

2. Relational Theology: Foundation for an Intercultural Morality

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Introduction

Before beginning the sketch of the foundations of intercultural and relational moral theology, it is necessary to keep in mind that the reflection and debate on the category interculturality is quite recent.¹ It has been only used more widely in specific areas “where it is necessary to account for cultural processes and interactions.”² Reflection and debate on intercultural moral theology is even more incipient: “There is still no sufficiently elaborate theoretical background to serve as a safe north; particularly in the difficult hermeneutical and methodological questions. . . .”³ Therefore, it is a path that is just beginning and where there are more questions than answers. For example, Can interculturality be understood as overcoming the model of inculturation? Can interculturality be understood as a method that helps a process of interaction and communication that favors intercultural dialogue in theology? We must pursue a dialogue that is carried out from a horizon of inclusion and equity, such that no culture is considered superior with respect to others, because “little by little we understand that there is no culture but cultures, that we cannot continue to consider that there are superior and inferior cultures, since this differentiation is the product of logics of conquest and domination that

¹ This contribution is a translated version of the Spanish text, which has been checked and adapted by the editors.

² Ricardo Salas Astrain, *Ética intercultural: Ensayos de una ética discursiva para contextos culturales conflictivos. (Re)lecturas del pensamiento latinoamericano* (Abya-Yala, 2006), 53–54.

³ Raúl Fonet-Betancourt, *Hacia una transformación intercultural de la filosofía: Ejercicios teóricos y prácticos de filosofía intercultural en el contexto de la globalización* (Ediciones digitales, 2020), 19.

must be overcome.”⁴ Taking this context into account is the starting point for our reflection, as it will help us understand more clearly the challenges, possibilities, and limits of the project of elaborating an intercultural moral theology.

With this context in mind, we can then say that “intercultural understanding occurs in the discovery and encounter with the other who is my brother.”⁵ Moreover, adopting a relational theology and the paradigm of communion, we can realize that we are part of an intertwined world. We are united by very deep bonds because “God ... is Trinitarian communion,” and we can recognize that “*each creature bears in itself a specifically Trinitarian structure*”⁶ (*Laudato Si'*, no. 239). “The being of God is a relational being: without the concept of communion it would not be possible to speak of the being of God.”⁷ So, “It challenges us to read reality in a Trinitarian key. ‘The world created according to the divine model is a web of relationships’ hence everything is connected,”⁸ everything is related and communicated with everything. For this reason, and as Pope Francis affirms in the foreword to *Veritatis Gaudium*, “Recognizing this interdependence ‘obliges us to think of *one world with a common plan*.’ . . . Indeed, ‘at this time theology must address conflicts: not only those that we experience within the Church but also those that concern the world as a whole’” (*Veritatis Gaudium*, no. 4).

This scenario and theological framework show us where, and give us the reasons why, we should undertake this challenging task of building an intercultural moral theology. When based on a relational theology, this

⁴ *Reflexiones de Raúl Fornet-Betancourt sobre el concepto de interculturalidad*, ed. Consorcio Intercultural (Coordinación General de Educación Intercultural Bilingüe, 2004), 7.

⁵ Gerardo M. Nieves-Loja, “Algunas reflexiones sobre la interculturalidad: Una aproximación interdisciplinaria,” *Aufklärung: Journal of Philosophy* 5, no. 3 (2018): 167–180, doi.org/10.18012/arf.2016.43720.

⁶ The quotation in italics is from St. Bonaventure.

⁷ John D. Zizioulas. *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church*, ed. P. McPartlan (T&T Clark, 2006), 1.

⁸ Juan Carlos Scannone, “Hacia una iglesia sinodal y una cultura del encuentro,” in *Antropología trinitaria: Hacia una cultura del encuentro. Para una pastoral en clave trinitaria*, ed. A. Bertolini and L. Cerviño (CELAM, 2019), 108–109.

task underlines the importance of becoming aware of our interdependence. It also underlines the obligation we have to think of a single world and to build a common project. We must always bear in mind that this will ultimately be a matter of entering into a relationship of communion, because we are all one. In this sense, Pope Francis stressed that communion can only be built in the difference and richness of diversity.

