
8 Intercultural Ministry

Video

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Scripture Passage

Lk 9:1-6 Sending the 12

Reading

Engaging our Diversity through Interculturality

by Roger Schroeder

While the social sciences and business world have been using the term “interculturality” for some time, its appearance in theological and ministerial studies is more recent. Let us begin with several definitions.

Internationality and multiculturalism refer to the fact that persons or groups of different nationalities and/or ethnic groups simply coexist, perhaps with little or no interaction. The minimum expectation is tolerance. Cross-cultural relationships point to a one-way movement from one worldview to another. As sincere as this may be, its goal is assimilation or accommodation. In contrast, interculturality implies a mutually enriching and challenging two-way exchange among different cultures. Theologically speaking, this is an image of the Reign of God. Sociologist-theologian Robert Kisala describes the meaning of interculturality as moving far beyond mere coexistence “to emphasize and make more explicit the essential *mutuality* of the process of cultural interaction on both the personal and social level.”¹ As a final definition, the term “culture” is used here in a post-modern understanding to include social location (generation, gender, economic class, etc.), social change, ethnicity/race/nationality, and particular individual and communal situations.² It is not limited to ethnicity.

The term “intercultural” appeared in some theological and missiological documents and programs in the 1980s, but the more systemized development of the understanding of the term began around the turn of the century in the writing of theologians like Robert Schreiter³ and Franz Xaver Scheuerer.⁴ The Center for the Study of Religious Life, which was located at Catholic Theological Union (CTU) in Chicago, published a set of materials in 2001/2002 to assist religious congregations through a “Cultural Audit” to move beyond multiculturalism.⁵ It should be noted that Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI) in the 1990s had introduced the term of interculturality in opposition to inculturation. His use of the term was based on an idealistic perspective of abstract anthropology which avoided interaction with concrete cultural realities.⁶ This is not how interculturality is being understood in this article or, generally speaking, in the Catholic Church today.

Theologians, missiologists, and practitioners in the areas of interculturality benefit greatly from the excellent work of social scientists like Milton Bennett, Mitchell Hammer, Geert Hofstede, Eric Law, and Edward Hall. Bennett developed a model for “intercultural competency”⁷ which was later refined by his former colleague Hammer.⁸ They identified six stages of moving from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism, or what I would call interculturality: denial, defense, minimization, acceptance, adaptation, and integration. Ethnocentrism is the all-too-human tendency to use one’s own culture (in the broad post-modern sense) as the normative measuring tool for perceiving, judging, and treating others. Hofstede developed four dimensions of cultural differences: power distance, individualism and collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and femininity and masculinity.⁹ The

aspect of power distance has been further nuanced by Chinese American Law.¹⁰ Hall identified high- and low-context communication styles, which can be identified with Hofstede's collectivism (socio-centric) and individualism (individual-centric) categories for societies that give priority to the needs of the group in the former, and those of the individual in the latter.¹¹ The works of social scientists are very important resources to help church personnel to understand, appreciate, and engage cultural differences.

From the church perspective, two very significant works on interculturality were published in 2015. *Living Mission Interculturally* by Anthony Gittins¹² is an excellent resource for leaders and members of religious congregations and all practitioners of church ministry. Gittins draws upon his anthropological training and years of preparing women and men for Christian ministry. It is hoped that this book will soon be translated into Spanish. Lazar Stanislaus and Martin Ueffing co-edited a two-volume work on intercultural living and mission,¹³ with contributions from a wide spectrum of international, ecumenical, and professional perspectives. A single volume of selected articles from this work was published in Spanish,¹⁴ and Orbis Books will be publishing a similar volume in English in 2018.

Theologically, interculturality is grounded in the Trinity and the *missio Dei* ("mission of God"), which was foundational for the Second Vatican Council. The second paragraph of the conciliar document *Ad Gentes* (AG) offers the powerful image of God the Father as a life-giving fountain of love watering the world and calling all peoples back to the fullness of God's life. Furthermore, the Spirit continues stirring in creation and history, and "Jesus Christ, as God incarnate and the 'face' of the Spirit, called the disciples and the Church to continue his mission."¹⁵ Since cultures are graced by God's life, the church is to acknowledge those "seeds" of the Word (AG 11, 22) and "a sort of secret presence of God" (AG 9) in every culture. All cultures also contain "weeds" which are contrary to God's reign. Therefore, interculturality must recognize the presence of both the "seeds" and the "weeds" in every culture or context. In this way, interculturality is to be mutually enriching and challenging as all God's people journey together back to God. The movement toward interculturality has been described recently as a theology, practice, and spirituality of prophetic dialogue—both dialoguing with God's presence in all cultures and taking a prophetic stance against any elements that are contrary to God's reign and/or failures to acknowledge God's presence in that culture.¹⁶

