Becoming Who We Are: Beyond Racism and Prejudice in Formation and Ministry

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Introduction

According to behavioral scientists, racism has become more covert and unconscious in both individuals and institutions. This insidious form of racism can be expressed both verbally and nonverbally, for example, in what psychologists call "racial microaggressions." In this article, I present the case of a Latino, Mexican-born priest ("Jesús") to illustrate how microaggressive themes can contain invalidating and possibly racist acts. I summarize research on this type of behavior and its psychological and emotional impact on the targets. To shed light on the development of intercultural competencies, I discuss the meaning and importance of developing these skills from the perspective of intercultural communication and the concept of catholicity found in the New Testament. In *Welcoming the Strangers Among Us*, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has stated that the church as a whole needs to have a change of heart toward these "strangers" in our midst. While there are many challenges relating to language and intercultural barriers, this article offers some practical suggestions for more authentic and respectful intercultural encounters in formation and ministry.

Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: The Case of Jesús

Jesús is a Mexican born priest in a Southwest diocese.[1] *He was born in Mexico and attended high school in his native country. He was then admitted to the seminary in the United States, ordained and has had several pastoral assignments since his ordination. As a priest for 15 years, he has held several administrative positions, mostly as associate pastor. He was recently assigned to a parish in a relatively rural area with a predominantly Caucasian population and a Euro-American pastor. Jesús came to counseling after having lived with the pastor for one year. Jesús reported feeling sad most of the time, bored, alienated, stressed and demoralized. Clinically, I initially hypothesized that his depressive and stress symptoms may have a dispositional or personal cause. However, as I probed further it became apparent that situational factors may have been contributing to his dysphoric emotional state. Jesús had been assisting the pastor in their assignment to four neighboring parishes and he reported truly enjoying his priestly ministry. Nevertheless, Jesús reported several incidents with this pastor and other parishioners that had negatively affected him at an emotional level. He recounted some of these experiences and shared conversations he has had with those involved in these interethnic and intercultural incidents.*

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He noted that he had become increasingly bored and isolated at the parish. He stated that the pastor was always watching TV shows on hunting and fishing, activities and hobbies the priest avidly enjoys and does on his days off. Prior to this assignment, Jesús was at a predominantly Hispanic parish where he was well connected with the com-

munity and the pastor was Latino. There he had access to cable TV with a variety of Spanish programs, including telenovelas and soccer, two hobbies quite predominant among U.S. Latinos. At his current parish, Jesús noted that the pastor had explicitly told him that the current channels were the only ones allowed at the parish. During their leisure time, Jesús had to sit for hours, socializing with the priest and pretending he was interested in hunting and fishing. The pastor then invited Jesus to go hunting and fishing, something Jesús reluctantly agreed to.

Jesús noted that the pastor always called him after every Mass or pastoral activity to ask how things went. Jesús began to notice some level of distrust and constant supervision by the pastor. Because Jesús had some administrative experience at prior assignments, he volunteered to do payroll. One day, the pastor came into the office and incredulously asked, "You know how to do payroll?" He then proceeded to examine what Jesús had done, only to conclude with dismay that Jesús had actually done it correctly.

*Jesús wanted to reach out to a few Latino families in a neighboring parish. However, on several occasions the pastor organized parish events at the local golf club where the majority of the Euro-American families could attend, but not the Latino families. Jesús reported feeling powerless. In a brief conversation with the pastor when Jesús brought up the need for a Spanish Mass for these families and suggested finding alternative venues for parish related events, the pastor reportedly remarked, "We are in the United States and it would be good for these families to learn English and assimilate with the other American parishioners." On one occasion, after resigning himself to the idea that Mass would not be celebrated in Spanish for the Latino families, Jesús brought an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe and displayed it on the right side of the church, away from the altar area. He was surprised to find out on the following Sunday that the image had been removed. Although it was the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe on December 12th, the chairperson of the parish liturgy committee remarked to Jesús that nobody in the English speaking parish community understands the "myth of Guadalupe, anyways, and that the Latinos should get over their superstitions." When Jesús went to the pastor to inquire about these actions, the pastor confronted Jesús with the affirmation that, "Why are they complaining about inclusion, they're already included, after all we're brothers and sisters in the Lord?" After these conversations, Jesús noticed that the pastor came to Mass on several occasions when Jesús was celebrating, and sat in the back pew of the church. Jesús then overheard the pastor asking a couple of elderly Euro-American parishioners, "Is Jesús' English understandable?" to which the parishioners responded, "Well, my hearing may not be that good now, but certainly, his English is very good." Most likely unconvinced by these responses, the pastor discreetly attended Mass again and asked Jes*ús about his seminary training i*n homiletics. More poignantly, he asked him, "Do you make a difference between a sermon and a homily in Spanish?" Jesús completed all of his seminary training in the United States and all of his teaching was actually imparted by Euro-American faculty with advanced degrees in philosophy and theology.*

