

“Witnessing to the Light: From Everywhere for Everyone”—The SVD Jubilee Theme from a Biblical Perspective

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The recently concluded XIX General Chapter of the Society of the Divine Word drew its biblical inspiration from Matthew 5:16: “Your light must shine before others.” This selection resonates profoundly with the theme chosen for the Society’s sesquicentennial celebration (1875-2025), which likewise centers on the metaphor of light. This convergence—the metaphor of light appearing in both contexts—underscores a cohesive theological vision and demonstrates the metaphor’s enduring relevance to both the Chapter’s deliberations and the jubilee commemoration.

This reflection explores the jubilee theme by examining its three constituent elements through a biblical lens. It also situates these components—“the light,” “from everywhere,” “for everyone”—within the contemporary missiological landscape confronting the Society of the Divine Word, while establishing connections to the priorities articulated during the recent General Chapter.

Your Light Must Shine

And even though our gospel is veiled, it is veiled for those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, so that they may not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not preach ourselves but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your slaves for the sake of Jesus. For God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to bring to light the knowledge of the glory of God on the face of Jesus Christ. But we hold this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing power may be of God and not from us. (2 Cor 4:3-10, NAB)

All the truly great persons I have ever met are characterized by what I would call radical humility and gratitude. They are deeply convinced that they are drawing from another source; they are instruments. Their genius is not their own; it is borrowed. We are moons, not suns, except in our ability to pass on the light. (Richard Rohr)

We begin with a fundamental question: what is meant by “your light”? This phrase derives from Jesus’ declaration, “your light must shine before others” (Matt 5:16 NAB), situated within the Sermon on the Mount—a concise articulation of the foundational principles that undergird the nature and identity of disciples and all who belong to God’s kingdom. In this discourse, Jesus designates his disciples as “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world.” The salt metaphor encapsulates the disciples’ identity, while light characterizes their mission. Thus, the essence of living under God’s sovereignty and following Christ encompasses a dual dynamic: being (identity) and illuminating (mission). This integration of ontology and purpose constitutes the core of discipleship.

To elucidate this concept further, we must first discern Jesus’ intended meaning of “the light.” Within the Sermon on the Mount, the light that disciples are called to radiate is nothing less than the teaching on discipleship embodied in the Beatitudes and their consequent mode of being in the world. The Beatitudes present a transformative vision of human existence and relationships that manifest God’s will. To experience divine blessing in this world and beyond requires the embodiment of these Beatitudes. In this hermeneutical framework, “the light” transcends abstract conceptualization; it signifies the revelation imparted by Jesus—a distinctive modality of being and acting.

The disciples were primary witnesses to Jesus’ revelation, both hearing his words and observing his praxis. This divine illumination enlightened them as its initial recipients. For these followers, Jesus’ teaching constituted the “be-attitudes”—an existential modality as light, which they were commissioned to manifest to the world. Consequently, the light was not intrinsic to them but rather the radiance of Christ’s revelation entrusted to their stewardship. Neither originators nor sources of this illumination, Jesus’ disciples were appointed as reflective instruments or beacons, mirroring God’s will and the authentic nature of fully realized humanity according to divine design. Their missiological mandate was to channel the inexhaustible profundity of divine light, casting it upon the world as living mirrors engaged in an eternal and graceful choreography of illumination.

What significance, then, does the possessive pronoun “your” (light) carry? Does it imply that the light belongs intrinsically to the disciples, emerging from their inherent qualities, efforts, virtues, or accomplishments? Such

an interpretation proves untenable, as the disciples' identity and mission remain wholly grounded in Jesus' revelation. The light they bear is not self-generated but ultimately constitutes the divine radiance mediated through Jesus and manifested through their being.

Therefore, "your light" must refer to the divine light refracted and, in so doing, colored by the individual and collective distinctiveness of the disciples, both as a group and as individuals. The light is "your" (or "our") because it is shaped by their (or "our") particular, unique qualities, values, and decisions. The pronoun "your" thus underscores the disciples' responsibility to embody and incarnate the divine revelation within the specificities of their lived experiences and contextual realities.

