



## **SVD Priesthood in the Year of Consecrated Life**

### ***Theological Reflections and Practical Directions***

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Two very different images might be helpful to keep in mind as one reads this reflection on how we might understand and practice being priests in our religious missionary congregation of the Society of the Divine Word today. The first is the image of a juggler. The second is the image of a simmering pot of soup.

On the one hand, trying to be a religious missionary priest in our particular Society with its particular charisms and traditions requires the skill of a juggler who has to keep at least four balls in the air. We are, perhaps first and foremost, missionaries, partners in the Triune God's own mission, called to witnessing to and preaching the Word through our commitment to prayer, justice, dialogue, inculturation, and reconciliation.<sup>1</sup> We are members of a fraternal community of consecrated life, professing vows of consecrated chastity, evangelical poverty, and apostolic obedience.<sup>2</sup> We live out our consecrated life as SVDs, dedicated to our dialogue partners who are faith-seekers, women and men who are marginalized, of many and varied cultures, and different commitments of belief, and who share four "characteristic dimensions" of biblical apostolate, mission animation, commitment to justice, and interest in good communication.<sup>3</sup> And some of us are priests, ordained to preside over celebrations of the church's sacraments, to preach God's Word, and to govern God's people in a spirit of coresponsibility, as sacraments of Christ, the Head of the church.<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, while these four aspects of our vocation need to be recognized as distinct, they can never be separated. The image of the juggler has to give way to the image of a simmering pot of soup, in which the various ingredients blend with one another to produce a delicious aroma and delightful taste—cooked, of course, according to various local cuisines, and so culturally sensitive and unique. Our SVD apostolic commitments of prophetic dialogue with persons who seek faith, are marginalized, who come from various cultures and faith (or no faith) commitments and our characteristic dimensions give our missionary commitment a particular SVD style. They explain, for example, why we live in unabashedly international communities, and so witness in a particular way to the intercultural richness of God's future. God's holistic mission expressed in various elements serve to stretch our sometimes comfortable SVD customs and traditions, as do the wider traditions of religious and consecrated life. Ecojustice, attention to beauty in our liturgical celebrations, ministry among person on the margins, and ecumenical dialogue

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<sup>1</sup> This is an abbreviated reference to the six elements of mission that Roger Schroeder and I propose in our book *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004): witness and proclamation; liturgy, prayer, and contemplation; justice, peace, and the integrity of creation; interreligious and secular dialogue; inculturation; and reconciliation.

<sup>2</sup> See SVD Constitutions 201-220.

<sup>3</sup> I refer here to our "primary mission commitments" of "the fourfold prophetic dialogue" and to the four "characteristic dimensions" that are spelled out in our 2000 General Chapter Statement in *In Dialogue with the Word, Nr. 1* (Rome: SVD Generalate, 2000), pp. 30-38, paragraph numbers 52-78.

<sup>4</sup> See John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (PDV), 11-18.

might shape our SVD spirituality and missionary activity in new and perhaps uncomfortable ways. Our presbyteral dedication often strains our lives in community and may temper some of our prophetic inclinations to critique and challenge the church's structures, like its hesitations to include more lay and female participation in decision making. Our living in communities that include brothers—lay men—may challenge and soften some clerical practices, like clerical dress or always concelebrating at Mass. The result—always in particular contexts—becomes a unique way of being an SVD priest.

In the pages that follow I would like to “unpack” these two images of juggler and pot of soup, and in this way offer an understanding of what it means to be an SVD missionary priest today, especially in the light of this year's celebration of consecrated life. A first section will reflect in brief detail on the four “balls” that the juggler is attempting to keep in the air—an understanding of mission, an understanding of consecrated life, an understanding of our SVD identity, and an understanding of priesthood. Then, in a second part I will reflect on the particular identity that emerges as these four elements interact with one another to form the particular identity of an SVD priest. What I hope is that these reflections can be the beginning of reflections among us in our particular missionary and contextual situations. Only by putting together the four elements of our SVD vocation in particular contexts can we understand SVD priesthood today. There is no one way to be an SVD priest. SVD priesthood will always depend on the context.

### **Keeping the Balls in the Air: Mission, Consecrated Life, Charism, and Priesthood**

We begin with what we have in common with the rest of the church—our participation in God's mission. We then move to what we have in common with other women and men who consecrate themselves to a particular way of living out that mission, and then focus on how we as SVDs live our consecrated life according to our proper SVD charism. Finally, we reflect on the ministry and life to which some of us SVDs have been called—ordained ministry.

