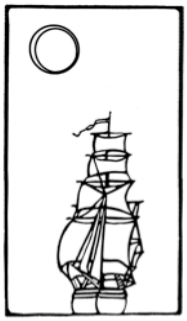

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Culture and Interculturality

Sisters of Mercy Hermanas de la Misericordia

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Dear Sisters, Associates, Companions and Friends of Mercy,

This issue, "Culture and Interculturality," has evolved over three years. Before the COVID crisis, members of MAST planned to follow-up Sister Patricia Flynn's encouragement to address this topic during an annual meeting. The theme had arisen during the last Chapter when the need arose for a distinction between "multi-cultural" and "inter-cultural." It is not enough to acknowledge we enjoy a community life in which women of many races, ethnicities and languages co-exist. Another model than co-existence was called for. What kind of recognition, re-calibration, adjustment of comfort zones, and integration does living together in a multi-cultural model require? This inevitably raises the thorny problem of racism, unconscious bias, "white supremacy" and marginalization of whoever belongs to the minority demographic. The articles here come at these challenges from various angles.

Doris Gottemoeller, R.S.M., had delivered a plenary lecture via Zoom for the June 2021 MAST meeting. For publication, she developed this essay on the French theologian Yves Congar, one of the giants of the early 20th century, whose work had a major impact on Vatican II. In "Change in the Church: The Legacy of Yves Congar, O.P.," she selects from Congar's vast opus those works dedicated to promotion of cooperative relations among religious and ethnic groups in the Church, recognition of diversity in ecclesial practice, the development of tradition which embraces different cultures, the ideal of inter-faith and inter-denominational harmony, and recognition of the dynamic power of the Holy Spirit. Doris then describes how the leadership of Pope Francis continues the legacy of Congar.

Deirdre Mullan, R.S.M., in "Racism and Interculturality," brings to her essay her decades of experience as representative of the Sisters of Mercy at the United Nations in New York. The question posed for her was, "What does racism look like when considered from an international perspective?" She starts with a comparison and contrast between the geographically separated but thematically linked lives of her father in Northern Ireland, and Nelson Mandela in South Africa. She analyzes a study published by the American Psychological Association on 7 factors that defines racism in the U.S.—but it could be the skeletal support for any country's racial divide. Finally, she describes the process of intentional intercultural living which transcends racial, linguistic, religious and ethnic divisions.

Deborah Watson, R.S.M., is a Californian dedicated to a mission to live interculturally. For the last 36 years, she has been serving in education, community organizing, communication and advocacy for women alongside Mercies in Peru and Argentina. In "Interculturality: A Personal Perspective in Light of Pope Francis' *Fratelli Tutti*," she describes her change of consciousness years ago as a U.S. woman and the cultural adjustments that have been part of her life in the southern hemisphere. She draws a parallel between her ideals and the vision of Pope Francis--the respect and support minority and majority populations ideally offer each other when they embrace an intercultural model for living together.

Mary Oladimeji, R.S.M., was born in Lagos, Nigeria. In "Intercultural Issues: The Voice of a Yoruba Woman," she engages the reader with the story of her own early life in an extended family characterized by Christian faith and Yoruba community traditions, language, and values. One's name has sacred, familial, intimate and unique features. Yoruba culture is well defined by its consultative norms and its social customs that define family relations, hospitality and decision-making. Western clericalism, in which a pastor tries to assert his ecclesial authority, can "rub" against Yoruba culture. When Mary came to the U.S. and entered the Sisters of Mercy, she also experienced cultural "rubs." Her autobiographical account is informative for readers so non-Africans can understand the specifics of what "intercultural" living can involve on a day-to-day basis.

Aline Paris, R.S.M., grew up in a bi-lingual French-English culture, and has served as simultaneous translator from French to English. She offers a reflection on Mark 7:24-30, the healing of the Syro-Phoenician mother's daughter in "Jesus, A Man of His Time." This episode, when read from the view of Jesus who grew as a human being, sounds to Aline like a boundary-crossing by Jesus. The woman's repartee broadened his horizon, resulting in an inter-cultural sense of his mission. If before, his focus was on "the lost sheep of the house of Israel," his compassion afterwards extends to Gentiles.

Diane Guerin, R.S.M., long involved in offering trainings in non-violent activism, does a book review of Robin DiAngelo's *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* (2018). DiAngelo's discussion is focused on white-black identity politics in the U.S. but has application to other racial divides. DiAngelo explores the defenses and self-protective instincts (the fragility) that arise in whites when they are challenged about their white supremacy and racist practices. How does racism shape the lives of white people?

Maria Luisa Vera, R.S.M, along with Doris Gottemoeller, R.S.M. made a Zoom plenary presentation at the annual meeting of MAST, held virtually, on June 12, 2021. It was titled "Ideas and Feelings on Interculturality: A Call to Organic Living." The link to her YouTube video is provided on page 40.

Hopefully, this issue of *The MAST Journal* will contribute to the Mercy-wide effort to untangle the institutional practices of racism, reduce the likelihood of violence, and inspire a commitment to learn about people of other cultures. The goal is to work toward living more intentionally an inter-cultural consciousness in community life, ministerial setting, and workplace environment.

Yours,

Eloise Rosenblatt

Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M.
Editor, *The MAST Journal*

Change in the Church: The Legacy of Yves Congar, O.P. [1]

Doris Gottemoeller, R.S.M.

It's been many decades since I wrote a book-length treatment of Yves Congar's work entitled, *The Theory of Development of Dogma in the Ecclesiology of Yves Congar*. It was within a decade of the close of the Second Vatican Council, and my graduate studies had focused on the study of the Church, i.e., ecclesiology. I knew that Congar had played a very influential role in the crafting of several Council documents, so he was a natural choice.

What I couldn't have foreseen then, and what has come increasingly to the fore, is his continuing relevance. "Development of Doctrine" includes changes in the Church's teachings, in liturgical practice, and, to some extent, in moral understandings. While we have all witnessed and participated in these changes, we may not stop to reflect on how and why change happens. At the same time, why do official Church leaders sometimes seem resistant to other changes which we might desire?

The topic of change in the Church has come even more to the fore during the papacy of Pope Francis. His famous remark, "Who am I to judge?" when asked about homosexuality, his Apostolic Exhortation after the synod on the family, *Amoris Laetitia*[2] and his promotion of women to roles in the Church previously limited to men all speak to his willingness to envision further change in the Church. In what follows I'd like to demonstrate how Pope Francis is continuing the legacy of Yves Congar.

I'll begin with some pertinent biographical facts about Yves Congar, since he is probably not well known to all, especially his contributions to the Second Vatican Council. Then I'll give some examples of change in the Church, past and present. That will be followed by a brief analysis of the dynamism of change, illustrated by both Yves Congar and Pope Francis. The conclusion will point toward the future.

Yves Congar, 20th Century Theologian

Yves Congar was born on April 13, 1904, to middle-class parents in the town of Sedan, France. His early playmates were Protestant and Jewish children, and, after the Germans burned the local Catholic church in 1914, the Catholics used a Protestant chapel for Mass for six years. It is easy to see in these circumstances a prologue to his later commitment to ecumenical and interfaith dialogue. By the time he was a teenager he determined he wanted to be a priest, and he entered the Dominican Order in Saulchoir, Belgium, in 1924. He was ordained in 1930.

> He had access to the fruits of the biblical, patristic, and liturgical renewals of the early 20th century.

The timing of Congar's education is significant. The Church was emerging from the Modernist crisis which had sought to make Catholicism more relevant by challenging the traditional understanding of dogma and authority; now scholars were finding a new openness to creative work. Some of the names associated with this moment in French history are M.D. Chenu, Henri de Lubac, Jean Danielou, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, and Congar himself. They dominated the French scene up to and through the Second Vatican Council.

To say that Congar was a prolific writer is an incredible understatement. His bibliography includes close to a thousand articles and books. He said at one point, "I hoped, by means of studies of incontestable scientific and theological value, to

gain the credit necessary to cover and support my views on ecumenism and thus convert whatever kudos and prestige might accrue to my humble person to the profit of the cause I serve." That might count as his personal mission statement! His investigations took him on several trips to Germany to familiarize himself with Luther's work and environment, and, also to Paris where he attended lectures at the Institut Catholique at the Protestant Faculty of Theology and made friends with a Franco-Russian circle composed of Orthodox, Protestants, and Catholics. In 1936 he paid his first visit to England and began his contact with English culture and the Anglican religion. In 1937 he published his first ground-breaking book, *Chrétiens désunis. Principes d'un "oecuménisme " catholique*.[3]

Just before the war there were some intimations of official displeasure with the work of Congar and his associates, but during the war he was imprisoned in Germany and hence involuntarily silenced. After the war, though, Congar suffered increasingly from suspicion, disapproval, and arbitrary censorship, culminating in a period of virtual silence from 1954 to 1956. In part this was a Vatican reaction to a book he published in 1950, *True and False Reform in the Church*, which we'll return to later. Congar was exiled from his home, his colleagues, his books, and his friends in Paris. In the strange way that God works, though, this silencing turned into an opportunity for new growth which was to serve him well in what lay before him. He spent the years studying in Jerusalem at the *École Biblique et Archéologique Française* and in Rome and Cambridge.

On his return from England in 1956, Congar was assigned as director of the Dominican monastery at Strasbourg where he resided for the rest of his career, engaging in an intensely active pastoral ministry as well as continuing his scholarly work with an increasing degree of liberty and approbation. The announcement of the Second Vatican council inaugurated a new stage in his life, as he was almost immediately named to the Preparatory Commission by Pope John XXIII. Subsequently he became a member of the Theological Commission and one of the most influential theologians at the Council.

A thorough analysis of Congar's contribution to the Council would include, in particular, the drafting of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*), on Revelation (*Dei Verbum*); the decree on Ecumenism (*Unitatis Reintegratio*); on the relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (*Nostra Aetate*) and on the Church's missionary activity (*Ad Gentes)*.

Fans and critics of the Second Vatican Council all agree that it was an agent of considerable change in the Church. Let's look at some of the changes.

Change in the Church

Looking backward, we can recognize that there have been changes in liturgical and pastoral practices and in dogmatic and moral teachings over the centuries. For example, the Council of Nicaea (325) gave us a Credo that we still use; the Council of Ephesus (431) declared that Mary is the Mother of God, and the Council of Trent (1545-1563) instituted diocesan structures and seminary training which we still use. Gradually slavery came to be recognized as sinful and that lending money at interest is not necessarily the sin of usury.

Many of the 20 ecumenical Councils were agents of significant change, but none more so than the Second Vatican Council.

Many of the 20 ecumenical Councils were agents of significant change, but none more so than the Second Vatican Council. We could probably all name many changes that have occurred in our lifetimes. Changes in the celebration of the Eucharist, in ecumenical

relations, and in religious life itself all come to mind. We could also evaluate these changes and, perhaps, list some changes we still hope for.

The Dynamics of Change

How does change happen in the Church? If there has been no new Divine Revelation recorded since the death of the last Evangelist and Apostle, what can change? How do we distinguish between Spirit-directed change and false change? Some key sources that help us answer these questions are two of Congar's works, *True and False Reform in the Church*[4]; *Tradition and Traditions*[5]; the Dogmatic Constitution on Revelation, *Dei Verbum* and the Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Reintegratio.*

The earliest source, *True and False Reform in the Church*, published in 1950, triggered Congar's silencing. Not long after its publication the Holy Office forbade its reprinting or translation into other languages. Yet less than 20 years later, most of its insights had found their way into the documents of the Council. One writer calls it "arguably Congar's most important and original contribution to Catholic theology." In it Congar offered four conditions for reform without schism. First, reform must be pursued in charity and in a spirit of pastoral service. Secondly, it is essential to maintain community with dialogue, not diatribe; a way to start is to focus on what's held in common and not what separates people. The third condition for reform without schism is patience. Over time, some ideas which seemed radical may turn out to be helpful and orthodox. And the fourth condition is renewal through adaptation. Not through the introduction of some novelty, but through the practice of *ressourcement*, a grounding in the foundations of the faith prior to adapting to some contemporary circumstance or insight. (As a founding member of the Catholic Common Ground Initiative, I recognize these as very similar to our charter.)

Tradition and Traditions was originally two studies, published in 1960 and 1963, which presented a historical treatment and a systematic treatment of the topic. Congar develops the very helpful distinction between traditions, practices which emerge variously in different cultures, and which change in response to cultural changes and Tradition (with a capital "T") which is the Spirit-led interpretation of Revelation. This is an exhaustive historical study, documenting almost every significant change in almost two millennia. The systematic treatment clarifies the relationship between Scripture and Tradition and the work of the People of God in their understanding and transmission of revelation. For our purposes, the most significant theme is that of Tradition as development. The oral teachings of Jesus were originally passed from one teacher to another until they came to be committed to writing, namely, the Gospels. A gradually growing treasury of spiritual reflection, based on the biblical text, began to accumulate and to be passed on. At times it was necessary to clarify the authentic teaching, sometimes in response to a growing error such as Nestorianism (the doctrine that there were two separate persons, one human and one divine, in Jesus Christ) or Arianism (the teaching that the Son of God is distinct from the Father and subordinate to him). This Spirit-led process of development is what is called Tradition.

One of the achievements of *Dei Verbum* is to clarify the relationship between Tradition and Scripture. Previously some scholars had promoted a "two-source" theory: Revelation comes to us through two sources. But in the words of the Dogmatic Constitution on Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, "Sacred tradition and sacred Scripture form one sacred deposit of the word of God, which is committed to the Church. Holding fast to this deposit, the entire holy people united with their shepherds remain always steadfast in the teaching of the apostles, in the common life, in the

breaking of the bread, and in prayer so that in holding to, practicing, and professing the heritage of the faith, there results on the part of the bishops and the faithful a remarkable common effort." Note the phrase, "the entire holy people united with their shepherds" (§10).

