



ACCEPT DIVERSITY WITHOUT EXCLUSION: FORMING TO INTERCULTURALITY IN A MULTICULTURAL COMMUNITY

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Thank you for inviting me to address an issue of extreme topicality and bring about positive changes. My intervention will try to focus on three aspects: a reading of what is happening, the possibilities for religious life, and the consequences for a genuine acceptance.

I. INSIDE A GLOBALIZED WORLD

It can be said that the most striking event of the last twenty years is the phenomenon known as “globalization”. The distances have been drastically reduced. People and places are more easily connected. Living in the world is now like living in a village. Globalization can, therefore, be defined as the contraction of time and space, which has caused a growing interdependence between people of different nations and cultures. It has brought with it a congenital process of exclusion that widens the gap between rich and poor. It is criticized for its approach, which allows the current powers to impose an economic system, a political ideology, a philosophical vision, a cultural model of values and a common or uniform “religious” mentality.

International migration is another expression of globalization which gives this phenomenon particular importance. Today, as a result of this fact, societies are becoming more and more multicultural. The pace of urbanization has accelerated in our cities. This has led to the emergence of ever-expanding mega-cities that become multicultural centres and supermarkets of plural beliefs and divergent values. Urbanization also transplants the deepest forms of poverty from rural to urban areas. It is estimated that today, in developing countries, one urban inhabitant in three lives in the slums of the city and this equates to about one billion people or one sixth of the world population¹.

¹ Cf. Union of Superiors General, *Inside Globalization: Toward a Multi-centered and Intercultural Communion*, Publisher “Il Calamo”, Roma 2000, pp. 10-21. More than half of the world’s population lives in cities, in ever-expanding urban areas, which very often give rise to megalopolises of tens of millions of inhabitants, such as Tokyo, Shanghai and Mexico City. But this already impressive proportion could grow further in favour of the metropolis and to the detriment of rural areas, with more than six billion people who will be “urban” in 2045 according to the latest *World urbanization prospects*, the document of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs on urbanization. In the 1990s there were only ten megalopolises in the world. Today there are 28, of which 16 in Asia, 4 in South America, 3 in Africa, 3 in Europe and 2 in North America. The largest remains Tokyo, the capital of Japan, with almost 38 million inhabitants, followed by Jakarta, Indonesia, with almost 30 million and New Delhi (India) with 24 million. Rural areas, on the other hand, will have to face

1.1 Crises in Religious Life

Along with the social elements mentioned above, it should be noted that globalization has marked the persistence of the crisis in religious life. There are two main indications of this crisis: the decrease of members in religious congregations, and the perception of an absence of significance.

The lack of new vocations has led to the aging of the provinces in Western Europe and North America, causing a decrease in vitality and creativity. The fear of taking risks and undertaking new initiatives has become real. Disaffection has infiltrated.

The lack of vocations is an indication, among others, of the perception that religious life is no longer a meaningful life choice. Many young people today are engaged in noble causes such as the promotion of peace and justice in the world, the defence of human rights, the elimination of poverty, and the safeguarding of the integrity of creation. Many are involved in voluntary services. Others join different lay movements. These considerations seem to suggest that today's young people no longer see religious life as an important choice through which they can express their ideals and their generosity.

It should also be borne in mind that the socio-cultural form of the current religion arose from the context of a predominantly agrarian society. This type of society has practically disappeared, and has undergone a radical transformation. The current reality is in large part not only post-agrarian, but also post-industrial and post-modern.

1.2 The emergence of a world Church

These phenomena of transformation have not passed without leaving any trace in the Church. The Second Vatican Council perceived the Church as a world reality, even if it was only a beginning, with an episcopate acting in harmony with the Supreme Pontiff. The continental Synods were a recognition of the diversity of situations and cultures that are part of the universal Church. They have been a confirmation of the fact that attention to the variety of situations and cultures is important to determine the model and form of the life and mission of the Church on the continents². In fact, it is no longer possible to simply give the message as directives from the centre and it is necessary to take into account the concrete situation of the local Churches. All of this has also imposed itself in the life of religious congregations.

