



SVD AUSTRALIA
Formation House

JOURNEYING IN FAITH

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

**The Divine Word Missionaries acknowledge
the Wurundgeri people of the Kulin nation
as the traditional custodians of the land
on which our residence and offices are located,
and where we live, work and pray.**

**We acknowledge the Australian and
Torres Strait Islander peoples of this nation.
We pay our respects to Ancestors and Elders,
past, present and emerging.**

**We commit ourselves to actively work
alongside Indigenous peoples
for reconciliation and justice.**

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Editorial

Dear Friends of Dorish Maru College,

Since moving to Australia after studies in Rome and London from 2018, I've continued to cherish the passion and excitement our students bring from a variety of cultures to Dorish Maru College (since 1988) – an SVD formation house in Melbourne. So, as I write this editorial to the *Journeying in Faith - Students' Journal* of 2022 within the wider context of fifty years of YTU theological education and formation - as the academic year comes to a close, we anticipate the beginnings of new years with the commencement of the Liturgical Year and the summer holidays in the academic world.

The 2022 academic year was a rich and busy one at the Dorish Maru College. No longer interrupted by the threats of lockdowns, we resumed face-to-face learning alongside of an already robust online curriculum. Our students were able to visit places during winter break and attend a number of formation inputs within the state and beyond that had been postponed during 2020 and 2021 due to the Pandemic.

The Annual SVD Mission Day – always a highlight each year for the Dorish Maru College – was once again held in October after a long hiatus due to COVID. All this activity has brought us to the end of a busy, productive, and rewarding year.

This issue begins with Mission Day 2022, followed by some of our Seminarian's current learning and experiences of mission. Next we meet the Seminarians who have newly arrived at DMC during 2022 as they share their journeys. The papers on Interreligious Dialogue and Canon Law versus Civil Law are from students at the University of Divinity. Finally there is a lesson from Covid 19.



In sum, the gathered essays of this issue offer a rich and fascinating tapestry across the integral formation that the Divine Word Missionaries of the Australia Province offers within an intercultural religious setting and pluralistic context in exercising Christian presence in world mission. We hope you enjoy this issue of *Journeying in Faith* and we welcome your response to our efforts.

My prayer, then, and the prayer of each of the formation staff at the Dorish Maru College, is that Christ, the Word made flesh, may “have first place in everything” in your lives, whether it be during the academic year or during the Liturgical year.

May God richly bless you and yours during these seasons of Advent and Christmas.

Albano Da Costa, SVD
For the editorial team

a.dacosta@ytu.edu.au

2022 SVD Mission Day



The SVD Mission Day on **Saturday, 8 October 2022**, hosted by Dorish Maru College and Yarra Theological Union/University of Divinity, made a welcome return this year, following a two-year COVID hiatus, with speakers exploring the topic, 'For a Missionary Church in a Wounded World'.

Keynote speaker at the Mission Day event was Fr Asaeli Rass SVD, Provincial. The Respondent was Sr Anne Jordan PBVM, of Cana Communities. The formal program was followed by Mass and a shared multicultural meal.

Fr Albano Da Costa SVD, Dean of Academic Studies at Dorish Maru College and one of the key organisers of the event, said the day went beyond his expectations, and it was wonderful to welcome people back in person.

"Last year's Mission Day program was entirely online, exploring Indigenous Culture, Mission, and Spiritualities, but the response we received from our mission partners this year was just amazing," he said.

"The Mission Day Eucharist truly reflected the intercultural mission of the Divine Word Missionaries in the Australia Province which was beautifully represented by the Latino, Indonesian, and the Vietnamese communities who were present, and I am sure this made a significant impact in the hearts and minds of our formandi (students in formation) to embrace intercultural mission.

"After the Eucharist the table of fellowship was overflowing, and I loved the way people stayed back to enjoy cultural performances by our students representing various cultures and the youth from several parishes across the Melbourne Archdiocese where SVDs do pastoral outreach."

In his keynote presentation, Fr Rass shared from his own experience of “Mission in a Wounded World” during his years of ministry in Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory. He spoke of witnessing endemic violence, alcoholism, and suicide. While acknowledging that the daunting task of addressing the problems of human suffering in the 20th century is not for the faint-hearted, he sees a way forward where love can conquer all. Fr Rass’s full address follows this review.

The respondent, Sr Anne Jordan PVBVM has spent decades working with volunteers at Cana Communities, a not-for-profit charity working with men and women, who have experienced homelessness, addiction, mental health issues and other barriers that have prevented them from creating a positive life for themselves.

Sr Anne began her response by speaking of her long-standing collaboration with the SVDs, telling the stories of three men who joined the Cana Communities for Eucharist celebrated by Fr Bill Burt SVD.

She told of their strong desire to be a part of the Eucharist and of being welcomed, even though they presented differently to many others who might attend Mass in a parish setting.

“These three men brought something to our Eucharist that we wouldn’t have had if they had not been people who couldn’t take no for an answer,” she said. “They were people who knew that Eucharist was important, and they knew they had a place at that table.”

Sr Anne also spoke of the importance of the interculturality that underpins SVD spirituality.

“As Cana people, we help support another culture in terms of the culture of people who’ve spent life in prison, in hospitals, with mental health issues, people who are disadvantaged in some way, homeless, whatever,” she said.

Finally, she said the practical sharing of a belief in a relational God helped open up the love of God in a real way for many members of the Cana Communities, underlining the importance of relationship in healing the wounded.



FOR A MISSIONARY CHURCH IN A WOUNDED WORLD

Asaeli Rass SVD Provincial



Immediately after Easter 2022, I found myself on Bathurst Island, Diocese of Darwin, NT. Here the elders told me a tragic story. On April 11, Gordon Pilakui had girlfriend trouble. According to his family, the 24-year-old had been arguing with her since they got together. He was jealous. She didn't care. But no one expected Gordon Pilakui to die.

April 11 was a Saturday night, and they are always the most volatile in Nguiu, capital of the Tiwi Islands. The evening began at 4pm with three hours at the town's only social club, speed drinking Victoria Bitter out of plastic bottles. Afterwards, Gordon and his girlfriend took home a crate of Cascade beer. Then an improvised bong was sparked up in a bucket, and Gordon and his friends smoked until they entered a parallel world.

Within an hour and a half, according to his cousin Michael, Gordon was off his head and raging. He ran to an electricity pole and began climbing up towards the 11,000-volt cables. A crowd of children who had been drop-kicking plastic bottles nearby gathered to watch. For 10 minutes Gordon swayed and swore, babbling about being haunted by a devil. Then he dived off, slamming into the ground, his

skull splitting like a pomegranate, kids running wild in fear...this tragic event took place in 2006.

The day I arrived, the community was yet again burying another young man who died exactly in the same way as Gordon. In the past 10 years, this tiny community, a 20-minute flight from the malls and casinos of Darwin, had acquired the highest suicide rate in the world per capita. In Nguiu alone, one in four had tried to kill themselves. I have personally buried close to 50 suicide related deaths in Central Australia, and it kept reoccurring. An elder commented, **“When all you have is violence leading to death, and the funeral ceremony is the only thing that remains of thousands of years of culture, what else is there for the future of our grandkids?”**

Just before I left, I was visited by a custodian of Bathurst Island, knowing that we, SVDs, are coming to work with the Tiwi Islanders and to build on the legacy of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart. He said, **“Father, it's grief after grief, whatever your Order is hoping to do, make Healing your priority.”**

COMMUNAL QUESTION: What do you understand by the term healing? If you were on Bathurst Island, would you consider healing as your priority? Why? What necessary steps would you undertake to begin this process of healing?

GLOBAL HUMAN SUFFERING

There is no doubt **“the problem of human suffering is becoming the main question of global mission** (Kevin Considine 2015:38)’, from the war raging between Ukraine and Russia to the growing insecurity in Nigeria; the devastating effects of Climate Change to the violent deadlock which has left millions in need in Myanmar. Globally about 1 in 3 (30%) of women worldwide have been subjected to either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime (WHO, 2021). Domestic and

family violence is a leading cause of homelessness in Australia (Mission Australia 2021). And there are more types of violence closer to home such as physical violence, sexual, emotional, psychological, spiritual, cultural, verbal abuse, financial violence, and neglect.

ACKNOWLEDGE AND REPENT

We know it is a daunting task and therefore prioritizing mission in a wounded world is not for the faint-hearted! Mind you, I did think of another proposition “for”, as in ‘mission for a wounded world but decided to drop it due to questionable tactics of missionaries mingling with colonialists of the past.

The deep trauma of the multifaceted wounds of the 20th century needs strong spiritual imagination, robust missiological discernment, practical theologies, and a very strong dose of non-violent prescription. And 45 minutes does not do justice to the subject at hand, and you must acknowledge the limits of any Christian to respond effectively.

In tackling this subject, I’m confronted by the sheer volume of woundedness and complex interplays of violence. However, these are not the same as God’s desire to heal all his children and end all violence. I also know I am risking oversimplifying the challenge facing missions and risks offering a Band-Aid to deep, life-threatening wounds in our world. I may also sound pessimistic to a world graced by God who saw it to be very good from the beginning (Genesis 1).

Still, I strongly believe, it is a call from the deep, from the Holy Spirit, the missionary par excellence - to work towards eliminating the root causes of violence (if possible), towards healing, social justice, and the world’s transformation. I’ll like to advocate a triad of missional attitudes, that could be part of our discussion today namely, **a culturally sensitive approach, interreligious cooperation** and, if all fails - **faithfulness**.

But before we move to exploring these, let’s back track to a bit of history.

Christian missionaries travelled to my part of the world, namely, Oceania, in the late 1700s with the deliberate intention of changing our societies. However, missionaries landed on our shores together with European traders who also arrived to steal our sandalwood, pearl shells, beach-de-mer and deep ocean seals. Obviously, my ancestors could not tell the difference between traders and missionaries. The former PM of Kenya, Jomo Kenyatta reflects:



(Jomo Kenyatta (c. 1897 – 22 August 1978) was a Kenyan anti-colonial activist and politician who governed Kenya as its Prime Minister from 1963 to 1964 and then as its first President from 1964 to his death in 1978).

The Complicity of Christian Missionaries

We need to dig deeper into the complicity of Christian missionaries in perpetuating violence on cultures, languages, and the deep religiosity of indigenous peoples. Christian missionaries must admit that they too have wounded many souls especially the little ones in our communities and have caused much violence in our attempt to evangelise. There are a lot of materials out there about the role of missionaries in the colonization of Africa and the south Seas. Mission in the age of the empire was problematic as mission was oftentimes blinded by power, position, protection and plenitude (Mission and

Context, *Theology in the Age of the Empire*, Jione Havea, 2020). In many cases Christian conversion looked more like European Capitalist conversion and the plunder of natural resources. Missionaries themselves often failed to distinguish between Christian principles and those of the colonialists. They misused biblical passages to further the causes of their colonial friends.

Even today, Churches of marginalized people, specifically in the global south, suffer the pains of abusive power wielded by “Empire Churches” that are more concerned about mega memberships and individualized spiritualities than “the vulnerable and the dispossessed.” It’s good to know anyway that empires do not have the last word!

Vietnamese American theologian Peter C. Phan observed that the word ‘mission’ is “not an innocent word.” In the name of mission, harm has been done to peoples and cultures throughout the world. The words ‘mission’ and ‘missionaries’ can carry a negative connotation of violence, imposition, destruction of cultures, colonialism, just to mention some.

What tends to irritate people of the south is the attitude of the north, that is, the separation between the “civilized” and “barbaric”. What makes them angry is the idea that the Lord might have a predilection for a small part of the human family who are wealthy and generally white, and the rest a lower-class entity, unable to achieve decent levels in spiritual and intellectual life according to their standards. All this also emerged during the recent Synod of Bishops for the Amazon.

