

Mission and Culture: The SVD Connection

Philip Gibbs, SVD

Philip Gibbs, SVD, a long-time missionary and anthropologist in Papua New Guinea, challenges missiologists in general and members of the Society of the Divine Word (SVD) in particular, to reflect on their missionary work through the lens of a more postmodern, "globalized" understanding of culture. He offers examples from his own ministry of dealing with the closing of a local gold mine, witnessing the violence in a local election, and relating to a woman infected with AIDS. The lecture was given on October 11, 2010.

I have fond memories of the four years studying here at Catholic Theological Union (CTU) in the 1970s. At that time, Steve Bevans was teaching in the Philippines and Tony Gittins was, as he puts it, "beating about the bush" in Sierra Leone, and for two years my classmate Roger Schroeder was in Papua New Guinea. Bob Schreiter was rather new at CTU and working on his book *Constructing Local Theologies*. Under his guidance, I wrote my thesis—a theological reflection on a myth from Papua New Guinea, and when taking a break from studying Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the "text" and "metaphor," I read widely in the field of anthropology—scholars such as Claude Lévi-Strauss, Victor Turner, and Mary Douglas. The novel ideas in those days were from Clifford Geertz, who published *The Interpretation of Cultures* while I was here in Chicago in 1975.

I recall too how Louis Luzbetak lived with us in the SVD community on Woodlawn Avenue—just a few blocks from here—and it was at this

time that he began working on a revision of *The Church and Cultures*. That opus would appear in its new form much later—in 1988. Louis Luzbetak was such a humble, hard-working confrere that I must admit that, to my shame and regret, in those days I did not realize his stature as a scholar, anthropologist, and missionary.¹ In terms of the latter—Louis, as a missionary *ad gentes*—I have since been fortunate to speak with people at Ambong—the outstation of Banz parish in Papua New Guinea, where he lived, worked, and studied from 1952 to 1956. The people remember him—not as a scholar but as a warm friendly missionary who was interested in their language and who liked to tell jokes and listen to stories.

Anthropos Tradition

There is a third strand to the thread of memories from my time in Chicago. As an SVD, I felt the benefit of a family link with the study of culture through what could be termed the “Anthropos tradition.”² SVD founder Arnold Janssen had insisted from the beginning on the inclusion of academic sciences in the training of future missionaries. Wilhelm Schmidt took up the challenge in what was then called ethnology.³ He began publication of the *Anthropos* journal in 1906, a journal still being published today, and he founded the Anthropos Institute in 1931.

Good ethnology depends on the data of ethnography, and Wilhelm Schmidt thought that missionaries could make an important contribution to ethnology through their cultural descriptions since many of them had lived for years with people, gaining their trust, and learning their language.⁴ Louis Luzbetak, who later served as director of the Anthropos Institute, writes how Wilhelm Schmidt “was my mentor and constant inspiration in my attempt to serve faith through science.”⁵ Members of the Anthropos Institute focused on different areas of the world, Höltker and Aufenanger concentrated on Oceania, Schröder on China and Taiwan, Hermanns on Mongolia, Fuchs on India, and Saake on Brazil and other parts of South America. Paul Shebesta studied the life of the Mbuti Pygmies of Central Africa, and among his many studies, Martin Gusinde made four research trips to document the life of the indigenous people of Tierra del Fuego.

As an SVD having done postgraduate studies in anthropology through Sydney University, I was deeply impressed by the Anthropos tradition, not so much in Schmidt’s culture-history method or his twelve-volume *Der Ursprung der Gottesidee*, but more because the tradition represented

a special relationship between mission and culture. I spent my summers here in the United States studying linguistics with the Summer Institute of Linguistics: two summers at the University of North Dakota and one in Oklahoma, and had the first of my articles published in the *Anthropos* journal during the time here in Chicago.⁶

So it was with a sense of confidence that I returned to Papua New Guinea in 1979, with the intention of living with the people, learning their language, their values, and their worldview in order to be able to share the Word in a way that could be understood by the people. It was a noble ideal, possibly valid in its day—but in effect things turned out quite differently. I want to tell you how, and examine why, in three experiences associated with a gold mine, electoral politics, and the HIV epidemic. I have chosen these three because they involve the quality of our relationship with the environment, with society, and with fellow human beings—themes that are surely relevant globally and not to just one nation such as Papua New Guinea. I trust you will not regard my narrative style as simply anecdotal, because my purpose is to use narrative to share my personal insights into the context of mission and particularly the way it relates to the human condition.

A Gold Mine

My first assignment in Papua New Guinea was to Porgera-Paiela, a large isolated parish in the Highlands. In its remoteness at the very end of the five-hundred-mile Highlands Highway (think passageway), Porgera would have little of interest, except for the fact that gold was discovered there by the first Australian explorers in 1939. For the past twenty years, Porgera has been the site of one of the largest gold mines in the southern hemisphere, producing up to one million ounces of gold a year. It means profit for the multinational mining company but also cash for the local people, and there has been a steady stream of newcomers into the district, especially during the short-lived Mount Kare gold rush starting in the late 1980s when young children could earn up to \$300 a day, and hiring a helicopter became the equivalent of someone in the United States hailing a taxi.