The order of treatment here is important. We are first of all Christians who have been called to live our vocation of “missionary discipleship”<sup>5</sup> as consecrated men in the Society of the Divine Word. We live out that vocation as ordained ministers. Our mission and consecrated calling as SVDs shape the way we minister as priests.

#### **Mission**

As the saying goes, the church does not have a mission. Rather, the mission—of God—has a church. Mission begins at the first moment of creation, as God's Spirit works with and within the processes of evolution as gases form, molecules come together, galaxies emerge, and, on some of them including planet earth, life and human consciousness evolve. Israel recognized God's creative, freeing, life-giving presence as God's Word and God's Spirit, and in the fullness of time that Word became flesh empowered by that Spirit in the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Those who followed Jesus were in turn endowed by his Spirit and, as they engaged in his mission, became the church. The church is “missionary by its very nature.” It is a “community of missionary disciples.”<sup>6</sup>

The church's mission is about cooperating with God in continuing the work of creation. It works with God in witnessing to the life, joy, and healing that working as God's partners can bestow, and it works with God's Spirit in helping people understand the depth of God's love as it tells the story of that love incarnate in Jesus the Christ. In the last decades since the Second Vatican Council it realizes that telling needs to be done within the context of people's experiences and cultures, and so commits itself to

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<sup>5</sup> See Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG), 24.

<sup>6</sup> See Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue: Reflections on Christian Mission Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), pp. 9-18; Vatican Council II, Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church, *Ad Gentes* (AG), 2; EG 24.

the process of inculturation. The church celebrates that love in its liturgy, the beauty of which can attract and fascinate; it opens its heart to the world's joy and pain in its prayer. It works with God to bring about justice, peace, reconciliation, and healing for all peoples, and for the wounded creation itself. It engages in dialogue with those who believe differently from it—either those of other Christian convictions or those of other faiths—or those who have no faith at all. The church is the great witness to God's mercy, with its doors always open. It participates, in the words of Pope Francis, in the revolution of tenderness.<sup>7</sup> It is a church that is “poor and for the poor.”<sup>8</sup>

The church's mission, because it participates in God's mission, takes place in every part of God's creation. Mission is “from everywhere to everywhere.”<sup>9</sup> The church's mission is both *ad intra* since it must constantly be evangelized,<sup>10</sup> and *ad extra* as it lives out its identity as the sign and instrument—the sacrament—of the world's salvation.<sup>11</sup> It participates in God's mission in its ordinary pastoral work, especially as it equips “the saints” for witness to the gospel in their ordinary lives and in various ministries of service within the church and the world. It participates as well in God's mission as it reaches out to various peoples who do not yet or no longer believe in Jesus as the Christ—in the mission *ad/inter gentes* or in what has come to be called the new evangelization.<sup>12</sup> In Vatican II's document on missionary activity, ecumenical dialogue was listed as essential to the church's mission, but such emphasis has been somewhat lost during the succeeding years. While one could list it among the six elements of mission noted in the preceding paragraph, I am more and more convinced that the work for the church's unity is an area of mission that needs particular emphasis in today's world.

### Consecrated Life

All Christians are called to participate in this movement of God throughout history and throughout creation. Some Christians, however, are called to participate in God's mission in the church in a particular way, to make visible in the clearest possible way what it means to be participants in God's missionary life.<sup>13</sup> These women and men are those who live as particularly consecrated to this life, basing their lives on the life and ministry of Jesus. As Pope Francis wrote in his Message for the Year of Consecrated Life, “radical evangelical living is not only for religious: it is demanded of everyone. But religious follow the Lord in a special way, in a prophetic way.” This is the priority that is needed right now: ‘to be prophets who witness to how Jesus lived on this earth.’”<sup>14</sup>

Although there are different ways of explaining what that consecrated life of prophecy entails, my own understanding is rooted in consecrated persons' commitment to a life in community. The greatest gift of consecrated persons to the church and to the world, to my mind—their basic ministry, I believe—is the witness they give by the vitality, mutual support, encouragement, challenge, joy, and holiness of their living together. Community life is more than simply doing things together—eating together, praying together, sharing the same daily schedule, or doing the same kind of work. It is rather a commitment to one another, to show the church and the world what God's future has in store. This is both a countercultural

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<sup>7</sup> EG 46-49; 88.

