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## INTERCULTURAL LIVING IN A RELIGIOUS CONGREGATION The SVD as an Example

*This is a reflection on the conditions and implications of living together in religious communities, when the members come from different cultural backgrounds. The author dedicated his doctoral thesis to this topic and presents its layout, the methods and some of the results. He addresses the topic mostly from a psychological perspective—he studied pastoral psychology—and draws on sociological as well as anthropological and theological views in order to formulate several practical suggestions for an improved and fruitful community life of missionaries.*

### 1. Introduction

During my philosophical studies in Ghana, I came into contact with confreres from different African cultures. After my novitiate, I arrived in Germany in 2001 to continue with my formation and theological studies, at the *Philosophisch-Theologische Hochschule* of the SVD in Sankt Augustin. Thus, my encounter with different cultures and my intercultural experiences became intensive, due to the fact that the professors and students not only come from many European countries, but also from other continents.

These intercultural encounters which I was privileged to experience closely not only fascinated me but also moved me to pursue certain questions, finally also in my doctoral studies and the thesis.<sup>1</sup>

Is intercultural living natural or not? How can cultural diversity be lived in a religious community? How do religious cope with cultural differences? What should religious consider when they are living together in an intercultural community? Which are the factors and

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<sup>1</sup> See: Peter Claver Narh, *Interkulturelles Zusammenleben in einer Ordensgemeinschaft am Beispiel der Steyler Missionare* (Pastoralpsychologie und Spiritualität 21), Berlin: Peter Lang 2019.

conditions that contribute to good intercultural living and which factors bring about hindrances? Which possibilities does a religious congregation have to make intercultural living viable for its members?

The objective of the work can be summarised as an attempt to develop a sensitive approach in which the diversity of cultures is respected, and taken seriously in order to transform given differences into resources for intercultural community life.

The work has four aspects: (1) Empirical; (2) Psychological; (3) Sociological; and (4) Theological.

These four parts are framed by an *Introduction* at the beginning and *Possible steps for living intercultural life in a religious community* at the end. This article gives a summary of the essential elements of these four major parts of the work.

## **2. Empirical Perspectives**

This part is basically about the experiences of SVDs, and as such deals with interviews with confreres concerning their concrete experiences of intercultural living in religious communities. “Interculturalism involves a conscious capacity to ‘mediate’ between two or more cultures, to observe similarities and conflicts, to generate a relationship between oneself and others, and to accept the role of a mediator.”<sup>2</sup>

### *2.1. Research Method*

I opted for a *qualitative* research method. The interviews concentrate on the reactions and answers of the interviewee, and are based on the method of personal conversation, from Inghard Langer in his book about personal conversation, as a method of psychological research.<sup>3</sup> The interviews were with open-ended questions. In order to provide a comprehensive view of the reality in the German SVD province, I made sure that both young and elderly confreres were interviewed; that the confreres interviewed came from different countries of origin in order to ensure that I reach as many cultures as possible; that not only confreres who have lived and worked in Germany for a long time have been interviewed but also those who have not been

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Hager, *Culture, Psychology, and Language Learning*, Bern 2011, 113.

<sup>3</sup> Inghard Langer, *Das persönliche Gespräch als Weg in der psychologischen Forschung*, Köln 2000.

there for long. I also included confreres who have had intercultural experiences in other SVD provinces around the world and have returned to Germany. The survey includes interviews with 3 Africans, 5 Asians and 4 Europeans.

### *2.2. Findings from the Interviews*

Many of the interviewed confreres find intercultural living an *enrichment* and they have *joy* in living it. Other confreres see intercultural living as a *chance* given to them by the SVD, and expressed that it is a *gain* for their lives since this form of life opens up new perspectives. Still other confreres experience intercultural living as a blessing for themselves and for the people with whom they work in different apostolates, and they see intercultural living as a form of witness to the Word of God.

Some of the *negative* experiences and challenges are: the lack of introduction into the local culture, lack of interest from confreres in other cultures, disregard for other cultures, communication difficulties, handling conflicts, prejudices, difficulties in finding the boundaries between inculturation and intercultural living, difficulties in the organisation of day-to-day activities. Finally, this question occurs: Which difficulties/differences arise from a person's culture and which of them are influenced by/can be attributed to his or her personality?

The confreres who have been interviewed found the following to be helpful in their intercultural living: openness, acceptance, interest in other cultures, the ability to listen, patience, showing understanding, language competence and having the motivation and willingness to live interculturally.

