

CRC Mission

The Canadian Religious Conference (CRC) is both a voice for and a service to leaders of religious institutes and societies of apostolic life. The mission of the CRC is to encourage its members to live fully their vocation in following Christ. The CRC supports its members in their prophetic witness to justice and peace within society and the Church. The CRC looks for audacious ways of interpreting faith and life so as to embrace the new vision of the universe.

September 2010

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News Briefs

CRC Theological Commission

The CRC Theological Commission is composed of women and men religious from the different regions of Canada. The Commission has a twofold mandate: to reflect on the significance of consecrated life from a theological perspective that integrates both human and social sciences; to propose future venues that will actualise religious life in a creative and prophetic way. It is within the framework of this mission that, once a year, the Theological Commission publishes an issue of the CRC Bulletin.

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The members of the Commission **are eager to enter into dialogue with you**, the readers of the CRC Bulletin. For this reason, you will find their email address at the end of each article. We encourage you to send them your comments, observations and questions.

2016 CRC General Assembly

The next General Assembly of the Canadian Religious Conference (CRC) will be held in Montreal from **May 26 through 29, 2016**. The chosen theme is: *The Mission of Congregational Leadership: Discerning Hope Amid the Challenges*.

The guest speaker will be Simon Pierre Arnold, OSB. A Benedictine monk from Belgium, Simon Pierre Arnold, OSB, has been living for the past 40 years in a monastery he founded in the Peruvian Andes. He has written several books on consecrated life, mainly in Spanish some of which were translated into French.

Au cœur des défis,
discerner
l'espérance
Discerning
hope
amid the challenges

CRC

Interculturality: Challenges and Promise?

Intercultural Living: An Experience of the Paschal Mystery

On May 14 and 15, 2015, the CRC Theological Commission welcomed four people to a meeting that took the form of a conversation which was also somewhat of an experimental exercise. In the fall of 2014, these guests had been asked to share an intercultural experience. What they had in common was that they were all members of different religious institutes and they had all lived in cultures other than the ones into which they had been born:

Pierre Tran Minh Back, CSSR, contributed the experience of his Vietnam–Canada displacement and his ministry among the lepers of Haiti.

Jeanne Bashige, SFHELMET, a Sister of the Holy Family of Helmet from Congo (on a mission to Canada), spoke of her childhood in a country marked by the multi-ethnicity of its population, with over 200 ethnic groups and 450 local languages, as well as its colonial history; she also recalled a five-year mission to study in Belgium.

Alba Letelier, SP, shared about her journey from Chile to Egypt and, later, to Canada.

Idara Otu, MSP, went from Nigeria to South Sudan, then to Canada; he highlighted the role of cultural values in Africa and especially the centrality of the sacred in the lives of Africans.

At the end of the meeting, each of the four guests agreed to write a text that was intended to echo the session on *intercultural living*. These presentations form the first part of this Bulletin. In the second part, you will find a more theological reflection on the theme: *Consecrated Life and Intercultural Living*. This second part of this Bulletin will allow us to consider:

- that the eschatological dimension of consecrated life can be nourished by intercultural living (Brother Antoine-Emmanuel, FMJ);
- that our humanization is always enriched by the meeting of the stranger in us, in others, in the Other (Sister Carmelle Bisson, AMJ);
- that interculturality calls on us to respect the stages of being, of begetting, of being gone, and of the “returning home, different” (Sister Patricia Brady, OSB);
- that the charism is rooted at the heart of intercultural living (Sister Gaétane Guillemette, NDPS);
- that the Scriptures can be a school on intercultural living – Pentateuch and the Pauline Corpus (Brother Louis Riverin, FMJ).

As always, the Commission will be pleased to welcome feedback from this reflection on intercultural living as experienced through consecrated life. It would also greatly appreciate hearing about any initiatives that this issue of the CRC Bulletin might have given rise to in the various communities.

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Religious Life:

Fulfillment of the Being

Religious life, before being seen from the outside as an apostolic commitment, should be experienced from within as a transformation of the being. But the being, in the human experience, especially in the Christian experience, is to “be with;” in other words, it is to start off on the path to follow the one who calls: “Then come, follow me.”¹

We must be constantly listening, on this journey where the Son of God is revealed as the Son of Man to fill my humanity with the abundance of his Life. This Life, worthy to be lived, draws from the momentum of my existence, mobilizes my talents and contributes to the fulfillment of life in others.

God enters our history to transform it. This transformation starts the journey towards universality. The inner attitude is that of availability, which enables one to welcome diversity and to take a step into interculturality or intercultural living.

Religious Life Offers a Space of Freedom

And in my fully human experience that is working towards growth, the framework of religious life has gently offered itself, despite its challenges, as a space of freedom in which I have been well served by:

- a life of discipline that helps me to work on my instincts, to direct my passions;
- a life of prayer that helps me give up my self-centredness so that I may centre myself on God;
- a fraternal life in which God, through the others, sharpens my ability to love and purifies my desire to be loved;
- a spirit of service in the Church’s great mission in solidarity with all human beings for the Life to come.

The life of the community is too often drawn towards outside activity. Today there is a demand to rediscover the spiritual heart of the deep inner being. It is a pathway of disorientation, of stripping away and self-emptying that is rooted in the mystery of the Passion-Resurrection. It’s taking up again the path of the Scriptures in order to rediscover them.

Remaining Yourself in the Midst of Diversity

The expression of my religious life, whether it be in preaching or in great silence, enables me to be served by the One who “came to serve.” During his act of service par excellence, where he stooped to wash the feet of his disciples, I have to humbly accept to allow myself to be “washed” by Him in order “to share with Him.” He who is my dear Master, my Lord and my God, which is also the extraordinary term of the holy man, in the image of the Father, to whom I extend my whole being in joy and hope. “You must therefore be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.”²

We must remain ourselves in the midst of diversity, otherwise there is great risk of fragmentation. When mankind no longer reaches out to one another, God no longer has a dwelling place in the world.

