

**Elisabeth FLICK, SA**  
**New Ways of Mission Today in an**  
**Intercultural Reality**

1. Interculturality was much spoken about in the 1990s, however as this word lost its novelty ... it began to be put into practice in life, and life was our patient and wise teacher. Then “inter-congregation” began to be spoken about as a prophetic way for the future of religious life, and a series of very interesting practical experiences have come and are coming to light.

But actually, inter-culturality became a reality long before we were able to understand and interpret it. I think that many Institutes and many of the people here have been in an intercultural situation for years within their own congregations, and probably have a good experience of it, both at the level of intercultural administration, and at the level of formation, community life and mission. This background will help us to initiate dialogue and an exchange of experiences. I have personally experienced international and multicultural community life in Africa, and have practical knowledge of intercultural administration thanks to my two mandates as Superior General, since I belong to an international community.

I well remember the years I was on mission, some thirty years ago, a period in which the need for true inculturation was being felt and demanded a radical change of mindset: 360°.... I was very well aware that it was no longer a question of exporting the cultural models of the countries we came from: but to promote the development of the local culture. How important it was to recognize the set of values inherent in each culture; the importance of the reciprocal “give and take” ... of the need to be prepared on encountering another culture to welcome the other person and each one’s gifts and wealth, to learn from the other person, not only to teach.... Nevertheless, how many years it has taken for this precept to be actually put into practice; how many times have I fallen into the trap of exporting my own standards, my criteria, believing them to be applicable at the universal level, instead of assuming a respectful receptive attitude of listening, open to the local culture and starting from there. (Some examples follow...)

2. Like Christ, impelled by the Cananite woman to widen the horizon of his mission (Mt 15:21-28), we are called to “change places”, to modify our way of seeing things, to move about, to leave our normal position, to renew our outlook and our behaviour. The conversion to be lived primarily involves the motion of the heart. It is a matter of letting our life to be called into question, transformed by our relationship with the other person in order to engage in a vital exchange which consists not so much in the ability to give as in the capacity to receive. In this reciprocal exchange, one agrees to submit one’s own criteria of judgement to the criticism of others. In this way one becomes able to recognize the Spirit of God at work in the world and to name the Gospel values present in each culture.

The reflection I should like to suggest to you this morning is based on and renews some of the challenging ideas Fr. Bruno Second in put forward in his article, entitled: “Vita Consacrata in Europa”.<sup>1</sup>

I know that to begin by referring to European situations is biased, but I think that the points proposed here, and which refer directly to Pope Francis’ appeals are addressed to the Church as a whole and to all the Congregations and religious Institutes in the world.

Firstly, it is well to remember that this is not the first nor will it be the last time that religious life has been called to seek and find new paths to carry out mission, in order to respond in an appropriate way to the social and ecclesiastical realities of the time. It suffices to think of the chequered forms religious life has taken over the centuries... but it is not my task to comment on history....

3. In a special way, following the Second Vatican Council the religious congregations had to show they were creative, bold, and trustworthy in order to continue to witness to their fidelity and to their active love of God in the heart of the Church, and in a changing world.

And we are called to believe that, despite our demographic statistics, notwithstanding the decrease in vocations, we are still able today to invent new approaches, because we believe in the power of the Spirit, who, tirelessly, renews all things.

With Pope Francis' election, this appeal to open new approaches has taken on new vigour and we are invited to review the way in which we witness to the unconditional love of God for each and every one, and more especially for those who are always excluded from our societies.

*“We are impelled to reopen the debate on evangelical poverty as a typical ‘form of Ecclesiae’ and as a ‘form of Christ’. We are continually requested, above all, to rediscover the art of drawing near to the poor and of charity to the least in the context of global indifference” (LC II, n. 4).* Pope Francis' special appeal rings out particularly clearly for our congregations of apostolic life. The religious congregations have done all they possibly could to *“rediscover the art of drawing near to the poor and of charity to the least”* which has taken different forms in history.

Today we are being asked to reinvent this art in an intercultural context in order to meet the challenges of a globalized world that is steadily and increasingly leaving people by the wayside.

