
6 Interculturality and Religious Life

Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8LXdBWRBAcM>

Interview with Sr. Adriana Milmanda, Missionary Sister Servant of the Holy Spirit

Scripture Passage

Good Samaritan Lk 10:25-37

Reading

Beyond International and Multicultural: Prerequisites and Prospects for Intercultural Community Living

Anthony Gittens, CCSP

Stating the Thesis

From Atlanta to Accra, Boston to Buenos Aires, Columbus to Caracas -- and from Duquesne University to the Dominican Republic -- understandings and experiences of community and personal identity have changed significantly in a century. Geographical and social mobility have re-shaped local and international relations. With this in mind, I want to bring into relief both a general and a specific reality, and assess its implications. Having first identified the nature and purpose of any intercultural community, we will then consider how the notion of interculturality itself might pose a challenge and act as a stimulus both specifically, to international religious institutes, and more generally, to multicultural faith-communities, from parishes to voluntary associations to universities -- whose mission statements declare their commitment to forging moral and organic communities from the raw materials of their diverse ethnic, cultural and even religious membership.

The words international and multicultural are now common currency, but intercultural is less familiar or ambiguous. I believe international religious communities like the Spiritans must become increasingly and intentionally intercultural, and in an increasingly pluralistic world, parochialism must be countered and xenophobia or discrimination repudiated. Without a virtual tectonic shift from "international" to "intercultural," there will simply be no viable future for international religious faith communities. To establish and defend this thesis in four steps, I will first explore some contested terminology, then identify theological implications.

Third, I will clarify the challenge, and finally evaluate the prospects for achieving the tectonic shift itself.

From Monocultural to Intercultural: the Terminology

True communication depends on a high degree of mutual intelligibility; precision of language and a common vocabulary are prerequisites for our reflections today.

Monocultural and Bicultural

Historically, most non-nomads lived and died within a primary world of less than ten miles' radius and among people of a common language and culture. Relatively speaking, very few human beings are truly bicultural. Exceptionally, climate or hunger dictates a move, but usually a monocultural group is involved. Beyond "people like us" are "people not like us."

However, children enculturated within a stable domestic arena where each parent speaks a different native language can – and do – become bicultural quite naturally. Socialized in a bilingual context, perhaps benefitting from moving physically between the primary cultures of each parent, a child finds it perfectly natural to shift between two languages ("code-switching") and across geographical territories. But persons who grow up in one milieu and later encounter another culture and language may become bicultural only by deliberately learning each culture and language sufficiently for them to pass more or less freely between two worlds. Bicultural thus applies to someone living simultaneously in two cultural and linguistic worlds, as do many bilingual Mexican-Americans, Korean-Americans, and so on. But when a person deliberately leaves home more or less permanently, the appropriate term would be cross-cultural.

Cross-Cultural

Someone belonging originally to one culture ("culture A") but later moving beyond its confines to reside for a number of years in another environment (his or her "culture B"), may become cross-cultural. Members of the host community are perfectly "at home" (living in their own "culture A"), but the interloper is "out of place," not "at home," an outsider or stranger¹ who, being now in his or her "culture B," must therefore learn this new culture and its language. Moreover, to learn another culture is every bit as challenging as to learn another language. To assume that another culture can be informally "picked up" is naïve and dangerous, not to say arrogant and condescending.

The cross-cultural person will remain an outsider and cannot be fully assimilated culturally. But outsiders come in many shapes and forms, typically "participating" or "non-participating,"² and the former can be of great value to the insiders.³ But "non-participating outsiders" are at best culturally or morally irrelevant (like tourists), and at worst destructive (like invaders). Unsurprisingly, the host population will take its time, carefully scrutinizing incomers. This is necessary self-protection for local communities that often carry bad memories of previous ungracious and dangerous strangers. During this time, the incomer is expected to be learning the cultural rules, responsibilities and sanctions necessary for smooth day to day living. From the stranger's perspective, this is neither simple nor painless: it is a process of liminality. Becoming truly cross-cultural therefore, depends as much on the response of the locals as on one's own bona fides.⁴

