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Multicultural Hermeneutics and Mission

Abstract

In this article, presented at the 2014 Interdisciplinary Colloquium, held at Royal Auditorium on the Kentucky Campus of Asbury Theological Seminary, October 10, 2014, the author examines multicultural hermeneutics in relation to mission and presents multicultural hermeneutics as a *dialogical*, *hospitable*, *border crossing*, *marginal*, *liminal*, and *missional* reading of the Bible *in solidarity* with *others*. He uses the well-known parable of the Good Samaritan as an interesting example for multicultural hermeneutics.

Keywords: multicultural hermeneutics, hospitality, marginality, liminality, missional, the Good Samaritan

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How true that America is made of diverse people from various races, ethnic origins, cultural backgrounds, and religious traditions. These diverse people live in the same cities and neighborhoods, while their children go to the same schools, play in the same playgrounds and belong to the same sports teams. Alvin Padilla rightly observes,

> Indeed, the whole world has come to our doorstep. Learning to live well in the diverse culture of North America is no longer an option, but a necessity. The U.S. Census estimates that in 2050 the proportion of whites in the population will be only 53%. Our children will live and serve in a society in which their classmates, neighbors and fellow disciples of Christ will be equally divided between whites and people of color. As new people move into our cities and local communities, the communities undoubtedly will change. The changes could be haphazard and filled with misunderstandings, hurt feelings and even violence, or the changes could permit all to reinvent and reinvigorate themselves for the better.[1]

Multiculturalism is both a reality and an ideal. As Kenneth Boa points out, "the notion of a monolithic culture in the West based on a single stream of tradition is no longer viable. We live in a *multicultural* world—one in which peoples of disparate cultural heritages and traditions live and work together. In this sense, multiculturalism is a reality—a present fact of life."[2] But it is also a goal toward which we move in order 1) to recognize the rights of people of varying ethnic, racial, geographical, linguistic, and social roots to political freedom, economic opportunity, and social tolerance; 2) to rectify political and economic injustice by pursuing policies that ensure freedom and opportunity for all people; and 3) to foster a genuine respect for diverse cultural expressions, recognizing that certain constants of life—love, growth, need, aspiration, suffering, hope—find expression in all cultures.[3] We have, in this cry for multicultural ideal, a tremendous opportunity to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ, relevant to a world in which so many cultures coexist in such close proximity, a world weary of conflict between peoples and nations of disparate cultures.[4]

Unfortunately, most American congregations are segregated, not just by race, but also by ethnicity. Martin Luther King, Jr. recognized this in 1958: "… eleven o'clock on Sunday morning when we stand to sing 'In Christ there is no East or West,' is the most segregated hour in Christian America."[5] The problem has become almost clichéd. For years, various academic studies and news articles have reported what many churchgoers already know: America has become more integrated in schools and businesses, workplaces, and restaurants, while churches

have not kept pace with other institutions. People like to become Christ-followers without crossing borders. They want to live in comfort with themselves and others with the similar cultural, racial, ethnic, economic, and educational background.

However, amazing things can happen, when we engage other cultures for Christ, and even more so when we begin to willingly give up some parts of our own culture for the sake of others. As the Apostle Paul had himself done—to the Jews he became a Jew, in order to win Jews… to those outside the law he became as one outside the law… to the weak he became weak (1 Cor. 9:13-23)—if we give up the safety and comfort of our own cultural/ethnic lifestyles, the result will be startling. Ian Scott calls this "voluntary cultural sacrifice," which is "especially necessary for the group that holds the cultural upper hand in a given time and place. Within any city there is always one group whose culture is easily mistaken for the universal norm..."[6] In the context of cultural and ethnic diversity, ongoing racial tensions and division, religious and cultural pluralism, and linguistic and cultural complexities, in order to live out the challenge of Ephesians 2.14-16, the *magna carta* of the church, we must strive to create symbiotic relationships and interactions between diverse groups.

Why Multicultural Hermeneutics?

In the 21st century, we find ourselves "in a challenging position as we confront the multicultural, postmodern and pluralistic world in which we have been called to bear witness to Christ."[7] As Terence Turner articulates, multiculturalism is "primarily a movement for change… a conceptual framework for challenging the cultural hegemony of the dominant ethnic group (or the dominant class constituted almost exclusively by that ethnic group)… by calling for equal recognition of the cultural expressions of non-hegemonic groups within [a given structure]."[8] Culture refers "primarily to collective social identities engaged in struggles for social equality," and is "not an end in itself… but a means to an end."[9] A desirable end in multiculturalism is *culture change*—all cultures conforming to the Kingdom culture, which requires culture contact with each other. A multicultural person is neither totally a part of nor totally apart from his or her culture. Instead, he or she lives on the boundary. To live on the edge of one's culture is to live with tension and movement to change, not standing still, but rather a crossing and return, repletion of return and crossing, back-and-forth. The aim is to experience the Kingdom more fully and completely, above and beyond one's own culture.

Moreover, if multiculturalism is "a system of beliefs and behaviors that *recognizes* and *respects* the presence of all diverse groups in an organization or

society; acknowledges and values their socio-cultural differences; and encourages and enables their continued contribution within an inclusive cultural context that empowers all within the organization or society,"[10] then multicultural hermeneutics is a way "to *celebrate* with the other[s] the power of the Gospel to transcend all barriers and bring about a oneness, creating a new humanity in Christ (Ephesians 2:11-22)."[11] Its intention is "to look up the other[s]… that the world has taught to regard with distrust and suspicion, not as a 'potential predator, but as a profitable partner.'"[12]

If we are to take seriously the vision of Rev. 7:9, then we must understand that multicultural hermeneutics is not for a condescension of the dominant culture, but rather, for the elevation of every one of us, including the dominant culture, into something far greater, far more marvelous and wonderful—the people of God.[13] In this paper, I will present multicultural hermeneutics as a dialogical, hospitable, border crossing, marginal, liminal, and missional reading of the Bible in solidarity with *others*, and examine the well-known parable of the Good Samaritan as an example for multicultural hermeneutics.

