

***From Multiculturalism to Interculturality:
The Aim of Theological Education in the Global Context***

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“What exactly is interculturality?” It is important to acknowledge at the outset that this recently-coined terminology is still very unclear for many people. First and foremost, interculturality is *not* merely “internationality” or “multiculturalism” whereby a community, which is comprised of people from different nationalities or cultures, can *co-exist* side by side with each other.¹ Rather, the ideal intercultural community, which consists of members from different cultures, can *interact* with each other and thereby mutually enrich the individual members and the community as a whole.² In a nutshell, interculturality may be defined as *mutual multi-directional exchange and enrichment*.³ It might be helpful to note that interculturality differs significantly from cross-cultural encounter. Interculturality is a multi-directional exchange whereby both parties are enriched in the encounter; cross-cultural encounter however is one-directional communication that does not necessarily involve in mutual exchange and enrichment. Consequently, these terms—interculturality and cross-culture—are not synonymous.

I propose that theological education today must be framed by the importance of interculturality and serve interculturality within the scope of its broader aims, especially as its faculty and students become more ethnically diverse. Interestingly, the Bible contains many illustrations or stories of ideal intercultural encounter, interaction, mutuality or exchange.⁴ Due to the limited length of this paper, I could only explore three paradigmatic examples that demonstrate genuine intercultural sensitivity and conciliatory interaction across cultural boundaries.⁵ I will begin by examining the ancestral figures of Abraham and Sarah from the Old Testament, and then explore Jesus of Nazareth and Paul of Tarsus as the representative figures of the New Testament. I will conclude by offering some pedagogical implications for teaching the Bible and doing theology in a global church and context. The overall aim of this article is to

¹ Robert Kisala noted that “our understanding has moved from assimilation to multiculturalism to interculturality.” See Kisala, “From Every Nation, People, and Language,” *Verbum SVD* 53, no. 1 (2012): 37.

² Likewise, Kisala says that “Interculturality emphasizes the mutuality of the contact between cultures, that all cultures are appreciated for the gifts they bring to humanity. It promotes the active sharing of these gifts and evaluates positively the consequent changes such sharing causes in all the cultures involved” (“From Every Nation,” 37). See also his previous article entitled, “Formation for Intercultural Life and Mission,” *Verbum SVD* 50 (2009): 331-35. The clarification of the term “interculturality” by Kisala is similar to other scholars’ definition; for example see Hans de Wit, “Through the Eyes of Another: Objectives and Backgrounds,” in *Through the Eyes of Another: Intercultural Reading of the Bible*, edited by Hans de Wit, et al. (Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2004), 3-48.

³ I owe this excellent definition to my friend Roger Schroeder who co-authored with Stephen B. Bevans: *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011).

⁴ While the Bible has examples of the failure of cross-cultural communication and intercultural mutuality, in this article I shall highlight the good examples and the biblical foundations for cross-cultural and intercultural interaction.

⁵ For a fuller exposition, see vanThanh Nguyen, “Biblical Foundations of Interculturality,” in *Interculturality*, ed. Martin Ueffing (Roscommon 25; Sankt Augustin: Steyler Missionswissenschaftliches Institut, 2013), 37-48.

show that Biblical intercultural hermeneutics can provide a model for reading, living, and ministering in an intercultural context.

Abraham and Sarah as Mediators of Blessings

Israel's ancestral history begins with Abraham and Sarah when they responded to God's vague invitation to leave their familiar surroundings in Mesopotamia and sojourn to the unknown land of Canaan (Gn 12:9). Abraham and Sarah moved about in Canaan searching for food and pasture for their livestock. They traveled without constraint through the length and breadth of the land. While Memre, near Hebron, became their principal place of residence (Gn 13:18), they settled in Shechem (12:8-9), Bethel and Ai (13:3), in the Negev between Kadesh and Shur (20:1-2), at Moriah (22:2), at Beersheba (21:33; 22:19), and for a time in Egypt (12:10; 13:1).⁶ They are clearly portrayed as immigrants, but what amazes me about the story of their migration is that the land they enter is not empty, for there were already present the Hittites, the Jebusites, the Perizzites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, and the Jebusites, just to name a few (Gn 15:19-21). Noticeably however, Israel's ancestors were not treated with hostility. Canaan is depicted as a peaceful place and a welcoming host country for immigrants and settlers. Consequently, Abraham and Sarah were not unwelcome strangers or considered as hostile passing travelers. They were allowed to freely survey the friendly territory that belonged to the people of the land. No one seemed to object to their coming and going.

