mature self-ministering communities. The "new" ministries must be embedded in these self-ministering communities.

These specialized pastors should be backed up and supported by a professional team of sociologists, anthropologists, religionists, pastoral theologians, organized by the society to enable its members to do this work properly.

### **c) Dialogue**

Dialogue is a "must" everywhere in the world. There is dialogue with other Churches; there is dialogue with atheists, Marxists, with fallen-away Christians, with workers, with youth, etc., etc. The dialogue the professional missionary societies are mostly concerned about is the dialogue with other religions, both primal and universal. Today, a missionary society, in order to have a right to exist, must be equipped for dialogue with non-Christian religions.

Beside the specialization in ministries and communities the missionary societies today must specialize in the language God used in the regions where they are going to work. Anthropology, sociology, comparative religions are not studies for the sake of themselves but in function of the dialogue between cultures and religions and Christianity. This specialization will necessarily have two aspects: the general and theoretical, which are basic everywhere; and the specific, which is proper to a

specific place and which helps directly a given Church. Applied anthropology does not mean a second-class anthropology. It means "top in its class"; but after being top in its class, it does not remain in the world of ideas but descends to earth and tries to analyze and explain the reality Christianity encounters, and shows the best way to come into dialogue with it. Applied social sciences help make true dialogue possible.

### **Specialization of the Whole Society**

The whole missionary society has the missionary charism and the ensuing specialization, but it is expressed differently among the members. It is the working together of all the members that makes it possible.

Some members, by inclination, will prefer to work at the practical level, with people, in a "parish." Others will work in "logistics," i.e., administration, finances, etc. Some, by inclination and invitation, will work at a more academic level.

This group of academic specialists study and help ministries, communities and dialogue at an academic level. They train the recruits; they update everybody. Some of them must also be part of the team working in the "parishes." All academics should have had direct experience in one of the society's specialized "parishes." Only those with that practical experience should be allowed to work at the theoretical level. Besides, there should be a rotation of these academics so that some are in the field working with the practical men and others are working at the theoretical level. It could well be that some academics are better at the practical level than others. The missionary society should keep this fact in mind when distributing its members.

### **Professional Missionary Societies and Local Church**

At this point one will ask: Are professional missionary societies not imposing their service on the local Church instead of listening to the needs of the local Church?

Of course there is a danger of that but it must not be so. The professional missionary societies should be known for their special charism and be asked to help a local Church through their special charism. E.g., teaching brothers cannot be said to impose on the local Church because they specialize in education, and probably would refuse to be involved in health. Mother Theresa cannot be said to impose on the local Church if she refuses to send her sisters to work among the elite and insists that they

work in the slums. This is the charism of her congregation and if the local Church calls for Mother Theresa, it calls for this charism and not for another one.

It is a fact that not every bishop knows about the charisms of every society. A bishop very often is short of priests and looks to a clerical society for priests to fill the vacant parishes.

The bishop has a right, nay the duty, to do so. If he gets some priests from a sister Church, no problem; but if he gets priests from a society, he must be informed about the charism of that society. A professional missionary society cannot be content just to fill a gap caused by an endemic shortage of ministers. The professional society, to be true to its charism, must look for the causes of this situation and find remedies for it, so that the local Church can become fully self-supporting and do without the professional missionary for ordinary pastoral work.

The charism is a gift to the wider Church, and the local Church should know about it, be free to make use of it when, where and for how long it cares to. This is required by the independence of the local Church. On the other hand, the identity of the society demands the freedom to determine its own charism and to offer it freely to those local Churches who call for it. A clear contract would avoid all dangers of abuses on both sides.

If we take for granted that in the post-Vatican ecclesiology the situation of a missionary society having the monopoly of the pastoral work in a diocese is over, then a new policy must be developed. Instead of assuming the total pastoral responsibility for whole diocese it will answer the request by a local Church to work in a specific area, either geographical or otherwise, according to our own charism. The area is decided by the local Church in dialogue with the society and the terms of our service are written into the contract between the local Church and the society.

A missionary society today still needs parishes not only in order to help the local Church but to be able to keep alive and up-to-date its own charism. It needs places where it can put to work its theories about Ministries and dialogue. These still necessary parishes would be pioneer parishes and with the blessing of the local bishop will try to set up these "new" communities, which are intended to find ways to overcome chronic dependence from abroad, to develop special ministries, to get dialogue going. These parishes, besides, would be places where the society gives practical experience to its academics in anthropology, sociology, comparative religions, missiology, etc.