Perplexed by the experiences he was having at his current pastoral assignment, and with some hesitation, he decided to share his current struggles with his monthly priestly support group "Jesus Caritas." All of the members of this group were Euro-American. The first reaction from one of the members was, "Have you considered that you may be overreacting to this? We all know Father Jim. He's such a nice guy." Jesús felt frustrated, but contained his emotions while internally struggling with his dilemma and asking himself if the experiences at his parish were really racially motivated or just his own overreaction, as the members of the priestly support group seemed to imply.

Racial Microaggressions

What is Jesús experiencing? Most likely, Jesús is coping with what is known in the psychological and sociological literature as "racial microaggressions." These are defined as "brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to people of color because they belong to a racial minority group."[23] To differentiate this complex interethnic phenomena, Sue and colleagues distinguish between *microinsults* and *microinvalidations*.[4] Microinsults include incidents that are perceived as offensive or insulting, whereas microinvalidations are incidents in which a person of color feels devalued, ignored or delegitimized. Their detailed taxonomy has identified at least nine racial microaggressions with specific themes and hidden offensive and devaluing messages that have a cumulative, detrimental psychological effect on people of color. These aggressions are experienced differently by the microaggressor and the target, with the perpetrator usually minimizing them and the victim feeling confused and in a catch-22 experience.

The themes, examples of the microaggression, and hidden messages include:

1. *Alien in Own Land*: For example, a person asking a U.S.-born Latino, "Where are you from?" with its message of "You are not American."
2. *Ascription of Intelligence*: For example, the remark "You are so articulate," with the deni-

grating message of "It is unusual for someone of your race to be so intelligent."

3. *Color Blindness*: Such as, the comment by a white person, "There is only one race, the human race," with the intention of denying the ethnic minority person's individuality and specific ethnic experiences.
4. *Criminality and Assumption of Criminal Status*: For example, the presumption that a Latino person may be dangerous, criminal or deviant, such as when a Latino person is followed around a store, with the prejudice that he does not belong because he is deviant.
5. *Denial of Individual Racism*: For example, the self-defensive comment, "I'm not racist, I have several Latino friends," with the intention of conveying that one is not racist by the mere fact that I have friends like you.
6. *Myth of Meritocracy*: For example, the opinion that "Everyone can succeed in this society if they work hard enough," with the hidden message that "Ethnic minorities are lazy and incompetent and need to work harder."
7. *Pathologizing Cultural Values and Communication Styles*: For example, the biased question to a Latino, "Why are you so quiet? We want to know what you think. Be more verbal," with the implicit demand to assimilate to the American culture.
8. *Second-Class Citizen*: For example, a Mexican always confused for a laborer, with the prejudice that all Mexicans are unsophisticated, manual workers.
9. *Environmental Microaggressions*: For example, churches with only white pastors and white parish personnel, with the racist, covert message that only whites are able to lead and ethnic minorities cannot be trusted.

Additional microaggressions have been identified and researched among specific ethnic groups, including African-Americans,[5] American Indians[6] and Asian Americans.[7] Sue et al.[8] identified eight major macroaggressive themes directed toward Asian Americans: (a) alien in own land, (b) ascription of intelligence, (c) exoticization of Asian women, (d) invalidation of interethnic differences, (e) denial of racial reality, (f) pathologizing cultural values and communication styles, (g) second class citizenship and (h) invisibility.