The Complicity of Colonialists and Multi-National Traders

The same goes for multi-national traders and colonialists who have extracted valuable resources from across the Pacific and other parts of the globe, have made companies billions but coming at a sometimes-catastrophic cost on food sources and

livelihoods. The complicity of multinational corporations that aid and abet international crimes such as crimes against humanity, war crimes, and genocide are mind boggling when they come to the extractive industries, that is, oil, gas or mining.

It is happening as we speak. In a few months’ time, the biggest seabed mining will begin in the South Pacific by a Canadian company — The Metals Company (formerly Deep Green Metals, Inc.). It has been given a license by the International Sea-Bed Mining Authority- giving the company exploration rights to a 74,713 km² block of seabed floor, the biggest in the world, to mine for nickel, cobalt, copper, and manganese...materials for your next smartphone and electric cars!

Sadly, three Pacific Island nations—the Republic of Nauru, the Republic of Kiribati and now the Kingdom of Tonga—are partnering with The Metals Company, “promising” locals’ opportunities for employment, capacity building and royalties from future productions. Seriously, you go figure at the potential violence on the interrelatedness of the deep ocean ecosystem.

In 2013, the British Government for the first time in history has formally apologized for colonial crimes and offered financial recompense to colonial victims in Kenya, East Africa. Let’s not forget the massacre of thousands of Indians by the British Colonialists in Amritsar on April 13, 1919. Today the Indian Government is still waiting for an apology. You know sometimes our best actions are those which admit our complicity and are marked by a spirit of genuine repentance and humility (Jim Wallis, *Sojourners*, 2401-15th St, NW, Washington, D.C. 1986

William Cantwell Smith, a leading Protestant figure in religious studies, said, “The wounds that we [Christians in the West] have inflicted on the world in the last 150 years have got to be recognized. Any conference on missions that don’t start with some kind of penitence and real sensitivity to the hurt that we have

inflicted, and continue to inflict, is just not Christian”.

THE PLENARY COUNCIL IN AUSTRALIA



The recent Plenary Council in Australia adopted a call for the Church in Australia to be humble, healing, and merciful within the heart of the people of God. It is a call to be like Jesus Christ, the humble man from Galilee, the gentle healer who touched the wounded and the one who reveals the merciful heart of God the Father to the world. The 2nd Assembly noted that

The distress caused by the Church, through the failings of some members, manifests itself as proud, arrogant, damaging, hierarchical, hypocritical and irrelevant, is far-reaching and antithetical to its true identity.....This pain has many faces: the sexually abused, the Aboriginal Australian, the woman, the homosexual, the divorcee, the drought-ravaged lands, the displaced refugees and the many more who experience alienation, dispossession and suffering (Plenary Council Australia 2022).

New and other forms of violence include clericalism, racism, power hungry priests and bishops, male-centred parishes, gender

violence, downplaying the dignity of women and baptismal priesthood of the faithful, cultural genocide, greed etc.

To contemplate these faces and sit in the uncomfortable place of our pain is challenging and burdensome, but it can also be a great privilege and blessing. Faith and grace allow us to connect with pain through the reality of the Paschal Mystery.

The suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus allow us to confront the horror of trauma, loss and grief, with the promise of hope, redemption, and new life. C.S. Lewis spoke on the power of pain to bring clarity of focus.

We can ignore even pleasure, but pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures and speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.

(C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*)

Whatever people are saying about the ‘would-be decrees’ of the Plenary Council, for me it was an opportunity for the Spirit to rouse the Church in Australia to a new awakening of its ever-urgent mission to witness Jesus Christ in a violent and hurting world.

CULTURALLY AWARE APPROACH

We, the Divine Word Missionaries will be holding our nineteenth General Chapter in 2024 in Rome. The theme for the GC XIX is “**Your Light Must Shine Before Others**” (Mt 5:16): **Faithful and Creative Disciples in a Wounded World.**” Prioritizing a wounded world as a context for Christian mission orients missional attention, and I recommend a strong culturally sensitive approach to addressing violence. “Violence is unacceptable as a solution to problems. It destroys the life, the dignity, and the freedom of human beings (Pope John Paul 2).

In 1948, the international community endorsed basic human rights principles. Despite diverse cultures and circumstances, UN Member States

agreed on the fundamental dignity and equality of all human beings. The domain of culture has also emerged as a potent area of discussion and the subject of interfaith declarations. We need to be fully aware of a more culturally sensitive mission approach to violence in our communities to achieve better and more sustainable results (Australian Human Rights Commission, Universal Declaration of Human Rights).

For instance, I was involved in a capacity building project in Alice Springs for ten years on violence prevention programs arising from alcohol misuse. Together with Aboriginal elders, a spot in the Simpson's desert would be allocated for an intensive culturally based problem-solving programme. Young people would be taught ancient skills of tracking, hunting and survival while refraining from mobile phone usage and social media interaction. We would also incorporate activities that highlighted major events of oppression of Aboriginal people, e.g., Police brutality, death in custody, stolen generation, Black lives Matter.

These young Aboriginal peoples would be educated not just in conflict resolution and anger management skills training, but on the atrocities committed against their people, their culture, to better appreciate their ancestors' strength, who endured such human suffering so that the knowledge is transferred to them to stress the resistance of oppression and violence. The simple idea is obviously not to humiliate the youth but to care for them and integrate them back into society. It's not by winning over him but by winning him over.

Establishing strong bonds between the Aboriginal youth and their community is crucial. Post prison days are spent reconnecting the young men and women in leadership training and community service projects and sometimes these programmes engage participants in becoming activists for social change in their community.

Real "success" in mission depends on a willingness to listen carefully & patiently and invest time in understanding how people of other cultures think about violence, what they believe about violence and how they behave. It requires an understanding of the formal and informal power structures underpinning cultures of the world. This often means active listening, engaging in authentic dialogue, and sharing knowledge and insights with community groups and influential individuals, including political or religious leaders, before jointly planning to move ahead on any project. It also entails identifying the positive, as well as challenging, cultural values, assets, expressions, and power structures.

"Tolerance, inter-cultural dialogue and respect for diversity are more essential than ever in a world where peoples are becoming more and more closely interconnected."

—Kofi Annan, Former Secretary-General of the United Nations

My experiences have shown that when you deal with culturally sensitive issues, you have no choice but to be as careful and as patient as possible. Every concern should be addressed properly. Otherwise, greater problems emerge at later times when nothing can be done.

Fr Stephan Bevans SVD writes, "All theology is culturally conditioned. ...We cannot effectively communicate the gospel in other cultures unless we can de-robe the gospel of its North American clothes and re-clothe it in the host culture", Stephen Bevans.

It's Christianity with an Asian Face! It's Christianity with a Pacific Face! It's Christianity with an Australian face! It's Christianity with an African face!



When Pope Francis, soon after his election, said, **“I see the church as a field hospital after battle,”** he, perhaps unconsciously moved beyond traditional Catholic encouragement of the corporal works of mercy to acknowledging the violence we have caused to the many faces of Christ in cultures.

Francis has also sought to revitalize Catholic mission, namely, **“mission correction”**, described his efforts to address problems of understanding and motivation. Francis indicates that there are ecclesial structures, habits, and attitudes that can directly hamper evangelization. Put simply, in our intention to be faithful and in our intention to be missionary, some things Christians in fact do are often counter missionary in their effects and damage the church’s relationship with the potential recipients of the Gospel.

The problem, in essence, is the church’s “Pharisee problem.” That is, the church often comes across looking and sounding more like the stereotyped scribes and Pharisees of the Gospels than Jesus himself. One often sees, in other words, too much policing and not enough pastoring, too much defending the faith and not enough open-handed sharing of the faith, too much protecting borders and not enough crossing boundaries.

INTERRELIGIOUS SOLIDARITY

People of different religions and cultures live side by side in almost every part of the world, and most of us have overlapping

identities which unite us with very different groups. We can love what we are, without hating what – and who – we are not. We can thrive in our own tradition, even as we learn from others, and come to respect their teachings.

—Kofi Annan, Former Secretary-General of the United Nations

COMMUNAL QUESTION: What does it mean for Christians to love and serve our fellow human beings in a world in which the COVID-19 pandemic has inflicted widespread suffering?

At a time, such as this, the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) call upon the followers of Jesus Christ to love and serve our neighbours. We focus on the importance of doing so in solidarity also with those who profess and practice religions that are different from our own or consider themselves unaffiliated to any faith tradition.

I have no single thread of doubt in my mind that the global challenge of responding to this pandemic of violence calls us to **increased ecumenical and interreligious awareness and cooperation**. There is no other way. It’s either we rise together in solidarity or fall together in shame for fear of trying.

Anthony Le Duc SVD writes “The COVID-19 pandemic has presented a particularly urgent need for religions to take an active role in



addressing the crisis. Although the pandemic is a time in which religious institutions are as much victims of the crisis as they are agents of addressing the problem, the conditions of the pandemic oftentimes disrupt the ability of religious leaders to engage with their followers and to communicate with one another” (Le Duc, Anthony, Religious Engagement in the COVID-19 Pandemic (June 2, 2021).

Let’s focus on the Parable of the Good Samaritan.

The parable of the Good Samaritan (cf. Luke 10:25-37) helps us to reflect on the question, **“Whom are we called to love and care for?”** and offers guidance about the complexities implied in the terms “service” and “solidarity.”

The story is an invitation to reflect on the need to transcend boundaries in one’s service to, and solidarity with, the victims of violence. It is also a call to overcome the negative assumptions we may hold and to recognize with humility and gratitude that the ‘other’ (the Samaritan in this case) may show us the true meaning of service and solidarity.

This parable challenges Christians to think about how to live in a world wounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, and by the scourge of religious intolerance, discrimination, racism, economic and ecological injustice and many other sins.

We need to ask ourselves: who is wounded, and whom have we wounded or neglected? And where might we be surprised by seeing Christ-like compassion in action?

This story urges us to overcome religious prejudice and cultural biases in relation both to those whom we serve, and to those with whom we serve, as we strive to alleviate suffering and to restore healing and wholeness in a pluralistic world. At the same time, it gives us hope that is central to our faith and the way we live it out, when we realize that it is Christ himself, as the unexpected

‘other’ – the Samaritan – who is offering His help to the wounded one.

The heightened awareness of our shared vulnerability is a call to new forms of solidarity reaching across all boundaries. We rejoice that Christians, as well as people of all faiths and goodwill, are collaborating to construct a culture of compassion, reaching out to the needy and the vulnerable with material, psychological and spiritual assistance, at the individual as well as institutional levels. Because we are one human family, we are all related as brothers and sisters and are co-inhabitants of the earth, our common home. Our interdependence reminds us that no one can be saved on their own.

For Christians, interreligious solidarity is a way both of living out Jesus Christ’s commandment to love the other, and to follow the example of the one we follow, Jesus the Christ. He came not to be served but to serve (Matthew 20:28)

FAITHFULNESS

“Be faithful in small things because it is in them that your strength lies. God hasn’t called me to be successful. He’s called me to be faithful”, Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta.

COMMUNAL QUESTION: How do you stay faithful when things get worse at the ongoing violence across the globe?

Let’s learn from Joseph in Genesis 37-41.

The Book of Genesis chapters 37–41 tell the low and high points of Joseph’s Egyptian slavery and imprisonment. He spent at least 12 years there before he suddenly became the Egyptian Prime Minister. And during that terribly lonely, desolate time, things seemed to go from bad to worse because of violence perpetrated on him. From being betrayed by his brothers, the separation from his father, thrown into a pit with snakes and scorpions, sold to a caravan of Ishmaelites, becoming an indentured servant, framed by his master’s

wife and thrown into prison, Joseph dreaded the night in this foul Egyptian hellhole. Darkness had swallowed the light from Joseph's life. It was hard to fight off the relentless hopelessness as he waited the escape of sleep.

Day after monotonous day passed with no sign of change. The familiar desperation surged hot in his chest. His youth was seeping out the cracks of his cage. He was pacing in his soul. Joseph wanted to scream.

And he remembered.

It was the remembering that kept his hope alive and bitterness at bay. He rehearsed the stories of God that had filled him with awe as a child. According to Joseph's reflection, God was always faithful to his word and eventually delivered Jacob and brought him back to the Promised Land a wealthy man.

