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BRIDGES OF BEING: INTERCULTURALITY IN THE LIGHT OF GLOBALIZATION, PHILOSOPHY, AND THEOLOGY

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Abstract

The concept of interculturality is today of considerable importance once we accept the viewpoint according to which the acceptance of a globalization of cultures does not merge the many into one. On the contrary, the globalization of interculturality will help our culture and our people continue to exist, keeping unalterably our own identity. At the same time, philosophy of interculturality views itself on the very level of difference, and thereby differs from multiculturalism, which argues for a plurality of cultures and against the unity of one culture. If it is to think about the center, that is brought about through the differentiation rather than unification. Interculturality, viewed through the lens of Christian theology, transcends mere cultural coexistence to reveal a mystery of communion rooted in the life of the Triune God. Far from being a sociological necessity alone, it reflects the vocation of humanity as created in the image and likeness of God (Gen.1:26). Each culture bears a fragment of the divine beauty, manifesting the inexhaustible richness of the Creator and inviting all people into dialogue marked by mutual reverence. In the patristic tradition, this encounter is not simply exchange but participation – a dynamic process in which human diversity becomes a sign of the coming Kingdom. As St. Maximus the Confessor teaches, Christ unites all things without erasing their natural distinctions, revealing that the ultimate ground of intercultural dialogue is not negotiation but Eucharistic communion. Interculturality thus emerges as both a gift and a task: a prophetic anticipation of the eschatological unity where every culture will offer its unique praise to the one God.

Keywords: interculturality, globalization, philosophy, Christian theology, Eucharistic communion, God, intercultural dialogue.

INTRODUCTION

Today, as Romania has secured its full rights as a member of the European Union, the idea of interculturality, and its importance for each of us – has grown to such an extent that it now represents one of the most delicate and challenging issues confronting Romanian civil society. Every person is born



within a particular culture. Each of us occupies a distinct social and geographical space in which we shape our lives, often negotiating tensions among different cultural complexes, and where we bring new generations into the world who inherit this cultural legacy. We wish these children, and others like them, to live in harmony with nature and with one another (Miguel Puwainchir, 3).

The formation of modern nation-states, however, has often been carried out irresponsibly, fostering national cultures that ignore or suppress the rich diversity of cultural identities within their borders. This process has frequently been accompanied by unrealistic laws and policies, generating recurring social conflicts.

In Romania, the recognition of intercultural relations and of a plurinational reality has been achieved only through the concerted efforts of all ethnic groups. Together, these communities have managed to secure a space of social and political respect.

It is therefore essential that every individual values his or her own identity, culture, and, even more importantly, religion or denomination. Our identities flow from the deep well of our Christian heritage, and we must resist the temptation – embraced by some of our compatriots – to surrender them to the pressures of cultural assimilation.

When nations develop social pathologies, the causes are not merely economic; they also arise from unresolved social and cultural differences. Those of us who cherish our distinct cultures must remain hopeful and engaged in the struggle to preserve them, even in a technological world that often invites minorities to disappear. In the future, no state should impose a single, homogeneous culture. Local cultures must not be reduced to mere objects of folklore, marketing, or commerce; nor should their only trace be in museums or books. They should not be remembered only through monuments. Rather, our cultures are living realities – capable of generating and regenerating themselves – and we must fight to ensure their continued vitality despite the serious threats they face.

Our aim today is to temper the human ego so that it may embrace a globalization of cultures that unites without erasing difference. We call upon national and supranational governments to enact legal and educational reforms that protect, support, and promote cultural diversity, embedding intercultural education within national curricula (Miguel Puwainchir, 4).

This is what we mean by *intercultural relations*. We seek to learn about other cultures and to encounter them openly, but without losing our own identities. For this reason, we must defend a global policy of cultural exchange that operates as a genuine two-way street. Only such a globalization of interculturality will enable our cultures, and our peoples, to survive and flourish.

Around the world, there are individuals who share this hope: people determined to transform social conditions and to advance intercultural understanding. Their efforts, and ours, represent a vital defense against the destruction that too often accompanies so-called “modern development.” We must safeguard our ways of thinking, protect our cultural landscapes, and continue to struggle for life and meaning in a world filled with adversities and threats. Western European governments, in particular, must be urged to respect the cultures of all new and established nations within this cradle of civilization we call Europe. Respect for the enduring vitality of these many cultures is, ultimately, respect for the people who embody them.

1. THE CONCEPT OF INTERCULTURALITY

Any culture is, at its core, *multicultural*, shaped through continual contact with diverse communities that bring their own ways of thinking, feeling, and acting. Such encounters never produce identical effects, yet it is through these exchanges that *cultural hybridization* and *interbreeding* emerge. A culture evolves only through interaction with others, though this process may be understood in different ways.