Concerned that influential outsiders might come with false claims as local “landowners,” I worked with the local leaders to document exhaustive genealogies of the clans occupying land close to the mine-site. It was a fine study—but the problem was with the exceptions. People were

not following the cultural "rules" as I understood them. The whole idea of "clans" is a central anthropological concept, but somehow it did not take into account improvisation and interested strategy. In the ambiguous rough-and-tumble of social interaction, I was forced to take a more constructivist perspective and to come up with a form of action theory that provided room for people as actors in these changed social circumstances.

When the local people from Porgera first encountered Australian explorers, they were not aware that they were being drawn into a historical context that was part of the colonial expansion of the world gold market. The Australian explorers referred to the Highlanders as "locals." So the global-local interaction commenced. However, as Marilyn Strathern has noted, typically Highlanders interpreted the newcomers as versions of familiar beings, first in spirit and then in human form.⁷ They perceived the explorers as beings whom they could relate to even though they were from elsewhere; and the Australians were dreadfully conscious of being in a particular locality where they had never been before. So it is possible to cast the Highlanders' strategy as global, welcoming the strangers, and the Australians as local, away from the familiar within the confines of this new place.⁸ In effect, that is what happened, and ever since the people of Porgera and the thousands of immigrants to Porgera from other areas in the Highlands have set out to devise ways to exploit possibilities for interaction in these changing circumstances.

The issue I had to face in this rather incoherent situation of rapid and chaotic cultural and social change was to find my place within this scenario. As Bob Schreiter reminds us, I had to "find ways of embracing both the global and the local if it is to be a faithful and credible voice for belief."⁹ My education and past experience naturally cast me as a representative of the globalized world. Yet, at times I felt quite the contrary, as for example, recently when I struggled up a muddy path in Porgera hoping to meet and discuss local concerns with the chairman of the landowners' association only to be told that he was in New York presenting their views to the United Nations Forum on Indigenous Issues. They added that they could give me a cell phone number to contact him in New York if I wished.

Admittedly not everyone from Porgera is a "worldly 'native'"¹⁰ traveling to the other side of the globe, but all, willingly or unconsciously, are now participating in a globalized world. In some ways they have reinvented themselves in local constructive efforts to indigenize exogenous ele-

ments. For example, people were willing to disregard their snake-ancestor Kupiane who lived in the mountain to be mined, only to reimagine the gold as the skin shed by their underworld snake ancestor.¹¹

What is mission in that situation? I came with ideas of inculturation of the global Christian message into the local context. But this approach met with resistance because the local people were more interested in global citizenry and remaking themselves as global Christians. The majority found the millennial Seventh Day Adventist message more to their liking. It fitted more closely with the gold-mining developments and their desire to share in the benefits of modernity.¹² The fact that modernity in terms of wealth, harmony, and happiness proved elusive provoked frustration and resentment that only fueled the millennial vision.

How is one to accompany people who appear to be deluded in their millennial expectations? In Papua New Guinea, indicators, such as life expectancy, maternal mortality, nutrition, and health, are dismal. There are other dimensions of life more difficult to measure in terms of human well-being and dependency. I attended meetings in which people were consulted about the ecological impact of the mine, and they believed that it would be to their advantage in terms of "development" and said they were ready to pay the cost. But what is informed consent without experience? Did they truly realize what it would mean in terms of dependence on imported systems, goods, and ideas, including imported religion? Their children today cannot imagine what life would be like without the mine. They also appear to believe, not only in a Jesus who saves, but one who pays dividends, if not now, then soon in the imminent coming of the millennium, prefigured by the mine.¹³ I perceived the situation as a religious attempt to deal with a cultural crisis, and the challenge is to find ways to work with these new identities and new logics to look for where God might be at work in this local-global complex.

An Election

Papua New Guinea achieved a peaceful transition to independence in 1975. Representatives are elected to a Parliament of 109 members, based on the Westminster system of government. The initial years of independence were relatively peaceful, but there was a flare up of violence and a gradual breakdown of law and order in the late 1980s. This was experienced particularly by the two million people living in the Highlands.

Elections in the Papua New Guinea Highlands are a form of investment, with successful candidates rewarding their supporters and disregarding others. I suppose this is typical of politics worldwide; however, in the Highlands, the situation can be quite volatile, so much so that the system has been labeled "gunpoint democracy."¹⁴ People can go to the extreme in their desperate desire to gain control of state resources and services. The state, which has had a decreasing presence in more isolated areas, finds it difficult to control the situation. In 2002 a "failed election" was declared in six of the nine southern Highlands electorates. By August that year thirty election-related deaths had been reported in the Highlands, including two electoral officials.¹⁵ Fearing that this pattern might spread, the electoral commission sought ways to control and monitor future elections.