In other words, Joseph could not shake the deep conviction that God meant to bring those dreams to pass. And he could not deny the strange pattern he saw in God's dealings with his forebears. God made stunning promises and then ordained time and circumstances to work in such ways as to make the promises seem impossible to fulfill. And then God moved.

Faith-fuelled peace drenched the anxious fire in Joseph's chest. **"I believe you, my God,"** he whispered. **"Like my forefathers, I will wait for you. I have no idea what my being in an Egyptian prison has to do with your purposes but I will keep honouring you here where you have placed me. Bring your word to pass as it seems best to you. I am yours. Use me!"**

Sometimes faithfulness to God and his word sets us on a course where circumstances get worse, not better. It is then that knowing God's promises and his ways are crucial. Faith in God's future grace for us is what sustains us in those desperate moments. Our struggle for justice and peace is not ultimately about winning or losing but about fidelity. Jesus does not want us to win but we do know

what the Gospel tells us, namely, that we ourselves must be loving, charitable, understanding, compassionate, forgiving and morally integral in our private lives.

Whatever awaits us in our participation in a wounded world, however dismal or successful, are not our story's end. They are chapters in a much larger story that really does have a happily ever after. Hope, and not anger must direct our actions and reminding ourselves of Psalm 58, "Surely there is a God who rules the earth".

CONCLUSION

As people of mission, we can neither close our eyes to the reality of violence nor should we despair. We can still believe in the power and the promise of Shalom offered by the Wounded Saviour on the Cross on Easter Sunday morning, or the south African philosophy of ubuntu as an alternative to hatred, violence, and divisions.

The unique and awesome truth about human history is that it can become creative or destructive, healing or damaging. This is the risk of Incarnation, the mystery of the Vulnerable God in our midst.

Our shared yearning across religions therefore is part of the united call for transforming hearts that reconciles the broken and troubled world. Priests, Prophets, Kings, Imams, Theologians, Mystics and Christian disciples are now called to rise and play their creative role in making every community the "light of the world" - towards a "new heaven and a new earth." (Matthew 5:13-16, Rev 21)

In the light of the Cross, it means called to repent of both our misuse of power and our use of the wrong kind of power in mission. Let's not be afraid to confront every theology and mission strategy that glorifies money, power, success, and greed (Jørgensen 2012:297).

At the end of the day, the great modern-day prophets of social justice such as Gandhi, Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton, Gustavo Gutierrez, Oscar Romero, Jim Wallis, and Richard Rohr, would all agree **that we all must make a vow of love**. Love, not anger, is the fuel for nonviolence and non-violence is the only possible basis for a new world order of justice and peace. Love conquers all.

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Mission and Context - Theology in the Age of Empire
By Jione Havea (Edited by), Collin Cowan (Foreword by), Peter Cruchley (Contributions by), Jione Havea (Contributions by)

Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 2013 apostolic exhortation "On the proclamation of the Gospel in today's world". 24 November 2013

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Mission Experience: A Journey to Encounter God in the Face of Others

Agustinus Bu'u Araujo Siga, SVD



Introduction

The church is missionary by its very nature because it itself is the result of the overflowing love of God, expressed in the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit (*Ad Gentes 2*). Hence, mission is fundamentally an invitation to every member of the church to take part in doing God's mission (*Missio Dei*) to the people. My understanding about mission emerged when I joined the Divine Word Missionary congregation five years ago. I was taught the meaning of mission through lectures and other opportunities to do mission in a particular way. In this case study paper, I want to share my experiences in doing mission in Indonesia. It was my mission encounters in a place called Maumere that I would reflect upon.

My Mission Experience

Religious life in Divine Word Missionaries is a life dedicated to mission. As a member of this congregation in my previous formation house in Indonesia, all the seminarians were encouraged to do a pastoral ministry which is an important aspect of religious life. For a certain time, we were given a chance by the formators to experience life in mission. Weber states in his writing on formation for intercultural mission:

for those in formation for cross-cultural/intercultural mission, such an internship, should be done by engaging the formandi in an intercultural missionary situation. This program gives the person the opportunity to apply the intellectual learning of culture in real-life situations, and further deepens the psychological/emotional strength needed for a life of intercultural mission.

When I was in my second year of philosophy in Indonesia, I was involved in an evangelization activity where we were given a chance to go to a rural area to teach the people how to lead a prayer service every Sunday, based on the readings. We were encouraged to live with the people and take part in their daily activities which were really important as we got to experience the life and spirituality of the people. Before immersing we had to be prepared by our formators. They coached us on how to deal with people in different situations and how to assist them in preparing liturgical prayers based on the Bible.

The place that I went to was called *Natarmude* in their local language, which means “the villages full of Lemon.” *Natar* means village and *mude* means lemon. This place was a rural area near the mountain in the middle of Flores Island, East Nusa Tenggara. The people are said to have come from *Tana Ai* since they have a particular traditions and customs which are really different compared to those people who came from the same regency. *Natarmude* was located far from the city. It took three hours for us to get from our seminary to this place. We could not go by bus since the road was very narrow and rocky. We could only drive a special motorbike and sometimes we needed to go on foot. There were not many people in this place. To be specific, there were only about 300 people living in this area. Due to lack of infrastructure, there was no regular mass service in this place. The priest would come only on special occasions such as Christmas and Easter. However, they do have a vintage small chapel which was built by a former SVD missionary from Germany known as Father

Nissen. Every Sunday, they would just assemble for a simple liturgical prayer led by a male catechist.

I stayed in this place for one month. I shared a lot of stories and life experiences with them. Every Saturday, I would get them together and assist them in how to have liturgical prayer without a priest. I tried to involve as many people as possible from various age groups. Then on Sunday, I would encourage them to take part in the liturgical prayer. I would divide them into smaller groups and in each group, every person was to do at least one service, for instance in the capacity as a reader or a leader. The main purpose for doing this was for them to learn how to meet their own spiritual needs on their own and simultaneously help each other to meet God through their individual and communal prayer. It was helpful that I brought along with me a kind of a guidebook which had been prepared by the bible animation coordinator of the seminary. In addition, I also did some pastoral ministry with the children. In Indonesia there was a well-known activity known as SEKAMI involving children within the church and. Literally, SEKAMI means the pontifical society of missionary childhood. It is about having fun activities with children such as singing, dancing or storytelling where we try to introduce them to the bible and mission work of the church.

During the weekday, I spent most of my time with the family with whom I stayed. I frequently went to the farm with them as I realized that farming was the only thing that helped them survive. Sometimes I would help them in selling their agricultural products in the traditional market. Then I came to realise that their life was very much a journey of struggle. It was not easy for them to earn money for a living. In the process, I got to learn more about their culture, their values and their faith through my everyday interaction with them. In the afternoons, I would join the youth group to play soccer or volleyball and then we would go straight to the river to bathe. I also frequently went to visit the sick people of the village. Most of them were the elders. We prayed together and spent time sharing stories. Some of them spoke in the local

language which I could not understand. However, the most important thing was that I was there with them, listening to whatever they were saying and supporting them in their difficult time.

My reflections on my missionary experiences

- **Mission as Reciprocal Communication**

Sometimes it was hard for me to understand their actions or their way of thinking. However, I still got to know them. I tried to put myself in their shoes. I tried to think from their perspectives, and I tried to feel, based on how they might feel about their problems in life. Somehow, I felt like it was not me who was trying to assist them. It was them who taught me many things about life in many concrete ways. The lesson here is that mission is not only a journey of a person to find the real self but also a reciprocal process. As we gain benefits from interacting with those whom we encounter, we also hope that they find something valuable from us through our life and action. Mission should be mutual and a two-way communication.

- **Mission as Inculturation**

In "Constant and Context", Stephen Bevans suggests that a spirituality of inculturation is needed to guide Christians through the heady but difficult task of allowing Christian faith and local context to encounter one another authentically. Therefore, I find that this mission was truly a meaningful chance for me to be a witness of Christian faith through dialogue and living with the people. In this way, I was enriched by other people's culture and spirituality. I tried to live how they were living, eat what they were eating and feel what they were feeling.

- **Mission as the Spirituality of Passing Over**

Milmanda states: "Missionary life is characterised by the centrifugal movement which leads one to cross geographic and linguistic frontiers." Consequently, as a missionary, I need to leave my comfort zone and try to deal with new and different situations that will really enrich my perspectives of life. Moreover, I need to leave behind my own expectations and try to adapt

into new situations just as how Jesus did in the gospels. Sometimes I tend to bring along with me many things but in reality, I only need to come like an empty glass because in the mission, I will be filled up by the many experiences I will have with the people.

- **Mission as a Preferential Option for the poor**

Gittins states that respect for boundaries or margins, is however only part of our responsibility to each other. It must always serve a greater and explicitly apostolic purpose, for instance, committed outreach, human contact, engagement and solidarity with "the other". In line with this, I always think that our mission should be embodied in our action. That's the real witness of being missionary. Spirituality of presence is very important. The whole life of Jesus was poured out in ministry at the margins. Jesus made choices in favour of those who were in the margins, the women and men who were victims of economic, political or religious circumstances. This was his preferential option for the poor.

Conclusion

In summary, mission actually is a journey to find God in the face of the people. In other words, mission is also a passion to relate well with God and with his people. It requires encounter and right relationship between people. In doing so, we need to realise that the mission we bring is fundamentally God's mission. It encourages us to share the love of the Holy Triune God with the world. At the end of the day, we will always be enriched by the reciprocal aspect of mission.

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DORISH MARU COLLEGE - WINTER BREAK EXPERIENCE

*Agustinus Bu'u Araujo Siga
& Neftali Velasco Fabian*

After two years of pandemic, we finally got the opportunity to travel out of Victoria as a formation community. During the winter break this year, we had a wonderful opportunity to explore many places in two different states of Australia: Queensland and New South Wales. During this time, we visited different SVD Parishes and confreres; shared our vocational stories with the parishioners and shared our lives with lovely families. Also, as part of our holidays, we attended a series of seminars and a silent retreat. We, as students, are grateful for having had these experiences.

The Journey Begins...

The journey of our winter break programme began on the 21st June. We departed from Melbourne as early as 5 am; and arrived in Sydney at around 5 pm. It was a long trip, but we really enjoyed the scenery and the beautiful landscape that we saw along the way. We stayed at Marsfield, our central community in Sydney, which enabled us to get in touch with our senior confreres. We shared stories during our mealtimes and introduced ourselves to our senior confreres. The next day, we had the chance to explore the city. For some of us it was our first time. We were so excited to see new things. We spent almost the whole day walking around the city and taking a lot of beautiful pictures. In various places of the city. The most beautiful part of that day was probably catching the sunset from the Sydney Opera House and the Harbour Bridge.

Brisbane

From Sydney, we headed north to the city of Brisbane. We created so many beautiful memories there. We were warmly welcomed

by our SVD confreres and parishioners. We stayed at St Mark's Parish, Inala, for a week. We were divided and allocated to three different Vietnamese families. On the one hand, that was quite challenging since we had never met them before. However, we slowly built communication with them until we felt almost at home. We were no longer strangers or guests but part of the families. We got to know each other by sharing stories and love.



On that weekend we participated in the parish's Eucharistic celebrations in which we presented our stories of vocation, usually after a short homily. Each one of us shared our stories at different times. We also prepared a short videoclip to show the parishioners what life is like at DMC. We visited St Maximilian Kolbe, another parish under the care of the SVDs in Marsden. Besides sharing vocational stories, we sang a communion song during the Mass. After the mass, we had a gathering with the youth, and we shared dinner. At St Mark's parish, Inala, we participated in three Masses. The parishioners were so excited to hear our stories. Both parishes have people with different cultural backgrounds. They were very generous and kind to us. Moreover, in St Mark's parish we had a special gathering with the youth. This activity was organized by Fr. Yon Wiryono, SVD, who is the current Vocation director of the SVD Australia province. That was a wonderful opportunity to get to know many young people in the parish. We encouraged and enriched each other with our

stories. One of the great outcomes of this activity was the chance to create new friendship networks.