The challenge of interculturality is thus a challenge of *encounter* and *respect*. Interculturality implies more than the mere coexistence suggested by “multiculturalism”: it presupposes a living relationship among people of different cultural groups. To speak of “intercultural relations” is therefore almost redundant, for interculturality already entails interaction (Miquel Rodrigo Alsina 5).

No culture is intrinsically superior or inferior to another (C. Guillaumin 1994, 160-161). While each may at times perceive itself as discriminated against, the absence of hierarchy affirms that all cultures merit equal respect. Accordingly, the only valid way to understand another culture is to interpret its expressions according to its *own* internal criteria. This does not forbid critical evaluation but calls for

moderation of the inevitable ethnocentrism that tempts us to judge unfamiliar practices through the lens of our own traditions (C. Guillaumin 1994, 160). Closer to our pedagogical concerns, another definition is also of interest: “We can consider culture as the system of representations which, while giving it a context, gives meaning to the collective and individual experience. Cultures do not in fact differ in their contents, or not all that much, so much as in the way in which these contents are organized, associated and placed in hierarchies.” (A. Doutreloux 1990, 56-57).

The term *intercultural* itself, which gained currency only in recent decades, reflects a shift in the perception of “the other.” Today, “the other” is no longer merely someone from another country but, more profoundly, someone who embodies a distinct cultural identity. The word “intercultural” is even replacing “cultural” in everyday discourse, signaling activities in which cultural variables are actively at play. Often, these activities focus on food, craft traditions, popular music, and other *surface* aspects of life, elements more easily shared and transformed. Such seemingly superficial exchanges can nevertheless spark a desire to discover new tastes and rhythms, providing an invaluable gateway to deeper understanding beyond national boundaries.

In the human sciences, culture is understood not simply as external customs but as the **totality of features that define a people, group, or society**, recognizable through habits, emotions, and a material world of utilitarian and aesthetic objects, unified by a distinctive way of relating these elements. Anthropologists broaden the concept even further. Clifford Geertz famously defined culture as “*an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life*” (Geertz 1973, 89). This interpretation presents culture as a **web of meanings**, where human actions must be read as texts charged with symbolic significance. Similarly, Claude Lévi-Strauss described culture as “*the set of rules and customs, prohibitions and obligations, techniques and institutions through which human societies ensure their survival and reproduction*” (Lévi-Strauss 1963, 3). His structural approach highlights the **underlying patterns and relationships** that give coherence to diverse cultural practices. Together, these perspectives reinforce the idea that intercultural encounters are not merely exchanges of external habits or folklore, but engagements with deep systems of meaning and social organization.

Because culture is inherently comparative, differences can appear anywhere: between individuals, professions, regions, or entire continents, with infinite gradations of variation. It is therefore unsurprising that the term *interculturality* carries multiple meanings of varying precision, some tinged with moral connotations. For some, interculturality signifies cohesion, a harmonious rebalancing of diverse cultural elements. Others regard it as a fashionable concept masking the dominance of global cultural forces that threaten diversity even as they celebrate it. J. Galap captures its ideal sense when he calls it “a way of being, a view of the world and of other people, a kind of egalitarian relationship between human beings and peoples... the opposite of ethnocentrism.” (Jean Galap 1995, 108).

Certain definitions also narrow interculturality to the context of immigration, particularly within the European Union, where open borders create new educational and social dynamics. For example, when a teacher interacts with a pupil from a different culture, interculturality emerges as the meeting of two complex identities: the teacher’s composite identity – national, regional, religious, professional, and personal – encounters that of a student shaped by migration, political displacement, and the process of acculturation in a host country (C. Camillieri 1995, 134-135).

Yet cultural distance is not limited to nationality. Two people of different nations may share similar worldviews despite divergent customs, while two avid football fans from the same country may find meaningful communication only through their shared passion for the sport. Ultimately, interculturality must be approached with reference to the deep structures of culture – *values, beliefs, and symbolic systems* – rather than merely external habits, for it is at this profound level that genuine dialogue and mutual transformation occur (M. Cohen-Emerique 1992, 26).

2. THE INTERCULTURAL APPROACH

What happens in this new paradigm of present days is a new offspring in terms of interaction “if we persist in regarding the other person as alien and distant ... and if we defensively take ourselves as the norm ... or if we are content just to rub shoulders? Cultural encounters do not need to be avoided if they can take place within a relationship of equals, without patronizing sentimentality, and questions can be

asked, for instance about our own cultural references and associations [...] If no-one feels threatened with losing their identity or having to fit in with the one being foisted on them, it will doubtless be possible to work our way through all the surprising complexities inherent in encounters, procedures and life education which do not ignore differences and which start to build interculturality" (N. De Smet 1991, p. 26). The intercultural approach is commonly marked by three stages: "de-centering", penetrating the Other's system and negotiation.

