Education in Multiculturality
Education to Interculturality

In Ecclesiastical Institutions of Higher Education
and in Formation Communities
for Catholic Consecrated Life in Italy

Edited by
Enrica Ottone – Luca Pandolfi

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Front cover
Pavel Égüez, *Grito de los Excluidos*, mural en cerámica.
Cotacachi, Ecuador 2001
(Photograph by Luca Pandolfi, 2007)

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"

Diversity always proves a bit frightening, for it challenges our securities and the status quo. [...] In the face of cultural, ethnic, political and religious diversity, we can either retreat into a rigid defense of our supposed identity, or become open to encountering others and cultivating together the dream of a fraternal society.

"

POPE FRANCIS
Speech to the Hungarian Episcopal Conference
Apostolic visit to Budapest, September 12, 2021

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The Need for Formation to Move from Multiculturality to Interculturality

❖ Peter Claver Narh

Abstract

This work tries to create awareness and orientation in the area of intercultural community of consecrated life. It is divided into six parts: 1. Multiculturality, interculturality and transculturality, 2. The necessity for interculturality in the formation of consecrated life, 3. Opening up for intercultural living in formation, 4. The contrast between collectivistic and individualistic cultures, 5. Some challenges in encountering other cultures and 6. Intercultural encounters.

Keywords

Community of consecrated life – Multiculturality – Interculturality – Transculturality – Formation

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Introduction

Interculturality is not actually something new. However, intercultural living does not succeed automatically. Yet, it can be learned and cultivated. Interculturality is often associated with the terms multiculturalism and transculturality and these terms are sometimes even confused with each other. This makes it necessary to understand and differentiate these terms. Even though all three terms are based on culture and describe forms of social coexistence, they differ from each other. While multiculturalism clearly distinguishes itself from interculturality and transculturality, the definitions of interculturality and transculturality are not necessarily distinctively different: they overlap.

① Multiculturality, interculturality and transculturality

1.1 Multiculturality

Multiculturality describes forms of social coexistence of national and cultural groups. Cultural diversity within the different national groups is recognised. Individual groups are understood as independent groups with equal rights within the society. There is no strive for Assimilation. The model of a multicultural society primarily describes the phenomena of living side by side. When talking about multiculturalism, the focus is on living side by side with one another. Consequently, there is striving for tolerance, understanding, acceptance and avoidance of conflict between the different cultural groups. Multicultural approaches support the desire for cultural diversity and try to create understanding between the different cultural groups. There is no striving for togetherness here. The cultural groups meet each other with tolerance and respect, but without entering into a process of interaction or exchange with one another.

There is the need to move from multiculturalism to interculturality in the formation of consecrated life. This is because a multicultural approach or a multicultural concept forms the basis for coexistence without conflicts in multicultural societies. But in my opinion, this is not suitable for the formation of consecrated life since the phenomena of mixing up with each other and the exchange of cultures and ideas are not topics of multiculturalism. However, these phenomena are central in the formation of consecrated life, where members have different cultural backgrounds. And this is because consecrated life is about togetherness and not about living side by side.

1.2 Interculturality

Interculturality refers, among other things, to encounters and exchanges between cultures – while preserving one's own cultural identity; Interculturality perceives and appreciates the cultural diversity of people; Interculturality recognizes that people are equal in many ways – and therefore works to overcome racist, sexist and other inhuman attitudes; interculturality reveals how much people and cultures influence one another – and challenges us to critically question our own lifestyles and cultures; interculturality sees every single person as a distinctive person with his or her own dignity.

Interculturality goes beyond the boundaries of cultures and thereby also pays special attention to the diverse cultural formations within a culture. Byram puts it this way: «…interculturalism involves a conscious capacity to "mediate" between two or more cultures, to observe similarities and conflicts, to generate a relationship between oneself and others, and to accept the role of a mediator»[1].