Along with the theology of interculturality itself, much has been done in intercultural theology, particularly in Europe. In his excellent extended review essay of *Intercultural Hermeneutics*,¹⁷ the English translation of the first of three volumes by Henning Wrogemann, Terry Muck states that the author identifies the two major challenges facing the church as "coming to grips with its global diversity and ... doing something about the misunderstanding that often results from that diversity."¹⁸ Wrogemann advocates for a means of "developing a hermeneutic, a way of understanding, that facilitates conversations among the various sectors of the church."¹⁹ While a fuller treatment of this major endeavor in intercultural theology by many authors is not possible here, it is important to note how interculturality is also impacting the content and methodology of doing theology itself.

Interculturality also implies practice. The Committee on Cultural Diversity of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) in 2011 approved five guidelines for intercultural competence in ministry. A number of resources, training programs, and courses are now available to address varied pastoral challenges and opportunities related to cultural diversity, multicultural or "shared" parishes, and Catholic educational institutions.²⁰ Patricia Wittberg widens the parameters by addressing the perspectives of not only ethnic cultures but also generational cultures in the US Catholic Church.²¹ The growing initiatives of the past ten years to address the phenomena of short-term mission experiences, parish "twinning," and non-US-born priests and religious serving in the United States should continue to draw upon the theology and practices related to interculturality.²² Many religious congregations are now more intentionally attending to issues of interculturality both domestically and internationally in a variety of programs.²³ Other concrete issues related to interculturality include reconciliation,²⁴ conflict resolution,²⁵ bullying, racism, inter-gender and inter-generation relations, personality and culture, intercultural communication,²⁶ immigrant/refugee situations, and

the use of social media and the arts.

Finally, the theology, theory, and practice of interculturality must be accompanied with an appropriate spirituality. Theological and sociological knowledge regarding diversity would alone not lead to a change in interactions and attitudes among people of different backgrounds. Christian individuals, parishes, institutions, religious congregations, dioceses, and the church in general need to respond to an ongoing process of conversion from all forms of ethnocentrism, racism, and prejudices against those considered different or marginalized.²⁷ There is a strong biblical foundation for interculturality. Jesus Christ was the “Word...made flesh” (Jn 1:14) in a particular culture and context. However, he witnessed to the inclusive Reign of God by his practice of sharing food with those Jews considered impure and marginalized according to a strict interpretation of Jewish table fellowship of some of his contemporaries (Lk 5:29-30; 7:36-38; 19:5-6). Furthermore, there were three major turning points or “events” for Jesus in relation to the Gentiles: a transformative encounter with the Canaanite woman (Mt 15:21-28; Mk 7:24-37), opening new spaces for dialogue with the Samaritan woman at the well (Jn 4:1-30), and his reference to a Samaritan as the ideal disciple (Lk 10:25-37). Later, the intercultural journey of the disciples of Jesus can be traced through the Acts of the Apostles,²⁸ particularly in the “intercultural conversion” of Peter around his encounter with Cornelius (Acts 10:9-35, 44-48) and the communal/ecclesial “intercultural conversion” at the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:5-21). The church needs to undergo such ongoing “conversions” in its encounter with new cultures and contexts today.

This relatively new theological and intentional pastoral focus on interculturality has been developing in many exciting and challenging ways—theologically, missiologically, ministerially, practically, and spiritually. Fostering mutually enriching relationships across our differences is an urgent need in our society and church today, and it is a profound counter-cultural prophetic expression of God’s Reign.

