

“Religious life has always had a prophetic role. In this book Gittins points out how it can maintain its prophetic edge by modelling how we can live fully and interculturally in an age of unprecedented migration. In almost every country we are in the birth pangs of a new way of being human. But migration and intercultural living are full of pain and possibilities. Living happily and productively in the future will involve learning not only how to respect cultural difference but the ability to enjoy living with difference. Gittins outlines the missionary and prophetic role religion can play and gives practical insights into culture, marginalization, and mission and the skills and attitudes required to live in such communities.”

— Noel Connolly, SSC
Columban Mission Institute

“*Living Mission Interculturally: Faith, Culture, and the Renewal of Praxis* is a treasure and seminal work on intercultural living as an expression of mission, an actual participation in God’s mission. This book is essential reading for international congregations committed to intercultural living and willing to ‘do the work’ necessary to make this a lived reality. The inclusion of questions for personal and communal reflection after each chapter and the appendices challenge the reader to move beyond the text and enter into a process that can lead to transformation. The freedom and openness to engage in a critique of culture is essential for the creation of a community of ‘radical welcome.’ The actual formation of intercultural community is crucial for the unfolding of religious life in a global context. Gittin’s experience, wisdom, and profound insights are both gift and blessing for religious life and the Church. This is not reading for the fainthearted.”

— Joan Marie Steadman, CSC
Executive Director
Leadership Conference of Women Religious

“In *Living Mission Interculturally*, Fr. Gittins provides the most comprehensive resource to date integrating the gifts from sociology, cultural anthropology (intercultural studies), and theology as they apply to religious communities. In his multidimensional approach to the topic, he guides his readers on a multifaceted journey with clarity of definitions, on the one hand, and landmarks for personal and community commitment and transformation, on the other. If the complexity of intercultural living is like a sphere, then each chapter of this book is like a slice of the sphere offering opportunities for deeper understanding and exploration of what it means and what it takes to be a faithful missional intercultural community.”

— Eric H. F. Law
Executive Director of the Kaleidoscope Institute
Author of *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb*

“I am a leader in an international congregation that is currently discerning just what interculturality can mean for us and for others. I’ve participated in workshops by Gittins on this topic and I welcome this further study as an aid to deeper listening and more focused response to what the world needs today from international communities. In a clear and accessible way Gittins goes to great depth at each turn of this very timely topic. His mission-driven exploration of intercultural living is immensely practical, challenging, and solidly based on scholarship, lived commitment, wide dialogue, and prayerful reflection. Gittins has given us a great gift and incentive to live our unity in diversity from a stance of radical faith and heightened cultural awareness. I am eager to share this gift with my whole international community and all of our partners in mission.”

— Mary Ann Buckley, SHCJ
American Providence Leader, Society of the Holy Child Jesus

“Many of us in religious communities, dioceses, and parishes are looking for advice and resources to address the growing challenges and opportunities of intercultural living today. *Living Mission Interculturally* is an excellent resource for practitioners. Drawing on his social-science background and in-depth knowledge of the actual situations of mission/ministry, Anthony Gittins provides a very fine tool with relevant information and practical exercises that can be used by groups and individuals. And he does this with an insightful, concise, and clear writing style that we know well and appreciate from his other writing. In his own words, Gittins ‘attempts to offer ways of approaching the “otherness” of other people and to stimulate readers into remembering their own “otherness” in relation to those among whom they live and work’ (xix). He has achieved this goal and left us with an excellent resource to respond to real-life situations.”

— Roger Schroeder, SVD
Louis J. Luzbetak, SVD, Professor of Mission and Culture
Professor of Intercultural Studies and Ministry
Catholic Theological Union at Chicago

“*Living Mission Interculturally* is a must-read for anyone who wants to live more fully and deeply our call as church and global citizens. Anthony Gittins’s book comes out of years of engaging theologically and living practically the invitation, challenges, and possibilities of intercultural community living. Gittins explains with great examples the dimensions required to move us toward living mission interculturality, whether as religious congregations or as parish communities. He both gives us an understanding of what we mean by intercultural community and shows us how to open ourselves to growth in very pragmatic ways. In the midst of all this, he reminds us that thinking and acting differently require a radical conversion, which God longs to live in us. This book is for everyone who wants to participate in building the reign of God here and now!”

— Maria Cimperman, RSCJ, PhD
Director, Center for the Study of Consecrated Life
Associate Professor of Theological Ethics, Catholic Theological Union

Living Mission Interculturally

Faith, Culture, and the Renewal of Praxis

Anthony J. Gittins, CSSp

Foreword by
Gerald A. Arbuckle, SM



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Foreword

The world is fractured by ideological conflicts, genocide, pathological forms of nationalism, and intercultural tensions—a world “groaning in travail” (Rom 8:22) in need of reconciliation across and within cultural frontiers. We need wise people to help us to understand what is happening and to offer us down-to-earth guidelines to live harmoniously together. Wisdom is information and understanding gained through contemplation on experience that will guide behavior. It is a form of understanding that combines a reflective attitude and a practical concern to act virtuously.

Author Anthony Gittins has the wisdom we need to live interculturally. This book is the consequence of his years of intelligently contemplating, and living in, many different cultures. The reader will discover, as I have done, that behind the book’s text is his unquestioning belief that God calls us to build cultures purified of whatever obstructs the presence of the Spirit. His enthusiasm is infectious. Readers will also find it irresistible.

Though the book is written for members of international communities of religious (women or men, lay or clerical), much of the book’s theoretical and practical insights can apply equally well to anyone committed to a ministry involving relationships between people of different cultures. To illustrate the wider and urgent relevance of the book, Anthony mentions, for example, the urgent need to foster intercultural living for clergy who have been recruited from overseas, and the need for religious congregations to cease their customary cultural assimilationist policies that are “increasingly ill-adapted to the realities of a global church and incapable of producing integrated communities composed of mutually respectful and supportive members” (p. xii).