4. Two options are being put forward to re-invent the *“art of drawing near to the poor and of charity to the least”* in an intercultural context:

1. To live as *“a Church which goes forth”* (n. 24) according to Pope Francis means:-

5. to dare to break down barriers, while Europe is building walls:

- ❖ Therefore, we must examine ourselves and identify our own mental limitations, those that prevent us from truly going to meet the other person with his/her difference,
- ❖ Investigate and identify the Congregation's institutional confines; whatever hinders change; what blinds us and makes us unable to discern the call the Spirit addresses to us from within every culture, and thanks to this survey, in line with the charisms and means available, stay ready and open to accept novelty.

6. To dare to share our resources, skills, members, structures, to launch new projects, not outlined *a priori*, but developed in progress, not projects made over the heads of others, not projects that may be very fine but which reflect our own perspective: but projects set up through dialogue with the other party, that promote the role and dignity of the poor people themselves, projects drawn up together taking into account the time frame, the space and the set of values of the others. Such boldness requires patient listening over time, dialogue, and much patience, to avoid imposing our

methods, criteria of analysis and efficiency, the pace of a given culture, in order to build together, step by step, in mutual respect and communication in order to set out on a common journey. Such boldness, on the one hand, also warns against the temptation to remain anchored to the safety of the *déjà vu*, already done and perhaps even successfully... and on the other, to work to create networks with bodies, structures, institutions... “it is no longer the age of lone navigators”.

7. Work boldly to help the young to integrate, especially those in the most disadvantaged areas, by studying their situation, their dreams, what contribution they can make through their qualities and creative gifts to the common good. Evaluate the contribution their culture can make through a reciprocal exchange of means, by integrating their diversity to bring about a renewed society, one that is more welcoming and human. It is very difficult for the youth of today to imagine a future. Our work must help the young people to plan their future....

I feel sure that you have many suggestions as to how the religious congregations today can take up and respond to the invitation to live as “*a Church which ‘goes forth’*” (n. 24) in a multicultural context.

## 2. The Practice of Hospitality

8. The second invitation Pope Francis makes is to re-discover the “*art of drawing near to the poor and of charity to the least*” and the invitation is to practise hospitality, “create ‘alternate spaces’ where one can experience the Gospel logic of self-giving, fraternity, embracing difference, of love of one another” (LC II, n. 2).

In a world in which the reception reserved to the foreigner is once again being called into question to the point of building walls between countries to prevent entry, and where in numerous countries, the person who is “different”, is less and less tolerated, we are called more than ever to witness in a concrete way that, it is not only possible to coexist but that it is actually a fertile source of reciprocal enrichment; without hiding the arduous aspect that conflict and relationship implies and always brings with it.

We are asked to practise hospitality among ourselves, firstly within our communities that are often “multicultural”, ceaselessly questioning ourselves on how we should accept our differences. This reception is the first sign of reciprocal and unconditional love that we can offer. However, we know well that it is not enough to live together in our Houses in order to overcome barriers and reciprocal misunderstanding. The community must assume the responsibility to undertake an on-going conversion, to adopt a new model of coexistence. “The life of ... all the members united together... is to be determined in such a way that it becomes a mutual support for all in fulfilling the vocation of each member” (Code of Canon Law, can. 602). *In fact there are many intercultural and multicultural communities, but what is lacking is a reciprocal contemplative outlook, the will to build up the Church together, the commitment to become laboratories of solidary hospitality by networking.*<sup>2</sup>

There are no ready-made definitions on how to do this. Without doubt each one of you has experiences you could share of life in an international community, some positive and some less so. On reviewing my experience at an intercultural General Council, during my mandate as Superior General, the journey each one of us had to make comes to mind, and at times it was not without a serious inner struggle that one met the other person in her reality, in order to understand the way

each one thought and communicated; not to expect uniform patterns of thought, but to respect each one in her way of being and communicating....

9. In this regard, I remember a particular episode in Japan. I was in Tokyo for an international meeting... at the time the cherry trees were in bloom (*sakura*). The Provincial, who was difficult to understand not only due to the language difference, said she wished to spend some time with me and suggested we went out together. We went to a fine park, full of flowering cherry trees and we sat under a large tree in flower. I waited for the Sister to speak, but she remained silent contemplating the beautiful tree in full bloom. It took me some time to understand the significance of that silence, but I respected it.... We sat there in silence for some two hours and gradually I, too, felt awed by the beauty of that wonderful tree and I almost lost the sense of time passing. Then we rose and returned to the community without exchanging a single word.... Just imagine my surprise when at the next meeting that Sister told everyone that she had had a deep and pacifying communication with me! I have thought about that experience for a very long time and I have learned that communication is not always by word of mouth and reasoning. And that one can enter into harmony through silence and an emotion shared in common, with the deepest respect for the other party.

