

Interculturality as an Eschatological Sign: Divine Intimacy Revealed in Today's Marital Unions

by Simon C. Kim

In July 2017, the *New York Times* published an article entitled “The Faces of Intermarriage, 50 Years After Loving v. Virginia,”¹ which highlighted cross-cultural, intercultural, mixed marriages. In the past, fascination with such marriages involving spouses of different ethnicities might have been due to the rarity of such unions because of legal restrictions, racial stereotypes, taboos, etc. Today’s interest in couples of different cultural backgrounds, however, often is based on their commonality in society. More marriages involving individuals of different racial and cultural groups are occurring in our society according to the *Times* article, which cites a Pew Research study showing a fivefold increase since the historic landmark decision of *Loving v. Virginia* fifty years ago. Today, one in six marital unions are considered as such, making this much more commonplace in our neighborhoods and churches. Whereas previous encounters with racial and cultural differences were always at a comfortable distance since one could enter in and out of such a diverse environment, today’s encounters are much more intimate because there is no compartmentalizing or escaping this reality when it comes to intercultural unions, especially for the children of these unions. Therefore, the new space formed by cultural hybridity challenges social and religious norms.

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Just as these mixed marriages are creating a new and intimate way for cultures to come together, the church’s embrace of being an intercultural reality is an innovation that is also eschatological—here, but not yet fully realized. God’s reign continues to unfold through the necessary interactions between the church and the world. Thus, Vatican II allowed for events such as intercultural marriages to signal the Spirit’s movement. A careful reading of how intimacy emerges from an intercultural encounter or setting, both in the time of Jesus as well as today, allows the church to better respond to the pastoral and social needs when people from various backgrounds come together.

1 Sheryl Gay Stolberg, “The Faces of Intermarriage, 50 Years After Loving v. Virginia,” *The New York Times* (July 6, 2017). Available online at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/06/us/the-faces-of-intermarriage-50-years-after-loving-v-virginia.html?hpw&rref=us&action=click&pgtype=Homepage&module=well-region®ion=bottom-well&WT.nav=bottom-well>.

Intercultural Intimacy

Interculturality goes beyond co-existing with the other (i.e., “multiculturalism”)² and creates new opportunities of how people come together. In *Fides et Ratio*, John Paul II emphasizes the gospel encounter with the Greek-speaking world as an example of ongoing cultural encounters and the necessary task of inculturation (FR 72). Therefore, such encounters involve a process of change, whereby one’s identity remains but is not the same; it is transformed and enriched.³ Through a mutual embrace of culture, language, and peoples, deeper movements of intimacy occur, as illustrated by today’s marital unions. The coming together of what was previously unimaginable, or from situations that were prohibited in the past, continues to reveal the dynamic nature of relationships found in Judeo-Christianity—the intimate ways of interacting with one another as a reflection of our relationship with the divine. Thus, becoming an intercultural reality in both church and society is not just about the diversity of its members but, more importantly, the ways cultures and peoples are received as having vital contributions⁴ and allowed to forge a new creation through the interweaving of their worlds as well as through the generations to come.

In *The Sacred and the Profane*,⁵ Mircea Eliade speaks of this new space as territory that humanity occupies to reflect divine cosmology. In doing so, humanity continues to create as well as perpetuate religious connections generationally and culturally. “To settle in a territory is, in the last analysis, equivalent to consecrating it. When settlement is not temporary...but permanent...it implies a vital decision that involves the existence of the entire community.”⁶ For immigrant communities, such establishments in this country come in a variety of forms. However, intercultural marriages signify the ultimate method of establishment, as these unions, especially when it comes to their offspring, cannot return to a “homeland” or continue in the same manner as the initial cultural groupings. Rather, a new territory is created where, for Eliade, the sacred can also be revealed. For this to occur, both secular and religious communities must have a role in upholding interculturality. What is upheld as a new territory is that intercultural couples become an *imago mundi* where their marital union is “symbolically situated at the Center of the World.”⁷ Theologically speaking, marriages bringing cultural differences together should not be seen as aberrations or rare occurrences. Rather, they must be viewed as today’s version of the communication with the transcendent.⁸