Throughout the whole narrative cycle, Abraham and Sarah are portrayed as "a model of how to live at peace with the host peoples of the land and share ownership of the land."⁷ There is no explicit indication from the author of Genesis that the people of the land should be expelled or destroyed.⁸ Contrary to what is portrayed by some scholars who appear to have a politically motivated agenda, the immigrant couple acted in exemplary ways by showing deep respect for the entitlement of the people of the land and to their local rituals and practices. According to Carroll Stuhlmueller, Israel's ancestors accepted and interacted with Canaanite forms of worship and lifestyle and even worshiped at traditional Canaanite shrines.⁹ Because of their intercultural mutuality and exchange, Abraham and Sarah were able to share the benefits of the land, overcome conflict and crises, and even mediate blessings to the inhabitants of the land.¹⁰

⁶ See vanThanh Nguyen, "Asia in Motion: A Biblical Reflection on Migration," *Asian Christian Review* 4, no. 2 (2010): 22-24.

⁷ Norman C. Habel, *The Land Is Mine: Six Biblical Land Ideologies* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), 125.

⁸ Contrary to Genesis' peaceful ideology of co-existence with the inhabitants of the land, violent repudiation of the foreigners and their expulsion are found in other Old Testament texts. The book of Joshua and Judges contain many violent scenes. Perhaps the most alarming text comes from Deuteronomy, stating, "In the cities of those nations which the LORD, your God, is giving you as your heritage, you shall not leave a single soul alive. You must doom them all—the Hittites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites—as the LORD, your God, has commanded you" (20:16-17). See also similar passages found in Dt 7:1-2, 6-8. Many prophets also denounced foreign idols and called for a destruction of cultic sites. Ezra even forced the men to divorce their foreign wives. A militant and anti-foreign ideology was viewed as being faithful to Israel's God, and thus some biblical writers demanded a complete separation from foreign practices. To understand why these violent passages were recorded and retained, one has to understand the historical context of the literature. For more information, see Lucien Legrand, *The Bible on Culture: Belonging or Dissenting?* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000).

⁹ Donald Senior, C.P., and Carroll Stuhlmueller, C.P., *The Biblical Foundations for Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983), 17.

¹⁰ For a detailed and comprehensive treatment of land as the central theme of biblical faith and theology, see Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith* (Second Edition; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002).

The story of Abraham encountering and interacting with Melchizedek, the king and priest of Salem or Jerusalem, is a good illustration of an ideal intercultural encounter. In this short intercalated vignette about the rescuing of his nephew Lot (Gn 14:18-20), Melchizedek met Abraham on his return from the mission and offered him bread and wine. Abraham clearly participated in table fellowship with Melchizedek, the Canaanite king and also a priest from a different religious tradition and culture. The intercultural exchange reveals that Abraham respected Melchizedek's custom by openly accepting his hospitality. The king then blessed Abraham with these words: "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, the creator of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who delivered your foes into your hand" (vv. 19-20). By gladly receiving a blessing from Melchizedek, Abraham acknowledged the power and legitimacy of the Canaanite "God Most High" (in Hebrew El 'Elyon). Norman Habel correctly noted that, "For Abraham to accept a blessing from Melchizedek is to acknowledge his power, his authority as rightful priest of a sacred site in Canaan, and his right to rule the territory of the Jebusites."¹¹ Abraham's cultural adaptation and sensitivity are startling to say the least. But that is not all. Abraham even responded with a gesture of mutuality by offering a generous tithe, presumably from his looted treasures (v. 20). Abraham's intercultural interaction obviously led to the promotion of peaceful relations with the settled inhabitants, and consequently he was welcomed as a friend in the new host country and culture.¹²

Abraham always recognized himself as a *ger* or "resident alien" and identified himself as such.¹³ At the end of his life, he pleaded with the Hittites saying, "Although I am a resident alien among you, sell me from your holdings a piece of property for a burial ground, that I may bury my dead wife" (Gn 23:4). This is a clear indication that even until the very end of his days, Abraham never ceased being a stranger in the land of promise. In this episode, Abraham is shown as one who respects the law of the land and is willing to purchase a piece of property according to the terms dictated by the local residents.