The Second Vatican Council, an initial experience of a world Church, has handed down the making of the Church to an enlarged scenario and has left prospects for renewal in this direction. Today the challenge is that of a *«world Church not simply in the sense of a Church that extends everywhere, but of a Church that takes into account the world in its entirety and interacts with it»*³.

The very idea of "catholicity" comes out redesigned: *Lumen gentium* 13 and 17 show the overcoming of a purely geographical-extensive vision of this ecclesial property. The eschatological trait is determined by a universal openness, according to a unity in plurality, constitutive of the Church at all levels, as fullness and totality through exchange and communication. The note of catholicity is therefore preached as much by the universal Church as by the local Church: for the latter the first form of the exercise of catholicity is given by the perma-

the opposite fate. Today there are 3.4 billion people living in the countryside, but by 2050 there will be no more than 3 billion and almost all (90 percent) will be concentrated in Asia and Africa.

² Cf. J. Allen, *The Future Church*, Kindle Edition 2009, pp. 17-21.

³ R. Schreiter, *La teologia postmoderna e oltre in una chiesa mondiale*, in R. Gibellini (ed.), *Prospettive teologiche per il XXI secolo*, Queriniana, Brescia 2003, p. 388.

nence in the dynamics of reciprocal giving and receiving⁴. The “world Church” that germinates in the Council and that the documents deliver as inheritance and challenge to the post-conciliar reception is then not the “universal Church according to the Tridentine spirit”, but the Church “*communio ecclesiarum*”, one in the plurality of the relationships of the local Churches in communion with Rome, living in the never-ending process of inculturation of the Christian faith.

1.3 Contemplative fraternity

Cultural changes have prompted us to move from life in common to the communion of life according to the Gospel and as a missionary expression. Communion of life is generated with simple, understandable and accessible structures for everyone, where the starting point becomes the acceptance of the brother, with his gifts, qualities, possibilities, and also as a surprise of God. Freer communities have been created, because the Spirit is creator and always awaits a new response. They have left or are leaving heavy structures that can become the sole reason for living, and have not tied themselves to a specific land, because they feel bound more to man than to a limited territory. We have thought of communities where structures are at the service of values, and gradually become signs of life, transparency rather than efficiency, and above all significant for our world. When a community is serenely free, because it is rooted in trust in God and in others, it becomes liberating and pacifying even for those who approach it. It easily frees all the abilities and gifts with which each and every person is rich, to put them at the service of others. All this facilitates a family atmosphere of collaboration, rather than of competition, opposition or jealousy.

1.4 Exodus communities

This type of community says that religious life must be characterized by a constant exodus, a meeting of the other. Religious life is to be understood as a spirituality of encounter rather than expectation.

Another “novelty” at this time are the attempts to put primary attention to the individual person, and not to the structures, be they pastoral, survival or otherwise. The mission is an indispensable point of reference; it is this that is constituted as a community around a shared project, for which there is no value in this or that culture, but each one urged to proclaim the Gospel. The ministry of vocation consists precisely in helping to purify, deepen, explain and construct the reasons for the call.

Gospel values are received, understood and lived differently in individual cultures. It is therefore important that everyone has their cultural identity present and clear, and is at the same time open to comprehending and accepting the ways of understanding and living the same values in other cultures.

1.5 Disorder in Religious Orders

In religious congregations the intuition began to develop that there is no single way of being religious and that the charism of the Founder can find different expressions in the cultures of different peoples. Like the Gospel, the original charism of the congregation can not only enrich, but can also be enriched by the cultures in which it is incarnated. This leads to a situation in which the religious congregation is no longer considered to be composed of members of different nationalities who all learn the same way of life, shaped by the dominant culture, but by members of different nationalities who share the richness of their cul-

⁴ On the proprieties of catholicism, cfr. W. Beinert, *La cattolicità come proprietà della chiesa*, in H.M. Legrand – J. Manzanares – A. Garcia y Garcia (Edd.), *Chiese locali e cattolicità*, EDB, Bologna 1994, pp. 467-501.

tural diversity. The multicultural nature of the members inevitably raises the question of the different understanding of the elements of religious life, such as prayer, community, use of money and vows.