It would have been impossible to skip a nice tour around the beautiful city of Brisbane. We spent a whole day relaxing and exploring different views. We also spent another day at the Gold Coast, which is famous for its beautiful beaches and warm weather. Another day we went on a pilgrimage to the Marian Valley, which is in the countryside. In this place there were grottos dedicated to Mother Mary of different countries. We prayed the rosary together for our vocation.

That night, we were invited to have a special dinner together with the Auxiliary Bishop of Brisbane, Fr. Tim Norton, SVD. It was hosted by the Holy Spirit sisters in Carseldine. As we gathered in the love of St. Arnold Janssen, we shared our experiences and encouraged each other to live faithfully in our mission. We spent our last day in Brisbane in visiting the SVD former novitiate and cemetery in Marburg. Then, we had a farewell party in the house of a lovely Vietnamese family.

Returning to Sydney

After creating great memories in Brisbane, we had another beautiful week in Sydney. Like our activity in Brisbane, we also participated in weekend masses in two SVD parishes: Macquarie Fields, which is taken care of by Fathers Bosco Son, SVD, and Gideon, SVD; and Ingleburn Parish, which is taken care of by Fr. Henry Adler, SVD. The visit to our SVD confreres and parishes was a good way for us to gain more experiences and wisdom, which are important for our future as Divine Word Missionaries.

This time we also had the opportunity to explore the city of Sydney a little more. Unfortunately, heavy rain prevented us from doing many other activities throughout the week. However, we still got the chance to visit our SVD cemetery in Marsfield. Another day we went to visit the house and tomb of St Mary

Mackillop, the first Australian saint. We concluded our journey in Sydney by having a farewell party and dinner together with our senior confreres in the Marsfield community. It was lovely to see the students and the senior confreres playing music and singing together. That event made us realise the richness of our missionary family, which is expressed in different ways in our communities.

Combining our Holidays with Ongoing Formation

An important part of our winter holidays consisted of a series of seminars and talks held in Sydney. All of them were intended to help us, as SVD students, get a deeper understanding of mission in the world. Through these activities, we had the opportunity to meet wonderful Divine Word Missionaries working, or having worked, in various ministries and in distinct parts of the world.

The first talk was given by Fr Ennio Montovani, originally from Italy, who spent a great part of his life as a missionary in Papua New Guinea. Overall, he emphasised the importance of respecting and learning how to appreciate the local people's cultures. In this context, he shared with us some of the challenges, but also great moments, he himself experienced as a young missionary in PNG. What surprised us the most was how his concept of mission changed overtime as he gradually became more involved with the local people. We learned that being a missionary implies openness and willingness to learn from other cultures. Fr Ennio wanted us to realise that humility and respect are two important values that we, as future Divine Word Missionaries, should cultivate and treasure.

The next day we were honoured with the presence of three brilliant SVD scholars and amazing human beings: Christian Tauchner SVD, Anthony Le Duc SVD and Steve Bevans SVD. Firstly, Christian, who had been a missionary in Latin America for many years, shared with us his current experience working

in our SVD Missiological Institute located in Germany. Some of the tasks he is involved in are the edition of VERBUM, an SVD magazine, and the edition and publication of SVD books in different languages. Through his sharing, we also reflected on the concept of *Missio Dei* as an important aspect of our role in the Church. Secondly, Anthony, based in Thailand, presented a summary of his work as a missionary. Besides teaching at the Seminary, he is also part of the Asian Centre for Social Communications. The latter aims to study the role of social communication in the Asian context and to promote research. Anthony has also edited several books in English and Vietnamese. His presence encouraged us to be active participants in the active promotion of academic studies and interreligious dialogue. Lastly, Steve, who came from Chicago, shared with us, with great passion, his reflections on the themes of *Missio Dei* and Prophetic Dialogue. Most students were familiar with some of Steve's works about mission because he is a prolific writer. Through his presentation, we were invited to reflect on these concepts to integrate them into our missionary work in the future.

During our last day in Sydney, we met Elmer Ibarra SVD, who is currently based in Santa Teresa Parish located in Central Australia. The highlights of his presentation included his involvement with some indigenous groups of Australia. He presented some of the learning experiences and challenges he has had through his ministry. For some of us this was the first time we encountered this ministry. We got to know how we can learn so much from the first inhabitants of this land through our missionary work.

Back in Melbourne, we travelled to the Arnold Janssen Spirituality Centre, located in Boronia. Having had some fun and been active during our trip to Sydney and Brisbane, we spent some time in retreat. It lasted for a week, and during this time we had the opportunity to reflect on our personal lives and vocation. We

were led by Father Victor, the parish priest of St Augustine Parish. We learned so much from his extensive experience and his values. After this period, we came back home to meet the new members of our community who had arrived recently from Vietnam. We look forward to continuing to have great experiences through the various activities that we undertake.

Seafarer Apostolate in Melbourne

Ruel Bancoro SVD

Seminarian Ruel Bancoro arrived in Melbourne last March 2022 to finish the second half of his degree as a Master of Theology. Covid-19 delayed his entry but he was able to finish the first year of his academic program online. He is a registered nurse and a general practitioner and after finishing his degree this year, he will return to the Philippines and resume his works with the urban poor and marginalised sectors in Cebu City under the JPIC arm of the SVD Southern Province



Arriving here in Australia from the Philippines this year to continue my theological studies at Yarra Theological Union, it felt strange that I would not be doing any of the medical apostolate works I used to do with the poor and marginalised back home. In our local SVD community here in Dorish Maru College (DMC) Melbourne, there is a program where

seminarians are encouraged to go out of the seminary and reach out to others. It is a once-a-week apostolate ministry which is different from parish work. This program was put on hold during the pandemic and the atmosphere when I arrived in DMC was still that of caution. Still, the house was discerning how seminary activities could be gradually restarted to reinforce the various dimensions of vocation and formation for, indeed, formation of seminarians does not happen in a bubble. Theological learnings ought to be grounded in sound practice in the hope that seminarians would have a better grasp of what a holistic religious missionary life ought to be.

When the apostolate ministry of DMC was allowed to resume, we applied to the Salvation Army kitchen program for the homeless but some problems in the Human Resources department delayed the acceptance of volunteers. Eventually, three of us chose the Stella Maris Seafarer's Centre which is located at the Melbourne Central Business District, less than fifteen minutes away from most of the Melbourne ports. The management and staff were delighted to welcome volunteers especially seminarians because the seafarer apostolate is one of the missionary works supported by the local church of Melbourne. Our own confrere, Brisbane Auxiliary Bishop Tim Norton SVD has been named recently as the new Bishop Promoter for Stella Maris Australia.

Our primary work with Stella Maris is to visit the ships docked in the different ports. We accompany the point person in the field, June Villadolid, a former seafarer himself, in anticipating the needs and addressing the problems and concerns of the seafarers. While they are here in Melbourne ports, these ships and the seafarers on board are bound by local maritime laws and we make sure that they follow them in issues such as seafarers' rights and responsibilities, safety, physical and mental health. We make sure that they are allowed to leave the ships on their day off, pick them up and drop them back to their ship

gates. Aside from the regular transportation provided by the Centre, the seafarers can also avail themselves of the other facilities and services inside the Centre such as the short term accommodation, chapel and chaplain counselling, souvenir shop, liquor bar, sports facilities (billiard table), sim card registration, internet connection and even a money exchange service. Recently, the Centre added a much-needed vaccination program for the seafarers. The Centre's strategic location within the business district also allows the seafarers to conveniently unwind within the city and buy whatever they need before they return to their respective ships.

The significance of this apostolate ministry can be appreciated when one sees the joy and excitement in the faces of seafarers as they welcome guests who visit and interact with them. Seafarers are unique workers themselves as they usually stay on board away from their families and their countries for a long period of time. They have their own challenges and struggles in their work environment, so interaction with others whenever there is a chance, provides a much needed break from their monotonous routine.



Ruel on the left

I hope

Krisna Papalesa



Time flies fast and we cannot hold onto it as much as we want to. However, I have within me this hope that at the end of it all, my life will all be well spent. My name is Antonius Kristanto Papalesa, I was born on 16 September 1995 in Jakarta. I have four sisters and three brothers. I love playing musical instruments, singing, learning languages, reading histories, and also writing poems. I arrived here in the DMC community on the 5th February this year.

When I was in Indonesia I realised how Covid-19 has affected many lives including mine. My student visa to study overseas was delayed for six months because of it. While waiting for my visa, I started an English course with my fellow seminarians Agus, Bertin, Charly, Icong, Vinsen, Will, and Surya who were also waiting for clearance to go to countries like Australia, Chile, Taiwan, and Germany. I found the English language fascinating.

While we were waiting for our visas there were many people who were doubtful of our chances to travel overseas because of the pandemic. I was upset and angry with our circumstances then, however, I did not complain. Instead of complaining about the

bad things that were happening, I prayed to God and asked for patience and understanding. I reminded myself that even though I could not go to Australia, at least I was trusted by my friends and formators who have chosen us to go overseas. Every day I hoped for God's miracle knowing that he chose me and that he would help me in my journey.

Finally, after six months, I heard that Australia has opened up its borders and allowed foreign students to come. It was the most wonderful news I ever heard since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic.



I was anxious the whole time when my friend and I flew from Soekarno Airport in Jakarta and arrived at Tullamarine Airport-Melbourne. When we were picked up by Bill Burt on 5 February 2022 from the airport, I realised that a new chapter of my life had begun in Australia. On our way to the SVD community, Bill oriented us about the daily routines in Dorish Maru College (DMC). Finally, I met my fellow seminarians in DMC: Nepo from Mexico, Cuong from Vietnam, and Peter from China. My first impression of them was that they were friendly and funny.

After two weeks of living at DMC, our academic dean gave me a special task, that of feeding the house birds twice a week. I have been doing this for seven months now and it has become part my routine. It is very enjoyable and fun because the birds seem to be singing with me all the time as I get more

familiar with them. I love how the birds produce unique sounds before and after I feed them. I know that they love me too by the way they make their sweet sounds: “pipit..pit...ciiit citttt!”

As an SVD seminarian I have to learn to keep to my habit of seeing the beauty in simple things, and of hoping for a bright future amidst challenges, through God’s help and providence.



Challenges in my New Journey

Truong Van Thuc

My name is Truong Van Thuc, a Divine Word Missionary seminarian from Nghe An province of Vietnam. I am currently on a formation program to become a priest. I studied philosophy in Saint Dominican Scholasticate for two years and finished this course in 2021. After my training program in the SVD Vietnam Province, I have been chosen to come to Australia for a two-year Overseas Training Program (OTP).

I have been here in Melbourne for four months now. I felt that this is a very good environment for me to train to become a missionary. Everyone here is very friendly, and they have helped me to adjust to a new lifestyle. However, I find myself still challenged in the integration process. Language, culture, and different way of thinking are difficulties and challenges for me. I believe that language is the bridge to understand more the local culture as well as how to be in a multicultural environment. Because my language ability is still very limited, I have sometimes found it difficult to be here during the past few months. But I know that this is also a great opportunity for

me to develop myself. I need more time and to be more open-minded to be able to learn new things.

I am very excited to be here, and I look forward to having many enjoyable experiences while studying and training here in Australia.



With my Vietnamese brothers.

A New Face at DMC

ZuoChuan Yang (Jacob)



I am ZuoChuan Yang, a Divine Word Missionary seminarian. I am from the province of Gansu, a beautiful place in north-central China. I am the second of three siblings. My parents are both farmers, my sister is an accountant, and my brother is a hair stylist. I completed high school back home before joining our congregation.

I arrived in Melbourne on 16th August this year and I am currently studying English language at English Language School for Pastoral Ministry (ELSPM) at Yarra Theological Union. I love it here and I look forward to being a great missionary for SVD in the future.



