Identity and Otherness

**Missiological Explorations of Engaging the Other
and Embracing the Otherness in a Pluralistic World**

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Introduction

In Galatians 3:28, Paul told the Galatian Christian community[1] that there are no longer ethnic and religious differences (no longer Jews or Gentiles), no socio-political divisions of status between the oppressed and the oppressors (no longer slave or free), no gendered differences between us (no longer male and female). But in reality, *otherness,* as Miroslav Volf defines in his award-winning book, *Exclusion and Embrace*, as "the simple fact of different in some way"[2] remains and it "has become a disturbing and challenging factor for us today. My assumption is that the contemporary world we live in today is perhaps more pluralistic than Paul's ancient time. The world of today is religiously pluralistic, ethno-culturally diverse and globally interconnected. My aim is not to raise the question: why is the world pluralistic? Rather the question I will be pursuing is: how should we perceive the identities of the other and ourselves? I consider the latter question more important because it raises not only the methodological approaches to otherness, but also the hermeneutical perception of the identities of the self and the other.

In response to that question, my aim is threefold and the paper is divided into three parts. In part one, I will examine the hermeneutics of identity and otherness. I will explore two kinds of identity and three kinds of otherness. In part two, I will explore some methodological ways of how Christians should think of their identity and the other and how they should engage the other and embrace their otherness. In part three, I will examine the teleological issues of mutual transformation through critical engagement and mutual acceptance of Christians and others in the name of Christ. The ultimate goal of this paper is to promote an engaging and embracing missiology in a pluralistic world.

Two Kinds of Identity and Three Kinds of Otherness

When it comes to the issue of identity, what we commonly hold in our mind is a national identity. If you asked someone, what his or her identity is, the common response would be a national identity. In Myanmar, if you put your national identity as the Chin, Kachin, Karen or any other kind of ethnic minority nationality on your identity card, you would unavoidably face discriminatory treatment.[3] My task in this paper is not to regard national

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1   Brad Ronnell Brazton, *No Longer Slaves: Galatians and African American Experiences* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2002), 93. Brazton argue that Paul addressed the implications of Gal. 3:28 within the large Christian community in Galatia

2   Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), see the back cover of the book.

3   Lian H. Sakhong, *In Search of Chin Identity: A Study in Religion, Politics and Ethnic Identity in Burma* (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2003). See also my forthcoming

identity as our primary identity, not because such national identity is less important than other kinds of identities, but because we often abuse national identity as a tool to judge or discriminate against the other who is different from us. Rather my task is to see human identity as our primary identity so that we would see inherent human equality despite a variety of socio-religious and national-ethnic differences and otherness.

I argue that our primary identity is rooted in God's creation and in Christ's redemption as new humanity (2 Cor. 5:17). In making my case, I like to address two kinds of identity: human identity and religious identity. Paul Hiebert helpfully proposes two ways of approaching the issue of identity, namely *the oneness of humanity and the oneness of Christianity*.[4] By the oneness of humanity, Hiebert means the universal citizens of one human family. This oneness of humanity is declared in God's creation account as His image bearers (Gen. 1:26; 12; Ps. 72:17). The oneness of Christianity, on the other hand, refers to one body of Christ with many members and different gifts.[5] The former rests upon God's image-centered approach, which emphasizes the commonality of humanity within the inter or "extra-religious cultural context," while the latter rests upon Christ's body approach, which demonstrates the oneness of Christians with many gifts within the "intra-religious context" (2 Cor. 12).[6] To illustrate the former, Hiebert writes;

> Christians must learn that our primary identity is as human beings. When we meet the religious other, we must see them first as fellow humans, only secondarily as males or females, Americans or Arabs, rich or poor. In reaching out to the lost other, Christians must meet them at the deepest level of their common humanity.[7]

According to Hiebert, our first identity is as a member of the human family, secondarily as a member of our national family, such as Americans, Burmese, Chinese and so on, and thirdly as a member of the Christianity family.[8] Or the last two identities could occur simultaneously in some contexts.

article, David Thang Moe, "Burman Domination and Ethnic Discrimination: Toward a Postcolonial Theology of Resistance and Reconciliation in Myanmar" in Exchange: Journal of Contemporary Christianities in Context, Vol. 47. No. 2. (April 2018).

4   Paul G. Hiebert, "Western Images of Others and Otherness," in *This Side of Heaven: Race, Ethnicity and Christian Faith*, edited by Robert J. Priest and Alvaro L. Nieves (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 97-110.

5   Ibid., 106-117.

6   See Mark Kline Taylor and Gary J. Bekker, "Engaging the Other in a Global Village," in *Theological Education* 26 (Spring 1990): 52-85.

7   Hiebert, "Western Images of Other and Otherness," 108.

8   Ibid., 108.

In some contexts, national identity and religious identity are inseparable. For example in Myanmar, if you are from the Chin or Kachin ethnic, you must be a Christian and if you are a Burman, you must be Buddhist. The question we must ask is: who defines our human identity and our religious identity? I argue that the first identity is given by God and the second by human beings. I mean our common human identity is not given by humans, but only by God who creates us to be human. But our national-religious identities are given by both ourselves and others (human beings). In other words, we do not choose to be humans, it is a choice made for us. Yet, we can choose to be Christian, Buddhist, Confucian, Hindu and so on. Hiebert writes how Christians should perceive their religious identity. He puts it this way:

> Christians must learn to see our religious identity as Christians. When we meet other Christians from different countries, races, denominations, we must see them as brothers and sisters in the same family. This familial belonging to a new community is our eternal identity. Our oneness with other Christians is deeper than the identities that divided us on earth, such as ethnicity (Jews and Gentiles), class (slave and free) and gender (male and female), which are not eternal.[9]