Pierre Tran Minh Bach, CSSR

¹ *The New Jerusalem Bible’s translation of Mt 19:21.*

² *Ibid., in Mt 5:48.*



Giving Voice:

Contemplative Listening

The Concept of Listening

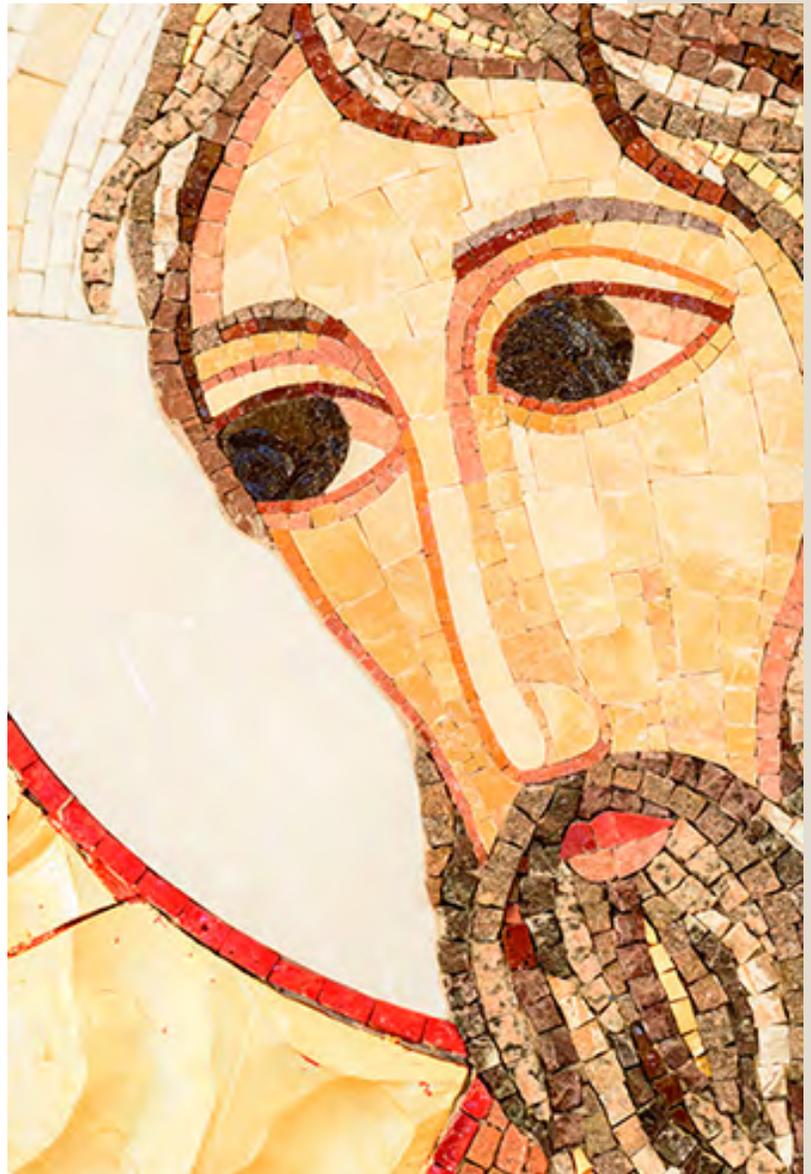
One of the attributes of God that I think is essential to emphasize in the context of this Year of Consecrated Life is “Listening.” God’s love engages God in a listening of love and compassion with God’s creation, fully consistent with what HE IS. And that listening by God invites us and also engages us in a relationship of love with God and creation, calling us to a consistency with what we say that we are.

I would like to start by introducing some definitions offered by the *Petit Larousse* French dictionary on the act of listening:

- To take into account what someone says; to follow.
- To pay attention to what someone says in order to hear and understand it.
- To be the listener of a singer, a speaker, the radio, to hear them voluntarily.
- To agree to hear what someone has to say, to give the person a hearing.¹

Taking into account these courses of action, I offer you the concept of “contemplative listening,” as developed in a process that has been proposed and experienced in our international community:

“Listen with a contemplative heart, a heart that is spacious, gentle and welcoming, with attitudes of opening frontiers and hospitality. By observing inner silence, we make more room for others; we have more space in which to listen. Being open, welcoming and totally present makes this contemplative listening possible. Listening in a contemplative way means putting our preconceptions on hold and releasing our grip on our own opinions.”²



¹ *Le Petit Larousse*, consulted October 16, 2015.
<http://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais/%C3%A9couter/27702?q=%C3%A9couter#27553>

² Brochure *Devenir transformées par l'écoute, le dialogue et le discernement contemplatifs*. Enracinées dans la Providence, accueillons l'avenir [Rooted in Providence, We Welcome the Future] 2013 version, page 5. Sisters of Providence.

A Call to Transformation through Listening

Often our listening is tinged by prejudices and concepts that we have acquired through our education, our family, our culture and in our various experiences and relationships. Being people open to recognizing and giving the floor to others, offering others the space and opportunity to express themselves and exchange their points of view, means taking a risk to which Jesus Himself was no stranger; it was the “transformation” of his own position.

I have a great appreciation for the text about Jesus and the Canaanite woman (Mt 15:21-28), who loudly begged him to have compassion for her demon-tormented daughter; Jesus responds by mentioning his mission, saying “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the House of Israel.” Confronted with the woman’s response that “even little dogs eat the scraps that fall from their masters’ table,” Jesus allows himself to be moved by the words of this woman, who reveals to him the depth of her need and her faith. In this relationship of contemplative listening, there is an opening-up to the possibility of welcoming diversity, of welcoming the other person to express their need and of making present the expansion of Jesus’ own mission.