So, in this approach, I first try to show that, from an authentically Christian perspective, moral theology is a response to a call. Concretely, it is about a morality of following. This is a call found in the concept of revelation contained in *Dei Verbum* (no. 2), wherein revelation is understood as the free and gratuitous self-communication and self-giving of God, who invites us to be God's friends and to live in God's company. Consequently, morality is nothing more than the response to this invitation, a response that implies the conscience and full freedom of the one who responds. For this reason, this chapter contends that morality is not a question of universal norms, doctrines, laws, and principles that are binding on everyone.

With this claim in mind, this chapter also presents relational theology as a condition of possibility for an intercultural moral theology. This reveals the difficulty of developing an intercultural morality rooted in a theology that emphasizes essence and substance rather than one that understands God as fundamentally relational and communal. In the same way, I identify some elements of the paradigm of communion or relational theology that are considered theological foundations for an intercultural morality.

Moral Theology as a Response to a Call

Morality, from an authentically Christian perspective, is a response to a call. This position is situated in the theological horizon proposed by the Second Vatican Council, which corresponds to what I term the call-response scheme, which we could also call a morality of vocation in Christ, a morality of following. On this account, "Man always experiences himself

as being called to this relationship of loving communion with God and to give an answer to such a call. His very nature has been created with a view to that communion by grace.”⁹

The opposite, which is the horizon of much preconciliar moral theology, would be the law-compliance scheme. Underlying it is a concept of revelation that is indisputably different and that will have important effects on the way of understanding, interpreting, and explaining morality. In this horizon of renewed morality, in accordance with the guidelines of the Second Vatican Council, conscience and freedom are of great relevance since we can consider these two aspects as enabling an authentic response to the God who calls and loves unconditionally.

Revelation as God's Free Self-Communication and Self-Giving

If we start from the conviction that the center of all theology is the free and gratuitous self-communication and self-giving of God to the creature then all other affirmations must be considered secondary.¹⁰ If the event of revelation is the foundation and condition of possibility of theology then moral theology, as a true theological discipline, also has its foundation and its condition of possibility in this central event.¹¹ Consequently, the fundamental elements that constitute a specifically Christian morality are grace, salvation, justification, discipleship, faith, hope, and love, which all derive from the central event of theology, which is revelation.

This understanding of theology was anticipated by the constitution of the Second Vatican Council *Dei Verbum*, which explains:

⁹ Gonzaga Zarazaga, *Dios es comunión: El nuevo paradigma trinitario* (Secretariado trinitario, 2004), 29.

¹⁰ This is how Rahner expressed it in his last lecture on February 12, 1984 at the closing of a congress at the Catholic academy of the Diocese of Freiburg, which was entitled “The Experiences of a Catholic Theologian.”

¹¹ Karl Rahner, *Hearers of the Word*, trans. Michael Richards, ed. J. B. Metz (Herder, 1969), 167; see also Rino Fisichella, “Theology I. Definition,” in *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, ed. R. Latourelle and R. Fisichella (Crossroad, 1994), 1060; see also Josef Fuchs, *La moral y la teología moral postconciliar* (Herder, 1969), 11.

In His goodness and wisdom God chose to reveal Himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of His will (see Eph. 1:9) by which through Christ, the Word made flesh, man might in the Holy Spirit have access to the Father and come to share in the divine nature (see Eph. 2:18; 2 Peter 1:4). Through this revelation, therefore, the invisible God (see Col. 1:15, 1 Tim. 1:17) out of the abundance of His love speaks to men as friends (see Ex. 33:11; John 15:14–15) and lives among them (see Bar. 3:38), so that He may invite and take them into fellowship with Himself. This plan of revelation is realized by deeds and words having an inner unity: the deeds wrought by God in the history of salvation manifest and confirm the teaching and realities signified by the words, while the words proclaim the deeds and clarify the mystery contained in them. By this revelation then, the deepest truth about God and the salvation of man shines out for our sake in Christ, who is both the mediator and the fullness of all revelation. (no. 2)

Obviously, God is self-communication. “Theologically, this raises the question of God’s relationship to us,” which is characterized by its nearness and freedom, on the one side, and by the incomprehensible remaining distance between us, on the other.¹² By coming close, God opens the door to mystery,¹³ “the mystery of a God who refuses to be alone; that is why the