In summary, Abraham and Sarah interacted amicably with the inhabitants from diverse cultures and tribes. Moreover, wherever they moved and lived, the immigrant couple fostered a way of life that mediated blessing. They did not simply co-exist but became ambassadors of good will to all the people they encountered, seeking to transform their own lives and the lives of others around them. As bridge-builders, they shared their resources and followed the appropriate local protocol and laws. Assessing their behavior and attitude, Abraham and Sarah clearly fulfill the three criteria or characteristics of real interculturality, namely: a) a recognition of other cultures; b) a respect for cultural difference; and c) a promotion of healthy interaction between cultures. Since they sought to create an atmosphere whereby each culture allows itself to be transformed or enriched by the other, Abraham and Sarah are considered paradigmatic figures of interculturality. Furthermore, from a theological-missiological perspective, one can see here the

¹¹ Habel, *The Land is Mine*, 126.

¹² *Ibid.*, 126-27.

¹³ Abraham (Gn 12:10; 17:8; 20:1; 21:23, 34; 23:4), Lot (19:9), Isaac (26:3; 35:27; 37:1), Jacob (28:4; 32:5), and Esau and Jacob (36:7), Joseph (47:4, 9) are designated as *gerim* (cf. also Ex 6:4). Abraham even described himself as a *ger* (Gn 23:4). In Exodus 6:4 the patriarchs are referred to collectively as *gerim* when YHWH declares to Moses that he had promised to give the fathers the land in which they were dwelling as outsiders. Even the psalmist refers to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as *gerim* who wandered about Canaan before their descendants took possession of the land at a later time (Ps 105:8-13). And in two other instances, Ps 39:13 and 1 Chr 29:15, Israel's fathers are called *gerim*. While in Egypt, the Israelites were also identified as *gerim* (Ex 22:20; 23:9; Dt 10:19; 23:8). See Reinhard Feldmeier, "The 'Nation' of Strangers: Social Contempt and Its Theological Interpretation in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity," in *Ethnicity and the Bible*, ed. Mark G. Brett (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), 241-70.

biblical foundations for the intercultural exchange and mutual enrichment of all nations in response to God's mission, who is calling all of them back to God.

Jesus an Intercultural Jew

Jesus of Nazareth was born and brought up in a specific culture. He was a Jew who spoke a Palestinian Aramaic and was conditioned by a Semitic way of speaking and thinking. One must realize that Jesus dressed like a Jew, prayed like a Jew, taught and argued like a Jewish Rabbi. His life, mission, and teaching were totally rooted in the Jewish culture and identity. The Evangelist John puts it very plainly, "the Word was made flesh" (1:14). This simple yet profound statement indicates that the Word found human expression in a Jewish culture.¹⁴ Jesus was a Jew, and it is within his Jewishness that he found his identity and belonging. Over the past several decades, New Testament scholars have correctly stressed that an understanding of first century Judaism is crucial to the reconstruction of the historical Jesus and the origins of early Christianity. Likewise, if we wish to understand and appreciate the intercultural dialogue or interculturality of Jesus, we must first recognize his deep Jewishness.

Jesus' mission was primarily to his people and normally took place within the Jewish territory (Mk 6:7-13). He clearly said that he "was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Mt 15:24). Even so, he healed both Jews and Gentiles (Mk 5:1-8; 7:31-37). The story of Jesus healing the daughter of the Syrophenician (Mk 8:24-30) or Canaanite (Mt 15:21-28) woman is a very good example of mutual inter-cultural exchange. The belief and strength of this poor and widowed foreigner impressed Jesus to the point of acknowledging her "great faith" and granting her whatever she wished. Many commentators have noticed that Jesus' attitude toward Gentiles in general became more favorable after this crucial encounter and eventually led Jesus to commission his disciples to inaugurate a universal mission (Mt 28:18-20). In addition to healing those of other races, Jesus also proclaimed the gospel to them.

Jesus' dialogue with the Samaritan woman at the well (Jn 4:4-42) is a fine example of cross-cultural exchange, whereby the woman and her people were enriched and transformed in the cross-cultural experience. When Jesus asked her for a drink, her first reaction was disbelief that he, a Jew, would even talk to her, a Samaritan. The disciples' shocking discovery of Jesus conversing with the woman at the well is a clear indication that his behavior was unusual. Nevertheless, Jesus took the initiative and broke the cultural barriers of race, gender, and religion. Despite her seemingly tarnished past, Jesus accepted her as she was without judgment and condemnation. I believe that it was through open dialogue and respectful exchange that Jesus was able to transform this ordinary Samaritan woman to become a missionary and an evangelist (4:39, 42). The story ended with the whole town coming to know Christ and believing in him. I believe that Jesus too was enriched and transformed in this unique cross-cultural encounter, for he no longer remained at the edge of town but accepted their hospitality and stayed with them for two days (4:40).