In application to us, Divine Word missionaries, when we speak of "our light," three immediate corollaries emerge: formation, discernment, and Christocentricity. Formation entails the intentional cultivation of our capacity to receive and transmit divine illumination. Discernment involves the critical evaluation of how we refract this light through our individual and collective charisms. Christocentricity ensures that amid the diversity of our expressions, Christ remains the original and ultimate source of the light we bear witness to in our missiological praxis.

Regarding formation, we stated that the light of revelation is invariably colored by who we are. Here, we address nothing less than the incarnation of the Word within the complex and multifaceted human reality of each individual, with all its attendant implications and consequences. Many are drawn to the Society of the Divine Word through a profound fascination with Scripture. Indeed, the vocational discernment process must scrutinize this motivation: is the candidate genuinely captivated by the Word, or merely seeking ecclesiastical status, office, and benefits?

Formation itself must shape the formandi, just as optical lenses are meticulously polished and crafted to reflect light with greater fidelity and clarity. Primarily, the lens must be properly oriented toward the light source, which necessitates nurturing a biblical focus throughout formation. Secondly, clarity and purposefulness become essential for enhancing transparency and focus. Thus, intellectual biblical formation assumes critical importance. Equally crucial is human and character formation. A psychologically or spiritually mal-formed individual, even when appealing to divine revelation, may distort it into an instrument of division and destruction. One need only examine how Scripture is manipulated in political discourse, by hate-propagating groups, or by fundamentalist ideologues.

Maintaining proper focus of the light and "preserving the clarity of the lenses" demands sustained vigilance. This brings us to the imperative of

ongoing formation. Too many have allowed their zeal for the Word to diminish, subsumed by quotidian demands and dulled by the familiarity of texts encountered repeatedly through liturgical cycles. Revitalizing and reinvigorating our biblical knowledge and spirituality requires deliberate choice and persistent effort, rather than passive reliance on membership within a religious community. “The dying of the light” throughout the course of religious life is a sad but all-too-common reality and a persistent threat demanding constant attention. Likewise, when addressing our light within the context of ongoing formation, we must remain mindful that shortly after discussing “your light,” within that same discourse, Jesus issued a sobering admonition: “If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!” (Matt 6:23 NRSV). Formation, therefore, concerns making the “light” authentically ours while ensuring that “your light” does not transmute into darkness.

The second matter that arises from the application of the light metaphor is discernment. While God’s revelation, like the sun, is all-encompassing, our light resembles a focused spotlight, illuminating only a fragment of the vast and complex tapestry of human reality. It is neither possible nor prudent to attempt the illumination of the entire world. The decision regarding where to direct our light—our mission—is integral to making the light uniquely ours. Yet, determining the proper focus of this spotlight is a complex task, given the multitude of needs and the diversity within ourselves and the world. Herein lies the crucial process of discernment: deciding what to embrace and what to relinquish. Such discernment must be guided by our distinctive charism, the needs and circumstances of the communities among whom we minister, and the human and material resources at our disposal. While the light of the Word remains immutable, how and where we choose to manifest it remains entirely our responsibility. In this reality resides both the profound dignity of our vocation and the grave responsibility it entails.

One specific dimension warranting consideration in this discernment is the reality of woundedness and brokenness. The light we project inevitably passes through the fissures and imperfections of our human frailty. Like a glow dimly visible through cracks in a fractured clay jar, so the Gospel radiates with particular vividness through our vulnerabilities and wounds, revealing the transcendent force of the message and God’s presence within our suffering. It is precisely within these sacred spaces of weakness that divine strength manifests itself most profoundly, rendering us authentic witnesses to the Gospel.

Simultaneously, we must confront the wounds of the world—multitudinous and variegated in nature. Which of these wounds demand our attention as bearers of the Divine Word? Which shadows must we dispel so that the

healing light may penetrate and transform these broken places? This discernment, too, constitutes our responsibility, and it is this choice that authenticates the light as truly our light.