For a professional missionary society there is a need to have such places where specialists can be trained in loco, where the theory can be brought into contact with the specific reality.

The missionary society takes the lead in ministries, communities and dialogue because that's its special charism; but the aim is for that work to become part of the Church the society is serving. Some young Churches will be better equipped and structured than others. The professional missionary society should erect some structures to make this work possible. Such structures take often the form of pastoral institutes for the study of traditional religions and cultures, like the Melanesian Institute, for instance, to which I belong. The local Church must take over these institutes which aim at inculturating the word of God into its cultures. But to start an institute, to start a study of ministries, communities and dialogue is the easiest part. To keep it going — that's another matter. It should be the task of a professional missionary society to see to it that those institutes function and continue. Often the highly specialized staff is not available to the local Church. That is where the up-to-date missionary society has an important role to play through its specialized members. The society, in as far as possible, should leave the leadership to the local Church and only provide the research staff necessary to make those institutes efficient and eventually self-sufficient. This is where an up-to-date professional missionary society ought to find an aspect of its mission today.

### **Needs of a Specialized Academics Corps**

A professional missionary society can decide to be at the mercy of somebody else to train its people and to support its specialized work. Sometimes a society might be forced by lack of means to go that way. But that dependency in formation, training and support can endanger the service, even the charism, of the society.

A professional missionary society should train its own members, imbue them with its own charism and vision, train the support people needed for its specialized work. Only then can the society be sure that those people will be there when they are needed and where they are needed: for formation of its own recruits, for ongoing formation of its own men in the field, for analysis of pastoral situations, for evaluation of pastoral efforts etc.

I'm thinking here of a group of people specialized in culture, religion, sociology, missiology, theology, to assess the missionary situation, help understand the partner in the dialogue, i.e., the non-Christian religions and

and the cultures of which these religions are the core. This group of people should help Christianity understand the challenge coming from the other religions and help Christianity to grow through it.

This specialized team of the society should work on the theoretical side of the problem of ministries and communities, and dialogue.

Another task of this group of people would be to train the missionary society's members and others who ask for it. This group should be part of any involvement of the society in the field. They help assess and update the methods and work, and they are responsible for the ongoing professional formation of the members of the society and of others who ask for it.

The members working at the institutes of the various young Churches, e.g., the Melanesian Institute, Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture, etc., belong to this group of academics. They should not work at such institutes as individuals but as members of the missionary society academics, as members of a professional missionary society, with the support of the whole academic group and of the whole society. This implies that they must communicate with the rest of the group and the missionary society. There cannot be mutual support unless there is communication; there will be no communication unless there are channels; there will not be channels unless there is a well-functioning structure. There should be a structure to enable the functioning of this academic group.

The various research institutes of the missionary society, e.g., Anthropos, Missiological Institute, faculties, should be integrated into that structure. The co-ordination should be the responsibility of the missionary society. The secretariats of studies and mission should help the society co-ordinate this work.

### Conclusions

Among the priorities of the professional missionary societies today ministries, communities and dialogue, have a top place.

These priorities ought to be tackled at the theoretical and practical level. At the theoretical level, there should be a group of anthropologists, religionists, sociologists, missiologists, theologians, specialized in the above mentioned fields, who carry on the research in these fields. They train their own people and others who ask for it. They work in the field to assess and update the work the missionary society does, and are respon-



sible for the ongoing professional formation of the members of their society and of any others who asks for it.

There should be a structure to support this group, to co-ordinate their work, to facilitate dialogue among themselves and to support them.

At the practical level the society works where it is allowed to use its charism in the above-mentioned fields and to take the lead if needed.

There should be some parishes entrusted to the missionary society where in the contract the society is allowed and expected to carry out its specialization, and where the academics get their field experience and the young "missionaries" are oriented.

To ask for a professional missionary society today is to ask for the charism of the same. To nominate a bishop of that society should mean to ask for pioneering or intensive work in the fields of specialization of his society.

**IV. S.V.D. STATEMENT ON  
MISSIOLOGICAL EDUCATION AND RESEARCH  
IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION**

prepared by the  
Asia-Pacific Region Co-ordinating Body  
for Missiological Education and Research

**PREFACE**

In developing programs for missiological education and research on an international scale, the Society of the Divine Word must commit itself not only to a fundamental unity of vision, but also to a fundamental respect for the same diversity of race, culture, and history that characterizes its own membership. The statement that follows is intended to formulate our common vision and focus it on the Asia-Pacific region, highlighting the general theoretical and organizational framework within which programs for missiological education and research can best be evaluated and developed, and offering concrete goals to be achieved in the near future. It represents the results of discussions held by the co-ordinators for Missiological Education and Research in the Asia Pacific Region, from 31 January to 7 February 1986, in Hong Kong, in response to initiatives originally taken by the Superior General and his Council and to the mandate established in Tagaytay in December of 1983, when the coordinating body was first formed.