Starting from this both beautiful and painful experience I think I may say that today what is essential is *“that one feel committed to live reconciled diversity, not as a mere approach of differences, but in “joyful difference”. Making all the factors, aims, initiatives, converge in the projects, as in prayer, through co-responsibility and solidarity....*<sup>3</sup>

10. We are also invited to practise this hospitality. To work *“concretely in welcoming refugees, drawing near to the poor”* (Pope Francis, *LC II*, n. 4).

In order to put these gestures into practice, we need to pool our resources, qualifications, personnel, structures, so as to be ready to receive others and offer them hospitality. Such a reception cannot be limited to making an empty space available, but means creating places and creative spaces to allow people in difficulty to become the protagonists, to recover the human dignity they have lost along the way, by exercising their skills and gifts.

It is possible to do this if we are ready to go beyond the security of what we know, to take new paths, ready to run risks, able to turn back ... to reread what has been achieved and experienced, to adjust our sights continually.

For such hospitality to become reality in the present global context a “prophetic” dimension is required: *“a religious must never abandon prophecy”* (*LC*, II, n. 2). *This means bravely denouncing forms of egoism and fear; by proposing alternatives to closure, through hospitality which is active compassion, to recover the genial fascinating testimony of our history of hospitality in the joyful, fruitful coexistence of difference.* In regard to this Pope Francis notes: *“this illusion can also be seen in the sinful structures linked to a model of false development based on the idolatry of money, which leads to a lack of concern for the fate of the poor on the part of the wealthier individuals and societies; they close their doors, refusing even to see the poor”* (*Lenten Message*, 2016, n. 3).<sup>4</sup>

The challenge of today’s world and the Church’s urgent appeals, voiced by Pope Francis, invite us to take on an ever more prophetic dimension of religious life that allows us to be guided by the Spirit on a largely unexplored route of *“fruitful, joyful difference”*, seeking to extrapolate from it, not what divides but what unites us.

I think that we can venture along these new, unexplored routes thanks to the young recruits who are entering religious life. Thinking about them and listening attentively to their experience three observations come to mind: -

### 11. The First Observation

- In Europe the new generation of religious developed in “a small number”. These young people have been formed in an inter-congregational and often in an intercultural atmosphere and have fused these two dimensions long ago.
- Since elementary school they have learned that they have to live with different cultures in their own country and abroad. They first became familiar with this in their early school days, then at work, and eventually at the Novitiate. All their higher education has catered for “courses” abroad; learning languages is obligatory from early infancy.
- Although the migratory phenomenon is not new, today it is taking on particular importance and breadth, because an entire continent is on the move, it has brought about mixed marriages in all strata of the population:

Cultural differences are not a new situation with which the young people come into contact on entering religious life. It is an inter-generational aspect they have had to come to terms with. The integration of cultural differences in daily life is the major evolutionary factor in the last 20 years, and it is a daily experience.

### 12. The Second Observation

❖ Today means and instruments are available, such as: the media, facebook, internet, etc., which have greatly facilitated long distance contacts: The World Youth Day (WYD), the World Cup, language courses, all promote bonds of friendship among young people from every country, even on the other side of the globe. Singers and musical groups are made up of musicians from every nationality, and they travel the world creating a global musical culture.

The young generation has grown up with globalization and absorbed it.

### 13. The Third Observation

- ❖ In the wake of the Second Vatican Council, the Congregations reviewed and up-dated their Constitutions in order to return to their source, to the charismatic intuition of their respective Founders. This work encouraged each Congregation to rediscover its specificity. Over these years the Congregations studied their differences, their specific *raison d'être*, their way of carrying out their mission, way of life, their charism.
- ❖ The drop-in numbers in most of the Institutes has led to a drawing closer together, to union in some cases.
- ❖ Perhaps the time has come to seek to cooperate, to join forces for the mission, instead of highlighting the distinctions?