This statement echoes the goal of Gal. 3:28, which describes God's salvation or reconciliation in Christ as a relational and an egalitarian aspect of Christians' self-perception of themselves and their view of the other in a new way.[10] In this text, Paul does not mean to describe God's reconciliation of humanity as a means of eliminating the sexual distinction of woman-ness, male-ness and the religio-ethnic distinction of Jewishness and Gentiles-ness, though he tries to eliminate the unequal relationship between slave and free. In Gal. 3:28, Paul's aim is to re-define our new identity as a new humanity (creation out of the old: 2 Cor. 5:17) and new oneness in Christ regardless of social-ethnic otherness and to ask how to relate ourselves to the other who are different from us.[11]

Since otherness remains, the challenge for us is how to perceive the other. Herbert Anderson defines the "other" in three ways, which I call "three kinds of otherness." He defines the "other as not us, the other as not like us, and the proximate other, who is like us, but different from us."[12] It is true that the other is not "us" in terms of nationality, immediate, and religious family. It is not like "us" in term of cultural practices and physical looks. Yet the other is not simply

9   Ibid., 108.
10   Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 213.
11   Ibid., 213. See also Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 21
12   Herbert Anderson, "Seeing the Other Whole: A Habitus for Globalization," in *Mission Studies* 14, (27 and 28): 40-63 (here p. 41).

the absolute other of us. Especially in our globalized world, the other, though they are not like us, is somehow part of our human community. Globalization draws us connected to each other more than ever before. Therefore in this paper, I would like to choose the third metaphor of the proximate other without abandoning some of appropriate implications associated with the first two metaphors.

Lalsangkima Pachuau is right when he said, "Of the three metaphors, the proximate otherness is most troublesome, but is significant that it brings out the complexity of the problem of difference."[13] When or if the other is just a distant other or what I call "the transcendent other" across the countries that other is not bothering us. But it is the "proximate other who is different from us, but is close to us who is both problematic and significant for us," according to Anderson.[14] As I have mentioned above, because of globalization and its interconnected impact of homogenization in many cases, a number of distant strangers or unfamiliar people have become near neighbors to us and the boundaries between "us and them" have been inseparable.[15] Let us take the US as an example where the distant other becomes the proximate other. As Alvin Padilla puts;

> 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 US census estimates that in 2050 that proportion of the whites in the population will be only 53%. Our children will live and serve in a society in which their classmates, neighbors, fellow disciples of Christ will be equally divided whites and people of color. As new people move into our cities and neighborhoods; the communities undoubtedly will change. The change could be haphazard and filled with misunderstandings, hurt feelings, and even violence, or the change could permit all to reinvent and reinvigorate themselves for the better.[16]

In the past, Americans have had to go to far continents, such as Asia if they wanted to study Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism, and other religions. Now the context has changed so that Buddhists, Confucians, and Hindus are becoming the proximate others to Americans. In the US, these proximate others are not merely the religious others, but they are also the proximate marginal

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13 Lalsangkima Pachuau, "Engaging the 'Other' in a Pluralistic World, Towards a Subaltern Hermeneutics of Christian Mission," in *Studies in World Christianity*, vol. 8. No. 1 (2002): 63-80 (here p. 68).
14 Anderson, "Seeing the Other Whole," 43.
15 Pachuau, "Engaging the 'Other' in a Pluralistic World," 68.
16 Arvin Padilla, "A New Kind of Theological School: Contextualized Theological Education Models," in *African Journal*. 2.2. (November 2012), 5-6.

others. Their marginal and religious otherness poses a missiological concern about how to promote a healthy and harmonious way of engaging with the other and of embracing their otherness. Moreover, the proximate otherness poses a sociological question of whether their otherness has a role in shaping our identity.

Kevin Vanhoozer observes that the "other is a hermeneutical problem in our times."[17] He suggests that the right hermeneutics of the identity of the Trinity serves as the Christian's proper perception of the self and the other.[18] To Vanhoozer, a good focus on both the One and Three (one God with three persons) provides the paradigms for successfully addressing the oneness of humanity with different cultural otherness.[19] Jung Young Lee also argues that humans are created to be different, yet equal, in order to copy the different characteristics of the Trinity within one Godhead with mutual abiding and equality.[20] The different characteristics of the Trinity with the same substance of one divinity provides the framework for rightly perceiving human diversity within the same substance of the *imago Dei* (Gen. 1:26-27) and calls for the oneness of humanity.[21]

Likewise, Christian identity is grounded in the identity of the Trinity or by what Miroslav Volf beautifully refers to when he says "the church is the image of the Trinity."[22] The three-ness of the trinitarian personhood and the oneness (tri-unity) is the model for the oneness of Christianity with one faith by embracing different gifts.[23] Just as "three persons in one divinity exist so intimately with, for and in one another by the power of eternal love," so also is the church as a community with different gifts to be communal by the power of reciprocal love.[24] Volf argues that the "church does not exist only through the narrow portals of ordained ministers, but through the life of the

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17 Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Does the Trinity Belong in a Theology of Religions? One Angling in the Rubicon and the Identity of God," ed, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age: Theological Essays on Culture and Religion* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997): 41-71 (p. 43).

18 Ibid., 47.

19 Ibid., see the back cover of the book

20 Jung Young Lee, *Marginality: A Key To Multicultural Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1995), 42.

21 S. Mark Heim, *The Depths of the Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 123-127.

22 Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998).

