

**VOCATIONAL DISCERNMENT AND FORMATION  
IN AN INTERCULTURAL WORLD  
EXPERIENCE AND VISION OF CAMILLIAN FORMATORS**

**fr. Leocir Pessini M.I.**

**fr. Laurent Zoungrana M.I.**

*La rottura tra Vangelo e Cultura è senza dubbio il dramma della nostra epoca, come lo fu anche di altre.*  
**Papa Paulo VI, Evangelii Nuntiandi, 1975, 20.**

*I processi di internazionalizzazione dovrebbero impegnare tutti gli Istituti (maschili e femminili) a diventare laboratori di ospitalità solidale dove sensibilità e sculture diverso possono acquisire forza e significati non conosciuti altrove e quindi altamente profetici. Questa ospitalità solidale si costruisce con un vero dialogo tra le culture perché tutti possano convertirsi al Vangelo senza rinunciare alla propria particolarità.*  
**CIVCSVA, Per vino nuovo otri nuovi, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2017, 40.**

## Introduction

I begin this reflection by expressing my sincere thanks to Fr. David Kinnear Glenday MCCJ, Secretary general of the Union of Superiors General (USG), for inviting me to present the experience of my Order – the Ministers of the Sick (*Camillian*) – in relation to the theme of *vocational discernment in an intercultural world*.

Since I will speak about our experience, that is our daily life, I thought it would make sense to begin by “listening to the voices” of our religious who are engaged in this challenging ministry within the Order<sup>1</sup>.

For this purpose, we designed a questionnaire containing five questions, which we sent to our formators of the various geographical areas in which we are present, with the following introduction:

“In October 2018 the Universal Church will celebrate a Synod of Bishops on the theme “*Youth, faith and vocational discernment*”.

In view of this Synod, the superiors general have decided to dedicate their next ordinary assembly, to be held in May 2017, to the theme “*Vocational discernment in an intercultural world*” (...).

You are at the forefront of vocational animation and formation. You are the first to discern whether a young man shows the *signs* of vocation to the consecrated life. That is why we would like to know what

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<sup>1</sup> In writing this paper, starting from “listening to the voices of our formators”, I received valuable help from **fr. Laurent Zoungrana, Vicar General/General Concillor** responsible for formation in the Camillian Order. He contacted the Camillian formators who live and work in the various countries where the Order is present. I wish to express sincere thanks to him and to all the formators who collaborated with their reflections and analyses with the questionnaire. The formators who participated were: 1) Babychan Pazhanilath, former Consultor General, in charge of formation in the Camillian Order (from Bangalore, India); 2) Pierre Yanogo and Hubert Goudjinou, former Consultor General, in charge of formation in the Camillian Order (from Burkina Faso and Benin respectively; both work in formation in Italy); 3) Denis Kaboré (from Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso); 4) Mateus Locatelli (from Sao Paulo, Brazil); 5) Pierpaolo Valli (from Verona, Italy); 6) Sante Tocchetto (Italian, works in formation in Thailand/Vietnam since 25 years); 7) Alfréd György (from Vienna, Austria); 8) John Toai (from Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam); 9) Neiber Cabrera (Peruvian who works in Buenos Aires, Argentina), 10) Johnson V. Varghese, (Indian who works in Jinja, Uganda); 11) Chucrani Mbirigenda and the formation team (Tanzania); 12) Luigi Galvani, Alphons Oles, Andi Superman (*Saint Camillus Formation Center* in Maumere, Indonesia).

criteria you follow when dealing with interculturality, which is to be understood as the plurality of cultures (or multiculturalism), the encounter of various cultures, the diversity of people, their values and lifestyles ...

So then, how do you build unity in diversity?

We ask you to answer the questionnaire bearing in mind interculturality and focusing on the discernment process used to engage in interculturality.

- 1) What challenges and difficulties do you encounter?
- 2) What biases do you identify in the process of interculturality?
- 3) What are the outstanding issues?
- 4) What maturation process do you observe in the course of formation?
- 5) What role can the general government of the Order play in intercultural dynamics?"

An interesting fact can be observed in our Camillian Order. The theme of inculturation was chosen to be studied during the annual meeting of major superiors in 1981, in the light of the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* of Pope Paul VI (1975), as it applied to *evangelization in the missionary areas of the Order* in relation to healthcare in Latin America, Africa and Asia. The Superior General fr. Calisto Vendrame (1977-1989) stated, "Today, more than ever before, the Church is becoming aware of the role culture plays in the religious life of people - of those who evangelize as well as of those who are evangelized - and of the need to evangelize cultures, not in a decorative manner, but going to the roots, if we want to avoid misunderstandings and dramas." And he recalls the words of Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*: "*The split between the Gospel and culture is without a doubt the drama of our time, just as it was of other times*" (n.20).<sup>2</sup>

In this interesting reflection, fr. Calisto Vendrame recalls that it is especially starting from Vatican Council II that one begins to speak of *incarnation* of the evangelical message, in a spirit of mutual enrichment and assimilation of values: a logic of incarnation that requires an *indigenization* of the Church, because "*the propagation of the Christian message must by no means obliterate or weaken these cultural and spiritual values, which constitute an invaluable legacy. The Church, in the full sense of this term, must become autochthonous for your countries, cultures, races.*"<sup>3</sup>