Among African-Americans, Sue et al.[9] found the denigrating messages: "You do not belong," "You are abnormal," "You are intellectually inferior," "You cannot be trusted" and "You are all the same." Clark et al.[10] identified the following microaggressive expressions targeting American Indians: (a) advocating sociopolitical dominance (such as, settler colonialism), (b) allegations of American Indian oversensitivity (such as being excessively emotional and too easily offended when protesting racialized characterizations in university mascots), (c) waging stereotype-based attacks (such as, all American Indians are alcoholics, casino gamblers and primitive), (d) denial of racism, (e) using logic of elimination and replacement (such as, American Indians are becoming extinct or vanishing), (f) expressing adoration for racialized symbols depicting American Indians in stereotypical roles and (g) conveying grief (for example, sadness, loss or perceived collective nostalgia in response to the discontinuation of Chief Illini week).

Examples of Microaggressions in Church Settings

Microaggresions are not necessarily verbal incidents, but may include environmental communications that subtly express rudeness and insensitivity to a person simply because of their background and identity. In the past, these environmental cues used to be more overt and explicit and included offensive visual displays meant to hurt the person of color while creating noninclusive and unhealthy environments (displaying the Confederate flag, for example). In church settings, environmental, implicit communications that convey to an individual that he or she is unwelcome or not appreciated have become more covert. People of color are offended by their insidiousness and they often report anger, isolation and indignation at these microaggressive offenses. Windsor[11] interviewed Catholics of color and found some poignant examples of these subtle environmental or contextual forms of relational aggression in church settings.

- "Vivian Juan, a member of the Tohono O-odham tribe and an assistant dean for Native American student affairs at the University of Arizona in Tucson, remembers attending Mass with her brother 'and an Anglo person getting up and moving away from us in church because of who we were. I consequently quit going to that church and selected one that had a more diverse ethnic population.'"
- "Luis Vargas, a Puerto Rican man in his mid-30s who is business manager at Our Lady of Fatima Parish in Perth Amboy, New Jersey, says many Catholics come to his predominantly Hispanic parish

after being turned away from neighboring parishes and even denied a funeral Mass for a loved one because they are not registered. For many Hispanics who do not link church affiliation with signing a slip of paper, this act is extremely offensive."

- "Take the images in a church, says Holy Ghost Father Al McKnight, executive director of the Black Catholic Clergy Caucus. 'All your pictures of saints are white. What does that do to a black child coming up? It's a racist environment. Any people should be able to see God in their own image because we are all created in the image of God.' 'You go to church for the kiss of peace. You're black, and someone else is white. You extend your hand, and in some churches people do not extend their hands, or they give the tips of their fingers—and they just heard the priest talking about the body and blood of Christ!' says Isabel Dennis, an African American Catholic leader from Harlem.'"
- "Socorro Durán, a Mexican Catholic grandmother from California, describes her experience: 'I'm the Spanish coordinator at my church. An Anglo priest told me to tell the readers not to genuflect when they go to the altar. He said not to do that because it was superstition. I told him the only gringo there was him—people do that because of respect for the altar. Nobody has the right to tell us how to experience God in our lives."
- "Burton Pretty on Top, a spiritual leader on the Crow reservation in eastern Montana and a lay minister to five parishes, says he feels left out at diocesan gatherings. There are no Native American people on the diocesan liturgical committee."

The Invisible Veil: Covert Racism in Formation and Ministry

The racial microaggressions framework is particularly helpful for understanding Jesús' psychological and emotional experience, and the complexities of interethnic encounters often reported by international clergy and ethnic minority men and women in seminary and religious formation and ministry. These microaggressions are typically unconscious, subtle and covert. Social scientists have noted that racism in American society has morphed substantially from the blatant and overt acts of discrimination and hostility of the pre-Civil Rights era, to more insidious expressions of racism.[12] These new racist behaviors have been labeled *aversive racism*, *implicit racism* and *modern racism* and reside in well-intentioned individuals who are not consciously aware that their beliefs, attitudes and actions often discriminate against people of color.[13] Regarding the indirectness, ambiguity and implicitness of these evolved forms of racism, especially in the Catholic Church, Cardinal George of Chicago states, "The face of racism looks different today than it did 30 years ago. Overt racism is easily condemned, but the sin is often with us in more subtle forms."[14] Psychologists have likened this type of racism to carbon monoxide: invisible, but potentially lethal.[15]