Inter-congregational projects have been started and are coming into being with the intention of opening new approaches to mission in order to answer the current urgent needs (South Sudan Project has been in place for some time now, the Bridge of Hope in Madrid, the emerging projects

of the UISG, and of CIMI in Sicily, the joint project planned by the RDC and the Diocese of Noto, Dunquerque/Calais), especially in the field of immigration, in Fukushima, Japan, after the *tsunami*). In order to succeed projects such as these needs, as a basis for mission, to overcome forms of difference and specificity that were formally strengthened. Do not say: “it has always been done this way” nor “it cannot be done because we are different”; it can be done precisely because we are different.

### **What New Missions?**

I have thought a lot about what Fr. B Secondin said regarding the “old” forms of mission and service in our Congregations. He referred very clearly and without beating about the bush to the words Pope Francis addressed to religious concerning the new way of living and doing mission. I think it is helpful to quote this in its entirety here:

Consecrated Life has in the diaconate among the poor and weak a glorious history, rich in holiness and prophesy. In the last decade too, it has not failed to seek to extend brotherly solidarity and a diversified and enterprising *diaconia* among the new forms of poverty, in all the peripheries. Perhaps today they may seem less enterprising, but it remains true that this is one of the features that is most admired. If anything, it is a question of seeking new goals and new frontiers, exploring anew with assurance among the “leftovers” of history, and among the social outcasts, among the thousand disfigured faces caused by downtrodden dignity.... “The same generosity and self-sacrifice which guided your Founders... must now inspire you... to keep alive the charisms... constantly being enriched and adapted, while losing none of their unique character” (*LC*, II n. 2). “We have to regard ourselves as sealed, even branded, by this mission of bringing light, blessing” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 273).

Every form of *work* stands as a glorious testimony to your history; the result of a tireless capacity to roll up your sleeves and get down to things first-hand, run risks, create ways to heal and free, bring human advancement and Gospel closeness. The various *sores* of the least have often served as *arrow slits* to see further and more broadly, and they have given rise to forms of *diaconia*, ways to alert the distracted to the many forms of injustice, to offer the balm of solidarity and tenderness, dignity and hope to those who have known neither respect nor brotherhood.

14. The crisis of our “*works of mercy*” — so numerous and historically important, even for the history of civilization — is raising a serious problem for the future. We feel the ground slipping from under our feet, because by virtue of them we felt we had dignity and the right to exist, to feel as Church, to deserve rights and prove our usefulness.

Their disappearance takes with it a certain form of consecrated life, an ecclesial model with its history of charity, of service, of enterprise also female and this sends us all into tilt. Have we perhaps confused the witness of charity with the organisation of “burdensome social services”? Many have transferred that model, by now worn and out of focus in the West — where it came into being and was developed — to other less developed places. But even there sooner or later it will be out of date: not so much because the works of mercy lose their usefulness but because the standardized model is no longer valid. New models must be invented to answer the new needs, take up the new challenges, the new emergencies: but also, in synergy with the new forms of co-responsibility, new availability.

Let us not be reduced to maintaining what we are doing in a short-sighted, administrative way. Indeed, Pope Francis says: “I ask you to work concretely in welcoming refugees, drawing near to the poor, and finding creative ways to catechize, to proclaim the Gospel and to teach others how to pray. Consequently, I would hope that structures can be streamlined, large religious houses repurposed for works which better respond to the present demands of evangelization and charity, and apostolates adjusted to new needs” (II, n. 4). This concept is very realistic and in line with the initial invitation to “create ‘alternate spaces’ where the Gospel approach of self-giving, fraternity, embracing differences, and love of one another can thrive” (II, n. 2).<sup>5</sup>

### **Let us look at the international, inter-congregational project set up in Sicily**

I am aware that my testimony on intercultural mission is partial, or rather very limited, in time and in space.

15. What I shall say actually stems from a very small experience, in embryo, but precisely because of this carefully sifted, so that the seed scattered may bear fruit in good time, and we know well that, as the Gospel also says ... the seed scattered grows, almost without our knowledge: “*The Kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed upon the ground, and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he knows not how*” (Mk 4:26-29), and we also know, as St Paul says in his Letter to the Corinthians: “*I planted, Appollos watered, but God gave the growth*” (I Cor 3:6-9).

