

Spiritan Horizons

Volume 10 | Issue 10

Article 22

Fall 2015

Living Mission Interculturally. Faith, Culture, and the Renewal of Praxis

Anthony J. Gittins

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dsc.duq.edu/spiritan-horizons>



Part of the [Catholic Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Gittins, A. J. (2015). Living Mission Interculturally. Faith, Culture, and the Renewal of Praxis. *Spiritan Horizons*, 10 (10). Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/spiritan-horizons/vol10/iss10/22>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by Duquesne Scholarship Collection. It has been accepted for inclusion in Spiritan Horizons by an authorized editor of Duquesne Scholarship Collection.

Yves Congar developed a Roman Catholic theology of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit co-instituted the Church (double sending by Son and Spirit, John 15:16; 14:16) and preserves her as apostolic (conforming to its origins). In his view, the Renewal style of assembly does not suit everyone. Krister Stendahl opines that it is doubtful one can live healthily with “high-voltage” religious experience over a long period of time. Using the New Testament narrative as paradigm, Jürgen Moltmann sees the Spirit indwelling creation and maintaining relationships of mutuality, just as there is mutual interpenetration in the Trinity (invoking the Eastern term, *perichōrēsis*). Christ accomplished salvation, the Holy Spirit confers it. A God who cannot suffer cannot love either. Moltmann uses the biblical metaphors for the Holy Spirit to depict his activity and effects, for example, *ruah* as energizing stimulus that awakens unguessed-of vitality. For John Zizioulas (Greek Orthodox) God has no ontological content, no true being apart from communion. The Holy Spirit is not given after Christ established the Church as *institution*, (as in Vatican II), rather is the very essence of the Church, which is *charismatic* in nature. Spirit and Eucharist demonstrate the simultaneity of both local and universal Church.

James Chukwuma Okoye, C.S.Sp.

ANTHONY J. GITTINS, C.S.Sp.

LIVING MISSION INTERCULTURALLY: FAITH, CULTURE, AND THE RENEWAL OF PRAXIS.

MINNEAPOLIS: LITURGICAL PRESS/MICHAEL GLAZIER, 2015.

ISBN-13: 978-0814683187. 264 pp. \$31.49

This book attempts to describe, justify, and promote “Intercultural Living” and to urge people – particularly members of international and multicultural communities, and others engaged in Christian ministry in situations of cultural diversity -- to grasp its potential and urgency, and then to undertake to work together to make it a reality.

The understanding of mission – of the Triune God, of the Church, and of the baptized – has changed significantly since Vatican II. It is now understood as a universal call in a world Church in a globalized world. In this light, the ideal of intercultural living now represents a challenge to people who already have first-hand experience of living in an international or multicultural context. If the word *international* describes any situation involving (people of) different nations, and *multicultural* identifies and emphasizes a cultural rather than a national component, *intercultural* can best be understood as adding a specifically new element, namely faith. Although faith may or may not already

be a factor in international or intercultural relations, it is always the explicit driving force and motivation for intercultural living.

Many religious orders and Congregations are international and multicultural in fact, and yet many of their members often find that they are trying to coexist *despite* personal and cultural differences rather than *with* them. Intercultural living becomes possible only if and when diverse people have a common and explicit faith reason for attempting to discover how personal transformation can lead both to enrichment and the transformation of a whole community.

Relations between employees of multinational corporations may be perfectly civil and professional, without anyone needing to make a radical effort to learn from each other's culture or seriously to modify their own behavior. Likewise, people may live as very proper and law-abiding citizens in a neighborhood or city where they come to daily contact with people of diverse cultures yet without ever becoming firm friends with any or learning another language. But members of international religious communities share a common faith and a common vision and are committed to a common ministry inspired by their Christian faith. In this case, the prospect of intercultural living has become an increasingly evident imperative in a globalized world.

In days gone by, religious communities might welcome new members, even from cultures different from their own predominant culture. This process was accomplished according to the *assimilation* model; people were effectively invited to join a pre-existing, well-established and proven community by learning its history, structures and practices, and gradually becoming assimilated into it. The current membership might be most welcoming and hospitable, showing newcomers how things were being done and would continue to be done, but the personal wishes and cultural traditions of the incoming person were of little or no account. If a person was deemed to be sufficiently able to assimilate to the community, all would be well; if not, the door was open for departures.