<sup>8</sup> EG 198.

<sup>9</sup> See this phrase in an issue of *Christianity Today* (April 14, 2013), <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/mission.from.everywhere.to.everywhere/32123.htm>.

<sup>10</sup> EG 121, 164, 174.

<sup>11</sup> See Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* (LG), 1.

<sup>12</sup> See EG 14 ; on “inter gentes,” see the reflections below on SVD mission.

<sup>13</sup> See John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (VC), 1. See also 31.

<sup>14</sup> Pope Francis, Message for the Year of Consecrated Life,

[http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2014/11/29/pope\\_issues\\_letter\\_for\\_year\\_of\\_consecrated\\_life/1112885](http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2014/11/29/pope_issues_letter_for_year_of_consecrated_life/1112885), II, 2. The Pope is quoting from a talk to Superiors General of Congregations of Consecrated Life on November 29, 2013.

witness and a prophetic embodiment of human hope, and this is particularly true among those communities who consist increasingly of several or many cultures.

It is in the context of community, I believe, that the living out of the vows can be best understood—the traditional three of chastity, poverty, and obedience, or other vows like stability or conversion of morals. Without the intimacy of community—a good circle of friends, a warm fellowship or sisterhood—real chastity is impossible. If intimacy in community is lacking, a woman or man religious will either find it outside the community, or her or his affective and relational life will wither. This, of course, does not exclude close friendships with both sexes outside the community, but puts them in perspective. The vow of poverty is much better explained by a commitment to a community of goods, by which everything that a community member gains is offered to the community for its support and welfare, and where all benefit—if not equally—with a certain equity according to individual needs and necessities for their ministries. It is a commitment not to destitution, which always dehumanizes, but to a simplicity of life that celebrates what is essential in living together. Obedience becomes the submission of one's personal development and goals to the work of the community and its particular ministries. Since obedience is rooted in deep listening (from the Latin *ob + audire*), discernment is called for both on the part of the individual members and the congregational leader.

A third component of the prophetic nature of consecrated life consists of the various charisms of the particular congregations. Every congregation that is thriving has a particular charism or set of charisms that fuels the enthusiasm of its members, and offers a particular gift to the church and to the world. These charisms are particular and powerful ways that a congregation contributes to the mission of the church, and embodies a particular way what God is doing in the world and in history. Franciscans—women and men—have a particular charism for ecology and ecojustice, since their founder, Francis, is the patron of ecology. Jesuits have been historically leaders in the field of education and scholarship, but in the 1970s committed themselves in a special way to work for justice in the world. Redemptorists and Passionists are experts in preaching missions in parishes, several days in which parishioners are called to a renewed faith. Maryknollers are an American group specifically dedicated to *foreign* mission. We SVDs, as I'll expand in the next section, are dedicated to mission in every sense, and witness by our efforts to form intercultural communities. The women and men who are Missionaries of St. Charles, or Scalabrinians after their founder, are dedicated to working with the world's migrants and refugees.

A final aspect of the prophetic life of consecrated women and men has to do with a certain “anti-institutionality,” if I could put it that way. A famous line of the early monk John Cassian notes that the good monk must by all means “flee from women and bishops,” and points, along with a dedication to chastity, to a kind of reluctance on the part of consecrated men to participate too closely in the official governance of the church.<sup>15</sup> Consecrated women and men are rather on the “cutting edge” of things in the church, often critical of clerical privilege or narrow interpretations of the law (for instance, that brothers in a congregation of brothers and priests cannot hold the office of major superior). They are often under suspicion of church leadership, evidenced recently in my own country of the United States by the investigation of women religious there. Since consecrated women are technically lay women and many communities of men consist of both lay and ordained men, there is a certain lay character to consecrated life that suggests that clerics should not take themselves all that seriously.