What are Multicultural Hermeneutics?

Douglas Jacobsen suggests that we must enter into a multicultural conversation about what the Bible means for us today, rather than domesticating the Bible by reading it through the limiting lens of only our own viewpoints.[14] Jacobsen proposes hermeneutical diversity in which beyond comparing our interpretations to academic expositions of the biblical text, we test them against the other interpretations by reading the Bible from different social and cultural locations.[15] This hermeneutical diversity calls for "an inclusive cultural context," or a *multicultural context*, not without borders, but with borders—borders not as barriers, but as clear markers.

Multicultural hermeneutics recognizes that interpretation is never itself independent of the interpreter, though in principle it concerns information independent of the interpreter, and yet it cannot be completely "objective or impartial."[16] As Christopher J. H. Wright correctly points out, "Even when we affirm (as I certainly do) that the historical and salvation-historical context of biblical texts and their authors is of primary and objective importance in discerning their meaning and their significance, plurality of perspectives from which readers read them is also a vital fact in the hermeneutical richness of the global church."[17]

Multicultural hermeneutics aims to "read the world *in front of the text*, by reading the text not only *within* and *across*" one's own culture, but also *beyond* it in the

socio-cultural contexts of others.[18] Its goal is to look at the world *within the text* but also *in front of the text*, and *beyond*—with "a vision for a new world through a lens of solidarity with others."[19] Multicultural reading practice expects the text to "surprise, contradict, or even reverse" the readers' presumed "horizon of expectation," that is, "a mind-set, or system of references," which characterizes their finite viewpoint amidst their *Sitz im Leben*, by challenging them to move beyond "patterns of habituation" in their attitudes and experiences, and even in their reading practices.[20]

Dialogue

First of all, multicultural hermeneutics is a dialogical reading of the text and listening to one another.[21] In Grant Osborne's hermeneutical spiral, "an interpreter's presuppositions are continually challenged and corrected in dialogue with scripture."[22] However, in a globalizing society, "the hermeneutical spiral is expanded beyond an isolated interpreter to include a multicultural hermeneutic community. Here we have not so much an 'epistemological privilege' of the poor or a 'theological hegemony' of the West but an intercultural hermeneutical dialogue whereby each voice can contribute."[23] Rather than seeking

> the truth selectively from our own views, within the boundaries of our unique situations, through our distinctive ways of thinking, and in our limited languages, where, as a result, the interpretation we produce is conditioned by our particular contexts and situations, we ought to deliberately and continuously broaden our understanding of the truth, by having direct and indirect dialogue with people whose socio-cultural and personal situations are different from our own.[24]

At best, multicultural hermeneutics is a journey—an intimate talk and a humble walk, with God and with others—not a wandering without a goal, but a movement toward justice and loving-kindness.[25] It is a prophetic journey that *is* (not has) a critical voice, both positive and negative, both affirming and critiquing. It may not be vocal, but it is never silent, because it always seeks justice and mercy, love and righteousness. It is a travel with the God who is on a journey to *save* the world, in pursuit of a theology of the *road* rather than the *balcony* or the *office*.[26]

Furthermore, as David Bosch mentioned of the dialogical paradigm in his discussion about the interrelationship between dialogue and mission,[27] multicultural hermeneutics is a prophetic dialogue—to speak God's word and what it meant then and what it means to us now, but also to engage with others in respectful conversation with the desire to learn and to share.[28] Especially in a multi-

faith context, it needs to occur in humble boldness and bold humility, with both conviction and openness.[29] It is not either-or, but both-and—bold and confident, and humble and open. In multicultural hermeneutics, dialogue is not so much a specific practice, but a basic attitude of hermeneutics that requires sensitivity to the social, cultural, religious and political aspects of engaging God, one another, and the world.

Hospitality

Secondly, multicultural hermeneutics is about hospitality, a lens through which we read and interpret the biblical text, but also "one that takes seriously the dangers involved in opening oneself to the other[s] while also maintaining the intellectual and moral necessity of hospitality to strangers,"[30] as "Jesus was both guest and host, dependent on *others* for welcome and startlingly gracious in his welcome to *others*."[31] It is within the hermeneutics of hospitality "where we seek to be hospitable in our interpretations."[32] It is about "a readiness to welcome strange and unfamiliar meanings into our own awareness, perhaps to be shaken by them, but in no case to be left unchanged."[33]

What we need in multicultural hermeneutics is a hermeneutics of *informed* trust, a desire to be informed by others and their readings and interpretations, which may then free us to encounter God in scripture—free us to expect that God will tell us something significant, even revelatory, about ourselves, God, and our lives together.[34] Rather than being motivated by the hermeneutics of suspicion, regarding the text or the understandings and experiences of others with doubt, we need the hermeneutical aspect of a willingness to listen and interact, before affixing our critical gaze, especially, regarding others' interpretations as naïve or too subjective, or as sociopolitical constructions or hegemonic ideological expressions.[35] In hospitality to one another, multicultural hermeneutics is devoted to the correction of error as well as right rendering for the present situation. As Gene C. Fant, Jr. puts it, it is the "hermeneutics of optimism," where we seek to find the possible interpretation, the one that seeks to find the most fulsome meaning possible,[36] by encouraging each one's needs for self-respect and dignity, and openness to difference and otherness, and by engaging the universality of true and liberating justice.