For the national elections in 2007, 2,700 candidates contested the 109 seats in Parliament in 9,100 polling places. I was asked through the National Electoral Commission to form and lead a domestic observer team in the Enga Province of the Highlands—a province known as a "hot spot" among the nineteen provinces in Papua New Guinea. It might seem surprising that they would request this of an expatriate missionary, but perhaps they asked me because I had been researching and publishing on the political culture of previous elections. I had noticed a renewed interest in power and "religious" phenomena, particularly in the lead up to the year 2000.¹⁶

Forms of spiritual power were becoming more and more sought after as people felt a need for personal and collective security in the face of chronic political instability.¹⁷ People are searching for solutions, and if Christian churches are not part of the answer, they look elsewhere. One recent study reveals that in the last ten years as many as five thousand Papua New Guineans have converted (or as they say "reverted") to Islam. Most of those converts had been Christian, and many had been Catholic.¹⁸ Calls by some academics and church leaders to separate religion and politics are met with incomprehension and resistance on the part of the general populace. In Papua New Guinea, as in many other developing nations, religion is part of life, which includes the social, the economic, and the political.

An event in the national Parliament helps illustrate the holistic worldview. In the year 2000, the speaker of parliament, Bernard Narokobi had a large cross mounted on top of the Parliament building. It was illuminated so as to be visible at night throughout much of the city. In explaining

his action to the Parliament, Narokobi said that the cross is "the light of Calvary. With your concurrence I would ask that this cross remain. It is a memory of our hope in the future as Christians. This may not be the mountain or the hill of Calvary; however, the way we tend to crucify each other in here, we may as well nickname the hill on which Parliament stands, the Calvary Hill."¹⁹ He explained further that Parliament makes decisions that are sacred because it is for the good of the people. This was an attempt by a devout Catholic to bring a symbol of Christian power into the very center of political power. Some people sensed a shocking conflict in bringing together these two powerful symbols, particularly those with a theology that sees an irreconcilable conflict between the reign of God and the realm of Satan. While Narokobi was absent from the chamber, a motion was passed to have the cross removed.

The incident described illustrates religious and political dimensions integrated in one worldview. To me the basic cultural issue is how such a view integrates a political culture based on strong-willed leaders who devise strategic alliances while competing for power, with money and guns as innovations on the traditional cultural practices. I ask myself, how can such a view be reconciled with gospel values? What is mission in this situation? Some Christians took what I call a spiritualist option, forming teams of "prayer warriors" to be positioned around election polling places to ensure that Satan could not enter and disturb the peace. That approach too easily allows a continuance of the status quo, which is basically unjust. There is little freedom of choice for the individual, particularly women, and often the electoral roll is grossly inflated with ghost names. In some communities people couldn't vote because the ballot papers were hijacked and sent elsewhere. What would be just in this situation? Am I trying to measure democracy using a yardstick from liberal democratic principles nurtured in the West?²⁰ Seemingly both democratic principles and Christian values have come from outside. Do they need to change in that new context?

The church cannot replace the state, but neither can it simply remain a spectator on the sidelines in what is clearly an unjust situation.²¹ Political involvement is a duty. It is part of our mission to remind the political world of its real task, that is, the attainment of peace and justice and the development of a more human world. As more people are feeling frustrated and disenfranchised I am convinced that our mission is to help people view politics relative to the reign of God. What do I mean by that?

It would be to help people realize that it is not all about selling or trading votes to get access to money and what money can buy. It is also to offer a vision whereby they can claim a different future.

That may sound awfully idealistic in a chaotic context where wealth and power are so lacking and thus appear to be the solution. But the solution to being part of an abusive system is not to succeed in making it to the other side so the oppressed becomes an oppressor, but rather the transformation of the system itself in a way that ensures dignity for all citizens, where all can participate in society, including the political process. Some might think I am promoting socialism. I like to think that I am promoting a view of the world similar to that of Jesus who, quoting from the prophet Isaiah (Lk 4:18–19), spoke about liberty for captives and freedom for the oppressed, and then proceeded to put that vision into practice.

In that highly charged situation, I was aware of the futility of explicitly proclaiming gospel values associated with the reign of God. It would be like trying to talk about global warming to a crowd of supporters intent on watching a ball game—or maybe like Paul trying to speak at the Areopagus. What communication code might make sense? I noticed that people were using a metaphor associated with eating. They spoke in the local language about *nenge nanengepi*: those who eat and those who don't. It is a way of referring to haves and have-nots. If you support a winning candidate, you will "eat rice." If you lose you will get a five-year contract for sitting at home eating sweet potatoes from your own garden. In fact, the term is used in song as a protest against the politicization of the public service. Referring to the *nenge nanengepi*—eaters and noneaters, singers hope the situation will change and that the arrogant supporters of winning candidates will be brought down to a level where they can no longer boast about the privileges they enjoy.²²

Roger Schroeder and Stephen Bevans, in a fascinating article on "Mission as Table Fellowship," show how Jesus' table fellowship with sinners, tax collectors, and other people marginal to society is an image of God inviting everyone to communion in the reign of God.²³ Could an image like that, linking with the metaphor of eaters and noneaters, be helpful for prophetic mission in the situation I have described, to help people come to new insights and a vision of alternatives to the present divisive political situation? I think that intercultural images such as the one just described can be helpful not only for developing ideas about God, but more importantly for witnessing to the reign of God in our midst.