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Extensive qualitative research has documented the detrimental consequences on targets of microaggressions. They generate feelings of invisibility and marginalization,[16] powerlessness, anger and feeling trapped. With little control over stopping the continuing onslaught, these microaggressions are ultimately detrimental to the mental and physical well-being of the recipient.[17] Empirical studies have linked perceived racial discrimination with adverse mental health outcomes.[18] Racial discrimination has a negative and deleterious effect on self-esteem.[19] Targets of microaggressions appraise these insults as threatening and stressful, and this may cause the onset of negative mental outcomes.[20] The detrimental power to hurt and oppress people of color has been attributed to their invisible nature. Sue et al. have found that "many Black individuals may find it easier to deal with microassaults because the intent of the microaggressor is clear and obvious, whereas microinsults and microinvalidations involve considerable guesswork because of their ambiguous and invisible nature." [21]

To fully and accurately assess Jesús' experience, and for analysis of similar experiences in formation and ministry, the dynamics of microaggressions can be examined along a continuum of five highly interactive and sequen-

tial domains: (1) incident, (2) perception, (3) reaction, (4) interpretation and (5) consequence. This heuristic tool for analysis of microaggressions was proposed by Sue et al. because it is surmised that

> a potential microaggressive incident[*incident*] sets in motion a perceptual questioning aimed at trying to determine whether it was racially motivated [*perception*]. During this process, considerable psychic energy is expended [*reaction*]. If the event is deemed to be a racial microaggression [*interpretation*], the reactions involve cognitive, emotive, and behavioral expressions [*consequence*]. [22]

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Incidents. Based on the taxonomy already outlined, these are verbal, behavioral or environmental situations reported by Jesús that have potentially derogatory racial undertones. The direct or indirect verbal comments by the pastor are clear examples of verbal incidents, such as "You know how to do that?" and "We are in the United States and it would be good for these families to learn English and assimilate with the other American parishioners."[23] Nonverbal microaggressions include the frequent presence of the pastor in the back of Mass followed by his questioning parishioners about Jesús' English fluency. A more obvious environmental microaggression would be the subscription to only English TV channels and the promotion of hobbies and entertainment typically associated with a specific ethnic group and the exclusion of Jesús' own preferences. The most blatant environmental microaggression is the organization of events at an elite place (such as a golf course) that subtly marginalizes the majority of the Latino parishioners.

Perception. This refers to Jesús' conjecture about whether these incidents are racially motivated. Many victims of covert indignities such as those experienced by Jesús have reported that it would be easier to deal with clear acts of bias because the intent of the perpetrators would be clear. Racial microinvalidations, on the other hand, create a "guessing game," a real dilemma between the accuracy of the statements and the motivation of the microaggressor.[24] In counseling, Jesús reported being extremely confused. On the one hand, the majority of people, both in the parish and among priests (mostly of Euro-American ancestry), praise the pastor for being very pastoral, dedicated and a decent human being. But Jesús has been left perplexed by the pastor's multiple, indirect verbal and environmental behaviors.

Reaction. This includes Jesús immediate responses beyond a simple "yes," "no," or "ambiguous" perception. It captures the process of inner struggle that has evoked strong cognitive, behavioral and emotional reactions. Jesús has reported at least four specific reactions to the accumulation of microaggressive acts: *health paranoia*, *sanity check*, *empowering* and *validating of his own self*, and *rescue attempts*. He has been harboring a generalized suspiciousness around the pastor. Every time he goes to the parish where the Latinos attend Mass, he is paranoid about answering the phone because he knows the pastor will invariably call and ask the Latinos about every single detail about the Mass. Speaking to the priestly support group is a clear example of a sanity check. To verify the accuracy of his perceptions, he would like to know if his reactions are reasonable or if he is merely "overreacting," as his peer Euro-American priests suggested. In speaking to his family in Mexico, he has been provided with emotional support to validate his own self. His family thinks that the blame and fault lies with the pastor and with the community in general for their lack of sensitivity to Latino experiences. Jesús has relied on this emotional support as a means of empowerment and to better cope with the onslaught of microaggressive acts. On several occasions, he has also felt the pull to take care of the pastor, partly because Jesús understands that the pastor may have been conditioned by societal and institutional forces outside of his conscious awareness. The pastor may be a victim of naïveté, internalized biases and prejudices resulting from being socialized in a primarily Euro-American milieu with overt racism.