The Christocentric nature of the mission defined through the metaphor of light emerges as an obvious consequence of all that has been said thus far. The light we shine is Christ's life, teaching, and presence, echoing St. Paul's words: "We do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord." Our ministry is ultimately about leading others to Christ, not to the messenger. Its supreme goal is to foster spiritual growth, drawing those who encounter it into a deeper, personal relationship with Christ. This makes the purpose of ministry both profoundly personal and deeply transformative. While the social and human dimensions of ministry are needed, they must not overshadow its ultimate spiritual aim.

To be the light is to offer direction, meaning, and guidance, unveiling a deeper sense of what it means to be human as intended by the Creator. Therefore, our light as SVD missionaries shines most authentically when the world recognizes in us the radiance of something beyond ourselves—a light that emanates from divine revelation, mediated through Scripture, and guiding and transforming those encircled by the shadows of modern existence: its chaos, injustices, alienation, and the many dark sides of human experience.

The Christocentric nature of the mission defined through the metaphor of light emerges as an inevitable consequence of all that has been articulated thus far. The light we manifest is fundamentally Christ's life, teaching, and presence, resonating with St. Paul's profound declaration: "We do not proclaim ourselves, we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord" (2 Cor 5:4 NRSV). Our mission is principally oriented toward guiding others to Christ, not to the messenger. Its paramount objective is to nurture spiritual transformation, drawing those who encounter it into a more profound relationship with Christ.

This renders the purpose of ministry both deeply personal and profoundly transformative. While the social and humanitarian dimensions of ministry remain essential, they must not eclipse its ultimate spiritual *telos*. To embody the light is to provide direction, meaning, and illumination, revealing a more comprehensive understanding of authentic human existence as envisioned by the Creator. Therefore, our light as SVD missionaries radiates most authentically when the world discerns in us the luminescence of something that transcends our individual selves—a divine radiance emanating from revelation, mediated through Scripture, and illuminating and transforming those enveloped by the shadows of contemporary existence: its chaos, injustices, alienation, meaninglessness, and the multifarious manifestations of human brokenness.

“From Everywhere” – The Commitment to the Word of God

A Vision of Boundless Inclusion

On that day there will be five cities in the land of Egypt that speak the language of Canaan and swear allegiance to the LORD of hosts. One of these will be called the City of the Sun. On that day there will be an altar to the LORD in the center of the land of Egypt, and a pillar to the LORD at its border. It will be a sign and a witness to the LORD of hosts in the land of Egypt; when they cry to the LORD because of oppressors, he will send them a savior, and will defend and deliver them. The LORD will make himself known to the Egyptians; and the Egyptians will know the LORD on that day, and will worship with sacrifice and burnt offering, and they will make vows to the LORD and perform them. On that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian will come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians. On that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the LORD of hosts has blessed, saying, “Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my heritage.” (Isa 19:18-25, NRS)

This extraordinary prophetic passage from Isaiah invites profound reflection on the boundless scope of God’s revelation and salvific plan. The prophet envisions a future wherein even Israel’s longstanding and formidable adversaries—Egypt and Assyria—become recipients of divine self-disclosure. The imagery employed is particularly striking: an altar to the Lord, previously exclusive to Jerusalem and thus symbolizing the locus of authentic worship, is now envisioned at the heart of Egypt, as God manifests Godself to these nations formerly considered outside of the covenant. Furthermore, Egypt and Assyria—the two hegemonic powers of the ancient Near East, historically characterized by mutual enmity and conflict—are depicted worshipping the true God together in harmonious communion, alongside Israel. Collectively, they are designated as “God’s people” and “the work of God’s hands,” designations traditionally and exclusively reserved for Israel alone. This radical prophetic vision underscores themes of inclusion, unity, and reconciliation, presenting a compelling image of the universal and all-embracing nature of God’s redemptive intent for all humanity. It constitutes an unequivocal message of boundless inclusion that vividly illustrates the “from everywhere” dimension of the people of God.

