

Relationships between us beyond all Barriers: Interculturality

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The subject that was entrusted to me is 'Relationships between us beyond all Frontiers: Interculturality'. To speak about interculturality is not easy; above all it is not easy to transmit attitudes more than ideas, to be open to the diverse, to grow together as a family, and to enrich ourselves with the riches of different cultures which our families welcome through our brothers and sisters and through the peoples to whom we are sent.

Today, in a reality in which the whole world is putting up walls and barriers are created to impede entrance to those who are 'diverse' because of colour, culture or origins, we are invited to engage in prophetic gestures, bearing witness to the fact that it is possible to live together, albeit having different cultures and origins. Our communities, which are privileged settings for this witness, are called to be workshops of intercultural communion, models of mutual appreciation and welcome, with a mutual respect for differences, on a journey of communion and integration that works to eliminate the barriers that we erect every day amongst ourselves as well.

I will now proceed to a very short excursus on the reality of consecrated life today and the world in which it is placed because our communities are not extraneous to what is lived in today's world, and perhaps are also strongly influenced by it.

Consecrated Life Located in the World

We live in a world of dehumanising poverty. The gap between the rich and the poor grows ever greater. It is shocking to learn that every day a fifth of the world's population is hungry and that every 250 seconds a child dies because of a disease connected with water... There are very many victims of discrimination because of race, religion, sex... the number of devastated families is numberless.

We live in a world of conflicts and wars: conflicts that are often caused by geopolitical and territorial questions, sectarian and ethnic conflicts, forms of religious fundamentalism (Boko-Haram, AQMI, Al-Shabbaab, ISIS...) and by greed for rare and precious resources. Every year thousands of people die in armed conflicts and millions of people are forced out of their homes and become refugees...

Violence in the streets, in families, insecurity, juvenile delinquency, crimes and fear of terrorism are the order of the day and news about them fills the pages of newspapers and online newspapers on internet.

We live in a world of mega-migrations, of refugees and of asylum seekers: a migratory wave that escapes all controls... and leads to security laws that are anti-constitutional... The closing of frontiers provokes a humanitarian crisis... it increases xenophobia.

In this context, governments have lost the trust of populations because of numerous corruption scandals; financial restrictions are borne with difficulty and cuts to resources for welfare multiply. The middle class tends to disappear to the benefit of the rich. The lack of real leaders and the loss of credibility by mainstream parties make room for populist negative tendencies. The future of the European Union is at stake.

Fundamentalism is increasing: cultural, national and religious tensions increasingly make themselves felt, in particular diffidence in relation to Muslims and a fear of the advance of Islam, of Islamic fundamentalism and radicalism, increases Islamophobia.

Located in the world, consecrated life feels touched and called upon by this reality, by changes to, and the development of, a new culture that is being born.

In addition, we are going through a change of epoch, a change that will not take place and cannot take place over the next twenty-four hours and which bears upon many aspects of our lives: values, habits and customs, thought, theology... Today reality is very different to what it was even ten years ago. The world is experiencing a globalisation that affects all levels, a globalisation that with its consequences, which are also of a negative character... affects and influences the whole world.

This change of epoch has rapidly immersed us in a virtual world that was unknown a few years ago, but to which a whole generation already belongs. This requires serious formation because this virtual world has launched us into a new way of communicating, of living relationships, and calls upon us and opens up new pathways, but it is a world that is still unknown to a large number of people.

This change of epoch has also affected the religious culture in which Western society lived for centuries but which today has been replaced by a secularised culture that affects religious life in a severe way. Today the presence of other religions in a Europe that is prevalently Christian has inverted equilibriums and inter-religious dialogue has become an essential requirement for peace; deChristianisation is proceeding apace. Almost everywhere we are witnessing a 'religious desertification': not only a decrease in religious practice but also controversies regarding the great ethical questions of the end of life, euthanasia and assisted procreation.