Multicultural

Any neighborhood, parish, university or country comprising people of many cultures is de facto multicultural. But this says nothing about how they actually relate; that is a measure of interculturality. Human responses in a multicultural context range from simple avoidance to rank hostility or conventional courtesy to deep friendship; and differences may be eliminated (by reactions from genocide to assimilation), tolerated (by attitudes from indifference to unconcern), or managed. "Separate development" or simple mutual apathy would be negative management, leaving everyone in a state of enduring liminality. But more positively, differences can be managed by mutual cooperation and the encouragement of diversity, as one might create an orchestra or chorus. Often though, multicultural communities can be appropriately characterized as merely "people living together, separately."

Intercultural

From the 1950s as multinational companies and global commerce expanded, the study of cross-cultural contact was in vogue, as employment moved people away from home. Vocabulary was still unstable, and the words multicultural and intercultural were often used synonymously. Both theory and language derived largely from the social sciences of cultural anthropology, sociology, and psychology. Corporations were hiring people to travel and reside internationally, but also trying to provide needed skills for communicating with a variety of business partners. But today, and for decades now, such skills have been identified, widely taught, and acquired across the business world.

Christian missionaries had of course been exposed for centuries to cross-cultural living, and had accumulated much informal knowledge and experience. But as missions have increasingly operated as a two-way street and the reality of global Christianity has become clearer, the challenges posed by de facto multicultural faith communities and two-way cross-cultural living have become acute. Missiologists became increasingly aware of the cultural dynamics at work in mission situations, including “reverse mission” from Africa and Asia to Europe and America – that is, two-way cross-cultural living.

Social science is unconcerned with religious faith, but the subject of theology is, quite explicitly, God. So when theology adopts sociological language, it also adapts it, with the result that theologian and sociologist no longer speak quite the same language. Sociology used multicultural and intercultural as effectively synonymous – or else the intercultural focused on the social dynamics of international relations, while multicultural simply identified a social fact within neighborhoods or voluntary associations. But theologically, the word intercultural relates explicitly to God and/or to interpersonal relationships shaped and motivated by the faith commitment of the participants. Theologically speaking, intercultural community members are drawn from diverse cultural backgrounds but share an intentional commitment to fellowship, motivated not simply by pragmatic or commercial considerations but by a shared religious conviction and common mission. Recently, many communities have seen the challenges posed by the cultural differences among their members.

The near-bankruptcy of the standard assimilation model of recruitment to religious orders (“Come join us, and we will teach you to do things our way”) has been revealed, as the demands of true intercultural living and ministry have become increasingly clear. But many members of such communities remain unaware of, or struggle with the challenge (which is fast becoming a real imperative), while failing to profit from rich and hard-won gains from the social sciences. Intercultural living then, is a faith-based and lifelong process of conversion, emerging as a requirement of members of intentional, international religious communities (and some intentional multicultural groups like large parishes).⁵ Healthy intercultural living depends on the level of commitment and support generated by the members. Individuals vary in adaptability and learning-levels, but each one generates positive or negative energy; and a small, resistant group can generate enough negative energy to thwart the wider community.

Before identifying the dynamics of intercultural living, we must address culture itself, since this is the context for lived faith; there is no person without culture, and faith can only be lived culturally. We do not live our faith in a vacuum or outside a specific cultural context. But inter-cultural living is multi-cultural rather than mono-cultural, and nobody can be expected to live their faith in and through an entirely alien culture, or the dominant culture of the majority.

Culture

Most people too readily assume they understand culture, which is actually subtle and elusive. Recognizable under many forms, culture is constitutive of every human person raised in a social world. Yet no one is born with culture; and, in different circumstances, anyone might have become enculturated differently. Babies born and raised in Beijing by Chinese parents become culturally Chinese; but a neonate flown to Pittsburgh and adopted by Euro-American parents will become a person of Euro-American culture. Environment and socialization are critically important, and everyone has a particular culture or constellation of cultural traits. But since faith can only be expressed culturally, an intercultural community should value each person's cultural identity as gift. Each one's lived faith constitutes an alternative and legitimate way of being: Christian, Jew, or Muslim. Yet everyone's different perspectives, habits and propensities pose challenges to harmonious community living. The ability to live with, and not simply despite, cultural differences is a hallmark of an intercultural community. Here are five descriptive definitions of culture, specifically chosen for their implications for intercultural living.