## 1. CONTEXT

We are gathered to reflect on our vision of the mission of the Society of the Divine Word in the Asia-Pacific region, and in that light to clarify the basic direction that our programs of missionary formation and research should take in the region. To do so, it is necessary to begin from the actual context in which we find the saving designs of God at work.

### a) The Religious Context

Asia is the homeland of all the great religious traditions of the world as well as of a wide variety of primal religions. Almost everywhere one finds popular religiosity flourishing. In some areas, this religious diversity has become a source of divisiveness, aggravated by an increasingly exclusivistic spirit of fundamentalism; in many quarters we also see a growing search for unity.

Where the accelerated rate of modernization and the spread of scientific rationality have brought about a decline in the influence of the traditional religious movements of Asia, a vacuum has been created for newer and often more aggressive religions to step in.

In spite of centuries of concerted missionary efforts, the good news of Christianity has not had a significant impact on most of Asia. Numerically it represents no more than a small minority and may be expected to remain so in the future. At the same time, Christians are finding a growing openness to the word of God in Asia, as well as a greater appreciation for their Christian service in society.

### b) The Cultural Context

Across the great land mass and throughout the islands of Asia and the Pacific, we see a bewildering diversity of ethnic, linguistic and cultural heritages — even within the same national boundaries. With the exception of a small number of homogeneous societies, the persistence of tribal and caste mentalities tends to work as a divisive influence and often to end in violent conflict.

The Asian worldview remains by and large traditional; life is centered on family and community. But industrialization and urbanization have taken their toll, weakening ties to tradition, breaking up the family structure, and facilitating the exploitation of women. Time-honored values are losing their hold and giving way to those of the consumer-oriented

society. The influence of mass media continues to spread, and in the hands of business and government frequently serves as a powerful tool for the control and manipulation of the masses.

### **c) The Socio-Economic Context**

Nearly two-thirds of the current world population is distributed in the Asia-Pacific region, with the children and youth forming the majority. Most of these people live in rural areas and work in the primary sector, where illiteracy is rampant. In most countries the evils of poverty, malnutrition and disease are of epidemic proportions; only a few privileged countries enjoy a satisfactory standard of living.

The economic structures throughout most of the region are grossly unjust and are directly responsible for mass underemployment, unemployment and outright exploitation. The greatest part of the wealth is concentrated in the hands of no more than the smallest part of the population. The laws and conventions of international trade and commerce tend to perpetuate this "neo-colonialist" state of affairs.

More and more people throughout Asia are becoming aware of their human dignity and right to just and equal treatment under the law. This is particularly marked in the case of Asian women. In addition, expectations for improved standards of living and equal opportunities for advance continue to rise.

### **d) The Political Context**

Many Asian nations are under the control of military dictatorships or totalitarian regimes insensitive to fundamental human rights, which in turn has led to mass migrations, refugees and regional conflicts.

Moreover, nearly all the countries of the Asia-Pacific region have been caught up in the struggles and special interests of the super-powers, whose conflict of ideologies in many cases only deepens and fortifies existing divisions in society.

Urgently needed reforms in the socio-economic sector are regularly hindered by excessive expenditures for armaments. In many areas the common people suffer from widespread graft and corruption among their political leaders and government officials. Hence, the emergence of popular movements for liberation, not infrequently involving armed resistance.

This, in broad outline, is the context within which we are called to discern the saving plan of God and to define our specific task as collaborators of the Divine Word.

## 2. FOUNDATIONS

From the very beginning God loved the world and all its peoples and made a covenant with them (Gen 9-10). We see this divine-human dialogue, which has continued down through history, embodied in the religious and cultural heritages of the Asia-Pacific region. In their art and literature, their rituals and symbols, their philosophies and values, we can discern the language in which divine love has communicated itself to the peoples of Asia. At the same time, we cannot fail to recognize the ways in which oppressive structures, institutionalized exploitation, and superstition have distorted the human response to that love.