To give an example, we can say that Europe is no longer the sole source of a formative and mission model. Because the missionaries of the South also go as missionaries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Today we speak not only of a mission “from south to north”, but also of a mission “from south to south”, unlike the past in which the mission was basically a phenomenon “from north to south”. The same cultural influences circulate and mix.

2. OPPORTUNITIES FOR RELIGIOUS LIFE

The situation of the world and of the Church today offers many opportunities for religious life. Among the many we highlight some: the interculturality of the members, the freshness of the new arrivals, the discovery of listening, and the evolution of people.

2.1 Interculturality of members

Numerous religious congregations have discovered the value of internationality in their composition. The ideal is not just “internationality” but “interculturality”. Here we open a parenthesis on this theme. The monocultural model, from which we come, has tried to define a culture that characterizes the whole context. The “guiding culture” has demanded that the minorities assimilate. The ideal inherent in this model was homogeneity and internal coherence, both within its own ethnic-cultural group and in the wider context. Cultural diversity was seen as a threat to stability. Impulses from other cultures that could serve for critical verification or further development of one’s identity were usually not allowed.

It is becoming increasingly clear that the meaning of the terms “intercultural” and “international” is different from a few years ago. Every person is marked by the culture that breathes through the family and the human groups with which he enters into a relationship, in the educational paths and the most diverse environmental influences, through the same fundamental relationship he has with the territory in which he lives. Culture is the way in which a group of people live, think, feel and organize, celebrate and share life. It is however established that no cultural expression exhausts the human experience; no culture is autonomous and self sufficient. Only with the humble awareness of the limits of every culture can we hope to arrive at an authentic interculturality that goes beyond the hegemony of the majority or of religious who live under the same roof⁵.

⁵ Meeting of the Holy Father Francis with the participants of the XXI Plenary Assembly of the International Union of Superiors General (UISG) May 10, 2019, www.vatican.va: « With regard to fraternal life in community, I am also concerned that there are Institutes in which multiculturalism and internationalism are not seen as a richness but as a threat, and they are experienced as conflict instead of being experienced as new opportunities that reveal the true face of the Church and of religious and consecrated life. I ask those in charge of the Institute to be open to the very newness of the Spirit, who blows where it wills and as it wills (cf. Jn 3:8), and to prepare the generations of other cultures to assume responsibility. Sisters, may you live the internationalism of your Institutes as good news. May you live the changing face of your communities with joy, and not as a necessary evil for preservation. Internationalism and interculturalism do not turn backwards».

2.2 Freshness of space

The new arrivals bring home a new freshness, a potential that has never been known before. It is also a precious pouring for the soul. In the community there are not only emigrants who are looking for a space to live, there is also a different wisdom and a different image of God. When a person moves, not only a culture moves, when the people emigrate they not only move their ways of living, God also changes. And the most beautiful God is an itinerant God, a God who walks. To accept, then it means to listen to life, whatever language it speaks. The acceptance asks us to open our eyes to ways of being that are not ours, flowered under other suns, bathed by different waters, but which are also refractions of the one Being in which the roots of every man sink. To give strength to this concept I take an effective image of Etty Hillesum: *"I feel like a small battlefield on which we fight the problems of our time. The only thing you can do is humbly offer yourself as a battlefield. Those problems must find hospitality somewhere, find a place where they can fight and calm down"*.

All life around us speaks to us of diversity, of variety. There is no life without diversity, without contrast. Wherever you turn, life needs diversity. Thus it was also according to the Bible when God, to create life, separated the waters above from those below, the earth from the sea ... Until everything was One there was no place for life, there was no place for the man. To us men God has entrusted the task of carrying out the work of creation, but instead of safeguarding diversity we have the tendency to bring everything back to one. There was a moment in which *"the whole earth had a single language and only words"* (Gen 11:1), they stopped the journey and built a Tower, a symbol of strength and power. A prison and an immobility from which God freed us with the gift of the diversity of languages. The problem with diversity is that they look a lot like contrasts rather than harmony. And, inevitably, the contrasts we always try to overcome.