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- 1 Robert Kisala, SVD, “Formation for Intercultural Life and Mission,” *Verbum SVD* 50, no. 3 (2009): 335.
- 2 Michael Rynkiewicz, *Soul, Self, and Society: A Postmodern Anthropology for Mission in a Postmodern World* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011); Gerard Arbuckle, *Culture, Inculturation, & Theologians: A Postmodern Critique* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010).
- 3 Robert Schreiter, “The Changing Contexts of Intercultural Theology,” *Studia Missionalia* 45 (1996): 359-80.
- 4 Franz Xaver Scheuerer, *Interculturality – A Challenge for the Mission of the Church* (Bangalore, India: Asian Trading Corporation, 2001).
- 5 Center for the Study of Religious Life, *Cultural Audit: A Tool to Help Religious Congregations Determine the Cultural Influences on Their Communities* (Chicago: CSRL: 2001/2002).
- 6 Christian Tauchner, “Editorial/Vorwort: Interculturality Revisited,” *Verbum SVD* 58, no. 1 (2017): 7-9.
- 7 Milton Bennett, “Towards Ethnorelativism: A Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity,” in *Education for the Intercultural Experience*, ed. M. Paige, 2nd ed. (Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, 1993), 21-71.
- 8 See work of Mitchell Hammer at *Intercultural Development Inventory*, <http://idiinventory.com>.
- 9 Geert Hofstede and Michael H. Bond, “Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions: An Independent Validation Using Rokeach’s Value Survey,” *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 15 (1984): 417-33.
- 10 Eric Law, *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb: A Spirituality for Leadership in a Multicultural Community* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 1993).
- 11 Edward T. Hall, *Beyond Culture* (New York: Anchor Books, 1976), 74-123.
- 12 Anthony Gittins, *Living Mission Interculturally: Faith, Culture, and the Renewal of Praxis* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015).
- 13 Lazar Stanislaus, SVD, and Martin Ueffing, SVD, ed. Vol. I: *Intercultural Living*; Vol. II: *Intercultural Mission* (Sankt Augustin, Germany: Steyler Missionswissenschaftliches Institut, and New Dehli, India: ISPCK, 2015).
- 14 Lazar Stanislaus and Martin Ueffing, ed. *Interculturalidad: en la vida y la misión* (Estella, Spain: Editorial Verbo Divino, 2017).
- 15 Roger Schroeder, “Interculturality as a Paradigm of Mission,” in *Intercultural Mission*, Stanislaus and Ueffing, 157.
- 16 Roger Schroeder, “Interculturality and Prophetic Dialogue,” *Verbum SVD* 54, no. 1 (2013): 8-21.
- 17 Henning Wrogemann, *Intercultural Hermeneutics*, trans. Karl E. Böhmer (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016).
- 18 Terry Muck, “Intercultural Hermeneutics: Vol. I of Intercultural Theology,” *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 41, no. 3 (2017): 194.
- 19 Muck, “Intercultural Hermeneutics,” 194.
- 20 See <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/cultural-diversity/index.cfm>
- 21 Patricia Wittberg, SC, *Catholic Cultures: How Parishes Can Respond to the Changing Face of Catholicism* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016).
- 22 For a further reference to the developments in the past ten years in these areas, see Roger Schroeder, *What*

is the Mission of the Church? A Guide for

Catholics, rev. and exp. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, forthcoming in 2018), chapter 8 and appendix 3.

23 For example, The Center for the Study of Consecrated Life (CSCL) at CTU is currently sponsoring a thirty-month program on “Interculturality and Consecrated Life” for twenty-one religious congregations, and the International Union of Superiors General (UISG), representing 2,000 women’s religious congregations, is planning to have a two-week program on interculturality in Rome in January 2019.

24 Robert Schreiter, *The Ministry of Reconciliation: Spirituality and Strategies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998).

25 Mitchell Hammer has developed a very useful framework for understanding four cultural models for conflict resolution. See <https://icsinventory.com/ics-inventory/the-ics-improves-communication-conflict-resolution-across-cultures>.

26 Franz-Josef Eilers, SVD, *Communicating Between Cultures: An Introduction to Intercultural Communication*, 4th updated ed. (Manila: Logos (Divine Word) Publications, 2012).

27 Philip Gibbs, SVD, “Conversion from Ethnocentrism,” in *Intercultural Mission*, Stanislaus and Ueffing, 3-16; Adriana Carla Milmanda, SSpS, “In- sserted Life: The Radical Nature of an Incarnated Spirituality,” in *Intercultural Living*, Stanislaus and Ueffing, 38-52.

28 Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2014). See chapter one.