1. "De-centering"

Taking a more distant view of oneself, trying to define one's frames of reference as an individual with a culture and sub-cultures (national, ethnic, religious, professional, institutional), blended in one's personal development. That can take place through this reflection on oneself, realizing what is relative about one's observations and making sense of one's reading references. "The stages through which an individual has been socialized in his/her community are lost in the mists of time, to such an extent that they may well be unaware that what seems obvious is a construct of the world which is culture-determined (L. Colles 1994, 8).

2. Penetrating the Other's system

This second stage refers to getting out of oneself to see things from the Other's perspective. "It is an attitude of opening up, a personal effort of enquiry about the main themes which are shaped around basic systems of reference and fundamental signs that are interpreted and blended in a unique way by each individual (M. Cohen-Emerique 1992, 26).

3. Negotiating

This level of the intercultural approach consists in finding the necessary minimum compromise and understanding to avoid confrontation where the stronger imposes his or her code of priorities on the weaker. It is here that cultural relativism, which would like all the values of members of a group to be made to coexist, is seen to be inoperative. How in fact do you proceed when you have a conflict of values? Living together implies agreeing about a common minimum of values and ways of looking at things. The framework of the negotiation can be inferred from the principle of autonomy of conscience. Thus, "the conflict must be resolved by a solution that each person will accept in all conscience and, failing this ideal unanimity, [...] to get as near to it as possible by various behaviours compatible with the democratic model" (C. Camillieri 1995, 38).

Jean Remy, inviting us to develop a new kind of urbanity, seems to be saying something similar: "To develop a cosmopolitan attitude in an urban situation where different ethnic groups coexist [...] implies a conception of urban life which runs counter to the idea of placing people in a uniform mould. [...] Cosmopolitanism is not just a problem of cultural open-mindedness and preoccupation with the problems of the Other. It works insofar as we can see to what extent each person contributes to the dynamism of the whole" (Jean Remy 1990, 103-104).

3. ASSIMILATION – INSERTION – INTEGRATION

Several authors use these terms as markers to try to describe a social basis of political attitudes to foreigners. Without falling into the error, we indicated earlier (confusion between an intercultural approach and an immigration approach), we think it is useful to use this reference in order to examine how we teach.

Assimilation

That can be summarized in the phrase: "I accept the Other if he rejects what is different about himself."

He is accepted without reservation or discrimination, but on condition he renounces his own personality and adopts the values and behavior of the host society in full and without hesitation.

Insertion

This mark of political attitudes to foreigners is to be put under the form: "I tolerate the Other with his lasting cultural characteristics, but he is foreign, different and will remain so." He has the right to work and take part in society, but he remains different.

Integration

Finally, a third token exposes the act of integration, which can be understood in the words like: "I wish to go on believing in my values but I do not make you give up yours."

It is, therefore, an open process. Integration is dependent on the passage of time; in the fullness of time it yields a rich cross-fertilization. “Negotiation is the protective barrier against that pressure to assimilate which threatens all professional representatives of institutions laying claim to a universal educative or socializing function” (M. Cohen-Emerique 1992, fn. 10).

The relativity of policies

A policy of individual integration imposes a kind of *acculturation* which is often brutal, depriving individuals of the references that define their identity. When the generation which has been born in the host country integrates, it causes xenophobic reactions bound up with the cultural proximity and the social rivalry that exist with the local population. However, it has the advantage of not creating a rigid long-term confrontation between established groups and of integrating the population of immigrant origin – or at least their children.

A policy of collective integration allows for an acculturation process lasting three or possibly four generations, protecting the migrants themselves from emotional trauma. But it reinforces ethnic self-awareness, contributing to the reinterpretation into ethnic and social divisions of the boundaries between groups and risking exacerbating group confrontation.

It helps “to emphasize the existence of groups suffering from several ethnic and social handicaps to justify acts of discrimination in social life and then to encourage the authorities to adopt compensatory policies of «positive discrimination». But above all, it could easily open the way to «community-related» thinking in the workings of public life, so that each ethnic group demands and possibly gets representation proportional to its number in each area of authority within the body politic” (D. Schnapper 1992, 140-141).

4.THE LINKAGE BETWEEN INTERCULTURALITY AND PHILOSOPHY

We are constantly in danger of yielding to the temptation of understanding interculturality as a restorational culture between or even beyond cultures. A historical “background” for such pretensions can be found in the tradition of the subjectivist formation of culture, which gained its momentum in the 19-th century, culminating in the first half of the 20-th century in the crisis of European culture. Since its very beginning, “cultural philosophy” has been primarily a crisis concept, which first of all undermines tradition and the value of European-ness and consequently all other cultural and civilization circles of our planet. This requires a different attention to the relationship between philosophy and culture, to their mutual conditioning.