The expression *inculturation* was officially reintroduced during the Synod of Bishops of 1977. Fr. Calisto Vendrame observes, "This term, which is inspired by the mystery of incarnation of the Word, refers to the insertion of the Christian faith into the cultural matrix of a people so that it may be assimilated and re-expressed by this people in its own original way and become a fundamental dimension of its life and thought."<sup>4</sup> The effort to blend in, that is to not stand out as a foreigner, is a first painful but necessary step for a more effective action in the midst of other cultures ("*Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies ...*", Jn 12:24). Another term that has been extensively used is *acculturation*. According to this perspective, a missionary remained a foreigner, and those who embraced the Christian faith were regarded as extraneous to the local cultures. Basically, acculturation was a way of integrating the other into the cultural

<sup>2</sup> VENDRAME C., *Inculturazione*, in *Camilliani/Camillians*, n. 141, year XI, November 1981, 541-552.

<sup>3</sup> *Insegnamenti* di PAOLO VI, XII, 354. The letter dated 30 March was published in the OR issue of 21 April 1974 and was addressed to the *First Assembly of Asian Bishops* held in Taipei (21-27 April 1974).

<sup>4</sup> VENDRAME C., *Inculturazione*, in *Camilliani/Camillians*, n. 141, year XI, November 1981, 545.

world of the missionary, for the process of acculturation was always in favour of the imported culture. The expressions of the faith and the discipline that derive from it are the same and monolithic worldwide.”<sup>5</sup>

This new view of inculturation that has started to be adopted in the health ministry oddly enough has not yet been included in the vocational ministry and formation programs of the Order. In fact, the *Handbook on Formation of the Order*, which was approved at the 2001 General Chapter and is going to be revised and updated this year (2017), does not mention the need for discernment and inculturation, in relation to the diversity of cultures and interculturality. In the introduction of the *Handbook* it is stated that “the general directives are to be adapted to the needs of the single provinces and delegations: this task is of crucial importance and implies the ability to translate the principles and norms contained in the *Handbook* in terms of the local cultures.”<sup>6</sup>

It only expresses the concern and recommendation to “translate the general principles bearing in mind the cultural distinctiveness of the different countries.”

Times have changed significantly! Today we say that we are immersed not in an epoch of changes but in a change of epoch. We contemplate this new landscape through the eyes of our formators, based on their answers to the five questions mentioned previously.

The theme of interculturality is a significant challenge for religious formation today. In fact, the phenomenon of globalization paradoxically leads to a certain reawakening of nationalisms and cultural particularisms: it is therefore urgent for us religious to face up to the challenges of our modern times, preparing our religious to be steady in their identity in the face of a culture that tends to weaken or ‘water down’ their choice of a life rooted in Jesus Christ.

Today there are new phenomena that have an impact on human coexistence at large and that challenge the possibility and ability to create a new order: the phenomenon of *globalization* has revealed a growing interdependence and shed light on the many disparities of otherness.<sup>7</sup> The other, the issue of the other, the relationship with the other, is an anthropological and ethical challenge we are faced with today.<sup>8</sup> The nature of our times is expressed essentially by the problem of interpersonal relationships that contemporary philosophy and sociologies of integration<sup>9</sup> tackle by shifting the focus from the individual to the person, from ‘within oneself’ to ‘for others’, from subjectivity to intersubjectivity. In today’s global society, as citizens of this *global village*, we all coexist in a context of pluralism.<sup>10</sup>

Globalization, seen as the systematic encounter among cultures, which were previously relatively separate and self-contained, has a remarkable impact on the development of personal identity. Dialogue among different cultures is no longer a problem concerning only immigrants and emigrants: it is a global challenge for the world population. The effect of globalization on a person’s identity is complex.<sup>11</sup>

Nowadays geographic boundaries isolate cultures far less than they did in the past. The accelerated flow of people from one county to another, from one continent to another, the intense communication via

<sup>5</sup> VENDRAME C., *Inculturazione*, in *Camilliani/Camillians*, n. 141, year XI, November 1981, 554.

<sup>6</sup> ORDINE DEI MINISTRI DEGLI INFERMI, *Regolamento di formazione*, Rome 2000, 6.

<sup>7</sup> MOUNIER E., *Gli esistenzialismi*, Ecumenica, Bari 1981, 102.

<sup>8</sup> Cfr. ROSSI B., *Identità e differenza. I compiti dell’educazione*, La Scuola, Brescia 1994; DE BENI M., *Prosocialità e altruismo. Guida all’educazione socioaffettiva*, Erickson, Trento 1998.

<sup>9</sup> Cfr. KHELLIL M., *Sociologie de l’integration*, PUF, Paris 2005.

<sup>10</sup> Cfr. DE VITA R., *Convivere nel pluralismo*, Cantagalli, Siena 2008.

<sup>11</sup> Cfr. KILANI M., *Anthropologie. Du local au global*, A. Colin, Paris 2009.

radio waves, cable, and satellite has reduced physical and psychological distances among people. An important effect of this phenomenon is the fact that a large number of people belonging to different cultures come much more into contact with each other: the culture of the valley, the countryside, the city, the culture of nations that exist on the same continent, the culture of populations of different continents.

This premise gives us a sense of how important the subject of interculturality really is. Institutes of consecrated life are not exonerated from reckoning with this global phenomenon: actually, they are concerned in a special way, for the encounter of different cultures is intrinsic to the Church's specific *missio ad gentes*.