Interpretation. This refers to Jesús' attempts to make sense of the microaggressions as he tries to attach meaning to them and ask why they have occurred, what the intentions of the pastor are and what social patterns may be related to them. After repeated verbal, indirect and environmental incidents, Jesús has begun to connect the dots and is gradually reaching a conclusion on the

following recurrent microaggressive themes:

You are intellectually inferior and unsophisticated. The frequent questioning by the pastor, even when subtle, about Jesús' abilities and skills, both administrative and ministerial, has led Jesús to interpret these acts as intentional on the part of the pastor to imply that Jesús is not sufficiently intelligent.

You are not trustworthy and you are not welcome here. The micromanaging displayed by the pastor and his constant questioning of Jesús' preaching abilities, along with the blatant dismissal of culturally meaningful rituals and symbols has led Jesús to interpret these incidents as a lack of trust and hospitality towards him for being Mexican.

You are a second-class citizen. The imposition of primarily Euro-American hobbies and forms of entertainment, the promotion of Euro-American values and the lack of respect toward Jesús' culture, language and values has strongly made the impression that he is a second-class citizen who needs to assimilate and negate his culture.

Consequence. This includes all the psychological effects (such as behavioral patterns, coping strategies, cognitive reasoning, psychological well-being and physical health) of microaggressions on Jesús. The inherent power dynamic in the relationship between the pastor and Jesús, whereby the pastor holds evaluative and administrative power over him, renders Jesús powerless. Therefore, Jesús reported feeling a general sense of powerlessness. The pastor was constantly defining his reality, causing him to feel trapped with little control. Jesús became increasingly isolated, bored with his ministerial duties and depressed. He disclosed that he had become increasingly disillusioned due to the constant invalidations of him as an ethnically, culturally and racially diverse individual. He experienced a gradual loss of integrity, especially when the pastor questioned his abilities by resorting to the reports of parishioners.

Intercultural Competencies: Perspectives from Intercultural Communication

Thus far the emphasis has been primarily on the pastor's behaviors and attitudes. Both the pastor and Jesús can develop and strengthen their intercultural competencies with a priority on improving their intercultural communication. This form of communication is inherently problematic in that "culture is largely responsible for the construction of our individual social realities and for our individual repertories of communicative behaviors and meanings."[25] To what extent Jesús' lack of assertiveness in communicating is contributing to the distressing interactions and microaggressive acts should be considered. Banks, Gao, and Baker have noted that "culture must embrace a group's logic of expression that members accept as natural and foundational to the group's way of being. This approach places participants' meanings and motives at the center of intercultural miscommunication."[26] Therefore, any model of intercultural communication competence must take into account communicators' interpretations and motivations as well as their skills.[27] Socialized in the Mexican forms of interpersonal communication, Jesús most likely values *simpatia*, friendly respect, and *personalismo. Personalismo* (stemming from *persona*) refers to a Mexican value that prefers a distinctive interpersonal style with the human person at its center. Ortiz has found that this is a core value in Latino cultures, and it is conceptualized affectively, cognitively and behaviorally.[28] *Personalismo* affectively prescribes for people to be interpersonally warm and affectionate. Cultural anthropologists have noted that this "cultural script" is characteristic of a cultural worldview of highly collectivistic and relational cultures that value people over tasks, things and time. Latinos engage in several verbal and nonverbal behaviors to show personable traits. They prefer face-to-face contact; personal, close and informal attention; shaking hands when greeting someone and hugging to express closeness and rapport; and formal and informal forms of address (*usted* versus *tú*, respectively). Microggressions are, therefore, countercultural to the Latino cultural interpersonal ethos. Ideally, the pastor and Jesús would engage in effective intercultural communication by exhibiting *simpatía* (friendly respect), and inspiring *confianza* (trust) and *respeto* (respect), three foundational characteristics and values of Latino interpersonal communication. In their pastoral document, *Welcoming the Stranger Among Us*, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops suitably underscores how important it is that we are mindful of these differences in intercultural communication:

> Intercultural communication—sustained efforts, carried out by people of diverse cultures, to appreciate their differences, work out conflicts, and build on commonalities—will thus be an important component of coming to know and respect the diverse cultures that make up today's Church. The dominant culture in the United States stresses the individual and his or her feelings and decisions. In less individualistic cultures, individuals may feel hesitant to express

their own opinions openly, even in a friendly setting, without reinforcement from the group.[29]

The intercultural dynamic between the Samaritan woman and Jesus (Jn 4:3–42), for example, mirrors the respectful interethnic interaction that must exist in our contemporary formation and ministerial structures.