An Epidemic

It is no coincidence that the countries struggling to face the HIV and AIDS epidemic today are the ones with a legacy of political, social, economic, and religious oppression in past centuries. This helps us realize that AIDS is not just a disease. It is a symptom of a cultural crisis: of dysfunctional political and socioeconomic structures, of lack of knowledge, and of things that have gone wrong in the way we relate to one another and particularly in the way we love one another.

Papua New Guinea is one of those countries. There are over thirty thousand people there who have tested positive for HIV/AIDS, but the number infected could be far greater because the majority of those infected don't know it.²⁴ Besides the *infected*, there are hundreds of thousands of people *affected*—searching for the resources to care for family members who are ill, or trying to cope without a husband, a wife, a mother, or father. In a country with no system for social security or old-age pension, the loss of a son or daughter is a severe blow to the security of parents in their advanced years.

In the last few years, my principal mission has been to research social and cultural factors that are contributing to the AIDS epidemic and to look for strategies that can help to alleviate it. "Going to church," prayer groups or Bible study groups have no necessary effect on reducing the epidemic.²⁵ In fact, some studies have found that attending church regularly may open new doors to relationships and consequent multiple sexual partnerships. Church rallies have been identified as "risk occasions" for youth in Papua New Guinea.²⁶

Why would the church be so concerned about this situation when ministry to the sick has always been part of its mission? Perhaps it has something to do with HIV and AIDS being symbolic of frailties associated with our human condition that cries out for the love that we share through the church's ministry.²⁷ It also calls for special attention because so many people in our world, particularly the so-called developed world, do not realize its impact.

My principal experience in this field over the past few years has been a reflexive one. It has taught me a lot about mission because I have come to realize that I am the one who needs to be converted—in my attitudes, my values, and my openness to different cultural views of life and death, and ultimately to a new theological anthropology. Allow me to give just one example from many that I could relate.

Agnes (that is not her real name) is a young woman living in one of the settlements in a town in Papua New Guinea. She cared for her sister who died of AIDS, and Agnes is infected with HIV also. She has not been to school and can't read or write. But she works as a volunteer at one of the urban clinics, washing patients, talking with them, encouraging them. She has a small house in the crowded settlement, and she invites women—mostly those living with HIV—to come and stay with her and share what little food she has. I went and stayed there one night. Women came at different times through the darkness of the unlit settlement until there were eight of us sitting on the rough wooden floor around a kerosene lamp as they shared about what it was like, some having been cast out of their families due to stigma and discrimination. Surely for some, their only means of income would hardly square with official church moral teaching. However, what impressed me was the sense of community and the way they supported one another. By about 1:00 in the morning I felt tired and was shown a corner where I could sleep. As I lay there in the early hours of the morning, I could hear the others in the next room praying the rosary. You can imagine my mixed feelings, with these women from the streets conducting devotions while I, the missionary, lay in splendid isolation, secure under my mosquito net. I must have fallen asleep as they recited a litany from the movement for Divine Mercy.

Two weeks later, early one morning, Agnes called me on a borrowed cell phone:

"Father Philip?"

"Yes, Agnes."

"Scholastica died." (Scholastica was one of the women who had been with us that evening in the house).

"Oh, I'm sorry to hear that. What are you going to do?"

"I don't know. She is beside me now—she died."

"Are there some relatives?"

"No, they kicked her out."

"So, what can you do?"

"I'm going to bury her, but they want K30 for a place in the cemetery. Father, can you call me back, this phone is running out of units?"

After the call I sat there gazing at the computer screen in my room. I had just returned from saying mass at the nearby convent. The sisters had

provided breakfast. I was safe, secure, well fed—but with some questions that troubled me. How can we understand the HIV epidemic in the light of the Christian mystery of life and death? Our response to such questions will affect the way we think about the epidemic and those affected by it.²⁸ If the life-giving Creator God is to be seen in the face of a human being living with HIV, then the Christian community has a responsibility to respond with the love and compassion. Our shared mission is found in promoting a new quality of life and meaning in life so that people will no longer think and talk about "dying from HIV," but rather "living with HIV." That is what Agnes and others like her are teaching me.²⁹

A phrase came to mind: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn 1:14). Agnes could teach me a lot about what we call theological anthropology. Do we stifle Christ's incarnational presence in theological discourse remote from human experience? "Incarnation" is a technical word with Latin roots, but the important question is not the phrase itself, but rather "*What does it look like?*" I have a lot to learn from the many people like Agnes, witnessing to a culture of life, and revealing the love of Christ in very down-to-earth human ways. In its most fundamental sense, isn't that what mission is about?

The SVD Connection

I have chosen the three examples from many possibilities because I think they say something important about mission and the way we relate to people in the context of the crises of culture today. The lessons learned from those examples can have wider implications. Where does SVD fit into this and what might be some of the challenges in terms of mission and culture in the future? My focus is on the SVD—my own and Fr. Luzbetak's religious congregation—but I hope that what I say is in some ways applicable to every missionary congregation and in fact to everyone who accepts that as loving human beings, we are all called to be part of God's mission. I am proposing that we have something important to contribute to intercultural relations associated with globalization, democratic rights, the AIDS epidemic, and many other issues that are all part of a changing cultural context.