Thus, intercultural intimacy does not simply mean a physical connection between spouses of differing backgrounds but, rather, how the lives of two different people must come together to appreciate the differences even when they cannot be fully comprehended. In this encounter, a greater sense of the mystery emerges and is appreciated since one can fully comprehend neither the complete reality of the other nor the new life of coming together. Rather, the embrace of the unknown is what helps us become church in the mystical communion as Christ’s body. Eliade cites the Greek understanding of marriage as *telos*, consecration, and the ritual involved in bringing two people together reflecting that of the mysteries where tension, danger, crisis is implied.⁹ Within this chaotic atmosphere also

2 “Multiculturalism” refers to a compartmentalized society when groups exist next to each other. See Frans Wijzen, “What is Intercultural about Intercultural Theology?” *GEMA Theology* 38, no. 2 (2014): 189. “In contrast, interculturality implies a mutually enriching and challenging two-way exchange among different cultures...moving far beyond mere coexistence ‘to emphasize and make more explicit the essential *mutuality* of the process of cultural interaction on both the personal and social level.’” For more on the theological use of internationality, multiculturalism, cross-cultural, and interculturality, see Roger Schroeder, “Engaging our Diversity through Interculturality,” *New Theology Review* 30, no. 2 (2018): 65.

3 Wijzen, “Intercultural Theology,” 189.

4 In her examination of how communication in remote villages is connected through the intensification of globalization, Cristina Sepsi Soare concludes: “The quality of intercultural communication is based on how each understands, accepts and respects the cultural differences of others.” See Cristina Sepsi Soare, “Interculturality and Globalization,” *EIRP Proceedings* 4, no. 1 (2009): 749.

5 Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1959).

6 Eliade, *The Sacred*, 34.

7 Eliade, *The Sacred*, 57.

8 Eliade, *The Sacred*, 58.

9 Eliade, *The Sacred*, 185.

lies the possibility for the mystery to reveal an intimacy with the divine within our faith tradition. Just as Christ's hypostatic union is a mystical union of the divine and human in the breaking of bread and pouring of the cup, the mystery that is created in intercultural intimacy brings humanity closer to divinity.

Just as Eliade focuses on the present in the creation of a sacred moment, Geoffrey Wainwright points to the *Parousia*, the imminent return of Christ in glory, as the final union between humanity and divinity. The coming together of creation upon Christ's return creates a "new territory" with the ultimate consecration of what is being signified today. Wainwright laments the diminished expectation of the *Parousia* in many religious circles and, thus, the inability to fully appreciate current encounters with the divine. He notes that the eucharistic celebration as the heavenly banquet heavily focused on Christ's return and that once enough time had passed, the church "relaxed" this outlook.¹⁰ Paralleling this loss was the absence of the role of the Holy Spirit in the West. The significance of both has led to a lack of understanding in the eschatological outlook, especially when it came to eucharistic celebrations or any other sacramental moment for that matter. Rather than recognizing the Spirit's activity and focusing our lives on the future consequences of the reign of God, the church's insistence on the past in the present moment hinders our readiness of what is still yet to come.¹¹ This "eucharistic *causative* value" is realized in the reconciliation present with Christ's body—"for such a eucharist will be the occasion for the Lord to exercise the three eschatological functions of casting out from us in the judgment what is amiss in us, of uniting us closer to himself in divine fellowship, and of joining us together in common enjoyment of his presence and gifts."¹² All of these characteristics of the eschaton are reflected in the ways people of different cultural backgrounds come together in an unitive way.

The use of Wainwright's eschatological perspective helps illustrate that something more is possible when we reclaim our vision of the coming kingdom as well as the current actions of the Holy Spirit in the lives of couples and in the church. Through sacramental intimacy found in intercultural marriages, the church is more prepared to partake of the mystery of the kingdom of God by being present. Since the sacramental life requires all our senses, can we not "taste" what is before us and thus participate in some manner, creating an eschatological intimacy through intercultural unions, echoing communion in light of the eschaton?