Such endeavoring to open up the possibility of this relationship should be understood as a constitutive discussion of the philosophical meaning of and within interculturality. However, how can we actually locate the starting point of this discussion insofar as we recognize the absence of a central locus in culture, and with the time of constituting culture qua centre already behind us? Or perhaps we could say that there is medial disclosedness opening up, a certain in-between or interlude, played out precisely in the dimension of interculturality. In this sense it is possible to constitute the philosophical meaning of interculturality through the opening up of this intermediacy.

This of course requires deflecting attention to the relationship between philosophy and culture, to their mutual conditioning, which has proved historically constitutive for European-ness as a “variety in unity”. It should be further observed that, for interculturality, the supposition of plurality of cultures as opposed to a single culture is not in any sense a constitutive one. One should accede to multiculturalism’s claim that there is no single culture and that there are only cultures. However, it does fail to recognize that, in affirming the pluralism of cultures, it simultaneously denies this medial locus, that which mediates plurality in its transposition between one’s own and the alien. It is not enough to distinguish between the one and the many, the uniform and diverse; what it takes, rather, is to acknowledge the difference in-between (Dean Komel, 6).

The concept of “philosophy of interculturality” cannot be equated with “intercultural philosophy”, insofar as the latter endeavors to discuss common philosophical issues in various cultural and civilization milieus on the basis of confronting various methods, epistemologies and strands of thought. This implies the recognition of philosophy’s determination by the current intercultural situation. However, it tends to rather easily forget the meditative role of philosophy in the common midst of interculturality. This is evinced in contemporary philosophy by the revelation of «difference qua difference». The philosophy of interculturality operates precisely on the level of difference, distinguishing itself from multiculturalism,

which merely affirms a plurality of cultures in opposition to any unifying principle. The distinction between interculturality and multiculturalism thus reflects a deeper limitation of the philosophical field, namely the challenge of articulating the constitutive meaning of interculturality itself. To avoid a purely constructivist understanding of this “intercultural intermediacy,” one must recognize the role of hermeneutic circularity, wherein the very determination of interculturality unfolds as an intercultural act, a dynamic interpretive process whose horizon remains inseparably linked to the question of «Europeanness» as a meaningful correlate.

Philosophy of interculturality embraces the critique of culture as centre, too; but it also claims its right for the open midst of intercultural mutual encountering and understanding. The midst is anything but the centre; it is brought about through differentiation rather than unification. In this way, the “common midst” can be grasped without consorting to the unified centre.

One of the key presuppositions of interculturality is that there is no central culture, just as there are no marginal cultures; cultures are determined only in their relation to the tradition of the intercultural midst, eventuating among them in the manner of their opening and reserving. The reserving of cultures is not just some sort of negative facet of marginal cultural provinciality. In times of absent central culture, when culture as the centre is found missing, the very understanding of “provinciality” has also undergone considerable changes, since it is perhaps the only guarantee for maintaining the provenance of culture out of indifference. This indifference within intercultural encounters does not merely suggest that Europeans lack self-knowledge or remain unwilling to understand one another, whether along the East–West or North–South axes, nor simply that we possess no shared identity markers or have failed to apprehend a distinctive “European essence.” Rather, the oft-repeated claim that Europeans are “poorly informed” about one another points to a deeper issue: a habitual mode of perception, a settled way of viewing reality and “culture,” which limits both our outlook and our capacity for genuine mutual understanding (Dean Komel, fn. 18).

The hermeneutic disclosure of intercultural midst is closely related to prominent philosophical issues of language and world as fundamental habits of common human existence. What clearly supports the idea that the same can be understood in various ways and that it is variety that opens up the common is the language of philosophy itself. Despite its reaching the universal, philosophy has become rooted in individual cultures, bringing along an extraordinary intercultural language of the world, which fills human existence both in the sense of truth and freedom (Dean Komel, fn. 18). In this regard, philosophy is not just “formal” argumentative language; by uncovering the truth it already speaks from within the openness of the world.

5. INTERCULTURALITY FROM A THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE: BETWEEN COMMUNION AND MISSION

1.1. Introduction

Whereas philosophy often treats interculturality as a rational category of dialogue and coexistence, Christian theology frames it as a *vocation of communion*. Beyond the plurality of cultures and the accelerating forces of globalization, Christian revelation affirms the *ontological unity of humanity*: “He made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth” (Acts 17:26).

This theological claim grounds an interculturality that is not merely a pragmatic negotiation between cultures but a divine call to relationship, where each culture is invited to participate in the universal plan of salvation.

5.2. Theological Anthropology: Image and Likeness

The foundation of Christian interculturality lies in the doctrine of the *imago Dei*. Every person, irrespective of ethnicity or tradition, reflects the Creator’s image. St. Basil the Great notes that “nothing is so characteristic of our nature as the desire for communion” (St. Basil the Great 2011, 9), while St. Gregory of Nyssa describes human diversity as a manifestation of the inexhaustible richness of God’s wisdom (St. Gregory of Nyssa 1994, 395). St. Maximus the Confessor deepens this intuition, interpreting the diversity of the world as a *cosmic liturgy*, a “polyphony of the divine Logos.” (St. Maximus the Confessor 2014, 7).