The SVD concern with mission and culture does not end with the Anthropos tradition. Scholars have observed the significance of the Vatican II Decree on The Mission Activity of the Church (*Ad Gentes*), having

been written for the most part at the SVD house in Nemi near Rome, and how the SVD superior general at the time, Johannes Schütte, formerly missioned to China, chaired the commission in its later stages and acted as relator presenting the final schema to the Council.³⁰ After the Council Schütte noted how mission does not mean simply announcing the Good News, but a “new incarnation of Christ” in people’s culture.³¹

Such ideas circulated within the SVD and eventually emerged in the 1983 revised Constitutions of the Society. Antonio Pernia, the present SVD superior general, points out how the 100s section of the Constitutions that presents the understanding of our missionary service has been greatly influenced by the Conciliar Decree *Ad Gentes*. Examples are Constitutions section 113 that treats the interaction of gospel, culture, and religion, and Constitutions section 114 that quotes from the Prologue to John’s gospel and refers to the incarnation.³²

SVD General Chapters since then have sought to deepen our understanding of the various ways we bear witness to the incarnation with debates on “passing over” to other cultures, to the poor and in dialogue with other religions and followers of contemporary ideologies (13th General Chapter, 1988). The idea behind the “passing over” concept was that missionaries should go to what were termed “frontiers” of faith and the margins of society. The chapter notes how this involves a “prophetic responsibility” to allow the unheard voices from the frontiers to be heard in the church and the world.³³ That prophetic responsibility has been treated further with the concept of “prophetic dialogue” introduced at the 15th General Chapter in the year 2000 and further developed in 2006.

The SVD adopted the term prophetic dialogue in an effort to bring together the Latin American concern for social justice and the Asian concern for dialogue. I wonder though where culture fits in. Could it be that prophetic dialogue is the method, and culture, wherever we are, is the context? In that case, how do we appreciate the intercultural dimension of our mission? I am concerned that prophecy and dialogue can get lost and confused if we don’t take seriously the changing, deterritorialized, multidimensional, homogenized, hybrid, unbounded dimension that Stephen Bevans calls the “entire situation in which men and women live.”³⁴ We need to reimagine the culture concept for today, and this will require a new recognition of the “Anthropos tradition”—not as a historical project, but looking to the future, including the development of what I am calling an “SVD tradition.”

Conclusion

I would like to conclude with three points. First, the Anthropos tradition continues, but as Louis Luzbetak himself noted, while the Anthropos Institute can lead the way, it cannot produce a “cookbook” where one can find specific recipes. Learning spoken language and what he calls “the silent language” of culture is a learning process similar to learning to play the violin. You have to do it yourself. No one else can do the practicing for you.³⁵

The SVD now has over six thousand members. It is part of the Roman Catholic Church, which is one of the largest multinational organizations in the world. At this time (2010) SVDs come from seventy-two different nationalities and work in seventy-two different nations—a happy scriptural coincidence (Lk 10)! I note too (depending on how one defines “continents”) that SVD members are working on all seven continents. It is hardly surprising that the theme for the coming SVD General Chapter is from Revelation 7:9, “From Every Nation, People, and Language: Sharing Intercultural Life and Mission.” The congregation hasn’t fully realized the intercultural possibilities to date, but the potential is there. It is true, as Luzbetak said, if you are learning to play a musical instrument, no one else can do the practicing for you; but when you do play you will surely play with others, whether it be a quartet or an orchestra. Almost twenty years ago, Louis Luzbetak referred to the Augustinian image of a group of pilgrims walking together and singing a song of hope, “Thy kingdom come.”³⁶ What tune or song is suitable for today? Would it be in harmony or discord?

Antonio Pernia gives an example of how the cultural makeup of the congregation can influence the way we do mission. He notes how the SVD mission in the twenty-first century will be carried out largely by missionaries originating from the third world, particularly from Asia.³⁷ From his own experience as Asian, he says that dialogue as a model of mission is one that accords with cultural dispositions from Asia: approaching mission from a position of humility, of contemplative presence, and as steward—not owner or master. One can only wonder at the combined contribution of cultural dispositions from the other five inhabited continents. That is the SVD connection—the long-term scholarly interest in culture coupled with living witness to the incarnation in flesh and blood internationalism.³⁸

Second, after having just focused on the SVD, I wish to take a broader perspective, particularly with regard to the issue of theological anthropology. In the Luzbetak lecture of 2003 Darrell Whiteman refers to the incarnation and to people "embedded in their culture."³⁹ I agree with the concept, but from the examples offered today of the gold mine, electoral politics, and the AIDS epidemic, you will realize that I have issues with a culture concept that views people as "embedded" in their culture—when in so many places today reality appears quite the contrary. At this time, I take a less essentialist view of culture, and for that we have to look beyond what cultural or social anthropology have to offer. I agree with Bob Schreiter that we need a renewed *theological anthropology*.⁴⁰