For the Divine Word Missionaries (SVD), this vision of inclusion resonates profoundly with our charism and identity, particularly in its intercultural dimension. The concept of being “from everywhere” transcends mere

theological aspiration to embody a lived reality within our congregation, recognized as one of the most internationally diverse in the Catholic Church. With members representing seventy-six nationalities, we incarnate diversity in its most dynamic manifestation. Our differences—encompassing ethnicity, nationality, language, cultural heritage, and ministerial approaches—are not merely incidental but fundamentally constitutive of our collective identity. We embrace with profound gratitude our status as a truly global community, reflecting in microcosm the universal nature of both the Church and the Kingdom of God.

This diversity manifests itself concretely in our communities, where conferees occasionally originate from nations with historical antagonisms or geopolitical rivalries, reminiscent of the ancient tensions between Egypt and Assyria. Notwithstanding these differences, we endeavor to collaborate in unity, bonded by our shared missionary vocation. Our diversity represents not simply an attribute but a substantive strength, providing a rich tapestry of perspectives and methodological approaches that uniquely equips us to serve effectively in diverse and complex sociocultural contexts. Our ministry with migrants and marginalized populations, for instance, exemplifies the pastoral efficacy of this diversity when properly channeled toward missionary ends.

Nevertheless, diversity inevitably presents challenges to communal cohesion. Absent a unifying foundation, interculturality can cause escalating misunderstandings and tensions—indeed, it frequently does. To address this dialectic between diversity and unity, it becomes imperative to anchor our multicultural reality in a solid and integrative core. For us as Divine Word Missionaries, Sacred Scripture and biblical ministry naturally propose themselves as this unifying foundation. The Word of God functions not merely as the cornerstone of our missionary identity but also as the framework within which our diversity and interculturality can flourish, coexist synergistically, and bear abundant fruit in harmonious collaboration.

Wholehearted Dedication to the Word of God: The “SVD Shema”

“Creative missionary activities are born of love for the Word of God.”

(Pope Francis, Address to the SVD XIX General Chapter)

The concept of “from everywhere” extends far beyond its apparent geographic, ethnic, or cultural dimensions. It resonates profoundly with the interior wellspring within each Divine Word Missionary that animates his missionary vocation and constitutes his fundamental identity. We might articulate this dimension as “from every layer of my being” or “from the totality

of who I am.” In this hermeneutical framework, “from everywhere” signifies the complete and undivided consecration of one’s integral personhood—intellect, corporeality, spirituality, affectivity, temperament, and gifts—to the service of God’s Word. It represents a profound existential commitment to opening oneself receptively and responding dynamically to the Word of God from every facet of one’s existence.

Pope Francis eloquently encapsulated this foundational identity when addressing the XIX General Chapter of the Society of the Divine Word, stating: “Creative missionary activities are born of love for the Word of God.” This insight resonates remarkably with the “Shema Israel,” the paradigmatic declaration that forms the cornerstone of Jewish theological and existential self-understanding and praxis as articulated in Deuteronomy 6:5: “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might” (NRSV). Illumined by Pope Francis’ perceptive observation, we might formulate a corresponding “SVD Shema”: “Love the Word of God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might.” This declaration crystallizes the quintessential nature of our identity as Divine Word Missionaries, simultaneously articulating both the generative source and the teleological principle of our missionary charism. Upon deeper reflection, three corollaries to this proposal emerge.

Encountering the Word: A comprehensive commitment

Love for the Word of God begins with a very personal encounter with Scripture through hearing or reading. However, this initial encounter must subsequently transcend sporadic or occasional moments and cannot be limited solely to the parameters of prescribed daily liturgical readings. Such episodic and fragmentary engagement proves fundamentally inadequate for genuine scriptural formation. A substantive relationship with Sacred Scripture necessitates methodical and systematic reading of biblical books in their integral form. Far from constituting an anachronistic practice, such a comprehensive and systematic approach unveils exegetical and theological insights that would otherwise remain obscured. It facilitates the discovery of less prominent, yet profoundly significant passages absent from the liturgical Lectionary, such as one exemplified by the prophetic vision articulated in Isaiah 19 referenced earlier in this reflection.