My Overseas Training Program

Nguyen Ngoc Khanh



I am Anthony Nguyen Ngoc Khanh. I am a seminarian of the Divine Word Missionary congregation or SVD. I came here from Viet Nam where I have a big family with ten members. I am the third among my siblings. I have been with SVD for ten years now.

After finishing my philosophy program, I came here in Australia for my two-year Overseas Training Program (OTP). I have been here for almost four months now. I have been living here in Melbourne in a friendly SVD community where I have been receiving so much help from everyone. Each member of my community has welcomed me like a real member of a family, and I appreciate it a lot. Because of their help, I have been learning and improving so much not only in my English but also in other cultures such as that of Australia, Indonesia, and China. I am adapting well in a very multicultural community.

In the first year of my OTP program, I have been studying English at the English Language School for Pastoral Ministry or ELSPM. In this school, I have been learning many new things that helped me improve in English communication. I am also learning other things such as how to be in an international class setting with different people, languages, and cultures.

Besides the advantages of being here in Melbourne, I also have had some difficulties and challenges. Firstly, I had difficulty with the strange weather because they change so fast

during the day that it makes living here difficult. Moreover, even though there are many kind people helping me, I am still struggling in my English and in learning new cultures that are very different from my own Vietnamese culture. However, when I take my time to learn, I improve slowly but surely every day. I hope that I can better improve my knowledge of English and other cultures in my stay here. I also hope that I can spend more worthy time doing many other valuable activities as a seminarian now in OTP while looking forward to being an active member of the SVD in the future



My classmates in Viet Nam

My Journey

Peter Tran Luong



There are many journeys in our lives. Some travel for holidays, jobs, or studies and others have to travel just to find a safe place to live. Each has his or her own purpose in journeying. I do too! I had a long journey to be here in a

very different country. But I have gone only for the calling of Jesus: “Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch” (Luke 5, 4).

I am Peter Tran Luong, a seminarian of the Divine Word Missionaries or SVD. The first time I learned about our Society was when I was a student at university. I heard some missionaries who came back to Vietnam for their home leave when they were talking about the “mission” where they had been assigned. Since then, I always hoped that one day I would become a missionary myself for the Kingdom of God.

Now that I have entered a religious order, I enjoy being a member of our congregation each day. I know I am not worthy to be a missionary, but God has chosen me to be one. I was sent to experience a new country with different people and culture, to study and to continue my vocation formation. I feel a mix of happiness, excitement, and anxiety for what will be ahead for me. I do not know what will happen to me in the future, but I believe that I will journey with God’s love and will always be under His will.

I have been living here in Melbourne, Australia for nearly four months now. I have experienced different things and they are not too bad at all. What is important is that I am learning a lot of things each day and I am happy with my own journey. I hope I will be able to catch a lot of fish when it is time for me to go out “into deep water” equipped only with Jesus’ words and the spirituality of Divine Word Missionaries.



My brothers and classmates in Vietnam

Finally in Melbourne after Covid-19

Joseph Duong Quoc Khoa



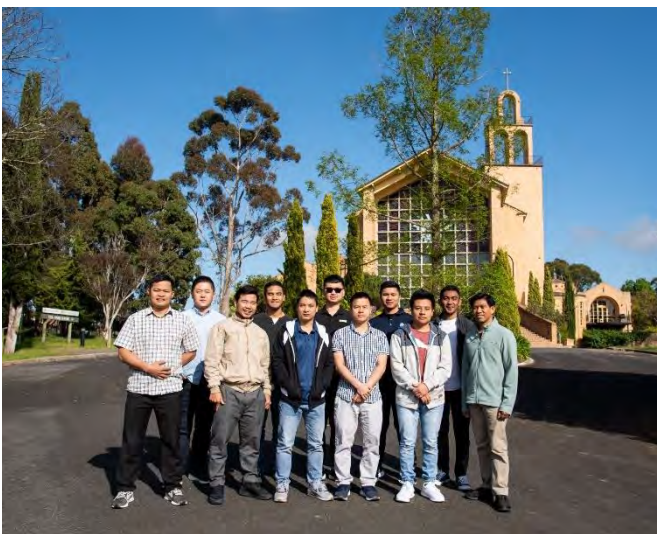
I arrived in Australia last July with three fellow seminarians from Vietnam. I am now continuing my English language studies at ELSPM (English Language for Pastoral Ministry) here in Box Hill, Victoria.

The weather here was so cold when we arrived, but I started to get used to it. The people here are so friendly. This coming summer I will be in Townsville North Queensland to experience life in the parish. There will be a lot of activities to do there, and I am looking forward to it.

I am Joseph Duong Quoc Khoa, 26 years old. I am originally from Vietnam. I am the second of three siblings. After finishing my novitiate last 2020, I was allowed to transfer from SVD Vietnam province to the Australian province. However, the Covid-19 pandemic delayed my travel for one year. During that time, I joined a philosophy class and tried to learn basic English.



Classmates from Vietnam sending us off



Dorish Maru College seminarians for Academic Year 2022

Yun Yang Temple: An Experience of Interreligious Dialogue

Neftali Velasco Fabian



Australia has become an extraordinarily diverse country. This is reflected in the variety of cultures, languages, and religions that can be found in contemporary Australian society. Through migration, people have brought elements of their own cultures, such as religion, to preserve their identity. Buddhism is an example of this phenomenon. This paper presents a report of my visit to Yung Yang Temple, a place where a large group of Chinese Buddhists gather to nourish their spirituality and identity through religious practices. For that purpose, I present a brief historical background of the place; an overview of its main teachings, practices, and activities. Finally, I reflect on my personal experience based on my very first visit to a Buddhist temple

Overview and Historical Background of the Temple



Yun Yang Temple is a Chinese Buddhist place of worship located in Narre Warren North. It is comprised of the main shrine, a meditation hall, a dining hall, a building for retreat purposes, and a large garden.¹ Since the complex is located on the outskirts of the city, it gives the feeling of being a quiet and relaxing place. It was founded twenty-seven years ago under the guidance of the Venerable Master Ru-Sun. He came to Australia in response to an invitation made by Chinese Buddhist people who were already established in this country.² So, the Yun Yang Temple was built to fulfil the community's spiritual needs and promote Buddhism in Australia.

According to the temple's website, the place was originally intended to cultivate Ch'an practices. With the increasing number of attendees, it was decided to include Pure Land practices as well.³ The Ch'an tradition focuses on practices that lead individuals to discover their Buddha nature. This stream of Buddhism emphasises the role of meditation towards illumination.⁴ In other words, the objective of meditation is to awaken each person's true self. On the other hand, those who belong to the Pure Land tradition believe

¹ Yun Yang Temple, "Guide Map," accessed 01 September 2022, <https://www.yunyangtemple.org.au/australia/guide-map>.

² Yun Yang Temple, "About Us," accessed 01 September 2022, <https://www.yunyangtemple.org.au/australia/about>.

³ "About Us."

⁴ Encyclopedia Britannica, "Zen: Buddhism," accessed 30 August 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Zen>.

in rebirth and invoke the Amitabha Buddha through various rituals.⁵ For this purpose, the Pure Land tradition includes practices such as chanting and ceremonies that lead people into an immersive experience.

Main Teachings and Practices

Basic teachings apply to all followers of Buddhism, regardless of their particular traditions. Firstly, all Buddhist people find refuge in the 'triple gems': Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. The first gem refers to the person of Buddha, the second one refers to the teachings of Buddhism, and the third gem is the community of disciples.⁶ Also, according to Buddhist teaching, there are four truths that influence the course of human life. The 'Four Noble Truths' are summarised as follows.

- Suffering as a reality
- Craving is the cause of suffering
- If craving ends, suffering ends
- The path to enlightenment liberates the human person from craving and suffering.⁷

In addition, early Buddhist communities had already formulated a path comprised of eight concrete actions that lead to liberation. They are classified into wisdom, moral and mental practices.⁸ All of these elements lead the human person to liberation from suffering.

The Yun Yang Temple emphasises specific Buddhist values and practices through concrete actions. Firstly, they encourage

people to become aware of their own destinies and realising that one cannot change them by convenience. This will only be possible by living the present moment to the full. Secondly, they encourage people to accept whatever life offers them with joy; including their destiny. This is achieved by understanding how the principle of cause-effect works; which is so important to understand Buddhism. This is known as 'karma'. Lastly, the previous values lead the human person to become more aware of their responsibilities and work towards fulfilling them.⁹ These main values offer a particular interpretation of life from which the Chinese Buddhist followers of this temple find meaning and inspiration.

Activities of the Yun Yang Temple

The temple hosts several activities and events that bring the Chinese Buddhist community together. Their schedule is divided into two main sections.¹⁰ The first section is dedicated to their weekly "Routine Dharma Practice". This is comprised of a cycle of various acts of worship and religious-spiritual practices. Examples of these practices are sutra recitations, offerings, and chanting ceremonies. These practices belong to the Pure Land Buddhist tradition. There is also a meditation session every Sunday. The latter corresponds to the Cha'an Buddhist practices. The second part of the temple's schedule is comprised of ceremonies with specific dates during the year. They are related to the life of Buddha and the identity of the Buddhist community around the world. Examples of

⁵ Encyclopedia Britannica, "Pure Land Buddhism," accessed 30 August 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Yogachara>.

⁶ Luis O. Gomez, "Buddhism in India," in *The Religious Traditions of Asia: Religion, History, and Culture*, ed. Joseph Kitagawa (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2007), 46.

⁷ Joshua J. Mark, "Four Noble Truths," World History Encyclopedia, accessed 28 August 2022, https://www.worldhistory.org/Four_Noble_Truths/.

⁸ Gomez, "Buddhism in India," 48.

⁹ Yun Yang Temple, "Yun Yang Values," accessed 03 September 2022, <https://www.yunyangtemple.org.au/australia/yun-yang-values#>.

¹⁰ Yun Yang Temple, "2022 Activities Schedule," accessed 03 September 2022, <https://www.yunyangtemple.org.au/australia/news/2021-activities-schedule>.

these events are the Buddha's birthday ceremonies and the Enlightenment ceremony.

Moreover, the members of the temple carry out several activities directly related to practising their teachings. Firstly, members are encouraged to attend the services together with their families. The main purpose is to promote Buddhist teachings and values in their own families. Secondly, there are activities that foster interaction between the elders and the new generations of the community. For example, there are birthday celebrations and the celebration of Chinese traditions. Through these activities, the community teaches the new generations the importance of respecting and honouring the elders. In addition, there is a team of volunteers from the community dedicated to making visits and providing spiritual care to the sick.¹¹

My Experience

To get a very general understanding of Buddhism, I joined two different activities at the temple: a Pure Land chanting ceremony and a Cha'an meditation session. This is my experience:

As soon as I arrived at the temple, I was greeted in my first encounter with some members of the community who were all women. This was rather surprising to me since I had only seen pictures of Buddhist men before. All of them were wearing white clothes. The first challenge I faced was related to language and communication. Almost all of them were speaking in Mandarin. Therefore, I could not ask many questions at that time. Thankfully, I was accompanied by another person whose first language was Mandarin. So, he was able to introduce me to the community and, at the same time, translate

what the members said to me. They welcomed us into their community.

I went up to the main shrine and waited for the Amitabha Chanting to start. At the entrance, I was welcomed by one of the leaders of the community. I was asked to take off my shoes, and so I did. Inside the shrine, there were three women wearing brown clothes at the front. They were facing a big statue of Buddha, located right in the centre. There were no chairs but only long kneeling cushions. So, I did not know whether I had to kneel or not. Anyway, the ceremony began, and there were different times in which people bowed down to the floor and stood up in reverence. At first, I was hesitant to follow their movements. However, I eventually felt confident to do what they were doing. The biggest challenge I faced was the language. I was given a book written completely in Chinese. Even though I did not understand the meaning of the words that they were singing, I was able to enjoy the melody. The singing went on for an hour. And having sung about two hundred pages, the ceremony came to an end. After this, I had the opportunity to talk to one of the members of the community, who kindly told me about his experience participating in this weekly activity. He said that the songs contain teachings of Buddhism. So, through repetition, people learn from them and apply them to their lives.