By theological anthropology I mean an understanding of what it means to be human from a faith perspective. Miracles in biomedical technologies, ecological awareness, and expanded reference to human rights are only some of the factors impacting on our understanding of what it means to be human. (I see now that in Germany access to the Internet is considered a "human right.") Theologians offer their views. Schillebeeckx refers to the "humanum"; Von Balthasar refers to a "being with finite freedom"; Panikkar writes about the "cosmotheandric." In recent papal encyclicals we hear of "transforming humanity from within, making it new" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*), and more recently, there is the instruction on human dignity from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (*Dignitas Personae*). From my own study, I think the fundamental issue in the dispute between the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the liberation theologians was over how one understands humanity and whether we start our theological reflection with God or with the human condition. The same tension continues today with Jon Sobrino maintaining, "*Extra pauperes nulla salus*," putting the poor in the place of the church in the ancient saying according to which "outside the church there is no salvation."⁴¹

Consider again Luzbetak's analogy of learning to play a musical instrument. Music is universal to humanity; however, the form it takes and the instruments used are contextual. Here one enters the field of intercultural hermeneutics—do we link the "meaning" of the music to the composer, the performer, or the audience? Could the music be part of a protest and hence prophetic or counter-cultural?

How we understand what it means to be human is important because intercultural and interreligious dialogue are as much something we "are"

as something we "do." Barbara Reid gives an account of the richly human experience of women's Bible study groups in Chiapas, Mexico.⁴² I hope that the three examples I gave earlier in this lecture illustrate that point also. Pope John Paul II in his address to the United Nations in New York in 1995 said that "freedom" is the measure of human dignity and greatness.⁴³ I think we need to reflect in depth on anthropology in terms of what it really means to be human in the situations in which women, men, and children live today. Such a study presumes involvement in intercultural and interreligious dialogue that takes us beyond ecclesial circles such as in the three examples I have used in this presentation.

My third and final point is that we as people of faith have an opportunity to offer a new "grand narrative" to a world in which metanarratives have become lost to relativism in a fragmented sense of culture.⁴⁴ What we have to offer is not a theory, but rather a very human presence reflecting that "God is with us."⁴⁵ God is with us whether the tune is of joy or sorrow, triumph or protest. That presence harks back to a narrative that is close to the SVD tradition: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn 1:14). Here I base my presumption of what is human not on the Genesis account of creation and fall but more on the Johannine insight that the Word became flesh so that God who is love could enter into deep personal union with the world, the beloved.⁴⁶

In her study of images and symbols in the Fourth Gospel, Barbara Reid shows how birthing imagery is woven throughout the whole of the Gospel of John. We read in John 1:12–13, "To all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born (*egennēthēsan*) not of blood or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man, but of God." As Reid points out, these verses focus attention on the birthing of God's children through their faith in the *Logos*, using the verb *gennaō*, which in the Fourth Gospel evokes primarily the female imagery of birthing. The imagery continues through to the symbolic breaking of the amniotic fluid in the water and blood coming from Jesus' side at the crucifixion when the "power to become children of God" that was assured in the prologue is accomplished.⁴⁷

We need to explore further such insights in order to enrich the symphony of the Good News that we share with "bold humility."⁴⁸ We need the contribution from scholars or from the "grass roots," and from the international SVD tradition, in order to imagine the world differently.⁴⁹

- What if people at the mine site in Porgera could really sense that God is with them so that they don't have to be so concerned with a millennial Jesus coming at the end of the world?
- What if a realization that God is with us would empower people in electoral politics with a vision of the common good?
- What if we could realize that God is with us through the presence of people like Agnes and her friends?

That is what I mean by the importance of that life-giving grand narrative of the incarnation in mission today.

So, when I leave CTU a few months from now—thirty-three years after the first departure, how will it be different? We shall see; that is work in progress.

Notes

1. After studies for the priesthood at Divine Word Seminary, Techny, Fr. Louis Luzbetak studied in Europe for six years, obtaining degrees in Canon Law and Dogmatic Theology from the Gregorian University, Rome, and a Doctorate in Anthropology from Fribourg University in Switzerland. He served in Papua New Guinea from 1952 to 1956.
2. "Our Anthropos tradition is really a way of doing mission which considers an appreciation of people's culture as a necessary precondition for genuine evangelization. A way of doing mission whereby the gospel message is not simply parachuted from outside, but enters into dialogue with the culture of the people. And so, a way of doing mission whereby the missionary is ready not just to change people but to be changed himself, or as EN (e.g. no. 15) puts it, a way of evangelizing whereby the evangelizer not only evangelizes but allows himself or herself to be evangelized" (Antonio Pernia, "Expectations of the Generalate of the Anthropos Institute," paper delivered at the Anthropos Institute—Europe meeting, Nysa, Poland, September, 14–20, 2003, 12). Pernia adds that "Without this tradition, something essential would be lost from our Society" (ibid., 13).
3. Ethnology analyzes data collected through ethnography. Schmidt as a culture-historian considered ethnology as *Geisteswissenschaften*, along with history, philosophy, and other social sciences. This was before Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown, and Boas had combined both ethnologist and ethnographer in one and the same person. Ernest Brandewie notes how for Schmidt fieldwork was not a *conditio sine qua non* for one to become a good ethnologist. "To absolutely require this of someone doing culture-history would be the