“What Are You Discussing as You Walk Along?” (Lk 24:13–35)

Once we have had a taste of the beginning of the transformation and we allow ourselves to be moved by the Spirit that opens us up to welcoming differences and novelty, we are then in a condition to give voice to others, that is to say, “to listen” as we walk along and to accommodate the realities of society and the people we are accompanying. Giving people the floor and an opportunity to speak, we offer a safe and sacred space, a space for contemplative listening and an opportunity for dialogue, one where we might find the answers and the meaning to what we are experiencing. It seems to me that this is a movement that is healing, consoling and liberating.



“What are you discussing as you walk along?” A simple question that evokes all the lived experience, with its full emotional weight of sadness, frustration, fear, disappointment, etc. The encounter with the realities that challenge us is precisely the moment in which God himself draws near, and comforts us with his own word, gives us strength and encourages us to share beyond ourselves.

The reality that we are living and sharing as humanity, as creation, is continually inviting us to open our eyes, to listen and be attentive to the voice of the Master. And the Master accompanies us to heal us, to comfort us and to set us free. He leads us in a sharing where we give and we receive—like we share bread—renewing and extending the meaning of our mission, opening our eyes to the reality of the presence of the Risen One who listens to us and gives us the word.

Alba Letelier, sp

Intercultural Living Experience:

An Experience of Hurt and of Going-Out from Oneself!

Following my participation in the meeting convened by the CRC Theological Commission in May 2015, I reflected on the four intercultural experiences presented. I did this by situating the cultural experience within the dimension of the integral growth of the human person.

I. Belonging, Living in a New Home

The testimony of the four witnesses invited by the CRC's Theological Commission made us aware that the choice of an intercultural life makes the heart grow greater, increases the capacity to love in everyday life, however, it involves surpassing oneself, a going-out from oneself to open oneself up to another, to someone who is different.

For each of the four witnesses, this going-out from oneself meant plunging into a new cultural and social reality where it is a question of:

- Experiencing a change of scenery with a new way of thinking, of approaching reality.
- Renouncing the desire to grasp reality based on the sometimes idealized outlook from one's own culture, one's own country.

- Realizing that one's usual references may no longer work, having to learn everything anew, even the banality of daily life such as asking for a glass of water or where the washroom is with gestures or babbling in a new language... etc. In short, like a child, relearning language to express one's basic needs.
- Refusing to pass judgment on people, values, and different ways of doing things.
- Deciding to belong, to inhabit this new home and all that encompasses in terms of the death of one self to be born as another.
- Consenting to live this experience through concrete decisions with a view to making a fruitful contribution to it.

II. Hurt, but Not Closed

In the intercultural living experience, most have experienced being hurt; nevertheless, their hearts have not been closed! The choice of openness because of their faithfulness to the "yes" to God who called them—and who was the first to show them the way—has always won out!



Our internal reflection on what we had experienced and heard from the experience of the four witnesses, led to a number of sources in scripture. The experience of the Lord's open side in John 19:31-37 is one that we can explore to nurture the meaning of the Easter experience; "one of the soldiers pierced his side with a lance; and immediately there came out blood and water." (Jn 19:34) Blood and water flowed from Jesus's wounded side: blood is a symbol of the life given that gives life; water symbolizes the gift of the Spirit that bursts forth from it. Blood is also an externalization of the love of the heart of Jesus, a love that springs out from his side.

Each person's commitment is rooted in a decision of giving oneself fully over to love. It is He who gives the breath to resume the path, meet the challenges in the steps of He who repeats to us today: no one can have greater love than to lay down his life for his friends. (Jn 15:13)

Having crossed through the pains inherent in this begetting of a new life, for oneself and for the other, we are happy to taste the fruits of joy, peace and communion, daring to risk new creativities to be together in community and for the mission!

Intercultural experience, chosen and lived in this paschal perspective, provides hope that consecrated life will have a greater fruitfulness in terms of initiatives and projects that extend to the inter-congregational level.

III. Consecrated Life and Intercultural Experience, Today and Tomorrow

These days of discussion make us realize that the ability to live in an intercultural community is built up from the experience of every human being. It is not given! This capability requires the integration of one's humanity, it is never definitively acquired!

For formation directors and mentors, helping to develop this capacity raises the urgency of ongoing formation in order to acquire the tools to better understand human functioning, to differentiate the culture, represented by a strategy in which the person invokes culture as a reason for not opening up to change. This strategy¹ works against the adaptability² required by a commitment to an intercultural living experience. This adaptability is the sure way to gradually shape the mental flexibility and openness to the other!