He also claims that the book's themes are needed to assist pastoral lay ministers in multicultural dioceses. He is right. Once while I was researching in a village in the South Pacific, I overheard villagers speaking about the "Backhome Man." Each time they used the expression there were hoots of laughter. I then discovered the man who so delighted them was a pastoral worker from another country. He began his sentences with the expression "Back home . . ." so often that the people nicknamed him the "Backhome Man." The generous worker had the gift of internationalism—that is, he was prepared to live in someone else's culture—but he lacked the skills to learn anything from, and integrate with, the host cultures. In brief, Anthony's insights into the complexity of culture and its practical implications are valid for anyone living and working in cultures other than their own, not just for faith-oriented people committed to intercultural living.

The book's blending of theory and practice is so effective that the book could well have been called *A Handbook of Living Mission Interculturally*. Intercultural living is an intentional and unequivocally faith-based venture. But faith must be lived in a cultural context, for "we have this treasure in clay jars" (2 Cor 4:7). Hence the importance of perceptively grasping the complex dynamics of culture. If we are to be authentic members of international faith communities, we need to uncover, respect, and honor the genuine demands of our cultures and commit ourselves to meet persons of other cultures with both gratitude and a willingness to learn. This means we must grasp the nature and power of culture. We need to identify as we strive to live interculturally what may be stifling or freeing us in our cultures.

The author proceeds to explain these points in ways that are easily understandable by the nonacademic reader. Rightly, he insists that intercultural living demands skills that must be gained and worked at diligently and unceasingly *if* people are to live amicably. Goodwill alone is not enough. How true! He masterfully draws on the lessons offered by the social sciences with particular reference to psychology, sociology, and social/cultural anthropology in particular. The author not only clearly articulates the skills required but also describes practical ways to achieve and assess them.

The second word in the book's title is "Mission" because, referring to the exhortation of Pope Francis, "*everyone* is called to be a 'missionary disciple': there is no other kind of disciple of Jesus" (p. 164).

We cannot have intercultural living *if* we are not in mission; a community that turns inward dies. That is, the essential aim and validation for intercultural living is God's mission and our joyful and enthusiastic sharing in it. Intercultural living humanly will always be challenging; it means letting go of cherished cultural attachments and being open to new cultural experiences. It demands constant effort inspired by faith. In the words of the author: "Intercultural living is in fact revolutionary: it affects everyone involved, it favors no one, and it demands of each one a transformation" (p. xiv). Transformation is the ongoing fruit of conversion to the mission of Christ; it is our changed lives that will invite others to listen to us.

In J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit: Or There and Back Again*, Bilbo Baggins initially turns down an invitation to go on a journey. He is too comfortable in his way of life to be bothered with the trials of an adventure. He finally accepts the challenge and even begins to enjoy it. But he soon tires of the relentless need to adapt to, and learn from, new cultures, so he turns for home and retreats from the world of adventure, singing: "Feet that wandering have gone, turn at last to home afar. Eyes . . . Look at last on meadows green." Anthony explains that we can commit ourselves to intercultural living, but there is always the temptation to weaken our efforts, to seek refuge once more, as Bilbo Baggins, in our own familiar cultures and our prejudices. He writes: "Jesus calls us to transform our particular cultures by defying sin and seeking grace as he strove to transform his. And it costs no less than everything: this is the measure of our faith, lived culturally" (p. 78). St. Paul uses the analogy of a runner when he explains the process of conversion required of intercultural living. To stop running for the Lord is to fall back into purely human insights and comforts (1 Cor 9:24-27). Constant discipline of the whole person is required: "Athletes exercise self-control in all things. . . . So I do not run aimlessly . . . but I punish my body . . . so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified" (1 Cor 9:25-27).

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Introduction

Challenge and Opportunity in Contemporary Mission and Ministry

Some topics prove to be of perennial interest to many people, while others become interesting because of particular circumstances; fires or floods in general may not capture people's interest or imagination—until a particular fire or flood involves themselves or their loved ones. With the phenomenon of globalization in recent decades, intercultural living has proved to be a topic increasingly relevant to more and more people and, quite frankly, very challenging to many whose circumstances bring them into frequent contact with people of different cultures. There was a time when most people spent their entire existence within striking distance of home or moved to places where people spoke the same language and lived very similar cultural lives as their own. But affordable jet travel, human migration (freely chosen or forced), the expansion of markets and trade, the availability of near-universal education, and increased pastoral missionary outreach have radically altered the nature of human relationships across the globe.

Internationality and multiculturalism describe aspects of the changes affecting individuals and groups, but the words frequently conceal as much as they reveal—they are not always adequate to describe certain social processes. Rather, they describe situations or social facts: “international” usually applies to any situation involving people of different nationalities, from “an international crisis” to “international cooperation”; while “multicultural” is typically

invoked where those involved are primarily distinguished or differentiated not by nationality but by culture. Neither word, however, identifies the actual quality of the relationships involved. International aid can be unilateral and token without creating a positive or meaningful relationship of mutuality between donors and recipients. Indeed, many donors never encounter any recipients, while recipients often have no idea where the aid originated. International aid can easily create resentment in the recipients and complacency in the donors.

The word multicultural can apply to a *de facto* social reality without disclosing anything about the quality of relationships involved. Millions of people live in multicultural cities or neighborhoods, side by side with people from very different cultures, but without ever trying to learn another language or encounter their neighbors in other than a perfunctory or conventionally civic fashion. Multiculturalism has been described as “living together separately.” For ourselves as people of faith, that simply cannot be enough.