Border Crossing

Thirdly, multicultural hermeneutics assumes a willingness to cross borders. Borders are primarily markers that divide one entity from one another. However, they are not barriers but rather frontiers from which to venture out into

new horizons in order to expand one's knowledge and circle of relationships.[37] As Virgilio P. Elizondo points out,

> Borders will not disappear, differences will not fade away, but they need not divide and keep peoples apart… They guard against a dull, homogenized society without any differences. Borders should not disappear but neither should they divide and keep people apart. The very nature of our faith can lead us to a creative transformation in the meaning and function of borders. Rather than seeing them as the ultimate dividing line between you and me, between us and them, we can see borders as the privileged meeting places where different persons and peoples will come together to form a new and most inclusive humanity.[38]

The act of border crossing is necessary in our walk with Christ. According to Lalsangkima Pachua, "Christian mission… is about the boundary-crossing activity of Christians… following God who crossed the boundary between God and the world (*missio Dei*) in and through Jesus Christ."[39] Bosch uses even a stronger term, "boundary-breaking," which is, of course, impossible without border-crossing: "the entire ministry of Jesus and his relationship with all these [the poor, and tax collectors, and women and Samaritans] and other marginalized people witness, in Luke's writings, to Jesus' practice of boundary-breaking compassion, which the church is called to emulate."[40] Peter C. Phan argues that Jesus was a border crosser, and his whole life was border crossing—from incarnation to resurrection.[41] Jesus, as border crosser, was the servant *par excellence*, and lived and died at the margin of marginality, despised and rejected by others but freed from the world's dominance that marginalized him.[42] Border crossing is "a theological imperative of Christian life *as imitatio Christi*."[43] Without border crossing, we cannot and will not follow the footsteps of Jesus. Multicultural hermeneutics sees borders as the privileged meeting place where people from both sides of the borders with different cultural backgrounds can come and listen to one another to create a fuller meaning of the text.[44]

Marginality

Fourthly, multicultural hermeneutics is not only a hermeneutics *from*, *across*, and *beyond* borders, but also a hermeneutics of marginality, since marginality describes and explores situations and conditions in which people suffer injustice, inequality, and exploitation due to factors such as race, religion, class, ethnicity, or gender.[45] Though often enforced by oppressive forces from outside, marginality is a place of radical openness and possibilities:

> Tremendous power is exercised by the powerful in assigning marginality and this creates alienation, estrangement and marginalisation, serving the interests of the powerful who establish themselves at and as the centre. However, the powerless who now find themselves at the periphery, marginalised or even in a liminal state, can utilise their marginality as an opportunity for radical possibility – what is considered as given, as reality can be re-imagined, and a new reality can be envisaged, construed and lived.[46]

As Daniel S. Schipani points out, "Conventional and pragmatic wisdom favors the safe havens of familiar territory, the shrewd and sensible stance of 'playing it safe.'"[47] However, "we can see reality better at places of marginality and vulnerability, and from the vantage point available to us at the borders…"[48] We can challenge each other to "move deliberately beyond our comfort zones, either by going out or by welcoming into our midst the stranger, the alien, or the different other," "[s]erving and being served on the margins or borders across and against boundaries, again and again becomes the sacred experience of encountering Christ and loving him anew."[49] We can encourage others "to relate and minister across and beyond those boundaries," offering an opportunity to respond… in an ethic and politics of compassion and radical inclusiveness." We can become boundary walkers and boundary breakers, by eventually choosing to relate and to minister 'out of place.'"[50] Margin is "the locus—a focal point, a new and creative core—where two (or multiple) worlds emerge."[51] As a border-crosser and a dweller at the margins, we desire for "a new and different center, the center constituted by the meeting of the borders of the many and diverse worlds, often in conflict with one another, each with its own center which relegates the 'other' to the margins. It is at this margin-center that [we] marginal people meet one another."[52]

Liminality

Fifthly, multicultural hermeneutics is like entering into a liminal space and a liminal time, becoming a "transitional being" or a "liminal persona" who is "being initiated into very different states of life."[53] A liminal space is "an in-between space… created by a person's leaving his or her social structure and not yet having returned to that structure; or to a new one."[54] In liminality, freed from the social structure and fixed cultural ideas, we become open to what is new, open to a genuine interpersonal communion in which they relate to each other truly in their full humanity.[55] Jesus is the perfect example of a person who entered into a liminal space:

> Jesus left home and lived in the wilderness of liminality, at the [borders] of his society… he… lived in a social limbo, in a liminal space, as a despised Galilean… Working out of his liminal space, Jesus… embraced especially the despised and sick people in their mutual liminality... Utilizing in liminal freedom, Jesus expressed his infinite compassion to those people whom society had rejected, crossing again and again the boundaries that the political and religious centers in Jerusalem had imposed on the people… There on the cross, Jesus hung in the deepest abyss of liminality, in a God-forsaken in-betweenness… But in this liminality, the costly suffering and thus life-giving nature of God's infinite compassion becomes historically explicit.[56]

In our liminal spaces, we hold not only our own method of hermeneutics and interpretations, but also others', in creative tension, by embracing their creative possibilities, instead of avoiding them. By understanding the liminal spaces not just as "in-between" places (between cultures, methods, and interpretations) but also as places of new possibility, a possibility of "both-and" and even "in-beyond,"[57] we identify with a greater community of all, by moving beyond our own cultural norms towards a common mission together. It creates a new space for hermeneutical and missional creativity—reading and doing mission from the margins for the marginalized.

Solidarity

Next, multicultural hermeneutics promotes "a hermeneutics of community," even of "a multilingual conversation, a sort of international hermeneutical community"[58] that embraces a hermeneutics of solidarity, which was the hermeneutics of Jesus—"a hermeneutical commitment to be in solidarity" with *others*. The hermeneutics of solidarity helps us see that "each person has become a particular reflection of the totality of others."[59] It is

> committed to "being-with" the other in solidarity and dialogue even in the midst of difference, tension or conflict. It is to hold that the truth in its fullness is not found in any single tradition, but rather, … it is born between people collectively searching for the truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction. It operates by opening itself to the polysemic meaning and significance of the other and willing to be informed and transformed by the very different cultural expressions of the stories of Gods presence in Jesus Christ.[60]

In solidarity, we do not simply affirm the otherness as otherness but seek to be enriched by it.[61] With solidarity, we struggle with others and seek their

fulfillment as part of our own fulfillment.[62] Solidarity seeks "mutual transformation toward a new reality of the global family, wherein we embrace one another as members of the same household, with an expectation of living together forever."[63] Most importantly, solidarity is not a mere concept, but a mission principle, a way of life. Multicultural hermeneutics is about a willingness to be with others in solidarity and be engaged even in the difficult dialogue between different readings of the Bible.