Culture is6 “the [hu]man-made part of the environment”: what social groups do to the worlds they inhabit. Universally, culture is material (artifacts, buildings); institutional (law and order, kinship and economic systems, and religion); symbolic (orality, perhaps writing, and words-objects-gestures that “say the unsayable”); and moral (values and virtues [and their opposites, vices]). These are the “social glue” of society.

Second, culture is “the form of social life”: the way a social group normally behaves, including rule-breaking behaviors.

Standardized behavior must be interpreted through the underlying belief-and-thought system. But there is always a discrepancy between what people say they believe and what they actually do. Insiders (and appropriately informed outsiders) can interpret heroic or ignoble behavior. Every social system has both sin and grace, pathology and virtue, and needs effective sanctions.

Third, culture is “a meaning-making system”; supported by standards and rules, it makes intelligible communication possible. Theoretical linguistics distinguishes three helpful and contextual criteria for communication: grammaticality (strict and consistent conformity to the rules of grammar), acceptability (less formal, but appropriate and intelligible communicative interaction) and meaningfulness (simple, basic, but adequate information-transfer). People can communicate meaningfully, if not always with the perfect grammaticality of the pedant or perfectionist – something to remember in intercultural living. Again, linguistics explores the paradoxical “rule-governed creativity” that allows a virtually-infinite number of utterances to be produced and understood from a limited core of grammatical rules. Every speaker routinely produces utterances never before articulated identically in that specific word-sequence, yet immediately understood by people who have never before heard precisely the same sequence of words! Likewise, intercultural community members embody creative and novel – yet comprehensible and acceptable – ways of living, from their common stock of beliefs, convictions or virtues.

We may note that although the rules of chess are few, the moves are limitless, but without knowing the rules, we could watch players for decades and still be unable to play chess.

Without a grasp of underlying rules and rationality, members of intercultural communities will never become as proficient as chess players.

Fourth, culture is analogous to skin. The skin is the human body's largest organ. Grafting it is difficult and sometimes impossible. If it is severely burned, death may be inevitable.

And yet skin can tolerate multiple scars, blemishes, wrinkles and dermatological conditions. We cannot be literally in someone else's skin; and if ours were to be stripped or flayed, we would certainly die. Cultures, like skin, need not be perfect and can tolerate both wear and tear and trauma; but the overall integrity of the skin is as necessary for life as is the overall integrity of a culture and its members.

Fifth, culture is "an enduring social reality." Cultures rise and fall, flourish and die, and none is static or immortal; implications for intercultural living should be obvious. Culture is transmitted gradually over time, through the generations: an ongoing process rather than a simple social fact. Some cultures, (termed "traditional") may appear to be in stasis or equilibrium, but every culture is in process of change, at varied speeds, and always "contested" by its members; and some are more resilient than others.

Reality (what people consider real) is socially constructed:⁷ people are born into a community that has already interpreted the world and determined the meaning of things, events, and relationships. Socialization or enculturation extends through the first decades of life, as a person is aggregated to the pre-existing world of meaning. Once adequately socialized, it is increasingly difficult to think our thoughts or ways are wrong.

With such understanding of culture, the challenge facing old and young alike is to identify and respond to the demands of intercultural living. The broader community must engage with the cultural identity of newer members and abandon the crude assimilation model as broken and unfit for the purpose. Individual members will respond to the challenge by embracing intercultural living wholeheartedly or halfheartedly, or by resisting and waiting for death. Everyone must stand and be counted: the future, viable or not, is at stake.