*Fr. Pierre Yanogo (Burkina Faso) – fr. Hubert Goudjinou (Benin): both involved in the area of formation in Italy.*

### **1. The challenges and difficulties encountered**

We are all aware that formation is the ultimate priority, because our future depends on it. With the decline in vocation in the West, we see the changing geography of the Order (increasingly African and Asian and less European). For years now many institutes have resorted to reorganization, in various forms, as a way of coping with the crisis in vocations. In many religious institutes there are now joint formation communities for the various stages of formation, with formators selected not for the colour of their skin but because they are prepared for this service. In this common project the postulants are entrusted to the care of the individual provinces to foster and grow their sense of belonging. It is a matter of changing our approach to formation: in this area it is no longer possible to work in an autonomous, self-referencing way, as loners. We must join forces and resources, especially on account of the decline in the number of candidates to the consecrated life.

Formation in an intercultural context requires that everyone be constantly engaged in one's 'internal pilgrimage': from one's own culture to that of the other, and all together towards the culture of the Gospel and of consecrated life. It is important to recognize that there is no ideal or superior culture. We are all gathered in Christ. Our differences are values we should accept and appreciate.

Whenever people come together, there are bound to be problems: preconceived notions, biases, stereotypes. It is sad to see that formees tend to take on the same attitudes as their young peers, without discernment. The intervention of a formator who does not belong to the same culture as that of the formee can at times be misinterpreted and misjudged.

Cultural diversity reveals that no cultural paradigm can profess to be unique and explain the whole of reality, for every culture is a crystallization of the great human adventure in space and time. Every culture is a point of view on reality: it can never pretend to be global, for a point of view is partial by definition. In other words, one could say that every culture sees the whole of reality, but in a partial way.

We are therefore faced with the pressing need for a pluralistic attitude towards cultural diversity. In the process of formation priority should be given to sowing the 'Gospel culture', which professes universal love, for Jesus has come to save all humanity and its different cultures. We believe that the human being, who is free by his own nature, can also transform culture.

Educating to interculturality can be understood as discovering the difference we carry inside of us and which is sometimes hard to reckon with; but also as the capacity to accept and relate with the difference that is outside of us. It is in the relationship with the other who is different from me, who is other-than-me, that the intercultural dynamics is played out.

Recognizing one's identity in spite of differences, is a primary objective that Christian communities must progressively converge towards in order to start a formation process based on the sense of belonging and on the conversion of intercultural relations within a multicultural context. In fact, in order to obviate such a conversion process one should avoid the mistake – disconcerting in some respects – of entrusting education to interculturality to educators and formators who, apart from their good will, have only a superficial knowledge of the formees' culture, or none at all.

A community living in a multicultural context should also avoid a rigid mentality, which inevitably emphasizes legitimate personal and cultural differences. This can lead to nationalistic attitudes or even to processes of creeping mutual intolerance.

Present in all cultures, but especially evident in the West, is the tendency to consider their peculiar values as universal and absolute. This leads to a second characteristic all cultural systems share: self-centeredness, that is the tendency to place oneself at the top of the value scale that is used to judge other cultural systems.

*Fr. Pierre Yanogo (Burkina Faso) – fr. Hubert Goudjinou (Benin): both involved in the area of formation in Italy.*

Another important and real difficulty has to do with communication. I believe the *condicio sine qua non* for living an authentic formation experience is language. Formation is not possible if a person cannot talk about him/herself using a common language that unites and creates bonds. We all know how hard it is to talk about one's inner world: if to this intrinsic difficulty we add the problem of language things become even more complicated and we run the risk of not providing serious formation.

I believe it would be best for formation to take place in the place of origin, so as not to run the risk of forming people who will then not want to go back to their own country, for convenience or other – not always authentic – reasons.

In working with formees of other institutes I have observed that the human and spiritual dynamics present and experienced by the candidates do not differ so much from one culture to another. Difficulties encountered in intercommunity relations, the resistance to opening up and placing oneself in the hands of another (the formator and/or companion in formation), the unwillingness to really become involved in one's formative journey, personal devices to avoid confrontation, shutting down (...) are just some of the dynamics I find in persons from different cultures. We could say that there is an anthropological ground that is trans-cultural and this is the ground on which we can and indeed must work seriously.

I believe that often the problem of 'cultural difference' conceals a sort of defense to avoid delving deeply into one's individual journey. If a person hides behind the 'screen' of cultural diversity, which becomes an alibi or justification to not change or not embrace the values one has chosen, it is clear that interculturality is an actual defence that does not allow one to proceed sincerely and speedily along the path of the Gospel.

A problem that is worth discussing can be that of different approaches to formation when attempts are made at unification within the same culture. The attempts made in the past, as well as more recently, to unify the formation processes in our country have not produced positive results. Aside from the persons who were directly involved in the unification project, in my opinion more planning is required and a shared value and content base one can work with. Realistically it is not sufficient to gather candidates together under a formator assigned and recognized by the major superiors in order for things to really work. It is necessary to sit around a table and try to share and lay down together some discernment criteria, in the absence of which one runs the risk of throwing everything back into question every time!

*Fr. Pierpaolo Valli – Italy*

Cultivate a non-judgemental, listening attitude. Avoid the tendency to associate personal defects to the culture of origin, as if there were moral subcultures incapable of fully embracing the Gospel, and the tendency towards self-centeredness, which is manifested with biases and stereotypes. Avoid thinking that my culture is better than that of others and overestimating culture to the detriment of Christian values: *the blood of the ancestors is stronger than the water of baptism* (Mons. Alseme Sanon).

