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## Michael G. Layugan SVD: From Mission to Missionary Church. Divine Word Missionaries in the Philippines 1909-1957

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# BOOK REVIEW

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**Michael G Layugan SVD: *From Mission to Missionary Church. Divine Word Missionaries in the Philippines 1909-1957*, Logos Publications, Manila 2014. ISBN 978-971-510-256-8. XVIII + 609 pp.**

The book which Michael Layugan published in 2014 in Manila is based on his dissertation “The History of the Society of the Divine Word in the Philippines and Its Contribution to the Local Church between 1904 and 1957,” which the author had completed at Louvain in 2013. The book is enriched with a number of photos from the respective missionary works of Divine Word Missionaries in the Philippines. The title of his new book *From Mission to Missionary Church* clearly designates the aim of the Divine Word Missionaries to build up a reliable contextualized church that was enabled to carry out its own missionary commitment in the Philippines and worldwide. The great migration movement of the last decades created numerous communities of Catholic Filipinos in Asia, the Pacific, Europe and, especially,

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North America. These communities were often served by Filipino Divine Word Missionaries. After the end of the Spanish colonial period in the Philippines, the Catholic Church was in need of new missionaries to counteract the Aglipayan movement, to evangelize indigenous communities at various parts of the Islands, to build up an efficient education system and to train Filipino clergy in order to make the church stand on its own legs. The all-unifying goal of the SVD missionaries was to make the Philippine Church a missionary church. The Catholic Church was in a very critical situation at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Many parishes were vacant since many Spanish parish priests had returned to Spain and there were insufficient Filipino priests to fill the gap. The Society of the Divine Word was flexible enough to accept the Philippines as their new mission field, even though it was not first evangelization work, according to its own aim as a Mission Society to work among non-Christians. Arnold Janssen experienced sending SVD priests to immigrant communities in Latin American countries for widening the missionary goal of the Missionary Society. The former China missionary and founder of the SVD mission among the local population of New Guinea, Fr. Eberhard Limbrock (1859-1931), knew the need of the Church in the Philippines and recommended the foundation of SVD engagement there. Before his death in 1909, Arnold Janssen followed his advice and, in 1908, discerned establishing the SVD in the Philippines and saw the possibility of developing and expanding its mission to various parts of the country.

There are various possibilities in looking at the history of a missionary society in a particular country. Michael Layugan has decided to organize his study according to the years in office of the respective SVD general superiors. Since the missionary endeavor depended largely on the decisions the Generalate administration made in favor of a certain mission, it makes sense to opt for such a schematization in historical periods, which represent the development of the SVD in a particular administration period of the SVD. This allows the researcher, as a member of that mission society, to dig deeper

into the archives of his society and make links between the material available in such archives that an outsider would hardly discover.

The first part of the study *Fr. Arnold Janssen and the Foundation of the SVD Mission in the Philippines: 1904-1909* deals with the question and the challenging situation of the Church in the Philippines at the beginning of the US-American governance of the country. During this time many Protestant missionaries discovered this country as their mission field.

Part Two of the work is entitled, “Fr. Nicolaus Blum and the incipient years of the SVD Presence in the Philippines of 1909-1919.”

The successful China missionary, Fr. Ludwig Beckert, was transferred from Shandong, China, to the Abra Mission of the SVD in the Philippines. Beckert arrived together with the newly ordained priest, Fr. Johann Scheiermann, on August 15, 1909 in Manila. Cagutongan in Pilar was their first mission place in the Philippines. With the arrival of many more missionaries in the following years, many more mission stations would be opened among the Tingguians in the Abra region of Northern Luzon Island. In 1910, Fr. Michael Hergesheimer, an Alsatian who played an important role in the growth of the SVD mission in the Philippines, arrived. When the SVD Region in the Philippines was started in 1912, Fr. Ludwig Beckert was appointed its first regional Superior. In the same year, the SVD Generalate at Steyler appointed the Japan missionary to make an official visitation to New Guinea and the Philippines. In both missions the visitators recommended to take better care on the health of the missionaries.

In 1912, Fr. Beckert achieved the formal recognition of the SVD by the American government, giving the SVD a legal personality. In the same year, the Regional Superior started negotiating with the archbishop of Manila to start a SVD mission house, procuring and taking over a parish in the capital city.

On November 4, 1913, the sick Regional Fr. Beckert died of overwork; while Fr. Scheiermann had passed away of typhoid fever in 1910. Three more priests died of typhoid and other sicknesses.

In September 1912, Fr. Wilhelm Finneemann arrived in the Philippines. He became another influential missionary and the first bishop in the Philippines.

In 1914, Fr. Michael Hergesheimer was elected the second Regional Superior. The bishops wanted the SVD missionaries to fight against the spread of the Aglipayan movement in the Philippines. The Aglipayans tried all means to drive the missionaries away.

The SVD missionaries faced many difficulties in the first ten years of their work in the Philippines; some were even deported during the First World War. The future of the SVD presence was at risk. Before the end of the war in 1918, the American government in the Philippines had deported seven SVD missionaries to the USA; one of them died in 1919 at Chicago and only four SVD missionaries remained in the Abra mission. In spite of the difficulties, Fr. Nicholas Blum, the Superior General of the SVD, decided that the SVD should remain in the Philippines, even though many had counselled him to give up this mission.

In Part Three, “Fr. Wilhelm Gier and the Consequences of the General Visitation: 1920-1932,” important stages of the SVD engagement in the Philippines are presented.