To taste is to try the relish; and to say that the eucharist provides a taste of the kingdom therefore allows us to express both the provisionally and yet the genuineness of the kingdom as it flavours the present... This use of *taste* is much rarer in the eucharistic liturgies and the theologians than one might have expected; but its value as an expression for the relation between the "already" and the "not yet" is undeniable.¹³

Intercultural Christianity from the Outset

From the very outset of Christianity, the commandment to go forth in Matthew 28 entailed a condition for the faithful that was not within Jewish religious or cultural purview. "Luke-Acts tells us that on the morning of Pentecost the Apostles received the Holy Spirit and were empowered to proclaim this new way of love to all humanity."¹⁴ Thus, the spreading of Good News has always been an intercultural one from its beginnings. Along with this commandment to go to those outside of the Jewish world, the Pentecost event also illustrates the cultural diversity of the members as "Parthians, Medes, Elamites and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya near Cyrene, as well as travelers from Rome, both Jews and converts to Judaism,

10 Geoffrey Wainwright, *Eucharist and Eschatology* (Akron, OH: OSL Publications, 2002), 154.

11 Wainwright, *Eucharist and Eschatology*, 175.

12 Wainwright, *Eucharist and Eschatology*, 177.

13 Wainwright, *Eucharist and Eschatology*, 188-189.

14 Virgilio Elizondo, "Jesus the Galilean Jew in Mestizo Theology," *Theological Studies* 70 (2009): 277.

Cretans and Arabs” experienced the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:9-11). This infusion of many different cultures as part of the ongoing formation of the early disciples laid the groundwork for what was to come in fulfilling Christ’s command to go and make disciples of all nations (Mt 28:19).

Rather than a static monocultural faith expression, the call to go forth gave way to a dynamic where faith would continually be influenced by new cultures encountered in the task of evangelization. Although the Jewish people attempted to maintain a strict exclusivity regarding faith and culture, their everyday lives spoke of another reality since the encounter with Gentiles could not be completely avoided. How else would the Pentecost event have occurred had it not been for the necessity of those with differing ethnic backgrounds coming together for the occasion? Neither was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit an unplanned event since the day of Parousia corresponded with Jesus’s ascension into heaven, nor was the location coincidental since the moment of conversion took place when people from different nations gathered in one place. “From the margins Jesus initiates not a new center but rather a new movement of the Spirit that enables people to cross segregating boundaries and form a new human family ... Galilee would never become the center, but it was the point of departure for the beginning of a new creation, as the Galilees today continue to be points of departure or new humanities to emerge.”¹⁵ Thus, the beginnings of the church entailed both the embrace and mixture of peoples, cultures, languages, etc. that constitute an intercultural community of believers since from the moment the Spirit descended upon them, every culture and people were now included in God’s reign with equality and dignity as the signature hallmark of those who followed Christ.

Overcoming the greatest cultural hurdle—what has often been referred to as miscegenation—was implicit in following Christ’s examples since it called both Jews and Gentiles together. Once abhorred as the ultimate violation of purity, intercultural unions and their offspring exemplify the Pentecost event and internally fulfill Christ’s commandment of proclaiming the Good News to all peoples. Transforming a community from a singular cultural mindset to one of inclusion is truly the work of the Holy Spirit, and it was a struggle for the early disciples as much as for us today.¹⁶ However, the challenge of inclusion of others is not simply welcoming them into the fold. The inclusion in both Jesus’s final words and in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is to embrace a new reality where other cultures influence in a way that creates new opportunities for growth. Therefore, the original encounter of others and their inclusion into the community of believers expanded the community’s understanding of God’s family.

These two occasions after Christ’s crucifixion, death, and resurrection mark not only the outward expression of the church but also illustrate that such a community of believers can be realized only in the encountering of others within their cultural context. It also reflected their current reality as well as the one that was still yet to come. Otherwise, new members would have been restricted to Jewish rituals rather than allowing them to hold on to their Gentile heritage. Although seeing the value of differing cultures seems to arise after Christ’s resurrection and the Pentecost event, Jesus’s own upbringing in the Galilean region reveals that this was not a new beginning in any way but a vision of humanity conditioned by his humble beginnings. “God did not become human as a universal, but in a particularity of Jesus’s life and praxis, which began in Galilee. From a Christian theological perspective, therefore, every particular human life can become a Galilean experience of divine disclosure within the world of actual things.”¹⁷

15 Elizondo, “Jesus the Galilean Jew,” 277-8.

16 Lee highlights a tense and conflictual atmosphere due to cultural interactions in the Galilean region especially when it came to the symbol systems of Jerusalem. However, this tension must be interpreted within the context of first-century Judaism’s intracommunity struggles to understand whether Jesus was calling his disciples into another way of life. See Michael E. Lee, “Galilean Journey Revisited: *Mestizaje*, Anti-Judaism, and the Dynamics of Exclusion,” *Theological Studies* 70 (2009): 392-3.