In today’s world, something is occurring with increasing frequency, whether for commercial or humanitarian reasons or due to an intentional commitment to “the other” (any person, but particularly one of a different culture or language). The phenomenon is that certain people under certain circumstances deliberately choose to work through linguistic and cultural divisions in order to build a community that can be called “intercultural.” That is the focus of this book. But, like the words “international” and “multicultural,” the word “intercultural” can either describe a simple social fact, or it can apply to a particular quality of relationships between the people concerned; it is the latter meaning that we will define, identify, and promote.

Written primarily for members of international communities of religious (women or men, lay or clerical), much of this book’s content can apply equally well to anyone committed to a ministry involving relationships between people of different cultures—the vast majority of ecclesial ministers in today’s globalized world. The single most important denotation of the word “intercultural” in these pages is that it is a theological word and therefore applies to people who are explicitly and implicitly motivated by faith in God. But before exploring this, here are four possible scenarios or situations in which intercultural living might be called for and in which this book might prove relevant.

1. *International Clergy in Vast Dioceses*

There are many reasons why people of different languages and cultures might attempt to form an intercultural community, virtual or actual. Consider some far-flung diocese in Canada's Prairie Provinces or in many other parts of the world where clergy are few and aging, and the bishop is concerned to provide priests as pastors and sacramental ministers. He travels far and wide to countries with more clergy and manages to recruit a handful from the Philippines, Africa, Poland, and India to complement his current diocesan clergy, all of whom are Canadian. His hope is that this new influx of priests of various cultures will bond in such a way that they will demonstrate to the local people the possibility and power of intercultural living. After three or four years, however, his experience is that a considerable number of his carefully recruited expatriate clergy have returned home or somehow failed their bishop, their people, and perhaps themselves. Moreover, those who remain seek the company of fellow priests from their own culture and do not mix very well with those of other cultures. The local Canadian clergy also find them difficult to understand and consider them problematic in some ways, while the bishop believes not only has his experiment failed to bear fruit but also that an increased number of pastoral problems of staffing, effective pastoral service, and oversight have been created.

The details of such a scenario can be filled in by anyone with imagination and a little experience. The question then becomes: what, if anything, might be done? This book attempts to provide some answers.

2. *The Expansion of a German Congregation of Sisters*

Imagine a religious foundation dating from the middle of the nineteenth century that establishes a new community in the United States in the 1860s. It is composed of only a handful of German-speaking sisters. Initially, their ministry is confined to a single diocese where they work among mostly German-speaking immigrants. But as they find their feet and their apostolate, they increase their proficiency in English and begin to seek and welcome local vocations. By the time of Vatican II, they have become well-established, with communities

and schools from the West to the East Coasts. Many of the younger sisters are from second- or third-generation German stock, so there is a strong German *ethos* and attachment to the German founders, although a substantial minority of the sisters are from English, Irish, Italian, and French stock. The religious habit, liturgical and praying style, and many customs and menu items derive, however, directly from the community's German origins. Characteristic of this community is that would-be postulants and novices are admitted by a process of assimilation: they are required to modify their behavior so as to accept the well-established conventions of the community with its heavily Germanic stamp, and anyone unable to do so will sooner or later leave the community. This assimilationist model was the default model in religious life for centuries: the order or congregation considered itself to possess a founding charism (an identity and specific purpose or "mission") embodied in its rule and constitutions, and this charism was to be lived from one generation to the next with very little variation and very much fidelity to the tradition. The approach was unremarkable in itself and ensured continuity and conformity by minimizing or suppressing individual differences of personal, temperamental, and cultural natures.

Spurred on by the reforms of Vatican II, such communities gradually diversified and expanded beyond their former territorial boundaries. With changing social conditions, new members now entered as mature adults rather than school-leavers, and the assimilationist model became increasingly ill-adapted to the realities of a global church and incapable of producing integrated communities composed of mutually respectful and supportive members. Today, while some communities remain largely monocultural and homogeneous, the majority of post-Vatican II religious have examined their original inspiration and attempted to focus it on today's world—incorporating people from cultures and local churches beyond Europe and America. Many have discovered, to their own surprise or chagrin and at great personal cost to aspirants, that it is impossible to continue with time-honored patterns of formation. Slowly but surely, they have become convinced that the assimilationist model is no longer fit for purpose if international and *de facto* multicultural communities are to be appropriately equipped for today's apostolate. But they are also aware that simply living under the same roof does not make people into a community or family. Unless they meet the challenge of *intercultural* living, communities risk fragmentation, loss of membership, and the

inability to serve the mission. This book is an attempt to chart a course for the future.

3. Individualism in Established Missionary Communities

Not every international or multicultural group is intercultural. True intercultural living is both a faith-based undertaking and requires that each individual be truly committed to others of different ethnicities and cultures. A spirit of independence and individualism will undermine any intercultural project, and membership of international religious communities does not automatically produce intercultural living. Some people have lived for decades outside their original cultural environment without becoming truly accepted by, much less integrated into, the community in which they live. Some maintain far stronger links with home than with the people they claim to serve, seeking the company of other expatriates rather than local people and clinging to their own language rather than making any serious attempts to learn the language of their hosts. Not only are their lives far from intercultural, they are doubtfully even cross-cultural in any real sense. Ironically, some recently internationalized communities (international in both recruitment and outreach) seem more committed to intercultural living than long-established communities. We will identify some blind spots that limit people's vision and commitment and attempt to offer some relevant pointers for intercultural living.