¹² “The concept of self-communication means: (a) the absolute nearness of God as the incomprehensible mystery which remains forever such; (b) the absolute freedom, hence the irreducible facticity of this self-communication, which remains a ‘mystery’ for this reason too; (c) that the inner possibility of the self-communication as such (absolute communication of the absolutely incomprehensible) can never be perceived. It is experienced as an event in pure facticity, it cannot be deduced from another point, and as such again it remains a mystery.” Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel (Burns & Oates; Herder, [originally published in German in *Mysterium salutis*], 1970), 88, n. 10.

¹³ Rahner states that “in this very event of God’s absolute self-communication the Godness of God as the holy mystery becomes radical and insuppressible reality for man. The immediacy of God in his self-communication is precisely the revelation of God as the absolute mystery which remains such.” Karl Rahner, *Fundamental Course on Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych (Crossroad, 1978), 120. He also confirms that “Grace is therefore the grace of the *nearness* of the *abiding* mystery: it makes God accessible in the form of the holy mystery and presents him thus as the incomprehensible.” Karl Rahner, “The Concept of Mystery in Catholic

Word comes forth: expression, call, dialogue.”¹⁴ God’s dynamic revelation draws the human being into experiencing the mystery.¹⁵ God, moved by love, gives Godself to the human being as a permanent offer of grace and salvation. Karl Rahner explains the core of this relationship between God’s self-communication and the human being as follows:

When we speak of God’s self-communication we should not understand this term in the sense that God would say something about himself in some revelation or other. The term “self-communication” is really intended to signify that God in his own most proper reality makes himself the innermost constitutive element of man. We are dealing, then, with an *ontological* self-communication of God.¹⁶

From this we can infer several elements which are important for understanding the relationship between God and human beings:

1. That “God’s self-communication means . . . that what is communicated is really God in his own being.”¹⁷ It should be emphasized that when speaking of revelation as self-communication, God cannot be understood as if God manifested a series of truths about God to which the human being must adhere; even less can it be understood as if God

Theology,” in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 4, *More Recent Writings*, trans. Kevin Smyth (Helicon Press; Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966), 56; see also Rahner, *Fundamental Course on Faith*, 44–89.

¹⁴ Lorenzo Álvarez Verdes, “La *Dei Verbum*, una constitución clave para la comprensión del Concilio Vaticano II,” *Studia Moralia* 41, no. 2 (2003): 237.

¹⁵ “It is an experience of mystery as such, or, rather, a letting oneself be apprehended by a mystery, always present, which at once overwhelms us and escapes us. . . . The Absolute is communicated as it is, as the incomprehensible, as ‘the from where’ constituent and enabling foundation of its own being, and as the ‘to where’ of its own transcendental dynamic. And this constitutive transcendence, as the transcendence of love, interprets in turn that from where and that to where as the sacred mystery that overwhelms the human being and by which he experiences himself as inhabited and sustained ontologically.” Santiago Arzubialde, “The Experience of God’s Transcendental in the Work of K. Rahner,” *Ecclesiastical Studies* 80 (2005): 298–299.

¹⁶ Rahner, *Fundamental Course on Faith*, 116.

¹⁷ Rahner, *Fundamental Course on Faith*, 117.

revealed or communicated a series of commands, precepts, and norms that human beings must obey and fulfill.¹⁸ Consequently, adherence to a list of truths about God, and obedience and compliance with a series of commandments, precepts, norms, and laws, even if they are unintelligible, cannot be the conditions of possibility to be justified and thus be able to access salvation and participate in grace.¹⁹

2. That God's intentionality in self-communicating Godself to humankind goes far beyond offering forgiveness and reconciliation—it is the invitation to “share in the divine nature’ (*Dei Verbum*, no. 2).”²⁰ To understand the purpose of revelation only in this sense, even if it is a grandiose fact, would not cease to be a reductionist vision: “God’s loving call is always a call . . . a choice (Rom 8:28–33; 2 Tim 1:9; 2 Pt 1:10).”²¹ As we pointed out before, “self-communication’ is really intended to signify that God in his own most proper reality makes himself the innermost constitutive element of man.”²² In this way, the self-communication of God has an ontological and real meaning,²³ that is, the most intimate part of the human is constituted by the very being of God who

¹⁸ Álvarez recalls the two tendencies in the initial drafting of the text of *Dei Verbum*, a static and a dynamic one: “The choice for the second model was clear from the moment the first scheme was withdrawn.” Álvarez Verdes, “La *Dei Verbum*, una constitución clave para la comprensión del Concilio Vaticano II,” 219.

