

FOREWORD

I am truly honoured to have been asked to write a Foreword for this book, *SVD Mission in Context: Creative Responses in a Wounded World*, celebrating the 150th Jubilee of the Society of the Divine Word.

The book emphasises the Jubilee theme, “*Witnessing to the Light: From Everywhere for Everyone*,” which embodies a thorough missiological, sociological, and pastoral perspective on the Church’s mission in a diverse and wounded world, extending beyond the jubilee year into a lifelong dedication.

The ongoing conflicts in numerous wartorn regions, the impacts of climate change, economic exploitation, sexual abuse, the exploitation of women and children, and harsh leadership have resulted in immense suffering and need. These shattered lives call upon all people of goodwill to pray, to respond with hope, and to seek a new approach—a fresh way of being Church—towards a renewed humanity. We cannot turn away; instead, we must let their reality resonate with us.

In the Bible, we learn that Jesus chose to share meals with sinners and visit places of misery, exclusion, and suffering—for these were also areas brimming with potential: “Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more” (Romans 5:20). “It is not the healthy who need the doctor, but the sick” (Matthew 9:9-13).

We all hold a special affection for the wounded people, despite differences in religious beliefs, social standing, cultural backgrounds, and personal experiences. They are our brothers and sisters, irrespective of race, colour, or creed (Genesis 1:27). In Bangladesh, there are thousands of them in refugee camps, along with many more displaced brothers and sisters in Myanmar. How does a follower of Christ reach out to the grieving widows and fathers in Russia, Ukraine, Israel, and Palestine? How does one bear witness to the Light or “witness to the Kingdom” (Tim Norton, SVD, Ch.5) amidst all these human dramas?

So many individuals have paid the ultimate price of love, coming from everywhere to assist those in pain. These include doctors, nurses, religious figures, priests, volunteers, and individuals of various faiths, as well as atheists, prophets and kings, mothers, fathers, and young people. Whether they were aware of it or not, their decision reflected a universal belief: *love*. “Greater love

has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). This verse, attributed to Jesus, highlights that the act of self-sacrifice or witnessing is not solely a Christian ideal and practice but can emerge from anywhere.

We might wonder why the People’s Republic of China, under the governance of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), recently pledged to the World Health Organisation (WHO) with a \$500 million donation over the next five years. Additionally, why does China possess the largest renewable energy sector in the world, indirectly responding to Pope Francis’ appeal to care for creation? In 2020, numerous countries, including Australia, lined the streets to pay tribute to the sacrifices made by COVID-19 frontline workers. Furthermore, the Sikh Golden Temple in India, known for having the world’s largest free kitchen, serves between 50,000 and 100,000 meals daily to those in need, regardless of their background. This embodies the Sikhs’ principle of witnessing to the same divine light they believe resides within all creation.

There are witnesses to God’s reign and saints living among us—non-Catholics, communists, and Sikhs—who convey and grasp the profound concept of love and light, as well as the interconnectedness of all things. This is the message that missionaries share every Sunday: Christ, the Logos made flesh. “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life” (John 8:12).

In reading this book, I am convinced that “witnessing to the Light” transcends geography, culture, and background. It serves as a universal invitation for individuals from all walks of life to unite and support each other—no matter their origins—where everyone can discover hope, purpose, and renewed strength for the challenges that lie ahead (S. Deva Savariyappan, SVD, Ch.17). Therefore, it is no longer just the duty of Christian missionaries; it has become a global mission. The mission is now a collaborative and interdependent effort, where every segment of the global church and secular society plays a role in the art of witnessing to something greater than ourselves. It is both a burden and a gift.

It is also affirmed here that the mission, in its entirety, surpasses the capacity of any single religious order or the Catholic Church, regardless of how well it is managed, to reflect in its practices. “The Christian gospel is not the possession of any person or any group from a particular time or place” (Tim Norton, SVD, Ch.5), and it calls for humility and active contemplation on our part.

This book, filled with well-researched academic essays, personal narratives, and missiological reflections, offers an excellent synthesis of how to effectively witness to the Light and God’s Reign, based on four key

dimensions: Mission Animation, Biblical Apostolate, Communication, and Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC). These dimensions are deemed essential to their mission and guide all their activities.

This book will encourage readers not to overlook the fragility of human nature. Instead, it urges them to “cultivate a spirituality of woundedness,” embrace prophetic dialogue, and engage creatively with diverse cultures and faith traditions (Kasmir Nema, SVD, Ch.14), and to adopt an “expansive moral imagination,” a paradigm of compassion (Anthony Le Duc, SVD, Ch.19) while moving towards a synodal way of being church (Albano Da Costa, SVD, Ch.12).

The practical implications of this book are significant for the life and mission of the Church, as illustrated in the SVD Anthropos Tradition and the renewed emphasis on intercultural formation (Roger Schroder, SVD, Ch. 11 and Stephen Bevans, SVD, Ch.13).

Missio Dei represents the mission of the Blessed Trinity (Antonio M. Pernia, SVD, Ch.7; *Ad Gentes* 1-2.9), and it calls for the genuine, faithful, and dedicated efforts of all of God’s children from every corner of the world through various organizational and communication channels to engage in that same mission for a Church that is inclusive and merciful. The book serves as a reminder that God’s Kingdom resembles a magnificent magnet on the horizon, attracting all the goodness of humanity from everywhere for everyone. “I will draw all people unto me” (John 12:32,33), Jesus proclaims.

I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to all contributors who participated in this project. Special thanks go to Anthony Le Duc, SVD for his hard work in editing and publishing the book. May this book highlight the hope that the spirit of Saints Arnold and Joseph, SVD martyrs, along with Blessed Maria and Josepha, will inspire and guide everyone towards a deeper connection with God’s reign, igniting both a gentle, healing, and passionate fire of the Holy Spirit within your community.

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