In the past God has spoken in many and varied ways to the peoples of Asia. Through the witness of Christianity he now speaks to them through his Son (Heb 1:1). "The Word became flesh in Jesus of Nazareth to reveal the Father's Name and to proclaim the Kingdom of his love" (Constitutions, Prologue). The Word that has existed from the beginning we have heard and seen and touched in Jesus Christ, in his life, his words, his deeds (1 Jn 1:1).

Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom as good news to the poor, as liberation to the downtrodden, as light to the blind, as forgiveness to sinners (Lk 4:18). As a servant of that message he suffered opposition, failure, torment and death, but was confirmed in his resurrection. And "by the outpouring of the Spirit the glorified Lord formed the new people of God as a sign of salvation for all. Christ continues his mission in his people to bring the good news to all nations and proclaim the Father's liberating and unifying love" (Const., Prol.).

Today the Church, the people of God, continues the divine-human dialogue that began with creation (Rom 1:19-20). It challenges the peoples of Asia to carry on and perfect that dialogue, not necessarily leading to a change from one religious way to another, but always through a conversion from sin and selfishness to love and justice.

Christ, as the full and final revelation of God's love, as the perfect ideal of service to others, as the radical challenge to all egoism and oppression, must be made known to all people everywhere. Acting through this work of the Church, the Spirit can prompt the variety of religions and ideologies of Asia to a death and resurrection from within.

Working in collaboration with all people of good will, the Church challenges sin and distortion wherever they are to be found, whether in itself, in other religions and ideologies, or in the wider social, economic and political realities of Asia.

The Holy Spirit has raised us up, as Divine Word missionaries, into a community that places itself at the disposal of the Church to accomplish this missionary task (Const., Prol.).

### 3. VISION

The most important thing about a vision is not that it is achievable within the next five or ten years, or even within our own lifetime, but that it provides us with an orientation, an ideal towards which we can exert ourselves. The primary source of any vision for future missiological programs is Christ, the Incarnate Word of the Father, revealed through our Christian Scriptures, our Church, and our S.V.D. Constitutions, as well as through the sacred writings and traditions of other religions and through our contemporary experience of the world in which we live.

To clarify this vision requires a response to three questions:

What is the task of our S.V.D. communities in Asia?

What is the goal of our missionary formation? What kinds of S.V.D. missionaries do we want?

What task do we assign to our missiological research?

#### a) S.V.D. Communities in Asia

In the light of the context described above, our S.V.D. communities in the Asia-Pacific region are faced with a number of important tasks and opportunities. Responding to them requires a search for a deeper understanding of the societies, cultures and religions of Asia in order to participate better in the various forms of dialogue that God has carried on with the people in whose midst we live and work. We come to this understanding through programs of immersion, study and research aimed at teaching us the language that God has used in the dialogue in Asia and drawing us into the innermost thoughts and aspirations of the Asian response. This in turn enables us to seek suitable forms for witnessing and communicating the Gospel and to work for the inculturation of the Gospel message, as well as to bring into being new communities and new forms of community, to nurture them to maturity, and to foster their communion with one

another (Const. 102). Further, it is our task to promote unity among Christians through our educational institutions and work in the field of communications, and to contribute wherever we can to harmonious cooperation among followers of other religions and among the various peoples of Asia. We seek to confirm genuine human values wherever they are to be found, to encourage education of the youth, and to cast our lot with the poor and marginalized of society.

Our communities can only achieve these goals if they remain united with the Divine Word who becomes incarnate in a particular age and culture; and if, following his example, they preserve strong roots in their own culture at the same time as they maintain a posture of open dialogue with the changing world in which they live and work (Const. 103.) This in turn requires that our communities remain centers of prayer, study and sustained reflection at the same time as they reach out in evangelical witness and service. Our programs of formation need to be developed with this end in mind.

#### **b) Missionary Formation**

The goal of our programs of missionary formation should be to cultivate a community of confreres sharing in a deep experience of and commitment to Christ, the final revelation of divine love, who came among us to establish the Reign of God. Those trained in our programs should be taught to discern the languages that God has been using to communicate with peoples across the world, and to participate in the mission of Christ by holding up the light of the Gospel as a challenge to carry on and perfect the divine-human dialogue. They must be prepared to carry out this mission "first and foremost where the Gospel has not been preached at all or only insufficiently, or where the local Church is not viable on its own" and where the liberating message of Christ is most needed.

The knowledge and experience of Christ at which the missionary aims is at once deeply personal and communal. It is the fruit both of personal prayer and of sharing in the life of the community; it is cultivated by the study of scripture and theology, by concrete experience and reflection, and by dialogue with those of other faiths and convictions.