Intercultural Competencies: Perspectives from the New Testament

At a more fundamental level, microaggressions (and any other form of racism or prejudice) directed at cultural, racial, ethnic or linguistic differences undermines our catholicity. The New Testament contains vestiges of an increasingly formed, inclusive consciousness, respectful of cultural differences rooted in the universal salvation for all humankind. The intercultural dynamic between the Samaritan woman and Jesus (Jn 4:3–42), for example, mirrors the respectful interethnic interaction that must exist in our contemporary formation and ministerial structures. Jesus skillfully dismantles deeply embedded cultural and linguistic microaggressions within a conversation that captures the intricacies of intercultural competence. Jesus creates a new intercultural consciousness and gently elevates the interethnic encounter to a new level that transcends historical particularities and human ethnic, cultural and linguistic boundaries. He finds a common ground between them, recognizing God as Spirit (Jn. 4:24), which transcends historical, cultural and religious boundaries.

As the Samaritan woman enters into dialogue, her prejudices are immediately evoked and expressed in a racial and ethnic microaggression: "You a Jew ask me a Samaritan for a drink" (Jn. 4:9). This microaggressive theme, "You are an outsider," is deeply rooted in the cultural and religious experiences of both the Jews and Samaritans, dating back to the exile and post-exile eras when the Samaritans began to be perceived by Jews from Judea as apostate and corrupt for mingling with foreigners. The woman is stuck with Jesus' Jewishness and her prejudices, but Jesus strategizes to raise the conversation toward transcendent realities. She continues to be blinded by the circumstances of her history and context. Jesus continues the dialogue by educating her about his identity and mission. The invisible veil is gradually lifted off the woman's ethnocentric worldview. This is achieved through an emphatic and respectful dialogue within her particular situation and interests, for example, Jacob's well, marital record and worshipping in Gerizim versus Jerusalem. As a model for intercultural dialogue, Jesus is aware of cultural differences, knowledgeable of the woman's particularities, skillful in his approach and sensitively attentive to her needs.

In his profound reflections "Ecclesiology for a Global Church," Gaillardetz notes that the church is fundamentally a community where people are called to affirm their differences. He reminds us that the church's catholicity is always a differentiated unity—a unity in diversity—and that "the oneness of faith is often discovered only by first courageously attending to what manifests itself as foreign or different."[30] Furthermore, he grounds this ecclesial consciousness in the theology of creation, for "if creation has been created good, then much that appears different and threatening in the world must be open, in principle, to a unity that celebrates rather than recoils from the reality of created difference."[31]

The Pentecost narrative essentially underscores how the first-century church moved from an ethnocentric congregation in Jerusalem to a multiethnic congregation in Antioch.

The early church also gradually came to this realization. At Pentecost, worship "in Spirit and truth," as described in the intercultural dialogue between Jesus and the Samaritan woman, is actualized. When the Holy Spirit came down upon the believers, they gave testimony to God's deeds, and Jewish foreigners heard and comprehended. Gaillardetz points out, "the differences of language were transcended by the Spirit, allowing each to understand each other. Yet note that those from other lands heard those giving witness in their

own languages. Cultural difference was not destroyed but became the very instrument for a realization of a more profound spiritual unity."[32] He concludes by affirming that "this biblical narrative of the origins of the church suggests an essential ecclesiological principle: the Holy Spirit does not erase difference but renders difference nondivisive. The account suggests that the church, born of the Spirit, is from its beginning open to diverse languages and cultures."[33] The Pentecost narrative essentially underscores how the first-century church moved from an ethnocentric congregation in Jerusalem to a multiethnic congregation in Antioch. God's Spirit made it possible for the hearers to experience the Gospel in their native tongue and within their historical, cultural and diverse particularities. This is the vision of the intercultural, Spirit-filled church we should strive as a community to recapture.