The *Decree on Ecumenism* speaks quite clearly about the need for change in the Church "Christ summons the Church, as she goes her pilgrim way, to that continual reformation of which she always has need, insofar as she is an institution of men here on earth. Therefore, if the influence of events or the times has led to deficiencies in conduct, in Church discipline, or even in the formulation of doctrine which must be carefully distinguished from the deposit itself of faith), these should be appropriately rectified at the proper moment" (§6).

At the risk of over-simplifying, let me suggest that change, specifically, doctrinal change, occurs in three inter-related processes involving the entire holy people united with their shepherds. The first stage is the Spirit-led insight of the faithful, the *sensus fidei.* In the words of *Lumen Gentium*, "The body of the faithful as a whole, anointed as they are by the Holy One, cannot err in matters of belief. Thanks to a supernatural sense of the faith which characterizes the people as a whole, it manifests this unerring quality when 'from the bishops down to the last member of the laity,' it shows universal agreement in matters of faith and morals." (§12) If you stop and think about it a little while, you can see that this is a pretty challenging requirement. We might think that the Church is ready for women priests, but the idea would be not at all acceptable to Catholics in India or Uganda. "Universal agreement" is a pretty high bar! We might say that this is an example of the importance of interculturality in the People of God.

"Universal agreement" is a pretty high bar! We might say that this is an example of the importance of interculturality in the People of God.

Another helpful passage occurs in *Dei Verbum*: "The tradition which comes from the apostles develops in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit. For there is growth in the understanding of the realities and the words which have been handed down. This happens through the contemplation and study made by believers, who treasure these things in their hearts, through the intimate understanding of spiritual things they experience, and through the preaching of those who have received through episcopal succession the sure gift of truth" (§8).

This passage also underscores the importance of the second process, namely, the articulation by pastors and scholars. As an insight matures, it might find its way into pastoral practice or Sunday homilies. Scholars might examine it from various angles in their specialized journals. As its relevance and cogency emerges, it might lead to the third stage, namely, an authoritative pronouncement by the magisterium.

This might come from a variety of sources such as a national conference of bishops, a Vatican congregation, or the pope himself. We are familiar with encyclicals, dogmatic constitutions, and various exhortations. The most authoritative pronouncement of all is that of an ecumenical council. As *Dei Verbum* says, "The task of authentically interpreting the word of God, whether written or handed on, has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church, whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ. This teaching office is not above the word of God, but serves it, teaching only what has been handed on, listening to it devoutly, guarding it scrupulously, and explaining it faithfully by divine

commission and with the help of the Holy Spirit; it draws from this one deposit of faith everything which it presents for belief as divinely revealed." (§8) Further, not every pronouncement is equally authoritative; the *Decree on Ecumenism* describes a hierarchy of truths, based on their relationship to the foundation of our faith (§11). Not every disagreement with a pronouncement is a heresy!

And, some say, the fourth stage is the reception by the faithful. An example would be the reception (or non-reception) of the prohibition of contraception in *Humanae Vitae*.

Pope Francis and the Legacy of Yves Congar

After this exceedingly limited summary of some of Congar's (and Vatican II's) contributions to our understanding of change in the Church, let's look at its actualization in the ministry of Pope Francis. For starters both men were exposed at an early age to a diversity of religious and cultural influences. For Francis, it meant growing up in Buenos Aires, far from the locus of papal activity.

From the moment when Francis stepped out on the balcony to greet the faithful after his election, he signaled change, e.g., his initial request for prayers and his adoption of the name "Francis," the founder of the Franciscan order. But in order to highlight the parallel with Congar's treatment of development in the Church, I'll follow the three stages of development we noted above and see how Francis is promoting them.

First of all, ascertaining the *sensus fidei* of the People of God. In a study of Francis by Massimo Faggioli titled *The Liminal Papacy of Pope Francis*[6] he highlights how Francis has expanded the boundaries of the Catholic communion, both geographically and doctrinally.[7] With respect to the former, his activities are much more focused on prisons, hospitals, slums, and refugee camps than on pontifical universities and academies and the halls of ecclesiastical and political power in Rome and the Vatican.[8] His first trip as pontiff was to Lampedusa, in southern Italy, the site of drowning of illegal migrants; his most recent trip was to Iraq to visit the struggling Catholic community there as well as the Shiite Muslim leader the Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani. Other stops on papal travels included countries like Myanmar and Bangladesh, Kenya and Uganda, Estonia and Latvia—hardly first world capitals. When he celebrated the opening of the Jubilee of the Year of Mercy it was in Bangui in the Central African Republic. Subsequent celebrations were not in St. Peter's Basilica, but in hospitals, elder care facilities, prisons, detention camps for refugees, and with the families, wives and children of priests who had left the ordained ministry.

His convening of the Synod on the Family was probably his most eyebrow-raising expression of expanding the perceived 'center' of the Church. In an earlier work. *Evangelii Gaudium*, he had written, "I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security" (§49). In the synod he included the peripheral condition of many Catholics in so-called "irregular situations." Of the many beautiful quotes in *Amoris Laetitia*, let me cite just one. "There are two ways of thinking which recur throughout the Church's history: casting off and reinstating. The Church's way, from the time of the Council of Jerusalem, has always been the way of Jesus, the way of mercy and reinstatement. The way of the Church is not to condemn anyone forever; it is to pour out the balm of God's mercy on all those who ask for it with a sincere heart" (§ 296).

The summoning of the synods on youth, on the family and on the Amazon, as well as the upcoming synod in 2023 are probably the best examples of consulting the faithful. In particular, Francis has moved the next synod back a year in order to allow for periods of consultation in every local diocese and at the continental level before the gathering of the bishops in Rome.

Consultations will be held in local dioceses from Oct. 2021 to April 2022; those at the continental level from Sept. 2022 to March 2023. The overall theme for this process is "For a synodal Church: communion, participation and mission." The press is calling this "a synod about synods." Doubtlessly we will all be hearing about this in the months to come and, I assume, offered an opportunity to contribute.

Francis also gives full measure to the work of theologians and pastors in articulating the *sensus fidelium*. In *The Joy of the Gospel,* he says "Proclaiming the Gospel message to different cultures. . . involves proclaiming it to professional, scientific, and academic circles" (§132). He goes on to discuss the contributions of theologians, universities, and Catholic schools. In a bit of wisdom he adds, "[T]he Church, and theology exist to evangelize, and not be content with a desk-bound theology." Next, he focuses on preaching and the characteristics of a good homily. "The homily cannot be a form of entertainment like those presented by the media, yet it does need to give life and meaning to the [liturgical] celebration" (§138).

We can see a kind of reciprocity here between consulting the faithful and evangelizing them: the *sensus fidelium* is in part shaped by what they hear from the pulpit and an effective homilist or theologian has listened to the faithful.

The third stage in change, or development of doctrine, in the Church is a magisterial pronouncement. Pope Francis has published two encyclicals, *Laudato Si* and *Fratelli Tutti*, as well as several apostolic exhortations, most notably those following the synods on evangelization and on the family. At the same time our U.S. bishops conference have issued various documents such as *Open Wide Our Hearts*, in 2019 against racism, and the periodic "Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship." It should be noted that the Vatican Office has preempted any upcoming statement about permitting public figures to receive the Eucharist.

Toward the Future

Finally, as Sisters of Mercy we share with the people of every race and nation the gifts of the Spirit which prompts us to new acts of Gospel witness. We remember that Christian living is itself an articulation of the *sensus fidelium.* As we said in the Founding Document for our Institute, "We believe that the life of our community is a vibrant sign of the gospel; we believe that the presence of the church is made visible in this world through our service to the poor, sick and ignorant." Further, our advocacy for the Mercy Critical Concerns can be a way to foster change in the Church. And let us resolve to be active participants in the consultation processes leading up to the synod in 2023.◆

Endnotes

[1]This paper is adapted from the webinar and recording of Doris Gottemoeller as opening presentation at the Annual Meeting of the Mercy Association in Scripture and Theology on June 12, 2021. The webinar is retrievable at You-Tube https://youtu.be/cE2S783mF3s

[2] *The Joy of Love. On Love in the Family* (Frederick,MD: The Word Among Us Press, 2016).

[3]Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1937.

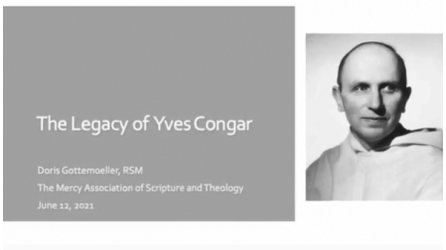
[4] Trans: Paul Philibert, O.P. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011).

[5] Trans: Michael Naseby and Thomas Rainborough (NY: Macmillan Company, 1966).

[6] Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2012.

[7] Massimo Faggioli, *The Liminal Papacy of Pope Francis: Moving toward Global Catholicity* (New York: Orbis Books, 2020): 83.

[8] Ibid, p. 76.



Racism and Interculturality

Deirdre Mullan, R.S.M.

The topic, racism and interculturality, invites me to dig deep. Today we are living at a time when words matter!

All across the globe, we are witnessing how words cause damage. They stoke antagonism and keep people paralyzed in opposition to each other. Words generate a constant shift of political paradigms and words create turmoil.

I was born in Derry, on the northern part of the island of Ireland. It was here that I first encountered the Sisters of Mercy who had come to Derry in 1848. Our foundress was Mary Ann Doyle, Catherine McAuley's companion. "It started with two – Sister Doyle and I."

I taught for over 20 years in Derry before assuming the role as Director of our Mercy Global office at the United Nations. I am an adviser to UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund, formerly United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund) with the specific role of forming partnerships between UNICEF and women religious. I serve as a trustee with ARISE, the anti-slavery and human trafficking organization based in London and New York. I am one of the coordinators of the NGO (Non-governmental Organization) --The Mercy Girl Effect.

Words generate a constant shift of political paradigms and words create turmoil.

When I received the invitation to write, I wondered if I should venture into these murky waters. The theme is especially difficult in the world we currently inhabit, where structural exclusion seems to be the order of the day and nationalistic tendencies seem to have eroded the concept of the common good. The topic, Racism and Interculturality, poses a major challenge to that ever-old, ever-new question:

"Who Then is my Neighbor?"

Coming as I do from a story-telling nation, I will weave my way around this very challenging topic, using the stories of two significant teachers in my life.

One was President Nelson Mandela, former President of South Africa. As a young teacher, I knew about the apartheid policies in South Africa because my younger brother Don was an advocate for workers in the "Dunnes Store Strikes" in Ireland, a project to educate customers at the checkout about the reasons for boycotting South African produce.

Mr. Mandela was born on 18 July 1918 in the small village of Mvezo, on the banks of the Mbashe River, in the Eastern Cape of South Africa, as the First World War was entering its final months. On the following day, 19 July 1918, in the town of Derry, on the banks of the River Foyle, in the northwestern part of the island of Ireland, my father, Charles Mullan, was born. One was an African baby with black skin, the other a European baby with white skin. Neither was born to hate the other. Both grew up in deeply divided societies.

Nelson Mandela suffered injustice because of the color of his skin. Charles Mullan suffered injustice because of his cultural background and religion. Neither filled their children with hate; they both taught by example that another way was possible! Near the end of his autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom*, Nelson Mandela wrote the following:

> No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.[1]

President Mandela's autobiography is the powerful testimony of a man who refused to hate despite the lifetime of racial discrimination he suffered, culminating in 27 years of unjust imprisonment. Mandela emerged from prison, not calling for retribution and revenge, but proclaiming his hope for a "rainbow nation" in which all the peoples of a new democratic South Africa would be cherished with the respect due to every human.

When Mr. Mandela said, "No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion," what did he mean? And what does it mean for us as Sisters of Mercy who belong to a diverse and international Congregation, drawing membership from 55 nation states?[2]

Racism is both an American problem and a global problem. It is not a problem for black people to solve.

Yes, we are diverse. Yes, we have different ethnicities and national origins. Yes, we speak different languages, with different accents and dialects.[3] Yes, we have different cultures, and we have different ways of expressing our understanding of God and the source of our creation. But does that make us different? So different that some choose to consider their color, culture, gender or spirituality to be more "pure," "true," "superior" or "normative"?

The Mercy Global Family forms a very small part of a more than 7 billion composing the global human family. In our family, some of us are intellectually more gifted, some of us are physically more powerful, some are economically more powerful, and some richer in cultural appreciation. Does that give us the right, either as individuals or collectively, to consider ourselves superior to others?

What Does Democracy Mean?

As countries across the globe become more focused on their nationalist interests, we wonder what democracy actually means? In this country (USA), and indeed in my own country (Ireland), the notion of democracy has many interpretations. In many countries, democracy and the privileges it brings have been largely reserved for white people through the intentional exclusion and oppression of people of color. The deep racial and ethnic inequities that exist today in the USA are a direct result of structural racism that has led to the historical and contemporary policies, practices, and norms that create and maintain white supremacy. Racism is both an American problem and a global problem. It is not a problem for black people to solve.

One description of racism as an American problem has been developed by Steven O. Roberts and Michael T. Rizzo in a paper they published in 2020 by the American Psychological Association. These researchers identified seven factors that contribute to American racism in particular. These factors are: Categories; Factions; Segregation; Hierarchy; Power; Media and Passivism. In the course of my discussion, I will use examples from both my personal life and what I have witnessed and experienced as a new citizen of this country.

Categories

"Categories" describes a system, which organizes people into distinct groups based on essentialist and normative reasoning. Individuals do not only learn about categories; they are embedded within us. I became aware of the concept of embedded categorization when I worked with a group of Catholic and Protestant young people (all white) in the north of Ireland during the "Irish-troubles." In an effort to promote mutual understanding, we used the medium of creative dance. The embedded perceptions about the "other" which emerged were both alarming and challenging. Most of the group had never actually interacted with persons from the other

group, yet their perception of differences was deeply embedded. This was very troubling in people so young.

Factions

When people find themselves divided into factions, their behavior is controlled by in-group loyalties, along with inter-group competition. People's positive perceptions of themselves get extended to positive identification of their group. They are conditioned to prefer association with other people like themselves.

When people find themselves divided into factions, their behavior is controlled by in-group loyalties, along with inter-group competition.