16. As you certainly know, the Executive Committee of the UISG (International Union of Superiors General) had expressed a wish, that we could define in a certain sense as a dream: which was to make a meaningful gesture to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its foundation, that will be celebrated this year, and involve the Superiors General belonging to the Union.

Pope Francis’ appeal after the first of many shipwrecks off the coast of Lampedusa, and the pressing request of some religious belonging to the Justice and Peace Group of the UISG, were the point of departure for identifying and building up the “Migrant Project”, an inter-cultural and inter-congregational project, that aims to serve as a “bridge” between the local population and the migrant population landing in Sicily.

17. For about one year we have been working on the “migrant” project and four months ago the dream of the Executive Committee came true. But, in fact, it is still a tiny reality... the “baby” is taking its first steps, not without difficulty, but with enthusiasm, in two directions, within the community and beyond. Within it, it is a question of studying the personal and community level in order to build two inter-congregational communities. Instead beyond it, means working to construct a net-work in the framework of Sicily, with the population and with the organizations, civil and Church, Italian and foreign, working in the area in order to succeed in contacting the world of the migrants so as to put ourselves at their service, in a simple humble way, not mediatic, in those areas not covered by the institutional structures, by being particularly close to those who are considered to be the “leftovers” (EG, n. 53) to be thrown away.

To the extent that the two communities learn to live in an inter-congregational and inter-cultural way internally, despite all the challenges and difficulties, they will be qualified not only to enter into contact with the migrants landing in Sicily, but they will be able to coexist and understand the foreigners they meet, communicate with them, appreciate and share their cultural values and

respective cultures. As these people come from different countries and continents: Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, the Middle East, North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa, this will be a source of enrichment, not for them alone but for the population that receives them.

18. The Good News can be proclaimed to them that it is possible to live together, work together, though of a different skin colour, language, charisms, because they are united by the same mission with a common passion for God and for humanity. In Sicily this silent witness can become a strong and encouraging message as well as an invitation to believe that the experience of Pentecost can still be active and present in today's reality.

19. Ten Sisters from different countries: Argentina, Ethiopia, Eritrea, France, India, Italy, Poland, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, members of seven different Congregations, are learning to measure up to the different cultures coexisting in the Sicilian culture, which is also totally new to them. Indeed, it is completely different from that of their respective countries. These Sisters consider that they too are migrants in a foreign land ... but precisely this experience, lived first-hand, is the first step towards true integration and a more authentic knowledge of the reality lived by the thousands of brothers and sisters who have come in search of a more dignified and more human life. They have put themselves at the service of those who land on the soil of Sicily with greater awareness and sensitivity to their suffering and weariness, because they have personally experienced what it means to be a stranger or guest who is, at times, unwanted, or merely tolerated.

The passion for God and for humanity is their reason for being together. The common mission enlivens them and helps them to undertake with creativity arduous, totally unknown paths and leads them to invent new and different approaches, and to bravely face the inevitable difficulties, even the suspicion of the people towards all that is new and different.

20. They are moved by the conviction that, still today, God feels compassion before the misery of his people. He asks them to lend him their hands, to embrace and console, support... he asks them to lend him their feet to tirelessly travel the roads to go to meet whoever is not welcomed, who has lost the way, to walk hand in hand with those who no longer have the energy to walk alone, infusing them with courage to continue the journey and begin to hope once more.

This conviction is what the Sisters are experiencing in Sicily. It seems to me that this is a call addressed to us to work harder to build communion day by day between one and all, and more particularly to our different congregations and religious families. We all bear hope and our respective charisms could be mutually enriching had we but the courage and boldness to cross the confines of our Congregations to answer the appeals of the world with missionary projects: common projects in which we could share our human and spiritual resources to the best advantage.

21. Today we live in a world that has passed from the "mono-": monoculture to the "multi- or inter-": inter-national, inter-cultural, inter-relational inter-religious dialogue, inter-congregation. In such a world, full of risks and the unknown, no one, no institution, no congregation can pretend to build the future with its own strength alone. But this construction needs to experience with courage and humble patience the encounter with the Truth, through dialogue, listening, pooling our common resources and mutual help.