Identifying Theological Implications

Because every mature person is a person of culture, spirituality (or lived faith) can only flourish in a cultural context. But how do faith and culture coexist? St Jerome coined the word spirituality in the fifth century, defining it explicitly as life in the Holy Spirit given at baptism to guide our faith-journey.⁸ It might be described as "a way of being in the world with God," where every variable (way, being, world, God) is shaped by each individual's experience. During a lifetime a person may embrace a number of possible ways (single, married, widowed, celibate and so on), experience different states of being (from youth to dotage, in sickness and health, safety or peril, as citizen or refugee and so on), live in several different worlds (rural, urban, tropical, arctic, peaceful or warring), and relate in different ways to God (Creator, Wisdom, Lord, Father, King, Warrior, Spirit – or the Jesus of Manger or Golgotha, miracle-worker or faith-healer).

Spirituality is not a set of formulated beliefs, but shapes and is shaped by how we relate to God and creation, pray and express our embodied selves, respond to suffering and well-being, and make life-choices. From different cultural environments and experiences, human beings have generated myriad legitimate expressions of Christian spirituality. People in a multi-cultural community, attempting, not just to live the faith, but to do so in an explicitly intercultural way, will encounter many opportunities and challenges, similarities and differences, with respect to liturgy, prayer, ritual, music, silence, privacy, conformity, and so on. Each person must discover a new *modus vivendi* amid cultural differences, learned behaviors and personal preferences. Some of the most contentious issues and initially unintelligible responses may prove – if approached sympathetically and creatively – to be mutually enriching.

Here are four areas of "contested" culturally shaped topics with particular salience for intercultural community members. Failure to learn from each other and adapt accordingly, can destroy the integrity of a community.

Our social location describes our enduring world and our place in it – from Pacific atoll to forest enclave, from isolated settlement to crowded high-rise, from tight-knit extended family system to free-wheeling independent citizen. Serious thought should be given to the formative power of each person’s social location, and to how much individual variety and preference is compatible with the demands of the broader community and its mission. Understanding others’ social geography, socialization, and social mobility is a prerequisite to appropriate responses. Sadly, some current community members know less about their brethren after decades than they do about movie stars or politicians.

Body tolerance describes the culturally diverse ways people treat and display their bodies and interact with others. It contrasts different people’s comfort levels. But a relaxed and spontaneous (“Dionysian”) attitude no more indicates immodesty than a controlled and disciplined (“Apollonian”) posture indicates modesty; cultural differences in body tolerance cannot be grossly correlated with virtue or vice. But culturally diverse people in an intentional community must become mutually sensitive to what is appropriate dress and demeanor, interaction and affection. The “noble simplicity of the Roman Rite” may be revered, especially in colder climates, yet, people from the tropics may find it ill-suited to appropriate displays of temperament and affect, and constrained by too many rules and rubrics. Compare the image of a day-long open-air liturgical celebration under an African sun, and a hurried 40-minute Sunday Mass with a congregation that neither sings nor emotes -- and the difference between Dionysian exuberance and spontaneity and the clock-governed “Sunday obligation” of Apollonian discipline and control become obvious. In matters of common prayer, liturgy, music or silence, movement and stillness, different comfort-levels and tolerances, will constitute significant points of concern within an intercultural community.

Health and sickness are culturally coded. Many northern people with highly developed health systems rarely see a dead body, and serious sickness is understood to be a matter for hospital isolation for a medical or surgical solution before a rapid return to the community. But in many parts of the world, death and dying are constant visitors, sickness is attended domestically and medical/surgical solutions are rare. Rather than sickness isolating patient from family, it integrates them; and when death nears, family solidarity is critical, whatever the expense or distance involved. But many members of conventional religious communities had to make a real break with their families, had no further involvement with sick or dying relatives, and were prevented by distance, finances or rules from attending funerals or assisting with family needs. Intercultural living demands a radical rethinking of what is appropriate or demanded in justice, relative to each member personally and to their kin.