### **SVD Identity**

We SVDs are a congregation of consecrated life, officially recognized by the church as “religious” who take simple vows. Tom Aschemann, former SVD General Mission Secretary and current Provincial of the Chicago Province in the USA (USC), once remarked that the important thing about SVD identity is not

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<sup>15</sup> John Cassian, *De Institutis Coenobiorum et de Octo Pincipalium Vitiorum Remediis*, XI, 18 (in J.-C. Guy, ed., SC 108.444).

that we are *unique*, or that we are *different* from every other religious congregation. In fact, such uniqueness is pretty nigh impossible, since we share many values and practices with many other religious congregations, and indeed with many other Christians. Rather, Tom said, SVD identity emerges as we are faithful to a number of values and practices that we have espoused over the years. Possibly such fidelity does indeed make us unique, particularly in terms of the peculiar constellation of these practices. but that is not the point. The point is that we understand these values and practices as something important to us as members of the Society of the Divine Word and, in trying to make them concrete, are formed by them.

As I have mentioned above, our SVD leadership has placed emphasis since our 2000 General Chapter on our engagement in “prophetic dialogue” with four distinct kinds of dialogue partners: those who have no faith community and/or who are faith-seekers, those who are poor and marginalized, those of various cultures, and those of different religions and secular ideologies. Coupled with this, and shaping the way we engage in such prophetic dialogue, are the four “characteristic dimensions” of biblical apostolate, mission animation, commitment to JPIC issues, and engagement in communications media.<sup>16</sup> While not every SVD is engaged in a formal way with every dialogue partner and every characteristic dimension, each one of us “ought to bear the marks of the Biblical, Animating, Prophetic and Communicating Word,” and each of us are formed by sharing the Word together, animating one another, being just and at peace with one another, and communicating with one another in “fraternal love.”<sup>17</sup>

Roger Schroeder and I have tried to deepen the idea and understanding of “prophetic dialogue” as the way that the church, and in particular the SVD, engages in mission. We have written of the need to engage in genuine intercultural encounter both in our communities and in our missionary outreach, as our 2012 chapter insisted upon as well.<sup>18</sup> Such an attitude—indeed a spirituality—of dialogue is one of constantly trying to practice deep listening, respect for the Other, openness to learn from other people, cultures, and contexts, striving to “let go” before we “speak out.” Our current Generalate has made its own the significant switch in missiological thinking from understanding mission as “ad gentes” to practicing mission “inter gentes.” Nevertheless, we are called to be prophetic as well—as agents of hope in difficult and seemingly hopeless situations, in striving to preach the gospel message in clear and inculturated terms, and in actions and words of opposition to any oppression and injustice. Heinz Kulüke and the current Leadership Team speak of “putting the last first.”<sup>19</sup>

Other significant characteristics of our SVD identity might be listed as well: our spirituality focusing on the Trinity and the Holy Spirit; our rich “Anthropos Tradition” embodied in scholars like Wilhelm Schmidt and Louis J. Luzbetak and in places like the Melanesian Institute in PNG or Ishvani Kendra in India; our practice of living in deliberate international, intercultural communities; our spirituality as expressed in the 1988 General Chapter of “passing over” fully into the contexts within which we work; our choice to continue to expand our missionary outreach in cutting edge places like Mozambique or South Sudan. Once again, we are not totally unique in these characteristics or commitments, but our identity calls us to be faithful to them.

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<sup>16</sup> See the wonderful reflection offered by Fr. Joseph Kallanchira, SVD on the four characteristic dimensions in Lazar Stanislaus, ed., *Inspiring Stories for Transformation* (Rome: SVD Publications, 2014), pp. 58-80.

<sup>17</sup> *In Dialogue with the Word Nr. 1*, p. 38, paragraphs 77-78.

<sup>18</sup> See Bevens and Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue*; and Roger Schroeder, “Prophetic Dialogue and Interculturality,” in ed. Stephen Bevens and Cathy Ross, *Mission on the Road to Emmaus: Constants, Context, and Prophetic Dialogue* (London: SCM, 2015), pp. 215-26.

<sup>19</sup> Heinz Kulüke, “‘Inter Gentes—Putting the Last First’—Leadership in a Religious Missionary Congregation in an International and Intercultural Context in the Light of the Example of Pope Frances,” *Conventus Semestralis: Unione Superiori Generali*, November, 2013.  
[http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:KeDeSTT8G4UJ:vd.pcn.net/en/index.php%3Foption%3Dcom\\_docman%26task%3Ddoc\\_download%26gid%3D261%26Itemid%3D11+&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us&client=safari](http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:KeDeSTT8G4UJ:vd.pcn.net/en/index.php%3Foption%3Dcom_docman%26task%3Ddoc_download%26gid%3D261%26Itemid%3D11+&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us&client=safari).