The interviewees had the following *suggestions and recommendations* for intercultural living in religious communities: elimination of prejudices, better communication among community members, having workshops about interculturality, being tolerant, creating awareness of intercultural living, educating confreres on interculturality and having discussions about intercultural living.

### **3. Psychological Perspectives**

The aim of this part of the work is to gain insight into the culture of a person. It is about the behaviour of a person in relation to his or her culture. Some of the important topics here are summarised below.

### 3.1. Human Beings and Culture

Culture plays a very important role in interculturality, because our whole behaviour is shaped by it. Culture is so fundamental in our lives. To underline this, Geert Hofstede does a comparison of culture with a computer and says culture is like the *software of the mind*.<sup>4</sup>

Diana de Vallescar Palanca also compares culture to the black box of an aeroplane and says in the case of misunderstandings in intercultural living which could bring tension or tend into conflicts or violence, one should go back immediately to the cultures of those concerned which act like the black box to help find the causes of those misunderstandings.<sup>5</sup>

### 3.2. Collectivism versus Individualism

Knowing the distinction between these two types of cultural forms is very helpful in understanding behaviours in intercultural communities. But it is also important to mention that cultures are not always divided into these extremes.

In collective societies or cultures, people define themselves as part of the group and therefore place group goals over individual ones. Whereas in individualistic societies or cultures, people consider themselves as separate entities and are therefore primarily interested in their own personal needs.<sup>6</sup>

People from collective cultures attach great importance to community and solidarity. It is therefore important for them to maintain harmony and to ensure that no one loses his or her face. People from individualistic cultures give relatively high priority to their individual goals, and their identities are mainly defined by their personal characteristics.<sup>7</sup> Some of the other differences of individualistic and collective cultures can be seen in the table below.

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Geert Hofstede/Gert Jan Hofstede/Michael Minkov, *Cultures and Organizations. Software of the Mind. Intercultural Cooperation and Its Importance for Survival*, New York et al. 2010, 5.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Diana de Vallescar Palanca, *Ordensleben interkulturell. Eine neue Vision*, Freiburg 2008, 97.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Triandis 1995 in: Laura E. Berk, *Entwicklungspsychologie*, München 2005, 86.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. David G. Myers, *Psychologie*. 3., vollständig überarbeitete und erweiterte Auflage mit Beiträgen von Siegfried Hoppe-Graff und Barbara Keller, Berlin et al. 2014, 160.

<b>Individualistic cultures</b>	<b>Collective cultures</b>
Social status should be judged by performance. People who perform well should not be hindered by their origin to rise socially.	People accept hierarchies and status differences, even if these are not determined by the current performance but rather through age and tradition.
Although harmony is important, honesty and straightforwardness are valued during discussions. Status differences play only a minor role here.	Disputes are to be avoided in daily social interactions, especially if they would lead to the loss of face of one of the participants.
At least the ethical ideal exists, that all people should be treated equally and there should not be a difference between Ingroup and Outgroup.	In the allocation of resources, differences are made between Ingroup and Outgroup. People of the Ingroup receive preferential treatment and especially relatives are actively supported in their careers.
Moral behaviour is oriented to one's own expectations and less on those of the group. Immoral behaviour leads to feelings of guilt and personal responsibility.	Transgressions and acts of immorality lead to loss of face in front of the group and feelings of shame both to the perpetrator and to the members of the group or the family as a whole.

### 3.3. Development of Self-image

Individualistic cultures promote an independent understanding of self. In order to achieve the cultural goal of independence, one has to understand oneself as an individual whose behaviour is meaningful in relation to his or her own thoughts, feelings and actions and not through the feelings, thoughts and actions of others.<sup>8</sup>

Collective cultures promote a mutually dependent (interdependent) understanding of self. The experience of interdependence implies that one perceives oneself as part of a broader social relationship and recognises that one's own behaviour is determined by others. The

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

person also realises that his or her behaviour is largely structured by and depends on the feelings and thoughts of the people he or she is in relation with.<sup>9</sup>

### 3.4. Culture and Personality

The connection between culture and personality becomes clear in this statement of Tafarodi: “Culture provides the symbolic tools by which individuals carve out the awareness of their subjectivity.”<sup>10</sup> Every human being is decisively influenced by the culture in which he grows up. However, he is not aware of this in his day-to-day activities.<sup>11</sup>

Every culture influences the personality of an individual because each person has a pattern of thinking, feeling and potential action which he has learned throughout his life and much of this is gotten from his cultural environment as a child. This *personality* is different from *human nature*.