23 Ibid., 208-210.

24 Ibid., 210.

whole congregation. This is because the Spirit does not constitute the church exclusively only through ordained pastors, but through all members serving equally with different gifts" (1Pet. 4:10-11).[25]

Thus, we must look at the one identity of the church and the different gifts and cultures of the church's members for a common ministry. Likewise, we must look at the one identity of humanity and their different religious cultures through the lens of the Trinity, so that we would perceive ourselves and the other rightly. In the past, Western Christians perceived the non-Western other negatively. "The other until the sixteenth century was pagan, during the enlightenment age was the unenlightened, during the nineteenth century was primitive, and during the twentieth century was different."[26] The first three images of the other are negative, while the fourth is positive. Against the first three images, I argue that we must perceive the religious other as neighbor in the twenty-first century.[27] The root of perceiving the religious other as neighbor echoes the twenty-first century's image of neighbor. There are eight references to Lev. 19:18 ("love your neighbors as yourself") within the NT (Matt. 5:43; 19:19; 22:39; Lk. 10:27; Rom. 13:9; Gal. 5:14; Jas. 2:8). In the NT, Jesus, Paul and James refer directly to the Leviticus command of loving neighbor.[28]

Naim Ateek argues that neighbor comes from the Hebrew word *ra*, which can be defined as "friend and fellow companion."[29] Neighbor is not necessarily to be seen as a blood relative person, but as a fellow human.[30] Likewise, Kosuke Koyama states that neighbor is to be defined as a "person who lives close by and is not a member of one's immediate family, but a member of the human family."[31] Neighbor reflects our common human nature, and our world becomes one neighborhood. But one human family does not mean that we are all the same. This echoes Anderson's third metaphor—*the other is like us (sameness), but different (otherness)*. As Dale Irvin argues, Jesus broke the dividing wall

25   Ibid., 152.
26   Vanhoozer, "Does the Trinity Belong in a Theology of Religions?" 43. The originate statement is quoted from, Bernard McGrane, *Beyond Anthropology: Society and the Other* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).
27   Kosuke Koyama, *Water Buffalo Theology*, 25th anniversary (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1999), 180. In the 1974 edition published by Orbis Books Koyama spelled "Waterbuffalo" as one word in the title, while 1999 edition spelled it as two words, 64-67.
28   Emerso Powery, "Under the Gaze of Empire: Who is my Neighbor?" in *Interpretation: A Journal of the Bible and Theology*, (April 2008): 134-145 (here p. 136).
29   Naim Ateek, "Who is my Neighbor?" in *Interpretation: A Journal of the Bible and Theology*, (April 2008): 156-170 (pp. 157-158).
30   Ibid., 158.
31   Kosuke Koyama, "Neighbor: The Heartbeat of Christ-Talk," in *The Living Pulpit*, (July- September, 2002): 24-25.

of hostility not by eliminating human differences, but by creating a new communion with God and with fellow humans as neighbors (Eph. 2:13-22).[32] In short, the Trinity provides the model not only for affirming the diversity and oneness of humanity, but also for the right relationship among humankind with different cultures within and outside the church. Recent scholarship has focused on the "relational aspect of the Trinity."[33]

In the following section, I will examine how the relational identity of the Trinity calls for rightly engaging the other and embracing the otherness in our pluralistic world.

Engaging the Other and Embracing Otherness

Robert Schreiter provides five ways that Christians' perceive of the other.

> First homogenizing the other (perceiving the other through the lens of sameness and otherness is ignored); second colonizing the other (either dominating the marginal other or assimilating their marginal identity); third, demonizing the other (the other is considered to be a threat to be expunged); fourth, romanticizing the other (seeing the other to be superior in its otherness); and fifth, pluralizing the other (seeing the otherness differently through the multi-cultural lens).[34]

We may observe that the first three not only perceive the other negatively, but also attempt to discriminate against their otherness, while "the remaining two recognize the existence of otherness to some extent, but fail to take it seriously."[35] For the purpose of this paper, I would develop Schrieter's last point, that is pluralizing the religious other as the other. I understand Schrieter's use of *pluralizing the other* as a way of seeing the other as the other by recognizing their otherness. My concern in this section is a balanced emphasis on why we should embrace otherness and how to engage the other.

First, I would argue that we must recognize otherness or difference as God's gift to the world. In his book *The Will of God,*[36] Leslie Weatherhead helpfully provides three different kinds of God's will—God's intentional will (God's

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32 Dale T. Irvin, "The Mission of Hospitality: To Open the Universe a Little More," in *The Agitated Mind of God: The Theology of Kosuke Koyama*, eds, Dale T. Irvin and Akintunde E. Akinade.173:187. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996): 173-187 (p. 182).

33 For example, see Ted Peters, *God as the Trinity: Relationality and Temporality in Divine Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), especially 179-182.

34 Robert J. Schreiter, "Teaching Theology from an Intercultural Perspective," in *Theological Education 26.* (Autumn 1989): 13-34.

35 Pachuau, "Engaging the 'Other' in a Pluralistic World," 71.

36 Leslie D. Weatherhead, *The Will of God* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1999),

original plan for the well-being of creation before the fall of humanity); God's circumstantial will (God's current plan for unity or oneness amid diversity: Jn. 17:22); and God's ultimate will (God's final restoration of life: Eph. 1:1-11).[37] According to Weatherhead, diversity is God's circumstantial will. If this is God's will, then seeing the other as the other and recognizing their otherness is imperative. The failure to recognize diversity means opposing God who affirms cultural diversity. Letty Russell rightly argues that "The difference or otherness is not a problem, rather the failure to recognize and embrace that difference or otherness is a problem."[38] The result of the failure to recognize and embrace otherness is exclusion. Volf reminds us that exclusion itself is a contemporary sin.[39]

Many Christians sinfully misunderstand God's election or calling of Christians as a way of excluding the other rather than seeing it as an inclusive privilege for reaching out to the other where they are with their different cultures and for recognizing their differences as ways of glorifying God with different voices.[40] In this regard, it is important to combine God's creation narrative with a Pentecostal narrative. If the creation narrative recognizes God as the creator of diverse cultures, then a Pentecost narrative (Acts 2:1-21) helps us understand how God affirms diversity as His greatest gift to the world, as I have mentioned above. The many tongues of Pentecost invite us to a consideration of the church as one body of Christ with many gifts (1Cor. 12). As Amos Yong observes, "there is a little debate among theologians over the relationship between the many tongues and cultures."[41] But one thing for sure is that a Pentecostal narrative affirms diversity as the opportunity for witnessing to Christ within and across the church in a pluralistic world.