¹⁹ Henri De Lubac and Enrico Cattaneo, “La Constitución *Dei Verbum* 20 años después,” *Selecciones de teología* 104 (1987): 343.

²⁰ René Latourelle, “*Dei Verbum* II. Commentary.” in *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, ed. R. Latourelle and R. Fisichella (Crossroad, 1994), 220.

²¹ Karl Rahner, “Theos in the New Testament,” in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 1, trans. Cornelius Ernst (Helicon, 1961), 115. See also page 117, “Of all that man has learnt by experience about God in saving history, the decisive thing is that out of his grace God the Father has called us in his Son to the most intimate community with him.”

²² Rahner, *Fundamental Course on Faith*, 116.

²³ Karl Rahner, “La comunicación de Dios mismo al hombre,” in *Sacramentum Mundi: Enciclopedia Teológica*, vol. 2 (Herder, 1972), 345.

freely and gratuitously communicates Godself.²⁴ This communication of God's very being to human existence also implies that God, taking place in us, makes us sharers in God's own divine life. Because "man is the being created by a God who desires to communicate himself, to pour out the love that He is."²⁵

3. That "Man is the event of a free, unmerited and forgiving, and absolute self-communication of God."²⁶ This presupposes that the communication between God and the human being does not change their mutual essence: "Divine self-communication means, then, that God can communicate himself in his own reality to what is not divine without ceasing to be infinite reality and absolute mystery, and without man ceasing to be a finite existent different from God."²⁷ According to Rahner, the human being is the proper place of God's self-communication, since "if there occurs a self-communication of God to historical man, who is still becoming, it can occur only in this unifying duality of history and transcendence which man is."²⁸ From this we can conclude that there is a historical dimension to God's self-revelation: it means that God reveals Godself in history because "God's self-giving, with its effects on man and on his insertion in the world, comes to be understood . . . as an event in historically situated man."²⁹
4. That the openness and acceptance of God's offering of Himself to humankind, in communicating Godself in the depths of their existence, necessarily implies a free human response: "The freedom God always guarantees to man is the freedom of accepting

²⁴ Rahner, *Fundamental Course on Faith*, 123–124.

²⁵ Gonzalo Zarazaga, *Dios es comunión: El nuevo paradigma trinitario* (Secretariado trinitario, 2004), 152.

²⁶ Rahner, *Fundamental Course on Faith*, 116.

²⁷ Rahner, *Fundamental Course on Faith*, 119.

²⁸ Rahner, *The Trinity*, 92.

²⁹ Fernando Berríos, "El método antropológico-trascendental de Karl Rahner como hermenéutica teológica del mundo y de la praxis," *Teología y Vida* 45 (2004): 433.

absolutely the absolute mystery which we call God, in the sense that God is not just one among other objects of our neutral freedom of choice, but he who only becomes known to man in this absolute act of freedom and in whom alone the very essence of freedom is fully achieved.”³⁰

Conscience and Freedom as a conditio sine qua non for a Response

Situated, then, in the theological framework that presents revelation to us as God’s free and gratuitous self-communication and self-giving to humanity, let us ask ourselves what the necessary conditions are for responding to this invitation to be God’s friends and live in God’s company (*Dei Verbum*, no. 2). In the response to this call, we find the center and the marrow of an authentic Christian morality:

If truth is the encounter between God and man, if belief does not mean the mere acceptance of some scientifically undemonstrable affirmations but the existential response to a God who gives himself, then divine revelation and human faith are but the two sides of the one process of the relationship between man and God. In a personal relationship there is no subject or object—certainly, we can treat the other as a thing, but this is not properly qualified as an interhuman encounter—there are two people who create among themselves not an undifferentiated unity, but a profound communion. . . . Biblical faith must not deviate into either objectivism or subjectivism, because both are concepts alien to the truth it postulates. Christianity knows that it does not have an object, but is at the disposal of a Person; that the important thing is not that his faith adds new knowledge or criteria, but that it fundamentally transforms him; and who always has at his side the Presence of the One who will never leave him alone.³¹

³⁰ Karl Rahner, *Grace in Freedom* (Herder & Herder, 1969), 205.