## Ordained Ministry

Some of us SVDs are ordained ministers. Very few of us are “permanent” deacons. A number of us are bishops, but canonically bishops are no longer members of congregations of consecrated life. Most of us who are ordained are priests, or in the preferred term of Vatican II, presbyters.

That term “presbyter” is significant, for by it the Council meant to widen the notion of ordained ministry that had been prevalent since the Middle Ages and canonized at Trent—that the essence of the priesthood was possessing the power to consecrate the Eucharistic species and forgive sins. While the Council in no way denied this understanding of priesthood, it based its understanding not on cultic powers received at ordination but on ordination’s conforming the one ordained to Christ as priest, prophet, and servant leader, Head of the Church.<sup>20</sup> Priesthood, therefore, was first of all a service rather than a state of life—witness the title of the Council’s decree the “Ministry and Life of Presbyters.” Indeed, as Pope Francis has pointed out, the conformity of the ordained to Christ the head “does not imply an exaltation which would set him above others. In the Church, functions ‘do not favor the superiority of some vis-à-vis the others.’”<sup>21</sup>

Contemporary theologies of priesthood speak of ordination as commissioning the one ordained to particular tasks on the one hand, and as conferring a particular identity on the other. In terms of the tasks to which a priest is commissioned, they are all tasks of *leadership*, assisting the entire church, as Pope John Paul II put it eloquently, to fulfill its basic priesthood.<sup>22</sup> Priesthood, in other words, is a ministry to ministry.<sup>23</sup> It is never about being *over* the rest of the church, but being with the rest of the church as its servant leader. These threefold ministries of leadership in the church focus on sacramental leadership, leadership in proclaiming and articulating Christian faith, and leadership in coordinating the church’s many ministries. The priest presides over the church’s celebration of the sacraments, serves as the fundamental preacher of the gospel, particularly at the time of the homily during the Eucharist, and as the one who discerns, forms, develops and safeguards the various ministries in which Christians are involved.

Pope John Paul II spoke of the particular identity conferred on the priest by ordination as conformity to Christ the Head and Spouse of the church.<sup>24</sup> Conformity to Christ’s headship, as pointed out above, is the priest’s conformity to Christ’s servant leadership; conformity to Christ’s spousal relationship to the church points to the fact that, in Pope Francis’s words, priests are “pastors, not functionaries,”<sup>25</sup> that is, priesthood is not so much a job but a relationship, to be lived out in friendship and love for God’s people.

These are the four “balls” that we have to keep in the air if we are to come to an understanding and practice of SVD priesthood. We move now to our second image as we try to interrelate these four aspects of our vocation to one another: a simmering pot of soup.

## Keeping the Soup Simmering: The Identity of the SVD Priest

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<sup>20</sup>LG 28; Vatican Council II, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, *Presbyterorum Ordinis* (PO), 6.

<sup>21</sup> EG 104, see note 74.

<sup>22</sup> PDV 17.

<sup>23</sup> See Stephen Bevans, “A Ministry for Ministry: The Vocation of Ministerial Priesthood in the Church,” in ed. Robin Ryan, *Catholics on Call: Discerning a Life of Service in the Church* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2010), pp. 132-47.

<sup>24</sup> E.g. PDV 3.

<sup>25</sup> “Pope Francis tells new priests: ‘Be merciful Pastors, not functionaries,’”

<http://www.catholicerald.co.uk/news/2013/04/22/pope-francis-tells-new-priests-be-merciful-pastors-not-functionaries/>.

Ingredients in a soup that blend and meld with each become, as the soup simmers, more than what each is in itself. So it is with the four elements or aspects of our vocation as SVD priests. In this section I will suggest several ways that we can understand this identity, but—perhaps more importantly—I want to offer as well a kind of method for further reflection in this area as well. As these ingredients simmer together possibly more and more ways that we SVDs can understand priesthood can emerge as SVDs reflect together and work to correlate these four aspects of our vocation with one another.

### ***Missionary Priests***

A first point of identity is that we SVDs are *missionary* priests. Certainly, as Vatican II points out in its decree on missionary activity, there is a particular missionary character to all exercises of ordained ministry.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, as priests who are particularly dedicated to leading Christians in their participation in the church's mission, SVD priests will concentrate on this particular exercise of the presbyteral office.