The scandals in the Church have contributed to disillusionment with religion and a sort of phobia towards Christianity that is felt by involved lay people and the media.

Despite this, the thirst for spirituality has never disappeared, although it is no longer looked for and quenched in traditional settings and on traditional pathways. We are asked to have new ways of being present and new styles of evangelisation.

Inside our Congregations we are experiencing these challenges of the world, as well as the challenges specific to consecrated life today.

Are we able to welcome these challenges as opportunities that open up new roads for us and invite us to respond to the provocations of this new culture which often shakes us? Is this not what our men and women founders did? They contemplated the reality of their times, they felt the thirst of their contemporaries, and, opening themselves up to the action of the Spirit, they provided a response. Today we are called to embody the Good News in this change of epoch with concrete and prophetic gestures, as Pope Francis has suggested to us.

Is not bearing witness to living together, even though we are diverse; uniting ourselves and placing our capacities for mission in common; and taking part in the building up of the Kingdom, together, consecrated men and women and lay people, respecting and welcoming the gifts of each one of us, perhaps one of these prophetic and concrete gestures in a society where so many people look for nothing else but gain for themselves?

Today we are invited to reinvent our way of living mission in an intercultural context in order to meet the challenges of a globalised world that increasingly leaves people at the side of the road.

'Intercultural life' is an important expression of global solidarity in our intercultural world. In the view of Fr. Antony Gittins, CSSP, an expert in practical and theoretical studies on interculturality, 'intercultural existence is a school of authentic discipleship lived culturally by different people together. It is not easy but it is urgent and necessary... it is the future of international consecrated life. If international communities do not become intercultural they will not survive'.

The witness of an intercultural community can play a crucial role in the process of reconciliation and healing of the poor, of refugees, of people who live in shanty towns, and of all those who are obliged to live in a multicultural and multi-religious reality. The witness of a harmonious life within cultural, social and religious conflicts is really a visible and credible sign of the Kingdom of God. Ongoing formation for intercultural life must become a priority for us all.

Today we live in a world that has passed from the 'mono' (mono-cultural) to the 'multi' and the 'inter': inter-national, inter-cultural, inter-relational, inter-Congregational. In such a world, which is full of risks and unknowns, no person, no institution, no Congregation and no community can seek to construct the future with its own forces alone. Instead, this construction passes by way of courage

and the humble patience of encounter in truth, of dialogue, of listening, of sharing resources, and of mutual help. ‘Very many Congregations, and especially ones for women, have begun to give priority to foundations in young Churches and have passed from situations that were almost only mono-cultural to the challenge of multiculturalism’.¹

Even if for some years now reference has been made to internationality and interculturality, it is nonetheless necessary to make clear what allows us to define a Congregation as being international and intercultural in character.

Internationality in consecrated life, in essential terms, is a matter of the diversity generated by the geographical provenance of the members of the same Congregation. At a specific level, how many nationalities can make up true internationality, or what the minimum number of nationalities that allows a healthy internationality really is, are separate questions. And perhaps the diversity of nationalities is more important than the number of nationalities. Five nationalities from four continents can be more demanding than ten nationalities from just one continent of the world.

A Congregation can be international because it has members that are international in character but it can also at the same time be culturally homogenous at the level of its Provinces or local communities.

The reasons behind the internationality of Congregations can be diverse in character. Some are international by choice and by origins, that is to say internationality has been a part of their charisms since their foundation and thus is actively promoted in their lives and mission. Others are international by chance. For example, when a Congregation has members that come from one country alone and works in a land of mission and members of the indigenous population begin to be asked to be admitted to the Congregation. Other Congregations are international by necessity, as, for example, when a Congregation, which up to that point was culturally homogenous, is forced to accept local vocations from a country of mission in order to deal with the lack of vocations in its home country.