4. Pastoral (Lay) Ministers in Multicultural Dioceses

In the past half century, the number of officially qualified and employed pastoral ministers has grown at an unprecedented rate. In the United States alone, there were none in 1967, 10,500 in 1986, and 22,791 in 2013.¹ Given the radical shift from monocultural or single ethnicity parishes to today's multicultural parishes, it is evident that pastoral ministers are now called on to work with and among a wide variety of cultural styles. The work of Eric H. F. Law has been a major contribution to multicultural ministry; his work will be examined in these pages. But this book is also structured in such a way as to offer to pastoral ministers some assistance in identifying challenges that

are part of their ministry. Since all Christians are called by baptism to reach out not only to the sisters and brothers they already know but also those they have yet to meet, and given that we live in a globalized, multicultural world, there ought to be something in these pages for anyone who takes the cultural component of their faith seriously. Intercultural encounters and intercultural living does therefore not only apply to people *within* communities of consecrated women or men religious but also to relationships *between* communities and their constituent members. Hence, anyone undertaking pastoral work in *favelas*, hospitals, prisons, retirement homes, parishes, and so on, where oneself (*ego*) is the outsider committed to learning about and from the insiders, is undertaking a form of intercultural living.

Everyone committed to this enterprise will experience vulnerability, limitations, and “outsider-ness” to some degree. But by identifying the way Jesus himself embraced such a status and called us to do the same, intercultural living is not only possible (with commitment and the determined acquisition of appropriate skills and sensitivity) but it also can be redemptive for both insiders and outsiders.

Intercultural living is in fact revolutionary: it affects everyone involved, it favors no one, and it demands of each one a transformation. It affects all new recruits, including the recruiters; it affects the way people adapt to new appointments, including their mentors; it challenges members of the dominant culture in any community or group; and it affects the way people within minority groups are treated and respond. Leadership styles and the process for the selection of future leaders will need to be scrutinized and modified in response both to the reiterated call of Pope Francis and to the needs of the actual people we serve. And if there is to be a viable, long-term future for intercultural living, every aspirant—clerical, religious, or lay—will need to demonstrate not only willingness but also a real commitment and proven capacity for intercultural living.

The Limits and Limitations of This Book

The topic of interculturality and intercultural living has generated a virtual library of academic scholarship, initially and in great part within the social sciences and more recently from the field of theology.

The present work neither claims nor aims to be a narrowly academic addition to this literature. If we distinguish academic or outer knowledge (“knowing about”) from apprentice or inner knowledge (“knowledge of”), the former being more theoretical and the latter more practical, the aims of this book are squarely directed to practical and apprentice knowledge. Theory is involved of course, and there are many bibliographical references for further reading; but my primary concern is to describe features of intercultural living and to invite readers on a path that can lead to the actual experience of such a mode of living. Throughout the book there are suggestions for experimentation and practical action for individuals and whole communities, and each chapter ends with suggestions for further integration. Some of the diagrams ought to provide food for meditation or faith sharing in community, while others, like the one on Social Profiles (chapter 6) or Psychological Responses (chapter 9) might be helpful for a workshop for community members. This book, then, is primarily for practitioners rather than theorists.

Living Mission Interculturally is not the result of primary research into daily practices in various communities, although some knowledge and experience of that has contributed to the presentation. Rather it offers a series of “approaches to” intercultural living, based as much on other people’s research as on practical wisdom distilled by anthropologists working with people of different cultures. In that sense, the book is eclectic or synthesizing in nature, aiming to present intercultural living not only as a serious challenge but also as perfectly feasible and worth striving for. It attempts to offer ways of approaching the “otherness” of other people and to stimulate readers into remembering their own “otherness” in relation to those among whom they live and work.

There are plenty of resources that offer paths of spiritual discernment or psychological testing of readiness for cross- or intercultural living. This book, however, is more of a “discovery procedure” by which people can gauge their own temperamental suitability, readiness, or willingness to adapt and learn the elements of intercultural living through exposure to some social analysis, some theological reflection, and some personal *examen*. In the course of such introspection and conversation, individuals ought to be able better to understand whether they are ready for the demands of intercultural living, and, if not, whether they can offer moral and spiritual support to

those who are. There is no shame in acknowledging that intercultural living is beyond one's current abilities, whether due to age, state of health, or other limitations. What is important is to know how one can best contribute to the good of the community and the missionary goal to which it is committed.

This, then, is something of a "how-to" book, but since intercultural living is at heart a theological or faith-based undertaking, some of its deeper theological and philosophical underpinnings are raised throughout. But in final analysis, no amount of theologizing or philosophizing can replace the necessity for individual commitment and for persistent efforts.

Here are two points to carry with us, each of which will recur throughout these pages. First, we must learn to appreciate our differences and not simply amalgamate or blend our similarities; the intercultural community we build must become a home (away from home) for everyone, not just for those of the dominant culture or for dominant individuals. The words of Jonathan Sacks give us fair warning if we fail in this: "Segregation is rapidly replacing integration as an ideal. Communities are turning inward."² And second, we must learn to identify the way we think and then rethink it for the sake of the mission. Later we will quote Rudy Wiebe's wise words: "You repent, not by feeling bad, but by thinking [and acting] differently."

And lastly, here is a parable or fable. As a child I loved to play cricket. I would have loved to be good at it. I had great enthusiasm. I had a modicum of talent. But I never had any coaching. I never received any encouragement. And I had no access to any decent equipment. Consequently, I never did develop whatever talent I may have had. But I might have if circumstances were different.

Many individuals and communities might like to live *in unum* interculturally. Many individuals and communities have a modicum of talent and a fund of goodwill. I would like in these pages to offer some equipment, a great amount of encouragement, some coaching, and some suggestions for continuous practice, alone or as a team. Not everyone will want to pursue this subject. Not everyone can become exceptionally good at it. But everyone is able to generate some enthusiasm and some encouragement for others. And everyone is able to commit to learning some skills and approaches and to endorse and affirm others rather than belittle or criticize them.

Are there any true intercultural communities? Yes, certainly in practice there are, wherever people are intentional about living as a community united in their differences and truly respectful of “the other.” But there could be many more if people believed that intercultural living was not only desirable but also really possible, and if they felt that it was something that could be learned and practiced systematically and effectively. Although goodwill alone is not enough, it is an important prerequisite. Some of what else is needed is described, offered, and encouraged in the pages that follow.