*Human nature* is what human beings (in varying degrees) have in common. This includes among other things the human ability to feel fear, anger, love, joy, sadness and shame. However, how these feelings are expressed is influenced by culture.<sup>12</sup>

On the other hand, the *personality* of a person is his unique programming, which he or she does not have to have in common with any other human being. Personality relates to characteristics that a person has partly learned and partly inherited. This learning takes place both under the influence of collective programming (culture) and personal experiences.<sup>13</sup>

What an individual has learned over the years through his or her culture becomes part of the personality. The values from a culture and all the elements which are learnt from a culture sit deeply within the personality of a person and guides his or her actions. This is particularly visible in conflict or shock situations, since undeniable aspects and values come to light under these conditions.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Richard J. Gerrig/Philip G. Zimbardo, *Psychologie*, München 2008, 534.

<sup>10</sup> Romin W. Tafarodi, in: *Toward a Cultural Phenomenology of Personal Identity*. [http://www.psych.utoronto.ca/users/tafarodi/Papers/Chap3\\_2008.pdf](http://www.psych.utoronto.ca/users/tafarodi/Papers/Chap3_2008.pdf) (Stand: 14.02.17).

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Gerhard Maletzke, *Interkulturelle Kommunikation. Zur Interaktion zwischen Menschen verschiedener Kulturen*, Opladen 1996, 42.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 6-7.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 7.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Vallescar Palanca, *Ordensleben interkulturell*, 97.

Culture helps to understand a person's personality to a large extent, but it doesn't produce the same personalities. Even people from the same culture can differ in many ways.<sup>15</sup>

In structuring our perception, our own culture plays a key role since we are taught in our cultural contexts how to perceive people, objects and events.<sup>16</sup> That means two people can experience or observe the same situation and have different opinions about it, because what they have experienced is selected and interpreted through their own glasses, which are culturally coloured.<sup>17</sup>

### 3.5. Intercultural Encounter

Ethnocentrism describes the tendency of people to evaluate other cultures from the perspective of their own culture, whereby the values and characteristics of their own culture are unquestionably evaluated as positive and deviations from their own culture are evaluated negatively.<sup>18</sup>

At the conscious level, many people assume that they barely have ethnocentric leanings and attitudes. However, each human being is ethnocentric to some extent, because our cultures have taught us *how the world really is*, and we believe this. This makes us believe that people from other cultures and what they do is *strange* or *wrong*.<sup>19</sup>

Important here is the movement to *ethnorelativism*. This means that someone is able to experience his or her own culture in the context of other cultures. It is the ability to see one's own beliefs and behaviours as one of several realities—knowing that there are many other valid attitudes to seeing things and dealing with situations.

Ethnorelativism differs from relativism in that it does not exclude the possibility of ethical judgments regarding cultural elements. It merely points out that these judgments must be based on objective criteria rather than on ethnocentrism.

*Diversity* is, according to Harrison and Sin (2006), the collective degree of differences between members of a social group.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Pamela J. Cooper/Carolyn Calloway-Thomas/Cheri Simonds, *Intercultural Communication*, Boston, Mass. 2007, 33.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 43.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 42.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Detlef Fetchenhauer, *Psychologie*, München 2011, 365-366.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Cooper et al., *Intercultural Communication*, 43-44.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Sebastian Stegmann/Rolf van Dik, *Diversität ist gut, oder?: Report Psychologie* 38:4 (2013) 153.

It has been proved that the way people perceive diversity can have a major impact on the way diversity influences individuals and groups. Any kind of diversity can demonstrably have positive or negative effects. The good news is that the more individuals or groups show positive attitude towards diversity, the more it becomes beneficial and less detrimental.<sup>21</sup>

To unfold the potential of diversity, it is important to emphasise similarities and differences at the same time, and talk about them.