The second activity was a meditation session. Because of my previous experience participating in the chanting ceremony, I was a little hesitant to join the session. I knew that, again, I would not understand anything because of the language barrier. Fortunately, the Master in charge of the meditation session came to greet us and motivated us to participate. She said that, even though the

¹¹ Yun Yang Temple, "Temple's Aims," accessed 03 September 2022,

<https://www.yunyangtemple.org.au/australia/temples-aims>.

session would be conducted entirely in Chinese, I would be able to follow by looking at her gestures. Then, I entered the room and the session started. I was the only person who was not Chinese in the room. However, there was a particular gesture from the Master that surprised me. She gave some explanations in English, alongside the usual Chinese instructions. This made me feel welcomed into the community. I also felt very special because that meant to me that she cared



about my presence in the room. The session went on for an hour. After all, I enjoyed the activity because it was something I had never done before.

Personal Reflection

Religion is only one aspect of the cultural identity of people. It cannot be fully understood unless it is experienced firsthand. In a country such as Australia, the manifestation of different religions is important to nourish the cultural identity of people who have come from different places in the world. My visit to Yun Yang temple has nourished my spirituality. Also, my understanding of Buddhism has been enriched. Gradually, I have become more aware of the importance of respect and tolerance toward people who are different from me and my way of thinking. One of the outcomes of my visit was to realise the importance of adopting attitudes such as openness to learning and humility. I cannot learn from others unless I have opened my

heart and mind to a totally new experience without prejudices.

I experienced interreligious dialogue in different ways throughout my visit to the temple. Firstly, I consider that my willingness to visit the place was already a step towards dialogue. I opened my heart and mind to whatever the experience was about to bring to me. In fact, I felt welcomed by the members who were at the reception desk. They kindly talked to me about the place and the activities they were hosting on that day. Secondly, I experienced dialogue by immersing myself in the experience of the chanting ceremony. I got into a dialogue with myself while noticing some similarities and differences between the Buddhist religious traditions and my own Christian tradition. Certainly, the great statue of Buddha in front of me helped me to become aware that I was standing in the 'sacred land' of one of the major religious traditions in the world. Lastly, through the meditation session, I felt really connected with the rest of the participants.

I found many similarities and differences between the Buddhist and Christian religions. Both religious traditions use a great variety of resources that lead the faithful to understand and live their faith. Practices like the weekly Eucharist or the use of songs during the Christian liturgy have similar functions as the weekly chanting ceremonies or the meditation session in the Buddhist religion. Moreover, for both religions, the role of the community is essential. Communities keep the teachings of their founders alive and allow their members to practise them. From my own experience, I have met several Buddhist people engaged in spiritual care in hospitals. Thanks to this, I have realised that religion should help us to become more human.

Conclusion

To sum up, the Yun Yang temple is a place of gathering and spiritual nourishment for Chinese Buddhists. It was established as a response to the needs of Buddhist members as well as to make Buddhist teachings known in Australia. Through my experience, I was able to nourish my spirituality and realise the importance of dialogue between different religions. Even though I experienced certain limitations due to the language barrier, they did not prevent me from having a great learning experience. To me, interreligious dialogue means going beyond mere words to have a real encounter with people from different cultures and backgrounds.

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Being a stranger to be enriched: A personal encounter with the Australian Islamic Centre, Melbourne

Cuong Quoc Dang



Introduction

Being a student at Yarra Theological Union creates a great opportunity for me to enhance my religious understanding through the unit "Inter Religious Dialogue" (IRD). Apart from learning academic theories in each lecture, a practical encounter through being a stranger to the Australian Islamic Centre (AIC) in Melbourne was added to my religious studies. Therefore, this paper is a reflective attempt to present my understanding of Islam based on my realistic experience with the AIC.

Australia Islamic Centre Background

Migration is not a new circumstance, but it took place in the dawn of the human history. The reasons that cause people to be on the move can be poverty, war and persecution. Leaving their hometown is not such an easy decision for many individuals but life on the move aims at a better tomorrow. The AIC community is no exception as the foundation of AIC was originally established by the Lebanese migrants who were suffering poverty after the civil war that lasted from

1975-1990. Since 1975, public debt in Lebanon rapidly grew with total public debt reaching 99.8 per cent of GDP at the end of 1990 including 88.6 percent from domestic indebtedness and 19.2 per cent external liability.¹² This reality shows that poverty was overwhelming in Lebanon due to the civil war. In 1989, a group of Lebanese faced by the crisis of poverty in Lebanon at this time migrated to Australia to look for an economic opportunity for their survival.

Current mission of the AIC

One of the main purposes of the AIC is to provide a place for believers to worship and pray. Faith is a fundamental element to connect between believers and God, but faith should be ritually practised for the majority of religions. Understanding the importance of a place for worship, a mosque is established for members to come and live and practise their faith. Additionally, the AIC is a place to welcome and unify other Muslims from different backgrounds. The percentage of Muslims in Australia remains at a humble number so finding a mosque can be a barrier for some Muslim migrants. Therefore, the AIC creates the opportunities for other Muslim migrants to come for paying worship and other services.

Furthermore, AIC welcomes people who are from different background and religions. Various services such as reception, conferences and a library are available for those who are in need. Creating a hub is the opportunity for people to come together and understand each other better. Getting to know each other is the foundation of collaboration so that harmony and peace may be widely promoted.

¹² Charles Harvie and Ali Salman Saleh, "Lebanon's economic reconstruction after the war: A bridge too far," *Journal of Policy Modeling* 30 (2008): 858.

Youth education is one of the priorities that AIC have been seriously working on. A school which is named as Salam Arabic School was established in 2000. The school has stood as a place to educate different generations over twenty years. Salam Arabic School not only helps students to develop their social skills and transmit knowledge but also creates an Islamic environment for young people to learn and inherit their ancestral religion. This way of doing education has borne fruits as young people have been taking over the role of leadership from the previous generations. Moreover, AIC cares for the wellbeing of the young people by providing various facilities. A gym has recently launched out to welcome the youth to come to do exercises for their physical health and fitness. Additionally, the centre organises a professional club with different sports. Competitions are held every year for students to come to have fun and interact with one another. These creative activities not only increase young people's physical strength and development but also prevent students from being involved in social evils.

Learning outcomes

Through my encounter with AIC, I have come to understand the five pillars which are the core belief of Islam. The first pillar is the profession of faith "There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of God." The first part of testimony indicates the witness of the oneness of God which is the most fundamental belief for Islam. None has the right to be worshipped but God alone, and that God has neither partner nor son.¹³ Believing in God alone is not sufficient for Muslim believers, but they have to carry out the teaching and instruction given by Muhammad who is the last prophet and

¹³ I. A. Ibrahim, *A Brief Illustrated Guide to Understanding Islam*, second edition (Houston: Darussalam, 1997), 65.

messenger sent by Allah. What has been said by Muhammad is God's guidance and assistance to His believers to keep their faith and put the sacred words into practice. Moreover, Muhammad is the last prophet who brings the reaffirmation of the truth and original revelation which has been shown through Moses, David and Jesus.¹⁴

The second pillar which is practised daily in Islam is prayer. Praying five times a day at sunrise, noon, the afternoon, sunset and night is compulsory for Muslims. Prayer in Islam has a central stand in the religious living of Muslims. Firstly, prayer is a unique way for believers to stay connected with God. This understanding comes from the Quran "Rehearse that which has been revealed to you of the Book (the Quran) and be constant at prayer, for prayer restrains man from that which is evil and wrongful, while constant remembrance of God is the spirit's most supreme enjoyment" (29:45). Through prayer participants are reminded of the presence of God in their life. Secondly, prayer is the time to be thankful. Prayer is an important attitude and act in Muslims to acknowledge Allah as the Provider. They give thanks to God for everything that they have been receiving.

Charitable acts are the third core practice in Islam. This is compulsory for those who are financially capable. Almsgiving relates to generosity and virtue that is a practical identity in Islam. The generosity is practically carried out in Islam because Muslims believe that everything belongs to God. Their responsibility is to share what they have to those who are not able to attach material wealth so that the world may become a better planet. Moreover, Muslims believe that the more generous they are, the more they receive from God. The reward can be received

in different ways such as in good health, good employment, happiness and so on. Lastly, almsgiving acts are done for the sake of God. Thus, charity should not be a public act, but it must be done in secret. Charitable acts must not be for any purpose of worldly earnings, fame, prestige or developing the reputation of being altruistic.

The AIC takes this third pillar of charity seriously. Financially capable Muslims in the community must make donations of 2.5 percent of their total income every year to poor and needy people. During the bushfires in Australia, the AIC sent five trucks of clothes and other items to those who were suffering from the natural disaster. Additionally, they provided essential needs to those who were in isolation or quarantine during the pandemic. These show that people in AIC really commit themselves to the work of charity for their neighbors who are in need.

The fourth pillar in Islam is the fast during the month of Ramadan. Muslim believers are required to fast from sunrise to sunset. Having food, drink and sexual activity are prohibited during daylight hours.¹⁵ The main purpose of fasting is to improve one's piety and to feel the hunger, suffering and pain that the poor are facing. Being able to share their empathy with those who are poor and starving can help them to be more generous in charitable acts.

The final pillar is the pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia which is the birthplace of Muhammad. Those who can financially afford the cost of travelling are obliged to take the pilgrimage once in a lifetime. The meaning of the pilgrimage shows the penitential acts of

¹⁴ John Renard, *101 Questions on Islam* (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 37-38.

¹⁵ Jacques Jomier, *How to Understand Islam* (London: SCM Press, 1989), 64.

the attendants so their past sins may be forgiven.¹⁶

Personal Reflection on the encounter with AIC

Inter Religious Dialogue does not mean to make comparisons in terms of dissimilarities, but it aims at seeking common ground.¹⁷ Having an encounter with AIC has made me realise that there are certain common beliefs between Catholicism and Islam. Both religions have the same ancestor, Abraham and worship the same God. The God that Catholics believe in is the same God who is called Allah in Islam. This basic understanding is important to promote the relationship between the two religions. Both Catholics and Muslims can become brothers and sisters as they have the same Father. Moreover, charity and fasting are two significant ways of living in both Catholicism and Islam. The purpose of these two virtues of both religions is not to gain favors from others and promote one's own reputation but it is a way for believers to live a life of sharing to make the world a better place for everyone, particularly the poor, marginalised and those in need. Having some common beliefs allows both Catholics and Islam to build friendship and walk together for the good of the world.

Paying respect is an indispensable attitude in IRD. Even though common beliefs may be found in IRD, I also encountered differences with AIC. It is not necessary for me to debate the differences nor show my disagreement, but I rather showed my respect to my new friend by deep listening. One example was when a man told me about his belief that the angels record what we are doing on the earth. I believe that if God is omnipotent, God knows and remembers everything that we are doing.

God may not need angels to record what each individual is doing. However, it was not necessary for me to have this argument with him, but I just showed my respect to his belief by listening to his sharing.

Conversion is the fruit that one may experience in IRD. Conversion here does not refer to a change of one's religion to another, but it means that one may accept certain beliefs from other religions. These beliefs may make sense to individuals who cannot find them in their own religions. I experienced this sort of conversion in terms of suffering during my encounter with a Muslim man. The question of suffering is an ongoing problem for many individuals, particularly those atheists who question the existence of God. The challenge for both theists and atheists is how to reconcile God's goodness with an imperfect world. However, Islam has a different approach to the problem of suffering. Their attitude to anything that relates to suffering is gratitude. They give thanks to God for the life that they have received before an unfortunate event takes place. As a Catholic I am in favor of this Islamic way of approaching the problem of suffering. If God is the owner and the creator of the earth so God has the right to take back what he has granted. This brings relief to my understanding of God in terms of suffering which has continued as an issue for me in understanding who God is.

I admired the commitment that Muslims in AIC show through their religious living. They seriously commit themselves to the service of charity and fasting for the sake of others. This is a challenge for my commitment as a Catholic in general and as a Divine Word missionary in particular. Being a Catholic is

¹⁶ Jomier, *How to Understand Islam*, 68.