The word *inter* in the term interculturality refers to a special form of relationships and interactions which, on the level of group phenomena, symbolise the develop-

ment of a new culture. Finally, interculturality opens up new possibilities of perception by paying attention to the space *between* cultures. A redesign of a new culture should be possible in this room *between* the cultures. I call it the *third culture*. This is not just about differences and similarities, but above all about overlays, mutual dependencies and mutual penetration of boundaries and contacts.

And this is what is expected in the intercultural formation of consecrated life:

– To interact with the different cultures
– To learn from the different cultures
– To be ready to question one's own culture critically
– To be in the position to see one's own culture, not as the ultimate/best culture, but to perceive one's own culture as one from many other cultures
– To be willing to give something up from one's own culture and be ready to learn something from another culture or from other cultures

1.3 Transculturality

Transculturality as such, means that the encounter between two different or even opposing cultures can consequently lead to a blurring of the boundaries, but possibly also to the elimination of these boundaries[2]. Even though I pointed out at the beginning that interculturality and transculturality cannot be clearly separated, there is still an important difference between the two terms: with interculturality, the relationship between two different positions and perspectives is emphasised more strongly, while with transculturality, more emphasis is placed on the *common*, both on the similarities that exist "beyond" cultural differences, as well as on those similarities, that arise as a product of intercultural interaction[3].

Transculturality emphasises the similarities between cultures, and the distinction between what is one's own culture and what is from a foreign culture is often no longer possible or hardly possible. Although transculturality can be seen as a concept that tries to grasp a transitional social form of coexistence and can provide valuable suggestions for shaping social coexistence and as such consecrated formation, interculturality fits better into the formation of consecrated life. Because in order to treat people equally, it may be necessary to make differences – that is, to treat unequal things unequally.

2 The necessity for interculturality in the formation of consecrated life

Interculturality means more than multiculturalism in the sense of a cultural diversity, also more than transculturality in the sense of crossing over certain cultures. This distinction is of great importance in the formation of people in consecrated life with different cultural backgrounds. Because they should not lose their own culture and identity, but bring them as an enrichment into the community.

In summary, *multiculturality* emphasises on living side by side, *transculturality* stresses what is common in the different cultures and *interculturality* is comprehensive because it pays attention to both similarities and differences in different cultures. Therefore, though both multiculturality and transculturality are good basis for living together, it is important in the formation of consecrated life to move to interculturality. Because it is the differences in cultures that become a challenge and an enrichment for living together and not the similarities. It remains a challenge to keep the uniqueness of the different cultures in a community and at the same time to find a common way of living together. This calls for openness.

3 | Opening up for intercultural living in formation

To be able to live in an intercultural community, it is important to be open-minded and to be ready to accept and learn from other cultures. Learning from other cultures first of all demands, that we respect other cultures and that we are convinced of being enriched by them. This presupposes that we acknowledge the dignity of people from other cultures and that we accept to live with the diversity of cultures in our said community. Such an attitude leads to mutual respect and creates the basics for good intercultural interactions.

3.1 | Diversity in formation communities

An intercultural community needs to accept diversity and diverse ways of doing things to achieve a good intercultural life. Diversity is according to Harrison and Sin[4], the collective degree of differences between members of a social group[5]. It characterises the extent to which a group is colourfully mixed up. This colourful group can differ in terms of spirituality, gender, generation, skin colour, education, culture and many other factors. The cultural diversity stays however in the background.

The recognition of these differences is very significant in a community, because it has been proved that the way people perceive diversity can have a major impact on the way diversity influences individuals and groups. Any kind of diversity can demonstrably have positive or negative effects. The good news is that, the more individuals or groups show a positive attitude towards diversity, the more it becomes beneficial and less detrimental.

