

Intercultural Living Experience: An Experience of Hurt and of Going Out from Oneself!

Following my participation in the meeting convened by the CRC Theological Commission in May 2015, I reflected on the four intercultural experiences presented. I did this by situating the cultural experience within the dimension of the integral growth of the human person.

I. Belonging, Living in a New Home

The testimony of the four witnesses invited by the CRC's Theological Commission made us aware that the choice of an intercultural life makes the heart grow greater, increases the capacity to love in everyday life, however, it involves surpassing oneself, a going-out from oneself to open oneself up to another, to someone who is different.

For each of the four witnesses, this going-out from oneself meant plunging into a new cultural and social reality where it is a question of:

- Experiencing a change of scenery with a new way of thinking, of approaching reality.
- Renouncing the desire to grasp reality based on the sometimes idealized outlook from one's own culture, one's own country.
- Realizing that one's usual references may no longer work, having to learn everything anew, even the banality of daily life such as asking for a glass of water or where the washroom is with gestures or babbling in a new language...etc. In short, like a child, relearning language to express one's basic needs.
- Refusing to pass judgment on people, values, and different ways of doing things.
- Deciding to belong, to inhabit this new home and all that encompasses in terms of the death of one self to be born as another.
- Consenting to live this experience through concrete decisions with a view to making a fruitful contribution to it.

II. Hurt, but Not Closed

In the intercultural living experience, most have experienced being hurt; nevertheless, their hearts have not been closed! The choice of openness because of their faithfulness to the "yes" to God who called them— and who was the first to show them the way—has always won out!

Our internal reflection on what we had experienced and heard from the experience of the four witnesses, led to a number of sources in scripture. The experience of the Lord's open side in John 19:31-37 is one that we can explore to nurture the meaning of the Easter experience; "one of the soldiers pierced his side with a lance; and immediately there came out blood and water." (Jn 19:34) Blood and water flowed from Jesus's wounded side: blood is a symbol of the life given that gives life; water symbolizes the gift of the Spirit that bursts forth from it. Blood is also an externalization of the love of the heart of Jesus, a love that springs out from his side.

Each person's commitment is rooted in a decision of giving oneself fully over to love. It is He who gives the breath to resume the path, meet the challenges in the steps of He who repeats to us today: no one can have greater love than to lay down his life for his friends. (Jn 15:13)

Having crossed through the pains inherent in this begetting of a new life, for oneself and for the other, we are happy to taste the fruits of joy, peace and communion, daring to risk new creativities to be together in community and for the mission!

Intercultural experience, chosen and lived in this paschal perspective, provides hope that consecrated life will have a greater fruitfulness in terms of initiatives and projects that extend to the inter-congregational level.

III. Consecrated Life and Intercultural Experience, Today and Tomorrow

These days of discussion make us realize that the ability to live in an intercultural community is built up from the experience of every human being. It is not given! This capability requires the integration of one's humanity, it is never definitively acquired!

For formation directors and facilitators, helping to develop this capacity raises the urgency of ongoing formation in order to acquire the tools to better understand human functioning, to differentiate the culture, represented by a strategy in which the person invokes culture as a reason for not opening up to change. This strategy¹ works against the adaptability² required by a commitment to an intercultural living experience. This adaptability is the sure way to gradually shape the mental flexibility and openness to the other!

To young people, eager to share this experience, it is important to provide opportunities to practice overcoming and going beyond oneself in order to meet the "other", in essence, all others. Indeed, more than a culture, it is the person that we learn to encounter.

Jeanne Bashige, SFHELMET

¹ Fritz Redl and David Wineman, «Le moi désorganisé» dans *L'enfant agressif* (Paris, Fleuries, 1973) Tome 2, 310p.

² Jeannine Guindon, *Vers l'autonomie psychique: de la naissance à la mort* (Nouvelle édition. Montréal, Sciences et Culture, 2001), p. 145.