These scriptural treasures possess the capacity to enrich, inspire, challenge, and direct our missionary praxis more profoundly than frequently cited and familiar pericopes. Their discovery engenders within us a renewed appreciation for the inexhaustible depth and breadth of divine revelation, fostering an approach to Scripture characterized by intellectual curiosity, hermeneutical

humility, and spiritual receptivity—essential qualities for sustaining a vibrant engagement with the biblical text. Moreover, systematic reading enables a more nuanced comprehension of the biblical narrative, which acquires its plenary significance within the literary context of its canonical book or within the broader framework of salvation history. Furthermore, it warrants acknowledgment that our Constitutions explicitly mandate such regular and methodical scriptural engagement (see C. 407.2).

Within this exegetical framework, the hermeneutical principle of *tota scriptura* (the entirety of Scripture), a foundational tenet of the Protestant Reformation, offers a valuable interpretive perspective for the Society of the Divine Word. This principle aligns harmoniously with contemporary Catholic biblical hermeneutics, particularly with the increasingly influential methodology of canonical criticism. The Reformers critiqued the predominant at the time *pericope tradition*—the selective extraction, isolated study, and homiletical application of biblical passages arranged according to the liturgical calendar. Instead, they advocated for *lectio continua*, the sequential and uninterrupted reading of Scripture in its canonical arrangement. This methodological approach proves not only exegetically sound but theologically indispensable, as divine revelation can be properly grasped only within the integrative context of the entire biblical canon. Exclusive reliance on decontextualized texts risks the hermeneutical pitfalls of proof-texting, interpretive manipulation, theological distortion, and potentially fundamentalist readings. Consequently, the practice of engaging Scripture in its canonical entirety—or at minimum, immersing oneself in complete biblical books—proves invaluable, particularly for ministerially and theologically mature religious. By embracing this comprehensive hermeneutical approach, we deepen our encounter with the divine Word and equip ourselves more adequately for the missiological mandate entrusted to our congregation.

Engagement with the Word of God: A living relationship

To love the Word of God necessitates the cultivation of a vibrant, dynamic relationship with Sacred Scripture. This devotion is neither static nor facile but, akin to all living relationships, demands intentional effort, steadfast perseverance, and sacrificial commitment. Biblical texts possess the capacity to bring consolation and spiritual delight, yet they simultaneously confront, challenge, and occasionally frustrate when their profound meanings elude comprehension. These moments of hermeneutical tension should not be seen as exegetical failures but rather as constitutive elements of a relationship that remains vital and evolutive.

Two particular impediments threaten to undermine this sacred devotion: excessive familiarity and spiritual indifference. The former occurs when repeated exposure to well-established texts, particularly those central to the liturgical cycle, diminishes our attentiveness and receptivity. Our familiarity with these pericopes often results in their passing through our intellectual and affective faculties without any resounding or substantive impact or insight. One efficacious remedy for this hermeneutical stagnation is deliberate engagement with extra-lectionary texts, which offer fresh theological perspectives and exegetical insights.

Indifference, frequently emerging from protracted familiarity, presents an even more formidable danger. It is not antipathy but apathy that signifies the dying of authentic devotion. To counteract this spiritual entropy, we must assiduously cultivate our relationship with Scripture through established spiritual practices such as personal reading, contemplative meditation, *Lectio Divina*, communal Bible sharing, and scriptural retreats. However, these practices yield transformative fruit only when approached with genuine sincerity and devotional commitment, rather than as routine obligations. When embraced with appropriate reverence and intentionality, these disciplines ensure that the “SVD Shema” transcends mere rhetorical formulation to become an internalized credo for every member of the Society of the Divine Word.

Intellectual commitment to scripture

While it may appear redundant to even mention here, but still the necessity of rigorous intellectual engagement with Scripture must be emphasized for missionaries entrusted with the ministerial responsibilities of kerygmatic proclamation and catechetical instruction. Biblical scholarship must maintain its role in both initial formation and ongoing professional development. For seminarians, a robust foundation in biblical studies equips them for lifelong engagement with the sacred text. For professed members, continuing theological education—through specialized workshops, academic seminars, and disciplined personal study—proves indispensable for deepening exegetical understanding and sustaining scholarly passion for the biblical corpus. Just as interpersonal relationships flourish through consistent attention and diligent care, our connection to Scripture develops through sustained intellectual investment. This scholarly engagement not only enhances our homiletical and teaching efficacy but also reinforces our personal relationship with the divine Word.