17 Sean Freyne, “The Galilean Jesus and Contemporary Christology,” *Theological Studies* 70 (2009): 297.

Therefore, Jesus did not command a new vision foreign to him but intensified a vision that included his Galilean childhood as well as his adult ministry to the poor since “Galilee would forever be an integral part of the Christian proclamation of the Good News by Jesus Christ.”¹⁸ From his very beginnings of being like us, Jesus was exposed to many peoples and cultures already intermingling through the economic trade practices in the region. Galilee was not simply occupied by the Jews, it also became a home for many foreigners who occupied the region for their own economic wellbeing. With such economic transactions, cultural practices also must have been shared with one another, since trade forced people to interact on various levels. Since Jesus’s ministry challenged the Jewish establishment, he was preoccupied with areas that were heavily Jewish in population and with the Jewish religious traditions.¹⁹ However, since he also dwelt in the midst of the marginalized he did not spend his days in entirely Gentile-free zones, but engaged in “alien cultures.”²⁰

With every burgeoning economy, trade practices created new classes based on wealth as well as marginalizing many more in poverty. Growing up in a culturally mixed economic setting provided a privileged lens that would shape Christ’s ministry to come. In particular, Jesus’s upbringing within an impoverished environment provided the focus of his ministry, echoing the prophetic voice of Isaiah to bring good news to the poor and brokenhearted (Is 61:1). Therefore, Christ’s message during his earthly ministry continually challenged the establishment—those who advocated for their privileged positions revolving around race and economic wellbeing—to bring to the forefront of society those marginalized by an elitist mindset. Within this message, however, there is also contained the prophetic voice of not only attending to the poor but also what influenced Jesus in his upbringing—those surrounding him already living in an intercultural reality.

The challenge to the Jewish establishment to heed the cries of the poor contained within it the message of also breaking down the racial and cultural barriers within the Jewish notions of purity. Jesus’s message was not a complete departure from Judaism but centered on those who were excluded. Thus, to be culturally mixed was not an exclusionary act but rather a privileged place of hearing the Good News of God’s reign. To have multiple heritages did not place people outside of divine mercy and grace, but, rather, placed diversity in the center of God’s reign. Why would Jesus simply confront one of the sorrows of his childhood and turn a blind eye to the other injustices that plagued the people whom he called friends and learned from throughout his life? Although publicly this may have not been called out in his ministry to the poor, it must have always been operating in the back of his mind. What Jesus encountered in Galilee through the events and people around him became his mission as the call to tend to the poor was also a command to accept not only those of different ethnicity and cultures, but more importantly to accept such interactions when embodied in a single human being. Thus, Jesus’s intercultural commissioning at the end of the Matthean gospel and the Pentecost event of gathering people from all the ends of the world was truly an intensification of his earthly existence.

In the Acts of the Apostles, the early church experience further exemplifies the need for intercultural encounters through the tensions brought about by the temptations to remain in a strictly monocultural reality. The conflict at the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:13-21) illustrates the struggles the early disciples had in not only proclaiming the message of Christ but, just as importantly, also imitating his way of life. The final resolution opens the way for the community to begin realizing the work on behalf of the poor, and must also include the welcoming of all cultures because of staunch supporters like St. Paul whose own diverse background as a Diaspora Jew made him more receptive to the Gentiles and their way of life.²¹ Jesus’s command to go forth insists that peoples and cultures

18 Freyne, “The Galilean Jesus,” 284.

19 Freyne, “The Galilean Jesus,” 285.

20 Freyne, “The Galilean Jesus,” 292.

21 Freyne, “The Galilean Jesus,” 291.

are to come together in rekindling his memories of the Galilean environment where people from all around came together for better or worse. Now with the power of the Holy Spirit, the injustices resulting from such interactions of cultural differences would be transformed into a truly just community of believers where faith is not void of culture, but in fact allows people of different heritage to create a family of God as witnessed from the time of Jesus's childhood. Thus, the Pentecost event that acknowledged different ethnic groups as part of God's reign is now being called into a more substantial reality to correct the earlier version as witnessed by Christ in his Galilean upbringing. "In a world of *missio*, the missionary is called to make manifest God's promises in Israel and their realization in Jesus and the Spirit."²²