This knowledge of Christ leads to a total commitment to Christ and his mission: the realization of the Kingdom of God through the power of the Spirit. This commitment invites one to place the Kingdom above self, family, culture, country and local Church. The call of Christ and one's own response is the pivot around which the missionary's personality,

prayer, study and service revolve, the center that bring unity to the things of life.

The ability to communicate knowledge and commitment cross-culturally demands of the prospective missionary a dialogue on several levels. In the dialogue with oneself, one seeks to discern not only the presence of Christ at work in one's life but also the Spirit at work in the socio-economic, political and religious realities of one's own surrounding society. This will help one to recognize the limits of one's own culture. In the dialogue with one's missionary community, one reaches out to one's immediate group of peers to exchange ideas, share experiences, and partake of genuine team spirit. In the dialogue with the people among whom one works, the individual will need to approach other languages, cultures and religions with an eye to discovering the "seeds of the Word," obscured and distorted as they may have become, and to learning how to speak through them of the Gospel. To carry on dialogue at this level requires both an understanding of current theology and methods of evangelization and a familiarity with the tools of the social sciences. Finally, in the dialogue with the Church universal, the missionary should reach beyond the confines of the local Church to be informed of the wider story of the Church with its rich variety of needs and aspirations. The missionary must be able to share insights and experiences so as to form a bridge between Churches.

The missionary should emerge from a program of formation ready and willing to speak of Christ to those who know of him only dimly or not at all; and to announce his liberating message to those whose personal dignity has been trivialized by the denial of basic human rights, the grind of poverty, the weight of oppressive structures, or the deprivation of cultural roots.

To move this vision closer to reality, attention needs to be given to each of the aspects of formation in order to insure that a missionary spirit pervade them all. The primary concern of spiritual formation is to cultivate a committed response to Christ's missionary call. It should enable those in formation to accept personal gifts and defects, and within those limits to discover an integrated rhythm of reaching outwards and returning within. It should make one attentive to the workings of the Spirit in others and enable one to respond to it by sharing one's own experiences of Christ. As a missionary, one must have a frontier mentality and be willing to stand at the cutting edge of the Church's work. In this regard, the religious vows should be seen both as a means of inserting oneself into the community of the Divine Word and as a means of freeing oneself for the service of the Kingdom.

Although Christ, as source and goal of the missionary commitment, stands above this world, the commitment is made within the world and as such is vitally connected with everything that happens there. To cope with the conflicts and tensions of Asia today demands a deep spirituality of the missionary, one rooted in Christ as the suffering servant of history and enriched by Asian religiosity.

One of the principal problems with our formal program of missionary education has been the blurring of the missionary focus itself. Our participation in theological coalitions has meant that we can no longer simply rely on our own theological faculties to fill this need. More often than not, it is the concerns of their own local Churches that provide an integrating principle to these theologates and hence obscure the primary goal of missionary formation, which is preparation for work at the frontiers of the Church. This situation holds out a twofold challenge: to foster a wider awareness of the essential missionary dimension of the Church, and to test the limits of applying theological concepts and tools developed in the context of one local Church to that of others.

Apostolic formation represents another dimension of missionary training full of promise but not without its perils. Ideally it should follow a model of preparation, action and reflection, and should progress from dialogue and ministry in one's own culture and faith to dialogue and ministry with people of other cultures and faiths. The development of so-called exposure programs deserves particular attention here.

### **c) Missiological Research**

It is important that our research programs be firmly based on our S.V.D. charism. Accordingly, we propose to understand them as the systematic and scientific reflection on the divine-human dialogue begun by the Word in creation, perfected in Christ and also found in the religions, cultures, socio-political and economic structures of the peoples. This reflection includes a study of past and present encounters between Christians and peoples of other faiths and ideologies, from which much can be learned to render our own present and future dialogue more fruitful.

The first element in missiological research, then, is systematic and scientific reflection. Missionaries have always reflected on their work and developed theories explaining the successes and failures of their missionary enterprises. Today we feel the need to make better use of the skills developed by the social sciences, to co-ordinate their research efforts, and share the results. Missionaries in the field cry out for more



reliable information and for better methods to tackle problems related to their work. Hence, the need for more updated scientific research programs.

The second element is the divine-human dialogue. It is not enough merely to claim that the reach of divine revelation extends beyond Christianity and that other religions are also the result of a divine-human dialogue. One must also provide the missionary with scientific tools for discerning God's revelation and the often sinful response contained in the particular religions, cultures, and socio-political and economic structures of our times. This enables the missionary to present Christ as a continuation of an ongoing divine-human dialogue and a challenge to deepen it further.