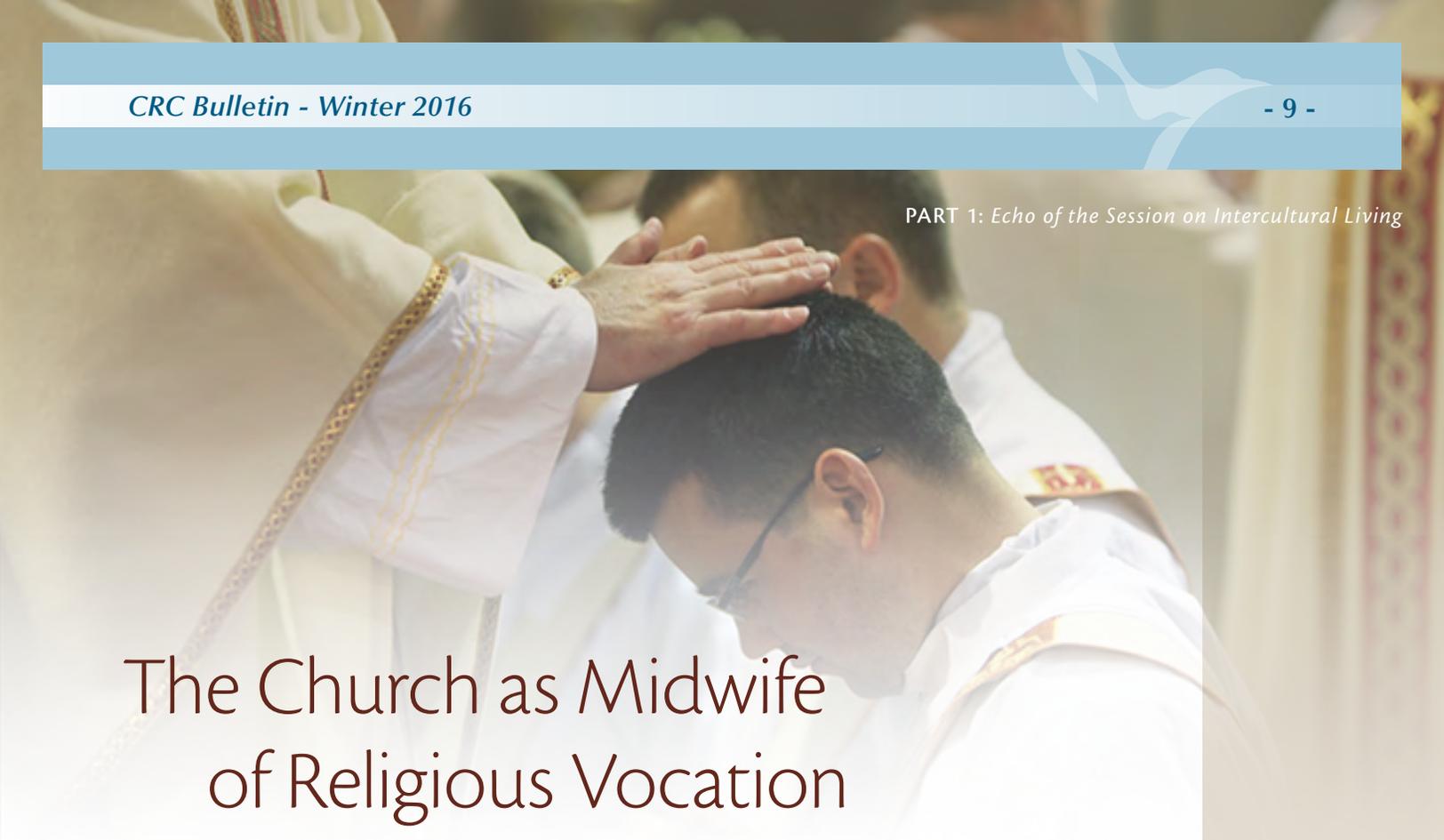
To young people, eager to share this experience, it is important to provide opportunities to practice overcoming and going beyond oneself in order to meet the "other", in essence, all others. Indeed, more than a culture, it is the person that we learn to encounter.

Jeanne Bashige, SFHELMET



¹ Fritz Redl and David Wineman, «Le moi désorganisé» dans *L'enfant agressif* (Paris, Fleuries, 1973) Tome 2, 310 p.

² Jeannine Guindon, *Vers l'autonomie psychique: de la naissance à la mort* (Nouvelle édition. Montréal, Sciences et Culture, 2001), p. 145.



The Church as Midwife of Religious Vocation

A religious vocation is a gift of God, and God's gifts are infinite. Vocation to the religious life is greatly the work of the Holy Spirit, who bestows divine gifts to the Church. However, it is difficult to define the nature of the future of religious life in Canada. Since God's gifts attend to the deepest yearnings of humanity, it is certain that the future will fulfill the dreams of both religious communities and the Church in Canada.

The Sacred Duty of the Church

At this particular time in our history, the Church cannot remain indifferent to the future of religious communities. The dwindling of new religious vocations is a 'sign of the times' for the Church in Canada, requiring attentiveness, understanding, discernment and action in the light of faith.

The Church has a sacred duty of solidarity with religious communities, and of serving as a midwife for the birthing of religious vocations. This summons the Church to foster a culture celebrating consecrated life, empowering the faithful to respond to God's invitation as religious. The future of religious life in Canada is in the hands of the Lord, who never fails to send laborers to his harvest. (Matthew 9:37-38)

Consecrated Life, a Gift to the Church

Vita Consecrata (VC), the 1996 post-synod Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II, speaks of the consecrated life as an essential element of the life of the Church, and affirms it as a gift to the Church, which must nurture vocations to this way of life.

In light of the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, "it has been recognized that the profession of the evangelical counsels indisputably belongs to the life and holiness of the Church. This means that the consecrated life, present in the Church from the beginning, can never fail to be one of her essential and characteristic elements, for it expresses her very nature." (VC no. 29)

"The whole Church finds in her hands this great gift and gratefully devotes herself to promoting it with respect, with prayer and with the explicit invitation to accept it. It is important that bishops, priests and deacons, convinced of the evangelical [excellence] of this kind of life, should strive to discover and encourage the seeds of vocation through preaching, discernment and wise spiritual guidance." (VC no. 105)

Idara Otu, MSF

On Earth as in Heaven

And when I am lifted up from the earth,
I shall draw all people to myself. (Jn 12:32)

Christian life is a mystery of attraction. Consecrated life is a mystery of attraction with a disconcerting intensity. Christ drew us into his Paschal Mystery. He drew us into his dying of love for the Father for the salvation of the world and in doing so, he draws us into his eternal glory.

Lives That Speak of Heaven

And why this disconcerting attraction towards persons of consecrated life? For what purpose? Is it not to make manifest, visible and tangible the gift that He wants to give to all humans in this life and, even more, beyond this life?

Who is it that will give to the world—and even to the Church—hope? Not just the hope for better times down here, but the hope of eternity, the joy of knowing we are all desired by God for an eternity of happiness in the bosom of the Father? Who will speak that hope? Not just through words but through lives? Lives that speak of Heaven. Lives that give a taste of Heaven. Lives that rehabilitate human beings, remind them of their dignity. And what infinite dignity for us to know that we are all invited for an eternity of fellowship, for an eternal immersion in the joy of the Three?