Hence the need to know the youth culture; try to understand how some values typical of our consecration – like authority, relating with others, or chastity – are understood in the culture of young people in formation.

Some preconceptions to overcome: the loss of some cultural features or the denial of the right to cultural ‘particularism’; the domination of the majority culture over minorities; the risk of accepting elements and values without a true moral value in order not to reject or hurt the culture of the other.

The lack of knowledge or the absence of an interculturality project can carry the risk of merely overlapping cultures, of superficial relationships, or the absence of true communion.

*Fr. Denis Kaboré – Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso)*

Some challenges relating to interculturality faced in formation: the search for a common language; the insertion of confreres into the local communities; generational challenges; diversity in the expression and interpretation of the Camillian charism; preconceptions and mistrust of poorer realities; discerning the authentic motivations in the vocational process and the authenticity of the charism lived out; overcoming the division between the ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ clergy; discerning the assignment of certain tasks (not only official ones) to make sure they are viable and can be fulfilled in the communities and in the local cultures; to take into account and respond to the various expectations and the problem of rights and duties; growing in one’s awareness of work ethics in the ministry.

Interculturality should be part of the formation process from the very outset; it should be included in the initial formation program, in the various missions, prior to final vows and priestly ordination.

*Fr. Alfréd György – Austria*

Uganda is a country with various tribes characterized by different customs and cultures. Vocations come from different tribes and cultures: the challenges met in the formation community originate here, since some tribes consider themselves above others and try to dominate and to emerge in various spheres.

The different education styles and methods of the various cultures are at the origin of clichés and biases. For instance: some tribes believe that if a young man is not circumcised he will never become a real man. When students come together for formation, some are looked upon with contempt by the others who come from the tribes in which circumcision is regarded as an important rite of passage. Other tribes do not comprehend the value of celibacy or of gratuitous service: a service without payment is not appreciated.

*Fr. Johnson V. Varghese, Uganda*

The main problem is always finding people who are willing to dedicate themselves to forming the new generations. One prefers pastoral and social work because it is more rewarding and offers the possibility of having more free time for oneself.

I think that the greatest difficulty and challenge has to do with being able to get past one's own culture and individual ways of thinking in order to try, as far as possible, to understand with patience and humbleness the people who are entrusted to us by the Lord's calling.

In our province of Thailand two cultures coexist: the Thai and the Vietnamese. They are very different and require special attention.

*Fr. Sante Tocchetto – Italian working in formation in Thailand/Vietnam since 25 years*

Some of the challenges we have to face are the lack of transparency, of interest for and respect of other cultures. On the one hand, the world has become a small village with many means of communication. On the other hand, there is an unsettling and worrisome rise in individualism, sectarianism and fundamentalism.

People seem to be more and more attached to their own culture, which they consider unique and better (superior). There is an urgent need to make space for other cultures. A confusing distortion we must avoid is identifying cultures with religions. The practices and traditions of every culture can become a meaningful part of any religious experience.

*Fr. Babychan Pazhanilath, Bangalore (India)*

## **2. *What kinds of biases can be identified in the process of interculturality?***

When Western civilization was interpreted as a superior culture it was used to legitimize colonialism and racism. All identities built without others are against others. This makes society and religious affiliation more conflictual, thereby increasing fragmentation.

Every good start in life is surely based on mutual knowledge acquired through effective forms of common cultural learning. The exchange of knowledge and joint learning must help to recognize differences. This cognitive action must help everyone to “develop in one's mind an intellectual respect of cultural diversity” and to overcome resistances, biases, exasperated ethnocentrism, which cause people to shirk from what is different. When we stand before the other we run the risk of using formal labels: a different culture, a different political option, a different geographic origin, race, academic title, distinction between rich and poor.

Stereotypes and biases do not allow for dialogue, encounter, intercultural. It is a matter of triggering a “cognitive transitivity”, stimulating everyone to adopt the other’s perspective, becoming attuned to the other’s thoughts, understanding the other’s mindset, which shape his way of being, and of implementing significant relational modes like dialogue, listening, acceptance, exchange. The cultures and differences we encounter are actually individuals who have different stories. When we give in to stereotypes, we no longer encounter the person, and intercultural relationships do not stand a chance.

It is a matter of trying to understand what motivates others and how they view things, to see what we have in common and how we can work together effectively. This fundamental cognitive behavioural objective can be pursued through concrete forms of intercultural learning and formation:

- *curiosity and the wish to discover*: the first step is no doubt the curiosity aroused by the presence of someone who is different from us. But we have to find a way to go farther, to discover where he comes from, his culture, his identity. Needless to say, this knowledge involves everyone: while the other, the foreigner, is stimulated to get to know the reality and the persons of the ‘new’ place in which he lives, the locals try to understand who the newcomers are. It is important to bear in mind that true intercultural learning involves everyone, not just others;

- *knowledge allows every one to overcome the fear of the other* and favours a more harmonious coexistence; it creates the conditions for building something together, making it possible to discover different cultures, individual talents and sensitivities, among other values;