It is now easy and fast to move from one country to another. However, the process of *arriving* in the host country takes much longer than we might think. Diana de Vallescar Palanca says that one's own organism has to get used to the new environment and it takes an average of six months to get physically adapted to the new environment. Our body shows its mental state in body language and begins to react and to adapt to the new rhythms, the types of nutrition, climatic conditions etc. The psyche, however, needs a bit longer and this can lead to a cultural shock.<sup>22</sup>

*Culture shock* is a psychic state where suddenly all the known values and patterns of behaviour seem to have lost their validity for the individual in the foreign cultural environment. The symptoms include homesickness, depression, nervousness, exaggerated cleanliness, withdrawal, unexplainable crying attacks, loss of ability to work effectively, and aggressive behaviour in the new environment. Culture shock is not a disease, but a defence reaction against the influences of a foreign culture.<sup>23</sup>

In the new environment, the individual feels that the usual problem-solving and decision-making strategies that have worked well for him all the time in his own culture have lost their effectiveness, because things are going on differently in the new culture.

The bigger the difference between the culture of origin and the culture on the ground, the more difficult it becomes to adapt.<sup>24</sup>

During this period of cultural shock, people need a great support from their community members.

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Vallescar Palanca, *Ordensleben interkulturell*, 81.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Edith Broszinsky-Schwabe, *Interkulturelle Kommunikation. Missverständnisse – Verständigung*, Wiesbaden 2011, 212.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Rolf Oerter/Leo Montada (Hrsg.), *Entwicklungspsychologie*, Basel 2008, 114.

#### 4. *Sociological Perspectives*

The chapter on sociological perspectives looks at living intercultural life in a religious community from a sociological perspective. While the psychological part of the work has roughly explained why an individual is the way he is, the sociological aspect deals with the question of how one behaves in relation to others.

##### 4.1. *Challenges in Encountering Other Cultures*

One of the big challenges in encountering people from other cultures is *strangeness*. The stranger in the classical sense is the one who comes from afar, unknown and unfamiliar. However, he or she must be close enough to be experienced as foreign because people you do not know about cannot even be foreign to you.<sup>25</sup>

Crossing the threshold between what is strange and one's own mentality poses a risk, because it is not only uncertain what meets you on the other side, but also how it changes you. What is important here is not to ignore or even deny these facts which are present in our communities, but to discuss them and to find means and ways of living together harmoniously. It is important here to emphasise the common goals of the community.

*Prejudice* means judgments that are made without verifying their validity on the basis of facts. These judgments usually have a pejorative and discriminatory tendency. Prejudice becomes a sort of defence mechanism. There are sometimes negative prejudices and hostile feelings towards others who think differently when people feel that their daily routines and well-established patterns of thought and behaviour may be disturbed.<sup>26</sup>

What I find interesting, or rather dangerous for intercultural living in communities, is that people usually assume that they themselves are free of prejudice.<sup>27</sup>

The emergence of these perceptions is diverse and comprises cognitive, affective, behavioural and ideological factors.

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. Birgit Rommelspacher, *Anerkennung und Ausgrenzung, Deutschland als multikulturelle Gesellschaft*, Frankfurt/Main 2002, 9.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Georg Auernheimer, *Einführung in die Interkulturelle Pädagogik*, Darmstadt 2005, 84.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Hans Nicklas, Klammern kollektiver Identität – Zur Funktion von Vorurteilen, in: Hans Nicklas/Burkhard Müller/Hagen Kordes (eds.), *Interkulturell denken und handeln, Theoretische Grundlagen und gesellschaftliche Praxis*, Bonn 2006, 109.

These perceptions are not so much the results of contact with the other, but are rather based on the influence of the environment as well as on historically and culturally based images, which are conveyed to us through the social discourse, family and media.

But the perception of the other can also be based on direct experiences which are then generalised. Generalisations, however, are quite doubtful. The important thing here is to be open in the encounter with others. For, if one insists on his or her own position and expects the other to have the same perception, one denies the originality and freedom of the other and makes him into a subordinate.<sup>28</sup>

#### 4.2. *Intercultural Dynamic Processes*

A new dynamic arises when different cultures come together. The encounter between different cultures first of all brings uncertainty, because different worldviews collide. This makes misunderstandings, misinterpretations and difficulties inevitable, especially because each partner takes it for granted that his or her worldview is the only *right* and *normal* one.<sup>29</sup>

This is a challenge for both locals and newcomers in a particular culture, initially, for the newcomer who is in a new culture. In view of the foreign customs and traditions, he or she can no longer rely on his or her usual thinking and feels impaired in his or her ability to act and in his or her self-confidence. Some react with a *defence* that they assimilate permanently into their behaviour. Others accept this *reality of differences*, create diverse correspondences through which they regain their ability to act and their self-confidence. Also, the locals are irritated by the behaviour of the other, which is foreign to them. Experiences of strangeness are made on both sides and it is advisable to exchange these experiences and remain in dialogue.<sup>30</sup>