But in recent decades and for several reasons, the assimilation model has proved to be "unfit for service" to Church and believers. In the first place, the numbers of candidates for priesthood and religious life from the dominant European and North American nations declined, while those from beyond increased almost exponentially. Second, we became much more aware of the relationship between faith and culture: culture shapes the contours of faith, and without a cultural "language" to do so, faith cannot express itself in action. Therefore, people must be positively encouraged to live their faith through their own culture, and to force them into an alien cultural matrix is to constrain or do violence to the appropriate expression of their faith. Third, Vatican II and

the subsequent papal documents of Paul VI and John Paul II particularly, cried out for the development of authentic indigenous theologies and *inculturated* faith (which should not be confused, but often is, with *acculturation* or cultural borrowing in the production of ritual(s) with an ethnic or cultural flavor). Inculturation (which, unlike acculturation, is a theological word) refers directly to the way people's faith is culturally expressed. Even the most creative liturgical acculturation does not of itself produce personal conversion or the fruits of a deepening faith. But a truly inculturated faith is evident by its fruits: the vital expression of Christianity shaped by a specific culture and context.

The upshot of these developments was a rather abrupt shift in the contours of international religious communities. As they became increasingly multicultural, the numerical superiority of the dominant culture was greatly reduced, while new members from beyond Europe and North America were also *cross-cultural* – either by having left their own original cultures to minister across cultural boundaries, or by becoming assimilated into the dominant culture. Many members of the dominant cultures remained essentially monocultural, though others, having ministered in the cultures from which new members were coming, were themselves cross-cultural. Consequently, in recent decades, culture itself has become an increasing challenge to international religious communities. Either their members effectively live in enclaves with other members of their own culture, or they attempt some token modification of their habits – eating, dress, prayer, and so on – but without anyone feeling entirely at ease with, or committed to the resulting *modus vivendi*. The emerging challenge now faces everyone equally: to move away from the assimilationist model, and to commit to a new way of living, in which everyone, not simply those from minority cultures, accepts to work together to establish *a new kind of Christian community*.

Intercultural living is expressed by people of different cultures coming together to build a new community in which everyone can find a place and yet no one is privileged above anyone else. Each person, in effect, leaves their primary or original home in order to come together and build a new home from the fabric of each person's life and culture. If four cultures are represented in a given community, the members will actually create a kind of fifth culture, an organic process in which each person is changed by the developing lives of everyone else.

Intercultural living is a dream that can be realized, but it requires concerted effort to learn necessary skills and to be converted by God's grace. Then, from *assimilation*, the community will be able to move to *mutual welcome* and ultimately to *radical inclusion*. The book attempts to chart the passage through these stages by offering a map of the territory to be covered. While the actual journey will be a matter for the discernment of individual communities, the book's chapters move from theory to practice.

Since language is so important, we need a common vocabulary and understanding of the challenge. Therefore the early chapters carefully clarify the terminology (cultural, cross-cultural, intercultural and so on) needed for meaningful communication. After that, some practical steps toward the creation of intercultural communities are proposed. Good will is assumed to be present but alone is inadequate for the task and process of intercultural living. Consequently various skills and virtues are described and encouraged.

Intercultural living is not for everyone, but everyone with a missionary heart and soul, whatever their age or state of health, has a vital part to play in the community enterprise, and every community needs to generate a “critical mass” of energy and focus if intercultural living is to become a reality. Without this, a community will fragment or resolve itself into its constituent cultural parts, and its mission will be thereby compromised.

Anthony J. Gittins, CSSp.

FRASER FLEMING

THE TRUTH ABOUT SCIENCE AND RELIGION: FROM THE BIG BANG TO NEUROSCIENCE. EUGENE OREGON: WIPF AND STOCK PUBLISHERS. 2016.

Strong emotions arise when science and religion intersect because the topics impinge on core beliefs. Religious explanations at the popular level can lack the careful rationalization and logic required for reconciliation with scientifically proven reality, while scientific explanations of the world often fail to satisfy the human longing for purpose and meaning. While many books are available, few encourage the reader to engage in a personal journey to answer questions about purpose, meaning, good and evil, and free will that arise from competitive scientific and religious views of reality. *The Truth About Science and Religion* is designed to coax the reader into a process of self-discovery beginning with the more distant issue of divine interaction in creation before moving to more personal issues such as what being human really means. Here is a book for people struggling to make sense of complex issues around science and religion.

Fraser Fleming is an organic chemist who conducts research in support of developing pharmaceuticals and has served as a program director in the Division of Chemistry at the National Science Foundation. The book developed from two Duquesne University study abroad courses, “Big Bang to Modern Man: A History of Science and the Influence of Religion.” Fraser is a founding member of the *Christian Academic Fellowship* at Duquesne University, an independent