Hence, cultural differences are not barriers but signs of a common origin and destiny, calling all peoples to a unity that does not erase distinction.

Image as Universal Dignity

Patristic tradition consistently interprets the *image* (*eikōn*) as the «*ontological mark of personhood*» shared by all humanity. St. Gregory of Nyssa argues that the image of God is present “in every man, ruler and slave alike” (St. Gregory of Nyssa, 1994, 396), grounding human equality not in civic rights but in a metaphysical reality. St. John Chrysostom echoes this when he admonishes his hearers to “reverence thy neighbor, for he is the image of God” (St. John Chrysostom 1994, Hom. 24), transforming intercultural respect into a form of reverence for the Creator himself. For intercultural theology, this means that dialogue is not merely an exchange of customs or ideas but an encounter between *icons of the divine*.

Likeness as Dynamic Communion

While the image is given to all, the *likeness* (*homoiosis*) is a **dynamic vocation**: the lifelong movement toward union with God through love and virtue. St. Irenaeus distinguishes between the image, which belongs to human nature, and the likeness, which “is added by the Spirit” (St. Irenaeus of Lyons 1994, 533), indicating a participatory ascent. In intercultural terms, this suggests that cultures, like persons, are called not only to coexist but to *grow together toward communion* in the divine likeness. Thus, interculturality is not static coexistence but a shared pilgrimage toward deification (*theosis*), where diversity becomes a medium of mutual enrichment.

Diversity as Reflection of the Logos

The multiplicity of cultures is not an accident of history but a reflection of the inexhaustible richness of the divine Logos. St. Maximus the Confessor describes creation as a “cosmic liturgy,” where each creature and each culture manifests a particular *logoi*, a unique expression of the one Word of God (St. Maximus the Confessor, 2014, 8). From this perspective, intercultural engagement is not a threat to Christian identity but an *opportunity to contemplate new facets of the same divine wisdom*. The encounter with the other becomes a theological event, revealing dimensions of the Logos that remain hidden within one’s own cultural horizon.

Christ as the Archetype of the Image

The New Testament identifies Christ as “the image (*eikōn*) of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15). The human image finds its ultimate meaning in the incarnate Son, who unites in Himself all nations and reconciles them “in one body through the cross” (Eph. 2:16). Intercultural dialogue, therefore, reaches its fullness only when it is *Christologically grounded*: the many cultures are not absorbed into a bland uniformity but gathered into the Body of Christ, where each retains its distinctiveness while participating in a higher unity.

Implications for Interculturality

If every person is an image of God and every culture a unique reflection of the divine Logos, then interculturality acquires a **sacramental character**. Hospitality toward the other is not mere courtesy; it is a recognition of the divine mystery present in every human face. As St. Basil insists, “the human being is a creature who has received the order to become God” (St. Basil the Great 2005, 64). The dialogue among cultures becomes a mutual assistance in fulfilling this command, a shared journey toward the likeness of God.

5.3. Globalization and Spiritual Discernment

Globalization creates new spaces of encounter but also brings the danger of **cultural homogenization** and spiritual fragmentation. Romanian Orthodox theologian St. Dumitru Stăniloae warns against reducing the person to an anonymous unit within technological civilization, emphasizing that authentic unity must respect the irreducible depth of the human person (Dumitru Stăniloae 2000, 45-47).

Christian theology therefore insists that true global communion is *eucharistic*, rooted in the free, loving communion of persons in Christ, not in economic or technological mechanisms. In this sense, intercultural dialogue becomes a spiritual discipline, requiring discernment to receive the gifts of each culture while rejecting the absolutization of any historical form (John Zizioulas 1985, 44–47).

The contemporary phenomenon of globalization presents both unprecedented opportunities and subtle dangers for intercultural dialogue. On the one hand, the increasing interconnectedness of peoples and cultures creates new spaces for encounter, cooperation, and mutual enrichment. On the other hand, globalization can foster *homogenization*, eroding local traditions and reducing cultural exchange to a superficial consumption of differences. From a theological standpoint, the challenge is not simply to embrace or reject globalization but to cultivate *spiritual discernment*, a capacity to perceive and respond to the presence of God within the complex dynamics of a globalized world.

Globalization as Kairos and Temptation

Christian theology invites us to view globalization through the dual lens of *kairos* and temptation. It is a *Kairos* – a providential moment – because it brings nations into closer contact and thus allows the Gospel’s universal message to reach every corner of the earth. As St. Paul writes, “He made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth” (Acts 17:26), affirming a divine purpose in the interdependence of humanity. Yet, globalization also bears the marks of temptation when economic and technological forces dominate human relationships, transforming persons into commodities and cultures into markets (David Bentley Hart 2003, 382–384). Without discernment, intercultural exchange can devolve into a *global monoculture* that suppresses the very diversity it claims to celebrate.