This, by now, is the context in which we live and which, like every context, brings with it its own positive and negative aspects, its frailties and its riches. The greatest challenge that we have to meet in this reality is the slow and patient construction of inter-national and inter-cultural relationships between us.

How can we construct this ‘inter’? What can help us in this undertaking?

Guiding Principles

Whatever the case, whatever may be the motivations and the organisational structures, I believe that these guiding principles, taken from a paper by P. A. Pernia,² can be useful if we want to commit ourselves increasingly to living the reality of interculturality within our own communities.

a) The theological motivation

‘That is to say, the belief that the purpose of our choice to be international or intercultural is to do with mission, because we feel called to bear witness to unity and diversity in the world and in the Church. We are, therefore, international not because we want to imitate the United Nations, or because it is pleasing to do so (not least because at times this is not in the least the case). Nor are we international for a practical reason, for example with the goal of recruiting vocations from the South or the East of the world because the number of vocations in the West has drastically diminished. On the contrary, we are international because we are called to bear witness to universality and to being open to the diversity of the Kingdom of God. This witness is particularly urgent today in the context of globalisation which, on the one hand, tends to exclude and, on the other, tends to eliminate all

¹ CIVCSVA, *Per vino nuovo otri nuovi. Dal Concilio Vaticano II la vita consacrata e le sfide ancora aperte*, Orientamenti (LEV, 2017), p. 25.

² A. M. PERNIA, SVD, *Costruire comunità interculturali, in un mondo multiculturale* (2017).

differences. From this point of view, there seems to be today a special urgent need to bear witness to the fact that the Kingdom of God is a kingdom of love that includes absolutely everyone and which, at the same time, is open to the specificity of each person and each people’.

b) An intentional community

‘That is to say awareness that international or intercultural communities must necessarily be international communities. In other terms, it is essential that their members consciously want to be an international or intercultural community with a very precise purpose. Every member should be convinced that internationality or interculturality is an ideal to be pursued or a value to be promoted. International or intercultural communities are not the automatic result of people who come from different cultures or nations and are placed under the same roof. Internationality or interculturality requires basic personal propensities, specific community structures and a particular spirituality. As a consequence of this, an *ad hoc* programme of formation is needed both at an initial level and at an ongoing level which prepares people for living in international or intercultural communities in an effective and meaningful way’.

c) Cultural interaction

‘That is to say awareness that the ideal is not only a community made up of people with different nationalities or cultures (or mere ‘internationality’). Nor is it simply a community in which people of different cultures or nationalities can co-exist side by side (or mere ‘multiculturalism’), Rather, the ideal is a community in which the different cultures of the members who belong to it can interact with each other and through this interaction can be enriched both as individual members and as a community as a whole (this is what real ‘interculturality’ means). In a healthy intercultural community, unity is not based upon uniformity (where the minority cultures are subordinated to the dominant cultures) but upon ‘unity-in-diversity’ (where the minority cultures are recognised as having a place in the community simply because they exist and independently of any other assessment of them)’.

In Practice

The move from words to life should never be taken for granted: the pathway towards a truly intercultural community is a long one and it is often arduous and difficult; it requires an open heart and a heart ready to allow itself to be transformed by the encounter with the other who comes from a different culture.

First of all it is a good idea to reaffirm that openness to interculturality is not something that takes place on its own; it is not automatic. It requires agreeing to set out on a journey towards a land that is not mine but which we seek to make our own (c. the story of Ruth 1:16-17: ‘Where you go, I will go, where you dwell I will dwell; your people will be my people and your God will be my God’). The journey is not a simple one and involves gradually addressing the challenges that are posed, and the obstacles that are encountered, on the route.

In order to be able to really set out on a journey towards a land that is not ours, we should recognise that we are shaped by a particular culture, which constitutes great riches, and also that this particular culture is very deeply rooted and involves risks if we make it the universal norm of culture.