Possible activity

Albatross

Overview

The purpose of this session is to help participants to learn by observation, to infer correct behavior from non-verbal or indirect clues, and to teach self-awareness. Participants learn self-awareness when they are given the chance to assess their own reactions to, and feelings about, the rituals that the Albatrossian couple perform.

First presented by Donald Batchelder and Elisabeth Warner (*Beyond Experience: the experimental approach to cross-cultural education*, Experiment Press, 1979).

There are two parts to this session:

The exercise of performing a ceremonial greeting between members of an imaginary culture (the Albatrossians/facilitators) and foreigners (the participants). There should be no on-lookers.

AND

Group discussion of what participants saw and experienced.

Duration 90 minutes

Group Size 12-15 participants (preferably with an equal representation of males and females)

Minimum Staffing 2 facilitators

Materials Needed: A dish or a bowl for hand washing; a cup with liquid for drinking Food to eat (preferably food that is easy to grab and feed to others) Sheets for the “Albatrossian” people to wear, enough chairs for half of the participants

Preparation: Read through all of the material and make sure you are comfortable discussing it; make notecards or highlight suggested questions to ask participants in group discussions.

This session requires two facilitators to act out the part of the Albatrossian couple. You will need a male facilitator and a female facilitator. If this is not possible, they will need to be differentiated from each other in some other way.

The facilitators should read through the exercise and be very comfortable with the cultural rituals and cultural communication that they will be acting out.

Have the room prepared with enough chairs in a circle for half of the participants to sit in; with one chair placed in the middle of the circle for the Albatrossian male.

Fill the bowl with water; set aside.

Fill the cup with a liquid to drink; set aside.

Culture:

Participants will:

1. Understand the concept of culture in terms of objects, behaviors & values
2. Be aware of the influence of culture on people
3. Understand in which aspects cultures may differ (communication patterns, personal distance, individualism vs. collectivism, etc.)
4. Be aware that understanding cultural characteristics requires knowledge of the cultural context (e.g. History, values, safety issues, religion etc.)

SET UP INSTRUCTIONS FOR FACILITATORS

Allow 15 minutes to set up room before session starts. Close all doors/windows so participants can't view preparations. Put a large circle of chairs with only enough chairs for the males of the group plus the male Albatrossian. Male Albatrossian should be wearing robes/toga and shoes. Female Albatrossian only robes/toga. She should be barefoot. Prepare a tray of Dixie cups with an interesting tasting beverage. Have a bowl of interesting tasting snacks. Ideally have some foreign/strange flute music quietly playing in the background. Small LED votive candles create a nice ambience also. Once the student group enters the room, all communication from the Albatrossians is in their language or gestures.

ACTIVITY: Albatross

Part 1: Seating of the Albatross Couples and Guests

- Albatrossian couple enters the room, the Albatrossian sits on the male chair, the Albatross woman kneels on the floor to his right. They "speak" to each other in their language, which consists of hisses, indicating disapproval; hums, indicating approval, and clicking sounds for transmission of other messages.
- Class enters room. "Participant-observers" are selected, males sit on remaining chairs, females [only] are asked to remove their shoes and are seated on the floor by each male. Faculty person or coordinator helps seat participants.

Part 2: Greeting Ritual

After each part, the Albatross woman returns to her seat by the male, they "speak" briefly. After a short pause, the Albatross male carefully and gently tilts her head towards the earth in a kind of "bow".

- Gender-specific greetings. First, the Albatross male gets up and greets each male in turn. In the generic greeting the Albatross male holds each guest by the shoulder or waist and rubs his right leg against the leg of the guest, sometimes turning in a circle. Then the guest reseats himself in his chair. After all males are greeted, the Albatross woman greets each female guest individually. She asks the guest to stand, she then kneels, runs both hands down the lower legs and feet gently, ceremoniously. The participant then returns to a seated position on the floor. Actors interpret and elaborate these generic greetings, often in very creative ways.

- Washing the Hands. The Albatross woman circulates a bowl of water to males, beginning with the Albatross male. Each male dips his right hand into the bowl and then shakes off the water. Only males participate. Then the Albatross woman returns to kneel by the Albatross male.
- Serving the Food. On a clicking cue from the Albatross male, the female rises, obtains the food, and offers it to each male, beginning with the Albatross male. Then, each female guest is given food. She does not eat herself.
- Serving the Drinks. Once again, the Albatross female gets the drinks, and serves them first to the males, beginning with the Albatross male, and then to the females. She does not drink herself.
- Selection of Ms. Big Feet. The Albatross couple examines the feet of each female and, unknown to guests, selects the female with the biggest feet. She is led to the male Albatross chair and is told to kneel at his side, like the Albatross woman. He “bows” her head and then that of the female “guest”.
- Gender-specific greetings. The same initial greeting is repeated, first for males, then for females.