Intercultural Christianity Today

It is undeniable that the Second Vatican Council opened the doors of the church to the world. By doing so, a dialogue of sorts was underway as the church was to continue teaching the world but now the world would also be able to "contribute to the better ordering of human society."²³ In particular, worldly events needed to be scrutinized as signaling the incarnation—Christ in the world—just as the church had been proclaiming from her inception. Through events that impact the daily lives of both Christians and non-Christians, the church would come to see the Spirit's continued formation of humanity. In certain ways, the US Catholic experience continues the Spirit's mission with the influx of immigrants in our neighborhoods and churches from its very beginnings. As people of differing cultural and ethnic backgrounds moved into specific neighborhoods, the church also felt the influence of their presence—foreign ethnically but not necessarily in religious belief. Therefore, the ecclesial response to the changing demographics within a given parochial area was to embrace a multicultural church. This embrace was either a joyful occasion or one borne out of necessity. Joyful moments of inclusion occurred less often than the accommodation of the other out of parochial needs if we take our cues from society once again. Just as neighborhoods feared outsiders entering their premises, parishioners also often embraced similar sentiments since they lived in the areas most affected. Thus, joyful moments of inclusion are few and far between, since these required an equality that the United States has struggled for many centuries to achieve and continues to do so to this day.

Equality is necessary since the other entering our parochial boundaries must be seen with just as much dignity as those who are already established within them. In addition, to truly appreciate cultural and ethnic differences, the established culture and language must be seen as one of many so that the newly encountered culture, people, and language can be seen as a blessing and asset. Thus, their presence simply adds to the richness of our communities of faith as well as to our residential neighborhoods and workplaces. Without such acknowledgement involving the equality of people and cultures, the tendency is to see the others as inferior because of their differences. Rather than appreciating the richness that they encompass, they are seen as needing assistance. Thus, compassion arises from the transformation of pity through the aforementioned equality within the context of a Christian narrative.²⁴ To be compassionate because the other is new to the area, speaks a different language, and adheres to different customs simply means that both parties understand the position that the other is in because of previous encounters—either experienced personally or through acts of solidarity.

The latter acceptance of a multicultural reality out of necessity, however, is a much more common experience in the ecclesial landscape of the United States. Starting with missionary encounters with the indigenous populations on the eastern seaboard as well as the treatment of our Hispanic brothers and sisters on the southern borders,

22 William R. Burrows, "Intercultural Formation for Mission: *Missio Ad et Inter Gentes*," *SEDOS Residential Seminar Arricia* (2007): 3.

23 Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes* (1965), no. 39, in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Postconciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014).

24 For more on the Christian movement from pity to Christian compassion, see Paul M. Blowers, "Pity, Empathy, and the Tragic Spectacle of Human Suffering: Exploring the Emotional Culture of Compassion in Late Ancient Christianity," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 18, no. 1 (2010).

those differing from the Euro-American experience of faith were often looked upon with pity because of their “uneducated” and “pagan” ways. Thus, they were included into the Christian fold out of duty to the missionary’s version of the gospel message. The perspective of seeing others as inferior because of their unfamiliarity with European religious customs, language, and mindset continues to influence the reception of new immigrants and people of different ethnic groups, especially in areas of this country where they did not tread before. While some communities do celebrate the presence of Catholics of different ethnicities, their inclusion often is to sustain the dwindling numbers of the older populations. Inclusion that is not joyfully celebrated is often accompanied by demands upon different ethnic faith groups to adapt to English-speaking practices in both ministry and administration. Basically, those who do not “pray, pay, and obey” in a manner similar to English-speaking Catholics are impatiently expected to adapt to the ways of those already established in the pews.