Mission

Finally, multicultural hermeneutics is a missional hermeneutics, where hermeneutics and mission go hand in hand, since both are a journey with God and others *from* everywhere *to* everywhere, especially from the centers of power to the fringes of the world to experience God in new ways and in new forms, as well as to empower people in the margins to claim their key role as agents of *mission from the margins*. Multicultural hermeneutics views margins of society as a special space of God's mission, where God is discernible and present. As for Wright, "the mission of God provides a hermeneutical framework within which to read the Whole Bible."[64] A missional reading is "not a matter of, first, finding the 'real' meaning by objective exegesis, and only then, secondly, cranking up some 'missiological implications'… Rather, it is to see how a text often has its origin in some issue, need, controversy, or threat which the people of God needed to address in the context of their mission. The text itself is a product of mission in action."[65]

Furthermore, missional hermeneutics is based on the hermeneutics of coherence in which we read the texts "from a perspective that is both messianic and missional."[66] Wright suggests, "Jesus *himself* provided hermeneutical coherence with which all disciples must read these text, that is, in the light of the story that leads *up to* Christ (messianic reading) and the story that leads *on from* Christ (missional reading). That is the story that flows from the mind and purpose of God in all the scriptures for all the nations."[67] Multicultural hermeneutics is also both Christocentric and missional. In addition, Wright recognizes that missional hermeneutics is also multicultural: "… appropriately we now live with multicultural hermeneutics… So a missional hermeneutics must include at least this recognition—the multiplicity of perspectives and contexts from which and within which people read the biblical texts."[68] He wants to move beyond a "biblical foundations for mission," beyond use of the Bible to support the world mission of the church, beyond important themes in scripture for mission, beyond multicultural hermeneutics, to a missional hermeneutic.[69] Just that, for me, multicultural hermeneutics is not subsumed in missional hermeneutics, but rather it is the other way around.

A Multicultural Reading of Luke 10:30-37

We often search through biblical stories that can provide models for mission. However, no single model fits all mission contexts and addresses all mission challenges. One of the key New Testament stories that have inspired innumerable people to engage in mission is the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37).[70] Though we call the Samaritan in the story *good*, as Steve Moore points out, "Jesus never used the descriptive words 'Good Samaritan'… 'Good Samaritan' is an extra-biblical label, a title that has been assigned to this parable, aptly reducing the essences of the story to two words."[71] This Samaritan is called *good,* because he went out of his way to provide practical assistance for the wounded traveler. This parable provides an excellent locus of discussion for multicultural hermeneutics. The question I want to pose is this: How *good* of a neighbor is the Good Samaritan?

Historical and Literary Contexts of the Parable

In order to understand this parable, we must first focus on its historical context. During Jesus' time, "Samaritanism" was a religio-ethnic identity marker, used as a principle for alienation, exclusion, and inferiority, producing marginality in relation to the Jews. Samaria and Judea had animosity towards each other. Samaritans were treated as either foreigners or a mixed race.[72] The Samaritan, in the historical context of the story, is to be marginal or peripheral to the racial, ethnic, and religious identity of Israel and the mainstream Judaism of that time. The words of David J. Bosch may be most appropriate for understanding the impact of the label "Samaritan:"

> Jesus' audience, including his disciples, must have found this parable unpalatable, indeed obnoxious. The Samaritan in the narrative… represents profanity; even more, he stands for non-humanity. In terms of Jewish religion the Samaritans were enemies not only of Jews, but also of God. In the context of the narrative the Samaritan thus has a negative religious value… [Even] Jews were forbidden to receive works of love from non-Jews and were not allowed to purchase or use oil and wine obtained from Samaritans.[73]

Another helpful context to consider is the literary context of the parable. First, it is important to note here that Jesus' ministry in Luke is primarily to the poor and oppressed, those who are marginalized by society in a variety of ways. Luke is often hailed as the gospel of the poor and marginalized and preferred by liberation theologians. Secondly, the parable of the Good Samaritan is found in what is called Luke's Travel Narrative (9:51-19:27), where, according to C. J. Mattill, "Luke as a

literary artist skillfully using his artistic license [sketches] a journey beginning in Galilee and leading via the road through Samaria to Jerusalem."[74] The purpose of this Travel Narrative is to present "a symbolic story which prefigures the conversion of Samaritans and Gentiles in Acts. [Luke] pictures Jesus as *going beyond Israel* as a model for the church's mission, which is grounded in Jesus' salvific contacts with non-Jews."[75] Whether or not this is an accurate analysis of Luke's intent of the Travel Narrative, what is clear is that, in Luke's view, as Phan puts it, Jesus was "the paradigmatic border-crosser," subverting every kind of boundary—racial, ethnic, religious, cultural, gender, and even socio-economic. Through the parable, Jesus subverts the racial, ethnic, religious, and cultural derogation existing in his day and expands the category of neighbor. Thirdly, Luke has a great interest in Samaria and the Samarians. There are two other important passages where Luke highlights the Samarians:

1. 9:51-55 shows two things about Jesus' attitude toward Samaritans: 1) Jesus planned to stay in a Samaritan village, by sending ahead of him messengers to prepare for him. Jesus did not separate himself from the Samaritans; 2) Jesus showed compassion towards the Samaritans when his disciples asked Jesus if they could command fire to descend from heaven to consume the Samaritans, who did not receive them. Jesus rebuked his disciples.[76]
2. 17:11-19 takes place on the borders of Samaria. In this story, Jesus is astonished that the Samaritan, referred to as "this foreigner," was the only cleansed leper to return to thank God. In contrast to the unthankful attitude of the nine lepers (presumably Jews), the Samaritan was commended for his gratitude, which is consistent with the positive portrayal of our Samaritan who displayed excessive compassion when a priest and a Levite exhibited none.[77]

Missional Reading from the Margins

The missional reading of the parable of the Good Samaritan is a marginal hermeneutics of mission, approaching the parable from the social location of marginality through the lens of mission, paying attention to the marginal voice, even if it is silent. This type of reading can "free faith from being reduced to a matter of knowledge, truth and understanding and root these in concrete [mission] praxis."[78]

In the parable, first of all, what we are seeing is border crossing. When the institutional leaders, Levi and priest, being *afraid*, refused to cross the border, the Samaritan did not hesitate but dared to cross. As Joel Green rightly points out, "Neighbor love knows no boundaries"[79] is the ultimate seminal feature of being a neighbor. The priest and the Levite knew the boundaries but decided not to cross and become neighbors. The Samaritan, in contrast, became a neighborly savior *beyond* borders.