But there was the day of Pentecost: the apostles in the streets of Jerusalem did not speak a single language that everyone could understand, they spoke their own language, and the representatives of the peoples of the whole earth understood them *"everyone in their own language"* (Act 2:8). There is therefore an alternative to uniformity or contrasts, if we speak our own language others can understand us in theirs. It is important to speak your own language: to be yourself, not the beautiful or bad copy of others. Diversity, we could say, does not require us to be better, or to change, but to be ourselves. This is why God at the Tower of Babel has given us the gift of different languages, of diversity, in order to learn to be ourselves, to be so again⁶.

2.3 The strength of listening

Interculturality, then, is not only or mainly the perception and description of plurality but above all the will and the capacity for interaction between people and institutions of the most diverse cultures. We live in the actualisation of a positive realization of new common spaces of life, of systems of values, of worlds of faith, of distinct spiritualities. The vision to be accepted is that of a greater possible appreciation of cultural-religious differences, and at the same time of a unity that does not eliminate or marginalize divergences but highlights their dignity and value.

The starting point for an authentic intercultural relationship lies in the profound knowledge of one's own culture, recognizing its strengths and limitations. We must then

⁶ Ibid.: *« I am concerned with the generational conflicts, when young people are not able to bring forward the dreams of the elderly in order to make them bear fruit, and the elderly do not know how to receive the prophecies of the young (cf. Jl 2:28). How I like repeating: young people run a lot, but the elderly know the journey. Both the wisdom of the elderly and the inspiration and strength of the young are necessary in a community »*

work hard to understand others, penetrate the meaning of their symbols, learn to respect their value system, and participate intelligently in their celebrations. Going beyond the limits of one's own culture begins with the willingness to listen to the other. Listening takes time and effort. We must also suspend judgments and be ready to take the risk of getting closer to the other. While prudence indicates the ability of good judgment in assessing one's own culture and that of others, wisdom allows one to weigh the values of one's own culture in the light of the culture of others and to grasp the impact of one's own cultural expression⁷.

2.4 The evolution of people

Interculturality is expressed in the invitation to a deeper vision of the current plural world and in continuous evolution, and of the people who live there. Regardless of language, culture and religion, it is necessary to have a vision that is in harmony with "Christian contemplation with open eyes".

This is the fundamental "mission" of consecrated life, a mission that does not consist first of all in charitable efficiency, and in commitment to development but in the ability to create meeting spaces where God can also be experienced today.

Sometimes internationality is intentionally chosen as a stimulus towards the creation of a fraternity where authentic interculturality can be experienced and can become an immediate subject of evangelization. The most effective means of promoting cultural mutuality is the art of dialogue. Dialogue is not proud. It "proposes", does not impose. It is never offensive, but always charitable and respectful in its approach.

An intercultural community exists where every member really feels "at home", not just a guest, even if privileged. What seems indispensable in all this is the presence of people who act as a bridge between members of different cultures in the community, who are familiar with more than one language and who have spent a sufficiently long time in another culture. Furthermore, these communities serve as the basis for evangelization efforts, given that they already show where the Gospel message wants to arrive, that is, the creation of a new world.

3. THE CHANGE IN FORMATION

The prospects that are maturing ask us to revisit the theme of formation in a new way. It is the key that opens the door to a meaningful life and mission. Without adequate training for today's needs, the risk of recurrence, of stopping and of losing the sense of what one is and does, is more than just a working hypothesis.

3.1 The necessary formation

Formation itself is already a delicate and difficult mission, because it is not only a question of professional preparation, but of coherence, authenticity and balance. When we commit ourselves to integrate people from different cultures so that they may know themselves, the will that God has for them and for the Congregation, to accompany them on this journey to build an international community that lives in communion, we must come to terms with the cultures and at the same time with cultural transformations.