Returning to Vatican II’s insistence of a humble dialogue between the church and the world where the signs of the times are interpreted in the light of the gospel, this remains of great concern today. The church has looked to the changing demographics of surrounding neighborhoods to brace for changes in church membership. The multicultural approach that arose out of the necessity to include others into existing ecclesial structures allowed the wider church to understand the changing faces of those in the pews. Just as Hispanic, Asian, or Black families moved into new neighborhoods, the church also acknowledged the movement of similar ethnic faith groups entering the church doors. Diversity has been acknowledged by membership, but usually with groups or gatherings with little interaction with one another.

Just as in the past, the movement of differing ethnic groups with their religious practices continues to impact both church and society. Ongoing immigration along with political debates surrounding migration should once again indicate to the church that something more than just diversity is on the horizon. One factor changing the multicultural landscape of the past is the marital unions that are being created by different racial and cultural groups. These intercultural marriages visibly occurring both within and outside the church indicate not only the acceptance and establishment of diverse communities, but, more importantly, the nature of interculturality. Whereas previous receptions of diversity hinted at acceptance and hospitality, today’s changing landscape reveals the need to go beyond the multicultural norms of the past. Mixed marital unions reveal the need for more than just acceptance or hospitality; they reveal the need to take on the other’s worldview, taste, speech, etc. In other words, we must be intimately connected with the diversity in our midst, echoing the intimacy of interculturality found in many newly created families. Intercultural marriages, therefore, force couples of differing backgrounds to create together a new way of being that does not reject or deny one culture over the other, but allows for a new way of interaction, thought, speech, and even approach to the divine, especially in the creation of new life between the two. Thus, mixed marriages are a sign of where the church is headed—the need to be able not only to accommodate diversity, but to embrace an intimacy of diversity where the traditional ways of being church are enhanced by the equality of every people and culture. This is within our reach if the other is seen with the same equality and dignity one sees in one’s own ethnicity and cultural practices.

Steps to Interculturality

While celebrating the increase of mixed marriages, the challenge is to place these unions as normative for the church as part of the intercultural reality that emerges from Jesus’s entire life, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and Jesus’s eventual return. When placed within this eschatological framework, contemporary struggles to embrace such realities as the unfolding of Christ’s love for God’s people has both immediate impact for local communities and for generations to come. This obviously poses quite a challenge since there are no concrete roadmaps, only signs suggesting the direction that we must go, due to the complexities of immigration and the resettlement pro-

cess as well as globalization. Therefore, the earthly lessons of Christ are important for our changing context. The steps that Christ took in his ministry as well as in the formation of his disciples to enter the intercultural space—the Pentecost event—are the steps that we still need to take today.

In proclaiming the reign of God at hand, Jesus’s teachings and miracles regarding those on the margins contained within them the inclusion process of God’s people. As today’s faithful are called to grow in their humanity by partaking in their spiritual union with one another and God, the instructions they receive must contain within them the notion of intercultural intimacy. Liturgical preaching, faith formation instructions, and service to the poor must include within the actual words and actions the notion that people of different cultural backgrounds are welcomed and necessary in realizing God’s reign. Whether directly or indirectly transmitted, the understanding that God’s reign includes their own experiences of living in a diverse population or in solidarity must always be part of the evangelization process. After all, in *Evangelii Gaudium* the Holy Father has called the faithful to become missionary disciples where evangelizers must not only take on the “smell of the sheep,” but, equally important, must have “sheep” willing to hear their voice (*EG* 24). In this Apostolic Exhortation, Pope Francis reminds the church that being a missionary disciple is to go into our surroundings with the message of Christ’s invitation to be part of his body, the church. In doing so, this message is only in imitation of Jesus’s own earthly proclamation if we keep before us the intercultural intimacy that he held in calling the people to come follow him.

Eventually, the cultural diversity as illustrated from Jesus’s childhood to his death and resurrection must emerge as a visible sign of God’s reign. Just as the Pentecost event was the visible sign of the new way God’s people would gather together in worship, evangelization by contemporary missionary disciples must also make present an intercultural intimacy between our relationship with one another and with God the loving Father. The challenge of achieving this is much harder than the previous step of simply placing before us the experience of living in a diverse population or being in solidarity. In other words, the paradigm shifts necessary in maintaining a message within a message requires further transformation of our lives.