Diversity is inevitable in intercultural living. Thomas Aquinas says in his famous and well-known Summa Theologica, God loves and blesses diversity, because it belongs to his creation[6]. For a successful intercultural living, it is necessary to allow diversity, since it can be a chance and an opportunity for community life if room is made for members of a community to bring in their different cultures. However, this cultural diversity only becomes a valuable resource if communities make the effort to accept the different cultures in their midst. Because diversity is not just what we expect from it but also what we make out of it. Hiding differences between cultures is of little help. In order to develop the potential of diversity, it is important to simultaneously emphasise on the similarities and differences in cultures.

3.2 | Dealing with differences within an intercultural formation community

Accepting and learning to live with diversity in an intercultural community means we have to be able to live with differences. One of the important things is to have the ability of *not denying differences*. It often happens that we avoid naming differences between cultures, fearing that this could foster conflict and xenophobia. Differences between cultures are natural. Their denial is not the way to eliminate conflicts in the long term. Differences should therefore be acknowledged and taken seriously, but without the usual derogatory connotations. In this way, they can be addressed and common ways for living together can be found[7].

Furthermore, it is important to *consider differences as a source of enrichment*. It is good to be aware of the fact that differences can not only present challenges but can also offer opportunities and enrichment in intercultural communities.

Additionally, *intercultural dialogue should be encouraged*. A competent approach to cultural differences in an intercultural community requires not only the addressing of problems and irritations that arise from misunderstandings, but also a dialogue on controversial validity claims of values, etc., or simply of communication rules, because a mutual understanding can only be deepened through dialogue.

It is therefore vital, that *intercultural dialogue is direct and concrete*. There is the danger of not dealing directly with foreigners when it comes to issues concerning them, but rather relying on read theories and reports of the media, which can lead to prejudices. We cannot remain by the description of others, their culture and practices that we get from the media, if dialogue is to succeed in a community. We have to speak directly with those concerned in order to get to know and understand them and the differences between us better.

Dialogue about differences between cultures *requires the willingness to change and rethink*. People in dialogue should at the same time be encouraged to open themselves to change. Intercultural dialogue is a mutual learning process: everyone learns something from each other's culture and gives something out from one's own culture. This interplay of different cultural aspects in dialogue and living together leads to changes or renewal of all concerned. And this openness is necessary because intercultural dialogue can only bear fruit if renewal of cultures is allowed. All these being said, it is useful when dealing with intercultural differences to become conscious of the fact that our behaviour is shaped and influenced by our own cultures and therefore allow rethinking.

4 The contrast between collectivistic and individualistic cultures

Living in an intercultural community, it is very significant to know the patterns of behaviour of collectivistic and individualistic cultures. This is because the differences between these two are very important to understand how culture influences a person's perception and behaviour in a community[8]. But it is also important to mention that cultures are not always divided in to these extremes. People from these two cultural forms will have different behaviours, because

> «…when individualists and collectivists meet, they bring to the encounter different social attitudes, moral values and behavioural inclinations. Their cognitive styles will differ as will the manner in which they communicate, particularly with respect to how they express their emotions and wishes. How they act, including their non-verbal behaviour, will also differ as a function of their core value orientation»[9].

In *collective societies or cultures*, people define themselves as part of the group and therefore place group goals over individual ones. Whereas in *individualistic societies or cultures*, people consider themselves as separate entities and are therefore primarily interested in their own personal needs[10].

Individualistic cultures promote an independent understanding of self. In order to achieve the cultural goal of independence, one has to understand himself as an individual whose behaviour is meaningful in relation to his own thoughts, feelings and actions and not through the feelings, thoughts and actions of others[11].

Collective cultures promote a mutually dependent (interdependent) understanding of self. The experience of interdependence implies that one perceives himself as part of a broader social relationship and recognises that one's own behaviour is determined by others. He also realises that his behaviour is largely structured by and depends on the feelings and thoughts of the people he is in relation with[12].

People from collective cultures attach great importance to community and solidarity. It is therefore important for them to maintain harmony and to ensure that no one loses his/her face. People from individualistic cultures give relatively high priority to their individual goals, and their identities are mainly defined by their personal characteristics[13]. The table below shows some other differences between individualistic and collectivistic cultures.