If Christianity and the following of Christ are not measured by the vital environment of each one, they do not leave their mark, they risk remaining external manifestations, which perhaps at best are accepted, tolerated, and at worst can cause personality deviations.

The acceptance calls for formation in reciprocity, which essentially consists in respecting and valuing the differences. It is a long and profound journey, which involves not only the

⁷ Cfr. H. Chang – C. Aurilia, *Educarsi all'interculturalità in che senso e come nella comunità religiosa*, in Gonzalez-Silva, *Vita consacrata e multiculturalità*, Ancora, Milano 2000.

spiritual dimension, but also the human one. Having become international, institutions must offer the essential elements to develop new formation processes. This specifically involves the new generations in formation.

3.2 Accepting is self-transcending

The willingness to accept the other is understood as an integral part of the process of self-growth, within a group context made up of people who share the same ideal that motivates their coexistence. Such an attitude of openness to the other takes on a vocational and planning character. It is in this way that everyone is involved in the change of self through the knowledge and integration of the riches of the other, in a relational context where each member of the group is invited to redefine himself or build himself in his own specific identity.

Only to the extent that one succeeds in living this self-transcendence of human existence is he authentically human and is he authentically himself. In mutual comparison, people have a dual task that concerns the other's and their own identity:

- maintain a solid sense of the original cultural traditions;
- incorporate a quantity of values and behavioural norms of the majority culture, sufficient for the members of that group to feel and behave like the members of that culture.

The distinctive feature of integration is therefore a bicultural sense of self. Cultural diversity and coexistence with others of different cultures can be maintained if people are at risk of exposing themselves and opening up to the surrounding world. For this reason, the differences between people who belong to different cultures are not to be eliminated or to be ignored, but to be accepted with profound respect, because it is from them that true dialogue begins⁸.

3.3 Some prior convictions

Formation for acceptance therefore presupposes a community that feels on a mission, not a community closed in on itself. This is an important mediation, especially for younger brothers, and it diminishes some attention to formation.

- *The theology of formation has surpassed the model of "imitation", to make its own the model of "following", and is being forged on the model of "identification" with the feelings of Christ. This entails, both in ongoing and initial formation, simultaneously a profoundly human and evangelically demanding formation⁹.*
- *The identity crisis that has influenced religious life calls for it to be founded in a model of relationship rather than in a model of contrasting strong identities, as was the case until not long ago. It is a task as necessary and urgent as it is arduous, because it is not easy to remain faithful to one's own identity and, at the same time, open oneself to integration with others.*
- *Fraternal life in community is an indispensable element. The ways of living it change according to the charisma. Sociological models of religious communities, forms of organization and community rhythms may be secondary, but the essential remains: a fraternal life in community that shows the world what Christian love consists of: a fraternal life in community that comes to be a true family united in Christ, where everyone manifests their needs to the other and where all members can reach full human, Christian and religious maturity. For many of our contemporaries it is the first form of evangelization.*

⁸ Cfr. G. Crea, *Vivere la comunione nelle comunità multietniche. Tracce di psicologia transculturale*, EDB, Bologna 2009, pp. 148-166.

⁹ Cfr. A. Cencini, *Formazione permanente: ci crediamo davvero?*, EDB, Bologna 2011, pp. 21-26.

- *Ordinary life is one of the first mediations as a school of formation. Everyday life, weekday life and normality are the true secret of formation and what makes it permanent*¹⁰. In this sense, international or multicultural communities are very important, in which one is obliged to confront oneself daily.
- In formation, particular attention must be paid to communication. Despite the many means of communication available to religious, one has the impression that today interpersonal communication has been greatly penalized. More and more interconnected people meet and fewer people communicate, more and more people talk about communities and yet they are increasingly alone. This can lead to tragic consequences in relation to vocation¹¹.
- Thanks to interdependence and collaboration, the group disappears to become a family, made up of heterogeneous people and a wealth of roles. A family in which common rules of conduct are developed and a satisfactory form of leadership is established.