Third is the element of "past and present encounters between Christians and peoples of other faiths and ideologies." Any encounter is an event that can either promote or hinder dialogue. Even before the first word has been spoken implicit, unintended messages stemming from lifestyle and from personal and group attitudes are already working as a kind of "para-communication." There is a need for serious study of these encounters to discover the para-messages that help or hinder a proper understanding of the Christian message. While remaining convinced that any good emerging from genuine encounter is ultimately the work of the Spirit and the creative power of the Word, there is a place for scientific research to assess to what extent social, economic, cultural, religious, and even theological factors have helped or hindered a true encounter at the level of faith. This recommends an interdisciplinary approach to our research projects.

The fourth element, learning how to "render our present and future dialogue more fruitful," rests on three assumptions: that encounters between Christians and peoples of other faiths and ideologies can be improved, or at the very least, that obstacles to improvement can be identified and approaches for dealing with them developed; that a spirit of openness and flexibility can aid missionaries in attaining the insights and skills necessary to identify the "seeds of the Word" in the lives of peoples of other faiths and ideologies; and that missionaries can respond positively and effectively to those seeds.

It should be noted, in summing up, that programs of missiological education and research are in no sense an end in themselves. They exist in order that we may become more effective "envoys" of the Word to the World. But one cannot be an envoy in a vacuum. Our vision of an S.V.D. envoy is one of dialogue and partnership, of gathering together through

dialogue and partnership a community of the Word, some of whom may one day be baptized, others of whom may never be baptized. The dynamic core of this gathering, of this movement towards a deeper union with the Father, should be the Christian community grounded in the desire to orient the movement on the right path throughout the things of everyday life.

In conclusion, we realize that to be true to the vision of being an envoy we must be open to dialogue and partnership with individuals and institutions possessing a vision and purpose similar to our own. In the first place, we wish to seek closer co-operation with the Sister Servants of the Holy Spirit and the Sister Servants of the Holy Spirit of Perpetual Adoration. In the second place, we wish to enter into dialogue and partnership with other mission institutes and congregations, with the laity, and with like-minded associations both Catholic and Protestant. And in the third place, we wish to co-operate with institutions and individuals of other faiths and ideologies who are open to the values of the Kingdom.

#### 4. OBSTACLES

Three main obstacles stand in the way of developing programs of S.V.D. missiological education and research in Asia. The *first* is the general lack of awareness of the need for such programs at all. In the time of Wilhelm Schmidt, anthropological studies were seen as an integral part of the vision and purpose of our missionary work. The same can hardly be said today. The sheer volume of the demand for direct evangelization and pastoral care, especially in the period following the Second World War, has forced serious scientific reflection on our work well into the background. We have become missionaries of action rather than of reflection. The inclusion of missiology and related subjects in our formation programs and systematic research in the mission fields have been accorded low priorities in S.V.D. planning.

*Secondly*, as a result of this neglect of the reflective dimension of our work relatively few of our members have been assigned to higher studies in these areas. It often happens that proposals for adding new areas of study to programs of initial and ongoing formation or new research projects are dismissed with mild regrets for lack of trained personnel without any attempt to face the basic question: Why is there a lack of personnel?

The *third* and most crucial obstacle is the lack of a structural framework and environment to support those who are teaching missiology and related subjects or doing research in these areas. There is no

structure that would encourage professors, scholars and missionaries in the field to carry on a constructive dialogue with one another. Each side keeps to itself and all potential for mutual consultation and the cross-fertilization of ideas is lost. As a result missiologists, anthropologists, scholars of religion, and other specialists tend to isolate themselves from missionaries in the field and their concerns. Some have even left the Society altogether. In the end both superiors and members at large lose sight of the need for specialists aside from the most concrete and immediate tasks they can perform.

## 5. POSSIBILITIES

Despite the obstacles that face it, our vision of missiological education and research in the Asia-Pacific region is rich with possibilities. Above all else, the very formation of the Committee issuing this paper demonstrates that we are now in a position to bring our researchers and scholars throughout Asia and the Pacific together to forget common goals and work together towards their fulfillment. While it is not always easy to appreciate one another's problems and share one another's assumptions and standpoints, we are convinced that we have bridged these differences sufficiently to produce a single set of recommendations for the region, and thus to complement the work that began in Tagaytay in 1983, on whose recommendation the Superior General appointed a full-time coordinator.