¹⁷ Jacob Kavunkal, "Fresh Perspective on Inter Religious Dialogue in Relation to Christian Mission," in *SEDOS Bulletin* 49, no. 3/4 (2016): 31.

not merely about obeying the teaching of Jesus and the Church but also living out of faith by putting theories into practice. Being a member of the Divine Word Missionaries (SVD) means to dedicate myself to the service according to the charism and spirituality of the SVDs. This requires me to have a genuine heart and a serious commitment so that I may live according to my missionary vocation.

Conclusion

The reality of the world nowadays is characterised by the reality and plurality of religions. It is significant to stress that being a member of any religion is the right of each individual. This fundamental right should be always respected, but this is not done all the time due to the lack of religious understanding of some individuals. A prejudice can be born to speak against a particular religion. One example is how common it is for all Muslims to be labelled as extremist terrorists. This is one of the main reasons that motivate me to learn more about Islam by engaging with AIC so that I may have sufficient understanding toward Islam. I believe that my encounter with AIC has been fruitful in my journey of religious studies. I have come to comprehend the five central beliefs in Islam as the basic doctrine for believers to follow. Additionally, engaging with AIC is a practical experience to help me learn how to dialogue with other religious people. The world today is characterised by globalisation where people are drawn closer together. This leads to the possibility of religious interaction among individuals so religious understanding becomes a key to keeping relationship or friendship alive. It is therefore vital that IRD should be considered as a basic subject in education environments. Personally, I will try to promote what I have learned from my encounter with AIC to those who do not know much about Islam or misunderstand who Muslims really are.

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Protection of Children Against Sexual Abuse and the Seal of Confessional:

A Case of Civil and Canon Law Headbutt?

Ruel V. Bancoro SVD

How does a priest prepare himself to administer the sacrament of reconciliation? What is the church law regarding this sacrament and in what respect does it differ from Australian civil law? When does the seal of the confessional apply?

A. Introduction

The primacy of *forgiveness of sins* is central to Jesus' vision of the Kingdom of God. The Markan account of Jesus' ministry expressed it with urgency, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near, *repent*, and believe in the good news" (Mk 1:15 NRSV). The gospel of Matthew conveyed its significance in the life and journey of Jesus' followers to whom the sacrament of the Eucharist was entrusted: "Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Mt 26: 27-28 NRSV). A common theme to be found in the Pauline letters is the notion that Jesus is the sole mediator between a sinful humanity and its ever-forgiving Father. The Roman Catholic church, while claiming apostolic continuity, infused a theological basis in the primacy of *forgiveness of sins* as it was eventually ushered into its current form and status as one of the most important sacraments. Consequently, this rendered the sacrament of confession, just like the rest of the sacraments, with utmost significance as it was ingrained well in the life of faith and practice of Catholics to the point that an outsider's extreme criticism seemed fair and valid, that "Protestants read the Bible, but Catholics do sacraments."ⁱ

The concept of forgiveness of sins is at the heart and core of a journeying church towards its fulness in the Kingdom of God. As a sign and channel of God's grace, the practice of

forgiving sins has evolved through the ensuing centuries after Jesus departed his disciples and apostles. It became known as the sacrament of penance or simply, confession. Just like the church itself, it adapted to the different norms and customs as well as to the various challenges and circumstances of each era it had gone through. The sacrament of confession, as a ritual, journeyed on and changed through history but as a visible sign of God's grace, the non-negotiable elements inherent to it remained: the clergy's role and mandate to absolve sins and the seal of the confessional.

I will proceed by briefly discussing the coverage of the canons dealing with the sacrament of penance. I will then expound on the role of a minister in the sacrament as it evolved theologically and was regulated canonically. As an integral part of the minister's responsibility, I will discuss the seal of the confessional; how it was initially seen as something fundamental to one's relationship with God and how it was later interpreted with regards to its potential in reinforcing social order. Finally, I will discuss the nuances of the relationship of canon law and civil law that became evident in the recent attempt of the states to bring forth proper legislation to protect children from sexual abuse.

Canon Laws on the Sacrament of Reconciliation

The revised Code of 1983 have thirty-eight canons dealing with the sacrament of penance, a drop in number from the sixty-six canons of the 1917 Code. The changes in the Code and the complementary revisions in the 1973 Rites of Penance reflect the reforms that *Sacrosanctum Concilium* envisioned. The 1983 Code's revisions were in keeping with the theological developments and reflections of the time and made readily evident in the introductory canon (can 959) which was purposely made less "judicial" than its 1917 counterpart.ⁱⁱ "After the introductory canon, the title treats: (1) celebration of the sacrament (cc. 960-964); (2) the minister (cc. 965-986); and (3) the penitent (cc. 987-991), along with (4) indulgences (cc. 992-997)."ⁱⁱⁱ

New norms were added to cover the rite of general absolution. The chapter on the minister of the sacrament of penance had a disproportionate number of twenty-one canons as it dealt extensively with keeping the requirement of the “faculty” as the mainstay over holy orders. Canons describing the necessary disposition and obligations of the penitent were described. Finally, a lesser number of canons were kept covering *indulgences* as compared to the 1917 Code.

A. Role of priests and the requirements for the sacrament of reconciliation

The role of the priests as ministers of the sacrament of confession had evolved through the centuries after the historical figure of Jesus departed from his followers who would then become the early practitioners of this ancient Christian rite. Initially, baptism was the sole channel for the forgiveness of sins as early converts were integrated into the thriving community. Baptism corresponds to the forgiveness of sins. As the budding leader of this community, the disciple Peter preached, “Repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven” (Acts 2:38 NRSV). Thus, the need for reconciliation as a ministry was established early on among those who wanted to be Christians as in the apostle Paul’s zealous words: “All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself” (2 Cor 5: 18-19 NRSV). From this, we can already prefigure the early beginnings of the sense of authority that would characterise this important sacrament of the church.

Through the eras that followed from that very primitive conception of reconciliation, the role of the ministers naturally evolved. It evolved through the circumstances and challenges of the times, notably the exponential growth in membership of the Christian community which was originally considered as a cult. It evolved through the development of many church’s doctrines especially those about the nature of sin and salvation. It evolved through lessons learned

from the abuses of many early ministers who seemed to get fixated with the temporal aspect of the sacrament. Finally, the role of the priests evolved side by side with the journeying church’s effort to assign to the sacrament of reconciliation the most appropriate doctrinal and canonical character over the unrelenting attacks of dissenters.

1. Basic canonical requirements of priests for the sacrament of reconciliation

The minister of the sacrament of penance must only be a priest and both the 1917 and 1983 Code of Canon Law unequivocally required this.^{iv} The development of the authority to absolve sins is historically a question of *jurisdiction* as the church steered its way amidst the ill motives and abuses associated with the practice of the sacrament. During the high medieval period, “the institute of penitential jurisdiction had increasingly become a source of conflict between the secular clergy and newly established religious orders on fire for souls in their sacramental ministry.”^v It became evident that this *jurisdiction* needed to be regulated.

The preliminary canon of the 1917 Code used the words “judicial absolution” and “legitimate minister” in describing the nature of the sacrament and the minister respectively. The use of these words resembles closely the language of the councils preceding it, namely, the IV Lateran Council (1215) and the Trent Council (1545-1563). Interpreted collectively, they emphasise that the sacrament’s essential elements for validity are derived from the sacrament’s judicial nature of having been instituted by Christ himself and therefore of divine origin. This was somewhat tamed down in the preliminary canon of the 1983 Code which understandably reflects the Vatican II communitarian spirit. The new text was clear that forgiveness is from God while the priest’s role is not diminished as the facilitator of grace when ministering the sacrament.^{vi}

The fundamental requirement of the *power of holy order* rendered a priest with a radical capacity to forgive sins although this power is

considered to exist only *in potency*. The minister is required to have a *power of jurisdiction* to be able to validly administer the sacrament. Just as invaluable as the power of order, the power of jurisdiction was upheld in both the 1917 and 1983 Code and went through different stages of development until it reached its current form in the 1983 Code.^{vii} This second autonomous power resulted from the reforms done by the IV Lateran Council under Pope Innocent III as an address to the abuses of priests in practicing the sacrament: “the Lateran decree came, at least in part, as a response to avaricious priest who lured the faithful of other parishes to their own in the interest of collecting their tithes.”^{viii}

More than three centuries after, this was further developed by the Council of Trent where it made a distinction between the *canonical institute of approbation* and the power of jurisdiction. The process of approbation primarily includes the judgment by the bishop on the competency of the priest for hearing confession while granting jurisdiction to the same priest meant that he would need to have his own subjects.^{ix} In the post-Vatican II climate, there was a shift in the terminology to cater for the spirit of the council. From the word “jurisdiction” the 1983 Code preferred to use the word “faculty” to distinguish the power of governance inherent to the old term “jurisdiction” and the broader sacramental power which can be inferred from the new term.^x Effectively, canon 966 of the new Code necessitates for an additional concession, a faculty to be granted to the minister of the sacrament by a competent authority, may it be the local ordinary or a superior of a religious congregation, according to the norm of canon 969.^{xi}

2. Practical requirements of priests for the sacrament of reconciliation

As mentioned already, the Council of Trent promoted the institute of episcopal approbation wherein priests were subjected to examination by their bishops to be judged competent for hearing confession.^{xii} Canon 970 reinforced a priest’s suitability through a written or oral examination to establish the requisite knowledge. Of equal importance,

the priest must also satisfy canonical requirements such as the ability to act with prudence and discretion, “taking into account the condition and the age of the penitent, and he is to refrain from enquiring the name of a partner in sin” (can. 979). Foremost also, as will be discussed at great length later, is the integrity of character, a trait needed in upholding utmost confidentiality which the sacrament requires (can. 983-984).

With regards to the suitability of a young priest in hearing confession, it is sensible to take account of his disposition while still in the initial formation. He should have completed all the needed documents and ministries before his promotion to sacred orders (can. 1050, can. 1035). His formator should certify the presence of satisfactory qualities required such as “sound doctrine, genuine piety, good moral behaviour, and fitness for the exercise of ministry. Likewise, after proper investigation, a certificate of the candidate’s state of physical and psychological health” (can. 1051) is required. Later on, a candidate priest should be able to show emotional maturity and self-confidence. He should be willing to observe the canons and the liturgical law on the sacrament.^{xiii}

On a canonical-theological aspect, a priest ought to see himself simultaneously as *doctor of souls* and a *judge* and that “he is constituted by God as a minister of both divine justice and divine mercy, so that he may contribute to the honour of God and the salvation of souls” (can 978). He should learn how to take a good history like a good doctor would, focusing on the preventive aspect of care rather than a hasty suggestion for an invasive surgery. He should not be disgusted by the disease itself but respect the beauty of life attacked intermittently by infection. More importantly he should be aware that through him “God heals the wounds of sin through love. The priest reveals the mercy of God to the penitent...he permits God to heal through him.”^{xiv} And just as a doctor must investigate about the illness before he can appropriately give a remedy, the priest must be able to judge prudently the sins of the penitent so

that he may be able to cure his spiritual wound.^{xv}

B. Canon Law (Seal of the Confessional) and Australian Civil Law

1. Seal of the Confessional

As pointed out earlier, one of the most crucial traits a priest must possess regarding the sacrament of penance is the ability to uphold confidentiality and protect the seal of the confessional with all his might. Canon 983 expresses the absoluteness of the sacramental seal and that there are no exceptions to the norm. It is forbidden to betray a penitent “in any way...in words or in any manner and for any reason.”^{xvi} More than twenty years ago, this absoluteness was recognised by the states of Australia and, at one point, even reinforced through appropriate legislation to revise an ancient law thereby making it certain that no priest would ever feel torn between his civic duty and religious calling. This was brought about by the raucous following the events in 1988 when a young priest ran the risk of being held in contempt by a New South Wales local court for not breaking the seal of confession when he was invited as a witness in a murder case.^{xvii} The general sentiments of that time resulted in enactments of similar statutes in Tasmania and Victoria, supporting the priest-penitent privilege.^{xviii}

2. Child Sexual Abuse and the Seal of the Confessional

The sacrament’s honoured status suffered a total turnaround in 2017 as the seal of the confessional found its way back again at the centre of media attention, public opinion and, at this time, under the prying eyes of the Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. This entity was established to inquire into and review the responses by institutions to allegations of child sexual abuse. From the succeeding political climate there emerged a conflicted landscape where the church laws and civil laws were contrasted against each other and were seen to have some seemingly unreconcilable differences. Divergence was evident when the church’s seal of confession

and society’s role in promoting the welfare of its children went on an inevitable head-to-head collision.