³¹ Jorge Zazo Rodríguez, *El encuentro: Propuesta para una teología fundamental* (Secretariado trinitario, 2010), 25–26.

In *Gaudium et Spes*, the Council presents us with two aspects of fundamental importance for our research: the dignity of conscience and the greatness of freedom. These two aspects complement the four criteria listed above.

In the depths of his conscience, man detects a law which he does not impose upon himself, but which holds him to obedience. Always summoning him to love good and avoid evil, the voice of conscience when necessary speaks to his heart: do this, shun that. . . . Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a man. There he is alone with God, Whose voice echoes in his depths. In a wonderful manner conscience reveals that law which is fulfilled by love of God and neighbor Conscience frequently errs from invincible ignorance without losing its dignity. The same cannot be said for a man who cares but little for truth. In fidelity to conscience, Christians are joined with the rest of men in the search for truth, and for the genuine solution to the numerous problems which arise in the life of individuals from social relationships and goodness, or for a conscience which by degrees grows practically sightless as a result of habitual sin. (no. 16)

Undoubtedly, the reference made by the Council to conscience signifies a change of horizon for moral theology. Traditionally, morality was situated in the fulfilment of laws, norms, and precepts, but now the Council places it in fidelity to one's conscience. Conscience is the tabernacle where the deepest relationship of the human being with God occurs. It is the Love of God poured into the depths of every human being (Rom 5:5), into their conscience, which tells them how to do good and reject evil.

With regard to freedom, the Council points out that "only in freedom can man direct himself toward goodness. ... For its part, authentic freedom is an exceptional sign of the divine image within man. For God has willed that man remain 'under the control of his own decisions,' so that he can seek his Creator spontaneously, and come freely to utter and blissful perfection through loyalty to Him" (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 17). Rahner concludes: "Inasmuch as freedom is always and in all its acts directed to the

mystery of God himself, the act of freedom is essentially always the act of man's surrender to the providence of God and in this sense a trusting risk."³² Bearing in mind that grace liberates freedom and thus constitutes its highest possibility—that is to say, God places in the depths of the human existential structure the very capacity to welcome the divine—the response of human freedom will consist in a definitive stance in the face of this radical challenge of God who freely communicates Godself.³³

The God who reveals Godself is moved by divine will for lordship and communion, and in these terms we must understand the human relationship with God, which is equivalent to saying that this relationship is understood within the framework of freedom. Certainly, as the Creator of all that exists, God is already Lord of the universe. But God does not want to be Lord only 'over' human beings but 'of' humankind. That is why we need the gift of our freedom. For this reason, and because only with freedom can we respond to God's love, to God's desire for communion.³⁴

Authentically Christian morality is therefore a morality centered on the call as a free gift, which emphasizes the personal relationship between God and human beings. Vocation in Christ is, in turn, a gift and a task because it necessarily presupposes our response—a response that implies at the same time the totality of the being who responds.

Relational Theology as a Condition of Possibility for an Intercultural Moral Theology

The previous section showed that revelation is the free and gratuitous self-communication and self-giving of God, who invites us to be friends and to live in God's company. Consequently, and from an authentically Christian perspective, morality is nothing more than a response to a call.

³² Rahner, *Grace in Freedom*, 220.

³³ Berríos, "Teología trascendental y praxis," 481.

³⁴ Zazo Rodríguez, *El encuentro*, 25–26.

This response implies the conscience and full freedom of the respondent. It is a morality of fellowship. Vatican II brought about a change from a theology that is based on essence and substance to an understanding of a God who is essentially relational and communal.³⁵ This section argues that this change is a necessary requirement for an intercultural moral theology.