Chapter One

Called to Conversion

The Changing Face of International Religious Communities

The social organization of religious institutes of both women and men religious (including brothers and clerics) varies widely, consistent with their founding *charism* and pastoral purpose and is rather different from that of the parochial or secular clergy. In principle, at least, the latter used to be drawn from men living within the boundaries of a particular diocese, and they generally shared a common language, culture, and nationality. By contrast, many religious orders and congregations spread rather rapidly and far beyond their historical origins. Recruiting from many cultures over time, they became truly international in extent and membership. Others again, though also international in membership themselves, deliberately refrained from recruiting new personnel from the distant areas they evangelized (“the Missions” as they were then called) until first an indigenous clergy or a diocesan community of women religious had been established in and for the church of the region. Still other communities, more local in ambition and scope, flourished for many years relatively close to their original foundation but later (particularly since Vatican II) began to reach beyond their previous area of influence in order to share their *charism* and personnel among people seeking pastoral assistance and expertise in other and unfamiliar parts of the world.

Times change. Gone now are the days when the membership of different provinces of international religious communities was largely homogeneous, ethnically and linguistically. And if each of those various provinces once bore the unmistakable and heavy stamp of the original or “mother” province (in attire and daily *horarium*), their identity in the twenty-first century is often very different—in membership, theology, missiology, focus, and works—from what it was as late as the mid-twentieth century. Social and geographical mobility are far more evident today than before the advent of the globe-shrinking Jumbo Jet in the 1960s; and the impact of such mobility is currently affecting and reshaping the contours of international religious communities.

The classical model for recruitment was that of assimilation: after a suitable period of scrutiny or vetting, prospective members were admitted on the general and specific understanding that they were to learn to accommodate themselves to a preexisting and well-tried way of living. If and when aspirants were admitted to a particular community but brought with them a different culture or first language, the adaptation required would be largely one-way: the new member was simply expected to “fit in,” while the community as a whole would continue as before—with a minimum of disturbance.

The thesis of this book is that, given the global demographic changes that have occurred in the lifetime of today’s senior members, the future of international religious communities must increasingly and intentionally become intercultural. Indeed, without the tectonic shift from international to intercultural, there will be no viable future for international religious orders. Unless we can live together interculturally, we shall fall apart, retreat into our respective cultural groups, or continue half-heartedly, perhaps professing unconvincingly what we do not really live.

The challenge facing everyone now—not only new members but also the current membership—is to identify and respond to the specific demands of intercultural living. Aspiring members will more naturally acknowledge that their own cultural identity must not only be respected but also seriously engaged with by current members, while the latter will be challenged to acknowledge not only that the former assimilation model is no longer fit for purpose but also that it is now incumbent on every older member to identify and respond to the real challenge of intercultural living, whether by embracing it wholeheartedly, halfheartedly, or by resisting it and waiting for death.

Everyone must be willing to stand and be counted: the future, viable or not, demands and depends on it.

Definitions and Usage

In the course of these pages we will gradually build up a composite picture of the meaning and significance of the word “intercultural,” used theologically. In that sense it is not in many dictionaries; and where it is employed it can be seen to have several referents. As used theologically, its focus is clearly different from that of the social sciences, where it most probably originated, and this book uses it explicitly in a theological sense: that is, intrinsically, it has something to do with God and faith. Where it does occur in a dictionary, its standard meaning is something like “of, relating to, or representing different cultures,” and it usually appears in the phrase “intercultural communication,” which, in turn, is described as communication-sharing across culturally different communities. Both of these are perfectly helpful and worthy as far as they go; but we will take them considerably further by placing them in a theological context. For several decades now, theologians and missiologists have been speaking of “intercultural theology” and “interculturality.”¹

When used in these pages with a theological focus, the word “intercultural” is most often associated with a way of living: “intercultural living” is our topic. It will be distinguished from “internationality” and “multiculturality.” I take the following as a working description that I will attempt to expand by describing its workings and implications:

[The intercultural approach] aims, in the final instance, to establish in reality the practical conditions that enable the subjects of any cultural universe to utilize the “reserves” of their tradition of origin as a point of support for their own personal identity, without discriminatory consequences, and to participate in using these cultural references in the process of exchange of ideas. All this is towards the common goal of searching for truth.²

This is clear and helpful, though the goal of these pages is not simply that of searching for the truth; it is primarily intended for

people who sense that something more than internationality or multicultural community living is urgently needed. Some, indeed, are already committed—and may have been so for many years—to intercultural living as a way of life that serves the pastoral and missionary purposes of their international religious community; but today's circumstances demand that many more undertake this way of living.

Ten Theses about Intercultural Living

For more than a half century now, the need for cooperation across cultures³ and for vastly improved cross-cultural communication skills has been identified by multinational companies and addressed by the social sciences.⁴ The earlier and widely used term “multicultural” has now been largely replaced by “intercultural”⁵ in order to focus not simply on the social fact that people of diverse cultures often live in close proximity but also on the specific challenges facing multinational corporations attempting to create a concerted workforce of culturally diverse personnel. Because these words are still sometimes used interchangeably—and social science and missiology address different social realities—I will clarify usage when necessary.

Just as the word *inculturation* has become a specifically theological word, unknown or insignificant to social scientists, so it is with the word *intercultural*; it may well be used to emphasize cross-cultural cooperation and mutuality, but in common or secular usage, that is all it means. So it is important for us at the outset to identify some features that are specific to *intercultural living* as it will be developed in the following pages *as a theologically weighted term*. Here are ten:

1. Intercultural living is an intentional and explicitly faith-based undertaking. It is therefore radically different from simply being a member of an international community and living under the same roof as others, including people of diverse cultures.
2. Since a particular culture (or constellation of cultural traits) marks every single person, it follows that a person's faith can only be lived *culturally*: there is no lived faith without a corresponding lived culture. Faith is expressed in practice. This requires that everyone be encouraged to express faith through one's culture and be made aware that failure to live deeply

within and through one's own culture can produce a kind of religious or spiritual schizophrenia.