#### 4.3. *Intercultural Competence*

Intercultural competence helps us to master a task, to meet a challenge or to carry out an activity in intercultural contexts. Intercultural competence is neither about insisting on one's own cultural standpoint nor about adapting to the cultural point of view of the

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. Edmond Marc Lipiansky, Die Komplexität der Vorstellungen vom Anderen, in: Nicklas et al., *Interkulturell denken und handeln*, 117.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Maletzke, *Interkulturelle Kommunikation*, 128.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Hagen Kordes, Interkultureller Umgang mit Fremdheitserfahrungen, in: Nicklas et al., *Interkulturell denken und handeln*, 309.

other person. It is more about finding a position between these points of view, a kind of *third culture*. A key point in this process is a change of perspective—the ability to perceive situations from the cultural point of view of others.<sup>31</sup>

Very important is the knowledge that intercultural competence does not consist of making a harmonious living together out of each conflict situation. Decisive is the sensitivity and the ability to understand in which intercultural encounters a creative relationship is possible, in which cases living side by side is necessary and in which situations everyone must insist on his or her independence and where tolerance is expected.<sup>32</sup>

### 5. Theological Perspectives

This chapter focuses on the theological perspectives of intercultural living. It gives the topic a theological foundation and makes it clear that the topic of interculturality does not originate from the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but it is a topic that was also found in early Christianity.

#### 5.1. Bible and Interculturality

First of all, it is important to clarify that the term interculturality does not come from the Bible.<sup>33</sup> The term interculturality established itself long after the emergence of the Bible or the New Testament.<sup>34</sup> The word interculturality has its roots in the philosophy of enlightenment and in the development of post-enlightenment.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, it has always been clear that human beings can be assigned to different cultures and are essentially determined by the action and interaction of these cultures, which also applies to the ancient Mediterranean region.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Hamid Reza Yousefi, *Interkulturelle Kommunikation. Eine praxisorientierte Einführung*, Darmstadt 2014, 90.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Dietrich v. Queis, *Interkulturelle Kompetenz. Praxis-Ratgeber zum Umgang mit internationalen Studierenden*, Darmstadt 2009, 33.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. S. M. Michael, SVD, Interculturality and the Anthropos Tradition: *Verbum SVD* 54 (2013) 61.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Jochen Flebbe, Sprachliche Brücken zwischen Kulturen im Neuen Testament: Erzählung – Metapher – Begriff, in: Franz Gmainer-Pranzl/Beate Kowalski/Tony Neelankavil (eds.), *Herausforderungen Interkultureller Theologie*, Paderborn 2016, 51.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Michael, Interculturality and the Anthropos Tradition, 61.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Flebbe, Sprachliche Brücken zwischen Kulturen im Neuen Testament, 51.

However, it would be misleading to think that there are only passages in favour of interculturality in the Bible. There are Bible texts that are intolerant towards foreigners. We find an example in Deuteronomy 7:1-3 which calls for distance to foreigners.

This work focuses on the texts which encourage interculturality in order to learn from them. The existence of both xenophobic and foreigner-friendly texts in the Bible shows that intercultural living does not happen automatically. It demands learning and requires growth, but it is possible!

#### 5.1.1. Abraham and Interculturality

The encounter between cultures already begins with Abraham, whom Jews, Christians and Muslims accept as their ancestor. He was called by God to leave his homeland and go to the unknown land of Canaan. Although he and his wife Sara had settled in Mamre in Hebron (Gen 13:18), they settled in Bethel and Ai (Gen 13:3), the Negeb between Kadesh and Shur (Gen 20:1-2), Moriah (Gen 22:2), Beersheba (Gen 21:33, Gen 22:19) and for a time also in Egypt (Gen 12:10, Gen 13:1).<sup>37</sup> This shows that many intercultural encounters already existed at the beginning of the biblical narratives.

#### 5.1.2. Interculturality between Naomi and Ruth

Also, in the book of Ruth, we find an intercultural unity between Ruth and her mother-in-law:

<sup>15</sup> And she said, "See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law." <sup>16</sup> But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. <sup>17</sup> Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the LORD do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you."