Finally, attitudes to time and space are so culturally variable that any group of diverse people will need to address them explicitly. We have all heard pejorative references – by people enslaved by clock or watch – to “African time” or “Mexican time”; but clock-watching can also produce hypertension, frustration and intolerance. Think again of those open-ended, timeless Sunday liturgies of African communities, compared to the clock-ruled, time-starved, and rushed liturgies in other areas. In many cultures, time is a gift, to be used freely without reference to chronology, while in others it is a scarce resource, treated as a commodity and with the very same vocabulary as we use for commercial transactions: we say that time can be ‘saved’ or ‘spent,’ ‘gained’ or ‘lost,’ and even ‘wasted’. When daily life is structured by the clock, there is little “time” left over for spontaneity, creativity, or simple availability. Intercultural living calls us to address the use (and abuse) of time. And as with time, so with space: attitudes to space – personal space, open-space, private space, common space, sacred space – are not simply whimsical but culturally shaped. In an intercultural community, space must be carefully negotiated, and not without some discomfort or pain, and certainly requiring compromise.

Clarifying the Challenge

Ethnocentrism is a fact of life: we see and interpret through culturally-conditioned eyes. It is immoral only when we inflict our own perspective on others, imagine it is the only true perspective, or act as if it were actually God's way of seeing the world. We are all ethnocentric, but with maturity and training we can identify this and act accordingly. An ethnocentric bias judges other people and worlds to be inferior reflections of one's own. The "other" then becomes the problem – to be avoided, demeaned, attacked or perhaps converted or assimilated.

Intercultural living challenges our ethnocentrism -- which should gradually erode through our exposure to other ways of living. And since none of us is entirely free, each has work to do. The narrower our shared world of meaning, the more we will distinguish insiders ("us") from outsiders ("them"). The challenge then, is to create a new culture from the constituent cultures of each member, so that there is no longer an us/them opposition. But this lovely thought is undermined in practice by what I call the "cultural flaw" and some theologians call "original sin."

God's idea of a community – from the mythical Genesis story to the historical community of the first disciples, and down to our own day – is one of radical inclusion and radical equality, made explicit by Jesus. But while God wants to unite, every culture is limited by a perverse tendency to stratify, separate, diminish and exclude; no human society is in fact radically inclusive or egalitarian. Every attempt to form an inclusive community of "we" – in Eden or in myriad subsequent Utopian communities – very soon results in alienation or the creation of hierarchy, or drives a wedge between people: an original inclusive community of "WE" thus becomes polarized into "US" and "THEM." It is precisely this situation that Jesus encountered. The Letter to the Ephesians describes humanity's self-inflicted wound and the Jesus solution. The author describes the polarized world of Jews ("us") and Gentiles ("them"), and God's plan to reconcile humanity to itself and to God as an all-inclusive "we."

But now in Christ Jesus, you who were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is the peace between us, and he has made the two into one and broken down the barrier which used to keep them apart, actually destroying in his own person the hostility between us (Eph 2:13-14).

This is a stunning articulation of Jesus' radical plan for humanity. Pauline writings also declare three times that there is henceforth to be no moral distinction or political division erected on the obvious differences between men and women, Jew and Greek, slave and free (Gal 3:28; Col 3:11; 1Cor 12:13). This is the very vision that must be the foundation and justification for every attempt to build intercultural communities. Jesus chose to become a person of the margins, a sociological and biblical "stranger" rather than a person of power and influence. Influential people occupy central positions where power and authority lie. But Jesus chose the most effective way to encounter the people marginalized by circumstance and by society: outreach to society's "them" or "other" -- whether by gender, ethnicity, religion, lifestyle, or social or moral standing. For him, margins and boundaries were points of engagement rather than marks of separation or discrimination. Since the primary purpose of intercultural communities is greater commitment to the mission of Jesus, every member is called to kenotic living: self-emptying service of, and among, "the least" or "the other." The only effective way of doing this is Jesus' own way, the Way of the Cross, the way of encountering those who live on the margins and walking with them.

Given the strong cultural pressures to achievement, advancement and social recognition, intercultural living stands as a bold invitation to a faith-based countercultural lifestyle. Even if we address ethnocentrism and "downward mobility," much remains to be done. Good will alone is insufficient: it has produced sin and scandal (from Crusades, slavery or burnings, to the

marginalization and abuse of women, to excommunications, and to an odious lack of due process). Some would-be disciples of Jesus have been stumbling blocks rather than honest witnesses; good will must be complemented and shaped by ongoing conversion.

