

Interculturality, Communication and the SVD

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Communication and Culture are right at the cradle of the Divine Word Missionaries. Arnold Janssen came to the foundation of the first Mission House in Steyl (Netherlands) as an editor and publisher. His first cooperators also came from different cultures in Europe, from Bavaria, Tyrolia, Luxembourg and other places of Central Europe. He himself came from the lower Rhineland and was a priest of the diocese of Muenster which was the capital of the province of Westphalia (Germany) .

During his 12 years work as a science teacher, Janssen also directed the Apostolate of Prayer in his diocese which eventually brought him to the foundation of a Mission periodical entitled “Kleiner Herz Jesu Bote” (“Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart”). To be more free for editing and publication of this periodical, his bishop released him from teaching and appointed him chaplain of the Ursuline Sisters’ convent at Kempen, the home place of Thomas a Kempis, author of the “Imitation of Christ” from the period of the *Devotio Moderna*.

On the occasion of the mission house’s 25 years of existence in 1900 a jubilee book was published, edited by Fr. Hermann auf der Heide: *Die Missionsgesellschaft von Steyl, Ein Bild der ersten 25 Jahre ihres Bestehens* (The Mission Society of Steyl, a picture of the first 25 years of her existence). In the very first pages this publication extensively reports about Janssen’s attempts to look for material for publication. This led him to meet Bishop Raimondi from Hongkong who was also one of the co-founders of the national Mission Seminary for Italy (PIME) in Milan. “In the spring of 1874” the book reports, “Raimondi visited for a few days Dr. Ludwig von Essen, parish priest of Neuwerk near Moenchengladbach. This was announced in the “Gladbach Daily” newspaper and stimulated the founder of our congregation to ask for an audience. He was friendly received and got sufficient answers to all his questions. Having achieved the purpose of his visit, he also expressed regret about the fact that there exists not one house or initiative for a similar foundation for Mission in Germany. The answer of Raimondi was short and clear: “Start one yourself...” to which Janssen replied: “I am already too old to go into mission!” “Doesn’t matter!” Raimondi answered: “There are also people needed in Europe to run such houses. I will visit you in Kempen and try to convince you more.” After that the Bishop indeed visited Janssen twice in Kempen but he could not convince him yet fully. Janssen assured him, however, that he would do his best to promote the idea. This was in May 1874. In the June edition of his periodical he again published an article expressing the need for a German Mission House and a call for persons to come forward for such an initiative, but nobody came. Finally, after long prayer and discernment, the editor and publisher realized that it was probably the call of the Lord upon himself to start such an initiative. (1900, pp 6-9)

Thus, in September 1874, after several months of prayer and discernment he formally decided to start and to look for a place in neighboring Netherlands because the political situation in Germany under Bismarck did not allow such an initiative within Germany (1900,p.9). His search finally brought him to Steyl near Tegelen (now part of the city of Venlo) which is only a few kilometers from the German border, next to Kaldenkirchen where an uncle of his mother had been a parish priest. There he could buy a dilapidated pub, which was just opposite the Steyl

village Church near the Maas river on which trading ships transported especially salt. Because of the construction of railways all over Europe at that time the salt transports shifted from ships to trains. Therefore, business in the pub near the small Maas harbour had gone down because there were not sufficient customers any more. Here Janssen opened officially the new house under the protection of the archangel St. Michael on September 8, 1875. Here he also continued editing, publishing and managing his Mission magazine. Since he had encountered difficulties in printing the periodical outside he decided to start his own printing press on December 6 of the same year. This was opened already January 1876 with a second hand printing machine (1900,p.55f.). Janssen himself reported this in a longer article in the January 1876 edition of the magazine, where he also underlined the role of the publication in the foundation of the Mission House in Steyl.

He wrote: “In our days, the press is a powerful instrument. How much did, for example, this publication lead to the foundation of our Mission House! Without it, the initiative would not have been taken or at least not in such a short time. Our Lord sent his apostles to preach the Word. During His time, printing was not known yet, but now we have it and the devil uses it to do harm. The more the servant of Jesus has to employ it to do good. How powerful is the printed word, which the machines produce by the thousands! But it is not only the multitude of the prints, they also need to be read and to be fulfilled. For this, God help us.” (p. 58)

The printing press and publications actually became the backbone for all activities of the growing mission society. The printing and publications brought not only the finances needed, but also many vocations who were inspired by the Steyl publications so much so that the congregation was considered almost as identical with printing and publication. In those days these were the main fields of media communication. The same principle was also employed in the different new SVD foundations all over the world. In some countries like Argentina or the United States new foundations of the SVD started first as distribution centers of the Steyl publications!