In regard to the commitment to our fourfold prophetic dialogue, we might think of SVD priests as particularly dedicated to and forming others for dialogue with those who are seeking faith, with those who are poor, members of various cultures, and adherents to other religions or Christian churches. This might mean involvement in training Christian women and men in places like the Mater Dei Center in South Africa to understand their faith more deeply so that they can share it more readily with others.<sup>27</sup> It might mean being involved in organizing and developing centers and organizations that work with the poor and that stand for the promotion of peace and justice. It might mean planning parish liturgies that celebrate intercultural sensitivity, or being involved in developing such intercultural communities among the women and men with whom we work. It might mean participating in groups of interreligious and ecumenical dialogue, and developing groups in our parishes, retreat houses, or residences that engage in such dialogues.

Our parishes should be “missionary parishes.” As priests we should be men who develop such parishes—with strong outreach to people who seek faith, who are victims of injustice, who belong to, perhaps, groups of immigrants who are new to our parishes, who embrace working with Christians of other churches and members of other religious traditions. Liturgies in those parishes should be celebrations that focus on the missionary outreach that every liturgical celebration moves toward. Prayers of the faithful should be focused on the work of the church throughout the world and on global current events. The cultural heritage of every cultural group in the parish should be accented and celebrated. As SVD missionary priests our task is to develop these characteristics and to form our parishioners in this missionary consciousness as well.

Our characteristic dimensions are dimensions that can take on a particularly presbyteral character. We can be responsible for the direction of Bible sharing and Bible study groups in our various apostolates—parishes, retreat centers, study centers. We can be particularly responsible to give homilies that are biblically literate as well as culturally sensitive. Our liturgies can be events of mission animation—not just on special occasions, but in the way we preside at them regularly. Our homilies can aspire to motivate people for greater missionary service, whether locally or world wide. For those of us priests who are theologians and teachers, we can have a particular dedication to helping our students understand the church's essential missionary nature, the importance of culture in every form of theology and ministry, and the profound catholicity of our global church. This is a practice that I have personally tried to do in over twenty-five years teaching students at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. Our commitment to justice can be embodied in commitment to groups who work for justice at all levels. We can advocate as parish

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<sup>26</sup> AG 39.

<sup>27</sup> See Stanislaus, ed., *Inspiring Stories for Transformation*, pp. 32-33.

priests the development of parish buildings that are ecologically responsible. We can be responsible for good communication methods and the use of proper communications media in our parishes, our mission animation efforts, our scholarship, and teaching.

All of these presbyteral commitments speak to SVD priests as *missionary* priests.

### **Missionary Priests in a Community of *Consecrated Life***

As SVD priests who are members of a community of consecrated life, we should be particularly committed to exercising priesthood *out of* and *for* the formation of community. Our Constitutions encourage the fact that “as far as possible, members shall not live or work alone but together with one or more confreres.”<sup>28</sup> Because of this, we might develop skills for a team approach to ministry, working for real equality and coresponsibility among ourselves. This kind of commitment to doing ministry in community should also spill over into the kind of community we develop in our presbyteral ministry. A fine example of this is given by Ghanaian SVD Augustin Kodo in a story he shares in *Inspiring Stories for Transformation*, recently published by our Generalate.<sup>29</sup> Especially in our parishes we should work to form a rich, vital community of sisters and brothers, where people know one another, encourage one another, and challenge one another, and where lay ministries abound. This kind of community is already a sign of what the church is, and indeed what the Reign of God will be. Formation of community, therefore, modeled on our SVD community, is a highly missionary activity. As SVD priests who partner with SVD brothers, the collaboration within our communities should be a model for the collaboration that we have with the lay people in our parishes and other ministries.

The prophetic nature of our vows should also mark the way we live out our SVD priesthood. Our vow of consecrated chastity should mark us with a zeal to lead communities in those places that involve considerable risk or hardship, and where family commitments would be a hindrance to ministry. I think particularly here of our commitments in places like South Sudan or China. Our vow of evangelical poverty should commit us to service among those who are on the fringes of society, like migrants and refugees.<sup>30</sup> Within a church that is struggling, under the guidance of Pope Francis, to free itself from clerical privilege and affluence, priests who live a simple lifestyle could be real models of reform across the entire church, and models as well to Christian people, especially in the richer countries of the North. Our vow of apostolic obedience can give a counterwitness to the clerical ambition that plagues the church as well, and can be a countersign to prevailing cultural values of individual fulfillment over community loyalty.