Because people care about cooperative alliances, they intuitively interpret the groups that they are assigned to as requiring their cooperation and trust, which leads to behaving in ways that benefit the in-group. Again, this was highly visible during the "Dance of Co-Existence," the exercise mentioned above, when the teenagers displayed group loyalty. In-group loyalty and factionalism is currently playing out in the U.S. Congress, where truth and facts are being sacrificed for in-group loyalty.

Segregation

In the U.S. and across the globe, racial segregation is pervasive at macro and micro levels. Segregation hardens racist perceptions and beliefs through the denial of intergroup contact. In the USA, because White Americans have historically constituted a numerical majority and occupied most positions of power, they have been able to establish societal norms. These include such norms as which accents are considered standard and who assumes what official positions in political elections. The fact that this numerical majority will be eroded by 2042, when Americans of color are projected to make up a majority of the U.S. population, is causing many White Americans to feel that their status is under threat, causing greater pro-White bias and support for extremist political candidates.

This was especially evident in the past four years during the Trump administration. While the 45th President of the United States did not cause American racism, his authoritarian, divisive, hierarchy-reinforcing, and racially prejudiced statements certainly contributed to a re-empowerment of White supremacists. A blatant example of this was when Trump proposed that the U.S. accept more people from countries like Norway, a predominantly White nation, and fewer people from countries like Haiti, a predominantly Black-Latino nation, which he referred to as a "shithole." [4]

In the same manner, a Unionist-controlled (Britain-sympathetic) government in Northern Ireland reinforced segregation between Catholic and Protestant peoples through a process of gerrymandering of electoral voting wards. This resulted in a majority-Catholic population in my home city of Derry, also called Londonderry, being denied voting rights, decent housing and jobs. As a Catholic man, my father, Charles Mullan, had no right to vote until 1969.

Hierarchy

Hierarchical organization of peoples emboldens some to behave in racist ways. As children growing up in Ireland, we looked to America as the land of possibilities. I think our ideas were in part formulated by my American grandmother, born in Philadelphia, who storied all her 37 grandchildren with grandiose tales of life in the USA. The truth of the matter was that her parents had escaped the poverty and class bigotry of Ireland and emigrated to the USA to begin a new life. That life was short-lived when my great-grandmother died giving birth to my grandmother's sister. Then two small American-

born children were returned to Ireland, where they remained for the rest of their lives. They never, however, lost the fairytale that they belonged to a global hierarchy, or as my Grandma would tell us, the greatest country in the world!

Americans are bombarded with social ideologies that legitimate their right to a place at the top of the world. Some ideologies are subtle, like the myth which suggests that hard work breeds success, despite the fact that success is more attainable for some than for others. Individuals who subscribe to the Protestant work ethic are more likely to attribute hierarchies to dispositions (e.g., those at the top simply work harder than those at the bottom), rather than to biased social structures.

Another ideology is the depiction of God as White and male. In contemporary USA, God is often conceptualized as a White male, which among Black and White Americans, adults and children, predicts evaluating White job candidates as particularly leadership-worthy. Americans are bombarded with social myths that assert that high-status membership is earned by hard work, fixed at birth, and given by God who is assumed to be White. As the first black President, Barack Obama often worked under that old, unspoken pressure that can still freeze a black student at a predominantly White school --one must be twice as good in order to break even.

Power

Holding positions of power allows Whites to legislate racism on both micro and macro levels. Because White Americans have historically constituted a numerical majority and occupied most positions of power, they have been able to establish societal norms. Thus, white supremacy is deeply and intricately woven into the fabric of U.S. society. At the micro level, parents influence much of their children's lives, and children are particularly sensitive to what authority figures do and say when determining what is or is not appropriate. Examples playing out at present suggest that parents who exercise a high degree of control are more likely to have children who trust authority figures. This is relevant in understanding the dynamics of movements like Black Lives Matter and Support the Blue.

That same perception was true when I was growing up in Northern Ireland where the majority of the police force was Protestant. As a child, I had a fear and distrust of the police. This fear and distrust were reinforced for me as a 16- year -old girl, when I witnessed Catholic women and men marching for civil rights in 1969, being battered to the ground. Years later, that image deeply affected me when, as an adult, I was appointed by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to be part of a group looking at the under-representation of women, Catholics and ethnic minorities in the police force. I was invited to a meeting at police headquarters in a very sectarian part of Northern Ireland. The environment was culturally oppressive, and I remember distinctly checking under my car in the police yard, to make sure a bomb had not been attached while I was inside at the meeting!

Racial socialization is the process by which parents transmit their beliefs about race to their children, through implicit, explicit, intentional, or accidental means.

How parents talk about race matters. Racial socialization is the process by which parents transmit their beliefs about race to their children, through implicit, explicit, intentional, or accidental means. Some White parents tend to adopt a colorblind ideology, ostensibly believing that race does not matter and that conversations about race should be avoided. However, this leaves the observations and myths learned from the broader

society unchallenged and reinforces the legitimacy of racial hierarchy. In contrast, parents of color often speak with their children about historical and structural inequalities, and about how to deal with racial biases that they might encounter in the real world.

Simply put, American society teaches American citizens that whiteness is superior. While parents of color often speak out against those lessons to prevent their children from internalizing them, many White parents often remain silent about those lessons, allowing their children to internalize them.

Media

Media is the medium which legitimizes overrepresented and idealized representations of the dominant group. That the media is both part of the problem and solution to the current race problem playing out in the USA is evident in the ethnicity of the newscasters. We have the CNN version of news in which racially diverse anchors speak to viewers, in contrast to the domination by White news anchors on Fox.

An article by John Amato, entitled "Helping the West's adversaries seems to be the goal of Fox News and its parent company, NewsCorp," the author writes:

> In an interview with the former Australian Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull stated very clearly that right-wing media mogul Rupert Murdoch has done more to divide and damage America with the help of Donald Trump than Russian President Vladimir Putin.
>
> What does Vladimir Putin want to do with his operations in America? He wants to divide America and turn Americans against each other, said Turnbull at a parliamentary hearing in Sydney on media diversity. That is exactly what Murdoch has done: Divided Americans against each other and so undermined their faith in political institutions that a mob of thousands of people, many of them armed, stormed the Capitol.
>
> Turnbull said that instead of appealing to the mainstream, media companies like Murdoch's thrive by cultivating the fringe.
>
> "Just reflect on the damage that Murdoch's publications and outlets (Fox News), particularly in the United States, have done to democracy there," Turnbull said. "I mean, the January 6th sacking of the U.S. Capitol was one of the most terrible events in American history."[5]

Over the first three years of Trump's presidency, nation-wide hate crimes on the basis of race, religion, and sexual orientation all increased at a rapid rate, according to Pew Research. The messaging of the former President was a constant media circus. In the U.S., media is important. The average household has two televisions. The average citizen watches television for around 2.8 hours a day. Around 84% of U.S. households own a computer and 77% of U.S. citizens own a cell phone with internet access.

How the media portrays racial groups thus plays a pivotal role in reinforcing American racism. In a 2000 study conducted to look at how the media feeds racism, Dixon and Linz compared how often people were depicted as criminals and victims on television, in contrast to actual crime reports. They found that Black Americans were overrepresented as criminals and underrepresented as victims, whereas White Americans were underrepresented as criminals and overrepresented as victims. Viewers exposed to such portrayals are more likely to perceive Black people as criminals.[6]

Media has also been used as a powerful tool to depict immigrants as people who want to steal their way into the USA. Everyone coming into the USA is not a criminal!

My own experience testifies to this. In between the expiration of an R Visa (religious), and the reward of a Green Card to work as the Sisters of Mercy representative at the United Nations, I was pulled aside by U.S. border control many times. At the top of his voice (It was

usually a male officer), the border patrol person called out, "Alien on parole." Then two officers escorted me to a facility away from everyone else. While I was initially intimidated, when this happened several times, I became angry and watchful. The only alien I had ever met was the movie character ET, and now here I was at a U.S. border point being assigned a similar status! Most of the other people being held were people of African, Latino or Asian descent. Many had small children and were held in a crowded facility. One time, when I was questioned where I worked, the border patrol officer suggested I would do better in a grade school than in that useless place called the United Nations. I remained silent but noted his number and subsequently reported this harassment to the immigration authorities. I wondered how the other people fared, given my experience as a White, educated woman!

Passivism

Passivism, when people stand or look the other way when something morally wrong occurs, is a way of denying the existence of racism. Taking no action can encourage others to do the same, allowing racism and hatred to fester and persist. Perhaps the most insidious component of American racism is passive racism, which is best described as apathy toward systems of racial advantage, or denial that these systems actually exist.

This is a phenomenon not confined to the USA. The bystander/denier culture has long been alive and well across the globe. In my culture, the saying: "Whatever you say – Say NOTHING," was the mantra told to countless generations of Catholic youth as a way to avoid trouble, especially when confronted by the police.

Passivism or the "bystander effect" is motivated by at least three factors: a) diffusion of responsibility; b) fear that helping will elicit negative public judgment; or c) the belief that the situation must not really be an emergency if nobody else is helping!

I recall a moment in my life when I was a bystander. Once when returning from school, I noticed a crowd of people near the church. As I approached, I saw a young woman, who was tied to a lamppost and tarred and feathered. Her crime was that she was dating one of the British soldiers stationed in the army barracks in Derry. Her punishment was a reminder to all local girls to stay away from British soldiers. Her eyes met mine and, as I turned away, that image stayed with me for many years. A paralyzing fear was my motive for turning away. But while I may have turned away, her tied-up body and frightened eyes visited me for many years.

The term xenophobia, which is often linked to racism, breeds fear and hatred of strangers or anything that is strange or foreign. While globalization has brought us closer together interweaving our lives both nationally and internationally in complex and inextricable ways, a new wave of tribalism is also being birthing all across the globe. The September 11th attacks in New York marked a new and more sinister wave of fear of the stranger.

Small non-state groups, hard to identify, are capable of organizing globally and wreaking havoc on a large scale. They have caused decades of regression in the effort to create an ethos of tolerance and respect. Driven by religious hatred or a particular ideology, they are willing to commit suicide bombings and embrace self-destruction as a religious act guaranteeing their entry into paradise. They make no distinction between combatant and non-combatant, innocent or guilty, involved or disengaged.

Religion and Politics

The openness of global societies and their interconnectedness reinforces their vulnerability to acts of political terrorism. The wars being waged by terrorists do not use conventional warfare methods. Religious ideology, political demands or economic motives are used to justify destructive attacks, kidnappings, and mass murders. As a

result, a new fear of "the other" has taken hold, both in this country and beyond. The politics of identity has replaced the politics of ideology. And identity divides. The very process creates an "us" and "them."

Religion typically helps believers find meaning and make sense of what is happening. Globalization can be experienced as profoundly destabilizing. Faced with change, those who feel threatened can turn to religion as a source of stability, an expression of all things they presume do not change. The word "religion" comes from the Latin *religare*, meaning to bind. That is what religions did, and still do. Religious faith binds people to God and to each other in communities. What religions have in common, especially in the case of the great monotheisms, is that they can create unities, systems, wholes. They bind faith communities together through shared texts, rituals, narratives, collective ceremonies, and symbols. Religions, as total systems of meaning, create totalities.

The great tragedy of WWII in the twentieth century happened when politics morphed into a religion, when a nation (in the case of Germany) embraced fascism as a religious-like cult of political identity. The single greatest risk we face in the twenty-first century is not that politics is religionized, but rather when religion is politicized.

Biblical monotheism represents the development of a universal inclusive spirit-- when humanity lifted its sights beyond the tribe, the city and the nation and thought of humanity as a whole. To this day, more than any other actor on the world stage, the great religions fulfill the imperative, "Think globally and act locally."

I have often seen this played out at the United Nations when the Holy See Mission challenges member states. Speaking to the special session called to combat Racism and Xenophobia held in New York on February 12, 2021, H. E. Archbishop Gabriele Caccia, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations, issued the following statement:

> The equal dignity of each person requires us never to turn a blind eye to racism or exclusion, but rather to turn to every person with openness, solidarity, and love. The ongoing disease of racism is a virus that can quickly mutate. Instances of racism continue to shame us, for they show that our supposed social progress is not as real or definitive as we think.
>
> We see that the evil of racism, xenophobia, and discrimination especially affects migrants and refugees. As Pope Francis stated in his encyclical letter *Fratelli Tutti*, "No one will ever openly deny that[they] are human beings, yet in practice, by our decisions and the way we treat them, we can show that we consider them less worthy, less important, less human." This is unacceptable.
>
> Fear of the "other" (xenophobia) also causes much of the intolerance, violence, and persecution suffered by an increasing number of people on the basis of their religion or belief. Disregard for the right to religious freedom, the "primary and fundamental human right," has led to individual believers and groups being denied basic rights, imprisoned, tortured, and even murdered because of their faith while perpetrators enjoy impunity. Some religious minorities are even in danger of being entirely extinguished in certain regions, including Christians who represent the most persecuted group globally.
>
> The international community must together combat racism, xenophobia and discrimination, and the "throw-away" culture they reflect. Only true fraternity can overcome this illness. Pope Francis asserted during the commemoration of the International Day of Human Fraternity, in a very clear and unequivocal way, "There is no time for indifference"– "either we are brothers and sisters, or we destroy [one another]."[7]

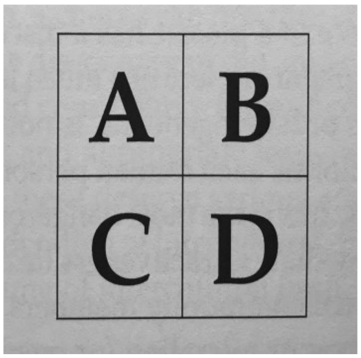
So, the question remains: What is the way forward and how do we get there? As Jonathan Sacks expressed it:

It was one thing for Christians to fight each other

> in the age of the Crusades; it is quite another to do so in the age of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons. It was one thing for wars to take place on a battlefield, another when anywhere – a plane, a bus, a hijacked delivery truck – can become the frontline and scene of terror.[8]

A lot has been written about multi-culturalism. By definition, multi-culturalism is about A, B, C and D cultures existing together in a location, separately. This has been the way for generations when ethnic groups lived together separately, as the following diagram demonstrates.