Part 3: Albatross Couple Leaves with Ms. Big Feet.

The Albatross couple instruct the selected female guest to leave the room with them.

ACTIVITY 2: Discussion (20 minutes)

After the greeting has been performed, “guests” – i.e. class members – are asked to describe what they have just seen, to identify recurring themes and the portions of the ritual which illustrate these themes. Predictably, participants are convinced they are observing a male dominated society and provide descriptions replete with inferences and culturally-specific interpretations of behaviors which support these presumed cultural themes.

Now the activity is over and the leaders ask the participants to resume their seats (now back in the language we are used to) and evaluate the game by asking questions like

- What did you observe?
- Did you notice anything in particular?
- What happened?
- How did the men feel?
- How did the women experience their roles?

Now the meanings of the actions are explained:

- In the Albatross culture the ground is considered holy.
- In the social hierarchy the women rank above men, therefore only women are allowed to touch the holy ground barefoot.
- The women are considered holy, too.

- The men must not touch what comes from the ground, therefore the women feed the men, whereas the women may touch the food and the water.
- The woman was chosen by the size of her foot, and the honor to kneel beside the leader was given to her as the woman with the largest feet because she has the biggest area of contact with the holy ground.
- The bending of the heads was a sign of gratitude - in this way the men can come closer to the holy ground (by touching the women!).
- Why did most of you immediately assume that the women were being discriminated against? (this is often the case – women feel obliged to work in the course of the game)
- Pointing out hierarchies: - in Europe up = good; in Albatross down = good
- Do you believe that in a foreign country/culture you would feel like you felt in this game?
- How can we try to find out what the underlying reasons for behavior are if we are not sure of interpreting the behavior correctly?

How did it make you feel? What was your reaction?

- Help participants see that their own reaction is very relative: that next to them is sitting someone with quite a contrary reaction.
- Let any and all reactions be express, yet develop the awareness in each participants that s/he is essentially responsible for what “happened.”
- Inevitably the comments arise that “If the experience were done differently” ...The facilitator must make it clear that the Albatross exercises was artificial insofar as it was a simulation. It was not “artificial” in the aspect which matters most: that during a given period of time, a group of people did such and such in that room and that each participants had a real reaction.
- Have participants first describe the ritual, allowing them to give their interpretations of what they observed—both general cultural themes and specific parts of the ritual. You may prefer participants to write, either as an exercise or to help them organize their ideas. You may ask them to share their impressions with their “neighbor”. Or, you can immediately elicit descriptions from the group as a whole.

Info for Facilitator

Aim toward creating the awareness that the “Why’s” of human behavior do not usually lend themselves to simple, neat (sociological/anthropological) concepts and answers.

WRAP UP: Discussion (20 minutes)

Major Points which come out of the discussion: How our observations are colored by our own cultural assumptions; how well we observe even to begin with (do we really notice details, or pay close attention?); that we can, in fact, infer a lot of useful information and learn what is expected of us without being told in so many words; that things doesn't always mean what they seem.

- ✓ Many, if not most, of the observations offered by participants will be highly value- laden. Often one student eventually points out this critical point, but it is important that the facilitator insures that the whole class hears the idea and digests it.
- ✓ Conclusion: (brief recap of information) –you don't need a lot of detail here. You can simply say how you're going to recap (ex: discussion, quiz, pop questions, etc.)

For Reflection

Did you grow up in a bubble as well? If so, what have you done to escape it? What actions are you taking to ensure that each day brings you new experiences, new insight, and new ways to think about your previous assumptions?

Diversity is all around us; we need to make a consistent effort to engage with it. Doing so opens us up to new opportunities, new insights, and new levels of empathy and understanding. You don't need to live a jet-set lifestyle to experience diversity and all it has to offer. You need to get outside, step out of your comfort zone, and embrace the challenges and strangeness of the world around you.

From: <https://www.thindifference.com/2019/01/a-daily-endeavor-finding-and-engaging-diversity/>