From All Nations, Tribes, Peoples and Languages

“After that I saw that there was a huge number, impossible for anyone to count” (Rev 7:9). And what immediately strikes the viewer who was given a glimpse of Heaven? This huge crowd that comes “from every nation, race, tribe, and language” (Ibid.). No nation, no tribe, no people, no language are excluded from this heavenly assembly.

Showing a glimpse of heaven here on earth cannot be done without going beyond boundaries! There is a taste of Heaven in the reconciled diversity of nations, tribes, peoples, languages and above all in reconciled sexual diversity.

So, if the Lord draws us so intensely towards Him, there is no doubt that He prepares our heart, that He purifies it and expands it to experience in a special way this diversity reconciled in Love!

Drawing us into his death of Love, Jesus makes us able to die to ourselves, to die to sin, to die to all the fears that make us afraid of the encounter with the other.

Interculturality Is First and Foremost a Pentecost

Consecrated celibacy is not consecrated isolation! It is an opening, an injury of the heart, a channel which opens to the other, without being exclusive. It is going so far as to preferring each “other” that the Lord puts on our paths.

Interculturality is certainly the fruit of a wisdom, of an art, of an asceticism... But it is also and even primarily a Pentecost. The disciples that start speaking the languages of all the nations present in Jerusalem are not simply brilliant polyglots. They are men and women with hearts transformed, seized by the paschal mystery of Jesus. They have left behind their fears, their fortresses, their sterile laws to go out to meet the other in a continual visitation that gives rise to an all-new communion.

Seeing the Other as a Gospel

Interculturality are those faces that light up because we let ourselves be illuminated by the Paschal Mystery. “Who are these people, dressed in white robes, and where have they come from?” And one of the elders replied, “these are the people who have been through the great trial; they have washed their robes white again in the blood of the Lamb.” (Rev. 7:14)

Consecrated life lived seriously has its share of trial. It asks a lot of us. It asks everything of us. To the point that our strengths alone are unable to answer the loving call that the Lord ceaselessly sends us to go further in love. So we let ourselves be washed and sanctified by the blood of the Lamb. We gradually let ourselves take on His chastity, His poverty, His obedience and His joy. And it is this all-new poverty that makes us look at the other as a gospel that we want so much to know.

A Mystique of Reconciled Diversity

Yes, there is a mystique of gender and cultural diversity, a mystique of reconciled diversity that is the fruit, the “abundant harvest” sprung from the grain of wheat thrown into the earth; it is of Jesus who died and rose to reweave us in Love. Is it not this new weaving, this other way of living together that will give our world a taste of Heaven?

For Reflecting and Praying Together:

- How to learn to look at the other as a gospel?
- How will our life give the world a taste of Heaven?

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From a Foreign Land to a Land of Humanization

Approaching the Stranger within Us

The world of psychology is familiar with a tool for acquiring knowledge of oneself and others, commonly called the Johari Window.¹ This schematic tool, or diagram, by taking into account behaviours, emotions, sensations and feelings, enables the individuals present to recognize that there are four levels of knowledge in interpersonal relations: one zone known to self and others, one zone not known to self and others, one zone known to self only and one zone known to others only.

For everyone, then, there is an area that is unknown—or foreign—to the self and to others, an area that we are going to call here, a foreign land.² In fact, we all carry within ourselves a hidden area, foreign to the other, an area to which we only have access if we are in the presence of people who are willing to reveal it to us. Based on that observation, who—between me and the other—is the most foreign or the most unknown in an interpersonal meeting? To try to respond to that question, let us examine more closely the Apostle Philip, Joseph, son of Jacob, and Jesus, son of the Father, the Word made flesh.

Three Reading Windows

We have become so used to considering the stranger as someone from a different village or hometown, as someone from somewhere else, that we have come to have difficulty seeing things from any other angle. In point of fact, we are all a little bit foreign to one another, starting with the way we look at the person in front of us. Philip said to Jesus, “Show us the Father and then we shall be satisfied,” and Jesus replied: “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.” (Jn 14:8) In fact, what is preventing Philip from seeing the Father is that he is still too foreign to the life of the Father in Jesus; his gaze is taking a long time to pierce the outer human shell of appearances and the face of the Father remains, for him, in a foreign zone.



And what about Joseph, son of Jacob, coming face-to-face with his brethren in Egypt, while famine rages throughout the country. They do not recognize their brother, because they believe him dead, and he, Joseph, recognizes them but chooses not to make himself known to them (Gen 42:8). Joseph’s brothers, coming from somewhere else and finding themselves in the court of Pharaoh, feel like pure strangers. On the other hand, Joseph disowned by his family and welcomed by Pharaoh, has become familiar with this land, which was formerly foreign.

Thus, from both sides, non-recognition—or the will not to recognize—creates a gap where members of the same family are unable to recognize a person who is of the same race as they are. Indeed, the story of Genesis emphasizes that fact by saying that they were “twelve brothers, sons of the same man in Canaan, but the youngest is at present with our father, and the other

¹ A grid presented and used in 1955 by Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham, hence the name JOHARI, arrived at by melding the two first names: Joseph and Harry.

² Enzo Bianchi, 2008, *J'étais étranger et vous m'avez accueilli*. Translated from Italian by Matthias Wirz. Bruxelles. Ed. Lessius. Collection: *Le Livre et le rouleau*, 31, p. 9.

one is no more.” (Gen 42:13) “The other one is no more;” someone whose name they will not even dare to reveal. Why? Perhaps it is because he was denied as a brother and sold to foreigners, due to jealousy or envy... who knows? Disappeared from their eyes, he no longer exists and even though he has turned up alive in their presence, he is a complete stranger. Indeed, the foreign land takes its roots in the heart of the being and from internal attitudes arise behaviour that is unreceptive to hospitality towards others.