Second, Christians must learn to see otherness not as a dividing line of discrimination between "us and them," but rather as an identity marker of differentiation. In light of the latter, Christians must learn to see "otherness as the privileged meeting place where different people come to form a new and most inclusive humanity in Christ."[42] This echoes the implication of Gal. 3:28 where we should not see the otherness of Jews and Gentiles, men and

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    21-42.
37 Ibid., 9-60.
38 Letty M. Russell, *Just Hospitality: God's Welcome in a World of Difference* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 62.
39 Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace* , 66-67.
40 Russell, *Just Hospitality*, 62.
41 Amos Yong, "Toward A Trinitarian Theology of Religions: A Pentecostal-Evangelical And Missiological Elaboration," in International Bulletin of Mission Research, 40 (4). (October 2016): 294-306 (pp. 299-300).
42 Timothy Matovina, ed, Beyond Borders: Writings of Virgilio Elizondo and Friends (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000), 183.

women, and slave and free as the dividing line of either assimilating one to the other or dominating one over the other, rather as the identity marker of a new humanity. Too often, Christians choose the former because of their pride. This leads me to offer some suggestions as to how Christians should engage the other.

Third, I would suggest that Christians should engage the other with the mind of humility. Koyama once argued that Christian mission has passed through two kinds of mind. One is with the *crusading mind* and the other with the *crucified mind*. He referred to the crusading mind as "all kinds of crusading against the other who are different from us."[43] The crusading mind approaches mission with an ethnocentric and monological style. The crusading mind of mission tries not only to colonize the other, but also to assimilate their otherness into the dominant culture. This echoes Schreiter's first and second ways of approaching the other (assimilating and colonizing the other).

Against the crusading mind of Christian missionaries, Koyama introduced an engaging mission model of the crucified mind. The crucified mind is not condemning,[44] because it is rooted in Christ's self-giving love. Unlike the crusading mind, the crucified mind approaches mission with a humble and dialogical style. Koyama reminds Christians to reject the crusading mind, which stands in contrast to the mind of Christ. He invites Christians to adopt the crucified mind, which is the mind of Christ. Echoing Paul's exhortation, "Let the same [crucified] mind be in you that was in Christ" (Phil. 2:5), Koyama proposes to use the crucified mind as the mission model of Christians' humble attitudes toward one another in the intra-Christian community and Christians' engagement with the religious other in the extra-Christian community.[45] The crucified mind does not condemn, but loves the other in light of the claim that all humans are created equal. This means that engaging mission with the crucified mind not only loves the other as neighbors created in the image of God, but also recognizes their otherness.

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43 Kosuke Koyama, *No Handle on the Cross* (London: SCM Press, 1976), see the preface. See also Kosuke Koyama, *Three Mile an Hour God* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1980), 54. *Italics* are his.

44 Koyama, *Three Mile an Hour God*, 54. See also Kosuke Koyama, "What Makes a Missionary? Toward a Crucified Mind, Not a Crusading Mind," in G.H. Anderson and T.F. Stransky, eds. *Mission Trends No. 1: Crucial Issues in Mission Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974): 117-132.

45 For a full discussion of Koyama's concept of the crucified mind, see my forthcoming article David Thang Moe, "The Crucified Mind: Kosuke Koyama's Missiology of Theology of The Cross," in *Journal of World Christianity*, Vol. 7. No. 2. (October 2017).

Fourth, Christians must engage the religious other and embrace their otherness with the open arms of hospitality. Hospitality carries several meanings. Theologically speaking, hospitality is both a metaphor of God's reconciliation and His virtue.[46] God reconciles the whole world to Himself through an act of Christ's humiliation and calls the church to witness to this reconciliation to the whole world (2 Cor. 5:19) so that the world or the religious other would experience this reconciliation.[47] In light of God's universal reconciliation, the mission of hospitality requires the church's threefold act of border-crossing of reaching out to the other where they are, mutual relationship with the other, and welcoming the other. Sociologically speaking, hospitality encompasses *attentiveness* (being attentive to the other in love and in respect), *invitation* (inviting the other into our community with generosity) and *spaciousness* (making a wider space within ourselves for the other to come in by de-centralizing the self).[48] These three factors need to be elaborated.

Fifth, "hospitality means paying attention."[49] God is a hospitable God who is attentive to the world as His creation through the incarnation of Christ. Just as God is attentive to the world as His creation and all humans as His image in love (Jn. 3:16), so we are to be attentive to the religious other as our neighbor in love.[50] Especially Jesus' attentive engagement with the marginal other, the Samaritan woman (Jn. 4) in love and respect is crucial for our attentive engagement with the marginal religious other in love. The crucial nature of Jesus' attentive engagement with the Samaritan woman is His willingness to break the social-ethnic boundary of Jew-Samaritan. Likewise, the Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37 breaks social-ethnic boundary and heals the unknown victim as neighbor. The starting point for Jesus and the Samaritan's reaching to the other is different. While the first one is a move from the center to the margin, the latter is a move from the margin to the margin. In both cases, love is the motivating power for their border-crossing.[51]

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46 Amos Yong, *Hospitality and the Other: Pentecost, Christian Practices and the Neighbor* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008). See also Hans Boersma, *Violence, Hospitality and the Cross: Reappropriating Atonement Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), see esp. 99-204.