Secondly, what the Samaritan did was a mission from the margins, rather than a mission from the center. Often, mission is in a way a movement from the center to the periphery, from the privileged to the marginalized, from a position of privilege, power, and possession to a marginalized position. But in the parable, it was from the position of *one* marginality to the position of *another* marginality. The Samaritan, a dweller at the margins—a temporary alien in the Judean part of Israel—and a border-crosser, moves into a new center, a center where conflicting, opposing borders of race, ethnicity, culture, and religion meet.

Dialogue with "Neighborology"

It is extremely helpful to be attentive to the other interpretive voices especially from the Global South, such as Kosuke Koyama on the topic of *neighborology*, which may be at first like a very uneasy, uncomfortable proposition. Koyama argues, what people need is good neighbors more than good theology, and the message of Christ must be put in neighborological language, rather than in Christological language.[80] Neighborology supersedes Christology, because, according to Koyama, that "Neighbor-talk (neighborology) is the heartbeat of Christ-talk (Christology)."[81]

Koyama further argues, "Our sense of the presence of God will be distorted if we fail to see God's reality in terms of our neighbor's reality. And our sense of our neighbor's reality will be disfigured unless seen in terms of God's reality."[82] Because God gives himself to us in Jesus Christ, the only way to communicate such a reality of God to our neighbor is to "accept the real claim which our neighbor makes on us," as "Jesus Christ, faced by the reality of his neighbor, accepted the claim made on him."[83] Neighbors are the product of cultural, historical, and religious influences, and if we want to make Christ known, we need to go over to the other side and interact with them, and live and incarnate Christ-talk in their cultural contexts. Koyama is right when he states, "Now how to communicate such a reality of God to our neighbors? Neighbors who are not 'neighborology' but real living neighbors who are in the midst of human and historical complexities."[84]

In addition, for Koyama, "the word 'neighbor' is about 'becoming neighbor…' The priest and the Levite chose not to become [a] neighbor to the man who was in great need. The Samaritan 'was moved with pity' and became [a] neighbor to him."[85] Becoming a neighbor "implies a movement." Even though the wounded traveler may have been a cultural enemy, the Samaritan extended hospitality, which is a movement to a total stranger in neighborly love. In light of Koyama's concept of neighborology, the Samaritan is a really *good* neighbor. However, the question still remains. How *good* is the Good Samaritan?

A Personal Reading

At first reading, this parable seems easy to understand. In a cultural context, the Good Samaritan is the person who responds to the needs of others, binding up their wounds. He does good deeds, is compassionate, and behaves as a pretty *good* neighbor. If I were the Samaritan, I would pat my shoulder and congratulate myself. This has been our conventional reading. But is this Good Samaritan really *good* enough? For example, a Hispanic man I know among many who live in Lexington, we will call him Raul, is daily subject to three kinds of injustice, which represents his life's vicious cycle of poverty:

1. Payday Lending. He has been paying interest rates as high as 400% to payday lenders for short-term loans. As a result, he has been trapped in ongoing debt.
2. Ex-Offenders Reentry. With a past conviction, it is virtually impossible for him to take the necessary steps toward rebuilding his life by getting state-issued photo IDs, opening a bank account, renting an apartment, or getting a job. Without employment, he cannot provide for himself or for his family. He might return to crime.
3. Affordable Housing. Even if he has a job making a minimum wage, his rent will be more than 30% of his income, and he will not be able to afford other necessities such as medicine, food and childcare.

For Raul who is consistently downtrodden, inhumanely subjugated, and ethnically marginalized the answer is "No," because the "Good" Samaritan has failed to follow through in his neighborly duties. Raul is suffering from the wound inflicted from poverty, discrimination, and dehumanization, as one who falls prey to robbers, one among many who are at the mercy of capitalistic bandits. What Raul needs is more than emergency relief or shelter for a week. He needs a neighbor

who is willing to be in solidarity with him, like Jesus, who, beyond words and deeds, embodied salvation in his solidarity with the marginalized.[86]

Often, what we see in mission praxis is two outward movements towards the *other*—the marginalized. The first movement is to physically enter into a broken reality—the reality of suffering, the violence of poverty, and the socio-cultural context that is normative for the vast majority of people in our world.[87] Notice Jesus' choice to open the parable with this phrase, "a man." This "constitutes a powerful rhetorical move on Jesus' part… Stripped of his clothes and left half-dead, the man's anonymity throughout the story is insured; he is simply a human being, a neighbor, in need."[88] The story does not say whether he was rich or poor, or Jew or Samaritan. Simply, he was stripped, beaten, and left half-dead alongside the road. The identity of the wounded man did not matter. Regardless of the wounded man's identity, the Samaritan simply "went" and entered into the reality of suffering.