Multicultural

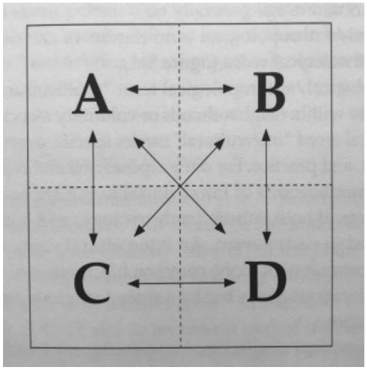


Is about different A, B, C, D cultures

- "existing" together in a location
- living together separately
- the experience of
  -ethnic groups
  -parish communities
  -families in neighborhoods
  -individuals in "community"

The call to interculturality is a process whereby A, B, C and D interact with each other through porous boundaries, as shown on the next diagram. While there is give and take, and some communication between groups, this is still not living intentionally in an intercultural way.

Interculturality: a process



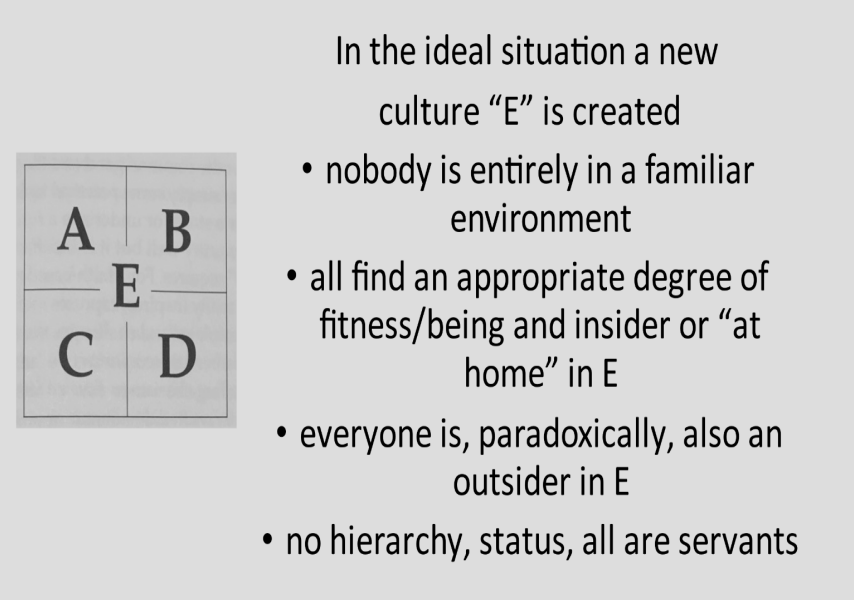
-Interactions of A, B, C, and D
with each other
-porous boundaries
-good relations, communications
-give and take, accommodations
-still not quite interculturality

This interaction of A, B, C, D represents
different cultures interacting
and trying to live intentionally
as an intercultural community/society

A further process is required beyond that outlined in the diagram above. It is a new, intentional movement of going and coming towards. It is an unfamiliar place for everyone and requires sustained effort and commitment. There is no hierarchy. It is a call to conversion and a journey to the unknown.

In this new space, no one culture dominates the other. Interculturality is not a problem to be solved, but rather a movement to be embraced. It is a theological call to conversion and transformation. Such a call/movement requires constant commitment and is more than just good will.

Those committed to living this way must be open to vulnerability, open towards all ethnicities and appreciative of the dignity of difference.



Is such an ideal possible in our deeply divided racist and xenophobic world?

Those who believe in the possibilities of interculturality must be prepared to change their attitudes and false presuppositions, recognizing that they will encounter great resistance.

Until the late twentieth century, the prominent default position was ASSIMILATION. If you want to live in this country, you must live like us! The dominant culture made the rules and those coming in from outside were meant to obey. Many of us who belong to religious congregations can acknowledge this experience. While the Second Vatican Council affirmed the richness of diversity, the dominant culture remained.

I can personally affirm this dichotomy. I come from the northern part of the island called Ireland. Our political, educational and healthcare systems are different from the rest of Ireland. While we are a culturally rich northern people, I have encountered resistance as a northerner. For example, I have been elected to attend most of our Congregational Chapters for the Sisters of Mercy with seven provinces. The majority of membership is aligned to the Irish Republic. Nevertheless, I have often felt like an outsider and marginalized.

As the part of the world where I was born begins to fracture open again, I hear troubling comments from members who are misinformed about the reasons there is trouble again on the streets of Belfast and Derry. They are a reminder that misinformation can foster negative attitudes not grounded in a full account of the facts.

So, can we move beyond racism and

xenophobia to a place where all are included? Pope Francis has invited each of us to go out intentionally and encounter others who are different from ourselves, reach out towards the fringes and peripheries and model inclusivity.

Intentional encounters have been articulated by Maria Cimperman, R.S.C.J., in her work on Social Analysis for the 21st Century. Cimperman identifies four layers of encounter:

1. To stop and see another. It is more than a glance. Think about the people we glance at every day – women in burqas, British soldiers on the streets of Northern Ireland.

2. To try and understand from the other's perspective. To be curious and ask questions, to wonder why rather than judge too quickly, to be open and peep inside, rather than being indifferent.

3. To try to recognize the other and connect, by honoring and respecting the humanity of the individual, however culturally expressed.

4. When we reach this layer, we will know that something within us has shifted. There will be a recognition within the self, of oneness with all.[9]

Fear is one of the greatest obstacles to such encounters and, as Samantha Power has reminded us so often, the greatest fear is fear itself!

Earth from the Perspective of Astronauts

In conclusion, perhaps we might consider widening our viewing tents and take a look at our world from the perspective of astronauts. Those who have had the privilege of gazing down upon the earth from space have commented on how unified the earth looks without human-made political borders.

Our galaxy is but one of billions of galaxies across the Universe. And, if the "Big Bang" theory marks the beginning of time, scientists calculate that the cosmos is still expanding and gathering speed.

With this perspective, we realize that, in fact, we are little more than tiny creatures who are relatively young and vulnerable in a fathomless existence. To look out is to look back into history, for the light that reaches our eyes from distant stars has, other than the sun, travelled longer than we have lived on earth. Such thoughts are awe-inspiring and should be humbling. They teach us that in the vast darkness within which we exist, those who believe themselves more intelligent and powerful and, therefore, more entitled, are truly ignorant, lacking the understanding that should move us to compassion.

The cosmos teaches us that we are yet infants learning to walk, dipping our toes into the lapping waves of a vast ocean of knowledge beyond us. Catherine McAuley appreciated this when she said:

> How quietly the great God does all His mighty works! Darkness is spread over us, and light breaks in again and again, and there is no noise of drawing curtains or closing shutters.[10]

Such thoughts, help us to realize that we have a great responsibility towards one another, to ensure that the miracle that is each one of us is cherished and given every opportunity to grow, irrespective of our skin pigmentation, social background or religious or secular beliefs. They help us to realize that perhaps our greatest endowment is the gift of consciousness, through which we can ponder and contemplate the great privilege of being.

Mercy Legacy

Catherine McAuley knew this and when she founded the Sisters of Mercy, envisioning a group of women who would serve and be served as part of the great community of life,

recognizing that we have a deep responsibility towards one another.

Mandela, too, had this deep sense of responsibility. When he was released from prison, he had the power to invoke an uprising that might have achieved the ultimate objective of black emancipation, but at a terrible price. Instead, he chose the path of peace and reconciliation, wishing to imagine a new South Africa in which the great rainbow of cultures, tribes and colors might offer hope to all humanity. That is his greatest legacy.

It is part of our sacred legacy too. Catherine McAuley, who lived many years before Nelson Mandela, understood this concept clearly. She inspired her early followers, "It is not sufficient that Jesus Christ be formed in us… He must be recognized in our conduct."[11]

Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu promoted the concept of Ubuntu, a multi-layered word familiar to several South African languages, including their native Xhosa. Ubuntu offers a way of thinking on what it means to be human. It tells us that our humanity cannot be lived in isolation from one another. Ubuntu emphasizes the connectedness that does, and must, exist between peoples. Archbishop Tutu described Ubuntu thus:

> A person with Ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed, or treated as if they were less than who they are. [12]

The idea has been further developed by Dingle who says: "A truly inclusive culture recognizes that 'a rising tide lifts all boats' focusing on continually recruiting, promoting and retaining a diverse array of talent and, in the process, creating a rich culture of belonging." [13]

Let me conclude with two quotations, one from the great astronomer and cosmologist Carl Sagan:

> Every one of us is, in the cosmic perspective, precious. If a human disagrees with you, let him live. In a hundred billion galaxies, you will not find another.[14]

And Catherine who challenged us:

> Try to act at all times and places that if the Lord were to appear, he would not be ashamed to point you out as one of his own.[15] ◆

Endnotes

[1] Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom* (London: Little, Brown & Company, 1994).

[2] Deirdre Mullan, RSM, *The Many Faces of Mercy*, Brochure produced by Mercy Global Concerns, April 2012.

[3] Deirdre Mullan, R.S.M., *Mercy: The Language of the Heart: UN International Year of Languages*, Brochure produced by Mercy Global Concerns, April, 2008.

[4] Unionist refers to the group who want to remain attached to mainland Britain as opposed to the Republicans, who desire unity with the Irish Republic.

[5] John Amato, Media Diversity Inquiry, Senate Inquiry, Australia, April 13, 2021.

[6] Travis Dixon and Daniel Linz, *Journal of Communications* Vol. 50, No. 2, (October, 2000) pp. 131-154.

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[11] Don Mullan, *The Little Book of Catherine of Dublin*, (Dublin, Ireland: A Little Book Company, 2005): 33.

[12] Archbishop Desmond Tutu, "Event to Launch the Tutu Desk," United Nations Headquarters, New York, April, 2014.
[13] Jeffrey Dingle, Global Director of an inclusion and diversity strategy at Jacobs Engineering Group, BBC Podcast on Diversity, May, 2021.
[14] Carl Sagan, *Cosmic Citizens, Cosmic Quotes by Carl Sagan*. Accessed at www.goodreads.com/author/quotes.
[15] Don Mullan, *The Little Book of Catherine of Dublin*, p. 86.

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Interculturality: A Personal Perspective in the Light of Pope Francis' *Fratelli Tutti*

Deborah Watson, R.S.M.

As I sat down to write this article, I realized that my only real qualification was the 36 years that I have tried very intentionally to live "interculturality." In 1985 I was "missioned" to the Altiplano of Perú. I never went to be a "missionary" in the usual sense, but rather to be a "presence" in a world far from my own culture and comfort zone, to somehow share the lives of those living on the margins of the circles of power and possessions—what I could name as the *anawim* or "lowly" in Old Testament terms. [1]

Thus, to write an article on "interculturality" is much more than an academic exercise for me. I have tried to live this concept long before I had the vocabulary to name it, or the capacity to identify its many facets and distinguish it from other related terms such as multiculturality, enculturation, inculturation, acculturation, and internationality.[2]

San Francisco Bay Area Roots

Growing up in the very cosmopolitan San Francisco Bay Area I had an early fascination with different foods, customs, dress, and language. I walked to dinner in the Italian North Beach area of the city, amused by a Scotsman in his kilt gazing at a stand filled with Chinese language newspapers. I entertained myself on city buses by trying to identify the different languages I was hearing--Spanish, Russian, Cantonese and the like. But I traveled **into** the city from what was then a "lily white" suburb (No "coloreds" allowed to spend the night!). My cultural fascination had quite a romantic, unreal tinge.

My graduate theological studies in the 1970's did include some in-depth exploration of cultural anthropology. [3] I began to develop a much more conscious appreciation of the power of culture to shape our lives. I discovered what Sister Judette Gallares would concisely express years later.

> Culture is the medium through which the very reality of human existence, faith, community, Church and so forth can be perceived, experienced, lived and expressed. Thus, the way people perceive truth, interpret meaning, and understand their experience of reality is bound up with their particular context and tradition. [4]

Mexican Border Experience

However, my first real foray into an unknown cultural milieu took place in the early 1980's. I joined a group of religious for a service-immersion, consciousness-raising experience on the Mexican border near San Diego. Some of us volunteered to live in Tijuana helping out at a little boys' orphanage where we found ourselves "in charge" for the week. It was a powerful experience from many aspects. Only years later did it dawn on me that one moment in particular experience offered a simple and very illuminating illustration of the challenges inherent in cross-cultural experiences.

Culture is the medium through which the very reality of human existence, faith, community, Church and so forth can be perceived, experienced, lived and expressed.

One of my tasks was to help the boys with breakfast and clean-up afterwards. To my dismay, their idea of mopping the floor was to throw around pails of water and swish it out. I spent much of the week trying to teach them the "right" way to clean a floor. Only years later, when I lived on the coast of Perú and in Argentina did I discover that for much of the world the boys' way WAS the right

way: You get the floor very wet, sometimes with a hose, and then squeegee it out. While humorous on one level, this simple incident illustrates the complexity of cultural issues. I, the know- it- all North American with a huge need to impose my efficiency norm on those Mexican boys, had set up a conflict situation. Only years later would I be able to "unpack" this experience as I continued on my own intercultural journey.

Perhaps it was my innate, fascination with cultural differences, my studies in cultural anthropology, and increasing involvement in social justice issues that led to my discernment with regard to Perú and to my participation in the Maryknoll Orientation process. It was there that the best insights of the day were transmitted. And I became familiar with what I later discovered was a distinctly catholic word: "inculturation," referring first of all to the incarnation of the Gospel message in the host culture; and then by extension, the "incarnating" of the customs, values, world vision of that culture in the missionary. I emerged determined to become enculturated in the language, ways and customs of those with whom I would be living and working. [5]

In subsequent years that desire has been tested in a myriad of ways as I moved about through the Aymara culture of the Peruvian Altiplano, and the somewhat more familiar cultures of coastal Perú, northern Patagonia, Clorinda on the border with Paraguay, and most recently Buenos Aires. I studied Aymara and entered into the rites, fiestas and customs *del pueblo*. In leadership in Perú I struggled, as a North American, with mutuality issues involving multiple Peruvian cultures and the need to nurture a Peruvian Sister of Mercy culture still *en pañales* (diapers). In Argentina and through the "birth" of CCASA (Caribbean, Central America, South America) I came to a grateful, and more peaceful, appreciation of the richness of our diversity.