Individualistic cultures	Collectivistic cultures
Social status should be judged by performance. People who perform well should not be hindered by their origin to rise socially.	People accept hierarchies and status differences, even if these are not determined by the current performance but rather through age and tradition.
Although harmony is important, honesty and straightforwardness are valued during discussions. Status differences play only a minor role here.	Disputes are to be avoided in daily social interactions, especially if they would lead to the loss of face of one of the participants.
At least the ethical ideal exists, that all people should be treated equally and there should not be a difference between Ingroup and Outgroup	In the allocation of resources, differences are made between Ingroups and Outgroups. People of the Ingroups receive preferential treatment and especially relatives are actively supported in their careers
Moral behaviour is oriented on one's own and less on the expectations of the group. Immoral behaviour leads to feelings of guilt and personal responsibility.	Transgressions and acts of immorality lead to loss of face in front of the group and feelings of shame both to the perpetrator and to the members of the group and the family as a whole.

If people from a collectivistic culture find themselves for the first time in an individualistic culture and they receive little or no support from their community, they would probably experience a much worse loss of identity than people from an individualistic culture under the same circumstances. Cut off from family, groups, and loyal friends, they would lose the connections that previously determined who they were. Because in a collectivist culture, identification with the group gives one sense of belonging, offers a range of values, a network of people who take care of themselves and ensure security[14]. On the other hand, it would be uncomfortable or too narrow for people from individualistic cultures if they were to *constantly* live with a community in a collectivistic culture. They would lack their *privacy*. It is therefore, necessary in intercultural communities to pay attention to this phenomenon of collectivism and individualism in order to understand each other and to try to find a common basis of going about things.

Countries that have a high degree of individualism are the Anglo-Saxon countries, the Netherlands and the Scandinavian countries. Collectivistic cultures are mostly found in parts of Africa, Asia and South America. Individualistic cultures are in the minority and collectivist cultures are in the majority with an amount of over 70 % of the world population[15].

It is good to be aware of these differences, but of course, the level of collectivism and individualism varies not only among different countries, but also within a particular country. In addition, individualistic and collectivistic orientations also depend on the situation in which people find themselves and what stimuli are present. It is therefore, possible to find individuals in an individualistic culture having many traits of a collectivistic culture and vice versa.

5 Some challenges in encountering other cultures

Being able to live a successful intercultural life has also to do with the ability to have the courage to address issues. Because the mere confrontation with the *differentness* of a person (that is, in the sense of an objective fact based on cultural differences) can lead to aggressiveness, condemnation or rejection. This is of course, not

always the case. In some areas (Food, Aesthetics, Art, etc.), being different is often readily accepted – it raises curiosity, attractiveness and interest. However, things are different when *differentness* meets deep-rooted values, traditions, customs and habits that make up our identity. When these things are in play, *differentness* can trigger violent reactions. An ethnocentric reflex emerges. We turn to consider some of the behaviours of the different person to be immoral, shocking or offensive because they violate values we are deeply attached to. Such behaviours question certain principles on which our identity is based and they are therefore seen as an attack on us. We think this justifies moral disapproval and condemnation as a reaction or an answer[16].

The point is about being open in our encounters with others and about our perceptions about them. Because if we persist in our own position and we expect the same ideas from others, we deny their originality and freedom and by so doing transform them into a subordinate or an object. This makes it very necessary and inevitable to deal with matters such as strangeness and prejudices in intercultural communities.

5.1 Strangeness

One of the big challenges in encountering people from other cultures is strangeness. The stranger in the classical sense is the one who comes from afar, unknown and unfamiliar. However, he/she must be close enough to be experienced as foreign, because people you do not know about cannot even be foreign to you[17].