The second movement is to respond to the suffering of others with compassion and mercy. This is a very natural human impulse, but one that we who live in the abundance of life tend to avoid for various reasons.[89] In the parable, the actions of the priest and the Levite "establish a cadence: they came → saw → passed by on the other side."[90] However, the Samaritan's actions are, though initially matched, radically departed from the actions of the predecessors: "He came → saw → was moved with compassion → went to the wounded man + cared for him."[91] Green rightly observes, "what distinguishes this traveler from the other two is not fundamentally that they are Jews and he is a Samaritan, nor is it that they had high status as religious functionaries and he does not. What individualizes him is his compassion, leading to action, in the face of their inaction."[92] The Samaritan took risks much more than could ever be required or expected—by stopping on the Jericho road to assist someone he did not know and giving of his own goods and money rather than leaving him on the roadside. In order to provide further care for the stranger, he entered into "an open-ended monetary relationship with the innkeeper, a relationship in which the chance of extortion is high."[93]

However, what Raul needs is much more than the first two movements of solidarity. As Isasi-Diaz correctly notes,

> Unfortunately the term solidarity has been co-opted, and it means not much beyond empathy with the poor and the oppressed, being aware of them and their struggle, being sensitive to them, supporting them, walking with them. There is nothing wrong with sympathy, compassion, mercy. However, solidarity is about all of this and much more… Liberation theologies clearly advocate for the poor and the oppressed… Advocacy is good, laudable, right and just. However, advocacy,

> unless done on behalf of oneself, is always tinged with a patronizing and lack of respect for the self-definition of those being advocated for.[94]

This is the third movement that enriches our multicultural reading of the parable. The Samaritan was not a direct cause of the marginalization of the wounded man, but he may have been responsible for causing or exacerbating his suffering. What if the robber was a Samaritan? What if this was a direct result of the on-going conflict between the Jews and the Samaritans? As Maureen H. O'Connell notes, "compassion [also] entails a confrontational element when encountering the idolatry, oppression, and exploitation that cause others' suffering, without which compassion 'fades quickly into fruitless sentimental commiseration.'"[95] The new relationship between the Samaritan and the wounded man should lead to "a genuine confrontation with the sin that cuts across and unifies those who are otherwise separated by the gap between the abundance of life and the dehumanizing conditions of immanent death; the sin of one's suffering is directly related to the sin of another's active complicity or indifference. Both are living in sinful conditions—one… is somehow responsible, and the other... suffers the consequences."[96] What we may have here is the historical injury of racial, ethnic and religious form of violence.[97] The Samaritan fails to follow through. He exhibits no internal reflection to assess the situation of the wounded man.

Furthermore, there is no dialogue between the Samaritan and the wounded man, which is essential to genuine mission. The Samaritan fails to include the voice of the wounded traveler. Throughout the story, the wounded man, unidentified, is still voiceless, just like many of our robbed, stripped, beaten neighbors. Often, they remain nameless. In knowing their names, we also come to know their race, ethnicity, nationality, religion and other categories. True liberation involves knowing the unknown, naming the nameless, and giving the voiceless a voice rather than merely becoming the voice of the voiceless. The parable ends with the Samaritan speaking to the innkeeper but the wounded man still without a voice. The Samaritan speaks for the voiceless but fails to give the voiceless a voice. Pachuau writes, "It is the peripheral voice from 'outside the gate' that communicates the eternal good news of God."[98] Solidarity with the wounded man could have provided "courage for both to continue to live their lives in reference to the truth that their salvation depends upon one another—dignity, justice, and a commitment to the Reign of God depend upon their ongoing relationship and mutual transformation."[99] As Jon Sobrino argues, "At the bottom, the spirit of solidarity is the attitude and conviction that the Christian does not go to God alone. We are saved as members of people… each of us lives our faith in reference to others, bestowing it on them and receiving

it from them again."[100] This spirit of solidarity, an inherently *social* spirit, injects "an active hope" into the sin and death that mark this world, and by so doing reveals the fundamental totality of our reality: that we live in "a world of both sin and grace."[101]

As Joel Green asks, "'What would happen if biblical studies took the Christian mission seriously?' and 'What would happen if the Christian mission took the (full) biblical witness seriously?'"[102] These are appropriate questions we must keep in mind, when we engage in hermeneutics and mission. We must hear more faithfully what God is saying through the Bible, and our mission must be much more faithful to what God intends for his people. We should never limit our reading of the parable of the Good Samaritan to doing charity-oriented philanthropic activities.

The Jesus we encounter in the Bible is the one who came to the marginalized and lived in solidarity with them. As for Koyama, mission in Christ's way is going to the periphery.[103] Our reading of the biblical texts should result in mission in Christ's way. Christ affirmed his centrality by going to the periphery. Christ affirmed his lordship by being crucified.[104] The ultimate love for God and for neighbor was demonstrated on the cross. The cross is the most extreme periphery, and it is where God's superb, neighborly love was demonstrated.[105] The only way of mission is the way of the cross—the way of self-denial and self-giving, and the ultimate theology of mission is the theology of the cross.

The Samaritan in the parable is a marginalized man like Jesus in many ways. He is a border crosser, a servant, and a new marginal man with a new center where his marginality does not diminish but exists on the center of the page of God's liberative story—no longer on the fringe, but at the center of a new story, a parable narrated by Jesus. Through the parable, Jesus wants us to see "a challenging model in the marginalized Samaritan ('Go and do as he did'): a model of compassion and life-giving actions; a model of identifying with the oppressed; a model of transcending the traditional barriers of culture and [race, religion, and ethnicity]… while identifying with the needy…"[106] However, the marginalized Samaritan did not go far enough in his neighborly love. His actions led to no further action beyond his charitable mercy. The Samaritan's mission was a mission from the margin over racism, nationalism, ethnocentrism, colonialism, and other "isms."[107] He became a savior without borders, but stopped short of allowing "the emergence of new mission from those who are marginalized, who have no way of contributing, of making their voices heard, their point of view valued and considered."[108] We need to listen to the words of Jesus, "go and do likewise," with much caution. We are commanded to go and do "likewise," not exactly "the same."