The sacramental seal of the church was caught in uncharted ground during the peak of the investigations on child sexual abuse; its relevance unfairly weighed by many a purely secular opinion. The seal was described by the Royal Commission as an inconvenient barrier to the government’s thrust to curtail the attacks on children, adopt appropriate laws and prevent future maladies. Suspicious lawmakers considered its nature and function as counter-productive to a society with an overarching priority to bring about justice and order. It was made apparent again, just like the precedent New South Wales case of 1988, that there was a conflict between the civil obligation of a confessor to do his duty as a responsible citizen and his canonical obligation to protect the seal of confession. What became utterly significant during the intervening decades was the huge number of child sexual abuse cases perpetuated not only by lay adults but also, and even more scandalously, by diocesan and religious priests and brothers. The Royal Commission developed some animosity towards the seal of confession. It was convinced it would be in the best interests of everyone if priests received no exemptions from obligations to report information about child sexual abuse. The Commission then ordered the Australian Catholic Bishop Conference (ACBC) to request an official statement from the Vatican.

Nevertheless, it seems that the state would not be appeased regardless of the response from the Vatican. Having already considered the gravity and seriousness of the matter at hand, the Royal Commission felt inclined to use all the avenues possible as it lobbied for an unprecedented legislation against the seal in various States and Territory jurisdictions, pushing forward some strict guidelines to be followed. In September 2020, the state of Queensland passed a law requiring priests to break the seal of confession as needed and to report cases of child sexual abuse or suffer three years behind bars. “South Australia, Victoria, Tasmania and the Australian Capital

Territory have already enacted similar laws.”^{xix}
The rest were expected to follow suit.

For the Royal Commission, all these efforts were geared towards protection of children who were disproportionately abused by church men. Measures were encouraged to have some systems on checks and balances among the bishops, clergy and religious. More institutional reforms inside the church were demanded. From the Commission’s perspective, the relational dimension of confession, where vital information of any actual or potential crime against a vulnerable child may be acquired, should be tapped for the protection of children and prosecution of sex offenders. The church at the very least was expected to cooperate with this noble task. But as the church was non-committing, it became a source of annoyance and even confusion for the members of the Royal Commission. This was expressed by one of the commissioners towards the archbishops: “You have the sacred duty to protect children based on scripture, the Church’s teaching and its commitments to civil authorities ...[and] that it is yet to deal with the dilemma of its own theology, the theology around the child or the Christology of Christ the child and the notion of the sacredness of confession?”^{xx} For the Commission, the protection of children was unquestionably non-negotiable.

Determined to move forward, the Royal Commission recommended the adoption of various encompassing laws in handling cases of child sexual abuse. The priest would not be required anymore to make any distinction between the *fact of confession* versus the *content of the confession*. He would have to report everything to civil authorities in relation to a crime committed or suspected, in addition to mere “sin and the sinner”, if deemed needed. He would not have to bother either between a “direct or indirect” violation as proscribed by the canon 983 or any canon law qualifying it: “A confessor who directly violates the sacramental seal, incurs a *latae sententiae* excommunication reserved to the Apostolic See; he who does so only indirectly is to be punished according to the gravity of the offence (can. 1388).” The Royal

Commission took for granted the canonical implications of breaking the sacramental seal for the priest himself, effectively ignoring the relevance of the very severe punishments associated with breaking the seal and the invaluable nature of the same. Basically, what the Royal Commission was trying to say was that it would start requiring the priest to report to the civil authorities *all* the necessary details received from confession that are needed in aiding the prosecution of child sex abusers. No ifs and buts!

3. Local church response on the seal of the confessional

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC) and Catholic Religious Australia (CRA) released its fifty-seven-page formal response in August, 2018. As if they did not have to wait for the Vatican’s opinion on the inquiry concerning the seal of the confessional, the document, while yielding to most of the recommendations from the commission, firmly rejected the Royal Commission’s call for possible removal or any kind of relaxation to the seal. The Conference reinforced the absoluteness of its inviolability, claiming unity with the universal church and adherence to the Code. Having accepted ninety eight percent of the recommendations in principle, the only recommendation that the bishops could not accept was Recommendation 7.4, the one dealing with the seal of the Sacrament of Penance: “This is because it is contrary to our faith and inimical to religious liberty. We are committed to the safeguarding of children and vulnerable people while maintaining the seal. We do not see safeguarding and the seal as mutually exclusive.”^{xxi} The last sentence was important because it makes an unequivocal position in both the church’s sacred duty to protect children and its equal sacred commitment to the seal of confession. This was where some archbishops who were initially examined by the Royal Commission fell short on being resolute, yielding to the idea that the above tension is a problematic “twin dilemma” for the church.^{xxii}

4. The Vatican’s response on the seal of the confessional

The respond of the Vatican to the Royal Commission's inquiry was, of course, a resounding "no!" but delivered in a form of a polite note with a self-explanatory title, *Note of the Apostolic Penitentiary on the Importance of the Internal Forum and the Inviolability of the Sacramental Seal* in June of 2019. The *Note*, before expounding on and clarifying the seal of the confessional, went on to point out that it is an unjustifiable claim "that the Church herself, in certain matters, should conform her own juridical system to the civil systems of the States in which she is present, as the only possible 'guarantee of correctness and rectitude'."xxiii Pope Francis was quoted, and his words were unmistakable:

Reconciliation itself is a benefit that the wisdom of the Church has always safeguarded with all her moral and legal might, with the *sacramental seal*. Although it is not always understood by the modern mentality, it is indispensable for the sanctity of the sacrament and for the freedom of the conscience of the penitent, who must be certain, at any time, that the sacramental conversation will remain within the secrecy of the confessional, between one's own conscience that opens to grace, and God, with the necessary mediation of the priest. The sacramental seal is indispensable and no human power has jurisdiction over it, nor lay any claim it^{xxiv}

The inviolability of the sacrament came from its divine origin so that it cannot be, in any way, modified by human laws. Drawing from the reflections of one of the church's legal scholars, the document expounded on St. Thomas Aquinas' strict interpretation of the seal, that the priest is acting in the person of Christ himself and that the priest must keep in secret *everything* that was confessed to him. With this, the Vatican's *Note* was able to address and correct the relaxed interpretation of the seal by the same archbishops who were consulted as a panel in the Royal Commission - the "sin and sinner" concept.^{xxv}

The doctrine also helped to further specify the content of the sacramental seal, which includes "all the sins of both the penitent and *others known from the penitent's confession*, both mortal and venial, both occult and public, as manifested with regard to absolution and therefore known to the confessor by virtue of sacramental knowledge."^{xxvi}

Moreover, by employing more of Aquinas' thoughts, the document maintained that the priest "becomes aware of the sins of the penitent '*non ut homo, sed ut Deus* - not as man, but as God', to such an extent that he simply "does not know" what he was told during confession, because he did not listen to him as a man but, precisely, in the name of God."^{xxvii} Therefore, the priest ought to forget everything about the confession: what was confessed or admitted by the penitent (content of the confession) or even the very fact that the confession ever happened (fact of confession).

Victims of child sexual abuse find courage to open up to a priest trusting that what was being confessed will be in a safe place with him who is a mediator and channel of God's grace in virtue of the holy orders. In effect, he or she is entering into a relationship with God, conversing with his or her Creator who would not divulge the content of their conversation to anyone else. While committed to upholding the seal of confession, a confessor's prudent actions will be to make sure that the child is safe, to encourage the child to report the details of abuse to a parent, caretaker or to a trusted confidant who may also be the same confessor but outside the seal of confessional. With these basic measures, the church may be able to deal with the "dilemma" of needing to be committed to his civil responsibilities and, at the same time, committed to the inviolable nature of the sacrament. With these seemingly mutually dependent undertakings, there is a need to rise above the notion that they are aspirations that are unable to stand on their own, and would lose their integral value, separately.

Another interesting insight on the relationship of canon and civil law came from Justice Francis Xavier Connor when he made an opinion before the Australian Law Reform Commission during the theoretical discussion on the penitent-priest privilege. This was way back in 1987, a year before the New South Wales case which put the seal of confession in the frontline of discourse. He pointed out the special treatment given by the Australian Constitution to the free exercise of religion.^{xxviii} In supporting priest-penitent privilege legislation at that time, three arguments were set out: firstly, there would be an opportunity for the priest to promote good by advising the child sex abuser to present himself to the authorities; secondly, placing the priest in a dilemma where he would be bound not to obey the civil law will accomplish nothing and would lead to loss of respect to the court; and finally, compelling use of confidential information from confession would border towards self-incrimination. This was of course sensible at that time but seemed swept aside by the ensuing climate surrounding the child sex abuse cases.

C. Conclusion

When the Royal Commission asserted, in the context of Australia's fight against child sexual abuse, that the civil law of the state reserves the right to demand for the disclosure of any useful information obtained from the confessional, the Holy See rightfully emphasised the historical, philosophical and theological basis for the inviolability of the seal of confession.

At the very heart of this sacrament, beneath the layers of traditions, laws, doctrines, personal bias and public scrutiny, lies the fundamental need of a penitent to maintain a relationship with God which is an afforded and protected right of every citizen.

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Lesson from Covid-19: Always Be ready!

Shouzheng Wang



Mt 24:42-51. Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore, you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour. "Who then is the faithful and wise slave, whom his master has put in charge of his household, to give the other slaves their allowance of food at the

proper time? Blessed is that slave whom his master will find at work when he arrives. Truly I tell you, he will put that one in charge of all his possessions. But if that wicked slave says to himself, 'My master is delayed,' and he begins to beat his fellow slaves, and eats and drinks with drunkards, the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour that he does not know. He will cut him in pieces[c] and put him with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

"Stay awake!" These are Jesus' words for us today. He tells us that we do not know the day or the time when the Lord will come again. I would like to give an example which seems not appropriate with this Gospel but something that is relevant as we are experiencing it at the moment. Jesus' coming is like Covid-19 virus, we do not know when it is coming inside our body but only when we get some symptoms that we know we contracted it. Yet before reaching this condition, we can protect ourselves and stay away from the virus. The most important thing for us to do is to be ready for we do not know when we will get it.

It is like when Jesus said that we do not know when the Lord will come again. Thus, each moment we have to be awake and watchful. This may sound impossible to do. However, Jesus uses two kinds of servants, the faithful servant and the wicked servant, as examples to let us know how to be prepared. The faithful servant always performs his duties and responsibilities whether the boss is looking or not. He is always ready to answer questions from his boss and his reports are always on time. He is a responsible worker, and the boss is delighted with him such that he is promoted in due time. On the other hand, the wicked servant works only when the boss is looking. He does not work earnestly and often comes

late. He even sleeps on the job. Then at the proper time, he is kicked out of the company or demoted. We are all servants and our relationships with God are not much different from that of a manager-employee relationship. The question is 'what kind of servants are we?' God has given us time, talent, and treasure to serve Him and to help others. At the appointed time, which we do not even know, God will call us to give an accounting. Therefore, we must always be ready for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour. Jesus does not tell us to be afraid or anxious but to be ready and to be prepared to welcome him when he finally comes. I looked back at the many moments of my life when Jesus came and he surprised me. There were moments when I was ready to meet him and there were moments when I was too distracted. I ask for the grace to learn how to look forward in meeting Jesus when he arrives, not with anxiety but with trust.



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