

Interculturality

Challenges of Today... Way of the Gospel... Colour of our Future...

It is interesting to note how the Catholic Church—and especially consecrated life—has been able to cross frontiers, bring together diverse peoples in a common faith and even bring people from different countries, cultures and education under one roof to form community. These secular experiences, lived in the name of the Gospel, should make of us, for our world, experts on interculturality and internationality—in the worlds of Paul VI at the UN in 1965, "*experts on humanity.*"

However, to hear the concerns shared with us at the last CRC General Assembly, internationality and intercultural living remain significant challenges, even for congregations that have spread out over almost every continent and have men and women religious from different countries and cultures in their ranks.

Many do not consider themselves "international congregations," since they are not "essentially missionaries," and have difficulty conceiving their future together, "*those from here*" with "*those from somewhere else.*" Others, on the other hand, with a more or less diverse "membership," are proud of their "internationality" and grasp the future with hope for the fruitfulness of their charism in migration, while recognizing the complexity of "being congregation beyond **all** our frontiers." Hence the observation that "*...internationality does not just mean a physical presence in different countries of the world. We must all assume the attitudes and characteristics that mark an international and multicultural congregation.*" (Aline Marie Steuer, CSC)

"Every Culture Is Plural"

Beyond internationality, intercultural relations introduce another level of complexity because every culture is diverse. Moreover, several cultures coexist within a same territory with greater or lesser difficulties of cohabitation. We have not all learned to "cultivate" our life in the same way.

The *Théâtre Parminou* troupe illustrated that very well at the CRC General Assembly. How does the original group—often the holder of decision-making power at all levels—manage to let go of its instinct of ownership and its tendency to entrench itself as the standard and to measure all cultures according to its own values? The history of colonization and evangelization reminds us of how difficult this adventure of living together is, even with our best intentions and good will.

Blessed Basil Moreau, when founding a congregation of Fathers, Brothers and Sisters of the Holy Cross in 1837, wanted to combine the efforts of the members of his religious family to meet the educational and evangelization needs of the France of his time. However, fairly quickly, he began to risk his sons and daughters outside their borders (in the United States, Canada, Bengal, Algeria, Poland, Italy, etc.).

In his Circular Letter 174 (1867), he urged them to expand their heart: "*Let us not limit our interests to the narrow confines of a particular house, a province, or our own country. This would be egoism and self-seeking. Rather let us be one with all our houses, and regard none as a stranger to the one in which we dwell.*" Today, Basil Moreau's ideal still challenges us, despite our assumed efforts to "think congregation, do congregation, live congregation... beyond all our frontiers."

When, in 2005, the General Chapter elected the first Congregation Animator from a country in the Global South, Haiti, it was simply a question for chapter members to choose a sister that would be able to help the congregation embrace and live the orientation chosen for the next six years; we were all sisters equally responsible for the present and the future of the legacy bequeathed to all of us by Basil Moreau.

Intercultural Living Initiatives

In our desire to be increasingly aware of living interculturality and internationality, and "to choose the rest of our history together," several initiatives are enabling us to keep moving forward towards this ideal, all while knowing what it will require in terms of conversion and rooting of the God of Jesus Christ, God of inclusion and unconditional communion. Allow me to briefly introduce three of these initiatives.

- 1. Interregional apostolic groupings** (formerly networks) have enabled sisters from different regions working in the same sector (education of children, of youth and young adults, of women, in pastoral work, in social justice and the environment, in art and creativity, and in mentoring) to "network" and help one another in their mission interest. Annual statutory meetings take the delegates to one or another country where the congregation is established and allow them to open themselves up to the "other" reality of each region and to "*comprehend*" from what horizon of wealth and poverty, beauty and degradation, struggles and challenges come those they call "their sisters."
- 2. The 2009 Forum** united the entire congregation for a two-year period around a common reflection on our new plural identity, under the theme: ***One Heart, One Passion...*** for "*putting our hands together for the work of resurrection*," addressing the complexity of identity, diversity and communion; this approach was celebrated with a week-long meeting, open to all sisters, associates and lay missionaries who could make the trip.
- 3. The international novitiate** established in Peru enables younger members to get to know one another while learning to be exposed to another culture, to experience the reality of being both "stranger" and "sister," to get used to "the different" and to experience the learning of one of the three languages adopted in Holy Cross.

However, the road is long and many questions remain. How can we truly identify with Jesus, the borderless Pilgrim, the Stranger become Friend, to build today culturally pluralistic and evangelically inclusive congregations, congregations that are prophets of "other relationships" at the heart of the very ambiguity of our globalized world?

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