And that personal journey has roughly paralleled our Congregational journey. In 1991 when we became the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, we were very conscious that we were creating an entity embracing 12 countries and multiple cultures and languages. In Perú we had just accepted Sisters from three very different cultural backgrounds. And our founding document reflected a deep desire to achieve a vital harmony in our new relationships:

> Animated by the Gospel and Catherine McAuley's passion for the poor, we, the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, are impelled to commit our lives and resources for the next four years to act in solidarity with
>
> - the economically poor of the world, especially women and children;
> - women seeking fullness of life and equality in church and society;
> - **one another as we embrace our multicultural and international reality**.
>
> This commitment will impel us to
>
> - **develop and act from a multicultural, international perspective**;
> - speak with a corporate voice;
> - work for systemic change;
> - Call ourselves to continual conversion our lifestyles and ministries. [6]

Over the years our vocabulary has changed, but we hold up as an ideal an even greater challenge as we embark on yet another phase of our cross-cultural Journey of Oneness. Our understandings have shifted from the mere acknowledgement of our de facto multicultural and international reality to a much deeper understanding of interculturality with its profound faith dimension as "We hear a call to strengthen our relationships with one another through reverence for our international and intercultural community."[7]

It was against this background that I recently read Pope Francis' 2020 Encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti.*[8] While it must be acknowledged that Francis is primarily speaking of a love at the universal,

global level, it struck me how relevant this document is to me personally and to our Institute as we deepen our lived experience of interculturality.

It is in the context of an appreciation for our global reality and the universality of Christ's call "to love one another as I have loved you" (Jn.13:34), that Pope Francis situates this theme of love, and what he calls "social friendship" – "a love capable of transcending borders" (FT §99) He is inspired by the universal and unconditional love that St. Francis of Assisi lived and desired for his fraternity.

Pope Francis begins the document by recalling the encounter between the saint and the Sultan Malik-el-Kamil in Egypt—an encounter that took place during the multiple wars between Muslims and Christians that we call the Crusades. From the very beginning, the document recognizes the intercultural elements of this call to live with "a love that transcends the barriers of geography and distance . . . a fraternal openness that allows us to acknowledge, appreciate and love each person, regardless of physical proximity, regardless of where he or she was born or lives" (FT §1).

Early on Francis addresses the issue of cultural colonialism, a thread that runs through my own cross-cultural experience. At the time of my conflict with the Tijuana boys I was pretty oblivious to my "colonial" attitudes, of my desire to impose my culture on the other, of a particularly "American" sense of superiority. Later living in both Perú and Argentina, I would be painfully aware of the dominance of United States culture and its imposition on the global scene whether we are talking about music, film, finances, political influence, military installations, or covert activities. And no matter how much I might be committed to intercultural living, my mere presence would be a frequent reminder of that cultural colonialism.

But Francis' treatment here isn't so much to address representatives of the dominant culture, but rather to speak to those who "abandon their tradition, and, either from a craze to mimic others or to foment violence or from unpardonable negligence or apathy, allow others to rob their very soul, and end up losing not only their moral consistency and in the end their intellectual, economic and political independence" (FT §14).

I can welcome others who are different, and value the unique contribution they have to make, only if I am firmly rooted in my own people and culture.

While it seems evident to me, that Francis is addressing the global rise of ideological fanaticism, I think the calling out of those being dominated has implications for us as community. In religious congregations with a dominant culture, often heavily influenced by the country of origin (in our case, Ireland), those of the majority culture must encourage those in a minority culture to be faithful to their own identity; and those living as a cultural minority have a responsibility to be true to that identity, even when it is threatened or ignored. In another place Francis continues:

> Just as there can be no dialogue with "others" without a sense of our own identity, so there can be no openness between peoples except on the basis of love for one's own land, one's own people, one's own cultural roots. I cannot truly encounter another unless I stand on firm foundations, for it is on the basis of these that I can accept the gift the other brings and in turn offer an authentic gift of my own. I can welcome others who are different, and value the unique contribution they have to make, only if I am firmly rooted in my own people and culture (FT §143).

In my own experience this means coming to terms with the darkness as well as the light in my own culture. And this happens gradually over time as one interacts and deeply shares with others in a cross-cultural situation.

Those in a religious congregation, having heard Jesus' call to leave all, once left the culture of their own home and biological family. In the measure that their new religious life culture is unfamiliar they may identify with Ruth: "Whereever you go, I will go, wherever you live, I will live. Your people will be my people and your God, my God" (Ruth 1:16). But to arrive at true interculturality a high degree of dialogue, listening, mutual understanding, respect and genuine appreciation for diversity is required.

And a genuine, lived appreciation of diversity demands true encounter.

> Goodwill alone is evidently insufficient and can produce great frustration and a sense of impotence. Knowledge is also important, and people striving for wholesome intercultural living must learn directly about and from each other in much more than a casual way. We could watch people playing chess for a hundred years, but unless we know actual rules, we will never understand it well enough to play. Similarly, living under the same roof as others (whether spouse, children, or religious) is not an adequate measure of intercultural living. Hard work, constant questioning of oneself and others, but, above all, real compassion, concern, love for the other are a *sine qua non* for mutual—and especially cross-cultural—understanding. [9]

Sister Pat Murray who writes and lectures widely on issues of interculturality and religious life has stressed that in addition to deep respect, honest conversation and the creation of appropriate physical and ritual spaces, real mutuality will demand serious study that may even include learning another language.[10] To return to my simple example: Ignorance of local housekeeping customs resulted in a misunderstanding that led to a conflict situation in the orphanage. Knowledge and Spanish language facility would have helped immensely.

Another thread that runs all though *Fratelli Tutti* is the importance of preserving and appreciating diversity. He warns against a kind of false universalism that "ends up depriving the world of its various colors, its beauty and, ultimately, its humanity. For the future is not monochrome; if we are courageous, we can contemplate it in all the variety and diversity of what each individual person has to offer" (FT §100).

And a genuine, lived appreciation of diversity demands true encounter. Francis speaks of a "culture of encounter" where people are passionate about meeting others, building bridges and planning projects that include everyone; where the art of encounter makes it possible to transcend differences and divisions. The image he presents is that of a polyhedron whose different sides form a varied unity and the whole is greater than its parts.

> The image of a polyhedron can represent a society where differences coexist, complementing, enriching and reciprocally illuminating one another, even amid disagreement and reservations. Each of us can learn something from others. No one is useless and no one is expendable. This also means finding ways to include those on the peripheries of life. For they have another way of looking at things; they see aspects of reality that are invisible to the centers of power where weighty decisions are made (FT §§ 215, 216).

Isn't this what we believe and strive for? There is no doubt that as Sisters of Mercy of the Americas we highly value our multicultural makeup, and we

resonate with Pope Francis' call to live a "social friendship" inspired by St. Francis of Assisi and his love for the whole universe. We are working hard to achieve a genuine interculturality. However, many challenges lie ahead. Our organizational structures, modes of communication and values around progress, efficiency and the use of resources reflect the dominant culture of the United States.

As we enter into this new phase of our Journey of Oneness, we will be taking some giant steps forward. For example, Institute Ministers, some from minority cultures, are participating more integrally in congregational life and decisions. This will be an enriching space of dialogue and mutual learnings. But it will not be without its challenges. All will be coaxed out of their comfort zones. There will be conflicts. Some will need to develop new measures of patience; others great amounts of courage to speak their truth in love. And we agree with Anthony Gittens, CSSp: "Intercultural living is increasingly perceived as necessary for viable international religious life, but the cost is high. Where it succeeds it will bring about a revolution in religious life as we now know it, but such a revolution is obligatory if dry bones are to live".[11]◆

Endnotes

[1] Cf. Is. 61:1; Ps. 16:19; Is. 29:19; Pr. 14:21

[2] For the purposes of this paper there is no need to define each of those terms, especially since a Google search quickly demonstrates the lack of general agreement. The reader may refer to the Wikipedia article on "Acculturation" which includes comprehensive definitions, referencing and extensive bibliography for all the related terminology. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acculturation

[3] Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Transaction Publishers, 1969); Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, Trans. Willard R. Trask (Harcourt, Inc., 1959).

[4] Judette A. Gallares, R.C., *Common Journey, Different Paths: Spiritual Direction in Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, ed. Susan Rakoczy, I.H.M. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 1992):158.

[5]The Wikipedia article on "Inculturation" traces the meaning and history of that term as it has been used quite uniquely by the Catholic Church. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inculturation

[6]Direction Statement, General Chapter, Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, 1991.

[7]Chapter Acts, Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, 2017, "Recommitment: Call to New Consciousness."

[8]Given at the tomb of Saint Francis, Assisi, Italy, October 3, 2020. References to the document will be indicated by the abbreviation FT and the paragraph number. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html

[9] Anthony J. Gittins, *Living Mission Interculturally* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015): 110.

[10] Pat Murray, Union International of Superiors General (UISG) Assembly, February 19, 2020.

[11] Ibid., p. 6.

Intercultural Awareness: The Voice of a Yoruba Woman

Mary Oladimeji, R.S.M.

Yoruba is the socio-cultural and spiritual tradition into which I was born and raised in Nigeria. For the Yoruba people, the life of an individual does not begin at birth. Life for us is cyclical and "stands for a wide concept." My life is connected to the lives of the ancestors, (living and dead), those unborn, "all other categories of animal and plant life, as well as the world of nature." Every child born is named on the eighth day during a naming ceremony that takes place in the presence of family, friends, and neighbors.

The repertoire of names (usually descriptive of the unparalleled precious gift that a child represents) is only surpassed by the repertoire of names given to the Creator. A naming ceremony marks the first stage of the initiation of a child into the community. It is usually lavish and elaborate. Family and friends bestow all kinds of gifts, particularly monetary gifts to the newborn, signifying the pledge of the community to support the newborn and its parents, in whatever way, for the child to grow into a healthy person who will one day contribute to the well-being of its community.

The news of the arrival of a new child is sent to the elders of the family who choose a name as well as a special name that will be connected to the praise-poetry of the extended family tree. In addition, the parents of the child also choose names; so do all the family members, friends, and neighbors. Every child's name tells a unique story about that child while also linking the child to the family tree. For example, one can tell from the first and the last name of a person the trade, profession, and the family's position in the society, and sometimes the circumstances of how the child came into the world. In many cases, elders consult the oracle before choosing a name for a child, as it is believed *"oruko Ni nro Ni",* literally translated, " We are hunted by our name." Put another way, "Our names place a demand on us to live up to them"! By pronouncing a person's name, we have the power to call a person to life or to death.

Names, particularly, one's praise name (*oriki*) is guarded. One's *oriki* (praise name) can only be proclaimed or said by an elder or one's parent. Very rarely would one's age- mate or one's junior pronounce one's praise name, except when an individual has achieved something special or done something courageous for the community. For this reason, our special names are reserved to those who gave one those names, except on rare occasions.

Every child's name tells a unique story about that child while also linking the child to the family tree.

The Yoruba language is a genderless language. The social structures are based on seniority and family membership, hence the giving of names. The concept of seniority is very fluid, to ensure equity in the use and exercise of power. For example, even though authority is typically deferred based on chronological age, an elder may find herself deferring to a younger person several times in the course of a single day. For instance, if an elder arrives at a place and finds that a younger person preceded her, she must acknowledge the younger person first. The same goes for any person coming into the house. They acknowledge those who are in the house before them, regardless of their age or status. "*E ku ile*". "*E ku abo*". Go the greetings. "*Eni ti o ki 'ni ku ile, padanu 'kabo*". Failure to acknowledge the presence of the person who precedes you, automatically makes you forfeit an acknowledgement in return. Apart from being considered highly disrespectful, failure to

acknowledge people in greeting can signify the greatest act of social rejection.

What's in a name? Everything!

An anecdote illustrates this lack of cultural understanding. I receive emails every now and then from somebody within the Institute somewhere and it will read: "Dear Mary Omolara Oladimeji." Calling someone's name is understood as giving and taking of power and authority. This power and authority must be given and consented to. When I hear a stranger call me Omolara or I see a name that is not for public use, used in the public domain, it rings hollow when used out of context.

Life-Cycle Features of Yoruba Culture

My siblings, like most Yoruba, are addressed by their Yoruba names by family and close friends. In public however, they are known by their Christian names. This practice of using one name in public and another in private goes back to our colonial history. Under the colonial occupation, Christianity served the role of advancing the colonial agenda without which the spread of Christianity would have been limited. Missionaries were the trailblazers for the colonizers. This history of European presence (as missionaries and colonizers) as understood by the natives may be described as two sides of the same coin.

As a result of this colonial experience, we have continued to describe our experience based on two bodies. For us, we have what we call "the body public" and "the body private". It follows that I am Mary in all the areas having a political reach, while I am "Omolara" in all the areas that relate to and hold deep socio-cultural and religious understanding of who I believe myself to be at my core.

But there is a slightly different reason why I am called Mary outside my family circle. When I was born, because of the circumstances surrounding my birth, my parents insisted that I should be called by my Christian name by everyone. My grandmother called me a different name based on what my birth meant to her. My parents mostly call me Omolara, which is the name that my parents with the elders gave when I was eight days old.

I was baptized Maria, not Mary. I became Mary in boarding school because fellow students refused to call me Maria, insisting that "Maria" is the vernacular version of English Mary. Since we were not allowed to speak in "vernacular," or our tribal language, students called me Mary. I was called into the principal's office to settle the business of which version I would be known by!

Initiation into young adulthood (age group or *egbe*) allows a young person to be part of certain decisions and role in the community. Young adults are allowed to be present at community deliberations and during times of decision. It is during these times that they learn skills in the art of negotiation, deliberation, and decision-making on a communal level.