Various passages in Holy Scripture testify to the tension and the work that are involved in moving out of the closure that one’s own culture can be, with its reference points and its well-known pathways, in order to open up to other cultures and thereby accept expanding one’s own.

This tension and this work were also those of Jesus of Nazareth. The gospels attest that:

– On the one hand, he first of all understood his mission, at the beginning, as a mission only in favour of the lost sheep of Israel (closure within his own culture): cf. the sending out on a mission of

his disciples: ‘These twelve Jesus sent out, charging them “Go nowhere among the gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritan, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Mt 10:5-6). The meeting of the Canaanite woman (Mt 15:21-28) would have to take place for Jesus to open his mission to universality...

– On the other hand, Jesus allowed himself to be exposed to criticisms, to judgements and to misunderstandings provoked by his being with publicans, sinners, foreigners...(the anointing at Bethany, the meeting with the Samaritan woman).

The universality of love led Christ to challenge and break down barriers, which were not only a physical, geographical or sociological reality but also symbolic, visible or invisible: religious barriers, cultural barriers, ideological barriers, barriers of race...

We should not be amazed, therefore, if when following Christ we have to work and allow ourselves to work to traverse tensions and difficulties and move out of our cultural closures in order to open ourselves to the intercultural.

Amongst the various texts of Holy Scripture that attest to the tension and the work that have to be done to move out of the closure that our culture, with its reference points and well-known pathways, may involve, in order to open ourselves to other cultures and thereby accept that we should expand our own, I would like to mention in particular chapter 15 of the Acts of the Apostles. This episode narrates to us the first great challenge posed to the nascent Church – the challenge of intercultural encounter: ‘But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brethren, “Unless you are circumscribed according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved”’ (Acts 15:1). In other words, if you do not live following Christ in exactly the same way as we do, you will not become ‘Hebrews’, you cannot form a part of the disciples of Christ. The question is a serious one and ‘when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question’ (Acts 15:2).

The subsequent part of the text reveals to us that it is necessary to accept taking time to really listen to the arguments of both sides, that we should not reject discussion and conflict, and finally that we should allow a compromise based upon recognition of the work that God has done not only amongst the Hebrews but also amongst the pagans: ‘And all the assembly kept silence; and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God has done through them among the Gentiles’ (Acts 15:12).

This recognition that God acts amongst other cultures as well is translated into a decision that is a compromise and this opens up the way to the construction of a universal Church, respecting the diversity of cultures: ‘For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from unchastity...So when they were sent off, they went down to Antioch; and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter. And when they read it they rejoiced at the exhortation’ (Acts 15:28-31).

Points of Relevance

With these episodes in our memories and our hearts, I would like to share with you some points of relevance that are not new for you if you already live and interact in intercultural communities, but which it is worthwhile going over together...

– A first point of relevance is *what we believe we know* about other cultures – our prejudices. Each one of us ‘knows’ or thinks they know a certain number of things about other countries, about other cultures, and this ‘knowledge’ can hinder us from discovering other aspects, other ‘unknown’ elements of these cultures and these countries. And at times we feel ‘obliged’ more or less consciously to correspond to what others tell us about our own culture, our own country, and this hinders an authentic ‘inter-national’, ‘inter-cultural’ exchange. And this takes place within the same country, the same culture (cf. the reactions to Jesus, Mk 1-6).

– The second point of relevance is recognising that the point of view of each individual is a particular point of view and that there is a need for the point of view of others in order to open up to the whole of the community and really to have as a prospect working for the common good.

We should first and foremost recognise, even if we want the opposite:

– That *we are not spontaneously ready to accept cultural differences*. For example, different ways of thinking, of posing questions or not posing questions, work rhythms, relationships with authority, the value given to speaking or to silence...discretion, timetables. This requires dialogue, exchanging opinions, justifying one's own way of acting and doing...rather than pretending that diversities do not exist or that everything is alright....