- *knowledge and interaction should be conducive to forms of solidarity and attention for the condition of others* and stimulate a better understanding of one’s own specificity, a greater appreciation of one’s own living conditions. More self-aware, more open to the other, ready to build friendly relations that allow one to appreciate and make the most of differences; but also attention for the current living conditions in order to overcome isolation and conditionings, and come to fully recognize their rights;

- *intercultural learning and formation* must also take into account the different contexts and places of interaction, in order to attenuate and eventually do away with the most aggressive forms of ethnocentrism so as to appreciate the common elements and the positive value of specificities to develop different living conditions;

- *intercultural learning does not involve just individuals but local communities within a given context*. It will therefore be very useful to promote initiatives involving educational institutions, meetings, and events that foster intercultural dialogue. In this way, the local community can dedicate attention to the cultural and religious reality of the people who represent it in the local setting;

- *intercultural mediation* is not limited to relations among cultures considered *a priori* in their entirety, but refers to the relations existing among universes of symbols or meanings and the dynamics that determine the evolution of cultural differentiations. What has to be promoted, defended and guaranteed, is everyone’s right to grow according to his needs, through his own projects, inserted and recognized in a social context.

We are therefore brothers gathered in the name of Christ to pursue the same charism. If a person suitable for a given stage of formation is not available, hopefully one will turn to well prepared and open-minded religious of other countries for formation.

*Fr. Pierre Yanogo (Burkina Faso) – fr. Hubert Goudjinou (Benin): both involved in the area of formation in Italy.*

It is a matter of discovering what is beautiful and good about every culture, overcoming the barriers of one's own cultural pride. I am convinced that respect and a good dose of humility are the royal road to building sound relationships and what makes us more open to mutual acceptance.

At the beginning of my work in formation in Thailand, as well as at the beginning of the Vietnamese mission, I have sought help and enlightenment from the superiors and educators of other already established or local Institutes. This was very interesting and helpful, and I was then able to discern what would be useful to me without denying my basic assumptions. For instance, I have always believed that a familial atmosphere is a very important aspect that promotes inter-relations, not just among students but also between formators and students. In the seminary one must find the atmosphere of a true family in which the educator must be like a kind older brother.

*Fr. Sante Tocchetto – Italian working in formation in Thailand/Vietnam since 25 years.*

### **3) What are the outstanding issues?**

Does everyone in the Order want and accept interculturality?

Is interculturality favourable and appropriate in the care and accompaniment of the sick? The patient/healthcare worker relationship is not concerned with cultural disputes. A sick person just wants to get better, it does not matter who will take care of him/her, as long as he/she is listened to and understood. Should not a young person who wants to follow Christ be ready to accept all cultures?

Does not taking care of an individual in formation or of a sick person require a suitable knowledge of that person's culture?

Do formators take into account our contemporary culture? We live in a world with new forms of relationships in which virtual relations prevail over immediate human relations.

The role of formators in forming to interculturality. Are formators sufficiently equipped to face the challenges of interculturality?

*Fr. Denis Kaboré – Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso)*

Regarding interculturality as a value and an opportunity for personal and community growth and enrichment.

*Fr. Neiber Cabrera – Buenos Aires (Argentina)*

How can formators be prepared and how can *team work* be organized to deal with multiculturalism with candidates still in formation?

*Saint Camillus Formation Center – Maumere (Indonesia) – fr. Luigi Galvani, fr. Alphons Oles, fr. Andi Suparman*

### **4) What maturation process do you observe in the course of formation?**

Make people understand and face the challenges of interculturality:

- Develop a pedagogy of interculturality, that is favour the respect and understanding of cultural differences met inside as well as outside of the community.
- Verify whether the young men in formation are capable of relativizing their cultural point of view.
- Promote intercultural reflection and cultural attention. This enables to discover early on what unites and what distinguishes the confreres in a community, overcoming the tendency to withdraw into one's culture while failing to promote a globalized culture.
- Favour teams of formators from different cultures. This could serve as a model for the young men in formation.
- Promote and encourage intercultural formation communities: international formation communities.
- Promote in the formation communities cultural days during which every group or individual shares some aspects of his culture of origin.
- Conversion to the Gospel. Being aware that all cultures must be cleansed in the encounter with Christ, for he is the true (real) man and the Gospel transcends cultures.

*Fr. Denis Kaboré – Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso)*

So far, our challenges have had to do with different cultures within Brazil (North, East, South, Southeast of the country). At times they are hard to manage, when they arise at once in the same community. We are trying to respond to this challenge through personalized accompaniment, bearing in mind the family and cultural background of every young man. The formators visit the families so as to better understand this cultural difference.

To face these difficulties, we have proposed a 'therapeutic process' based on psychological counseling, the purpose of which is to help the seminarians to process their life story, their feelings and emotions. This has been very helpful in overcoming the challenges of interculturality in Brazil and has helped the young formees to mature.

*Fr. Mateus Locatelli – Sao Paulo (Brazil)*

The young candidates to the consecrated life require a sound vision and an awareness of the values and counter-values of their own culture before being sent to another cultural reality. It is necessary to pay attention to and promote the candidates' culture of origin rather than assimilate it within the context of a foreign culture. The formator too needs to be more aware of his own culture, of his tendencies in relation to biases and stereotypes. He too must know the different cultures of the formees and be able to appreciate and tap into the values, but also distinguish the purely cultural aspects from those which reveal the candidates' immaturity.