How does a Congregation honor and accommodate existing familial and cultural obligations of Sisters?

Marriage is an initiation into full membership in the community. There are some comparisons with taking vows in a religious community of women when members come from different ethnicities and cultural backgrounds. How does a Congregation honor and accommodate existing familial and cultural obligations of Sisters? Consciousness of these pre-existing cultural obligations of individual Sisters would ensure continuity with Sisters' cultural history. If a community doesn't acknowledge these histories, as essential to its inter-cultural reality, the stage of inclusion and incorporation can cause psychological, emotional, and spiritual disconnection within a Sister who takes vows and her primal personal and cultural identity.

In Yoruba culture, a death and burial ceremony is an initiation of the deceased into the company of the ancestors, another expression into fullness of membership of one's community. A Yoruba burial ceremony lasts between 14 and 28 days. A yearly ritual is also observed in honor of the dead. (Editor's Note: We can ask how the comparatively shortened funeral practices in women's religious communities in western countries, and the U.S. particularly, are different, and how this difference is felt by women with different family and cultural traditions of mourning their deceased.)

Spirituality and Religious Culture

Faith and spirituality permeate every aspect of Yoruba life. Faith and religious worship is centered on nature and cosmos. The Yoruba believe in the creator of the universe (*Olodumare*) as well as in a pantheon of gods and deities; they venerate their ancestors. This religious worldview makes the Yoruba people a notably religiously tolerant society. While every religion will have regular adherents and devotees, members of a particular faith community pay homage and take part in religious festivals of the gods and deities of their own faith. How do they relate to other religions?

A concrete example of religious tolerance that I grew up taking for granted was the story that our grandparents and parents told us. When our parish church was being built, both Christians and Muslims as well as those who remained adherents of the ancestral faith, contributed money and helped to ferry sand, bricks, wood, and mortar to lay the foundation of the church. We have a song that goes something like this: "We will adhere to our cultural heritage, 'faith' meaning Christianity, will not prevent us from adhering to our cultural heritage."

Likewise, when the foundation of the central mosque was going to be laid, both the Muslims and the Catholics raised money and ferried building materials for the work. Although the Catholics constitute the majority of our hometown, the legacy of our ancestors--which I can describe as faith, unity, development, egalitarianism, and equity-- are seen to have been lived out by our parents, grandparents, and great grandparents.

Meeting a Cross-Cultural Challenge Within Christianity

There are great advantages, in a cross-cultural setting, to being knowledgeable, respectful, and open toward others who are culturally different from us. Breaking out of our homogeneous groups takes effort. The more accustomed we are to living with people whom we perceive to be like us, the more effort it takes to reach out to others we perceive to be different from us. Once divisions are established along cultural, ethnic, and racial lines, it takes a great deal of courage and determination to communicate across these lines. We may encounter feelings of discomfort as we reach out to others, or we may fear that others from within our group will disapprove of including outsiders. Without a strong commitment to overcoming differences, we may give up when obstacles to communication arise.

Once divisions are established along cultural, ethnic, and racial lines, it takes a great deal of courage and determination to communicate across these lines.

One of my earliest memories of "rubbing" of cultures (a preferred description to "culture clash") happened during my first year of high school. I was part of the youth group and leadership which a majority of whom were also in the church choir. While our pastor was on sabbatical, a young Claretian priest who had just returned from studying in Rome was sent to stand in for our pastor. He began making changes without

consultation with the parish council. He simply ordered changes and made demands. Aside from his abuse of clerical power (we did not know this term at the time), he was very disrespectful to our elders. Even though I was only a teen, I knew that something was wrong and felt we had to do something.

After about a month of the new priest's arrival, at the end of rehearsal, I asked what everyone thought of the way the priest was going about things. His condescending attitude to the elders turned out to be the biggest issue for everyone as well. This priest was acting from a socio-cultural mind set very different from the Yoruba people. The first striking cultural difference is that among the ethnic group of this priest, men's authority almost goes unquestioned. Priests are also very revered. Among the Yoruba however, seniority determines the exercise of power and authority (i.e., age and wisdom). Where a younger person exercises authority, homage is paid at the same time to the wisdom of the elders. Among the Yoruba, a priest is respected for what he symbolizes, and he exercises his authority always mindful of the authority of his elders.

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We decided to send a delegate of the CYO (Catholic Youth Organization) to welcome him formally to our parish, to ask him how we could assist him in his work and offer him some suggestions on how to engage the people of the parish. He was happy about the first two points. As for the third point, he made it clear that he was the priest and pastor, that he was in charge, and everyone should do as they were told.

We went home and when we returned for rehearsal the following Saturday everyone was angry but had no solution. I proposed that we should hold our rehearsal but not sing during Mass on Sunday. We would come to church and sit with the people. The choir used to process in with the priest, lectors and the servers. We didn't want him to suspect anything, so we went to get our choir robes from the sacristy as if we were going to sing. The sacristy was on the north side, while the entrance is on the south side. After waiting for us for ten minutes, he processed into the church. He asked the congregation where the members of the choir were. No one could answer his question, no one except the choir knew of this plan. He was clearly angry. He told the congregation in the church that he had visited the choir at our rehearsal yesterday, and wondered why it was that no one mentioned that we would not be singing during Mass. He demanded that the choir report to the rectory that evening. We always have a youth meeting right after Mass. We all agreed that we were not going to see him until he changed his behavior.

After we did not show up at the rectory, the priest came to the school. I was told by one of the prefects that the priest-pastor wanted to see me and the choir members at the Sisters' convent. All the Nigerian Sisters then belonged to the priest's ethnic group. I didn't go to the convent because I felt shy about having to face all the Sisters and the priest. I also figured he came to see all the girls in the choir and would probably not notice I wasn't there! About fifteen minutes later, a student accompanied the priest to where I was clearing some bushes on the school grounds (it was one of our evenings of general cleaning and maintenance). I did not see him approach, but the student called out my name and pointed me out to the priest. When I looked up to see who was calling me, the priest was already walking toward me. When he came closer, he said, "You are Mary." He couldn't hide his surprise. He demanded to know why we were refusing to sing at Mass. I told him that we were not going to sing

until he had learned how to speak to the elders, work with us and stop talking down to us.

He later told me that he was expecting the ringleader to be one of the older girls in senior class. We may not have changed his deeply held cultural views about women and his clerical training about mutual collaboration between laity and the clergy. However, he began to consult with us and to meet with us once a month about how things were going to be done. We suspected he was advised by the Sisters to work with us or perhaps he figured he had a whole lot more to lose.

A Meal for the "Guest"

My grandmother always had a wrap of food set aside for the unexpected "visitor." I observed that although we rarely had guests from out of town, apart from relatives and friends who are regulars at dinner times, my grandmother never failed to keep a wrap of food for the "guest." As I got older, I began taking responsibility for some of the cooking. I also began disregarding the tradition of setting aside food for the "guest" because it entailed extra work. I was to learn the hard way a lesson and the wisdom inherent in this practice.

One day, a group of eight men arrived from my grandmother's home just as we sat down to dinner. The usual practice would be to offer food already prepared while more food was cooked while the guests were eating what was already on the table. Once the guests were welcomed and seated, my grandmother looked in the place where food for the "guest" was always kept. She called me into the hallway. Once I made it known that I had not reserved any food, she calmly went into the house, took my food that was yet untouched and served it to the guests with the words that more food was on the way. I didn't have to be told that was her cue for me to get to the kitchen and prepare more food! After that incident, I never forgot or failed to reserve food for an unexpected guest.

Hospitality is at the center of the Yoruba life. We say " *alejo l'oba*" (a visitor is king). When I shared the importance of giving names to children which express the belief of the Yoruba of the preciousness of children, it turns out that the practice of keeping food for a "guest" is not just for a physical guest. Food is a sign of abundance. The Yoruba believe that the spirits of the unborn visit their intended home to ascertain whether the family can provide for them. Absence of food in the home wards off the arrival of new children.

Vocation to Religious Life as a Cross-Cultural Calling

When I was aspiring to enter religious life, we were encouraged by priests from our hometown to talk to the three Sisters from our home-town. One of them is a close relation. The first one entered an all-Irish community in the 1960's and the next two entered a religious community founded by an Irish bishop for Nigerian women to serve in the Lagos archdiocese. Everyone expected us to follow our "older Sisters." After a lot of prayer, it was clear in my young mind as I later shared as a young novice and a Sister, "that I came to an awareness or understood my call to go beyond, to be bigger than clan, tribe, or nationality." With that clarity in my mind, I discerned to enter the Sisters of Notre Dame, knowing that I with the other two young women who entered with me were going to be pioneers. There were no other Yoruba in the community.

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However, the fear expressed by those familiar with tribalism and favoritism of the dominant group in that community turned out to be true. But the clarity of my calling to embrace difference remained. I felt the call to leave my comfort zone, even when that call demanded that I depart from my place of birth and everything familiar.

Beginning Life in Mercy

When I look back on my experience as a novice, a great deal of that period was spent trying to explain, educate, and sometimes justify who I am, my cultural practices, my ethnic difference, and my Yoruba customs. The period of candidacy afforded very little time and opportunity for dialogue around cultural differences, cultural understanding and an honest dialogue that could help toward intercultural bridging.

I lived in two houses during my candidacy. The first house was created as a welcoming community for candidates. Its composition included one Irish sister, the oldest; one sister of Mexican descent; one Filipina; Sri Lankan; two white Americans, and me. Irish was the dominant culture.

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Having women from more than one cultural background for the first time in the community, and in the Institute, did seem like an opportunity to have an honest dialogue that might help to prepare the community toward a future of an international and intercultural reality, even though it is in our Constitutions. This dialogue, unfortunately, didn't happen immediately. During our first year as candidates, we lived with the incorporation minister. Things got reported to her whenever there was a cross-cultural "rub." Two of the professed Sisters wanted to introduce former convent practices like designating our sleeping area as cloister, having both morning and evening prayers together, and meals together every day. After a year, the house no longer felt like a welcoming house for candidates. The three candidates were moved to different houses.

At my new house, any time there was an issue around cultural differences, I was reported to the incorporation minister and the local president (the culture of deferring to the superior was still very strong in our former region). There was no question about Irish tradition being the defining culture in almost all aspects. For example, dinner must include potatoes in one form or another. Following several incidents of my food getting thrown away because it smelt "bad," a meeting was called; there was a proposal I consider having my own fridge to store my food. I declined the offer to store my food separately. I promised to label my food and asked them if in doubt, to ask me before getting rid of anything that looked or smelt "bad."

I was also the only black person in the neighborhood. Since I was not a signatory to the house account, the house bursar would sign a check any time it was my turn to buy groceries. Nine times out of ten, the check was declined, and I would have to call the bursar at the regional motherhouse to vouch for me. I got so tired of this treatment and the time it took that I asked sisters at my house what they were going to do about the issue. The house bursar then called the manager of the local grocery store. They came up with a plan for me to have my passport photo enlarged with the signature and phone number of the house bursar clearly displayed in their office. Any time my check was declined, I could ask person at the check-out to verify my identity from the notice board in their office.

Experiences like these helped me to continue to reflect on and articulate my cultural history and family practices. When I went on to the Institute inter-novitiate, the opportunity to explain my background and sometimes request accommodation for my difference was encouraged by the two novice ministers.

During my inter-novitiate year, some matters had to be addressed to the Institute leadership

team, through the intervention of the novice ministers. For instance, why I needed to braid my hair instead of cutting it short or perming it like many African American women in the U.S. do. Sometimes, Sisters compared me to African Americans. A couple of the Sisters I lived with when I was a candidate knew a couple of African American employees at the hospital where they worked. They asked the African American women questions pertaining to hair care, food, and other questions about cultural practices. They apparently assumed that sharing the same skin color meant that our ethnic and cultural practices were the same. I had to explain that there's a world of difference between African American cultural practices and those of African or Nigerian, and especially Yoruba women.

I had to explain that there's a world of difference between African American cultural practices and those of African or Nigerian, and especially Yoruba women.

Integration of Immediate Family Living in the U.S.

My mother lived in the U.S. for nine years, helping my sister and her husband raise their three children. The original reason for her coming to the U.S. was to help my sister who was beside herself when her second daughter was born prematurely. She was afraid they might lose the baby. My father had asked my mother to come to help my sister.

One of the Sisters at the time asked if my mother was still in the U.S. and if she was ever going back home to Nigeria. Without waiting for my response to her question, she said, "I could never live with my daughters or be supported by them!" I didn't know her well enough or have any idea how to explain Yoruba cultural practice and beliefs--that the relationship and responsibility of parents to their children and vice versa for Yoruba people is life-long.

Yoruba people have a saying: *Bi okete ba'dagba tan, omu omo e lo mu* (An old rodent is suckled by her young). The principle behind that saying is this: While a child is still young, the parents look after it. One day, it will be the turn of the once-young child to look after the parents when the parent can no longer fend for themselves.

By helping to raise my nieces who were born in the U.S., my mother helped to teach her grandchildren our language, culture, values, and our faith traditions. Their grandmother's contribution to their upbringing has helped them grow up to be well-adjusted children. When my younger sister and brother moved to the U.S. with their families a few years ago, we did not experience the often-reported strains that occur among families of children who were brought up in Africa and in Europe or the U.S. My nieces who were born in the U.S. learned very early what traditional cultural behavior, family obligations and responsibilities are. These values include respect for elders and seniors, gratitude, the bond of family, faith, religiously inclusive celebrations, providing food for guests and visitors who are always expected.

Thoughts About Integration of Different Cultural Traditions

While I believe in points of convergence among cultures, our focus should not be comparison. Instead, our focus should be on the contributions that each culture makes to humanity and the survival of our species. One of the reasons I am suspicious of making comparisons between cultures because such an exercise is often about holding up certain cultures as superior to all others that don't enjoy position of privilege.

If we recognize that each culture is self-sufficient and self-contained, then we will be more open to multi-cultural living. By self-sufficient I mean that each culture was created to serve the need of a people and for that reason, there is

no basis for viewing it as "developed," "undeveloped" or "developing" from a cultural perspective that it was not created to serve.