same as requiring every historian to be actually present at that period of time or incident which he is describing, a principle which would quickly do away with history" (Ernest Brandewie, "Ethnology and Missionaries: The Case of the Anthropos Institute and Wilhelm Schmidt," in *Missionaries, Anthropologists, and Cultural Change*, vol. 1, ed. Darrell Whiteman and Frank Salamone [Williamsburg, VA: College of William and Mary, Studies in Third World Societies, 1983], 377, 379–80). James Clifford explains the change of view from the ethnographer-theorist to anthropological fieldworker, as with Malinowski and Mead (James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988], 27–28).

4. Because of his interest in groups that were ethnologically "older" than others, Schmidt had encouraged fellow SVDs to study groups that were in danger of disappearing—such as the people of Tierra del Fuego or the Mbuti pygmies of Central Africa. The frontispiece of the *Anthropos* journal stated that it was published *unter Mitarbeit zahlreicher Missionare*—"with the cooperation of numerous missionaries." The phrase was omitted when the Anthropos Institute was established in 1931.

5. Louis J. Luzbetak, "My Pilgrimage in Mission," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 16, no. 3 (1992): 125. In one of several letters from Louis Luzbetak to Wilhelm Schmidt he apologizes, "I haven't forgotten you: I'm so taken up with my work now that I've given up practically all letter-writing" (December 9, 1953) (SVD archives, Collegio del Verbo Divino, Rome.)

6. Philip Gibbs, "Kepele: A Ritual from the Western Highlands of Papua New Guinea," *Anthropos* 73 (1978): 434–48.

7. It was a common occurrence for the Highlanders to view white explorers as spirits (see Bill Gammage, *The Sky Travelers: Journeys in New Guinea 1938–1939* [Calton, Victoria, Australia: Melbourne University, 1998]).

8. Marilyn Strathern, "The Nice Thing about Culture Is That Everyone Has It," in *Shifting Contexts: Transformations in Anthropological Knowledge*, ed. Marilyn Strathern (London: Routledge, 1995), 164.

9. Robert J. Schreiter, *The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), ix.

10. Clifford's term referring to Squanto, a Patuxet "just back from Europe" encountered by the English Pilgrims on their arrival at Plymouth Rock in the New World (Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, 17).

11. The landowners association (*Kupiane Yuu Anduane*) is named after the snake ancestor. See Aletta Biersack, "The Mount Kare Python and His Gold: Totemism and Ecology in the Papua New Guinea Highlands," *American Anthropologist* 101, 1 (1999): 68–87; Richard Jackson and Glenn Banks, *In Search of the Serpent's Skin: The Story of the Porgera Gold Project* (Port Moresby, Papua

- New Guinea: Placer Niugini, 2002); Jerry Jacka, "Emplacement and Millennial Expectations in an Era of Development and Globalization: Heaven and the Appeal of Christianity for the Ipili," *American Anthropologist* 107, 4 (2005): 643–53.
12. Ibid., 645.
 13. Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, "Millennial Capitalism: First Thoughts on a Second Coming," *Public Culture* 12, no. 2 (2000): 291–343; Jacka, "Emplacement and Millennial Expectations."
 14. Bill Standish, "Elections in Simbu: Towards Gunpoint Democracy?" in *The 1992 Papua New Guinea Elections: Change and Continuity in Electoral Politics, Political and Social Change*. Monograph 23, 277–322, ed. Yaw Saffit (Canberra, Australia: Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University, 1996).
 15. Ron May, "Disorderly Elections: Political Turbulence and Institutional Reform in Papua New Guinea," State Society and Governance in Melanesia, Discussion Paper 2003/3 (Canberra: Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University, 2003), 8.
 16. Christin Kocher Schmid, ed., *Expecting the Day of Wrath*, Monograph 36 (Boroko, Papua New Guinea: National Research Institute, 1999).
 17. Pamela Steward and Andrew Strathern, "Money, Politics, and Persons in Papua New Guinea," *Social Analysis* 42 (1998): 132–49.
 18. Scott Flower, *The Growth of Islam in Papua New Guinea: Implications for Security and Policy* (PhD diss., Canberra: Australian National University, 2010).
 19. Papua New Guinea Parliament, *Hansard*, April 13, 2000, 2.
 20. Philip Gibbs, "Democracy and Enga Political Culture," in *Politicking in the Highlands: The 2002 Papuan New Guinea Elections*, State Society and Governance in Melanesia, Discussion Papers, vol. 2004/1 (Canberra: Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian Catholic University, 2004), 2–15.
 21. Ron May puts it well: "The problems that beset Papua New Guinea will diminish the state's legitimacy and eventually pose a threat to democracy that cannot be explained away as the result of a chaotic-looking but basically sound 'Melanesian Way' of doing politics" (May, "Disorderly Elections: Political Turbulence and Institutional Reform in Papua New Guinea," 164).
 22. Philip Gibbs and Joseph Lakane, "Haves and Have-Nots: The 2002 Elections in the Enga Province, PNG," *Catalyst* 33, no. 2 (2003): 96–116.
 23. Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, "Mission and Table Fellowship: Mission in the Aereopagus of Today," in *Prophetic Dialogue: Reflections on Christian Mission Today*, ed. Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 101–14.