Going Down to One’s Own People

In the wake of the questioning of Philip and the story of Joseph and his brothers, the Incarnation, the kenosis of the Son of God propels us deeper into this field of **foreign origin**: “He came to his own, and his own people did not accept him.” (Jn 1:11) What does that mean? “Who, being in the form of God, did not count equality with God something to be grasped. But he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave.” (Phil 2:6-7)

Dressed in the skin of Adam, similar in every way to a human being, except for sin, this man of flesh, the Word, born of God, is not received. He also is locked away in a space of foreignness, the space in which the Light is slow to pierce the darkness. The stranger remains in the doorway, not welcomed for what he is in truth, he cannot reveal himself in the depths of his being except to the one who would dare to say: “It is nearly evening, and the day is almost over.” (Lk 24:29)

However, the one we call the stranger, the one “from elsewhere,” if he is welcomed, beyond his origins, challenges the stranger nestled in each of us. The response to this challenge can then transform a foreign land into a land of humanization. As soon as that happens, the borders shrink. The Father may, once again, send the Son among his people. In an eternal path of growth, we can then see in us, and in the heart of women and men of our time, the birth of filial attitudes and kinship that we are called upon to embody in our daily lives.

Giving New Meaning to Foreign Land

This reflection is intended as a starting point (not an end point) to give rise to deep stirrings within us. Philip (Jn 14:8) is called upon to change his view of Jesus; Joseph (Gen 45:3-4), after having tested his brothers, chooses to make himself known to them; the stranger on the road to Emmaus, the dead whose departure was being wept over, suddenly becomes the Living. Similarly, the memories of all our fathers and mothers in faith, starting with Abraham and Sarah, who were called upon



to take the road, invite us to become eternal pilgrims and travellers in search of God. And in this pilgrimage, we must start off by first travelling in the foreign land that lives within us. Their physical displacements were nothing compared to the countless inner displacements that marked these people.

In such contexts, from purification to purification, they were led to make a Covenant with the unknown God who, over the centuries, was revealed to be the God of the Covenant. Not only did their foreign land become a place of communion, a land of humanization, but this experience enabled them to make a people able to welcome He who, henceforth, would bring them from this foreign land to the promised land. Our spiritual genetics will always bear the trace of that and that is why Peter, in his first epistle, exhorts his people, as they are and will remain, the eternal strangers and nomads (or pilgrims) (1 Pet 2:11) in this land of exile.

For Further Reflection:

- Am I able to name my inhospitable land (my foreign land) that is called to become a land of humanization?
- Upon hearing: “I was a stranger and you welcomed me” and, in the light of Philip, Joseph and his brothers, and Jesus, Son of the Father, the Word made flesh; what evangelical novelty does this word of Christ arouse in me?

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Be, Beget, Be Gone¹

The Challenge of Inculturation

One of the greatest challenges to religious life today is inculturation. Every religious institute is comprised of persons of every race, culture, class and nation in the world. Many of these institutes in the first world send missionaries to so-called third world countries. Work of these pastoral agents may be summed up in three stages: Be, Beget and Be Gone. Let's take a look at each of them.

Stage One: Be

Religious doing missionary work must be present to and among the receiving people as witnesses of the Good News. First they must listen to the people they are evangelizing for only they will know how to verbalize the message so that it is intelligible to those who are to receive it. Put differently, missionaries must learn the ways of the people and their language before attempting to teach them. All of this is a slow process that cannot be rushed.

Stage Two: Beget

Evangelical agents must beget, that is, assist in the formation of small groups or base communities with whom they will share the Gospel. These communities seek to discover the riches of the Good News in their own culture as well as elements which differ from their culture and are challenged by the Good News. Recipients interpret it in the light of their own experience of faith. Scripture then becomes their own book, illuminating their life-long journey to God as they struggle in concrete practical ways to liberate themselves from oppression. Then God is discovered as One with them in their struggle. Here



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the local church has its beginnings and Christ is born again into the culture of the small community.

Stage Three: Be Gone

Missionaries, like all Christians, are called to bring the Good News of salvation to peoples of other cultures. When they have done this and the local church has been firmly established and leadership is in the hands of the indigenous peoples, it is then time for the first bearers of the Good News to depart. Thus the new local church is able to develop on its own, relating with other churches as part of the universal church. This departure is probably the most difficult step. It means missionaries return to their place of origin and perhaps to another situation.

¹ Peter Schineller, *A Handbook on Inculturation*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), p. 27.

Be Back Home

There are biblical precedents for this step.² Consider the journeys of Moses and Elijah. Both men were sent back to return to the place of origin which they had fled from for fear of their lives.

Moses fled Egypt and went to Midian after killing an Egyptian. In Midian Moses experienced God in the burning bush. God sent Moses back to Egypt to lead his own people out from oppression and injustice under Pharaoh and his minions. (See Exodus 3-4.)

Elijah had fled the wrath of Queen Jezabel for forty days as he journeyed to Mount Horeb. Here he experienced God not in thunder, lightning or earthquake but in the gentle breeze. Elijah was also sent back to re-establish the covenant and restore Israel to its true faith as well as to anoint Hazael as king or Aram, Jehu as king of Israel and Elisha as prophet to succeed him. (See: 1 Kings 19; 2 Kings 2:1-18)

Before terminating the “be back home” section, let us look at a few final notions employing the letters “re”. **R**eturning missionaries bring back and share the newness they have found, becoming **r**everse missionaries.

Rev. Dr. Miguez Bonino in The J. Lovell Murray Lecture at the University of Toronto in 1978 addressed many of the complex issues facing missionaries. Are they needed short-term or life-long? Are they specialists in technology needed for a short period of time to help in a particular situation? According to Dr. Bonino, God calls us to be available for new forms of liberation and he demands of us availability and obedience.

Not only are religious communities called to evangelize but also to look at their own cultures which



are living, changing entities; these cultures require constant re-enculturation as do the religious institutes which originated in them. The task which currently challenges us is monumental. Are we ready to embrace it whole-heartedly?