<sup>18</sup> And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more. (Ruth 1:15-18)

In this scene, Ruth, a Moabite woman, becomes a blessing for Naomi. The author emphasises here that the love of God is not just for the chosen people of Israel, but crosses ethnic boundaries—another sequence for interculturality.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. VanThanh Nguyen, SVD, *Biblical Foundations for Interculturality: Verbum SVD* 54 (2013) 37.

### 5.1.3. Paul and Interculturality

With Paul, we find another example where traces of interculturality are found in the Bible. He showed sensitivity to other cultures. He was not only able to cope with them, but was also able to make the good news understandable for people of other cultures. Paul adapted to the cultural framework of his audience: He used sophisticated rhetoric among the intellectual Greeks (1 Cor 1:17-31); among conservative and attentive Jews, he used the Hebrew scriptures and the midrash to explain the Torah (Gal 2:19); for those familiar with sport and the military, he used athletic (1 Cor 9:24, 2 Tim 4:7) and military (Eph 6:11-14) images and metaphors to convey his message; for the ordinary people he used pictures with parts of the body (Rom 12:4, 1 Cor 12:12-17, Eph 4:11-16) or everyday things (e.g. a mirror in 1 Cor 13:12 and a vessel in 2 Cor 4:7) for everyone to understand.<sup>38</sup> Paul had what is necessary for intercultural living: “[...] he had the right attitude toward culture, namely, affirming as well as confronting. Because of these attitudes, Paul was able to be a Jew to the Jews and a Greek to the Greeks” (1 Cor 9:19-23).<sup>39</sup> The Areopagus speech of Paul (Acts 17:16-34) shows another example of his sensitivity to other cultures and thus his intercultural ability.<sup>40</sup>

### 5.2. Interculturality as a Development Process in the Bible

This process or way to interculturality in the Bible is not easy. First of all, there is a diversity of cultures as a given fact of biblical narratives: Many nations, cultures and languages exist side by side and with each other, but not without competition and conflict. Despite this coexistence, Israel sees itself as a people with a special role among the others: those *chosen* by God, the covenant people. This attitude brings Israel into conflict in some narratives. The *conquest* of Canaan and the wars over territorial control during the time of David show this difficulty. On the other hand, Israel is seen as a people with a mission beyond its borders, as the light of nations (cf. Isa 42:6). The well-known story of Jonah shows how mission succeeds even if Israel is reluctant. And finally, it becomes clear in Isa 45:1-7 that the God of Israel is a God of all peoples.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 44.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 45.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Cynthia M. Campbell, *Of Every Race and People*, in: David V. Esterline/Ogbu U. Kalu, *Shaping Beloved Community. Multicultural Theological Education*, Louisville, KY 2006, 103-104.

### 5.2.1. The Development of Jesus to Interculturality

Since Christianity originated from Judaism and Jesus and his disciples were also Jews, the first question which came up was whether the Good News was intended only for Jews or also for others. Even with Jesus, this tension was evident as the Canaanite woman asked him for healing.<sup>42</sup> He, too, was initially closed to people from other cultures and answered her: “I am only sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Mt 15:24). However, at the end of the Gospel, Jesus seemed to have had a different understanding when he said, “Therefore go to all nations, and make all people my disciples [...]” (cf. Mt 28:19). There is no doubt that Jesus developed openness towards people of other cultures. The Jesus of the Gospels crosses the borders of gender, race, ethnicity, and culture by healing the daughter of a Roman leader, allowing himself to be convinced in the dispute with a Syrophenician woman that he must help her, even though she is a foreigner (Mk 7:24ff), enters into a religious dialogue with a “culturally not pure” Samaritan woman (Jn 4).<sup>43</sup>

### 5.2.2. The development of Peter to Interculturality

Peter also saw a development that marks an important turning point for both interculturality and the theological understanding of the Christian faith. This was expressed in his encounter with Cornelius. As Peter listened to Cornelius and heard his dream, he realised that the covenant with God, which was actually made with Israel alone, must apply to all cultures, races and nations:<sup>44</sup> Then Peter began to speak and said, “I now realise how true it is that God does not show favouritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right” (Acts 10:34-35). This can be seen as *the conversion of Peter to interculturality*.<sup>45</sup>

Interculturality as a development in the Bible can be seen systematically by Theo Sundermeier, who speaks of *God as a foreign God, Christ as the foreign guest* and the *Spirit as the guide of foreigners*. By meeting a foreigner, we get something from God, whom we

<sup>42</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 103.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Christoph Schneider-Harpprecht, *Interkulturelle und interreligiöse Kompetenz. Eine Aufgabe der Gemeindeentwicklung*, in: Arnd Götzelmann/Wilhelm Schwendemann (eds.), *Inter-Kulturalität*, Freiburg [Breisgau] 2006, 146.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Campbell, *Of Every Race and People*, 104.