The creation of an intercultural intimate environment requires the similar steps that mixed-marriage couples undergo. What these unions teach us is that mutual respect of differences is a prerequisite for love to develop between people of differing cultures. A single culture, custom, language, etc. cannot be perceived as being superior over another. If one spouse feels inferior because of his or her background, then love does not have an equal footing to truly come to fruition. Thus, the People of God must also take on the same disposition by seeing others of differing backgrounds as equals if they want to engage the other in their midst. The hurdle in today’s church involves an ignorance of how ethnic differences must be seen equally. Rather than seeing English-speaking Catholics of European descent as a cultural group—one of many within our diverse country—this group is often seen as the exclusive or primary model of being both American and Catholic.

Mutual respect can only be achieved when all cultures, regardless of their longevity within the US, are treated as one of many and viewed as having a valuable contribution to both church and society. The result of the Pentecost event is not for the nations to become a singular culture, but rather to take their cultural differences in forging new expressions in worship. Respect for cultural differences allows for religious and cultural contributions to be embraced and not hidden away in shame for fear of belittlement. When the faithful can exhibit their cultural heritage as part of the wider church and not relegated to their own ethnic space, then this equality allows for an intimate sharing and weaving that enhances the life of the church.

A concrete example of this is how we celebrate certain feasts in our liturgical cycle. While European devotions become universal celebrations for the wider church, many ethnic celebrations outside the European context are

categorized only as being valuable for a particular community. Even the great celebration of *Nuestra Senora de Guadalupe* is seen as a Mexican celebration when this Marian presentation is actually for all of the Americas. In some dioceses where Catholics of non-European descent are the majority, their particular celebrations are nevertheless still seen as their own devotion and not meant for others. For example, with more than eight hundred Vietnamese priests serving in the US, how can the devotion to the Vietnamese Martyrs or Our Lady of La Vang simply be “their” celebration when so many of them are serving the wider church? Beyond this reasoning, when the faithful have given their lives in such great numbers such as in the case of the Korean Martyrs (103 canonized in 1984, 124 beatified in 2014), should they not be models for the entire church instead of being designated solely for Korean Catholics?

Conclusion

Thomas Rausch describes the eschaton as more than just about the four last things involving death and judgment, heaven and hell.²⁵ Rather, the eschaton comprises all of salvation history. The relationship between God and creation, especially with humanity, is continually realized as a way of grounding the covenant of creation.²⁶ Furthermore, any relational aspects—especially in regard to interculturality—ground us in the larger covenant so that we can also live in loving relationships given to us in this moment as well as in the future promise.

As the complexity of intercultural unions continues to pose challenges to church and society, much more effort must be made by both in order to create an environment that is indicative of the eschaton—here and now, but not fully yet realized. This is not to naïvely say that intercultural marriages fare better than those not categorized as such. Factors that make marriage successful are applicable to all groups; however, normative intercultural encounters remind us once again of the need to take culture seriously in any relationship. In both church and society, we are just beginning to grapple with this reality that has been taken for granted too long. For example, not until the 2010 U.S. Census did mixed marriages appear as part of one’s ethnic identity. Thus, the previous notions of mixed marriages that were considered along the lines of skin color (e.g., black and white) are no longer the so-called norm, and more attention is now needed to better understand how these unions play an intricate role in realizing the reign of God.

Finally, if the church is called to missionary discipleship, this requires no less of us as it did in the New Testament period. First, we must resist the temptations of cultural exclusivity that was before the Jewish people. Without the mindset of how our words and actions must always transmit the intercultural intimacy of God’s reign—the reception of other cultures as containing valuable and necessary insights into that economy—different cultures will continue to come together in multicultural ways while still struggling to come together as one body. Second, by acknowledging that the Euro-American experience of the faith is just one of several encounters by various groups who have been shaped by the immigration and resettlement process in this country, other cultures are then able to contribute to the wider church, adding to the dynamics that have fueled the church in the US for centuries. If steps such as these are embraced, even imperfectly at times, this process would contribute to the church’s experience of the eschatological reality promised and constantly being brought about by Christ.

²⁵ Thomas Rausch, *Eschatology, Liturgy, and Christology: Toward Recovering an Eschatological Imagination* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), xiii.

²⁶ Rausch, *Eschatology*, 19.