The Gift and the Trial of Proximity

The Church Fathers frequently warn that *proximity without love* breeds rivalry rather than communion. St. Augustine observes that “the earthly city...seeks its own advantage under the guise of unity” (St. Augustine 2003, XIX.13), a warning that resonates with the political and economic ambitions often hidden beneath global rhetoric.

Spiritual discernment (*diakrisis*), as taught by the desert tradition, requires the believer to test “the spirits to see whether they are from God” (1 John 4:1). In the context of globalization, this means evaluating cultural exchanges not merely by their novelty or efficiency but by their capacity to foster *authentic communion* – relationships marked by justice, mercy, and mutual recognition.

The Liturgy of the Nations

From an Orthodox theological perspective, globalization can be interpreted as a prefiguration of the *eschatological gathering of nations*. The Book of Revelation envisions a heavenly liturgy where “every tribe and language and people and nation” offer praise before the throne of God (Rev. 7:9). St. Maximus the Confessor describes the final consummation as the “recapitulation of all things in Christ” (St. Maximus the Confessor 2014, 41), where diversity is not abolished but transfigured.

For interculturality, this eschatological horizon provides both *hope and criterion*: any global movement that deepens solidarity without erasing difference can be discerned as a sign of the Spirit’s work.

Spiritual Discernment as Intercultural Ethos

In practice, spiritual discernment demands three interrelated attitudes.

- *Ascetic Detachment*: Following St. Isaac the Syrian, who urges the believer to remain free from “the passions of the world” (St. Isaac the Syrian 1984, Homily 2), Christians must resist the consumerist mentality that often accompanies globalization.

- *Eucharistic Hospitality*: The Eucharist, where the many become one without loss of identity, offers a model for intercultural exchange rooted in gratitude and sacrificial love.

- *Prophetic Witness*: The Church is called to challenge structures of injustice that exploit global interdependence, echoing the patristic conviction that love of neighbor is inseparable from love of God.

Toward a Discerned Global Interculturality

A theologically informed interculturality, therefore, does not merely celebrate diversity or lament uniformity. It seeks to *discern the movement of the Holy Spirit* within the processes of globalization, embracing those aspects that manifest the Logos and resisting those that obscure the image of God. As St. Basil the Great teaches, “Let all things be tested, and what is good be held fast” (St. Basil the Great, *Long Rules*, 31), a maxim that encapsulates the Christian vocation to engage the global world with both openness and critical vigilance.

5.4. Mission and Dialogue

The Gospel commands the Church to proclaim Christ “to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8), yet this mission is inseparable from *dialogue* and *hospitality*. The Second Vatican Council’s declaration *Nostra Aetate* teaches that the Church “rejects nothing that is true and holy” in other religions (Vatican Council II 1966, §2), while contemporary Orthodox statements affirm that mission and dialogue are not mutually exclusive but mutually enriching (*Message of the Great Council of the Orthodox Church*, 2016, §3-4).

Through this lens, interculturality becomes a *sacrament of encounter*, an icon of the Kingdom where differences are not dissolved but transfigured.

The relationship between mission and dialogue lies at the heart of the Christian approach to interculturality. Both concepts are often misunderstood: mission is sometimes reduced to proselytism, while dialogue is perceived as a compromise of truth. A theological perspective insists, however, that *mission and dialogue are not mutually exclusive but complementary dimensions of the Church’s life*. The Gospel’s universal scope requires both the proclamation of Christ as the incarnate Logos and the respectful encounter with cultures and religions shaped by other historical experiences.

Mission as Witness, not Domination

In Orthodox tradition, mission is understood less as expansion and more as *martyria* – witness. The Church bears witness to Christ not through cultural domination but through the embodiment of the Gospel in love, humility, and service. As St. John Chrysostom reminds us, “the Church is not a court of judgment but a place of healing” (St. John Chrysostom 1984, 3.6), meaning that the missionary task is therapeutic rather than imperial. In the context of interculturality, this witness respects the freedom of the other and avoids transforming cultural or religious dialogue into ideological conquest. Mission, when rooted in the Eucharist, becomes an invitation to communion rather than an imposition of uniformity.

Dialogue as Participation in Truth

Dialogue, in its theological sense, is not mere negotiation or relativism but a participation in the search for truth. St. Gregory the Theologian insisted that truth is not owned by individuals but revealed in communion, where the Spirit leads believers “from partial knowledge to greater clarity” (St. Gregory of Nazianzus 1994, 285). Intercultural dialogue, therefore, is not foreign to mission but part of the Spirit’s pedagogy, guiding peoples toward a deeper recognition of Christ, who is “the true light that enlightens everyone” (John 1:9). For this reason, dialogue becomes both a *path of humility* – acknowledging the limitations of one’s cultural expression of faith – and a *path of hope*, trusting that God works mysteriously within all cultures and peoples.