The main possibilities for the future may be clustered in two main areas. The first has to do with increasing awareness among our confreres of the benefits of solid missiological research and education for those working in parishes and pastoral centers, in seminaries and houses of formation, in schools and universities, and in development and social action projects of various forms. Although at first these efforts may have to swim against the currents, we are convinced that they will justify themselves in practice.

In this regard, it would be possible to bring greater clarity to what makes our labors in a given apostolate distinctively SVD and to evaluate our involvement in those terms. For example, work in a development project, parish, or school might be seen not simply as a responsibility that we assume until such time as the local church is able to take it over, but as a locus within which to identify the challenges facing the missionary dimension of the Church and see approaches for responding to them. In this process those in the field could solicit the cooperation of specialists from our educational and research institutes.

A second cluster of possibilities revolves around the idea of initiating a comprehensive network to facilitate communication and collaboration at all levels by providing a structured organizational framework. A first dimension of this network would link those in the field to those in research and educational institutes at the regional and national levels, as mentioned above. A second dimension of the network, which is also well within the range of present possibility, would link our missiological institutes to related institutes in the region. The primary focus would have to fall on our seminaries, houses of formation and research centers, and from there could branch out to include similar organizations of other like-minded groups, committees established by conferences of bishops and religious superiors, and eventually take on ecumenical and interreligious aspects. Such an effort would take time to initiate and require a great deal of patience and planning if it is to function effectively. But the possibility is before us.

A third dimension of the network would link our national missiological institutes across the Asia-Pacific region to one another. This process has already begun and can be further promoted through common projects and exchanges of personnel and information. The appointment of a coordinator for missiological education and research in the region makes it possible to begin at once consolidating efforts in this regard and promoting them with new vigor.

Clearly, the network should function as a unit, with the workings of each dimension feeding into and receiving from the others. The realization of the vision on which this Committee is founded, and indeed the idea of a "Pan-Asian Institute of Missiology" itself is conceivable only in terms of such an interdependence.

## 6. GOALS

At this point we may spell out our specific goals as precisely as possible, distinguishing between short-term goals, or those we hope to achieve within the next five years, and long-term goals that will take us further into the future.

### a) Missiological Education

#### Long-Term Goals

1. That a mission-oriented formation program for those in houses of formation and those already in the field be worked out and implemented.

2. That we have the capacity to train missiologists and mission-related specialists in the Asia-Pacific region.

#### Short-Term Goals

1. That prior to and in preparation for the next General Chapter in 1988 all our members in the Asia-Pacific region be given the opportunity to attend a workshop of no less than two days in which the purposes, structures, and possibilities (especially for them) of our programs of missiological education and research would be explained to them and set out against the background of the contemporary mission in these regions.
2. That seminars for formation personnel in Asia-Pacific region be organized shortly after the General Chapter in 1988 to treat key issues concerning S.V.D. missionary formation.
3. That the provincials see to it that an adequate number of confreres be assigned for specialized studies aimed at missiological formation and research, and with a view to establishing provincial, national, and/or international missiological institutes.

#### **b) Research and Publications**

##### Long-Term Goals

1. That an S.V.D. network be set up to co-ordinate our programs of education and research, and that it serve as a comprehensive organizational framework for the local, national, and the Asia-Pacific levels.
2. That a broadly based network of institutions and individuals in the Asia-Pacific region interested in missiological education and research be established.
3. That two, possibly three, common research and/or educational projects be taken up throughout the Asia-Pacific region.

##### Short-Term Goals

1. That a systematic study be undertaken in each country of the Asia-Pacific region to determine what S.V.D. research facilities and personnel exist, and what research projects are currently in progress within the S.V.D.

2. That a similar study be conducted to provide information on non-S.V.D. research personnel and projects in the region.
3. That each province initiate or cooperate with the local church in a research project dealing with the issues facing mission work in the province and involve some of the members of the province in planning and actual research related to the findings.
4. That opportunities be provided to share research findings with missionaries in the field (e.g. through meetings, discussions, seminars).
5. That the need for and feasibility of a missiological journal or journals for the Asia-Pacific region be assessed.

### c) Finances

#### Short-Term Goal

1. That the full-time Co-ordinator for Missiological Education and Research in the Asia-Pacific region inquire into funding agencies prepared to sponsor the types of research projects referred to above.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The meeting of S.V.D. co-ordinators for Missiological Education and Research which produced this statement took place in Hong Kong from 31 January to 7 February, 1986. While our discussions took up and brought to fruition many of the insights put forward at our meeting in Tagaytay in 1983, we do not consider our discussions to have ended. We intend to continue at a later date, picking up where we have left off. In the meantime it is our hope that what we have so far produced will be of use to missionaries in the field, particularly those missionaries who are responsible for the formation of future members of the Society, and that it may stimulate new theological reflection and research regarding the missionary task of the Society of the Divine Word and the Church in the Asia-Pacific region.