Develop intercultural values based on Gospel values and on our Camillian charism and spirituality. Culture is also a concrete expression of values. Living in a religious community, marked by the diversity of the various cultures, we must be capable of promoting a common culture that is viable in all places and regions, that is the values of the Gospel and of our charism and spirituality. At the beginning of the formation

process, the formator must help the candidates to integrate and internalize the values of the Gospel, of the Camillian charism and spirituality, and accompany them carefully, so as to be able to later evaluate how they live out these values.

Create opportunities for the candidates to share their life story, concerns, and cultural practices with the community. The formator too needs to know and evaluate the tendencies, stereotypes, concerns and biases of the students, in order to help and correct them.

Avoid all forms of privilege reserved to specific groups of students and/or cultures, so that all may experience the regular process of formation and vocational growth.

Encourage students to learn the official language of the Order so that through communication they can understand each other and appreciate the values of others.

*Fr. John Toai – Ho Chi Minh City (Vietnam)*

Significant cultural practices must be adopted and respected regardless of religious background. It is important to be open, interested, and curious when faced with other cultural expressions. We need to know other cultures, also in order to know better our own identity, with our values and counter values. As regards formation, it is important for the formator to be open to discover other cultures, respectful and patient in the process of cultural adjustment. As far as possible, initial formation should take place in one's own cultural setting under the guidance of a formator who knows and respects that culture. The candidate must not be alienated from his culture. It is very important to take into account the culture of the students, especially when the structures of formation and of the ministry are just starting.

*Fr. Babychan Pazhanilath – Bangalore (India)*

## **5. What role can the general government of the Order play in the process of interculturality?**

The Central Government has the task to animate ...

First it must make itself present in order to get to know the various realities of the Order; then it must animate and encourage; finally it must make the different realities known. The encounter among different cultures, formative realities, and sharing during periodic meetings are mutually enriching.

*Fr. Sante Tocchetto – Italian working in formation in Thailand/Vietnam since 25 years*

The reorganization of the Order in the area of formation cannot be optional. The central body of the Order cannot be a mere 'animator', but a leading player; it must take all its responsibilities for formation. In the specific case of Italy, it is called to evaluate carefully the places of formation and the quality of the formators on the basis of clear plans. It must give greater authoritativeness to formators, offering them the opportunity to stay updated in the face of the new challenges of formation.

The reorganization of the Order, which implies, among other things, the multiculturalism of the formation structures (students, formators), requires a personal commitment on everyone's part: working on oneself, acquiring a new vision of the Order, a new vision of the other, including missionary experiences for students a part of the formation program. Give formators the opportunity to dialogue among themselves.

*Fr. Pierre Yanogo (Burkina Faso) – fr. Hubert Goudjinou (Benin): both involved in the area of formation in Italy.*

- Organizing conferences or meetings on the topic of interculturality. Promote intercultural forums in the various cultural or language zones.
- Encourage missionaries *ad extra* and provide them with support (accompaniment). That is, open up communities formed by religious of different cultures. They would set an example.
- Employ the skills of sociologists to study the question of interculturality within the Order.
- Send documents or reflections on interculturality adapted to the different stages of formation (initial, ongoing). Every semester publish articles or send circular letters to the young men in formation, to the young perpetually professed, and to the older confreres (the ‘not so young’).
- frequently remind formators of the challenges of interculturality. Ensure the regular formation of formators to the contemporary culture. What are the needs of our world today?

*Fr. Denis Kaboré – Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso)*

Promote the formation of formators and vocational animators on the topic of interculturality. Facilitate the unification of formation houses by geographic areas. Raise the awareness of the older confreres as to the value of interculturality. In decision-making, take into account the sensitivities of the elders and the hopeful quest of the younger confreres. The General Government must be a sign of peaceful and effective leadership grounded in interculturality.

*Fr. Neiber Cabrera – Peruvian working in formation in Buenos Aires (Argentina)*

Need to gather together (regional meetings, language areas) the formators from the different countries and cultures to better facilitate the knowledge of cultural differences.

*Fr. Johnson V. Varghese – Indian working in formation in Uganda*

The General Government must mobilize the Order to address interculturality in depth, through specific studies (workshops and conferences on interculturality and other creative experiences) as well as an updated formation program, considering the complexity and requirements of the inculturation process.

*Fr. Pedro Tramontin – Brazilian working in formation in the U.S.A.*

The General Government should organize periodic meetings with formators and provide formators with the opportunity to study this topic – which is so new and yet so old – as part of their ongoing formation, at the regional as well as general level.

Prepare guidelines to facilitate multicultural formation.

*Saint Camillus Formation Center – Maumere (Indonesia) – fr. Luigi Galvani, fr. Alphons Oles, fr. Andi Superman*

The main responsibility of the General Government of our Order is to create and plan a formation process in relation to interculturality.

*Fr. Schukrani Mbirigeda and formation team – Tanzania*

## 6. Some final points for our reflection and discussion

I wish to conclude by focusing on some important aspects that must be further explored in the face of this delicate *process of inculturation (=incarnation) in an intercultural reality*, which is no doubt a challenge and an asset, but is also fraught with conflict and misunderstandings.

\* The incarnation of the Word has been a cultural event. Interculturality is the encounter between Jesus' salvific message and the multiplicity of cultures. An authentic inculturation of the Christian faith is based on the mystery of the incarnation.

\* Inculturation requires respect for the dignity of the individual, of every individual, in his/her entirety. It begins when we encounter the living Christ in the other and ends when we contemplate the risen Christ.