An “intercultural project” is not just a rational game-plan but a faith-driven and lifelong undertaking. Faith may or may not motivate multinational companies or volunteers, but it is the foundation of the life-project of every Christian disciple. Our aspirations reach beyond the reasonable or coldly rational; and in the face of frustration and failure it may be our faith alone that sustains us and others. So, without mature faith-sharing, appropriate correction, reconciliation and mutual encouragement, the project will inevitably founder, as Pope Francis made explicit, excoriating the Curia at Christmas 2014. And we all know the corrosive effects of gossip and slander, or of the basic lack of encouragement from peers and leaders.

And yet: even personal faith is insufficient unless supported by the actual fruit of people’s good intentions: the ongoing commitment to acquiring appropriate skills and virtue. Not that everyone must become super-efficient, but everyone must persevere in the effort. In ministries that require a new language, the most effective are not always the most fluent or brilliant, but those most dedicated to the process of trying to learn a little and never giving up in the face of difficulty. So with learning the art of intercultural living: perseverance may be a better witness than expertise.

The constant challenge is to become virtuous. A virtue is moral good repeated until it becomes a habit (and vice is its opposite). Intercultural living demands a litany of virtues: the virtue of practical respect for personal and cultural differences; commitment to seek truth through dialogue: truth is not a commodity but a goal to be sought with others, and it will change us all. Then, because marginality and “downward mobility” constitute the apostolic strategy of Jesus, his disciples must strive for the same, lest we fail to encounter poor and forgotten people. Again, we are called to cultivate the virtue of being continuous learners – the actual meaning of the word “disciple.” And we must learn from the best of theology and tradition: intercultural living is really as old as Christianity and we have a lot to learn from the past.

Evaluating the Prospects

Since intercultural living is not the mobilization of an international work-force but a faith-based commitment to the vision of Jesus, to “problematize” it is strategically and psychologically impoverished: rather it is an opportunity, a challenge and a grace. Not everyone need be young and active: the moral support of those who are less active is of incalculable value; but a polarized group is self-defeating. But intercultural living is not a “natural” arrangement, though it is possible in a supernatural context.⁹ Diplomacy, compromise, and a common vision must inspire a common effort and provide appropriate means to sustain it. Even for members of established international communities, it is something new: most of us remain rather mono-cultural even in multicultural or international environments. Intercultural living is necessary but costly for viable international religious life, but obligatory if dry bones are to live. If successful, it will revolutionize our lives and the Christian mission. And in some form it challenges all in ministry to any “other,” by whatever criteria. Not everyone will accept the challenge to mission in intercultural communities, though it is open to everyone. And it does require a critical mass of committed supporters, lest the apathetic or resisters compromise its realization.

As membership of international institutes continues to decline and age in the northern hemisphere, communities that do survive with integrity in the coming decades will do so through their international, culturally diverse, membership.

They will be characterized by “fusion” or the integration of culturally diverse personnel. The

opposite of fusion is “fission”: the fragmentation of international congregations so that they become no more than loose aggregations of culturally discrete groups. Thus they would remain international entities, but at the cost of their intercultural witness to the gospel. This happens through individualism, tribalism, factionalism, or the loss of the founding charism. The future of international religious life – and collaborative ministries -- depends significantly on the ability of each community (local and institutional) to think and act interculturally. Failure to do so in a global church will lead to terminal decline.

Conclusion: From Invitation to Radical Welcome

Intercultural living is a much more persuasive force than cheap rhetoric about loving one’s neighbor. But new wine cannot be put into old wineskins, and we cannot build such communities by recycling old material or uncritically employing obsolete ideas. The classical model for community-building was assimilation: new members were welcomed into a pre-existing and largely monocultural community with its established rules and expectations, standardized dress, food and forms of prayer. Those able to adjust accordingly might be admitted; others would soon leave; there were always plenty of aspirants. The unspoken message was “come join us and share our ways and religious tradition.” This cost the existing community very little; life could go on while potential newcomers were being formed, assessed, and then accepted or not. Potential incomers different from the norm were either marginalized or rejected by a community administration that held the initiative in all matters.