Jesus also demonstrated cross-cultural sensitivity in his teaching, especially in his parables. The central message of Jesus' ministry was "the coming of the Kingdom of God" (Mk 1:14-15). One of the ways to get this message across was through story telling. Like a good teacher, Jesus loved to tell stories and was very good at it. Jesus' stories however are unique for they usually have unexpected twists and are often subversive. More than just telling stories, Jesus spoke often in parables, particularly in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke). The

¹⁴ Legrand, *Bible on Culture*, 75.

simplest definition of parable is a short story, metaphor, or simile usually drawn from everyday experiences to communicate a certain lesson or truth that intends to shock the listener by its vividness or strangeness. Jesus often begins by saying, “The kingdom of heaven is like” While parables are down to earth with high verisimilitude and are easy to remember, they are not always obvious and easy to understand. Jesus’ parables have the power to grab attention for those who hear them. They have the potential to transcend space and time as well as the culture of the original speaker and listener to speak even to us today messages that are still pertinent and images that are still powerful. To farmers he spoke in images of fields and wheat, to housewives in images of bread making and housecleaning, to builders in images of stone and mortar, to fishermen in images of net and fishes, to merchants in images of pearls and treasures. Jesus’ parables of the kingdom can be appreciated by listeners of diverse background and profession.¹⁵ The most famous example is the Good Samaritan, who helped a man who had been robbed and beaten nearly to death (Lk 10:29-37). While religious Jews avoided the injured man in the ditch, the Samaritan showed compassion to the stranger who was probably a Jew and a potential enemy.

Although being steeped in his Jewishness, Jesus was a different kind of Jew. Jesus touched the lepers, befriended sinners and outcasts, and liberated those who were possessed by impure spirits. Jesus recognized the dignity in the people he met and restored them to their rightful place. More than simply associating with them, he participated in table fellowship with them. This was a radical move, for people in Jesus’ time did not just eat with anyone. To sit at table with someone was a sign of respect, trust, and friendship. Jesus surprised everyone by sitting down to eat with anyone. Jesus excluded no one at the dinner table. Moreover, Jesus offered his very self as food and drink for those who hunger and thirst for the Kingdom of God. Many who came in contact with Jesus were transformed, for example, Zacheus the tax collector (Lk 19:1-10), the woman who anointed Jesus (Mk 14:3-9), Martha and Mary (Lk 10:38-42), and the two distressed disciples from Emmaus (Lk 24:13-35).¹⁶ Noticeably, Jesus did not simply interact with people; rather he and those he encountered were mutually enriched.

In short, I have shown that Jesus was a very cross-cultural Jew and on various occasions can be considered an intercultural Jew. In any case, Jesus is ideal in showing that God’s mission includes all peoples, and this lays the biblical foundation for intercultural exchange and mutual enrichment of all nations in response to God’s mission.

Paul a Culture Sensitive Theologian and Missionary

Paul is surely the most influential early Christian writer and missionary. He was a diaspora Jew who was born in Tarsus (Acts 21:39), a city well known for its intellectual environment. He eventually moved to Jerusalem to be “at the feet of Gamaliel,” a leading Jewish scholar of the time (Acts 22:3). Paul personally admitted that he was fully a Jew saying, “Circumcised on the eighth day, of the race of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrew parentage, in observance of the law a Pharisee” (Phil 3:5). So much so that he

¹⁵ Nguyen, “Speaking in Parables,” *Give Us This Day* (July 2012): 240-41.

¹⁶ What Jesus did in the Gospel of Luke, the disciples imitated in the Acts of the Apostles. A very good example of such a parallel is found in the story of Peter and Cornelius (Acts 10:1—11:18). Peter’s table-fellowship with Cornelius and his household caused no small confrontation with the Jerusalem church. However, it was through this watershed encounter that the way was opened for Paul to evangelize in Gentile territory and among Gentile folks. See vanThanh Nguyen, “Dismantling Cultural Boundaries: Missiological Implications of Acts 10:1—11:18,” *Missiology: An International Review* 40, no. 4 (2012): 455-66.

persecuted the early disciples of Jesus and was determined to extinguish the Christian movement (Acts 9:1-2; Phil 3:6). But that was prior to his encounter with the risen Christ on the road from Jerusalem to Damascus.