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In a similar way like printing and communication, *culture* also played an important role right from the foundation and development of the Divine Word Missionaries, though it might not be that obvious immediately under this word. As a science teacher and publisher of a mission magazine, Janssen had developed an “inborn” sense for mission and culture.

Actually, right from the beginning of his foundation of the house in Steyl, there was an *intercultural* situation albeit on a small scale: The first community there had people from Bavaria (Johann Bapt. Anzer), Tyrolia (Joseph Freinademetz), and Luxembourg (Franz Xaver Reichart, Peter Bill). Janssen himself was also looking for cooperators in the Netherlands and Belgium (Leuven). One might then say that in a European understanding, the first community in Steyl was, right from its beginnings, already something which we would call in modern terms *intercultural*.

One of the other important criteria for the new foundation was supposed to be also academic work (1900, p.27). This point, however, brought Janssen into difficulties with some of his first cooperators who eventually left the society.

As a former teacher, Janssen had a special concern for academic studies. He therefore selected the Dominican Third order as the first rule for his house. The silver jubilee book of 1900 gives as reason that “the Dominican Order is according to his rule a teaching and mission order and still does accomplish excellent work in this field till today”. Already in an early stage of the Mission House many of the young members were sent not only for philosophical and theological studies but also for seemingly more secular subjects like Linguistics, Ethnology and Anthropology. Along the same lines, Janssen also encouraged all his missionaries to collect data in these fields and related subjects from the culture of the people they were working with (Fischer, 241). From this and early studies in different fields of Culture by Fr. Wilhelm Schmidt towards the end of the 19th century Janssen encouraged and supported Wilhelm Schmidt in the foundation of the publication *Anthropos* in 1906, three years before his death. The main purpose of this publication, - which still exists today together along with an institute of the same name, - was to publish reports and studies of missionaries on the people and cultures where they worked (Koppers 1925, 23f.) Ethnology, Anthropology, and Linguistics soon became a trademark of the Steyl society. This shows a strong relation and concern about the cultures of people right from the early days of the SVD.

In a review for the second volume of *Anthropos* a reviewer wrote: “In this thick volume with over 1,100 pages, one finds more about the culture of foreign people than in all other publications of this kind together in the whole of Germany” (Koppers, 24). Between the two world wars a whole group of recognized SVD anthropologists completed the *Anthropos* team with names like Martin Gusinde, Paul Schebesta, George Hoeltker, Wilhelm Koppers, Damian Kreichgauer and Michael Schulien who became the founder and first director of the Ethnological/ Missiological section of the Vatican Museum, founded in 1925 as a Mission Museum in the Lateran.

All his life, Wilhelm Schmidt underlined in a special way the vivid interest and support of Arnold Janssen for his initiative as well as his concern for cultures beyond European borders (Koppers, 26). All this indicates that *culture* is right from the beginning a special concern of the SVD, although the relation between culture and communication was not yet fully seen.

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The SVD involvement in the study and development of Catholic *Missiology* points into the same direction. Developed as a theological discipline through Joseph Schmidlin 1909 in Muenster, the home diocese and study place of Arnold Janssen himself it was always strongly supported by Steyl. One of the two very first candidates for a doctorate in Missiology in 1925 was Fr. Anton Freitag svd, who pioneered this field before and after the Second World War together with people like Johannes Thaurer, August Tellkamp as well as Karl Mueller, Stephen Bevans, Roger Schroeder and many others. Another missiologist, Fr. Johannes Schuette, directed the society for 10 years as Superior General. He was at the center of the creation of the *Ad Gentes* document on mission at the Second Vatican Council, which he himself presented 1965 in the aula of the assembly after it was developed in the SVD house in Nemi (now named: Ad Gentes

Center). Schuette had been imprisoned and expelled as a missionary from China and used this experience for his own doctoral dissertation in Missiology in Muenster entitled “The Catholic China Mission in the Mirror of the Red-Chinese Press.”

From here Schuette also developed later in his teaching and as superior general a special interest in communication and Missiology. He had a clear vision to see the inter-relation between culture and communication. In fact, he planned for the SVD Generalate in 1967 a special communication secretary like the one for mission. Unfortunately this was not supported by his companions in the direction of the society.

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Considering all this it can not be denied that *social communication* always played a special role in the history and activities of the Divine Word Missionaries. This field is, however, very often seen as specialization of only some individual members or institutions but not of the society as a whole. Since communication – like in most other circles of the Church – was mainly identified with the media (Press, Film, Radio, TV), its relation to culture and mission is only seldom recognized, if at all.