24. *The 2009 STI, HIV and AIDS Third Quarter Surveillance Report, July–September, 2009*, Papua, New Guinea: National Department of Health, STI, HIV and AIDS Surveillance Unit, 2009).
25. Elizabeth Reid, "Pastoral Leadership and the HIV Epidemic," A Manual to Assist in the Formation of Priests, Religious, and Church Workers in PNG and the Pacific on the Pastoral and Ethical Challenges of the HIV Epidemic (unpublished manuscript, 2009), 124.
26. National HIV and AIDS Support Project (NHASP), *Situational Analysis for Strategic Planning at District Level: Simbu Province. Social Mapping Project* (Papua New Guinea: NHASP, 2005).
27. Robert Vitillo, "The Catholic Church Responding to AIDS as Teacher, Servant, and Pastor," Paper at Caritas Europa Conference, "Stigma or Solidarity? New Challenges for Church Responses to HIV and AIDS in Europe," Kiev, April 24, 2007.
28. Philip Gibbs, "Forces of Death and the Promise of Life in Papua New Guinea," *Australian E-Journal of Theology* 14 (2009).
29. Sadly, Agnes passed away in late 2010.
30. Heribert Bettscheider, "The Contribution of the Society of the Divine Word to the Elaboration of *Ad Gentes*," *Verbum SVD* 46, no. 4 (2005): 371–402.
31. "Missione non significa infatti semplicemente annuncio della Buona Novella di Cristo, ma una nuova incarnazione di Cristo e della sua Chiesa in un altro popolo, nella sua cultura e nella sua mentalità" (Johannes Schütte, "I problemi posti dalla missione al Concilio," in *Il Destino delle Missioni*, ed. Johannes Schütte (Roma-Brescia: Herder-Morcelliana, 1969), 9–23, at 16.
32. Antonio Pernia, "Mission for the Twenty-First Century: An SVD Perspective," in *Mission for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder (Chicago: CCGM Publications, 2001), 14–15.
33. *Nuntius Societatis Verbi Divini* XII, 5, 1988 (Rome: Generalate, 1990).
34. Stephen Bevans, "Inculturation and SVD Mission," *Verbum SVD* 42, no. 3 (2001): 260.
35. Louis J. Luzbetak, "Refounding Anthropos," Unpublished Position Paper (June 24, 2001), 8.
36. Louis J. Luzbetak, "'Inculturation': A Call for Greater Precision," in *Verbi Praecones: Festschrift für Karl Müller SVD zum 75. Geburtstag*, ed. Kurt Piskaty and Horst Rzepkowski (Nettetal, Germany: Steyler Verlag, 1993), 45.
37. Pernia, "Mission for the Twenty-First Century," 18–19.
38. I am proposing an ideal here. In a talk about developments with Anthropos International, Anthony Pernia challenges SVD missiologists to confront reality when he notes, "One can even wonder how many of our

students know that AI exists" (Pernia, "Expectations of the Generate of the Anthropos Institute").

39. See Whiteman's lecture in Chapter 3 in this volume.

40. Robert J. Schreiter, "A New Modernity: Living and Believing in an Unstable World," the 2005 Anthony Jordan Lectures, Newman Theological College, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, March 18–19, 2005, 33.

41. Jon Sobrino, "Jon Sobrino al P. Peter Hans Kolvenbach," Letter, December 13, 2006. <http://chiesa.espresso.repubblica.it/articolo/127601>, para. 4.7.

42. Barbara E. Reid, *Taking Up the Cross: New Testament Interpretations through Latina and Feminist Eyes* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007).

43. John Paul II, 12, address to the Fiftieth General Assembly of the United Nations. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/1995/october/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_05101995_address-touno_en.html.

44. Schreiter, *The New Catholicity*, 129.

45. "[W]hat revelation proclaimed, that God is with us to free us from the darkness of sin and death, and to raise us up to life eternal" (Vatican Council II, Constitution on Divine Revelation [*Dei Verbum*], para. 4). Significant elements of this text were introduced by the Indonesian bishops. See Philip Gibbs, *The Word in the Third World: Divine Revelation in the Theology of Jean-Marc Ela, Aloysius Pieris and Gustavo Gutiérrez* (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1996), 26.

46. Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God* (New York: Continuum, 2007), 40.

47. Reid, *Taking up the Cross*, 156.

48. "Bold humility" is a term used by David Bosch (*Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991], 489), which Bevans and Schroeder consider fits well with prophetic dialogue (Bevans and Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue*, 2).

49. See *ibid.*, 116.