Paul's revelatory experience dramatically changed the course of his life.¹⁷ He was no longer the old Saul that he once was; rather Paul was commissioned by the risen Lord to be an apostle to the Gentiles (Gal 1:12). Filled with zeal, he embarked upon various missionary journeys, which the book of Acts neatly arranged into three journeys, and founded many Christian communities or *ecclesia*. Paul also wrote many letters to these Gentile churches that he had visited in order to teach, encourage and admonish them in their infant faith. Fourteen letters were attributed to Paul from Tarsus.¹⁸ Through his missionary activity and writings, Paul eventually altered the landscape and transformed the religious character around the Mediterranean Basin. Gentiles gradually embraced monotheism and more importantly believed in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

No one doubts that Paul was very instrumental in the expansion of early Christianity. But the question is: "How was Paul able to influence and convince Gentile communities that had a different set of beliefs and customs to adhere to the Christian faith and way of life?" I believe that Paul was able to plant the gospel of Jesus Christ in ways that made sense and moreover intersected with the concrete aspects of the lives and cultures of his listeners. As a context theologian and missionary, he applied an "audience-sensitive approach"¹⁹ in his evangelism. In other words, Paul contextualized the gospel within the cultural setting of his audience. This approach requires flexibility, creativity, and humility. To intellectual Greeks, he used sophisticated rhetoric for effective persuasion (1 Cor 1:17-31). To conservative and observant Jews, he appealed to the Hebrew Scriptures and applied Hebraic Midrash to explain the Torah (Gal 2:19). To those who are familiar with sports and tools of warfare, Paul used athletic (1 Cor 9:24; 2 Tm 4:7) and military (Eph 6:11-14) images and metaphors to get his message across. For ordinary folks, he used images of body parts (Rom 12:4; 1 Cor 12:12-17; Eph 4:11-16) or everyday tools (e.g. mirror in 1 Cor 13:12 and earthen vessels in 2 Cor 4:7) that everyone could understand. Although a Jew, Paul understood the paganistic world he lived in. Flemming rightfully notices that Paul was "audience-sensitive without being audience-driven,"²⁰ because he had the right attitude toward culture, namely, affirming as well as confronting culture. Because of these attitudes, Paul was able to be "a Jew to the Jews and as a Greek to the Greeks" (1 Cor 9:19-23). Flemming further states, "[Paul's] 'at-homeness' within overlapping Jewish, Greek and Roman environments put him in a singular position to contextualize the gospel for both Jews and Gentiles, not as a foreigner, but as a cultural insider."²¹

Paul's Areopagus speech to the Athenians (Acts 17:22-34) clearly demonstrates his cultural sensitivity and "at-homeness" with his audience and therefore serves as a compelling example of ideal cross-cultural exchange. While this comes from the book of Acts, Luke nevertheless depicts a genuine character of the historical Paul. In this missionary sermon, Paul demonstrates a willingness to interact with the worldview, belief and practices of his audience. He began the speech by saying, "You Athenians, I see that in every respect you are very

¹⁷ vanThanh Nguyen, "Evangelizing Empire: The Gospel and Mission of St. Paul," *Verbum SVD* 51 (2010): 55-69.

¹⁸ Seven of the fourteen letters are undisputedly written by Paul himself: Romans, First Corinthians, Second Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, First Thessalonians, and Philemon.

¹⁹ Dean Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 92.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 116.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 150.

religious. For as I walked around looking carefully at your shrines, I even discovered an altar inscribed, ‘To an Unknown God’” (17:22b-23). Paul is fully aware of the Athenian culture, religious beliefs and practices. He also shows a remarkable familiarity with the Athenian philosophical traditions by quoting well-known sayings from their philosophers and poets (see v. 28).²² Flemming summarizes the speech in this way: “[Paul] uses this insight to respectfully engage their worldview, drawing upon indigenous language, images and concepts to communicate the gospel in culturally relevant forms.”²³ While Paul takes a respectful and conciliatory approach by beginning where the audience is, Paul does not simply conform to their worldview and beliefs, but rather he seeks also to confront, correct and transform their understanding of God. Despite Paul’s painstaking effort to contextualize the gospel for his audience, the message however proved too much for many to accept. But it was not all a failure, for some were convinced and believed, for example “Dionysius, a member of the Court of the Areopagus, a woman named Damaris, and others with them” (v. 34).