The Patristic Balance: Firmness and Openness

The Church Fathers provide models of this delicate balance. St. Basil the Great advocated for discernment in engaging pagan literature, urging Christians to “take from it what is useful, as the bee gathers honey” (St. Basil the Great 1962, 379), a principle that applies equally to intercultural encounters today. Similarly, St. Justin Martyr spoke of the *logos spermatikos* i.e. the “seeds of the Word” present in all cultures and philosophies (St. Justin Martyr 1997, 46), suggesting that dialogue is not a dilution of faith but a recognition of divine illumination beyond the visible boundaries of the Church. Such patristic insights reveal that intercultural dialogue, rightly understood, is already part of the missionary ethos: to discern, affirm, and fulfill what is good in other traditions within the fullness of Christ.

Mission through Dialogue in a Globalized World

Globalization amplifies both the need and the complexity of holding mission and dialogue together. On one side, digital networks, migration, and global mobility expose Christianity to unprecedented opportunities of witness. On the other side, cultural pluralism and secular ideologies challenge traditional forms of evangelization. Theologically, this situation requires a renewed commitment to *mission through dialogue*: proclaiming the Gospel in ways that respect the dignity of every culture while offering a transformative encounter with Christ. This vision is neither triumphalist nor relativistic but reflects the kenotic pattern of the Incarnation – God entering into dialogue with humanity by taking on human flesh.

Toward an Intercultural Ecclesiology

Ultimately, the integration of mission and dialogue within interculturality leads to a vision of the Church as a *catholic* (universal) *communion of cultures*. Here, mission preserves the proclamation of the Gospel as absolute truth, while dialogue affirms the multiplicity of cultural expressions as valid paths of participation in that truth. This double movement echoes Pentecost, where the one Spirit enabled the apostles to speak in many tongues, not erasing difference but transforming it into a symphony of witness.

5.5. Eschatological Horizon

Finally, theology situates interculturality within an *eschatological horizon*. The ultimate goal is not a purely horizontal consensus but the communion of all peoples in the Body of Christ, where “every tribe and tongue and people and nation” (Rev. 5:9) are united without losing their particularity. Intercultural dialogue thus anticipates the fulfillment of history in the *heavenly liturgy*, where diversity is eternally preserved and glorified.

A theological exploration of interculturality cannot remain confined to historical, sociological, or even anthropological dimensions. Christian theology ultimately views all human encounters – cultural, social, or religious – within the *eschatological horizon*, that is, the final fulfillment of history in the Kingdom of God. This perspective reveals that intercultural dialogue is not merely a pragmatic necessity of globalization, but a foretaste and anticipation of the *eschaton*, when the fullness of communion between God and humanity will be revealed.

The Kingdom as the Goal of All Cultures

The Gospel announces that history is moving toward the “new heaven and new earth” (Rev. 21:1), where every people, tribe, and language will bring their gifts into the eternal city (Rev. 21:26). From this perspective, *all cultures participate, however imperfectly, in the journey toward the Kingdom*, where their particular languages, arts, and traditions will be purified and fulfilled, not erased. St. Irenaeus of Lyons affirms that God’s plan is to “recapitulate all things in Christ” (St. Irenaeus of Lyons 1994, 443), gathering the diversity of human history into a single communion of love. Interculturality, therefore, is not an end in itself but a *pilgrimage* toward this eschatological unity.

Eschatology and the Transfiguration of Difference

The eschatological vision of the Church does not abolish cultural diversity but *transfigures* it. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit enabled the apostles to speak “in many tongues” (Acts 2:4), symbolizing a unity that embraces difference rather than suppressing it. St. Maximus the Confessor teaches that in Christ “the many are preserved in their distinct identities even as they are united in love” (St. MAXIMUS the Confessor 2014, 91), offering a paradigm for interculturality that avoids both homogenization and fragmentation. Thus, the eschatological horizon allows Christians to affirm cultural identities while orienting them toward a communion that surpasses all boundaries.

History, Mission, and Eschatological Tension

The Church lives in what the Fathers call eschatological *tension*, already tasting the Kingdom through the Eucharist, yet not fully possessing it. This “already–not yet” dynamic gives urgency to intercultural dialogue: it calls believers to engage *cultures with humility*, recognizing that every encounter is provisional and penultimate. St. Gregory of Nyssa describes the Christian life as an “ever-moving ascent” (Gr. *epektasis*) toward the infinite God (St. Gregory of Nyssa 1978, 115-118), which implies that

no culture can claim finality. Dialogue thus becomes a shared movement toward the ultimate fulfillment in Christ, where every truth and every beauty find its consummation.