Once it has been recognised that nothing should be taken for granted, a great effort is needed by everyone to find how to gradually adjust to each other, and how to allow each person to have their own fitting space, to find their place. And managing to do this once does not mean at all that such a step has been taken once and for all: each time to you have to start all over again...

– That *we think that we know the other*...but we must allow an abandonment of this knowing in order to accept others as they are, with their riches and their frailties, their good and positive aspects.

Some Moves that should be Lived in Order to Shift from the Multi-Cultural to the Inter-Cultural

These moves are never made once and for all. They are done with small steps. They require time and each one of these moves requires each person to abandon some things, as well as the capacity to accept compromises (cf. the decision taken by the council of Jerusalem, Acts 15).

This means that each person *should become aware of the assumptions of their culture*. When we meet each other, when we enter into relationships with each other, we are all a little short-sighted, that is to say able to see clearly what is very close to us, what forms a part of our lives, of our experiences, but unable to make out what is further away. 'Given that we are human beings we have a tendency to have tribal forms of behaviour. We erect – real or imaginary – frontiers that distinguish us from 'others'. This is an old method by which to achieve survival. There are a certain number of frontiers that allow our forms of organisation to survive. We have to recognise the differences that exist amongst us, which can be our cultural points of view or points of view that are ethnic, generational...We do not serve either ourselves or the world if we forget the larger background in which our lives are reflected'(Laurie Brink).

I would like to emphasise further points of relevance which I believe are an invitation to begin to work on ourselves and above all to allow God to work in us rather than thinking that it is first of all other people who have to change.

1. Being increasingly convinced that difference is wealth and not a barrier. The problem does not lie so much in the difference of the other: most of the time the problem is me for I become destabilised in the encounter with a culture that is different from mine; it is my personality that encounters difficulty in living, thinking and expressing itself in ways that are different from the other's personality.

2. Knowing how to create projects together and construct the future together. To work together, and even more to live together, we have to have a 'federating' project and be convinced that each person needs the other and that nobody can do anything on their own. We need to construct projects together, to dream together, and to meet common needs and common concerns. Each person brings their own contribution, whether large or small, and thus each person becomes an architect of the project that will be constructed, day by day, starting from the small and simple deeds of daily life. In this exchange of giving and receiving, we mutually enrich each other.

3. Respecting differences. This is an enormous work that always has to be recommenced. I say respect for differences and not indifference (which involves allowing each person to lead their own life as they wish, tolerating the other doing the same as long as they do not trouble me too much).

Truly welcoming with a great and open heart and recognising that different ways of doing things, of planning, of presenting oneself, are for me a gift of God that leads me to renew the way that I look at the world and humanity and works to reveal a face of God that hitherto has been unknown to me. Truly welcoming the other in their difference and believing that I, too, am welcomed in the same way, requires a long and patient interior effort that never ends. It is important to learn from experience more than speeches, and to allow oneself to be helped, or, to put it better, to be accompanied.

Let us not conceal the fact from ourselves: the daily life of internationality and interculturality is difficult; indeed, in human terms almost impossible. And it may happen that some people are too frail to live these difficulties and move beyond them. Thus they should not be blamed but accompanied without their being judged, in order to help them recover their balance in another context in which they can give the best of themselves.

To Sum up: Attitudes that Help us to Break down the Barriers between us and in Mission (here once again I have based myself on the paper of P. A. Pernia)

Lastly, to live truly in an intercultural way we should acquire the fundamental attitudes of ‘intercultural people’, that is to say of people who are ‘skilled at an intercultural level’. Amongst others, three attitudes seem to me to be essential, namely:

- The recognition of other cultures.
- Respect for cultural differences
- The promotion of a healthy interaction between cultures.

I will now engage in a brief analysis of these three points.

