

PASTORAL CARE IN A MULTI-ETHNIC CHURCH
REFLECTION ON PANEL SHARINGS

+Orlando B. Cardinal Quevedo, O.M.I.
Panel on Multi-Ethnic Migrants
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Two images struck me from the Sharings of Ms. Mitra Khakbas of the Multicultural Development Australia (MDA) and of Fr. Brian Kelty of the Ukrainian Catholic Church.

The first image comes from the poem of the 13th century Persian writer, Sa'adi, as quoted by Mitra:

**Human beings are members of a whole
In creation of an essence and soul.
If one member is afflicted with pain
Other members uneasy will remain
If you've no sympathy for human pain
The name of human you cannot retain.**

Listening to the poem what immediately came to my mind is the mystery of the Mystical Body of Christ in St. Paul. We are all parts of the Body of Christ. Every member is important, even what seems to be the least. When one member suffers, the whole Body feels the pain. When one member achieves success, the whole Body rejoices.

Migrants in Australia are marked by multi-culturality, differences in race, in culture, in ways of life and traditions, in thinking, valuing, language and thought expressions. This is part and parcel of multi-ethnicity, of multi-culturality. Yet they have objective communion on two levels. They all share in the same humanity and share the same home, our one and only mother earth. At a deeper level, the baptized have communion in the one Body of Christ.

Objective communion is not always a subjective reality. For it to be a fact, we need to move from multiculturalism to interculturality. Multi-culturalism is the fact that migrants have varied cultures. But each cultural group can create a ghetto for itself, unrelated to the

others except for peaceful co-existence. In ghettos fears, insecurities, biases and prejudices are not resolved. They remain possible triggers for violence and extremism.

Mitra spoke of moving away from the “transactional” to “inter-relational.” To my mind she was referring to the “intercultural” dimension where multi-cultures relate with one another, moving beyond themselves, building community, unity in diversity.

Pastoral Care for migrants in such a setting aims at integration or assimilation, but not by way of a dominant mono-culture but by way of interculturality -- and the becoming of an inter-cultural community. It is in such a community where biases and prejudices recede into the inoperative margins of the mind. Respect for cultures, language, ways of worship -- mutual cultural enrichment take place.

In his turn Fr. Bryan told the story of a Bishop visiting his flock in the Ukrainian Church in Phoenix, Arizona. He spoke to them as a “community of the desert.” What a beautiful image this is! “Community of the desert.”

The term reminds me of the liberation of the Israelites from slavery and oppression in Egypt.

Moses confronted Pharaoh and relayed to him God’s message: “Let my people go that they may worship me in the desert” (Ex. 7:16).

For the Israelites in the Exodus, the Sinai desert was both a wasteland of great suffering, of hunger and thirst, of rebellion and idolatry and also an oasis of faith and of God’s mercy on his people.

In the desert God is present, God is encountered, God is experienced as compassion, providing bread from heaven, water from the rock, shelter from the heat, light in the darkness. In the desert the transformation of an oppressed people into God’s own people took place. In the desert the Israelites became community, the “community of the desert.”

Indeed, there is strength in diversity. As at the Pentecost event where various tongues were spoken but everyone understood one another, so also today in the catholicity of many cultures and tongues, everyone can understand one another. But only through the common language of the heart which is love. Beyond ears, beyond words. Heart speaks to heart. “*Cor ad cor loquitur.*”

I have spoken of several movements in the pastoral care of a multi-ethnic groups: a movement towards interculturality, a movement towards community, towards a deeper experience of communion in the one Body of Christ.

Pastoral care for multi-ethnic groups in the Church in Australia will require close and active pastoral accompaniment towards this vision of communion.

I thank my colleagues in the panel, Mitra and Fr. Brian, for their sharings. They provided the main lines of thought. My task was simply to weave their thoughts together into a theological and pastoral tapestry. I hope I have been helpful.

Thank you and God bless.