3.4 Ideal expectations

The ideal expectations that generate impoverished relational and structural dimensions are not an insignificant element. As far as I know and feel, it seems to me that there is no lack of expressions like: “finally new vocations”. The expectations of rotation in the roles resound, then, almost like a challenge: “now it’s up to them and let’s see how they manage”, no less serious are the claims of uniformity in the conduct: “we have always done so, what they think they’re doing to renew these”. Finally, I would like to point out the call to a certain formation that have to endure without complaining: “a good religious knows no nostalgia”. If we want to be concrete we can say that they are all situations that can catch even a consecrated person unprepared. It is true that the need to experience something different and authentic emerges strongly when the difficulties are stronger. Goodwill, let alone institutional zeal, is not enough to adapt to a new multicultural community, but there needs to be a path of progressive involvement, both on the part of the person who joins, and on the part of others in the group. It is precisely from the reciprocal encounter between people belonging to different cultures that everyone can discover the meaning of the bond to the same religious family on the basis of shared objectives. This common perspective becomes a strong element of cohesion in the group, but also an opportunity for confident dialogue, necessary to re-read the cultural differences in terms of mutual enrichment¹².

In the specific context of multicultural communities, the support of multicultural cohabitation cannot be reduced to attempts at accommodating adaptation or episodic mutual endurance efforts, but it must be a continuous interpersonal maturation work where dialogic attention to the different contextual opportunities can become a favourable opportunity to open up to new strategies of appreciation and mutual enhancement.

Strengthening this common identity through the rediscovery of the value identities of each one means accepting the progressive journey of maturation, in which the differences open to new meanings because they are recognized and integrated in the group’s project of communion.

¹⁰ Cfr. A. Cencini, *Guardare al futuro. Perché ha ancora senso consacrarsi a Dio*, Paoline, Milano 2011, p. 96.

¹¹ Cf. Th. M. Newamb, *The acquaintance process*, New York 1961.

¹² The principle indicated by the Pope supports us: «*The whole is more than the part, and it is also more than the simple sum of them. [...] Nor do people who wholeheartedly enter into the life of a community need to lose their individualism or hide their identity; instead, they receive new impulses to personal growth. [...] Instead, it is the polyhedron, which reflects the convergence of all its parts, each of which preserves its distinctiveness. [...] it is the sum total of persons within a society which pursues the common good, which truly has a place for everyone*» (*Evangeli gaudium*, 235-236).

3.5 Common meanings and cultural differences

In every situation man is called to a different behaviour. I have tried to ask some of my brethren what the meaning of their religious life is.

This I gathered:

- The goal of my life as a religious is to be ever closer to God. To serve him in my brothers and sisters every day.
- Do good to people, not for their own glory, but for others. I would like to be remembered doing something for others.
- The meaning of my life is first of all to know that I am loved by God, and to try to respond with love to all that I will encounter on my way.

These answers indicate the need of the subjects to give meaning to the difficulties of cultural adaptation they have faced. When people are aware of the motivation of their vocation, they know how to provide meaningful answers to different situations, even when faced with difficult conditions of cultural adaptation. Every situation carries a meaning. We could also add each culture a meaning within itself: it is up to everyone to look for it and find it, because it is unique and unrepeatable, inherent in every condition both of success and failure. In a multicultural community, this search for meaning is concretized in the encounter with those who are culturally different, because together it is possible to detect the elements of value that make it possible to proceed towards the objectives of meaning in the life of consecration.

To be a person means to be absolutely different from any other man, because each one has unique characteristics that allow him to enter into a relationship with others and to discover in mutual relations the values that unite all for the same ideal of life.

The universal meaning of the relational factor is even more evident when it comes to people who live in religious groups animated by the same vocational purpose, as in the case of multicultural communities, where the reciprocal relationship is understood as a task to be accomplished through meaningful relationships, with which they witness the sense of communion among peoples, races and cultures.

In the context of intercultural dialogue the interpersonal relationship has a special value, above all because the different cultures differ in the way they conceive the relationship.