47 Ibid., 139.

48 Cathy Ross, "Often, Often, Often Goes the Christ the Stranger's Guise: Hospitality as a Hallmark of Christian Ministry," in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, vol. 39, No. 4. (October 2015): 176-179. The *Italics* are the author's and the phrases in the parenthesis are mine. The idea of de-centralizing the self for the other, see also Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 20-21.

49 Ibid., 176.

50 Ibid., 176.

51 See, David Thang Moe, "The Word to the World: Johannine Trinitarian Missiology (John 20:21-22)," in *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*, Vol. 26. Issue 1. (April 2017): 68-85.

Peter Phan and Lalsangkima Pachuau are right when they sum up "mission as all about a border-crossing act."[52] For them, Jesus is the border-crosser and His whole life of Trinitarian mission was border crossing. The incarnation is the border crossing by which the triune God steps out of Himself and crosses into the world "without crushing our human identity."[53] This reminds us that we have a Christian mission of border crossing of reaching out to the marginal other in particular and the religious other in general *without crushing* their identity. I emphasize that this is a missiological imperative of Christians imitating Jesus Christ who crosses the border between heaven and the world in love.[54]

Let us now see engaging mission as invitation. Mission is not only about reaching out to the other to witness to God's hospitality in love, mission is also about inviting the other with generosity. When we reach out to the other, we are the guests and they are the hosts in a sense,[55] but when we invite them we are the hosts. Yong rightly states that "Christian mission of hospitality involves us as both guests and hosts."[56] This is because, for Yong, "Christ is not only the missionary who came into the world as a stranger (Matt. 25:43-44), but also the host of all creation who invites the world to particulate in His banquet of salvation."[57] I agree with Yong, but my focus is on how we should see the church as what Hans Boersma calls "the community of hospitality with fifthfold characteristic."[58] Fifthfold characteristic, according to Boersma, includes;

> Evangelical hospitality (proclaiming the gospel of reconciliation and forgiveness as hospitality); baptismal hospitality (welcoming all the reconciled humans into the body of Christ); Eucharistic hospitality (proclaiming the death of Christ and inviting all reconciled humans into the fellowship of the Lord's Supper); penitential hospitality (confessing our

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52 Peter C. Phan, "Crossing the Borders: A Spiritual for Mission in Our Time from an Asian Perspective," in *SEDOS Bulletin, 35*. (2003): 8-19 (16-17). See also Lalsangkima Pachuau, "Missiology in a Pluralistic World: The Place of Mission Studies in Theological Education," in An International Review of Mission, 89/355 (October 2000): 539-555.

53 Pachuau, "Engaging the 'Other' in a Pluralistic World," 77.
54 Moe, "The Word to the World," 80.
55 As the ethnic Christian in Myanmar, I deeply understand the alienation of the ethnic as the guests or aliens rather than the hosts. See my article, David Thang Moe, "Being Church in the Midst of Pagodas: A Theology of Embrace in Myanmar," in *Journal of the International Association for Mission Studies,* vol. 31. No. 1. (2014): 22-43 (see especially p. 38).
56 Yong, *Hospitality and the Other*, 132.
57 Ibid., 131.
58 Boersma, *Violence, Hospitality and the Cross*, 205-234.

sins and struggling for restorative relationships) and cruciform hospitality (following the ways of Christ by suffering with fellow humans and anticipating the fullness of the hospitable kingdom).[59]

Although Boersma's fifthfold aspect of hospitality plays a crucial role in defining mission as the practice of hospitality, I have confined myself to employing the *Eucharistic hospitality* as the central idea of the identity of the church as the host for the other. Like Boersma, Christine Pohl rightly argues that "hospitality is basic to who we are (our Christian identity as the community of hospitality) as following Christ,"[60] in a hostile world. Pohl's thesis of Christian hospitality is grounded in three main themes: "remembering our heritage, reconsidering the tradition, recovering the practice."[61] The first two describes the apostolic tradition of hospitality, while the third point prescribes the contemporary Christians' practice of hospitality for the other. In light of this, I like to read the Lukan traditional parable of the great banquet (Lk. 14:15-24) as a good metaphor in which the host broke boundaries and invited the excluded and marginalized groups.

Many New Testament scholars interpret this banquet as an ecclesiastical image of the messianic meal.[62] In the ecclesiastical image, God's *oikos* can be classified as a classless society with both the rich and the poor, the host and the guest, and it must be crowded with different races and ethnicities without excluding one from another.

As I re-read Luke's parable through the lens of a pluralistic context, I view the host in the parable as the metaphor of the church, while the banquet is the metaphor of Holy Communion and the guests coming to the banquet represent the religious outsiders. I am deeply inspired by how the host willingly breaks the boundaries and invites the excluded groups into the house for the banquet, which represents the church's Eucharistic meal.[63] Reconciliation enclosed in the Eucharist becomes the church's responsibility to extend compassion and generosity to the marginal religious other in particular, as the host in the parable does. In order for God's kingdom to be full as the host's house is full of guests (14:23), the task of the church is to invite the guests to come in.[64] But

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59 Ibid., 208-235.

60 Christian D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 150.

61 Ibid., 3-187.

62 David B. Gowler, *Host, Guest, Enemy and Friend: Portraits of the Pharisees in Luke and Acts* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), 246.

63 Moe, "Being the Church in the Midst of Pagodas," 38.

64 Philip S. Elser, *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts: The Social and Political Motivation in Lukan Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 179.

the question is, if our invitation is rejected. What should we do? Certainly, we should not invite them by force. I would suggest that we should pray and wait. This leads us to the next step.