Since Vatican II and the increase of religious from the global church, this model has given way to a more inclusive approach by some long-established communities. Now the message is clearer: “come join our community and help us diversify internally and internationally.” This is a significant advance, indicating a desire not only to speak and teach but to listen and learn. But inclusion of “the other” simply does not go far enough. Unless customary behavior is changed, a marginal outsider merely becomes a marginal insider. Many cultural “others” still feel ineffective and invisible in their own communities. Without a careful power-analysis and self- analysis of the established community there will be no radical inclusion. Such analysis would show whether the traditional decision-makers and privileged personnel have remained as before, or whether incoming members are treated as equals. So intercultural communities must reject both “assimilation” and token “inclusion,” and develop an attitude of “radical welcome.” Then the message is “bring your cultural and religious values, your voice and autonomous self, and help us together to build a new community.” This facilitates the authentic incarnation of each member, which means that everyone will be affected by the cultural diversity, and called to an ongoing conversion to God, to each other, and to the cultural values which shape each life. Not that people will be able to hide behind their own cultural conventions, or play the “culture card.” Rather, each will need to examine cultural habits, bad and good, and learn to compromise some comfort for the sake of the “new” community. The cost will be spread vertically and laterally and not only borne by new or incoming members. But an authentic faith-based undertaking will survive.

Three principles might help us move forward. First, we are called to build a home: a home away from home it will be, since “we have here no abiding city,” but not a proliferation of mere “houses” where different individuals subsist under the same roof, that is, “living together separately,” not intercultural living. Second, integrated communities evolve gradually, organically, and not without pain. Therefore we must truly value difference, because God created difference and saw that it was good. The “cultural flaw” uses difference to justify discrimination and disrespect. That is sinful. And third, we must rethink the way we think. Rudy Wiebe says, “you repent, not by feeling bad but by thinking [and acting] differently.” This is the cost of conversion, and it is much more difficult to think differently than to feel bad and do nothing. In a classical rabbinic story, the teacher asks the disciples: “When do you know it is dawn?” One says, ‘when you can distinguish a white thread from

a black one.” “No,” says the teacher. “When you can see the outline of a tree against the horizon,” ventures another. “No,” says the teacher -- to this and all other efforts to answer the question. Finally he says, “when you can look into the eyes of an “other,” a stranger, and see a brother or a sister, then it is dawn. Until then, it is still night.”

May we have the grace and good sense to look for, and to live in, the light of a new dawn!

Anthony J. Gittins, C.S.Sp.
Chicago

Endnotes

1. There is significant literature on the sociology and theology of the stranger. See Gittins, *A Presence That Disturbs: A Call to Radical Discipleship*. Liguori, 2002:143-162, and *Ministry at The Margins: Spirituality and Strategy for Mission*. Orbis, 2002:121-160.
2. Gittins, *Presence*, 96-107.
3. Gittins, *Ministry*, 135-41.
4. See Gittins, *Ministry*, 121-60.
5. Intercultural living constitutes a challenge and opportunity for many other people working and ministering among people of several or many languages and cultures. Though by no means all of these people can, or will learn the skills and virtues mentioned here, dedicated ministers will resonate with many aspects of intercultural living, and may find much insight into how to respond to the challenges they face.
6. These descriptive components are gleaned from many sources. “Culture” is a topic that has generated a vast amount of easily accessible literature. I offer a simplified but multi-faceted description.
7. We only need to consider the reality of witchcraft, Eucharistic Presence, Heaven, Resurrection, Metempsychosis or ghosts to take the point here: one person’s reality may be another’s fantasy.
8. Jerome is credited with coining the word *spiritualitas*.
9. [Jesus said] “For you it is impossible, but not for God. Everything is possible for God.” Mark 10:27.

Anthony J. Gittins, C.S.Sp., is Professor Emeritus of Theology and Culture at the Catholic Theological Union, Chicago. He earned an MA in Theoretical Linguistics, MA in Social Anthropology, and a PhD from the University of Edinburgh (1977). He spent eight years on mission in Sierra Leone. From 1980 to 1984 he was Formation Director in London, UK, and lectured at the Missionary Institute there. Between 1984 and 2011 he taught at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. Among his 16 books are most recently *Living Mission Interculturally: Faith, Culture and the Renewal of Praxis* (2015), and *The Way of Discipleship, The Way of Jesus* (2016), both from Liturgical Press.