Relational Theology versus an Essentialist and Substantialist Theology

When we refer to the concept of revelation, this is nothing more than explaining how we understand God's communication with us. Such explanations recall a certain cultural background. For example, one consequence of the cultural changes that occurred in the early centuries of the Church is the hellenization of Christianity. So, in many instances, one would almost wonder if texts of that time are talking about the God of Plato, the God of Aristotle, or the God of the Gospel.³⁶

In view of the dogmatic theological development of the first centuries, one speaks, not without reason, of a hellenization of Christian thought, of an entry of the biblical kerygma under the signs of hellenically preformed metaphysics; the difference between thinking and speaking in the Bible, and thinking and speaking in the theological tradition of late antiquity, must be emphasized.³⁷

This hellenization of Christianity has brought disastrous consequences for the understanding of God, for theological anthropology, and for morality. Despite the Second Vatican Council, this hellenized Christianity continues to have strength in some circles, and theological thought continues to be elaborated from the categories of a non-Christian philosophy.

³⁵ Piero Coda, *Desde la Trinidad: El advenimiento de Dios entre historia y profecía* (Secretariado trinitario, 2014), 99.

³⁶ Klaus Hemerle, *Tras las huellas de Dios: Ontología trinitaria y unidad relacional* (Sígueme, 2005), 25.

³⁷ Hemerle, *Tras las huellas de Dios*, 33–34.

This is not the space to develop the consequences I have mentioned. I will only focus on Hemerle's observation that the hellenistic interpretation of God obscures the event of revelation in historical-salvific, Christocentric, and Trinitarian terms, as it is expressed in *Dei Verbum*, no. 2. The God who reveals Godself is not a deity, nor an immovable mover, nor an essence or substance. And here we have a great problem, a consequence precisely of this hellenization of Christianity, since "despite their orthodox confession of the Trinity, Christians are, in their practical life, almost mere 'monotheists.' We must be willing to admit that, should the doctrine of the Trinity have to be dropped as false, the major part of religious literature could well remain virtually unchanged."³⁸ That is, we are theists, but we are not Christians. Drawing on Rahner, Piero Coda explains this development, writing, "Western theology has ended up imposing the understanding of the relationship between God and salvation history, too often leaving its organic connection in the shadows. Consequently, a theology of the immanent Trinity has been elaborated that dispenses with the dynamics of salvation history, forgetting that only from the economy of revelation can one adequately go back to the being of the Trinity itself."³⁹

Understanding the Trinitarian mystery in ways that rely on Greek concepts of essences and substances fails to resolve the divide between God and the world. Those dichotomies have led us to understand the human being through the dualism of the body and the soul, two antagonistic and irreconcilable categories. It has led us to understand reality as divided into the sacred and profane, as if all creation were not the self-revelation of God. Gonzalo Zarazaga indicates that we should follow Rahner in his critique of this divide:

God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is in himself the Trinity. Only in this way is it one and not by virtue of a single abstract substance. The treatise on the Trinity must therefore not start from the metaphysical

³⁸ Rahner, *The Trinity*, 10–11.

³⁹ Coda, *Desde la Trinidad*, 104.

consideration of that one substance in order to be able to think of the one God, but must start from the Trinity itself as it has been manifested to us in the salvific economy: as the Father who sends the Son and the Holy Spirit to bring about redemption and to offer salvation. The immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity are always the same and only God who gives himself totally to the world and to men as he is.⁴⁰

The Paradigm of Communion

What we have said so far has many consequences for our theology in general and for the elaboration of an intercultural moral theology in particular. “But,” as Zarazaga observes, “this service can only be rendered if the whole of theology begins to allow itself to be reworked from its foundation in the Trinity, perichoresis, and communion.”⁴¹ The Christian God, the one who revealed Godself in Jesus Christ, is communion and perichoresis and opens us to a new theological paradigm, namely communion as an expression of the Trinitarian mystery: “The Second Vatican Council has begun to imprint a new Copernican turn capable of overcoming the old paradigms of substance and subject, which are already shown today to be radically insufficient to account for the enormous complexity and plurality of reality.”⁴²

This new focus on communion between God and humankind leads us to understand that we are part of an intertwined world. But this bond is not marginal and superficial, rather “the roots of the Church are Trinitarian and therefore interrelational, that is: they are the Trinitarian relations of a prolonged ‘going out’ through the missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit.”⁴³ This has immense consequences for understanding creation: “For Christians, believing in one God who is trinitarian

⁴⁰ Gonzalo Zarazaga, “La comunión trinitaria. La contribución de Karl Rahner,” *Estudios eclesiásticos* 80, no. 313 (2005): 267.