Finally, I would argue that making a space for the other plays a crucial role in an engaging mission of hospitality. In his book *Reaching Out*,[65] Henri Nouwen writes;

> Hospitality means the creation of a friendly space where a stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Give the guest a chance to talk. Hospitality is not simply to change people, but to offer them where change can come.[66]

Volf also states the reason why we should make a space for the other. Volf writes;

> At the heart of the cross is Christ's stance of not letting the other remain an enemy and of creating a space in Himself for the other to come in. The arms of Christ are open—a sign of space in God's self and an invitation for the other to come in.[67]

In Volf's view, the two dimensions of God's hospitable act through the crucified Christ are important for the moments of Christians' creation of a space for the other to come in. One is God's *self-giving love*, which overcomes hostility and extends hospitality to the other, and the second is *other-receiving love*, which invites and welcomes the other to come into a friendly space.[68] We must admit that the creation of a space for the unknown is not as easy as the creation of a space for friends we know. Yet following Christ who reaches out to everyone, including the enemy at the risk of His life, we ought to de-centralize ourselves and make a space for the other to come in (Matt. 16:24).

Thomas Ogletree reminds us that our costly commitment to following Christ in a risky world must be balanced by "our readiness to enter the world of the other and our willingness to make a hospitable world for the other to come in."[69] Our readiness to reach out to the other and embrace their otherness

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65 Henri J.M Nouwen, *Reaching Out* (London: Fount, 1975). Nouwen calls the creation of a space for the other is the "second movement of spiritual life," while the first movement is called "reaching out to ourselves from loneliness to solitude" and the third movement is "reaching out to God from illusion to prayer," 3-42; 13-126.

66 Ibid., 68-69.

67 Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 126.

68 Ibid., 127.

69 Thomas W. Ogletree, *Hospitality to the Strangers: Dimensions of Moral Understanding* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1985), 4.

and our willingness to make the space for the other to come in our community are basic to who we are as following and embodying Christ who first extends hospitality to the other and embraces otherness (Rom. 15:7).

Engaging and Embracing Missiology as Mutual Transformation: The World without the Other

We come to the concluding section right back where we began. We are living in the same one world with different identities of religio-cultural backgrounds. God creates us not to live in self-enclosing isolation from and discrimination against the other, but to have a mutual relationship with one another in respect. This is the imperative of copying the relational nature of the Trinity. Mark Heim helpfully combines the relational nature of the Trinity (God's identity) with the relational aspect of salvation (God's economic work) which defines our new human identity in Christ. For Heim, salvation is a relational communion with God, fellow humans and other creatures.[70] As Christians, we must copy the relational identity and nature of the Trinity through a right relationship with one another as fellow Christians within the church and as fellow humans outside the church.

Right relation with the religious other as our fellow humans is my focus here. By the world without the religious other, I do not mean that our Christian identity depends on the identity of the other. Rather our identity should be shaped by the identity of the other, and also the other should be shaped by our identity. Thus, when we engage the other and embrace otherness, our primary goal is not to include them into our community by force. This I call "an assimilative missiology." In this sense, inclusivism is different from embracivism.[71] What I like to discuss is an engaging and embracing missiology, which reaches out to the other by crossing the borders as the identity markers for enrichment. The goal of engaging and embracing missiology is mutual "transformation."[72]

Some Christians try to transform the other without being transformed by the other because they misunderstand being transformed by the other as a synonym of being conformed to this world (Rom. 12:2). It is true that God does not want us to be conformed to the immoral form of the secular world, but this does not mean that we are not to learn some moral teaching of other religions for cultivating our Christian faith. I would argue that the "religious

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70 S. Mark Heim, *The Depth of the Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 49-78.

71 For example, see Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 60-64.

72 A good deal of mission as transformation, see *Mission as Transformation: A Theology of the Whole Gospel,* edited Viney Samuel and Chris Sugden (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009).

other is not the mere object for conversion or transformation, but a neighbor to and from whom hospitality must be both given and received."[73] Hospitality is a key for mutual giving and receiving. Angelyn Dries writes, "Hospitality is about relationships in respect and love. The stories convey some type of reciprocity, of transformation/change and mutual learning."[74]

Angelyn Dries reminds us to see hospitality not only as a relational, but also as a transformative dimension of Christian life. "The New Testament metaphor of salvation as reconciliation,"[75] is not just about the right relationship with God and fellow humans, but also about the transformative acceptance of the self by God and the other by us. From a sociological perspective, hospitality is a mutual benefit of giving and receiving through a relational and transformative act of hosts and guests. When hosts and guests are to meet, they have to share their different stories and exchange their insights. However, I will not argue that Christians are always hosts and the religious other are not always guests. Rather I like to treat them as "neighbors" to whom hospitality must be both given and received for mutual information and transformation. Mutual information through an act of sharing different stories and exchanging their insights creates the mutual transformation of each group.

In making my case, I like to re-read Acts 10 as a contextual text for why an engaging and embracing missiology is urgent for mutual transformation. This text shows the story of respectful engagement and mutual embrace between Peter (Jewish follower of Christ) and Cornelius (Gentile religious outsider). Reading this text through the contemporary lens, Peter represents a Christian, while Cornelius represents a religious outsider. What is significant in this story is the idea of salvation as a universal reconciliation.[76] According to Luke Timothy Johnson, God's embracing story of the Gentile Cornelius expresses "the most critical phase of the expansion of God's people."[77] This demands for the reconciling relationship between Peter (Jew) and Cornelius (Gentile) through engagement of the religio-ethnic border-crossing and mutual acceptance of perceiving one another as God's image and new humanity in Christ.

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73 Yong, *Hospitality and the Other*, see the back cover.