Practical Suggestions and Recommendations

As the U.S. Catholic Church becomes a more mission-receiving—rather than a mission-sending—church, foreign-born clergy and their receiving communities need practical recommendations to more successfully navigate issues of adjustment.[34] Msgr. William Belford, current vicar for clergy at the Archdiocese of New York, provides some excellent suggestions for welcoming the stranger among us. His recommendations for being more hospitable towards international clergy are worth quoting in their entirety:

1. Everyone wants to make a good start in a new place, but we need help to do that. A new coworker will make the most of his mistakes from ignorance. My fault as pastor is expecting a new priest to know the big picture and also figure out the details without my help. And even for the priest who has been in several American parishes, each new parish is different from the last. We should write things down for the newcomers, and urge them to ask how things are to be done in this place. There is also the matter of expectation, which affects our feelings. There is a stunningly realistic quote on p. 55 in *International Priests in America* about how differently a pastor and a new associate can experience his first day in the parish.
2. Priests come in many styles and personalities: friendly and cold, *laissez faire* or controlling, happy or bitter, team player or lone ranger, etc. International priests also have styles and attitudes, defense mechanisms and worries, agendas and survival strategies. All of us have likes and dislikes, strengths and weaknesses, which we probably won't change. Better to mention them, and deal with them, than to act as if they don't exist or don't matter.
3. The happiest rectories and working places are those where communication exists, where compromise and cooperation are a way of living. Decades ago, pastors had all the power, and curates[35] had most of the work. Now the pastor really needs assistance, and theoretically has a greater stake in making each priestly relationship a lasting and productive one. But his disappointments, poor health, or bad experiences might have lowered his risks.
4. Every new and international priest deserves assistance and repeated answers from the time of arrival until he is confident and competent. It is onerous but useful for pastors, before the man comes, to write down the details of duties, procedures, phone numbers and other advice, but that makes life simpler. And also, if the pastor cannot do this himself, let him delegate a kind and friendly person—perhaps a deacon or wise parishioner—to be a mentor for the new priest, show him the neighborhood, eat with him, take him shopping for what he needs, help him move in and set up his room, and in general make sure that adjustment is not too overwhelming, lonely, or mysterious.[36]

Adopting an attitude of openness and respect when engaging persons of other cultural groups is essential.

For receiving communities of immigrants and international clergy and religious, Lumas[37] has articulated the necessary attitudes needed to dismantle racism, ethnocentrism and behaviors that perpetuate microaggressions. Adopting an attitude of openness and respect when engaging persons of other cultural groups is essential, and the following specific intercultural actions are highly recommended:

(1) Articulate a vision of church and society that invites the spiritual inheritance of diverse

cultural groups to complement and enrich each other. (2) Promote cultural awareness such that persons and groups not only become more conscious of their normative values, assumptions, worldview, preferences, behavioral norms, etc., but they can also identify how their culture resonates with or resists the gospel message and/or the faith tradition. (3) Foster cultural affirmation by enabling persons and groups to identify ways that their ethno- or socio-cultural religiosity gives fuller voice to latent dimensions of the Gospel and/or faith tradition, as well as ways that their religiosity can assist the larger faith community to have a fuller knowledge and appreciation for new theological insights, prayer forms, pastoral priorities and expressions of discipleship that are consistent with the Gospel, but not adequately explored. (4) Cultivate cross-cultural literacy by providing varied and ongoing opportunities for persons to view events, situations, ambitions, and problems from the perspective of other cultural groups and learn how these groups engage the gospel message and the faith tradition to address these realities. (5) Facilitate ongoing opportunities for intercultural sharing that enables persons from different cultural communities to participate in each other's communal life and celebrations, prayer, community service, education of the public and theological reflection. (6) Acknowledge that some persons may use referents other than ethnicity to name their cultural identity, i.e., youth culture, American culture, etc., and invite them to help their conversation partners see the convergent injustices of racism, classicism, ageism, sexism, homophobia and cultural arrogance. (7) Remember that culture belongs to a group, not simply a person, and ensure that the conversation partners who help construct the vision and plan of our catechetical efforts actually constitute diversified group of well-informed and representative spokespersons of their respective communities. And, (8) anticipate the need to work through the stressful feelings of isolation, alienation, fear or anger that are inevitably evoked by the challenges of meaningfully engaging with persons unlike ourselves.[38]