Looking at things from a sociological perspective, strangeness is everything that is unknown to us. When people meet in intercultural communities, their cultures are initially mutually strange to each other. The feeling of strangeness is therefore programmed in intercultural communities. Crossing the threshold between what is familiar to us, to something that is strange, always brings a risk, because the new thing we are going to encounter is not only uncertain to us but also changes us. It is therefore important in intercultural communities not to ignore or deny the existence of these realities, but to make them open and accessible for discussions in order to be able to find common means and ways of living harmoniously with each other. Encountering strangers or people from other cultures goes beyond learning a foreign language. It is also about understanding foreign cultures and changing perspectives[18].

5.2 Prejudices

Prejudices are usually judgments that are made without verifying their validity on the basis of facts. These judgments usually have a pejorative and discriminatory tendency. Prejudices become a sort of defence mechanism. There are sometimes negative prejudices and hostile feelings towards others who think differently when people feel that their daily routines and well-established patterns of thought and behaviour may be disturbed[19]. These negative or hostile opinions sometimes arise just because a person belongs to a particular group. He/she is assumed to have the unsound practices which are attributed to that group[20].

Based on the points mentioned above, prejudices become a challenge in intercultural living which needs to be addressed, because in the encounter of people from different cultures, such ideas and attitudes are almost always present on both sides and they influence the interaction among these people. What I find interesting, or rather dangerous for intercultural living in communities is the fact, that people usually assume that they themselves are free of prejudices[21].

Religious are not immune to this danger and since individuals cannot clear these social prejudices automatically, this remains a challenge when people from different cultures come together. Therefore, it is important that religious communities are aware of this phenomenon and to make it a point to talk about it – thus not to make it a taboo topic. Only then will it be possible to break down such prejudices.

Intercultural encounters

Intercultural encounters are delicate and need to be accompanied with care. This is because when people from different cultures come together, different worldviews meet. This makes misunderstandings, misinterpretations and difficulties inevitable, especially due to the fact that each partner takes it for granted that his/her worldview is the only *right* and *normal* one.

This is a challenge for both locals and newcomers in a particular culture, initially, for the newcomer who is in a new culture. In view of the foreign customs and traditions, he/she can no longer rely on his/her usual thinking and feels impaired in his/her ability to act in his/her self-confidence. Some react with a *defence* that they assimilate permanently in their behaviour. Others accept this *reality of differences*, create diverse correspondences through which they regain their ability to act and their self-confidence. Also, the locals are irritated by the behaviour of the other, which is foreign to him/her. Experiences of strangeness are made on both sides and it is advisable to exchange these experiences and remain in dialogue[22]. The next point can be helpful in trying to understand each other.

6.1 Living in a new culture

Intercultural living presupposes that at least one person or a group of people have moved from one culture to live in a different culture. This makes it necessary to pay particular attention to the phenomenon of arriving in a new culture. Nowadays it is easy and fast to move from one country to another, thus from one culture to another. However, the process of *arriving* in the host country takes much longer than we might think. Diana de Vallescar Palanca says that one's own organism has to get used to the new environment and it takes an average of six months to get physically adapted to the new environment. Our body shows its mental state in body language and begins to react and to adapt to the new rhythms, the types of nutrition, climatic conditions, etc. The psyche, however, needs a bit longer and this can lead to a cultural shock. Nobody really knows what we have left behind and what we are to expect in the new culture and environment[23].

A modulation begins between the near (here) and the far (there). Such coordinates fulfil a new psychic meaning and lead to a redefinition of a person's affective topography. It is as if the environment, things and people impress him/her in a new way due to the memories, expectations, fears and emotional connections that he/she is more or less aware of[24]. In this context, he/she almost involuntary strives to regain his/her *there* (where he/she came from) with its mental and affective schemes and behaviours. In his/her *here* (our current situation), his/her homesickness, which is usually strong like never before, appears to be part of his/her life and seem to build his/her new identity. The new cultural situation begins to influence the personality of the person concerned and his/her way of relating to others. His/her reactions and perceptions, how he/she is being perceived by others and what he/she has learned are sometimes confused[25]. In this situation, it is important that a community shows concern and understanding to the one involved and it is necessary that he/she is assisted in a way the community finds appropriate to help him/her arrive *here*, also emotionally and psychologically.