In conclusion, by consecrating ourselves to the Word of God “with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might,” we actualize the essence of the “SVD Shema” and embody the comprehensive significance of

the principle “from everywhere.” While our congregation is indeed characterized by geographical universality, this descriptive statement achieves its plenitude only when it encompasses a holistic devotion to the Word of God emanating from every dimension of our being—intellectual, corporeal, and spiritual. This integral commitment constitutes the fundamental core of our missionary identity, simultaneously inspiring and sustaining us as we illuminate the world with the ineffable richness of divine revelation.

“For Everyone”—Our Mission through Commitment to the Biblical Apostolate

*The time is surely coming, says the Lord GOD, when I will send a famine on the land;
not a famine of bread, or a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD.*

(Amos 8:11 NRSV)

“Think SVD, think Biblical Apostolate.”

(Abp. Paulus Budi Kleden, SVD)

*“We realize that in dealing with the word of God, the Bible, we are talking about
the very heart of the Society of the Divine Word.... The biblical apostolate forms an in-
tegral part of our heritage left to us by Blessed Arnold, and as Divine Word
Missionaries we ought to make it a permanent trademark of our mission work”*

(Nuntius XII, pp. 710) (HFS A14.1)

Our Name Is Our Mission

The phrase “for everyone” encapsulates the universal scope of our mission. The seminal missionary mandate of Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20 unequivocally highlights the global nature of the Christian mission (“all nations”) and its primary purposes: building communities through baptism and grounding them in the revelation brought by Jesus (“teach them...”). This universal missionary mandate requires continual refinement and renewed embrace. For us, Divine Word Missionaries, this mandate has been explored and articulated in various formulations since our inception. A fundamental question for every SVD member, and a principal focus of each General Chapter, has always been discerning the distinctive vision and particular focus of our mission. As our Congregation commemorates 150 years of service, this question remains as vital and exigent as ever.

A pivotal moment in our recent history of missiological discernment emerged during the XVIII General Chapter (2018), which promulgated the profound declaration: “Our name is our mission” (IDW, 6 [2018], § 17, 53).

While the chapter document did not extensively elaborate this theme, it did illuminate the multivalent meanings of the concept “the Word of God,” which constitutes the foundational element of our name. The document characterized our name as “a permanent challenge,” alluding to five possible hermeneutical frameworks for interpreting the “Word of God,” with Sacred Scripture enumerated as one of those essential dimensions. This rich polyvalence was elegantly described as a “symphony of the Word” (see. *Verbum Domini*, 7). This profound metaphor aptly conveys that the boundlessness plenitude of God’s revelation through Jesus cannot be circumscribed within a single concept or ministerial expression. However, it also elicits a further question: which instruments in this grand symphony is the *Societas Verbi Divini* specifically called to play? Evidently, we cannot perform on every instrument in the vast orchestra that constitutes God’s salvific project for humanity and, indeed, for the renewal of the entire creation!

We observe that the declaration “our name is our mission” appears in the concluding paragraph (§ 53) of the XVIII General Chapter document, standing as its final assertion. However, since the document does not explicitly delineate the implications of this statement, it can be interpreted as an open-ended invitation to action, one that solicits a decisive and substantive response.

Such a narrative technique of open-ended conclusions is profoundly scriptural. The Gospel of Mark, for example, originally concludes at 16:8 with an unresolved account, compelling the reader to contemplate their response to the proclamation of the empty tomb. Similarly, the Acts of the Apostles culminates with a depiction of St. Paul in imprisonment yet still proclaiming the Gospel in Rome. Though Luke undoubtedly possessed knowledge of Paul’s ultimate fate, he elected to terminate the narrative on a note of suspense, inviting readers to perpetuate the narrative of Gospel proclamation through their own lives and ministries. Analogously, the XVIII General Chapter’s document concludes with an open-ended declaration intended to provoke “a serious examination of our ways and means of achieving our missionary goal” (IDW, 6 [2018], §53). This deliberately unresolved conclusion constituted a clear challenge to discern and formulate a response.