3.6 New potential for opening up to cultures

The acceptance of the other leads to a careful consideration of cultural diversity. This attention to cultural identity has a double meaning:

- On the one hand it serves to identify and strengthen the boundaries of one's own identity, identifying in one's own way of being the specific task of each one.
- On the other hand, it helps the individual to relate in the new environment, without fear of disorientation.

In fact, as the individual orients himself in the new environment, he makes himself available to modify his own cultural system, without having to stop behind attitudes of defensive distrust. This confrontation with the new culture leads him to rediscover his own, to verify and evaluate it, thus acquiring greater security in his traditions, which helps him to deal with the other without fear of losing his own identity.

Self-realization passes through sincere openness to the other. When the person opens himself up to the diversity of his brother, it means that he makes himself available for confrontation and dialogue, this fact leads to a continuous inner and relational renewal, to a continuous passage from "I" to the "we".

When a religious becomes part of a multicultural community, he finds the influence of the host group important in the work of cultural adaptation. It is likely that an open attitude to

the diversity of the other and a greater willingness to provide support will help people move from a phase of marginalization to one of greater trust.

When a person migrates from one culture to another, he must face the risk of coming into contact with habits and traditions that are foreign to him. In this impact it often needs better communication skills and a broader knowledge of the environment. If this is not the case, he may feel a sense of disorientation and discomfort. This is stronger if the impact is experienced in a traumatic way or if the discomforts are trivialized by a superficial attitude. All this has repercussions on interpersonal relationships. Often in the new environment he lacks concrete points of reference.

An African brother of mine said: *"When I return to the community I have the impression of leaving Africa to enter Europe. Many factors combine to offer this impression: we speak another language instead of the local language, we listen to foreign radio, we decorate the house with images that come from Europe, we easily criticize the rulers of the country, we refer to Western criteria for judging everything, we eat in the European style, we are not hospitable to Africans"*. At this point, the impact with all these innovations can become a real cultural shock, to the point of turning into a condition of inner emptiness or loss of meaning.

What about the linguistic factor. It remains a constantly open problem, because certain nuances lead to giving completely different meanings, and misunderstandings are the order of the day.

The congregations with the creation of international communities, composed of members of different nations, race, language, culture and social background, who live together for a project of life and mission, propose that prophetic sign, a forerunner of a reconciled and unified humanity in a single family.

It is an exciting but immense task, which at other times, at the beginning of Christianity, required centuries of prayer, reflection, attempts, in which even the deviations were not absent. Today Christianity will be understandable and accepted only through the mediation of the cultural models of the people to whom it is announced.

BY WAY OF CONCLUSION: NEED TO ADAPT

This task becomes more difficult and delicate when it comes to letting the salvific message of the Gospel descend into people's hearts and the radical ways in which it has been interpreted and implemented historically by the institutes of consecrated life. Congregations are not adequately prepared to face this situation. They felt whipped out of their certainties, from their human and spiritual traditions, from what was always considered essential. Faced with new situations, they are called to review, recalibrate and verify the specific charism, and the very modality of evangelical radicalism. This is obliging the institutes to reflect that the Gospel and the consecrated life can be expressed, lived and planned in different ways, while jealously preserving their original values. At the same time they have been accustomed to the respect, esteem and appreciation of cultural differences, with listening, understanding, constructive dialogue, through the appropriation of the essential.

The International religious communities are a prophetic sign for this humanity which, if on the one hand goes towards a more globalized culture, on the other continues to show signs of racism and cultural and religious intolerance. We are aware that we must form ourselves in this new mentality, and that we must always ensure that prejudices and pre-understandings do not resurface at critical moments. It is necessary to respond to this movement of the Spirit, bearing in mind that it is the Lord who leads the small history of the congregation.

Are we sure that it is more important to become yourself and not something better? An ancient problem, even Adam and Eve thought about it and decided not to be themselves, but to become something better. Since then we have never stopped eating the forbidden fruit, taking wrong paths. But God wants us too well, he will keep the differences and these differences will continue to hurt us until we learn to be ourselves, to recognize our needs, our desires and those of others around us.