Questions for Reflection:

- Has your community engaged the services of competent cultural anthropologists and/or sociologists as well as missionaries who have had similar experiences to assist in the preparation of its future missionaries?
- Are the scriptures one of your principal tools in the formation of base communities? How might oppressed people use a different hermeneutic in interpreting scripture and applying it than a dominant group?
- How are returning missionaries treated in your community? What can they contribute now?

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² Anthony J. Gittins, *Called to Be Sent: Co-Missioned as Disciples Today*, Liguori, Missouri: Liguori Publications, 2008, p. 5.

Charism at the Heart of Intercultural Living

In a good many writings, we have talked about what interculturality is, the challenges and conditions in achieving an intercultural community and the ensuing requirements for initial and ongoing training. We know that interculturality is a complex reality that is never fully realized. Learning about intercultural relations in community requires a change in mentality, a transformation of our ways of being, thinking and acting. It also calls for a new kind of community.

Interculturality is achieved through a long journey of conversion, of dispossession of the self in order to enrich oneself from the other and find their identity.¹ This is an evangelical opportunity for our communities to live the mission in response to the Christ who, in the form of God, did not count equality with God something to be grasped, but was born in human likeness. (Phil 2:6-9). This path is a prophetic one, a manifestation of the Church communion in the unity of the Body of Christ, where “there can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither slave nor freeman, there can be neither male nor female.” (Gal 3:28)

This journey of conversion tells us clearly that institutes of consecrated life are engaged in a process of intercultural living that is one of learning and creativity, of emptying oneself, of death and resurrection. It is a process of building unity and community and apostolic communion that finds its foundation in the charism of the institute. Sister France Royer-Martel, MIC, even raises the hypothesis that, for her congregation of the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, intercultural living becomes a condition of inculturating the charism.² And she points to Grasselli,³ specifying that inter-

cultural living includes the commitment to prepare the inculturation of the charism.

Here is the aspect that I would like to look at. How does the institute’s charism fit into the heart of intercultural living? What about interculturality as a condition for inculturation of the charism?

Charism at the Heart of Intercultural Living

First, a few words about the charism of consecrated life and that of the institutes. The charism, recognized as a gift of God to the Church, is at the foundation of consecrated life and of the various institutes.⁴ Intimately linked to the Church’s mystery, the charism of an institute is a living reality. It is the actualization of an initial intuition⁵ and it takes shape in the spiritual experience of the founder. As Nicolas Boccard points out, an institute is the embodiment of a particular charism given by God.⁶ It “does not exist in and of itself, it only exists through the people who live it; they alone are able to truly express it. It gradually becomes clearer, in the slow construction of an institute⁷ [... because it] is not a definitive given. It becomes clearer over time and is [gradually] discovered in function of the institute’s experience.”⁸ Therefore, there is a call for a constant updating of this living reality of charism.

¹ Reflection of Pierre Tran Minh Bach, participant in the exchange on interculturality during the meeting of the CRC Theological Commission, May 14, 15 and 16, 2015.

² France Royer-Martel, MIC, *L’interculturalité chez les M.I.C. : lieu d’émergence de l’universel, signe prophétique d’une humanité nouvelle*, Master of Arts dissertation in science of the mission, Ottawa, 2003, p. 4.

³ Francesco Grasselli, «Internazionalizzazione e Inculturazione del Carisma Degli Istituti Missionari», *Ad Gentes, Teologia e Antropologia della Missione*, Anno 3, no 2, 1999, p. 187 (cited in France Royer-Martel).

⁴ Nicolas de Boccard, *Charisme et instituts de vie consacrée*, [“Charisma and institutes of consecrated life”] éd. de Boccard, Paris, 2015, p. 17-18. See also p. 91.

⁵ Ibid., p. 95; ⁶ Ibid., p. 92; ⁷ Ibid., p.95; ⁸ Ibid., p. 205.

The charism that characterizes the overall experience of being committed to the consecrated life is made up of a number of components, including a way of experiencing the evangelical counsels, a spiritual lifestyle, an experience of community life, a specific form of apostolate and a particular insertion into the world.⁹ These components of charism shape our way of being together and affect all aspects of the institute's life, including learning about intercultural life in an international community. Anything having to do with the intercultural development of the community in its spiritual, community and apostolic dimensions therefore concerns the charism. The charism is an integral part of the intercultural experience, a place for the transcendence of cultures and a hub for integrating differences.

Inculturation of the Charism

Interculturality is aimed at living together in unity, communion, respect and an identity assumed for the purposes of living our disciple-missionary vocation according to each institute's specific mission. It implies a choice of values and the shaping of attitudes in a relationship of dialogue and interdependence. It requires the inculturation of the charism. Just as in the case of charism, interculturality is not achieved once and for all. Both of them, depending on their nature, are a gift, a grace, a becoming, a path to meet the other, God and humanity.

The charism is a place that serves to guarantee the unity and communion of the religious family. Similarly, the "purpose of the inculturation of the charism is to achieve full communion with God and the unity of all humanity, whence the requirement of a conversion and the need for intercultural education."¹⁰

Learning about intercultural and apostolic community life requires awareness of one's personal identity in one's relationships with other cultures. For it is through culture that a person's way of thinking, behaving and praying is shaped. It is also in the sharing of one's cultural wealth and paying attention to the culture of others that can concretely embody certain interrelated and interdependent evangelical values with the other members of the religious and human family. It is therefore understandable that formation courses include ways of deepening and

integrating the charism in fraternal intercultural communities.

While motivating candidates to integrate the charism in their spiritual, community and apostolic lives, learning interculturality teaches them to experience the institute's charism in a way that is adapted to every culture. Together, they become a "sign of fraternity, solidarity and communion between peoples, races and cultures, in dialogue and mutual understanding."¹¹ This intercultural formation opens an evangelization without borders and a genuine inculturation of the charism in the various cultural sites and mission countries.