Consequently, the subsequent XIX General Chapter (2024) took up where its antecedent left off, and did articulate a response to this challenge. Amidst its diverse deliberations and outcomes, the chapter enunciated a clear and resolute call for a renewed commitment to the Biblical Apostolate as one of the key means to manifest our name through our mission. To appreciate the significance of this development, it must be emphasized that the Biblical Apostolate had been conspicuously absent from the official pronouncements of the preceding four chapters, where no explicit commitment or dedicated

section on the Biblical Apostolate was evident. Fortuitously, our most recent chapter accorded the Biblical Apostolate due attention alongside other characteristic dimensions, perhaps signaling a renaissance of this ministry's indispensable role in our mission.

First, the very first resolution of the XIX GC (preceded only by the procedural stipulation of the new General Administration's assumption of office date) mandates each PRM to implement the "our name is our mission" concept in a "concrete, systematic, organized, sustainable, and accountable way" (Resolution 1.2.2). Even more significantly, the final document incorporates a substantial section dedicated to the Biblical Apostolate (FW, 6 [2024], § 61-65). Here, the document specifies that "the Biblical Apostolate is an intrinsic characteristic of every SVD confrere, regardless of their specific ministry. It is not an exclusive responsibility of selected individuals such as Biblical Apostolate coordinators or PRM leadership. Everyone should incorporate a systematic, organized, sustainable, and accountable approach to biblical ministry" (§62). This unambiguous directive from the chapter underscores that the Biblical Apostolate must not be relegated to chance or individual initiative. Rather, it necessitates a structured, coordinated endeavor across our Society, ensuring that Scripture remains the cornerstone of our life and mission. Is this significant development in our missiological discernment at the Congregational level a manifestation of the *kairos*, a response to the hunger for the Word of God prophesied by Amos?

Another significant moment at the chapter transpired during the address of the outgoing Superior General, Archbishop Paulus Budi Kleden, SVD. In what might be construed as his farewell discourse to the capitulants, he devoted substantial attention to the role of the Biblical Apostolate in SVD life and mission, drawing upon his extensive experience as General Councilor and Superior General. During his address, he articulated a phrase that, I believe, encapsulated a critical aspect of his vision for the future trajectory of our society: "Think SVD, think Biblical Apostolate." This succinct declaration brilliantly distills a core dimension of our identity, one for which we could and should be immediately recognizable in the ecclesiastical and missiological landscape. Archbishop Kleden's parting exhortation may indeed be embraced as a resounding call to action, challenging us to intensify our efforts in advancing the Biblical Apostolate as the distinctive hallmark of our mission.

It is imperative to underscore at this juncture that the Biblical Apostolate represents one of the principal avenues through which we fulfill our mission. Manifestly, it is not the exclusive expression of our missionary commitment, nor does it encompass the totality of what we offer to the contemporary world. However, our very name compels us to establish Sacred Scripture as the

foundation of all we are and undertake. The Biblical Apostolate is not merely an optional ministerial modality; it constitutes an essential component of our identity, affirming that our mission is irreducibly grounded in the Word. Other aspects and dimensions of our mission undoubtedly possess significance and play their proper role. However, without the Biblical Apostolate the “our name is our mission” principle would remain fundamentally incomplete, lacking historical roots, theological depth and its intended missiological significance.

Our Mission through the Biblical Apostolate

What form does our commitment to the Word of God through the Biblical Apostolate assume? It is precisely at this juncture that “the Light” must be transformed into “our light,” as biblical ministry necessarily adapts to the unique context of each PRM, community, and confrere. Just as the biblical texts themselves are profoundly contextualized within their historical and cultural matrices, so too must biblical ministry be contextually situated in order to emerge authentically and function efficaciously. Therefore, it would be presumptuous to attempt to prescribe a singular modality or trajectory for the Biblical Apostolate across the entire Congregation.