Editor's Conclusion

Promoting integration of cultures in women's religious life calls for acknowledging that our members come from different ethnic, linguistic, geographical and cultural traditions. Sisters of Mercy can't be defined by one particular national or ethnic culture. Our self-understanding as an international religious community needs to be "opened up" and made broader. There are many conversations we have yet to initiate so members can comfortably share our family, linguistic and cultural traditions that define us as individuals. There are also painful stories of cross-cultural conflicts—the "rubbing" -- which happens because of ignorance or incomplete information
held by those belonging to the dominant culture. Have we up to now assumed that there is an uber-culture and spirituality of vowed religious life that automatically absorbs and integrates all our differences as individual persons?

> If we recognize that each culture is self-sufficient and self-contained, then we will be more open to multi-cultural living.

Despite good intentions of the "in group," members who feel themselves in the minority can suffer feelings of being irrelevant, silenced, marginalized, subordinated or "disappeared." As Mary Oladimeji asks, is it possible to talk about intercultural living without also talking about racism? Is there a connection or an intersection between interculturality and racism? How will this ongoing discussion advance our understanding of ourselves as an international community of women religious?

How will this discussion affect the way we pray, how we read the scriptures, what aspects of Jesus' ministry we identify with, what we particularly adopt in the Church's post-Vatican II renewal, how we live together, how we understand our charism and apostolic mission, how we celebrate, and how we welcome our new members? ◆

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Book Review on *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Race*

Diane Guerin, R.S.M.

Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Race* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018).

Amid escalating police brutality, racially motivated violence against people of color and denial of white privilege, Robin DiAngelo, Ph.D., in *White Fragility*, challenges white people to examine their internalized racial superiority. Being confronted with this, our immediate response might be, "I don't consider myself superior," or "I treat everyone equally and with respect."

No one wants to be associated with racist views or actions, but when our understanding is limited or our intent is questioned, there is a tendency to justify and explain our position or response. Socialized into a place of dominance in the culture, we are either unaware of our privilege or unable to acknowledge its presence. Not having to deal with racism and daily micro-aggressions, white people possess little or no "racial stamina." They feel uncomfortable or threatened when confronted. They rush to restore the balance that will relieve their tension and maintain the white dominance in the racial hierarchy. This is "white fragility." "White fragility is not weakness *per se*. In fact, it is a powerful means of white racial control and protection of white advantage" (p. 6).

I believe that white progressives cause the most daily damage to people of color.

In a society that prizes individualism, it is difficult for white people to fully understand the barriers and structures that limit the advancement of people of color. There is a belief among many whites that the economic difficulty of people of color is not a consequence of unjust systems of racism, but rather a result of individual character. If we adhere to this view, the issue of race gets side-lined.

People who read the book may perceive themselves as progressives, as does DiAngelo herself. She states that her intention in writing this book is for those who view themselves as open-minded and, therefore, not racist. She writes:

> This book is intended for us, for white progressives, who so often—despite our conscious intentions—make life so difficult for people of color. I believe that white progressives cause the most daily damage to people of color. I define a white progressive as any person who thinks he or she is not racist, or is less racist, or in the "choir," or already "gets it." White progressives can be the most difficult for people of color because, in the degree that we think we have arrived, we will put our energy into making sure that others see us as having arrived. None of our energy will go into what we need to be doing for the rest of our lives: engaging in ongoing self-awareness, continuing education, relationship building, and actual antiracist practice (p. 5).

It is refreshing that DiAngelo, an educator and diversity consultant, acknowledges her own racism and white fragility. This admission keeps her work from being censorious. Instead, she challenges the reader that "they" or "you" need to be transformed.

DiAngelo describes a history of how racism was born. As Europeans invaded lands and displaced indigenous peoples, they attempted to

justify their actions. They treated people of color as under-developed human beings. This view allowed them to see colonization as their "right," because they (the invaders) were "civilized." This is the root of racism and white supremacy, says DiAngelo. In emphasizing the history of racism, she argues that race is a social construct and not a biological difference. Historical treatments have tended to stress the biological factor, relegating people of color to a "less than" status compared to their white colonizers. This belief contributed to and maintained the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

In the workshops that DiAngelo conducts on white fragility, participants who are white frequently refer to the progress made in race relations since the civil rights era. Many believe the fallacy that we are now living in a "post-racial" America. Though great strides have been made and significant changes have occurred, racism is not a thing of the past! Where Jim Crow laws were obvious and blatant, today's racist beliefs and behaviors can be concealed behind strict voter ID laws and cuts to early voting in the name of preventing voter fraud. The result? A disproportionate impact on people of color. The outcome remains the same as Jim Crow era laws--limiting or denying people of color the ability to vote, build up wealth and move forward in society.

Through the medium of television, the civil rights movement of the 1960s was brought into our living rooms every evening. Those features became the topic of conversation and influenced political change. The suppression and violence toward the demonstrators aroused anger and concern in viewers. Publicity began to shape a new understanding of racism.

"These images of black persecution in the South during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s also allowed Northern whites to position racists as always Southern" (p.71). This perception contributed to the belief that only bad, evil people were racists. DiAngelo refers to this concept as the "good/bad binary," and she asserts that this is one of the reasons white people find it difficult to talk about race. She further emphasizes that every white person has racial biases. Through complicity with others like themselves, they maintain the structure of racism.

DiAngelo holds that white people have been shaped, conditioned, influenced and socialized to participate in racism-- that it is inevitable.

DiAngelo holds that white people have been shaped, conditioned, influenced and socialized to participate in racism-- that it is inevitable.

> If we cannot discuss these dynamics or see ourselves within them, we cannot stop participating in racism. The good/bad binary made it effectively impossible for the average white person to understand--much less interrupt racism (p. 72).

There is an unspoken agreement among whites to maintain white privilege and to protect one another from any feelings of discomfort when addressing issues of race. Consequently, white people hesitate to confront one another when a comment or action is likely racially inappropriate or problematic. This is referred to as "white solidarity."

> White solidarity requires both silence about anything that exposes the advantage of the white position and tacit agreement to remain racially united in the protection of white supremacy. To break white solidarity is to break ranks (p. 58).

White solidarity is key to maintaining white supremacy and white privilege. Throughout the book, DiAngelo does not exempt herself from the personal responsibility and hard work of dismantling racism. She shares her own experiences, successes as well as setbacks. These serve to encourage readers that it is possible to make a personal commitment to dismantle racism and expressions of white fragility.

If some of what is shared in this book seems a bit overwhelming or unattainable, DiAngelo encourages us to view our progress on a continuum.

> I have found it much more useful to think of myself on a continuum. Racism is so deeply woven into the fabric of our society that I do not see myself escaping from that continuum in my lifetime. But I can continually seek to move further along it. I am not in a fixed position on the continuum; my position is declared by what I am doing at a given time. Conceptualizing myself on an active continuum changes the question from whether I am or am not racist to a much more constructive question:Am I actively seeking to interrupt racism in this context? And perhaps even more important, how do I know? (p. 87).

In the final chapter of *White Fragility*, "Where Do We Go from Here?" the reader is challenged to continue the journey of self-awareness, education, and action. Interrupting racism is no easy task. "It takes courage and intentionality. We can never consider ourselves finished with our learning (p. 153).

Robin DiAngelo presents us with deeper insight into how white supremist attitudes created racism. She challenges us to look at our complicity in fostering its continuance by guarding our own sense of white privilege. She also shares how white fragility perpetuates racism. On a hopeful note, she shares ideas, experiences, and techniques to disrupt racism and ways to dismantle it. It remains for white people to seriously commit themselves to transform the brokenness created by white privilege and white supremacy. ◆

EDITORIAL BOARD MEMBERS

The Mercy Association in Scripture and Theology publishes the MAST JOURNAL begun in 1991, three times a year. Members of the Editorial Board are: Sisters Eloise Rosenblatt, Editor, Patricia Talone, Aline Paris, Sharon Kerrigan, Mary Paula Cancienne, and Doris Gottemoeller.

Subscriptions and correspondence to Julia Upton, R.S.M., 600 Convent Road, Syosset, NY 11791. Email: jupton@sistersofmercy.org.

Manuscript submissions to Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M. at 1600 Petersen Ave. #40, San Jose, CA 95129. Email: eloros@sbcglobal.net.

Ellen Smith, R.S.M. layout, and printing by Firespring, Omaha, NE.

Jesus a Man of His Times: The Syro-Phoenician Woman: Mark 7: 24-30

Aline Paris, R.S.M.

Jesus is fully human and fully divine. This is a basic premise of the Christian faith.[1] If Jesus was in fact fully human, he would have experienced many of the attitudes towards others that all humans experience in relating to "the other." It is also safe to say that Jesus would have been affected by the culture in which he was raised and lived.

Too often Jesus' humanity is downplayed in favor of his divinity. Some Christians believe that somehow his humanity was under the control of his divinity. It is interesting that one of the first heresies in the early church was Gnostic Docetism--in the late first century, early second century. This heresy denied the fullness of Jesus' humanity. Perhaps the writer of the Johannine letters was responding to this growing heresy in the early Christian community when he stressed that "those who do not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh; any such person is the deceiver and the anti-Christ."[2]

It is often only in the opportunities we have in being exposed to other cultures that we begin to recognize our own expectations and biases.

In my teaching experience I frequently met students who were quasi-Docetists. This seemed related to a familiarity with the Gospel of John with its high Christology—an emphasis on the divinity of Jesus. For these students, the Gospel of Mark was disconcerting, almost to the point of being scandalous. Mark, with his low Christology, emphasized a human Jesus. This makes Jesus' willingness to suffer and die even more inspiring because of our natural fear of death. The contrast between the two gospels is striking. Jesus in Mark gets his hands dirty and gets weary. Jesus in John is one that I could call "hovercraft Jesus." His feet hardly ever touch the ground. This is not to take away from the beauty and inspiration of John's gospel. However, we need to recognize that Mark, Matthew and Luke provide a balance to our teaching and preaching about Jesus.

If we accept that Jesus was fully human, then we also need to accept that he lived within a particular cultural context. Jesus was a northern Palestinian Jew, raised in Galilee. There are several references in the gospels that Jews from Galilee were looked down upon by other Jews. "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"[3] Therefore, it is safe to assume that he had a worldview that was influenced both by his culture and religious upbringing.

All of us have our cultural biases which can simply be preferences or limiting attitudes toward people in other cultures. It is often only in the opportunities we have in being exposed to other cultures that we begin to recognize our own expectations and biases. I remember a visit to Israel. Being used to Sunday as a holy day, when most businesses are closed, I was stunned that in Israel, Sunday was a day of commerce, the first day of the business week. This made me realize that in the middle East, Christians are a demographic minority. Muslims whose holy day, *Jumu'ah*, was Friday, outnumber Christians. Jews celebrated their holy day, Shabbat on Saturday. It was an eye-opening moment. I have come to apply this lesson to other situations in my life.

I would propose that Jesus, as a human being, must have had such eye-opening moments. One such event could have been the account of the

healing of the Syro-Phoenician woman's daughter as recorded in Mark 7:24-30. (The story is also in Matthew 15:21-28). This narrative portrays Jesus with seemingly ethnocentric thinking which was in line with the prevailing Jewish view of Gentiles as outsiders.

Jesus had gone into Gentile territory, the region of Tyre (present day southern Lebanon), perhaps to get a needed break since he "did not want anyone to know he was there."[4] This may be another example of Mark's *Messianic Secret,* or it may simply demonstrate the humanity of Jesus. He felt wearied and pressured from his healing and preaching, and just wanted a break. While he was there, a woman with a sick child at home approaches Jesus, begging him to heal her daughter of a demon. Mark specifies that the woman is a Greek (Gentile*)* which explains Jesus' response to her. He does not refuse her request, but states that Jews must come first. "Let the children be fed first."[5]

However, what is shocking about the text is that Jesus then refers to the woman and her child as dogs (*kynariois*), "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." I recall one of my students having a strong reaction to Jesus' response. She said, "I thought Jesus was without sin and if I did or said that I would be sinning." Commentators have pointed out that Jesus was using a diminutive form of *kusi,* referring to wild dogs. But Mark uses *kynarion* which refers to domesticated house dogs, or pets. The fact that the woman's response refers to dogs being under the table also suggests the softer use of the term. Nevertheless, it remains a surprise to the modern reader that Jesus would refer to her as a dog—whether it's a puppy or not. "Dog" was a common reference Jews used for Gentiles when they felt their social and cultural difference as reflected his culture.

The woman is not put off by Jesus' rebuke. She is the mother of a sick child so she will move mountains to help her daughter. The mother stands up to Jesus. He is "'bested' in a verbal repartee," in the words of Donahue and Harrington.[6] She takes his insult and, while remaining courteous, turns it back on him so he will see it for what it is. "Sir (*Kyrie)* even the dogs (*kynaria*) under the table eat the children's crumbs."[7] She is not asking for much. Only crumbs will do because she believes they will save her child. Jesus grants her request. When she returns home her daughter has been healed.

Several barriers are broken in this event. A Gentile approaches a Jew. A woman approaches a man. A woman meets with a man when she is alone and unaccompanied. A woman makes a demand of a man in public. The man grants her request. This may have been an eye-opening event for Jesus, affecting his own cultural perspective. It may have been a conversion moment for him in his healing and preaching ministry. What is most significant for me as I pray this text is that Jesus, who had limited his ministry to his own Jewish culture now sets out for the regions of the Decapolis (Gentile territory) and immediately heals a deaf man.

This may have been an eye-opening event for Jesus in affecting his own cultural perspective. It may have been a conversion moment for him in his healing and preaching ministry.