The prophetic nature of our consecrated life should also embolden us to press beyond where in the current institutional church might feel comfortable or self-satisfied. Might we not move to experiment in ways in which we might “recognize more fully ... the role of women in decision-making in different areas of the Church’s life”?<sup>31</sup> Might we not try to include lay women and men more fully in the ministry of our parishes or our other ministries? Might we not work to make our liturgies more interculturally sensitive and expressive? Might we not decide to be less clerical in the way we ordinarily dress? Might we not be more ecumenically welcoming in our parishes and local communities? Might we not make our communities places of interfaith hospitality and dialogue? Might not our communities distinguish themselves as places of hospitality towards and advocacy for migrants and refugees in the area? These might be ways that our prophetic witness as SVD priests could be concretely expressed.

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<sup>28</sup> SVD Constitution 303.5.

<sup>29</sup> See Stanislaus, ed., *Inspiring Stories for Transformation*, pp. 33-35.

<sup>30</sup> See the fine reflection by Budi Kleden in Stanislaus, ed., *Inspiring Stories for Transformation*, pp. 36-58.

<sup>31</sup> EG 104.



Our particular charisms as SVDs might also be ways of expressing a particular style of living out our priesthood as consecrated persons. I have already mentioned our missionary charism, concretely expressed in our fourfold prophetic dialogue and our characteristic dimensions. One practice that I engage in personally is that practically every time I preach I try to make some kind of reference to Christian's missionary obligation because of baptism. Our commitment to interculturality should make our presbyteral ministry one of intercultural sensitivity, and one dedicated to developing communities in which every culture present has a role and a voice in their ecclesial life. Our great SVD "Anthropos Tradition" and our Society's devotion to the Trinity and the Holy Spirit might find expression in the kind of homilies we give, the kind of liturgies over which we preside, the kind of continuing education and ministry formation we provide, the type of encouragement we give to our students in our educational institutions, the style with which we lead our various parish, centers, and institutional communities.

## Conclusion

Thinking about the distinctiveness of the priesthood in communities of consecrated life is a relatively new enterprise, but it is an important one to engage in, especially during this Year of Consecrated Life.<sup>32</sup> "All priests," wrote John Paul II in *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, "share in the one priesthood of Christ . . . ." But, as Dominican theologian Paul Philibert has argued, while for diocesan clergy priesthood is "an office that gives an identity," for religious "it is an office in the service of their religious identity which provides a charism as a warrant for ministry."<sup>33</sup> A major charism of the SVD, and a "warrant" for our ministry—those of us who are priests—is the charism of intercultural life and missionary work, wherever that may be in the world. It is further shaped by our commitment to a prophetic dialogue with our various dialogue partners, and our commitment to Biblical Apostolate, mission animation, work with women and men on the world's margins, and our dedication to the creative use of the media of communications.

These reflections are only a beginning of what should be reflections coming from all parts of our Society, from priests in all kinds of ministry. My hope, however, is that I have provided here two helpful images and a particular method that could guide this reflection further. Such reflection can only help to deepen our understanding, appreciation, and gratefulness of the great gift with which many of us SVDs have been entrusted—that of ordained ministry in our missionary religious congregation of the Society of the Divine Word.

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<sup>32</sup> There is, however, a burgeoning literature. An important source is Paul K. Hennessy, ed., *A Concert of Charisms: Ordained Ministry in Religious Life* (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1997). See also my own reflections, "Learning to 'Flee from ... Bishops': Formation for the Charism of Priesthood within Religious Life," *Australian e-Journal of Theology*, 10 (May, 2007), [http://aejt.com.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/378058/AEJT\\_10.2\\_Bevans\\_Learning\\_to\\_Flee\\_from\\_Bishops.pdf](http://aejt.com.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0004/378058/AEJT_10.2_Bevans_Learning_to_Flee_from_Bishops.pdf). See also the Conference of Major Superiors of Men in the United States, "Formation for Priesthood in Religious Life," <http://www.cmsm.org/documents/FormationReligiousPriestsOct2011.pdf>.

<sup>33</sup> PDV 17; Paul Philibert in "Religious Priesthood: Issues and Concerns for Renewal," in *The Charism of Priesthood: Diocesan and Religious Priests Together in Ministry* (Chicago: National Federation of Priests' Councils, 1996), p. 11.