<sup>45</sup> Thomas Malipurathu, SVD, *Reaching Out across the Cultural Divide—Glimpses from the New Testament: Verbum SVD* 53 (2012) 190.

meet in the foreigner; Jesus as a foreigner shows solidarity with foreigners; and the Spirit brings us together, so that there are no foreigners, but only Christians.<sup>46</sup>

### 5.3. Biblical-ethical Basis for Intercultural Living

*The dignity of mankind:* Everyone enjoys a unique and inviolable dignity given to him or her by God, for every person is God's creature (Gen 2:7), everyone is an image of God (Gen 1:26-27), and everyone is a child of God (Eph 2:15).<sup>47</sup> The human dignity given to us by God is a weighty responsibility to treat everyone with respect.

This dignity is so important that the Federal Republic of Germany has anchored its inviolability in its constitution. It says: Human dignity is inviolable. It is the duty of all state authority to respect and protect it (cf. Article 1, paragraph 1 of the German Federal Constitution).

*We are called to unity:* The vocation of unity, which calls for intercultural living, begins in the Bible with no discrimination against strangers: "When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the LORD your God" (Lev 19:33-34).

In the New Testament, the call to unity is strengthened by removing various boundaries: There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus (cf. Gal 3:28). This crossing of borders aims at a harmonious living together and challenges us to help people of other cultures who are in need. The story of the Good Samaritan makes this clear (cf. Lk 10:25-37).

*The call to solidarity:* As images of the triune God, the Bible calls us through many texts to solidarity with foreigners and people of different opinions, which becomes the basis for intercultural living.

Without using the term solidarity, the author of 1 John shows how essential solidarity is in Christianity. He does that almost provocatively and writes: "If someone says, I love God! but hates his brother, he's a liar. For he who does not love his brother, whom he sees, cannot love God, whom he does not see" (cf. 1 Jn 4:20). And in the under-

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Theo Sundermeier, *Den Fremden verstehen. Eine praktische Hermeneutik*, Göttingen 1996, 207.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Francisco Cabral, *Multikulturelle Gesellschaft. Aktuelle Herausforderungen an die Zivilgesellschaft und an die Kirche*, Offenbach 1994, 114.

standing of Jesus, a sister or a brother is not only the one from the same culture or region, but also the stranger, as made clear in the story of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37). It does not only show who a sister or brother is, but also calls for solidarity with strangers. Matthew even goes one step further and calls for solidarity with enemies: “You have heard that it has been said: You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy. But I tell you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you” (Mt 5:43-44). Furthermore, we are called to solidarity with the marginalised. Jesus gave an example of this when visiting Zacchaeus (cf. Lk 19:1-10). In Matthew 25:31-36.40, Jesus calls for solidarity with all people, regardless of their culture. He sums it up in verse 40, saying, “[...] What you did for one of my lesser brothers, you have done to me.”

### ***6. Possible Steps for Intercultural Living in a Religious Community***

In my research, it became clear that intercultural living, although not new, is not automatic, but can and needs to be learned and nurtured. On this background, I have presented possible ways which religious congregations have to make their intercultural living more effective.

#### *6.1. Dealing with Interculturality Positively*

The attitude to diversity is important, because when diversity is seen as a problem that needs to be resolved, many difficulties are experienced. However, if it is considered as positive, it generates an innovative spirit which can bring life into a community.<sup>48</sup>

#### *6.2. Dealing with Differences within an Intercultural Community*

*Not denying differences:* It often happens that we avoid naming differences between cultures, fearing that this could foster conflict and xenophobia. Differences between cultures are natural. Their denial is not the way to eliminate conflict in the long term. Differences should be acknowledged and taken seriously, but without the usual derogatory connotations. In this way, they can be addressed and common ways for living together can be found.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Cf. Phill Wood/Charles Landry, *The Intercultural City. Planning for Diversity Advantage*, London 2008, 10-11.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Auernheimer, *Einführung in die Interkulturelle Pädagogik*, 132-133.