6.2 Culture shock

Culture shock is a psychic state where suddenly all the known values and patterns of behaviour seem to have lost their validity for the individual in the foreign cultural environment. The symptoms include homesickness, depression, nervousness, exaggerated cleanliness, withdrawal, unexplainable crying attacks, loss of ability to work

effectively, and aggressive behaviour in the new environment. Culture shock is not a disease, but a defence reaction against the influences of a foreign culture[26]. The bigger the difference between the culture of origin and the culture on the ground, the more difficult it becomes to adapt[27].

Every culture shapes its members by teaching them what is desired, allowed or prohibited. What is learned is like an equipment that gives the individual an orientation in his/her everyday life and helps him/her to behave as expected. When someone enters a new culture, his/her *cultural equipment* which has worked well until then is questioned. His/her behaviour, core values and worldviews are challenged and he/she receives a culture shock. In the new environment, the individual feels that the usual problem-solving and decision-making strategies that have worked well for him/her all the time in his/her own culture have lost their effectiveness, because things are going on differently in the new culture. This can lead to a shock. His/her world of interaction becomes uncertain, which gives him/her a certain discomfort or an emotional or physical restlessness that reflects in frustration, anger, depression, lethargy, aggression or illness[28]. It is very important that a person in such a situation has someone to talk to. Sharing with others who are as well new in a culture and are mostly going through similar experiences is also helpful. This gives them the feeling that they are not alone in such a situation and lets them know that certain experiences are *normal* when encountering a new culture, and people from a new culture. This can be very supportive during this time.

Culture shock is not only for newcomers in a culture, it is also experienced by the local people when they come into contact with the culture of the new person in the community. However, the intensity varies, because the local people are favoured by a known framework of actions as well as by the possibility of having easier access to advice and support from colleagues, friends, relatives etc., which makes them less vulnerable[29]. Generally speaking, people who have lived, worked, studied in other cultures or travelled a lot to other cultures will have fewer problems with culture shock than the others.

Conclusion

For a successful intercultural living in a community, it is important to be first of all aware that there is no automatism in this regard, but that it requires sensitivity and needs to be developed. Intercultural sensitivity is not natural, and therefore its appropriation needs special attention[30]. Martin Üffing sums this up and says that interculturality does not just happen by putting together under the same roof people of different cultures. Rather it is something that needs to be consciously created, intentionally promoted, carefully cared for and attentively nurtured. It requires certain community structures, some basic personal attitudes and a strong missionary spirituality[31]. It is therefore necessary to pay particular attention to the points below.

- Intercultural formation is an opportunity, and yet it remains a challenge that requires determination
- The local culture should not be neglected, but paid attention to, since interculturality doesn't exist in a vacuum
- It should become clear to all formators and those in formation that intercultural formation is a process that demands efforts, both from local and from foreign formators or those in formation
- It is important to ensure that the challenges associated with intercultural formation are not left unattended to, but are discussed
- It is important to treat other people/cultures and the other sex with respect
- It is good to understand other people and their cultures. Because Henry Ford said: The secret of success is understanding the other person's point of view

– The ability to question one's own cultural values and practices is also of great importance. Because as Hofstede says: The inability to question one's own cultural practices and values evidently creates high conflict potential when members of different cultures have to live and get along with each other

In intercultural formation, it should be possible to rephrase the message in the letter to the Galatians. Instead of the sentence: There are no longer Jews and Greeks, no more slaves and free people, no man and woman; for you are all one in Christ Jesus (*Gal* 3, 28), we should be able to say: There are no longer formators and those in formation from Africa, America, Asia, Europe and Oceania, because we are all one in Christ Jesus and are fellow sisters and brothers, not in the sense that the individual loses his or her identity, but in the sense that living together is possible despite the different culture

Endnotes

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24. Cf. *ivi*.

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