3. Intercultural living itself should not be imagined primarily as a *problem*. It would be far preferable if people were to identify it as a *challenge* to be faced and dealt with appropriately. Nor should it be seen as someone else's challenge (or problem); it is a challenge that faces everyone alike. A community that is polarized into "us" and "them" will never achieve intercultural living; only in a community striving to become "we" can it possibly succeed.
4. For the vast majority of people, intercultural living is undesirable and unnecessary. In fact, it is unnatural or at least not "natural" (as we shall see). But it is possible, perhaps "supernatural," if undertaken from a supernatural motive. And since it is a form of faith-based living, it is not achieved by a simple mastery of new techniques;⁶ it requires virtue and indeed the transformation or conversion of all involved.⁷
5. As anyone who has attempted intercultural living will attest, it is far from easy. But it is highly desirable and appears to be urgently desired by God, lest one single culture comes to dominate in a culturally diverse community and individuals become significantly distressed, alienated, or worse.
6. Goodwill is not enough to bring about intercultural living. Goodwill has been responsible for the perpetration of many human tragedies and scandals, both within the church and beyond it. Goodwill is surely very necessary, but alone it remains quite insufficient. Also required are commitment and the sustained hard work necessary for the acquisition of both skills and virtue.
7. Intercultural living demands graciousness, diplomacy, compromise, mutual respect, serious dialogue, and the development of a common and sustaining vision. A vision is something that inspires the common effort of a lifetime and also provides appropriate means to achieve a desired end.
8. For the majority of people—even in established international religious communities—intercultural living is something quite new. Most humans throughout history have been monocultural,

and this remains true in modern times even when people live in a multicultural or international environment.

9. 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.
10. Intercultural living—at least in a modified form—is not just required of members of international religious communities; more broadly, it presents a challenge to any person of faith who undertakes ministry to any “other,” whether other by gender, age, ethnicity, religion, culture, or any criterion of difference.

As we proceed, these statements will be exemplified and clarified as necessary, but they are articulated here in order to provide an initial perspective on the journey that lies before us—the journey will require both careful preparation and strategic planning.

Three Guidelines

The following might serve as a guide, an orientation, or a framework within which we attempt to build intercultural communities and intercultural living.

1. *We are called to build a home together.*⁸ Intercultural living only becomes possible if we have somewhere to call our own to which everyone can lay equal claim, for which each assumes equal responsibility, and where all can live in harmonious coexistence. But this is not to say that everyone, or indeed any one, will feel completely and entirely “at home” at all times, nor that coexistence will be like a perfect *Shangri La* or paradise. This is partly because the call to missionary religious life is also a call to leave home for the sake of the Gospel. So we will need to approach the paradox carefully.

It is important not to romanticize and to be realistic about what is feasible, but if people under a single roof become alienated from or unconcerned about each other, or cliquish or isolated, intercultural living is clearly impossible. Jonathan Sacks, former chief rabbi of

United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, contrasts a range of different places in which people might live, whether as permanent resident or transients. He considers the differences between a family home and other living spaces: a hotel, motel, country house, elite club, nursing home, hospital, prison, castle or fortress, and so on. Sacks distinguishes each of these according to rights, responsibilities, degrees of freedom or ownership, comfort level of each, as well as other criteria. The following paragraphs provide a few examples.

A *retirement home* is sometimes known tellingly as a place of “independent living.” Here, many people may live under one roof, but each with his or her own freedom, budget, privacy, and self-determination. The larger community may come together for meals and some entertainment, but each person is free and nobody is held to any moral or legal requirements apart from observing normal social conventions governing such things as excessive noise and habitual rudeness. It is a form of independence or “alone-togetherness.”

Prison, euphemistically known as a “correctional facility,” is very different. Here, the rules are specific, all-embracing, and strictly enforced. The “inmates” have some human rights but are deprived of many others like free association and freedom of speech. Each inmate must keep to a regime for a specified time, after which he or she may be released into the wider society, often having received little or no help to adjust to the society from which they were forcibly and legally removed. This might be characterized as a form of “together-aloneness.”⁹

A *motel* or *hotel* operates on a host/guest or principal/client basis. A “guest” has certain entitlements depending on what has been advertised by the establishment (“host”/“principal”) and paid for by the “client.” A special fee may be extracted if the property is damaged, and the usual civil conventions apply, with increasing force as the motel or hotel is more expensive and elitist. In principle this is neither aloneness nor togetherness.

A member of a *country club* may first be required to pass a vetting process requiring sponsorship and a declaration of certain personal and private details. Once admitted to membership, a person will be subject to the rules of the club and entitled to its privileges. The annual fee is designed to cover the provision of the club’s amenities, and these should be freely available to the member. Normal “wear

and tear” of the property will not be penalized, but strict rules will govern the member’s responsibility in the case of damage or disruption. This is an example of loose affiliation.

As we reflect on communities we ourselves have known and perhaps lived in—whether specifically religious communities or residences of any other kind—it might be instructive for us to identify the images they evoke and consider whether or not they were appropriate for their stated purpose, especially if they purport to be religious communities as such.

The title of Rabbi Sacks’s book is *The Home We Build Together*. But as the adage reminds us, “a house is not a home.” A *family home* is much more than a group of relatives living under the same roof and very different from a prison, an intensive care unit, or an expensive hotel. Membership in a select club may allow certain privileges without requiring the member to perform essential duties such as preparing meals, making beds, or tending to the garden. Once the annual fees have been paid and the member behaves with discretion and decorum, he or she is “entitled” to a range of perquisites, including privacy and the attendant status involved.