In 1920, the American authorities allowed the German SVD missionaries to return to the Philippines. The returnees arrived in Manila on December 8, 1920. In 1920, the fifth General Chapter elected Fr. Wilhelm Gier for a term of twelve years as the successor of Fr. Blum as Superior General SVD, who had died in 1919. Fr. Heinrich Bürschen was the Regional Superior from 1920 to 1926. Fr. Gier was the first Superior General to come for a visitation to the Philippines. In December 1921 and January 1922, he visited and encouraged all confreres in the country. In 1922, the SVD took over the mission work on Lubang Island. In 1924, the SVD accepted the invitation to take over the newly erected Espiritu Santo parish at Manila. In late 1923, the SVD purchased a piece of property in Manila-Tayuman, near the Espiritu Santo parish. The Catholic Trade School was

opened at the newly erected buildings at Tayuman and the SVD printing press was moved from St. Rita's Hall to Tayuman. In 1924, the headquarters of the SVD were transferred from Bangued to the capital Manila. In 1926, a new SVD mission was started in Zambales. The SVD took over the responsibility of running the seminary in Vigan in 1925. The administration of the Diocesan Seminary at Binmaley, Pangasinan was accepted in 1928 by the Regional Superior Theodor Bittenbruch (1927-1933). In 1929, a new property was purchased in New Manila for the erection of a SVD formation house, which became later known under the name: Christ the King Seminary. In 1930, the first two Filipino candidates were sent to Techny, USA, for their formation. In 1929, the German P. Wilhelm Finneemann, SVD, from Steyl, the first priest of Espirito Santo, was nominated Auxiliary Bishop of Manila.

Part Four, "Fr. Josef Grendel and the New Commitments of the SVD in the Philippines: 1932-1947," handles the takeover of new mission fields.

In 1932, the Sixth General Chapter at Steyl, Netherlands, elected the new Superior General, Fr. Josef Grendel. Because of World War II, Fr. Grendel remained in office until 1947. Fr. Bittenbruch was elected for a third term for the years 1933 to 1936. In his third term, the Filipino regions accepted many new tasks and missions. Property for a retreat house in Baguio City was purchased in late 1932. In late 1933, the first SVD missionaries went to Cagayan. The plan to build a SVD seminary in New Manila could finally take place on August 4, 1933 with the SVD Brothers and local helpers as builders. On April 21, 1935, the SVD Generalate in Rome, decreed the erection of the Missions House Christ the King in New Manila. In June 1935, the first novitiate was opened with eight candidates at Christ the King Mission House. On May 21, 1936, Bp. Finneemann ordained Rafael Rulloda as the first Filipino to become an SVD priest. In 1936, the newly created Prefecture Apostolic of Mindoro was created with Bp. Finneemann as its Prefect. The SVD was commissioned with this Prefecture. In 1935, the SVD took over the San Carlos College in Cebu. Fr. Michael Ansbach was the

Regional Superior for the years of 1936 to 1937. In 1937, the SVD Region was made into a province. At that time the province had 1 bishop, 68 priests, 15 brothers and 7 clerical novices. Fr. Anspach became the first provincial superior in 1937 and remained in this office until 1944. The *Propaganda Fide* wanted the SVD to take over a new mission in Mindanao. In 1938, the Provincial Council decided to accept this offer. In 1941, another offer was made to the SVD regarding the takeover of the management and administration of St. Paul's College in Tacloban on Leyte Island and accepted. In 1941, by request of the Manila archbishop, the SVD founded the Sacred Heart of Jesus parish at Quezon City (New Manila). The Japanese occupation of the Philippines brought a lot of suffering to the people and the ministers of the church. On February 27, 1942, the Japanese landed on Mindoro Island. Bp. Finnemann was forced by the Japanese soldiers to board a ship on October 26, 1942. He was then thrown overboard into the depth of the sea. Several more SVD missionaries were killed by the Japanese soldiers during the war.

Part Five is entitled, "Fr. Alois Grosse-Kappenberg and the Consolidation of the SVD Missionary Endeavors: 1947-1957."

Because of World War II, the Seventh General Chapter was only held in 1947. Fr. Alois Grosse-Kappenberg was elected and remained in this office until 1957. The Independence of the Philippines were declared on July 4, 1946. On July 1, 1948, Santo Carlos became the second Catholic University in the Philippines. Many expelled SVD China missionaries were sent to the Philippines after the foundation of the People's Republic of China. In 1951, the first two Filipino SVD missionaries were sent to Flores and Timor in Indonesia. In 1954, the SVD received St. Jude parish from the Manila archdiocese, near the Malacañang Palace of the President of the Philippines. Later, a Chinese School was erected next to the parish. In 1956, it was decided to buy land in Tagaytay to build their new formation house outside Manila.

The author is convinced that the development and expansion of the SVD mission in the Philippines for the next fifty years was necessary because

the SVD appointed new missionaries from various nationalities to the Philippines and because of the growing number of Filipino SVD missionaries. The SVD during those years was able to accept many new parishes and educational institutions, including diocesan seminaries. “By engaging into unfamiliar grounds and responding to the needs of other dioceses, the Society expanded its geographical boundaries” (570) far beyond its beginnings in Abra in Northern Luzon.

The SVD mission method was clearly directed to consolidate the existing parishes and to start new ones for the sake of giving the parishioners a solid Christian formation. This was favoured by the many educational institutions the SVD took over or were founded in those years, as well. The training of diocesan, and later also SVD, priests and brothers from the Philippines contributed tremendously to the strength of the Catholic Church in the Philippines.

Fr. Michael Layugan’s doctoral research was done at the Catholic University of Leuven in Belgium and completed there in 2013. The book, which he published a year later in the Philippines, is a significant contribution to the history of the Catholic Church in the Philippines in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It shows how much human dedication can achieve, even under difficult circumstances. The book is enriched by a good selection of photos of the SVD mission and their missionaries in the Philippines.

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