74 Angelyn Dries, "Hospitality as a Stance in Mission: Elements from Catholic Mission Experience in the Twentieth Century," in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 39. No. 4. (October 2015): 194-197 (here p. 196).

75 Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, see the back cover of the book.

76 Beverly B. Gaventa, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 55.

77 Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 186.

In order to interact with each other in respect, Peter and Cornelius made a hospitable space where there is no room for hostility. They realized the presence and power of the Spirit in their midst (Acts 10:33). It is through their interaction by the power of the Spirit that Peter and Cornelius were transformed or converted—Cornelius was transformed as a new believer and Peter was transformed into a new way of experiencing God as the "One who shows no partiality" (Acts 10:30). One's transformation is radical, which gives a new space/heart for Jesus to come in, and the other's transformation is by renewal, which "gives a new space for the other to experience oneness in Christ."[78] This story serves a crucial model for the church's continued transformation and her continued "transmission of Christian faith into other faiths."[79] Too often, Christians think that conversion or transformation is just a radical event, but by looking at the transformative life of Peter, we come to realize that conversion or transformation is also a process. From this follows two suggestions for how mutual transformation is possible.

First, it is important to see conversion not just as an event, but also as a process. The event of conversion is a moment when one is convinced psychologically and responds to Christ as his/her Savior. This is a movement of self-realization that we are sinners and Jesus is our Savior. In this regard, conversion is closely related to salvation. Salvation and conversion are not synonymous. Making a distinction between conversion and salvation is important because "salvation is the work of Christ, whereas conversion is the human's work of response to divine salvation."[80] However, the two are closely related to each other in the context of which we see conversion as both an event and a process. Salvation is offered as a gift for all (Eph. 2:8). But human response is needed. Human response is enabled by the work of the Holy Spirit (Phil. 2:13), just as it happened in the conversion of Cornelius.[81] Likewise, the gradual conversion or transformation of Peter is possible through a combination of his own commitment to change and the power of the Holy Spirit. In his book *The Continuing Conversion of the Church*, noted missiologist Darrell Guder argues that conversion is not just an event, but a continuing process. He writes;

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78   Lalsangkima Pachuau, "Vulnerability and Empowerment in Crossing Frontier: A Christian Theology of Mission," in *Asbury Journal*, Vol. 68. No. 2 (Fall 2013): 78-94 (here p. 85).

79   For example, see Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995), 16-25.

80   Gordon T. Smith, "Conversion and Redemption," in *The Oxford Handbook of Evangelical Theology*, edited by Gerald McDermott (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010): 209-221.

81   Gerald R. McDermott and Harold Netland, *A Trinitarian Theology of Religions: An Evangelical Proposal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 161.

> The Holy Spirit began the conversion of the church at Pentecost and has continued that conversion through the pilgrimage of God's people from the first century up to now. The conversion of the church will be the continuing work of God's spirit until God completes the good work began in Jesus Christ.[82]

This statement affirms the need of the continuing conversion of a believer. Second, Richard Peace rightly states that "Christian conversion involves repentance from sin, turning to Christ and it results in life gradual transformation."[83] The human response to God's salvation is the beginning of a process in which converted believers are transformed into the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29). In the context of being transformed into the image of Christ, salvation involves sanctification, holiness, and glorification. This sequence of salvation does not just occur after conversion. This began at the moment of God's once-for-all-justification and its gradual aspect of transformation continues to occur in the life of a new believer. We may argue that the event of conversion has more to do with one's psychological or personal transformation, while the process of conversion has more to do with the ethical or moral transformation, but the choice is not either personal or moral transformation. The choice is "both-and," and the ultimate goal is moral transformation in the process of becoming more like Christ.

In their book *A Trinitarian Theology of Religions*, Gerald McDermott and Harold Netland rightly remind us that all religions have "theological differences, yet moral similarities."[84] I agree that there are theological differences, yet moral similarities among religions. In relation to theological differences, Karl Barth writes, "the doctrine of the Trinity is what basically distinguishes the Christian doctrine of God in contrast to all other possible doctrines of gods."[85] Indeed no religious founder, such as Mohammed, Confucius, or Buddha can be claimed to be eternal gods in the flesh. "The Christian central doctrine of the crucified and risen Christ is nonnegotiable in world religions."[86]

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82 Darrell L. Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000, 206.

83 Richard V. Peace, "Conversion," in *Global Dictionary of Theology*, edited by William A. Dyrness and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008): 196-197.

84 Gerald R. McDermott and Harold Netland, *A Trinitarian Theology of Religions: An Evangelical Proposal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 193-196.

85 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God*, vol. 1.1. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1936), 301.

86 McDermott and Netland, *A Trinitarian Theology of Religions*, 193.

However, all religions have moral teachings. No other religion has ever taught that cheating, stealing, committing adultery, and murdering are all morally permissible. "All the religions agree at least on the second table of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:12-17), which teach about the right relationship with fellow human beings and God (or whatever they call ultimate reality)."[87] Although they may interpret and apply them differently, the religions never agree on the basic principles behind the commandments.[88] Thus, in our reaching out to the religious other, it is important for Christians to recognize the ethical bridge between Christians and other religions not only as point of contact for proclaiming the gospel of salvation, but also as a source for cultivating our moral faith.

Learning from the ethics of the religious other is imperative for mutual transformation. McDermott and Netland offer two suggestions. First, Christians must remember that the "full meaning of the Christian faith is greater than our perception of it, and the lives of religious outsiders can sometimes help us see better what actually is inside."[89] The Buddhist eightfold path of morality, meditation, and wisdom could enrich Christian moral life. Christian life is not a lawless life. Moral law plays a crucial role in cultivating our ethical faith for sanctification. In Philippians 2:12, Paul exhorts Christians "to cultivate our salvation." Similarly in Ephesians 2:9, Paul reminds us that Christ does not simply save *from* something (the power of sin and death) but also *for* something good (transformative life into the likeness of Christ). Salvation does not end when we are converted and baptized into Christ. Our conversion and being justified is just the beginning. We need to further allow the Spirit to dwell in our hearts so that we can be transformed into the likeness of Christ by cultivating our minds (Rom. 12:2).