A *family home*, however, is an *evolving, organic entity*. Its shape is forever changing, as husband and wife become parents, as a child gains a sibling, and as siblings grow through different stages and at different rates. And all this time, each person in the home has needs and rights that deserve to be respected and negotiated in an environment in which everyone has a different temperament and changing moods. Family harmony, indeed survival, depends on the quality of interaction between each member and requires constant compromise, change of plans, and adaptability to unforeseen circumstances. And when the children begin to leave home, every member of the family unit is affected to some degree. Even when the last child has left, the identity of the family continues in a modified form. Family reunions help maintain the “family spirit” while each family member adjusts to a new life. No family can survive without drama and trauma, fusion and fission, and great mutuality.

Reflecting on the different ways in which people live, permanently or temporarily, might help us visualize an intercultural community as one with much more in common with a family home than with any of the other examples of communal living. A major difference, of course, is that people do not choose their family home, but in many

significant ways, they do choose their religious community. But specifically chosen or not, a community in an international religious order today bears the weight of great expectations from its members and great responsibility for becoming fit for purpose. That is, it must become a nurturer of faith, a place of mutual support, encouragement, and challenge. Furthermore, it needs to bear public witness to the real possibility of people of different cultures and languages but a common faith and vision being able to survive and thrive for a purpose beyond any individual whim or comfort and a sign of the Kingdom or Realm of God. Such is the daunting, difficult, but not impossible task before us! But Sacks warns that "if identity resembles a hotel, identity will be, not in integration but separation."¹⁰

2. *We are called to discover the dignity of difference.*¹¹ One of the most enduring and intractable human challenges is to see difference in a positive and constructive light. But there is a pervasive human propensity to define things and persons according to differences rather than similarities. The very word "define" means to set boundaries around, to mark off, to delimit and distinguish. I am *not* Chinese, young, female, a physiotherapist, artist, or activist; but to define myself negatively, by saying what I am not, gives little indication of my true identity. To identify myself positively as British, elderly, male, cleric, professor, academic, and so on is just as true but conveys a vastly different image and identity, as would my self-identification as brother, son, uncle, adoptive father, friend, and so on. But it is so easy to slip into negative or differentiating descriptions of people: from labeling someone as non-Catholic, not a priest, nonpracticing, "just a layperson," or similar terms, it is only a short step to treating that person as "not one of us" or "other" in a highly pejorative, xenophobic sense. The great human paradox is that we are all the same and yet all different; the great human folly is that humanity is often alienated from itself by using differences not only to distinguish but also to disagree, dissent, and discriminate, sometimes with appalling consequences. We are members of a single race, and its name is *human*.

In an old familiar rabbinic story with many forms, the teacher asks the disciples: "When do you know it is dawn?" One says, "When you can distinguish a white thread from a black one." "No," says the teacher. "When you can see the outline of a tree against the horizon,"

ventures another. “No,” says the teacher—to this and to all other efforts to answer the question. Finally he says: “When you can look into the eyes of a stranger, an ‘other,’ and see a brother, or a sister, then it is dawn; until then, it is still night.” This, in a sense, summarizes the process that should ultimately produce intercultural communities. We certainly have to identify and learn the skills to engage with our respective processes of cultural conditioning, during which, and subtly, the cataracts of ethnocentrism and other biases and prejudices will have clouded our vision somewhat. Such skills are not easy to come by, however, especially as we move through the middle and later periods of life. But as we proceed, we identify some of the skills and virtues we need to seek. The example of Jesus himself will, of course, be our guide.

Part of our task, then, is to rediscover the dignity of difference and celebrate it in our intercultural communities. Pope Francis is explicit: “We must walk united with our differences: there is no other way to become one. This is the way of Jesus.”¹² The agenda of those seeking to live in intercultural communities is lengthy and taxing and will not be accomplished easily. But by God’s grace and our commitment, we can put our hands to the plow and not look back. As Rabbi Sacks puts it, “Peace involves a profound crisis of identity. The boundaries of self and other, friend and foe, must be re-drawn.”¹³

3. *We are called to rethink the way we think.* Many of us, often trained in and certainly influenced by Western cultures, operate out of a largely dialectical (oppositional or exclusive) mode of thought. Perhaps more simply expressed as “either/or” thinking, a dialectical mode of thought pursues an argument to a conclusion that judges one person or thesis right and another wrong. By contrast, an analogical (complementary or inclusive) mode of thought looks for compromise between two extremes, finding some truth or validity in each: this is “both/and” thinking.¹⁴ As we strive to develop principles and practices of intercultural living, we need make a conscious shift between these two modes. Each approach or perspective can yield valuable insights, but the analogical way is probably better placed where common living and unity-with-difference are sought. Each person involved in developing intercultural modes of living needs to feel that there is no *us* and *them* but only a community seeking to identify itself inclusively as *we*. As Rudy Wiebe expressed it, “[In a Jesus

society] you repent, not by feeling bad but by thinking different[ly].”¹⁵ On reflection, to think differently is considerably more difficult than to feel bad; it is relatively easy to do the latter without anything or anyone really changing; but after a lifetime of learning just how to think, and then to think that our thinking is right thinking (and even to think that the way we think is actually the way God thinks), we all become rather resistant to thinking differently.¹⁶ To think and act differently often requires nothing less than a radical conversion.

As members of international religious communities of the twenty-first century, we need to face the urgent and pressing task of learning the skills and virtues required of each person, even though the challenge is formidable, especially perhaps (but not inevitably) for some of our older members.¹⁷ New challenges have arisen (and will not disappear) in today’s multicultural, globalized world. And today’s religious—especially those who have been socialized in (or indeed live amid) strongly ego-focused and rights-based cultures and societies¹⁸—face an ongoing call to conversion. Xenophobia is not new and has taken on alarming religious (pseudo-religious, of course) forms in recent times. These are the poisoned fruits of bad religion, but we can all be tainted by that. As Jonathan Swift, of *Gulliver’s Travels* fame and a clergyman himself, said: “We have just enough religion to hate each other, but not enough to make us love one another.”¹⁹ This must change—and members of international religious communities should surely be leaders and exemplars of the change.