Possible activity

1. A Survey of the congregation²

Participants could divide into groups of 5 or 6. Half of the groups could start with A and then consider C while the other half begins with B and then moves on to C.

- (a) All participants reflect and write answers to the questions in A or B for 15 minutes.
- (b) Participants use the Mutual Invitation Process to share their insights in groups. The recorder could summarize the group’s answer to each question. (30 minutes)
- (c) All participants then reflect and jot answers to the questions in C for 15 minutes.
- (d) Participants use the Mutual Invitation Process to share their insights in groups. The recorder summarizes the group’s answer to each question. (30 minutes)
- (e) The recorders read their reports at a plenary session. (10 minutes)
- (f) A plenary discussion is held on the following questions:
 - What have I learned from this survey?
 - On the basis of these learnings what further dialogue is needed for action to be taken to improve the life of the community?

(20 minutes)

A. Material Aspects:

Do an imaginary walk around the local central house and/or formation house and write your observations:

1. What does the architecture of the building and grounds convey?
 - How does it compare with buildings nearby?
2. What do the location and design of the various rooms say about life as lived in the house?
 - What do the furnishings, interior décor and artwork convey?
3. Where do people meet and chat with each other?
 - Where do people find their own space?
 - What does the spatial layout say about community life?
4. What are the staple food items? What style of cooking is usual?
 - Are there any explicit or implicit norms about eating, seating at table, time?
5. In what ways are other religious congregations or communities in the area different in house design, furnishings, space and food?

B. Practices in the house.

1. Are there any group or community practices on a daily basis in the houses?
2. Are there any group or communal recreations?
3. What community prayer is practiced?
4. Is there an unspoken code of behavior? If so, what are its main tenets?
5. What are the explicit or implicit norms about guests (relatives and others) and hospitality in the house?
6. What feast days/occasions are celebrated?
 - How are these celebrated?
 - What alternative type celebrations could there be?
7. Do the structures of governance of the congregation reflect cultural influences?
 - Cultural influences on gatherings that occur regularly, annually etc?
 - How is authority and membership exercised?
 - Role of the Director/Coordinator, district superior (or LM coordinator)?
 - What are the decision-making processes?
 - How do things actually get done?
8. What cultural influences are seen in the formation process in the following?
 - What were/are the main rules in your spiritual year, formation program, orientation program?
 - What was/is the relationship between formator or spiritual year director/student ?
 - What spiritual practices introduced in formation have most influence on your life?
 - What other spiritual practices are important in your life now?
 - Procedures to deal with attitudes or behaviors that might be harmful to individuals and/or the community?

C. Ideas and Values:

1. What are the main influences of the founders on your group?
2. What are the values and influences on the congregation of your patron?
3. What values and assumptions underlie the main material aspects and practices e.g. community prayer, celebrations, food, hospitality?

What values and assumptions underlie the main community practices?

What values and assumptions underpin the formation processes, decision making, leadership,

4. What are the values emphasized in the history of the congregation e.g. Who are our martyrs, heroes, models, prophets, writers?
 - What influence have they on the group?
5. What are the most influential writings, hymns and myths, symbols in your tradition?
 - What sort of ethos have they promoted in the group?

² Exercises 1 – 4 in this section are adapted from the Cultural Audit

For Reflection

Three principles might help us move forward. First, we are called to build a home: a home away from home it will be, since “we have here no abiding city,” but not a proliferation of mere “houses” where different individuals subsist under the same roof, that is, “living together separately,” not intercultural living.

Second, integrated communities evolve gradually, organically, and not without pain. Therefore we must truly value difference, because God created difference and saw that it was good. The “cultural flaw” uses difference to justify discrimination and disrespect. That is sinful.

And third, we must rethink the way we think. Rudy Wiebe says, “you repent, not by feeling bad but by thinking [and acting] differently.” This is the cost of conversion, and it is much more difficult to think differently than to feel bad and do nothing.

Anthony Gittens