Discernment in a Globalized Eschaton

Globalization, with its rapid exchange of ideas, goods, and symbols, creates a false anticipation of eschatological unity – a “global village” that mimics the universal communion promised by God. Theologically, this requires *spiritual discernment* to distinguish between the superficial unification of consumer culture and the authentic catholicity of the Kingdom. As St. Augustine warns, the earthly city seeks peace but cannot provide the eternal peace of the City of God (St. Augustine 2003, 861). Interculturality, when grounded in the eschatological promise, resists both naïve utopianism and despair, offering instead a hopeful realism rooted in Christ’s victory over death.

Eucharist as the Foretaste of the Eschaton

The Eucharistic liturgy provides the most concrete expression of the eschatological horizon. In the Divine Liturgy, people from different nations and cultures gather to partake of one bread and one cup, anticipating the final banquet of the Kingdom. St. Nicholas Cabasilas writes that in the Eucharist, “we receive not merely grace, but the very Kingdom itself” (St. Nicholas Cabasilas 1974, 85), making each intercultural encounter within the Church a sacrament of the world to come.

CONCLUSION

Although interculturality does not necessarily originate from postmodernity, it is, nevertheless, supported by it. Interculturality is, thus, within as well as outside of postmodernity. Furthermore, interculturality and postmodernity share a common framework approving of the value of plurality in culture, philosophy, religion and politics. They go hand in hand in their emancipatory protest against monistic tendencies. They do, however, recognize the tension lying at the back of the simultaneity of contradictory process, namely of globalization and fragmentation.

The term *interculturality* is preferable to that of *transculturality* for the simple reason that all our points of view are bound up in a culture and do not exist in vacuum. The prefix *inter-*, in comparison to *trans-*, points to an experiential core of existence. If there is any universal worthy of the name, beyond either being postulated or just defined, it is the intercultural one. The prefix *trans-* seems to point to something beyond and makes us believe in a transition, says Ram Adhar Mall, the founding president of the International Society for Intercultural Philosophy (Ram Adhar Mall 2000, 35-36).

From intercultural philosophers point of view, we are quite at home here, for ‘the inter-’ is what we are looking for. This is also the “placeless every-where”, the “ubiquitous utopian never-neverland”, to which R. A. Mall in his authoritative exposition of intercultural philosophy (Ram Adhar Mall 1995, 135) clings, not in the least as an arguable and plausible, identifiable factuality, but as a last resort, lest we give up all hope of the possibility of intercultural communication, translation and understanding (Wim van Binsbergen 2005, 150).

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Interculturality, when viewed through the lens of Christian theology, emerges not as a mere strategy for peaceful coexistence but as a **sacramental encounter** that reveals the mystery of God’s plan for humanity. Rooted in the doctrine of the *Imago Dei*, the dignity of every human person and culture reflects the inexhaustible richness of the Creator. As St. Gregory of Nyssa teaches, the divine image in each person is “never fully comprehended” (St. Gregory of Nyssa 1994, 404–405), a truth that calls the Church to continual openness and humility before the other.

The mission of the Church, therefore, is not to impose uniformity but to bear witness to *the unity-in-diversity* of the Kingdom of God. The Gospel’s universal call embraces every people and language, yet it does so through the particular histories, symbols, and traditions of each culture. This paradox – unity without erasure, communion without confusion – is mirrored in the Trinitarian life itself, where the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit remain distinct yet perfectly one (St. Basil the Great 2011, 77).

Intercultural dialogue becomes, in this light, an *eschatological sign*. It anticipates the final gathering of all nations before the throne of the Lamb (Rev. 7:9), when the “glory and honor of the nations” will be brought into the heavenly city (Rev. 21:24). As St. Irenaeus affirms, Christ will “recapitulate all things” without abolishing their particularity (St. Irenaeus of Lyons, 1994, 443),

transforming human diversity into a hymn of praise. Every genuine intercultural encounter is thus a *foretaste of the world to come*, where cultural differences are not erased but transfigured in love.

At the same time, the Church must exercise *spiritual discernment* in the face of globalization's ambiguous promises. The global marketplace can mimic catholicity by creating a superficial sense of unity, but only the Holy Spirit can grant the deep communion for which humanity longs. St. Maximus the Confessor reminds us that true unity is found only in Christ, who "gathers the divided into harmony without destroying their natural distinctions" (St. Maximus the Confessor 2014, 91).

In the end, interculturality is not merely an ethical project or a sociological necessity. It is a *theological vocation* that calls every culture to contribute its unique beauty to the cosmic liturgy of creation. The Eucharist, where believers of every tongue and nation share the one Bread and one Cup, remains the most profound sign of this vocation, offering a present taste of the *final communion* in which "God will be all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28). In this mystery, the Church discovers that interculturality is nothing less than the unfolding of salvation history itself.

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