I should just like to bring some points to your attention which derives from the observations of these Sisters in Sicily, in order to live inter-cultural life daily.



22. These points are an invitation to start to examine oneself and above all to let God work in us instead of thinking that it is first of all the others who have to change.

1. Always consider that difference is wealth and not a barrier. The problem is not in the difference of the other person, most often it is in oneself. It is I who feel uneasy on meeting a culture different from my own, and my character has difficulty in accepting to live, think, express myself in unfamiliar ways.
2. A good way would be to create joint projects and build the future together.

We need to be careful to plan projects and to build the future together.

To live together we need to set up a “federate” project in the conviction that each one needs the other, that “no one can go it alone”.

We need to plan the project together; to dream together, to tackle common needs, share our worries in order to build together. Thus, each person contributes, day by day, in a large or small way, to the development of the plan, starting from small, simple routine gestures. Through this reciprocal exchange we are mutually enriched.

3. Learn from experience rather than advice, and allow oneself to be helped or guided.  
Make no mistake, daily international and inter-cultural life is difficult, humanly speaking, almost impossible. It could happen that some people are too frail to handle these difficulties and win through. In this case they should not be penalized but accompanied and helped without criticism to recover their balance in another context where they can give of their best.

What helped the group to form was the period of formation prior to their arrival in Sicily. In that period, they lived together and reviewed their life and learned to analyze what they had experienced. This was made possible thanks to supportive community and personal help.

Language sometimes represents a trap due to the lack of a common idiom – one must try to identify a form of communication that does not depend on words. One should let symbols speak, nevertheless, in the long term it is essential to have a common language to facilitate reflection; a form of expression everyone can understand.

#### 4. **Respect for Differences**

This is a huge difficulty that is unending. To respect differences does not mean indifference, just letting each person do as he or she pleases provided it does not bother one too much. I think that to truly embrace with an open, generous heart different methods, ways of doing things, different ways of praying, different eating habits, is to receive God’s gift. It enables one to renew the way one views the world and humanity, while revealing an as yet unknown face of God. To truly welcome the other person in his/her difference and believe that one is accepted to the same extent, demands a slow, docile self-transformation that is on-going.

### **Inter-culturality as a new paradigm of mission**

23. Only by accepting multi-culturality positively as an undeniable fact of the modern age and by adopting inter-culturality as our lifestyle, will we be able to discover a new paradigm for mission work. If, previously, everything was based on the goodwill of each individual imbued with his/her own culture and set of values, today this perspective is no longer enough. Today a change of paradigm, a new style, based on inter-culturality is necessary.

The change of epoch we are experiencing with its burden of complexity marked by: the dissolving of social relationships, reducing a person to his/her potential output and cost, as someone to exploit and exchange, forms of violence and the on-going rejection of whoever is different, viewed as a threat, call for the elaboration of a new paradigm for global life, a new grammar of civil coexistence, essentially based on the recognition of the importance of the other person, of his/her diversity as a source of enrichment, of the inalienable dignity that exists in each one. To achieve this, it is no longer a question of changing one's mental outlook, as was thought previously, but one must create "a new mindset" (*EG*, n. 188) open to change.

This inversion of route can only be possible if we set out to approach the other person, as an outgoing wayfarer, who through the other person becomes able to discover his/her own identity, through dialogue, exchange, coexistence. To study his own hermeneutic, man needs the other person. In this perspective, diversity may be regarded as a gift and a resource, not as a threat.<sup>6</sup>

This presupposes the ability to put into practice and to harmoniously co-ordinate a number of factors, abilities and other interior and exterior attitudes in order to complete a determined task effectively.<sup>7</sup>

24. This method, by means of the inter-cultural approach, aims to bring about an experience lived as a personal process of transformation through comparison with another person, and this process cannot be entrusted to the goodwill of the people involved alone. This is a dynamic process that takes place in daily life according to Marc Thomas, who states that: inter-cultural life is learned just as a human being learned to walk: thanks to experience and the risks taken as they come. The inter-cultural lesson is not simply learned by the transmission of didactic knowledge, nor by emulating the behaviour of others, but by trial and error. Thus, the learner, channeled by a good "guide", mutates into him/herself and acquires the knowledge and skills needed.<sup>8</sup>

In other words inter-cultural skills can be defined as the ability that allows one to grasp and simultaneously analyse a situation when people and groups from different cultural backgrounds come into contact; the ability to manage these situations: actually, the ability to take one's distance from the situation of cultural confrontation in which one is involved, in order to be able to interpret and understand what is at stake here, in order to facilitate this process.<sup>9</sup>

25. Thus, we could say that to acquire this ability requires a continuous learning process that in turn calls the person into question at three existential levels: personal cultural identity, knowledge of the other person, how to manage the relationship.