*Considering differences as an enrichment:* It is good to be aware of the fact that differences can not only present challenges but they can also offer opportunities and enrichment in religious congregations.

*Encouraging intercultural dialogue:* A competent approach to cultural differences in an intercultural community requires not only the addressing of problems and irritations that arise from misunderstandings, but also a dialogue on controversial validity claims of values, etc.—or simply of communication rules, because a mutual understanding can only be deepened through dialogue.

*Intercultural dialogue must be direct and concrete:* There is a danger of not dealing directly with foreigners when it comes to issues concerning them, but rather relying on read theories and reports of the media, which can lead to prejudice. We cannot make do with the description of others, their culture and practices that we get from the media, if dialogue is to succeed in a community. We have to speak directly with them in order to get to know and understand them better.

*Dialogue requires the willingness to change and rethink:* People in dialogue should at the same time be encouraged to open themselves to change. Intercultural dialogue is a mutual learning process—everyone learns something from each other's culture and gives something from one's own culture. This interplay of different cultural aspects in dialogue and living together leads to changes or renewal of all concerned. And this openness is necessary because intercultural dialogue can only bear fruit if renewal of cultures is allowed.

### 6.3. Reflection

Intercultural living is an opportunity, but at the same time it always remains a challenge that demands determination. It is useful to always keep the neutrality of differences in cultures in mind because a cultural difference is neither good nor bad.

Intercultural dialogue is not about bending people, but about one's own inner willingness to change by meeting people from other cultures, and by finding a common path in consensus with these people. A genuine encounter which provides a good basis for intercultural living does not force one's ideologies onto others, but allows other worldviews and patterns of thinking as a basis for a common life.

It is important to ensure that the challenges associated with intercultural living don't become taboos, otherwise it may cause great tensions which escalate over time. People should feel free to address these challenges without being stigmatised.

Interculturality cannot be lived in a vacuum; interculturalism happens in a specific culture that should play an important role. In other words, the local culture should not be neglected or isolated. Foreigners need a good connection to the culture and thus to the local people. At the same time, it should become clear to everyone that intercultural living is a process that requires effort from natives and foreigners.

In intercultural living within a religious community, it should be viable to rephrase the statement of the Galatians. Instead of the sentence: There are no longer Jews and Greeks, not slaves and freemen, not men and women; for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:28), it should read: There are no more religious from Africa, America, Asia, Europe and Oceania, for we are all one in Christ Jesus and are sisters and brothers—not in the sense that the individual loses his identity, but in the sense that living together is possible despite the different cultures.

#### ABSTRACTS

Dieser Beitrag ist eine Reflexion auf die Bedingungen und Folgerungen für gemeinsames Leben in Ordensgemeinschaften, wenn die Mitglieder verschiedene kulturelle Hintergründe haben. Der Autor widmete sich diesem Thema in seiner Doktorarbeit und stellt hier einen inhaltlichen Überblick vor, mit den Methoden und einigen Ergebnissen. Er geht an den Gegenstand vor allem aus psychologischer Sicht heran – er studierte Pastoralpsychologie – und bezieht soziologische sowie anthropologische und theologische Sichtweisen ein, um einige praktische Vorschläge für ein verbessertes und ertragreicheres missionarisches Gemeinschaftsleben zu erarbeiten.

En este artículo se trata de una reflexión sobre las condiciones e implicaciones para la vida comunitaria en comunidades religiosas cuando sus miembros provienen de trasfondos culturales diferentes. El autor dedicó su tesis doctoral a este tema y resume aquí su trabajo, los métodos y algunos de los resultados. Se acerca a la cuestión sobre todo desde perspectivas psicológicas – estudió psicología pastoral – y se remite a propuestas sociológicas, antropológicas y teológicas para llegar a formular algunas propuestas prácticas en vistas a una vida comunitaria misionera mejorada y más fructífera.

Voici une réflexion sur les conditions et les implications du vivre ensemble dans des communautés religieuses où les membres viennent d'environnements culturels différents. L'auteur a consacré sa thèse de doctorat à ce sujet et en présente le plan, les méthodes et quelques-uns des résultats. Il aborde le sujet surtout d'un point de vue psychologique – il a étudié la psychologie pastorale – et utilise également des données sociologiques, anthropologiques et théologiques pour formuler quelques suggestions pratiques en vue d'une meilleure et fructueuse vie communautaire des missionnaires.