The recognition of other cultures

‘This attitude involves recognising minority cultures and allowing them to be visible in the community. In a multicultural context there will always be the phenomenon of a ‘dominant culture’ and ‘minority cultures’; the culture of the dominant group and the cultures of the minority groups. In this case, the temptation is to ignore or diminish the minority cultures and wait for the minority groups to adapt or conform to the way of doing things of the dominant group. A person who is truly intercultural will pay especial attention to the cultures of the minority groups and will be committed to recognising their presence and their role in the community. This will involve some elements typical of the minority cultures being utilised for certain communal activities, for example, meals, worship and free time’.

Respect for cultural differences

‘This is the attitude that allows the diverse to be diverse and thus the avoidance of attempts to level cultural differences by incorporating minority cultures into the dominant culture. In a multicultural context, the experience of differences can create a sense of malaise amongst its members. And often the temptation advances to eliminate differences in the certainty that the minority groups will adopt the style of the dominant group. This means that the search for unity will not be based upon unity understood as uniformity but on unity seen as ‘unity in diversity’.

As regards respect for cultural differences, there is a specific observation to be made as regards the lives of our Institutes. We need to start from the belief that superior cultures and inferior cultures do not exist because each culture has its own heritage of thought, values, traditions and ways of understanding reality, and should be acknowledged as having the same dignity as other cultures: they are different cultures but they are all equally appreciable and rich in specific gifts and ‘colours’ which should be shared with other cultures. We may observe that many of the families of consecrated life

that are today present in the Church were born in the geographical and cultural context of Europe. For example, the various component parts that are recognised today as part of the Great Camillian Charismatic Family in large measure were founded in European countries. The specific cultural ‘colouring’ of the men and women founders has certainly influenced the understanding of their charism and its embodiment, first in the founder themselves and then in those who followed them. From this can come the risk of believing that the culture in which a charism has hitherto been understood and expressed is the best (or even the only culture) and of wanting to impose it on all the Institute even when by now it has spread to, and is embodied in, different geographical and cultural contexts. A certain misunderstood ‘Eurocentrism’ of the Church itself is not well tolerated by the Churches of other geographical areas. An Asian or an African or a South American will understand the same charism in a different way from a European, and starting from their specific culture they can enrich the understanding of it and expand the ways in which it is embodied.

The promotion of a healthy interaction between cultures

‘This is the attitude that tends to create an atmosphere in which the various cultures of the community can interact with each other. At this point, the distinction between ‘multiculturality’ and ‘interculturality’ comes into play. ‘Multiculturality’ refers exclusively to a situation in which a variety of cultures coexist in a community. ‘Interculturality’, on the other hand, refers to a situation in which the various cultures that are present in a culture are placed in a condition where they can interact with each other. This requires openness on the part of each culture to being enriched and transformed by the other cultures. A ‘healthy interaction’ between cultures is based on the certainty of the value of one’s own culture and on the certainty that this last is not threatened by encounter with difference and diversity. In this way, each individual member, like the community as a whole, is enriched by interaction between different cultures’.

Interculturality as a New Paradigm of Mission

Our communities are together for mission and today interculturality is the element that is essential to living mission in a new way that is adapted to reality and at the service of the new forms of poverty that are present today in the world.

It is only by positively welcoming multiculturalism as an inescapable fact of the modern age, and by adopting interculturality as a style of life, that we can achieve a new paradigm by which to engage in mission. If previously everything was based on the good will of individuals who were permeated solely by their own culture and their own values, today this approach is no longer sufficient. Today we need a change in paradigm, a new style, based upon interculturality.

The epochal change that we are going through, with its complexity, the liquefaction of social relationships, the reduction of people to being costs and resources and to being the objects of exploitation and exchange, and forms of violence and rejection perpetuated on those who are different and seen as a threat, require the drawing up of a new paradigm of global living, a new grammar of civil coexistence that is based, essentially, upon the importance of the recognition of the other, of his or her diversity as riches, and of the inalienable dignity that dwells in that person. To achieve this, what matters is not, as was once said, changing mentalities but, rather, acquiring a mentality of change.