\* An intercultural lifestyle is the future of the consecrated life. Unless our communities become intercultural, we will not survive. But the question is: how can this new intercultural culture, spirit, relatedness be built concretely?

\* Interculturality does not mean losing or diluting one's own personal and cultural identity, but it carries with it the need to open up to the other who is "distinct and different". Only when we are open to the other can we feel that diversity can enrich our life. This process requires intercultural education, clear communication, and integrating the perspective of the other into our vision (the exercise of walking in someone else's shoes). We must avoid the uncritical tendency to adopt the call as the '*melting pot*' theory (a big 'hotchpotch' that refers to the type of society which lives and allows for the blending of elements of heterogeneous origins, of different ethnic groups, typical of the American society).

\* Rather than fear, we must celebrate the beauty of the multicoloured face of our Order. Perhaps we are only at the beginning of the process of building a new and unforeseeable future, in which only the Spirit of the Lord can lead us.

*Fr. Pedro Tramontin – Brazilian working in formation in the U.S.A.*

The cultural problem is no longer about distancing oneself from faith or the evangelical counsels, but from the human. The fundamental drama is no longer the breach between faith and life, nor secularization or dechristianization, but losing the sense of the human. And it is no longer a drama experienced by the Church but by everyone: man's humanization to the values in the light of the Gospel and of Jesus Christ.

The centrality of the person accepted in his/her totality, so as to allow him/her to develop his/her potential, make him/her acquire personal agency skills, and tap into his/her resources for the good of him/herself and others, becomes crucial in this process of interculturality. The other is not regarded as labour force to be exploited, but as a person who brings with him/her his/her culture and values that surely have some affinity, something in common with the local values and culture: there is no denying the universal dimensions of authentically human values that constitute a sort of common heritage.

*Fr. Pierre Yanogo (Burkina Faso) – p. Hubert Goudjinou (Benin): both involved in the area of formation in Italy.*

## 7. Trying to educate to the ‘wisdom of discernment’ according to Pope Francis

Pope Francis speaks with great insistence about the need for discernment today.

To the Jesuits, gathered for their 36th General Congregation (24 October 2016), he clearly proposed a morality based on discernment: “Discernment is the key element: the capacity for discernment. And what I am noticing is precisely a lack of discernment in the formation of priests. We run the risk of getting used to ‘white or black’, to that which is legal. One thing is clear: today, in a certain number of seminaries, a rigidity that is far from a discernment of situations has been introduced. And that is dangerous, because it can lead us to a conception of morality that has a casuistic sense (casuistic logic)”<sup>12</sup>.

During our historic meeting with Pope Francis, on the occasion of the 88th General Assembly of the Union of Superiors General on the theme “*Go and bear fruit: at the service of fruitfulness in prophecy*” (25 November 2016, Synod Hall, Vatican), the Holy Father exhorted us with the following words: “Personally, I am extremely interested in the question of discernment. I have on several occasions urged the Jesuits to focus on this: in Poland and then before the General Congregation. Discernment unites the issue of training young people for life: all young people, and in particular seminarians and future priests. Because the training and path that leads to the priesthood requires discernment. (...) It is currently one of the biggest problems we have in priests’ training. In education we are used to dealing with black and white formulas, but not with the grey areas of life. And what matters is life, not formulas. We must grow in discernment. The logic of black and white can lead to abstract casuistry. Discernment, meanwhile, means moving forward through the grey of life according to the will of God. And the will of God is to be sought according to the true doctrine of the Gospel and not in the rigidity of an abstract doctrine. Reasoning on the education of young people and on the training of seminarians, I decided on the final topic as it was announced: “*Young people, faith and vocational discernment*”. (...) This, however, is the key point: discernment, which is always dynamic, like life. Things cannot be static, especially when young people are involved”<sup>13</sup>.

During the meeting with priests and consecrated people of the Milan diocese (pastoral visit, Saturday 25 March 2017), Pope Francis, replying to a question on how to act and think in a ‘multi’ society – multi cultural, multi religious, multi ethnic – stated:

“I believe that the Church, throughout all her history, unbeknownst to us, has much to teach us and help us for a culture of diversity. We must learn. The Holy Spirit is the master of diversity. Let us look at our dioceses, our presbyters, our communities. Look at our religious congregations. So many charisms, so many ways of realizing the experience of believing.

The Church is One in a multiform experience. She is one, yes. But in a multiform experience. And

<sup>12</sup> “TO HAVE COURAGE AND PROPHETIC AUDACITY”. Dialogo of Pope Francis with the Jesuits gathered in the 36th General Congregation. Monday, 24 October 2016. Cfr. <http://www.laciviltacattolica.it/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Q.-3995-3-DIALOGO-PAPA-FRANCESCO-PP.-417-431.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> Pope Francis meets 140 Superiors general of the Institutes of Consecrated Life in a long, open and fraternal dialogue. Cfr. [http://vd.pcn.net/it/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=3986:papa-francesco-incontra-140-superiori-general-degli-istituti-di-vita-consacrata-in-un-lungo-dialogo-aperto-e-fraterno-&catid=48:notizie-2016&Itemid=64](http://vd.pcn.net/it/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3986:papa-francesco-incontra-140-superiori-general-degli-istituti-di-vita-consacrata-in-un-lungo-dialogo-aperto-e-fraterno-&catid=48:notizie-2016&Itemid=64)

this is the richness of the Church. Although one, she is multiform. The Gospel is one in its fourfold form. The Gospel is one, but there are four and they are different, but this diversity is richness. The Gospel is one in its fourfold form. This gives to our communities a richness that shows the action of the Spirit. (...)