Matthew includes this story in his gospel with a few changes while Luke omits the narrative completely.[8] Is the reason Luke's spirit of inclusivity-- so it is not surprising that he has not included the text? Matthew is written for a community composed mostly of Jewish-born Christians, but the community also has Gentile converts. There may have been some unsettled feelings about the inclusion of Gentiles. In Matthew, Jesus states, "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but

go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."[9] But the lived experience of the community, in the generation after the historical Jesus, is not so restricted. Thus, we see several passages in Matthew that acknowledge the inclusion of Gentiles. For example, three Gentile women are included in the genealogy of Jesus (Tamar, Rahab, and Ruth).[10] The Magi or wise men from the East are "outsiders," but the first to make a long journey to acknowledge Jesus as their Lord. [11] The final directive of Jesus is to go to all nations and baptize them.[12] The story about the healing of the child of a Canaanite woman emphasizes a theme in Matthew's gospel-- the inclusion of Gentiles. They, as well as Jews, are saved by God. Salvation is for the Jews first, and then through them, for the rest of the world.

How does this story fit the growing awareness of our interculturality? We all grow up and develop within a particular cultural context. Sometimes we are so immersed in it that we fail to recognize the limitations of our perspective. The richness of cross-cultural and inter-cultural experiences allow us to broaden our perspectives and thus be enriched as human beings. The story of the Syro-Phoenician woman and her encounter with Jesus provides a window into Jesus' own development as a human being, even in adulthood.

Some try to sanitize this text. They justify Jesus' rebuke as simply his testing of the woman's faith. But the power of the story is precisely in Jesus' rebuke and the woman's rebuttal. Jesus himself, a man of his times, through a significant experience with someone of another culture, was able to shift his ministry to be more inclusive. As Hebrews states, "Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered; and when he was made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him."[13] The Syro-Phoenician woman may have played a role in his perfection. May she be an encouragement for us as we strive for our own perfection. ◆

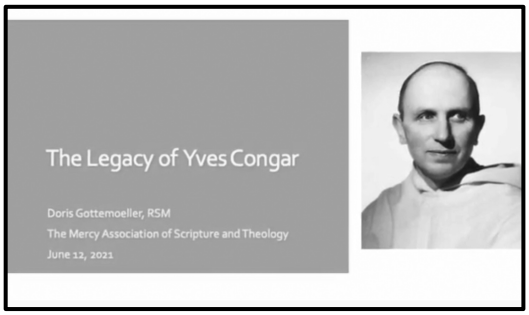
Endnotes

[1] Council of Ephesus (321) DS 250-251; Chalcedon (451) DS 301; *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (#464). "The Church must confess that Jesus is inseparably true God and true man." (#469)
[2] 2 John 7 (NRSV); also 1 John 4:2-3
[3] John 1:46 (NRSV). There was a negative view of Galileans as a place of origin for prophets or a messiah. (John 7:41-42, 52).
[4] Mark 7:24.
[5] Mark 7:27.
[6] *The Gospel of Mark. Sacra Pagina* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002): 234.
[7] Spanish: las migajas; French: les miettes.
[8] Matthew 15:21-28.
[9] Matthew 10:5-6. This saying of Jesus may come from M which is Matthew's unique source besides Mark and Q. Therefore, it is very early in the tradition and may be an authentic saying of Jesus.
[10] Matthew 1:3-5.
[11] Matthew 2:1.
[12] Matthew 28:9.
[13] Hebrews 5:8 (NAB Rev).

Annual MAST Meeting Presentations
June 12, 2021

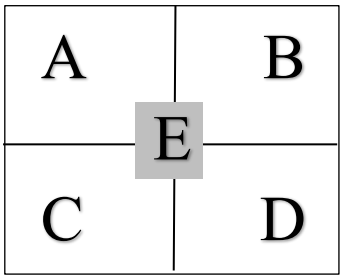
Sr. Doris Gottemoeller gave a presentation on "Change in the Church: The Legacy of Yves Congar, O.P." You can access a YouTube video of her presentation by copying the following link into your internet search box.

https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=cE2S783mF3s



Sr. Maria Luisa Vera gave a presentation on "Ideas and Feelings on Interculturality: A Call to Organic Living." You can access the YouTube video of her presentation by copying the link below into your internet search box.

https://youtu.be/n9XnKLRlkLQ



A New Intercultural Community

In this case, A, B, C, and D maintain characteristics of their core identity but gradually each is transformed and converted to a way of living that is somewhat new and somewhat familiar to each.

Discussion Questions

(**Gottemoeller**) *We could probably all name many changes that have occurred in our lifetimes. Changes in the celebration of the Eucharist, in ecumenical relations, and in religious life itself all come to mind. We could also evaluate these changes and, perhaps, list some changes we still hope for.*

Which changes since Vatican II were most significant for you, and which changes do you still hope for? Do any of them affect relations between different ethnic and religious groups?

(Guerin) In what ways have I witnessed racism in speech or action and how have I dealt with it? Tell the story. In the process of sharing, what have you learned from others with similar challenges?

(**Mullan**) *The author cites a paper by Roberts and Rizzo in 2020, presented to the American Psychological Association, that lists 7 factors that contribute to racism in the U.S.*

If you had to pick your top two in impact, what would they be of this list: 1) dividing people into categories; 2) recognizing factions; 3) creating institutional segregation; 4) maintaining hierarchies; 5) assigning power positions to certain people; 6) how groups are represented in media; 7) passivism-- people looking the other way and not getting involved.

(**Oladimeji**) *Breaking out of our homogeneous groups takes effort. The more accustomed we are to living with people whom we perceive to be like us, the more effort it takes to reach out to others we perceive to be different from us. Once divisions are established along cultural, ethnic, and racial lines, it takes a great deal of courage and determination to communicate across these lines.*

Take some time to journal or write about your experience of "breaking out" from your homogenous group, or of having someone else try to "break in" to the group that is your comfort zone. What feelings arise in trying to "break out" that are different from having someone else try to "break in"?

(Paris) What have been your "eye-opening moments" in regard to your experiences with cultures different from your own?

(**Watson**) *The author cites Pope Francis in Tutti Fratelli where he says that those of the majority culture must encourage those in a minority culture to be faithful to their own identity; and those living as a cultural minority have a responsibility to be true that identity, even when it is threatened or ignored.*

What are the challenges to community practice when members of the majority culture live together with members of a cultural minority? What accommodations work and which don't?

MERCY ASSOCIATION IN SCRIPTURE AND THEOLOGY

MAST, The Mercy Association in Scripture and Theology, met for the first time in June 1987 at Gwynedd-Mercy College in Gwynedd Valley, Pennsylvania. Called together by Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M. and Mary Ann Getty, twenty Mercy theologians and Scripture scholars from fourteen regional communities formally established the organization to provide a forum for dialogue and cooperation among Sisters of Mercy and associates. The stated purpose of the organization is to promote studies and research in Scripture, theology and related fields; to support its members in scholarly pursuits through study, writing, teaching and administration; and to provide a means for members to address issues within the context of their related disciplines. This work is meant to serve women, the Church, and the Institute.

MAST has been meeting annually since then, and the organization now numbers fifty, with members living and working in Australia, Canada, the Caribbean, Central and South America, as well as in the United States. Julia Upton, R.S.M., currently serves as MAST'S Executive Director. **The Annual Meeting will be held at Mercy Heritage Center in Belmont, N.C., from June 17-19, 2022.**

Members act as theologians in the Church and carry on theological work in their respective disciplines and ministries. They also seek to be of service to the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas by providing a forum for ongoing theological education.

For information on becoming a member and being added to MAST's mailing list, contact the association's Executive Director, Julia Upton, R.S.M. by e-mail at jupton@sistersofmercy.org or by mail at St. Mary of the Angels Convent, 600 Convent RD, Syosset, NY 11791-3863.

Dues can be paid by check, payable to MAST and sent to association Treasurer, Katherine Doyle, R.S.M., Holy Spirit Convent, 3920 West Land Park Drive, Sacramento, CA 95822-1123. E-mail is mkdoyle@sistersofmercy.org.

Since 1991, The MAST Journal has been published three times a year. Members of the organization serve on the journal's editorial board on a rotating basis, and several members have, over the years, taken on responsibility to edit individual issues. Maryanne Stevens, R.S.M., was the founding editor of the journal, and Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M., currently serves in that capacity.

Contributors

Doris Gottemoeller, R.S.M. holds a Ph.D. from Fordham University in New York, with a dissertation on the ecclesiology of Yves Congar. Prior to her election as the first Institute President, Doris had decades of service in elected community leadership at the local and provincial levels in Cincinnati, Ohio. Afterwards, Doris transitioned to a role in healthcare as senior vice-President for Mission Integration at Catholic Health Partners, a multi-state health system. She has served and is serving on many boards of trustees. She has published widely on themes of religious life, spirituality, and renewal. She also co-edited, with Sister Denise Colgan, a book celebrating the 25th anniversary of the establishment of the Institute called *Union and Charity: The Story of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas.* Doris was a founding member of the Common Ground Initiative in 1996, along with several leaders of Catholic institutions, when Joseph Cardinal Bernadin was Archbishop of Chicago. The purpose of Common Ground is to address critical, even acrimonious, issues in the church through dialogue. Doris was honored with the Bernadin Award in 2018. Besides demanding board work, she gives educational presentations via Zoom for various religious congregations. She is a member of the editorial board of *MAST Journal*, regularly making presentations and contributing articles.

Diane Guerin, R.S.M. holds a Ph. D. in education from Walden University in Minneapolis with a concentration in alternative dispute resolution. She has been involved in the field of nonviolence education for more than forty years. She is the former program director for the Philadelphia Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolence in Philadelphia, the only satellite center of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change in Atlanta, Georgia. She was a desegregation coordinator for the School District of Philadelphia and has written curricula for anti-racism, conflict resolution and mediation. As the founder of Creative Conflict Consultants, she has trained hundreds of students, community groups and community-based organizations in mediation skills. She also ministered as the Justice Coordinator for the former Mid-Atlantic Community. She now devotes her time to consulting, writing, and actively participating in justice endeavors and actions.

Deirdre Mullan, R.S.M., holds an M.A. in Educational Administration and a Ph.D. in "The Feminization of Poverty," both from the University of Ulster, N. Ireland. She served as Director of the Mercy Global Concern (MGC) at the United Nations for over ten years. From September 2012 to April 2016 she served as the Executive Director of the Partnership for Global Justice at the U.N. responsible for providing access to U.N, events for over 125 small congregations who did not have the resources for a full-time representative at the U.N. Since May 2014 she has worked with UNICEF, the body at the UN focusing on children's and girls' education. She is one the founding members of the NGO "The Mercy Girl Effect." Currently she is the consultant adviser to UNICEF on their initiative "Partnering Religious Congregations with UNICEF." Her publications have appeared in *The Furrow*, *The Tablet*, and *The Derry Journal*. She has been recognized with four honorary doctorates. She regularly publishes booklets through MGC and U.N. outlets on themes such as protection of women, girl children's rights, access to water, and peace-making.

Mary Oladimeji, R.S.M. was born in Lagos, Nigeria. She grew up in that country with her grandmother and extended family, where she received a Catholic education. She was immersed in the language, customs, and traditions of her Yoruba community which recently celebrated its 100th anniversary of conversion to Christianity. Her extended family includes Catholics, Muslims, and traditional Yoruba devotees. She came to the U.S. in 2002 at the invitation of her sister in California. She entered the Sisters of Mercy in Auburn, California in 2004. She holds a B.A in English Language and African Literature from the University of Idaban (Nigeria) and an M.A. from the University of San Francisco in International Multicultural Education. She developed curricula on non-violent activism and gives workshops to young people, bishops, priests and religious in Nigeria on this topic. She has also presented workshops and retreats on intercultural awareness to women religious.

Aline Paris, R.S.M., most recently was Professor of Theology at College of St. Mary in Omaha, Nebraska where she was awarded the Inspiring Excellence Award. She retired after twenty-five years after developing and teaching a broad range of courses. She holds both an M.A. in Theology/Scripture, and M.T.S. from St. Michael's College in Winooski, Vermont; and both an M.T.S. and a D.Min. in Word and Worship from Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. She was the first person admitted into that newly established doctoral program. Earlier, she spent a year of graduate theological studies at the Institut Catholique de Paris. Her previous ministries included serving as an elementary school principal for nine years (where she received Principal of the Year award in 1987); a DRE for eight years (including one role that involved coordinating music worship in 7 parishes in a Vermont deanery at once); and a junior high school teacher for six years. She served as spiritual director for several Cursillos. She was raised in a Franco-American culture with French as her maternal language and has experience serving as simultaneous translator from French into English. Aline served three terms as Executive Director of MAST and remains a member of the Editorial Board of *The MAST Journal*.

Deborah Watson, R.S.M. holds an M.A. in Theology from the School of Theology at Claremont in California. After 17 years as elementary and junior high teacher and parish director of religious education in California parishes, Deborah joined other Burlingame Sisters ministering in the Altiplano of Perú. She has worked in South America for the last 36 years. She has lived with Mercy communities in Perú and currently is part of the Argentine community in Buenos Aires. Her pastoral ministry has been primarily with women and children in Puno and Chimbote, Perú. In Argentina, she has served in Clorinda and Rio Negro. Deborah was active in the formation of the CCASA Community (Caribbean, Central America, South America) and has held various leadership and administrative positions in CCASA, Perú and Argentina. She now acts as Communications Liaison with the Institute for CCASA countries. In Buenos Aires she participates in *Manos Abiertos*, a Jesuit-sponsored project that includes the settlement and accompaniment of refugees.

Maria Luisa Vera, R.S.M., a native of Brownsville, Texas, received a public-school education, and met the Sisters of Mercy when she enrolled in the Canales School of Vocational Nursing of Mercy Hospital in Brownsville, Texas. She holds an R.N. from Incarnate Word College (now University) and as a registered nurse, served in Mercy hospitals in Texas and in Fort Scott, Kansas. In the early 1980's she was part-time vocation minister for the Sisters of Mercy in St. Louis, Missouri, and also parish minister at St. Martin de Porres church. From 1985 to 1995, Maria Luisa served in elected office on the Institute Leadership Team in Silver Spring, Maryland, while also named to various boards and committees for healthcare and healthcare education. From 2006 to the present, Maria Luisa has been President of Mercy Ministries of Laredo, Texas, with its two branches, Casa de Misericordia and Mercy Clinic. Among other projects for the civic community in Laredo, she advocates for the medically un-insured.

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