Conclusion

According to the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (now the USCCB), "racism is an evil which endures in our society and in our Church."[39] This evil is so pervasive and is masked through an intricate web of both overt and covert systems of power and control, as well as unconscious rationalizations. As Fr. Bryan Massingale poignantly remarks, "Racism connotes a network of unearned and unmerited principles, advantages, and benefits conferred to some and denied to others because of racial differences and a complex of beliefs, rationalizations, and practices used to justify, explain, and defend this network of unearned advantage and privilege."[40] The case of Jesús, and so many others in both formation and ministry, clearly demonstrates the struggle with these racist structures and the ideological rationalizations that perpetuate them. While enjoying supremacy and status over Jesús, the pastor imposed on him what, in his view, was normative and accepted. This resonates with Kovel's nuanced assessment that, "Racism has been defined as the uncritical appropriation of what is normative to only one race, the one deemed dominant…in a racist society, the oppressor assumes the power of definition and control, while the oppressed is objectified and perceived as a thing."[41] This oppressive power to define Jesús' priestly and ministerial roles increasingly led to his marginalization and delegitimization. When Jesús sought out counseling, he was on the verge of abandoning the Catholic priesthood.

"It is one of the properties of the human person that he can achieve true and full humanity only by means of culture." The implication of this conciliar message is that God works through culture and culture has a redeeming value.

Aware of these experiences, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has urged all of us to a conversion:

> The presence of so many different cultures and religions in so many different parts of the United States has challenged us as a Church to a profound conversion so that we can become truly a sacrament of unity. We reject the anti-

> immigrant stance that has become popular in different parts of our country, and the nativism, ethnocentricity, and racism that continue to reassert themselves in our community.[42]

The call is to respect and truly honor everyone's culture. According to Section 53 of the Council document *Gaudium et Spes*: "It is one of the properties of the human person that he can achieve true and full humanity only by means of culture." The implication of this conciliar message is that God works through culture and culture has a redeeming value.

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Endnotes

1. This is a true story and the name of the priest has been modified to protect his confidentiality. Some of the experiences reported by the pastor are compiled from other cases the author has seen in the course of counseling international clergy and seminarians, and from intercultural consultations with diverse individuals in ministry.
2. This article uses the term "minority" in several quotations and references to the psychological and sociological literature where the original sources use this designation. The Most Reverend Edward K. Braxton, auxiliary bishop of St. Louis, has noted that "the common use of the word 'minorities' as the collective designation of these groups of people perpetuates negative stereotypes and is contradicted by what it means to be an American citizen…In its present usage, the term 'minority groups' often connotes the haves versus the have-nots, the powerful versus the powerless, the assimilated versus the non-assimilated. It may even implicitly advance the argument that some American citizens are 'inferior' because they have not assimilated middle-class mores and the cultural heritage of Western Europe," from: Edward K. Braxton, "There Are No 'Minority' Americans," *America*, 182, 20, (2000), 6.
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sells and J.N. Tobin, et al. "Perceived Ethnic Discrimination in Relation to Daily Moods and Negative Social Interactions," *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, 30, (2007), 31–43.

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23. Contrary to efforts "to Americanize" ethnic groups from other countries, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a series of statements beginning in the 1980s defending the right of all people to their cultural and ethnic traditions as long as they are congruent with the faith. In their pastoral letter *Beyond the Melting Pot: Cultural Pluralism in the United States* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 1980), they urged dioceses to enable cultural groups to worship in their own space and own language, with their own clergy and cultural practices. In Section 5 of *Hispanic Presence: Challenge and Commitment* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 1983), the bishops stated even more strongly that cultural pluralism should be the policy within both the church and society: "The church shows its esteem for this dignity by working to ensure that pluralism, not assimilation and uniformity, is the guiding principle in the life of communities in both the ecclesial and secular societies." In Section 60 of *Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2001): "It is not a call for 'assimilation' or the disappearance of one culture into another, but for continuing cooperation in pursuit of the common good and with proper respect for each cultural tradition and community." The Pope has also voiced caution on assimilation. In his 1995 address for *World Migration Day*, Pope John Paul II argued that immigrants "must be able to remain completely themselves as far as language, culture, liturgy, and spirituality, and particular traditions are concerned."
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