When the document *Inter Mirifica* was prepared for the Second Vatican Council, it originally was build around the Mass Media. But this was criticized at an early stage from within the Vatican with the remark that the Church would not be in the first instance concerned about technology and the media as such but rather about people. Because of this, it was proposed to use the expression *social communication*, rather than “Mass Media” because such a term would go beyond technology and comprise all ways and means of human communication which are always embedded also in respective cultural forms. This shows again the strong relation between Communication and Culture.

Despite this, the expression is till today still mostly used as identical with Media. This is also the case with the Divine Word Missionaries, where also today communication is still considered synonymous with media instead as “social communication” as being an essential element of culture and society. Using an expression of *Communio et Progressio (No.11)*, the SVD Constitutions (115) state that in its deepest sense, communication is a “giving of self in love” and therefore should be a characteristic of *every* SVD missionary. This, however, has only seldom been reflected in a detailed way in the life and activities of the Society and its individuals. It is similar to the Jesuits who already in a document on communication in their 1995 General Congregation stated: “Communication in the society has usually ben considered as a sector of apostolic activity, a field for some specialists who have often felt isolated or on the margin of the apostolic body. The Society needs to acknowledge that communication is not a domain restricted to a few Jesuit professionals, but a major apostolic dimension for *all* our apostolates...”(In; Eilers 2009,65 f.)

At the beginning of a new generalate in 2000 a proposal was made to create a kind of think-tank of some SVD’s to spell out what would be the specific mission in communication of the SVD considering the experiences of Arnold Janssen and beyond, especially also the inter-relation between social communication as the “communication *of* and *in* human society” and culture.

The aim was to link these two streams into a special and unique mission of the SVD. Unfortunately the proposal ‘died’ on the table of somebody who was supposed to follow it up...Thus the ‘confusion’ on the specifics of the SVD communication ministry goes on...

The field of Communication is very broad and goes far beyond a single medium or a group of even traditional ones as expressions of Culture. Where is in all this the specific mission for a society of St. Arnold Janssen marked since its beginning by communication and Culture?

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One of the obvious areas of special concern should be *Intercultural Communication*, which is burgeoning in the last 20 years in the secular field partly because business people, beside others, want to know how to best ‘sell’ their ideas and products in a globalized world. The Catholic Church in general still has to show a special interest in this, more so the SVD. As one of a single and lonely initiatives the Gregorian University in Rome has been offering such a course since 1981 as part of the Missiological Faculty and the Interdisciplinary Center for Communication. But the course ceased in 1996 and was unfortunately never continued because of lack of qualified teachers.

“Intercultural Communication” studies the communication between people of different cultures. Such communication is determined, among other factors, by different ways and means of non-verbal and verbal communication, and is influenced by social structures, values as well as people’s worldviews. Until a person or group of persons becomes aware of such differences and acts accordingly, communication is bound to fail. All attempts for inculturation and theologizing will be hampered as long as there is no basic knowledge and sufficient awareness of this field.

Intercultural Communication cannot properly function without the awareness and knowledge of its basic elements because any community is based on communication which must be shared within and among its members. This holds especially also for any proclamation of the Good News in different cultures.

Actually there seem to be only very few theological schools offering such courses as *obligatory* for all students. Such is the case for the “CICM Maryhill School of Theology”(MST) in Manila. Till recently none of the SVD theological schools or formation programs in Asia offer “Intercultural Communication” as an obligatory course which should be basic not only for missionary work in other cultures but also in developing and maintaining intercultural communities of students and priests in a globalized world.

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Pope John Paul II has developed a new and special approach to Culture and Communication which should challenge the SVD in a special way and prompt her to embrace it as one of her special fields in the tradition of St. Arnold Janssen. In his Encyclical letter on Mission *Redemptoris Missio* (RM, 1990) the pope places the world of Communication as the “first Areopagus” of modern times as number one of a listing of cultural sectors and creating a new culture. This way he caused a paradigm shift in the Church’s approach to Communication. While Vatican II’s *Inter Mirifica* and similar documents underline (1) the right of the Church for

the use of Media and (2) try to secure a proper and responsible moral use of them John Paul II talks in RM (37c) about a *New Culture* created by modern Communication where the message of Christ has to be integrated. Such new culture “originates not just from whatever content is eventually expressed, but from the very fact that there exist new ways of communicating, with new languages, new techniques and a new psychology.” This new approach to communication is stated in an Encyclical Letter on Mission (!) and relates from there directly also into the Arnold Janssen tradition. Should it not be a special challenge for the SVD to involve herself in this new situation and approach to Culture and Communication. Is a globalized world where social networks now play an important role and become essential elements of a new Culture not also an important mission field for the sons of St. Arnold Janssen?