Paul’s Areopagus sermon is an outstanding example of cross-cultural evangelistic witness.²⁴ It also gives us a glimpse of the real Paul at his very best when it comes to cultural sensitivity and adjusting one’s approach in preaching and dealing with people from other cultural backgrounds. While Paul is flexible and conciliatory in his approach, he remains firm in his interaction seeking for mutual transformation without compromising the truth of the gospel message.

Pedagogical and Theological Implications

This article began by clarifying that real “interculturality” is more than just *co-existing* side by side with people from different nationalities or cultures. Rather, the ideal intercultural setting for interculturality provides a space or opportunity for people from different cultures to *interact* with each other and thereby mutually *enrich* and *transform* each other and those around them. With this understanding, I have turned to the Bible by exploring the stories of Abraham-Sarah, Jesus of Nazareth, and Paul of Tarsus as paradigmatic examples that illustrate ideal intercultural encounter or interaction. What follows are some pedagogical implications of teaching the Bible and doing theology interculturally in a global church and context. But first, let us look at the inevitable demographic and theological shifts on the horizon.

According to projections of the US Census Bureau in 2008, the US population will change drastically by race and ethnicity in the near future. By 2050, the white population of 201 million is expected to reach 215 million; African Americans will grow from 40 to 59 million, Asians from 16 to 38 million, and Hispanics from 50 to 133 million. What this means is that, by midcentury, the ethnic minorities in the US will become the majority, while the whites will be a minority, consisting of only 48 percent of the total 450 million population.²⁵ As for Christianity

²² Scholars believe that the saying, “In him we live and move and have our being,” is based on an earlier saying of Epimenides of Knossos (6th century B.C.). As for the saying, “For we too are his offspring,” it is a quote from Aratus of Soli, a third-century B.C. poet from Cilicia.

²³ Flemming, *Contextualization*, 82.

²⁴ See Lynn Allan Losie, “Paul’s Speech on the Areopagus: A Model of Cross-cultural Evangelism,” in *Mission in Acts: Ancient Narratives in Contemporary Context*, ed. Robert L. Gallagher and Paul Hertig (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 221-33.

²⁵ Lester Edwin J. Ruiz and Eleazar S. Fernandez, “What Do We Do with the Diversity that We Already Are?” *Theological Education* 45 (1, 2009): 45. The 2010 population projected at 312 million will reach approximately 452

worldwide, it is estimated that by the year 2025, the majority of the 2.6 billion Christians will be found in the “global South,” namely Africa, Central and Latin America, and much of Asia.²⁶ With Christianity growing at a phenomenal pace in the global South, it is believed that in the near future most Christian scholars will be concentrated there. Consequently, the shift in Christianity’s center of gravity from the global North to the global South will not only be demographic but also theological.²⁷ This shift will have a seismic affect on doing theology as it is moving away from the “center” to the “periphery.” The demographic and theological shifts will significantly alter the theological landscape.

How should theological educators in the US prepare for this monumental change when the minority will become the majority? I suggest that we need to begin to move from a multicultural model to an intercultural model of theological education whereby people from different cultures and backgrounds do not simply co-exist but rather *interact* with each other and thereby mutually *enrich* and *transform* each other both in the classrooms and beyond. From a pedagogical viewpoint, this model requires from teachers active, sensitive, and respectful listening skills to hear the diverse voices represented in the classroom and to humbly acknowledge that such wisdom and insight can be tapped in that context.

Moreover, by applying the intercultural model of education educators recognize and affirm that there is not a single dominant perspective for doing theology or reading the Bible, but rather there are multiple or polycentric perspectives. Furthermore, by listening to the voices of all people in the church, especially to those on the periphery, for example, women and people of color, the model recognizes that everyone has something to offer to the theological endeavor and can be mutually enriched. In addition, this model not only acknowledges but also addresses the global issues of culture, class, ethnicity and race, leading to a truly global intercultural theology.

million. By midcentury, whites will be approximately 48 percent of the population; African Americans, 12 percent; Asians, 8 percent; Hispanics, 30 percent; and others, 2 percent.

²⁶ According to Philip Jenkins, 595 million would live in Africa; 623 million in Central and Latin America; and 498 million in Asia. Europe might still be in third place with 513 million. See Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Revised and Expanded Edition; England: Oxford University Press, 2007), 2. Jenkins predicts that by 2050 only about one-fifth of the world’s three billion Christians will be non-Hispanic whites (*Next Christendom*, 3).

²⁷ Priscilla Pope-Levison and John R. Levison, *Jesus in Global Contexts*, (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 12.