Conclusion

As a concluding remark, I want to introduce what Desmond Tutu said about what happened to Africa:

> There is a story, which is fairly well known, about when the missionaries came to Africa. They had the Bible and we, the natives, had the land. They said 'Let us pray,' and we dutifully shut our eyes. When we opened them, why, they now had the land and we had the Bible. It would, on the surface, appear as if we had struck a bad bargain, but the fact of the matter is that we came out of that transaction a great deal better off than when we started. The point is that we were given a priceless gift in the word of God: the gospel of salvation, the good news of God's love for us that is given so utterly unconditionally. But even more wonderful is the fact that we were given the most subversive, most revolutionary thing around. Those who may have wanted to exploit us and to subject us to injustice and oppression should really not have given us the Bible, because that placed dynamite under their nefarious schemes.[109]

This is a quite serious assertion about the Bible and what it can be and do. For Tutu, "The Bible is the most revolutionary, the most radical book there is."[110] How we read and appropriate the Bible requires a great awareness of and sensitivity to the changing world that is becoming more multicultural. A personal reading of the parable through the eyes of Raul inspires us to ask the question: What kind of a neighbor am I really? Multicultural hermeneutics promotes more attentiveness, wisdom, and faithfulness concerning the multicultural life we are now living in witness to Christ among diverse neighbors.

End Notes

[1] Alvin Padilla, "A New Kind of Theological School: Contextualized Theological Education Models," *Africanus Journal* 2:2 (November 2010): 5-6.

[2] Kenneth Boa, "Christ and Cultures: Multiculturalism and the Gospel of Christ," in bible.org/seriespage/christ-and-cultures-multiculturalism-and-gospel-christ. Italics are mine.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Martin Luther King (Jr.), Peter Holloran, Ralph Luker, Penny A. Russell, *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr. Volume IV: Symbols of the Movement, January 1957-December 1958* (London: University of California Press, 2000), 356.

[6] Ian Scott, "Paul and God's Multicultural Mission," in www.tyndale.ca/~missiodei/2009/04/the-apostle-paul-and-gods-multi-cultural-mission/.

[7] Padilla, 5.

[8] Terence Turner, "Anthropology and Multiculturalism: What is Anthropology That Multiculturalists Should Be Mindful of It?" *Cultural Anthropology* 8:4 (1993): 412.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Caleb Rosado, "Multicultural Ministry," *Spectrum* 23:5 (April 1994): 28.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Padilla, 7.

[14] Douglas Jacobsen, "Multicultural Evangelical Hermeneutics and Ecumenical Dialogue," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 37:2 (2000): 129.

[15] Ibid., 133.

[16] Robert A. Triana, *Methodical Bible Study* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985), 7.

[17] Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2006), 39.

[18] Enjoo Mary Kim, *Preaching in an Age of Globalization* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 66. Often used is "trans-contextual" or "trans-cultural."

[19] Ibid.

[20] Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 34.

[21] Ibid., 68-70.

[22] Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland, eds, *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 318.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Kim, 21.

[25] Gioacchino Campese, "Walk Humbly with Your God! Notes on a Spirituality for Missionaries with Migrants," *Missiology: An International Review* 25:2 (1997): 131.

[26] Cathy Ross, "Making a Difference: A Conversation with Chris Wright's The Mission of God," *ANVIL* 24:4 (2007): 253. Italics are mine.

[27] David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991), 483-9.

[28] Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue: Reflections on Christian Mission Today* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2011).

[29] Bosch, 489.

[30] Scott Huelin, "Peregrination, Hermeneutics, Hospitality: On the Way to a Theologically Informed General Hermeneutics," *Literature & Theology* 22 (2008): 1.

[31] Christine D. Pohl, "Hospitality: A Practice and A Way of Life," in www.mennovision.org/Vol%203%20No%201/Pohl_Hospitality.pdf.

[32] Gene C. Fant, Jr., *The Liberal Arts: A Student's Guide* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 76. He writes, "Alan Jacobs calls this 'hermeneutics of love,' where the audience invokes the Golden Rule, that we love others as we would have them love us. We should interpret meaning as we wish that others would interpret our own meaning" (ibid.).

[33] Thomas Ogletree, "The Activity of Interpreting in Moral Judgment," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 8 (1980): 19. See also, Gerrie Snyman, "Empire and a Hermeneutics of Vulnerability," *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 37 (2011): 1-20.

[34] Jacqueline E. Lapsley, *Whispering the Word: Hearing Women's Stories in the Old Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 19.

[35] Thomas R. Thompson, "Interpretaio in bonem partem: Jurgen Moltmann on the Immanent Trinity," in *Theology as Conversation: The Significance of Dialogue in Historical and Contemporary Theology*, eds. Bruce L. McCormack and Kimlyn J. Bender (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 159.

[36] Gene C. Fant, Jr, The Liberal Arts: A Student Guide (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 75. Also, see Fant, *God as Author: A Biblical Approach to Narrative* (Nashville: B & H Academic Publishing Group, 2010), 26-34.

[37] Peter C. Phan, "Crossing the Borders: A Spirituality for Mission in our Times From an Asian Perspective." *SEDOS Bulletin* 35 (2003): 8-19.

[38] Timothy Matovina, ed. *Beyond Borders: Writings of Virgilio Elizondo and Friends* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2000), 183.

[39] Lalsangkima Pachuau, "Missiology in a Pluralistic World: The Place of Mission Study in Theological Education," *International Review of Mission* 89 (2000): 540.

[40] Bosch, 86.

[41] Peter C. Phan, "Crossing the Borders," 16-7. Also, see Phan, "Evangelization in a Culture of Pluralism: Challenges and Opportunities," *Australian eJounral of Theology* 9 (2007): 1-15.

[42] Ibid., 89.

[43] Phan, "Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue: A Challenge to Christian Mission," in www.ofm.org/capgen06/Relatio/04PhanEN.doc.

[44] Phan, "Crossing the Borders."

[45] Sandra Kirby and Kate McKenna, *Experience, Research, and Social Change: Methods from the Margins* (Toronto: Garaband Press, 1989), 33. Quoted from Jane Kopas, "Outsiders in the Gospels: Marginality as a Source of Knowledge," *The Way* 33:2 (1993): 117.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Daniel S. Schipani, "Transformation in the Borderlands: A Study of Matthew 15:21-28," *Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology* 2:2 (Fall 2001): 21.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Ibid., 22.