Conclusion

In short, the constant deepening and updating of the charism as well as learning about interculturality combine to help an institute's members become aware of their primary identity as sons and daughters of God. This identity which transcends culture, places value on each and every culture, creating intercultural communities¹² centred on the communion of life¹³ and testifying to the universal kinship "rooted in the divine filiation."¹⁴

Just as, Father, you are in me and I am in you, so that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe it was you who sent me ... and that you have loved them as you have loved me.
(Jn 17:21-23)

Questions for Further Reflection:

- Based on your personal and community experience, how do you see the charism fit into the heart of intercultural living?
- In each country where your institution is located, what is the aspect of the charism that reaches the most members in the country? Name some changes that you see?

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⁹ Ibid., p. 124; ¹⁰ France Royer-Martel, *op. cit.*, p. 19;

¹¹ Ibid., p. 53; ¹² Ibid., p. 54-55; ¹³ Ibid., p. 67;

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 58. Reflection by Sister Évangéline Plamondon, MIC.



Two Invitations to Intercultural Living: The Pentateuch and the Letters of Paul

Our societies and communities are still increasingly being faced with the challenge of different cultures living together. This enterprise didn't just start yesterday; in point of fact, it can be detected in the Bible itself, as shown by Fr. Michel Proulx, o. PRAEM., in a recent article that I will outline in this article.¹ In the work of editing the Pentateuch and drafting the letters of Saint Paul, Fr. Proulx sees intercultural projects at work, that is to say the forming of new communities made up of people from different cultural backgrounds.

Composition of the Pentateuch

The Pentateuch acquired its current form in the mid-fifth century BCE, under the Persian Empire at the time of the return from the Exile... of certain members of the People of the Covenant! For not all followers of Yahweh were deportees to Babylon returning to Judea.

Some had stayed put, and had not benefited from the same theological developments as the deportees. Others would not return from Babylon or Egypt, where the upheaval caused by wars had taken them and where they had remade their lives while still aspiring to live as genuine members of the People of the Covenant. Still others came from the religious and cultural interbreeding that occurred under the Assyrian kingdom in the former Northern Kingdom: these were the Samaritans. To preserve these different "Israel" from breaking up, the composition of the Pentateuch seeks to give them a common homeland by defining a unique identity with multiple facets.

Three Literary Strategies

Father Proulx identifies three literary strategies that serve this project. Let us first note the conservation and even the articulation of two identity principles, two stories of the origins of the People of the Covenant.

The first is the story of the Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It founds a genealogical understanding of identity that recognizes the members of the people spared from deportation and who stayed in the land of their ancestors. On the other hand, those returning from Babylon or Egypt identify more with the people entering the Promised Land under the leadership of Moses. This Exodus-based understanding appeals in turn to a common voluntary adherence to a social contract, the Mosaic law, to unite a multiethnic population. These two principles of identity will be articulated at the cost of compromise and concessions without, however, eliminating all the tensions.

The second literary strategy was to place the conclusion of the Pentateuch, with the death of Moses outside of Canaan's borders, prior to entry into the Promised Land. This shows that one can be a member of the People of the Covenant even when inside other borders and in another culture. The example of Joseph illustrates this wonderfully: an inhabitant of Egypt against his will and married to an Egyptian woman, he still worked for the survival of his family from this land (Gen 37-50).

¹ "Deux invitations à l'interculturalité: le Pentateuque et les lettres de Paul," *Lumen vitae*, 70/4 (2015), p. 369-381.

A third strategy, which is also a concession to the Jewish Diaspora, relates to the place of worship. The contributions of the tradition of the priests of Jerusalem to the Pentateuch find their culmination, surprisingly, not in the building of the Temple in Jerusalem, but in the Tent of Meeting. This portable shrine with no particular geographical place symbolizes the relationship of God with believers in the diaspora, who walk in faith without access to the Temple of Jerusalem. Deuteronomy even extends a hand to the Samaritans, with the invitation of Moses to go, after the entry into Canaan, to Mount Gerizim (Deut 11:29 and 27:11-12), which is their sanctuary.

From the Pentateuch to Saint Paul: The Same Call

If we go from the Pentateuch to St. Paul, the same call to recognize an identity that transcends cultural differences acquires new dimensions. The communities being addressed by Paul's letters are composed of Christians of Jewish and pagan origin. Yet between the Jews and the members of other ethnic groups and religions, there was traditionally a staunch divider, a "barrier" of separation and hostility (Eph 2:14). Therefore we see the powerful character of the Pauline call:

"For all of you are the children of God, through faith, in Christ Jesus, since every one of you that has been baptised has been clothed in Christ. There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither slave nor freeman, there can be neither male nor female — for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Gal 3: 26-28)

An Invitation to Go Beyond Boundaries

The image of the garment, biblical symbol of profound identity, expresses the new identity of the believers: By faith in Christ and by the gift of the same Spirit that cries in their hearts "Abba, Father!" (Gal 4: 6), they are all sons of God.

This new identity transcends the other identity markers, without, however, erasing or denying cultural differences. Paul himself continues to introduce himself as a Jew (e.g., Rom 9:3; 11:1). And it is precisely on the basis of the founding element of the Jewish identity, the paternity of Abraham, that Paul invites us to go beyond the boundaries between Jews and pagans. Abraham was considered righteous, not because of his works but because of his faith (cf. Gen 15:6, quoted in Gal 3:6 and Rom 4:3). Arriving well before the law of Moses, it is thus by faith that the Father of all believers, Jews or pagans, with his progeny announced long before in Gen 17:5, is quoted in Rom 4:17 as "I have made you the father of many nations."

A Common Challenge

In Saint Paul, the common identity that puts things into perspective, that of the son of God, is of a new and radical depth. And yet from the Pentateuch to Saint Paul, and to us, the challenge is still the same: to recognize a common belonging which, without erasing the differences, enables us to transcend cultural differences. May we know how to gather the fruits of this biblical teaching in all our intercultural challenges.

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