This change of direction becomes possible only if we set off on a journey towards the other, as pilgrims on an exodus who, starting from the other, become able to discover their own identity in relationships, in dialogue, in exchange and in coexistence. To engage in hermeneutics in relation to

himself, man needs the other. From this point of view, diversity can be accepted as a gift and a resource and not as a threat.

This assumes a capacity to implement and coordinate, in a harmonious way, a set of knowledge, abilities and other internal and external dispositions with the goal of performing a specific task in an effective way.

In the intercultural approach, this task seeks to achieve an experience lived as a personal process of transformation generated by dialogue with the other. And this process cannot be entrusted to the good will of people alone. This is a dynamic process that is built day by day, according to the vision of Marc Thomas who states that: 'the intercultural is learnt like a man learns to walk: thanks to the experience and the risk that are taken and accompanied; intercultural learning is not achieved through a simple transmission of didactic knowledge or by copying forms of behaviour but, rather, through experimentation: those people who learn, channelled by a good 'accompanier', are transformed into themselves by producing the knowledge and the skills that they need'.³

In apostolic consecrated life this process takes place within a community called by the Lord to live together and to share the same mission according to a specific charism. In this context, the intercultural is an element that is vital for the future of consecrated life at all levels. This is an ongoing process that involves an intercultural synergy where people commit themselves to a journey that is able to organise, in a harmonious way, their personal identity and their relationships with the other, moving towards a project of communion for mission.

Intercultural competence can be defined as that capacity that allows an individual, at one and the same time, to know how to analyse and understand situations that involve contact between people and between different cultures, and to know how to manage these situations. One is dealing here with a capacity to achieve sufficient distance from the situation of cultural interaction in which one is involved in order to be able to find and read what comes into play in this process, in order to be able to manage such a process.

We can then understand that the acquiring of this competence requires a constant learning that calls on a person at three levels of their existence:

- Their personal cultural identity, which should be explored in an ongoing way.
- Their knowledge of the other, who has to be discovered.
- Their management of their relationships so that these become fertile encounter.

We must not forget that it is not national cultures or identities that enter into contact but individuals. This means that an intercultural relationship takes place, contemporaneously, both at an interpersonal level, which brings into play the personal and social identity of the individual, and at an intercultural level, which brings into play the cultural differences between the individuals who encounter each other: this involves a series of aptitudes and reactions that are specific to whoever enters into contact with the other.

Roads to Follow

Aware that culture has a dimension of universality and of singularity, which recognises the dignity of every human being, and for which, as has been observed above, good will alone is not enough (not even a series of techniques implemented to respond to the problems of life), the great challenge becomes formation in intercultural skills. Some criteria can guide us on this journey:

³ M. THOMAS, *Acquérir une compétence interculturelle. Des processus d'apprentissages interculturels au quotidien*, Mémoire de DESS en Psychologie, Nancy 2000, in <http://www.mediation-interculturelle.com> (accessed 1 March 2013).

- Exploring one's own personal identity in order to discover one's frame of reference through a process of decentralisation.
- Entering into a relationship with the other in order to understand one's system of reference and interact with difference.
- Promoting a dialogue in order to engage in a re-reading of the relationship in order to construct fraternity as an epiphany of communion.⁴

I invite you to stop for a moment to see the riches that are in your great Family of St. Camillus which, in addition to experiencing the riches of interculturality, experiences the diversity of vocations. May the Spirit give you lucidity, cordiality, vigour and boldness for a dialogue amongst you and with cultures so that your intercultural style of life may be a prophetic sign of a fraternity that is increasingly embodied in the lives of the sick, the poor and peoples where you proclaim the Gospel of health and life!

⁴ M. SÉIDE, FMA, *Instituts religieux et Sociétés de Vie apostolique dans les exigences interculturelles. Approfondissement et pratique de vie*, 1 February 2016.