DIVINE WORD ANTHROPOLOGICAL INSTITUTE RETURNS TO ITS ROOTS

The General Council of the Society of the Divine Word (SVD) appointed Father Roger Schroeder SVD, Louis J. Luzbetak SVD Professor of Mission and Culture at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, for a fourth term as the international coordinator of Anthropos Institute (AI).

Founded in 1931, AI cultivates collaboration in the fields of anthropology, ethnology, linguistics and religious studies. The AI center that is located in Sankt Augustin, Germany, handles the publication of Anthropos: International Review of Anthropology and Linguistics, a peer-reviewed journal that contains research articles, reports, commentaries and reviews in all areas of cultural anthropology and the scientific study of religion. In its 110th year, Anthropos is published in five languages.

In addition to Anthropos, the AI center in Germany publishes two monograph series, Studia and Collectanea Instituti Anthropos; maintains a library of more than 102,000 volumes; and holds the international AI archives.

There are also nine other centers in India, Japan, Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, Ghana, and Brazil, where one or more AI members work.

Father Schroeder, Father Philip Gibbs SVD in Papua New Guinea and Father Michael Sebastian Maria SVD in India make up the AI International Council.

“Over time, the work of Anthropos Institute tended to be only academic with less relevance for regular SVD mission activity,” Father Schroeder said. “Since 2000, the Generalate [worldwide headquarters of the Society of the Divine Word] has been intentionally promoting a shift from a sort of ‘ivory tower’ of experts to an international network of currently 40 SVD AI members with backgrounds in the social and religious sciences, working around the world. The newly-introduced structure of an international coordinator and council of Anthropos Institute is striving to bridge the gap among the AI members working around the world and between AI and the down-to-earth SVD mission work.

“In the early years, St. Arnold Janssen [founder of the Society of the Divine Word] supported anthropologist Wilhelm Schmidt and other SVD in their study of the cultures, societies and languages, normally

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in places where the SVD were working,” Father Schroeder said. “Anthropos Institute was later founded to maintain this scientific study as one aspect of the Society’s missionary work.”

Respected anthropologist Wilhelm Schmidt SVD, who developed the anthropological theory of culture circles and was tapped by Pope Pius XI to set up the Vatican’s Ethnological Museum, became AI’s first director. As such, he worked with founding members Divine Word Fathers Martin Gusinde, Wilhelm Koppers and Paul Schebesta, ethnographers and authorities in their fields of study.

Father Gusinde studied peoples of Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Japan, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, the United States and Venezuela. He is credited with saving the memory of the cultural history of the now-extinct Yamana people of Tierra del Fuego. Father Koppers is known for advocating a historical, comparative approach to understanding cultural phenomenon. His studies of hunting and food-gathering tribes led to theories on the origin and development of society. Father Schebesta, who specialized in Egyptology and ethnology, studied the Ituri pygmies of the Congo and was the first to richly describe pygmy cultures of Africa and Southeast Asia.

These experts studied the cultures of the people in the lands in which Divine Word Missionaries served. Today, the AI coordinator and council are calling its worldwide network of scholars and researchers to return to that heritage.

During the past five years, members of Anthropos Institute have played an important role in the preparation of and follow-up on the topics of intercultural life and mission from the 2012 General Chapter, a meeting of SVD delegates from around the world that happens once every six years.

AI members also are involved with work with practical implications. Some members are studying local cultures in India and Africa, urban situations in Brazil, and local social issues, such as care of people with disabilities in villages in Papua New Guinea. In January 2016, several AI members will be working with the Arnold Janssen Spirituality Team, based in Steyl, Holland, to develop SVD/SSpS (Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters) spirituality through a retreat on interculturality.

Other AI members in North America include Father Jon Kirby SVD, who spent 36 years as a missionary in Ghana and now works in Los Angeles; Father Alexander Rödlach SVD, who is originally from Austria and teaches at Creighton University in Omaha, Neb.; and Father Pio Estepa SVD of the Philippines who currently teaches at Divine Word College in Epworth, Iowa. Each has extensive international and intercultural experience.

Established in 1875, the Society of the Divine Word is the largest Catholic congregation of missionaries. The religious order consists of more than 6,000 missionaries in 78 countries.

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