The Church is One in differences. She is one, and those differences unite in that unity. But who makes the difference? The Holy Spirit: He is the master of differences! That great Artist, that great Master of unity in differences is the Holy Spirit. And we must understand this well (...)with regard to discernment: discerning when it is the Spirit Who makes the differences and unity, and when it is not the Spirit that makes difference and division.

How often have we confused unity with uniformity? And it is not the same. Or how many times have we confused plurality with pluralism? And it is not the same. Uniformity and pluralism are not good in spirit, they do not come from the Holy Spirit. Plurality and unity instead come from the Holy Spirit. In both cases what we try to do is to reduce tension and eliminate the conflict or the ambivalence we are subject to as human beings. To seek to eliminate one of the poles of tension is to eliminate the way in which God wanted to reveal Himself in the humanity of His Son.

All that does not assume human drama can be a very clear and distinct theory but not coherent with the Revelation, and therefore ideological. Faith, to be Christian and not illusory, must be configured within processes: human processes, without being reduced to them. And this too is a major tension. It is the beautiful and demanding task that our Lord has left to us, the “already but not yet” of Salvation. And this is very important: unity in differences. This is a tension, but it is a tension that always makes us grow in the Church”<sup>14</sup>.

Pope Francis then speaks of the need to *form in discernment*:

“Discernment of these things that seem opposed to one another, or that are opposed, to know when a tension or an opposition comes from the Holy Spirit and when it comes from the evil one. And for this, [it is necessary] to form in discernment. As I think I have understood from the question, diversity presents a very tricky scenario. The culture of abundance to which we are subjected offers a range of many possibilities, presenting them all as valid and good. Our young people are exposed to constant “zapping”. They can navigate on two or three screens open simultaneously, they can interact at the same time in different virtual scenarios. Like it or not, this is the world in which they find themselves, and it is our duty as pastors to help them through this world. So, I think it is good to teach them how to discern, so that they have the tools and elements to help them walk the path of light without extinguishing the Holy Spirit that is in them.

(...) I am convinced that as an ecclesial community we must increase the habitus of discernment. And this is a challenge, and requires the grace of discernment, to try to learn to have the habit of discernment. This grace, from the young to adults, everyone.

(...) Amid a multitude of voices where seemingly all are right, the discernment of what leads us to the Resurrection, to the Life and not to a culture of death, is crucial. This is why I underline this need. (...) we must teach our people discernment. And teach them to ask for

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<sup>14</sup> Pastoral visit of the Holy Father Francis to the archdiocese of Milan: encounter with priests and consecrated persons in the Duomo. Speech of the Holy Father. Duomo of Milan, Saturday 25 March 2017. Cfr. [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/speeches/2017/march/documents/papa-francesco\\_20170325\\_milano-sacerdoti.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/speeches/2017/march/documents/papa-francesco_20170325_milano-sacerdoti.html)

the grace of discernment.”<sup>15</sup>

After this process of reflection, seeking the grace and wisdom of discernment, in conclusion we can say that this topic requires specific and specialized attention, based on a serious dialogue with the human sciences as well as with philosophy and theology, in order to address with the *wisdom of evangelical discernment*, and steered by the Camillian charism and spirituality, the complexity of the new existential and cultural situations of our time. In the face of the complexity of the ‘new other’ simple or superficial answers are no longer viable, nor are solutions improvised in the name of creativity.

Quoting fr. Matthew Vattamattam CMF: “There is an inevitable process of death and birth as one is called to leave one’s own familiar milieu and move into a new land for missioning. When this process is owned up and accompanied, intercultural encounters and intercultural community living become a joyful journey into the mystery of God’s abundant love for humanity. When a person steps in to a new culture for a longer stay, he goes through a “culture shock” which involves the agony and ecstasy of dying to the old and being born into a new.”<sup>16</sup>

“In a progressively growing intercultural world scenario, Institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life have a special role to play as witnesses of unity and fraternity before the world by the quality of life and relationships both within their communities and with others in mission. This calls for formation for cultural intelligence, intercultural competence and capacity for dialogue. Formation in consecrated life needs to integrate this aspect in the preparation of their members for intercultural fraternal life and inculturation in order to contribute their share in the new evangelization.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Pastoral visit of the Holy Father Francis to the archdiocese of Milan: encounter with priests and consecrated persons in the Duomo. Speech of the Holy Father. Duomo of Milan, Saturday 25 March 2017. Cfr. [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/speeches/2017/march/documents/papa-francesco\\_20170325\\_milano-sacerdoti.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/speeches/2017/march/documents/papa-francesco_20170325_milano-sacerdoti.html)

<sup>16</sup> Cfr. VATTAMATTAM M., *Intercultural Community living: Graces and Challenges*, in: [www.claretianformation.com](http://www.claretianformation.com) – 2 luglio 2012.

<sup>17</sup> Cfr. VATTAMATTAM M., *Dialogue with Cultures and Inculturation in Formation*, in: <http://www.claretianformation.com/dialogue-with-cultures-and-inculturation-in-formation/> – 1 novembre 2015.