[50] Ibid., 19.

[51] Ibid., 60.

[52] Phan, "Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue."

[53] Kim, 69.

[54] Sang Hyun Lee, "Claiming Our Liminal Spaces," *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 27:3 (2006): 193.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid., 195.

[57] Jung Young Lee, *Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1995).

[58] Gordon Zerbe, "The Wisdom of the Cross and the Knowledge of Our Age," in www.mennoniteeducation.org/MEAPortal/Portals/57ad7180-c5e7-49f5-b282-c6475cdb7ee7/Menno%20Univ%20Fac%20Conf%202006%20docs/ZERBE%20060823%20The%20Wisdom%20of%20the%20Cross%20Rev%20%282%29.pdf.

[59] Miroslav Volf, "Exclusion and Embrace: Theological Reflections in the Wake of 'Ethnic Cleansing,'" *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 29:2 (Spring 1992): 272.

[60] Christopher Duraisingh, "Contextual and Catholic: Conditions for Cross-Cultural Hermeneutics," *Anglican Theological Review* 82 (2000): 687.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Kim, 50.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Wright, *The Mission of God*, 26.

[65] Christopher J. H. Wright, "The Truth with a Mission: Reading All Scripture Missiologically," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 15.2 (2011): 5.

[66] Christopher J. H. Wright, "Mission as a Matrix for Hermeneutics and Biblical Theology," in *Out of Egypt: Biblical Theology and Biblical Interpretation*, eds. Craig Bartholomew, Mary Healy, Karl Möller, Robin Parry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 107.

[67] Wright, *The Mission of God*, 41. Italics are his.

[68] Ibid., 38-9.

[69] Michael W. Goheen, "Critical Examination of David Bosch's Missional Reading of Luke," in *Reading Luke: Interpretation, Reflection, Formation*, eds. Craig G. Bartholomew, Joel B. Green, Anthony C. Thiselton (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2005), 249.

[70] It is hard to imagine any other passages more influential than the parable of Good Samaritan on western cultural history. It has become part of our culture and vocabulary. Just observe myriads of hospitals and institutions of mercy bearing that name.

[71] Steve Moore, *Who is My Neighbor: Being a Good Samaritan in a Connected World* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2010), 37.

[72] See Tite Tienou, "The Samaritans: A Biblical-Theological Mirror for Understanding Racial, Ethnic, and Religious Identity?" in *This Side of Heaven: Race, Ethnicity, and Christian Faith*, eds. Robert J. Priest and Alvaro L. Nieves (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 211-22.

[73] Bosch, 90.

[74] A. J. Mattill, Jr., "The Good Samaritan and the Purpose of Luke-Acts: Halevy Reconsidered," *Encounter* 33:4 (1972): 372. All of the references to Samaritans in Luke's Gospel are in the Travel Narrative: the inhospitable Samaritans (9:52), the Good Samaritan (10:3), and the grateful Samaritan (17:11, 16), which shows Jesus' or Luke's great interest in Samaria.

[75] Ibid., 373. Italics are mine.

[76] Rebuking is a strong word often used in exorcisms or rebuking demons.

[77] Tienou, 214.

[78] Monica Jyotsna Melanchthon, "Marginal Readings: Implications for a Lutheran Hermeneutic and Communion," in www.lutheranworld.org/What_We_Do/DTS/DTS-Documents/EN/TLC_Augsburg/Papers/Melanchthon.pdf.

[79] Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 426.

[80] Kosuke Koyama, *Water Buffalo Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999), 67.

[81] Kosuke Koyama, "Neighbor: The Heartbeat of Christ-talk," *Living Pulpit* 11:3 (2002): 24.

[82] Koyama, *Water Buffalo Theology*, 65.

[83] Ibid., 67.

[84] Ibid,. 155.

[85] Koyama, "Neighbor: The Heartbeat of Christ-talk," 24.

[86] Goheen, 245.

[87] Mark W. Potter, "Solidarity as Spiritual Exercise: Accompanying Migrants at the US/Mexico Border," *Political Theology* 12:6 (2011): 835.

[88] Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 429.

[89] Potter, 835.

[90] Green, *The Gospel of Luke,* 430.

[91] Ibid., 431.

[92] Potter, 835.

[93] Green, *The Gospel of Luke,* 432.

[94] Isasi-Diaz, "Liberation Theologies for the Twenty-first Century."

[95] Maureen H. O'Connell, *Compassion: Loving Our Neighbor in an Age of Globalization* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2009), 20.

[96] Potter, 836.

[97] Hee An Choi, "Theology and the Bible," in *Chalice Introduction to Disciples Theology*, Peter Heltzel, ed., (Atlanta: Chalice Press, 2008), 39.

[98] Lalsangkima Pachuau, "Editorial Note: Space in the Margins," *Mission Studies* 24 (2007): 2.

[99] Potter, 836-7.

[100] Jon Sobrino, *Spirituality of Liberation: Toward Political Holiness* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988), 100.

[101] Ibid.

[102] Joel B. Green, 'Proclaiming Repentance and Forgiveness of Sins to All Nations:' A Biblical Perspective on the Church's Mission, in *The World is My Parish: The Mission of the Church in Methodist Perspective*, ed. A. G. Padgett (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1992), 14.

[103] Kosuke Koyama, "Jesus Christ Who Has Gone to the Utter Periphery," *Ecumenical Review* 43:1 (1991): 100-6.

[104] Ibid.

[105] Ibid., 102.

[106] M. Gnanavaram, "'Dalit Theology and the Parable of the Good Samaritan*," Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 50 (1993): 80-1.

[107] Choi, 40.

[108] Isasi-Diaz.

[109] Desmond Tutu, "Preface," in *Religious Human Rights in Global Perspective: Religious Perspectiv*es, Volume 1, eds. John Witte, Johan D. Van der Vyver (Cambridge, MA: Kluwer Law International, 1996), ix.

[110] Desmond Tutu, *Hope and Suffering: Sermons and Speech* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984), 178.

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