The Call to Conversion: What, Who, Where, When?

We are called to continuous conversion, and conversion always takes place in a particular—and changing—context. But for persons invested in intercultural living, that very investment entails not only the willingness but also the authentic desire to be converted yet again. Here, for personal and (even better) for communal reflection, are two authors’ ways of distinguishing three components, aspects, or partners in our own conversion, followed by a number of definitions of conversion in general. Since conversion underpins everything in this book, they may help focus us individually and as a community.

Taking words from the prophet (“Act justly, love tenderly, walk humbly with God,” Mic 6:8), Donal Dorr identifies three aspects or facets of conversion: *political conversion*: that is, conversion to public, systemic issues (“act justly”); *moral conversion*: that is, conversion to the neighbor (“love tenderly”); and *religious conversion*: that is, conversion to God (“walk humbly with God”).²⁰ Orlando Costas (and see the definitions below) also speaks of a triple conversion: for him, it is conversion to *Christ*, to one’s own *culture*, and to the *world* or other cultures and persons.²¹ These perspectives can be very helpful in the context of the *raison d’être* and experience of intercultural living.

As for definitions: the first is very comprehensive, consistent with its being found in a dictionary. The author is Lewis Rambo:

Conversion is a process that takes place in a dynamic force-field of people, events, experiences, ideas and groups. Cultural, social, personal and religious dimensions infuse and shape the process in numerous ways, in different settings. It is a process in which God makes us vulnerable to the transcendent; a lifelong process of breaking away from any obstacle or idol, and turning to the living God and to the needs of other human beings.²²

The operative terminology here, as many students and retreatants have indicated over the years, includes: “process,” “dynamic force-field of people,” “cultural,” “vulnerable to the transcendent,” “lifelong,” and “breaking away from, turning to, God, humanity.” It is a rich definition, and some of its features will recur in other definitions.

Jim Wallis, an evangelical Christian and one of the founders of *Sojourners*, emphasizes our social responsibility and God’s justice, entirely consistent with his own commitments: “A turning to God that is always deeply personal but never private; both a moment and a process of transformation that deepens and extends through the whole of our lives; the beginning of active solidarity with the purposes of the Kingdom of God in the world.”²³

Here, people are often struck by words or phrases like: “personal but never private,” “moment and process,” “transformation,” “active solidarity,” “kingdom,” and “world.” This is not focused on, nor does it seek justification from, the church alone but looks to the realm or

kingdom of God, as Jesus did, for the ultimate realization of God's purposes.

The third definition, from Orlando Costas, a Pentecostal Christian, represents a profound change in his own spiritual journey. From a youthful naivety that assumed that as long as one accepted Jesus as one's personal savior, little work remained, to an appreciation for the real challenge of engaging with the process of one's personal and lifelong conversion, he offered this definition: "[Conversion is] a dynamic, complex, on-going experience, profoundly responsive to particular times and places, and shaped by the context of those who experience it. It constitutes both a break with and a new commitment to society, placing believers in a dialectal relationship with their environment. It is personal but also ecclesial."²⁴

Again, some words and phrases jump off the page: "dynamic," "ongoing," "times and places," "shaped by context." We may note that a "complex" experience does not mean "complicated," but something much closer to "delicate."

Nikos Nissiotis, an Orthodox Christian, came from a tradition that deeply valued the community in which one was formed and subsequently worshiped. His succinct definition emphasizes the community's role very well: "[Conversion is] not simply an individual, once for all act, but a process of continuous personal change and growth, with and for the other members of the community."²⁵

In the context of intercultural living, this is particularly pertinent: "with and for the other members of the community." Finally, Canadian theologian Bernard Lonergan seems to be inspired as he reflects on conversion in the words that follow. In the course of a reflection on a very different topic, he suddenly takes wing in a great lyrical passage that continues for a couple of pages. Here is a partial paraphrase but wonderful taste of what is well worth tracking down in its entirety:

[Conversion] is entirely personal, utterly intimate, but not so private as to be solitary. It can happen to many, and they can form a community to sustain one another in their self-transformation and to help one another in working out the implications and fulfilling the promise of their new life. Finally, what can become communal can also become historical . . . pass from generation to generation . . . spread from one cultural milieu to another

. . . adapt to changing circumstances, confront new situations, survive into a different age, and flourish in another period or epoch.²⁶

If this had been commissioned by someone looking for some inspirational words for members of a fledgling intercultural community, it could hardly have been improved in any way; but it is not simply a pious inspiration or a utopian dream. People of fierce faith—united in a clear and common cause, committed to personal and mutual transformation, sincere about undertaking the hard work of learning other cultures, and willing to persevere throughout a lifelong process relying heavily on mutual goodwill and the grace of God—have indeed experienced what Lonergan describes. If what can be imagined can actually come to pass, intercultural living can be a reality—not simply by imagining it but by allowing the collective imagination of a community of faith to stimulate and sustain individuals in community through the vicissitudes and victories of their daily lives.

Suggested Follow-Up

1. Looking at Sacks's description of various living spaces and the different rights and duties associated with each, can you reflect on the nature of the community space you live in? Identify features it shares with a true family home (refer to the description) and in what ways it resembles one of the other residences Sacks mentions—or perhaps identify one that he does not include.
2. Reflect on the distinction between dialectical (either/or) and analogical (both/and) thinking, in your own case and in the way your community tends to operate. Are any adjustments called for?
3. Refer again to the various definitions of conversion and their focus on God, others, culture, and the world. Worth pondering personally, they might also be the basis of a community discussion.