We wish to express our thanks first of all to Father General and his Council, whose interest and generous support made this meeting possible. We are also grateful too the provincials of the Asia-Pacific region for the encouragement and assistance they have given; and also to all the S.V.D. confreres and others who, even though they were not actually present, added so much to our discussions through their advice and criticism of the working papers circulated prior to the meeting.

## Appendix

### IMPLEMENTATION OF GOALS

In the implementation of the goals mentioned in the section on GOALS, the following points are offered as suggestions:

#### Long-Term Goal

#### Seminar For Formators

Venue: Divine Word Seminary, Tagaytay, or Ishvani Kendra, Pune, or Nanzan University, Nagoya.

Aims: A. That the Formators set goals and strategy for themselves for the future development of the missionary dimension of S.V.D. formation in the Asia-Pacific region.

B. That the interaction of the formators bring mutual support and more unity and depth to our missionary formation.

Content: A. Lectures on the challenges facing the missionary activity of the Church in the Asia-Pacific region today; advances in missiology and the theology of mission which undergird the S.V.D. Constitutions; S.V.D. spirituality; and the present priorities of the Society.

B. The main input for the seminar would come from the experience of the formators themselves.

Responsibility: The seminar would be organized and offered by the Coordinating Body for Missiology. However, the seminar would require the interest and active participation of the formators, which would have to be assured before the seminar could proceed.

Duration: Minimum: two weeks; maximum: six weeks.

#### Short-Term Goals

## 1. Basic Workshop for All Members

**Aim:** To make all S.V.D. members aware of the vision, structures, content, and possibilities open to them for missiological research and educational programs in the S.V.D.; and thereby to gain their support and where possible their active participation in such programs.

**Content:**

- A. Overview of the main issues facing the missionary activity of the Church today.
- B. Discussion of how these issues affect the members doing the workshop.
- C. The vision, structures, obstacles and possibilities of S.V.D. programs for missiological research and education.
- D. A discussion of how recommended programs could be of benefit to the mission work of the participants.

**Means:** The Coordinator in each country would be responsible for directing these workshops. He would either conduct them himself or form a team of three or four to assist him. The full-time coordinator could help with training the team or core group.

**Time:** Quarterly conferences could provide the occasion for a workshop.

## 2. Adequate Number of Specialists

The provincials and coordinators should:

- A. Encourage confreres with field experience and the ability to take up higher studies, especially missiology, anthropology, comparative religions, and sociology.
- B. Support those who are doing studies and aid them when they have completed their studies to undertake a suitable position in the proper environment in order that they may pursue their specialization for the service of the missionary work of the Society and the Church.
- C. Aid confreres with specialized skills who, for one reason or another, have become isolated from the mainstream of the Society's work to find their way back to a more active participation in S.V.D. undertakings.



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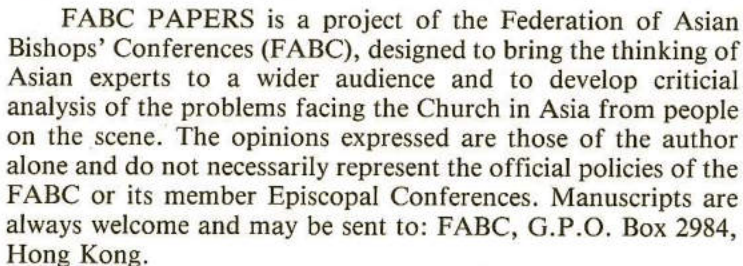
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FABC Papers:

33. Third Plenary Assembly: Workshop Discussion Guides
  - a. Church Organization in Asia Today
  - b. Forms of Christian Community Living in Asia
  - c. The Diocese and Parish as Communities of Faith
  - d. Total Human Development and the Church as a Community of Faith in Asia
  - e. The Dialogue of Communities of Faith in Asia
  - f. Is the Laity the "Marginalized Majority" in the Church?
  - g. The Role of Women in the Church as a Community of Faith in Asia
  - h. Seminaries and Religious Houses as Centers of Formation of Church as Community of Faith in Asia
  - i. Consecrated Religious Life in Asia as Witness of Church as Community of Faith
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