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As a former Science teacher Arnold Janssen was always interested in new technical developments, especially in the field of press and printing. Thus he made it a point to visit the 1889 World Exhibit in Paris where the latest printing machines were on display. Inspired from there he ordered the latest printing equipment available at his time. He also sent some of his brothers for further training and study to Leipzig which was that time considered strongly protestant, but the most important and primary place for printing and publishing in Germany. Today, he would probably observe the convergence of communication means, with all its possibilities and challenges for human, inter-cultural, inter-national relations. The formation of “Cyber-missionaries” would probably top the list of his programs. Pope John Paul II published already two years after his words on the “New Culture” (Redemptoris Missio) a World Communication Day message on the “Internet, a new form for proclaiming the Gospel” which he concluded with the following considerations which also Arnold Janssen would fully subscribe today:

“The Internet causes billions of images to appear on millions of computer monitors around the planet. From the galaxy of sight and sound will the face of Christ emerge and the voice of Christ be heard? For it is only when his face is seen and his voice heard that the world will know the glad tidings of our redemption. This is the purpose of Evangelization. And this is what will make the Internet a genuinely human space, for where there is no room for Christ, there is no room for man...”

Recent World Communication Day messages of Pope Benedict XVI also point into the same direction with themes like “New Technologies, New relationships: Promoting a *Culture* of respect, dialogue and Friendship” ((2009), “The priest and Pastoral Ministry in a Digital world: New Media in the service of the *Word*” (2010), “Truth, Proclamation and Authenticity of life in the Digital Age” (2011), “Social Networks: portals of truth and faith; new spaces for *Evangelization*” (2013).

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There is still another dimension to the communication and cultural dimension of Communication and the SVD! Despite some official resistance, Arnold Janssen gave his new congregation the name of the Divine *Word, Logos*. In one of his early works (1971, 55 ff) Joseph Ratzinger, now Benedict XVI, pointed to the relation between Logos and *Dia-Logos* as reflecting God’s way of

communication. It means that a society of the Divine *Word (Logos)* should be a society of Dialogue, the society of *Divine Dia-Logos!* This actually is also the basis for *prophetic Dialogue* (cf. Bevans/Schroeder 2004, 348-395; 2011/12) as a special commitment of the SVD since the last General Chapters without yet developing the communication dimension.

Following the encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* which Pope Paul VI published during the Council (1964) Dialogue became a special concern of Vatican II. The Asian bishops already in their first Plenary assembly of the newly created “Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences” (FABC, Tapei 1974) pointed to a ‘triple dialogue’ as essential for the Church in Asia: 1. the Dialogue with people, especially the poor, 2. dialogue with Cultures and 3. dialogue with Religions. (Rosales 1997,14-16,22f.) Dialogue is communication and where is here the communicative role of the Society of the Divine Logos – leading to Dia-Logos?

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The word *Interculturality* is a new creation which still has to enter most of the dictionaries. In reality it is an adjective which is changed into a substantive similar to the word “international” when it is changed to “internationality.” There is, however, an important difference: while nationality refers to political units such as nations, interculturality refers to cultures, which are not that easily defined like a political unit.

Furthermore, Culture is not only related to a group of people’s way of life but can also be applied even to the “culture” of a single person which is determined by his/her birth, upbringing and life experience. It means that every person and community has to develop the ability to shift from the own culture to the challenges of other cultures, moving out from its own to the relate openly and creatively to others. It means to move from *ethnocentrism* to *ethnorelativism*. Milton Bennet (1986) sees in such a process six steps which move from the denial of any differences to defense and minimalization and further growing into acceptance, adaptation and integration. (cf. Eilers, 2012, 133-136). Such a development seems to be essential for any attempt for “interculturality”.

The recent development of studies on the *cultural quotient* of persons goes into the same direction. Similar to the way the “intelligence quotient” (IQ) or “emotional quotient” (EQ) of peoples are tested, we can also talk about the “cultural quotient” or CQ of a person (or even community?), which refers to “a person’s capability to adapt effectively to new cultural contexts” which has “a cognitive, motivational and behavioral dimension” (cf. Eilers 2012, 31).

Considering the cultural involvement and communication heritage of Arnold Janssen all members of the Divine Word Missionaries congregation should have a high CQ. This can be developed and strengthened in the formation process by becoming aware of the need and possibilities for placing both Communication and Culture, e.g. Intercultural Communication, in its proper place within the society and its Communities. At the same time one has to develop a proper disposition to effectively respond to the demand of Pope John Paul II for a “new Culture” as the “first areopagus” of modern times created by modern communication. St. Arnold Janssen was a pioneer in Communication and Culture. He sent many of his people for proper formation and studies. Are we able and willing to do the same in today’s world of converging and digital communication?

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