The inter-cultural element is vital for the future of religious life and for mission. What it calls for is an on-going process which demands intercultural synergy whenever one undertakes a journey that can harmoniously combine the personal identity and the relationship with the other person.

We must not forget that it is people who come into contact, not merely their cultural background or national identity. This means that the inter-cultural relationship is both simultaneous and

interpersonal. It puts each person's identity and social standing at stake at the intercultural level too, and brings out their cultural differences, which result in a series of reactions and particular attitudes on the part of the individuals who come into contact.

26. The encounter with the other person, different from me, always represents unknown factors that need to be clarified, which may instill fear, at times result in antipathy or the assumption of an uncompromising position. Therefore, this encounter entails some risks that may be addressed and studied together if, instead of adopting a defensive attitude, we choose to enter into dialogue and receptive listening; if we agree to share our resources, help each other. This way calls for courage, but also for patience and humility, nevertheless good will is not enough, not even by employing a series of techniques aimed to answer the difficulties of life.

The great challenge continues to be how to qualify people to fill intercultural positions?

Some practical suggestions.<sup>10</sup>

- study one's own identity in order to discover one's own frame of reference through a process of discernment
- approach the other person in order to understand one's own frame of reference and then interact with the difference;
- start a dialogue to reappraise the relationship in order to build up fraternity as the epiphany of communion.

27. So many doors can open before us, but one must be attentive to the breath of the Spirit who helps one to have the courage and boldness of our respective Founders, according to the charisms and power we have and especially not to be afraid to dream and to fly high.

In this year in which the Church has invited us to let ourselves be touched by God's Mercy, perhaps we are invited to give proof of mercy firstly to ourselves and to ask God to teach us, day by day, how to advance, even by taking little steps, maybe even backwards at times, in order to be disciples of Christ **together** who know no boundaries to love which calls us, today more than ever, through Pope Francis' words, to leave our limited frontiers behind and to go forward to meet each and every one to witness to God's mercy and infinite love for each person, without exception.

Rome, 3 May 2016.

End Notes

<sup>1</sup> Bruno SECONDIN, Sfide attuali della VC in Europa, in Testimoni, 4 aprile 2016

<sup>2</sup> cf. Articolo n° 6, 2 Laboratorio d'interculturalità.

<sup>3</sup> idem

<sup>4</sup> *Messaggio per la Quaresima 2016.*

<sup>5</sup> *Sfide attuali della vita consacrata in Europa* In Testimoni, n° 4,2

<sup>6</sup> Dal documento dei Missionari della Consolata "*L'interculturalità come nuovo paradigma della missione*", 13 gennaio 2014

<sup>7</sup> Cf. PELLEREY Michèle, In PELLEZZO, J.M. – NANNI C – MALIZIA G. Ed *Dizionario di scienze dell'educazione*, Roma, LAS 2008

<sup>8</sup> THOMAS Marc : *Acquérir une compétence interculturelle. Au quotidien, processus d'apprentissages interculturels. Des processus d'apprentissages interculturels au quotidien.* Mémoire de DESS in Psychologie, Nancy 2000, in [http:// www. Médiation-interculturelle.com](http://www.Médiation-interculturelle.com)

<sup>9</sup> FLYE SAINT MARIE Anne, *La compétence interculturelle dans le domaine de l'intervention éducative et sociale*, in *Les cahiers de l'Actif* (1997) 250/251, 1,55

<sup>10</sup> Da Martha SEIDE, *Instituts religieux et Société de Via Apostolique dans les exigences interculturelles. Approfondissement et pratiques de vie.* Atelier sull'interculturalità, nell'incontro Vita consacrata in unità, 29 gennaio 2016

---