⁴¹ Gonzalo Zarazaga, “Aportes para una teología de comunión. En torno a la contribución de Gisbert Greshake,” *Stromata* 62 (2006): 151.

⁴² Zarazaga, “La comunión trinitaria,” 265.

⁴³ Scannone, *Hacia una Iglesia sinodal y una cultura del encuentro*, 107.

communion suggests that the Trinity has left its mark on all creation” (*Laudato Si'*, no. 239), which leads to the conclusion that “each creature bears in itself a specifically Trinitarian structure” (*Laudato Si'*, no. 239).⁴⁴ As a mirror of the Trinity, the created world can be understood as a “web of relationships.”⁴⁵

Since we are created in the image and likeness of a God who is communion and relationship, communion and relationship constitute us ontologically. John Zizioulas speaks of communion being an “ontological category,” since “there is no true being without communion. Nothing exists as an individual, conceivable by itself.”⁴⁶ This is the foundation of the bond that unites us all with everyone and with everything: “If God’s being is radically relational, then this suggests that reality is relational to the core.”⁴⁷ This has consequences, as Colin Gunton points out, for how we understand the human person:

Human being in the image of God is to be understood relationally rather than in terms of the possession of fixed characteristics such as reason or will, as has been the almost universal tendency of the tradition. By this I mean that the reality of the human creature must be understood in terms of the human relation to God, in the first instance, and to the rest of creation in the second.⁴⁸

Thus, moral theology’s most important challenge is to read reality in a Trinitarian key, in a relational key, and to act accordingly. This relational key also needs to be applied to the human person: “To be a person is to be oriented toward communion.”⁴⁹ And we would say that it also has communal, social, political, and ecological implications, repercussions,

⁴⁴ The Italics in the original refer to a quotation from St. Bonaventure.

⁴⁵ Scannone, *Hacia una Iglesia sinodal y una cultura del encuentro*, 108–109.

⁴⁶ John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1993), 17.

⁴⁷ Denis Edwards, *Breath of Life: A Theology of the Creator Spirit* (Orbis Books, 2004), 94.

⁴⁸ Colin E. Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 3.

⁴⁹ Edwards, *Breath of Life*, 95.

and consequences, in such a way that we are faced with the challenge of generating links, rebuilding, and renewing community commitment. As Zizioulas notes, individualistic approaches contradict the ontology of the human being. Relationality encompasses the cosmic, the social, and the divine world because “an existence of communion in otherness, is not a matter of our *bene esse* but of the very *esse* of ourselves and of the world in which we live.”⁵⁰

In other words, and as Pope Francis insists, it is a matter of working to generate a true culture of encounter (*Fratelli Tutti*, no. 215; *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 237). However, we must bear in mind that communion is only built on difference, that is, on otherness, on plurality, not on homogeneity; therefore, it is not an easy task. This is especially so because in Western culture the other often appears to be an enemy: “We accept the other only in so far as he or she does not threaten our privacy or in so far as he or she is useful for our individual happiness.”⁵¹

This issue raised by Zizioulas is not a minor issue, especially when we address the violence that results from the rupture and deterioration of these deep ties that unite us: “There is a pathology built into the very roots of our existence, inherited through our birth, and that is *the fear of the other*,” which “is in fact nothing but the fear of the different; we all want somehow to project into the other the model of our own selves, which shows how deeply rooted in our existence the fear of the other is.”⁵² Fear of otherness results in “identifying difference with division” with the result that “we divide our lives and human beings according to difference” which can easily turn “into conflict and confrontation as soon as those interests cease to coincide.”⁵³ Our societies and our world situation amply witness to this today.