Second, Jesus as a Jew by his human identity deliberately uses the Samaritan from a different religious and ethnic background as a moral exemplar to teach his disciples and "Christians for thousands of years what it means to be a moral neighbor in an immoral world (Lk. 10:25-37)."[90] This shows that God may use the moral religious other as His image to help the moral life of Christianity. McDermott and Netland argue that the Dalai Lama's genuine forgiveness of his enemy, the Chinese murderers of the innocent lives of his fellow Tibetans "helps many Christians to understand what Jesus means by forgiveness,"[91] in a violent world caused by enemies. In addition, Confucian moral virtue plays

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87 Ibid., 194. See also Ronald M. Green, "Morality and Religion," in the *Encyclopedia of Religion*, edited by Mircea Eliade (New York: McMillan, 1989): 10-99.

88 Ibid., 194-195.

89 McDermott and Netland, *A Trinitarian Theology of Religions,* 199.

90 Ibid., 199.

91 Ibid., 199.

a crucial role in applying Christ's Golden Rule (Matt 7:12) as the reciprocal relationship among human beings. Confucius can enrich Christians by helping them know what we mean by Christ's Golden Rule in our moral relation in our family, church, and society.[92]

If the moral teachings of other religions can shape us to be moral disciples of Christ in partnership with the moral teaching of the Bible, it is no longer possible for us to merely convert the religious other without being transformed by their ethical insights. In the process of interaction with each other and embracing otherness, mutual transformation must occur by the power of the Spirit. This is what happened to Peter and Cornelius and this means that engaging the other and embracing otherness is not only for the sake of the other from the perspective of transmitting the Christian faith, but also for the sake of ourselves from the perspective of ethical transformation.

Thus, we must see mission as a two-way communication between a Christian and the religious other in love and respect. Moreover, it is important for Christians to understand that in our reaching out to the other, we do not simply bring God to the other, rather we bring the gospel. We do not bring God to them because God has already been there prior to our reaching out to them. But since they do not know God (Acts 17:23), we make God comprehensible to them through the gospel and through their moral insights. [93]

Andrew Walls is right when he said, "God accepts all humans as they are and where they are with their cultural identities and God transforms them into the image of Christ."[94] The former is what he calls the "indigenizing principle," which tends to localize the gospel through local religious cultures, and the latter "the pilgrim principle," which tends to universalize the gospel.[95] As God's pilgrims, we are called to continually go beyond our comfort zones to transmit Christian faith into other faiths or proclaim the gospel of salvation as reconciliation and redemption by learning their cultures and by appreciating what is moral in them as sources for transforming our ethical faith and building their new faith. I affirm that the religious other is not the mere object for conversion, but the neighbor to and from whom ethical insights must be both given and received for cultivating a Christian faith of holiness. Christian faith is

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92 Ibid., 200. For Confucian teaching, see Confucius, *The Analects*, translated and edited by D.C. Lau (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1979, 7.23; 3.13; 7.35.

93 See my article David Thang Moe, "Adoniram Judson as a Dialectical Missionary who brought the Gospel (not God), and Gave the Bible," *in Missiology: An International Review*, Vol. 45. No. 3. (July 2017). This article appears online first, see the link http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0091829617701085 (accessed May 29, 2017).

94 Ibid., 54.

95 Ibid., 53-54.

not only about believing in Christ as Savior and Lord, but also about reflecting the holy nature of the Trinity (Lev. 11:44). Thus, it is right to conclude that the relational and transformative aspect of salvation is imperative for reflecting the holy and relational nature of the Trinity.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have explored three major themes. The first is the hermeneutics of identity and otherness. I have argued that we must learn to see our primary identity as a member of the same human family. This primary identity is grounded in the image of God and is reformed in Christ as new humanity. I have also argued that although our primary identity is grounded in the same creator, we are different from one another. My focus is on religious difference or otherness. In light of this, I have suggested that we must see the religious other as both the image of God and neighbor. In the same way a Christian must be seen as part of the body of Christ without ceasing to see the Christian-self as the image of God. In other words, God's creation and His plan of new creation or reconciliation are the starting points for a right construction of the identity and perception of the self and the other.

The second theme is the methodological question of how a Christian should engage the other who is different from us. Arguing against the assimilative and hostile ideas of homogenizing and colonizing the other, I have employed hospitality as a relational tool for engaging the other and embracing otherness. This theme emphasizes the relational nature of the triune God and the external expression of salvation froom a relational aspect. We must copy the relational aspect of the Trinity as the model for our respectful engagement with our fellow humans—both Christians and non-Christians. What I have demonstrated in this section is the importance of seeing the other as the other and to see otherness not as a diving wall, but rather as an identity marker.

The third theme stresses the teleological concern of mutual transformation through a critical engagement and mutual embrace of one another. This theme emphasizes salvation not only from a relational aspect, but also as a transformative aspect of mutual acceptance and recognition in the name of Christ. The goal of mission is not only to convert other faiths to Christ by the power of the Spirit, but also to allow Christians themselves to be converted morally in a new way of experiencing Christ. Recognizing diversity as God's gift to the world, we must interpret the gospel not only through our eyes, but also through the eyes of the other without compromising the integrity of the truth of the gospel, so that we will see the full meaning of the gospel for the whole world.

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