Notwithstanding this essential contextualization, three guiding principles that broadly delineate the scope and purpose of Biblical ministry can be postulated: animation, dissemination, and formation. In the initial phase, the role of those conducting biblical apostolate—the biblical ministers—is to ignite interest among those they serve, primarily through the personal witness of being genuinely dedicated to and intellectually and spiritually captivated by the Word. Without the desire kindled by their exemplary commitment, people are unlikely to engage substantively with Scripture. Dissemination naturally follows from this initial inspiration. The Scripture must be accessible, which necessitates the distribution of Bibles and, where needed, translation of the sacred text into vernacular languages. This process culminates in formation, wherein participants are guided into a more profound relationship with the Scriptures, both spiritually and intellectually. This entails enhancing Biblical literacy through exegetical courses, Bible studies, as well as fostering spiritual growth through *Lectio Divina*, communal reading, contemplative prayer, scriptural sharing, and related devotional practices. The guidance, inspiration, and energizing presence of the biblical ministers remain indispensable throughout this transformative journey. Collectively, these sequential steps embody the mission of “shining our light” upon the world.

Bringing these theoretical reflections into concrete praxis, it is instructive to highlight the contribution of the biblical working group at the XIX

General Chapter, which developed a series of pragmatic recommendations for advancing this vital ministry. These suggestions provide a substantive framework for implementing our commitment to the Word and can be synthesized into three cardinal points.

First, SVDs must recognize and embrace their shared responsibility for the Biblical Apostolate. Commitment to Scripture constitutes a vocational imperative for every SVD confrere, irrespective of their specific apostolic domain. It is not circumscribed to any particular role or ministerial function but represents a collective mission that permeates all dimensions of our apostolic endeavors. Whether engaged in parish ministry, educational institutions, justice and peace advocacy, or any other missiological expressions, each confrere is called to integrate Scripture organically into their quotidian activities, ensuring that the Word of God remains a unifying presence and teleological purpose in all our undertakings.

Second, a structured and systematic approach to biblical ministry is indispensable for its viability and fruitfulness. PRMs need to develop achievable and realistic action plans to implement the Biblical Apostolate effectively. These strategic plans should emphasize long-term sustainability, organizational clarity, and transparent accountability, ensuring that this apostolate functions as an interconnected and cohesive enterprise rather than a disconnected assemblage of isolated initiatives.

Finally, without dedicated leadership, efforts to strengthen the Biblical Apostolate are unlikely to attain their intended objectives. Appointing a dedicated full-time Biblical Apostolate coordinator in every province, and where feasible, in regions and missions, is essential for the vitality and perpetuity of this ministry. This leadership role provides the necessary focus and administrative guidance to animate and direct biblical initiatives comprehensively. Providing such specialized leadership would underscore the central importance of Scripture within our missiological paradigm and offer a structured framework to ensure its programmatic effectiveness and intergenerational continuity.

Final Remarks

In conclusion, let us return to the XIX General Chapter, which powerfully characterized our present global context as a “wounded world,” one torn by deepening sociopolitical conflicts and economic divisions, where conspicuous wealth and unprecedented affluence collide with abject poverty and human-induced suffering. The Catholic Church, too, confronts its own struggle for

theological direction and ecclesiastical coherence within this fractured reality and amid its growing internal tensions. In the midst of this multifaceted turmoil, the Chapter summons the Society of the Divine Word and each confrere to function as a luminous presence radiating in the darkness of a troubled and disquieted world.

This reflection has advanced the argument that our focus on Scripture and commitment to the Biblical Apostolate could serve as the quintessential beacon of light we project upon the world by virtue of our distinctive charism. Can we, as a Congregation, embrace this vision with renewed missiological zeal, ensuring that Scripture not only remains the focal point of our mission but also serves as the inexhaustible wellspring of our theological creativity, apostolic passion, and unwavering commitment? This must constitute our preeminent aim, for through steadfast dedication to the Biblical Apostolate, we affirm that our name is indeed our mission in its most profound sense. In doing so, we respond prophetically to the existential hunger for God's Word evident within both the ecclesial community and the broader human society, remaining faithful to the foundational spirit of our SVD vocation and charism.