⁵⁰ John D. Zizioulas, “Relational Ontology: Insights from Patristic Thought,” in *The Trinity and an Entangled World: Relationality in Physical Science and Theology*, ed. J. Polkinghorne (Eerdmans, 2010), 156.

⁵¹ Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 1.

⁵² Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 1–2.

⁵³ Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 2.

It is really shocking how fear of the other, fear of difference, and fear of otherness are generators of atrocious and monstrous violence in us, in our communities, and in our society. All forms of discrimination are a clear sign of rejection of the other, who we consider different and therefore as a threat, a competition, and a rival. To value difference and rebuild broken ties by strengthening community engagement presents a tremendous challenge for intercultural moral theology.

Conclusion

At this point and by way of conclusion, we believe that it is necessary to pose some questions that this challenging task of building an intercultural moral theology leaves us with. A question that remains on the table is whether we can consider interculturality as an overcoming of inculturation. In many cases, moral theology has developed from the paradigm of inculturation or, on some occasions, transculturation. The weight, strength, and emphasis of the processes have not been centered on the Gospel but on the imposition of a culture that is considered superior. In this process, religion became an important mechanism of control.

If moral theology has begun the transition from inculturation to interculturality then the intercultural paradigm and cultural differences, with their corresponding ethical and religious implications, should not be considered a threat but a benefit. Along these lines, we can ask ourselves if intercultural ethics would then be a matter of respect for difference, or common minimum ethical standards, or a consensus? Dussel noted that consensus can conceal deep mechanisms of oppression and exclusion.⁵⁴ It is therefore a question of going beyond a simple consensus because it is a question of building a common project on the basis of communion.

What is clear is that moral theology can no longer ignore cultural pluralism since it constitutes an important aspect of the historical context

⁵⁴ Juan M. Zielinski, "De la inculturación a la interculturalidad: Crítica intercultural a la filosofía y teología inculturadas de Juan Carlos Scannone," *Revista de Epistemología y Ciencias Humanas* 6 (2014): 190.

we live in today. This pluralism is a demand that cannot be avoided and therefore presents a challenge. A hermeneutic of one's own tradition is necessary given its relationship with the traditions of the other.⁵⁵ So, on what hermeneutical bases should an intercultural moral theology be built? Should interculturality be understood as a method that helps a process of interaction and communication that favors intercultural dialogue in theology?

When we talk about intercultural dialogue, it is important to make clear our understanding of culture, and here we opt for the definition of Juan Carlos Scannone, who interprets culture as a form of living together of a human group. Culture, for this author, refers to the human way of inhabiting the world, which encompasses the use of utensils, customs, significant symbolic structures, values, rules of action and interaction.⁵⁶ This approach to the category of culture as the human way of inhabiting the world gives us the occasion to think in terms of an intercultural, ethical, and historical "we," such that we can recognize the plurality of cultures and the value and richness of diversity. Hence, culture encourages us to understand the connections between cultures and recognize that, while our expressions differ, we are not so different from one another. We can discover this in dialogue that "tends to a more profound conversion of each one to God. The same God speaks in the hearts of both partners; the same Spirit is at work in all."⁵⁷

The shift from inculturation to interculturality requires us to situate ourselves on the horizon of the other, on the horizon of a relational theology, on the horizon of a theology of communion, because dialogue is only possible if the other is considered as a valid interlocutor. So, as we have already pointed out, the intercultural turn of moral theology must go

⁵⁵ Raúl Fornet Betancourt, "El quehacer teológico en el contexto del diálogo entre las culturas en América Latina," *Revista Iberoamericana de Teología* 3, no. 4 (2007): 75–76, 79.

⁵⁶ Juan C. Scannone, "Normas éticas en la relación entre culturas," in *Filosofía de la cultura*, ed. D. Sobrevilla, *Enciclopedia Iberoamericana de Filosofía*, no. 15 (Editorial Trotta, 1998), 226. See also Zielinski, "De la inculturación a la interculturalidad," 198.

⁵⁷ Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Orbis Books, 2000), 383.

beyond minimum ethical norms because what is at stake is the encounter with the other, becoming aware that we are all interdependent because ontologically our being constitutes a trinitarian structure of communion.



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