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*Vulnerability and Empowerment in Crossing Frontiers: A
Christian Theology of Mission*

Abstract

This paper was presented in Asbury Theological Seminary, on May 9, 2013, at Dr. Lalsangkima Pachuau's installation in the J.W. Beeson Chair of Christian Mission. In this essay, he explores the frontier crossing aspects of mission theology in the light of a Trinitarian view of the *missio Dei*. In particular, he examines the account of Peter and Cornelius crossing the Jewish-Gentile frontier in the book of Acts.

Keywords: Trinity, frontier crossing, *missio Dei*, Cornelius, mission

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Introduction¹: A “Meeting” of Two Strangers

It is with a sense of great honor and gratitude that I receive this appointment as the J. W. Beeson Chair of Christian Mission at Asbury Theological Seminary. This professorial chair is named after Dr. John Wesley Beeson at the bequest of his children. In associating my name with this chair, I cannot but contrast and compare my life’s experience with that of J. W. Beeson. Not only are we persons of different times—just about a century separates us—we are men of different continents, culture, and ethnicity. If two strangers are to meet, they have to move toward each other, crossing frontiers. Indeed that seems to have happened most obviously on my part, but also significantly on Dr. Beeson’s. Meeting and befriending strangers is an essential and important part of the developmental process in human life, and in an institution’s life. Dr. John Wesley Beeson had a long and successful career in educational administration. He served as President in three different colleges, and these three colleges were all known under his name. His biographer James T. Dawson tells us that “there existed . . . three Beeson Colleges, namely the Meridian Female College, the Meridian Male College, and the Conservatory of Music.”² If he was best remembered among intellectuals and educationists for these colleges, he may have been best remembered by farmers and agriculturists for his invention of a potato drying procedure. In a memorial article, the late Joel D. Jones wrote,

So he designed the first “potato dry house” ever built, and all over the nation his exploits were published. The International Harvester Company, the Southern Railway, and finally the United States Department of Agriculture published the process in pamphlet form. Millions of dollars have been added to the income of the South because of the process J. W. Beeson invented and freely gave to the Southern farmer.³

After a successful career of 23 years, J. W. left educational administration and entered the insurance business with Liberty National Life. His two sons Dwight Moody and Ralph Waldo joined him in this business with great success. The fruit of this success through their generous hearts and Christian commitments created this chair among others.

If J. W. Beeson’s life story is traced as a movement from educational administration to business, mine is a shift in the opposite direction, namely from business to education and partially now to administration. If we were not moving toward each other, the meeting point, which we celebrate today, would not have happened! We both have crossed several important frontiers on the way. Till my late teens and early twenties, I saw myself as heading to become a businessman in my small corner of the world. At the touching of the Holy Spirit, my life changed, and so did the direction. No one, myself included, understood how a young man in a promising business with some

experiences pointing to a career in politics ahead of him could become an itinerant evangelist travelling to remote villages with no earthly promise of success. After several decades of bumpy but meaningful ministerial experience (since 1981) and theological education (since 1986), here am I “meeting” a stranger in a faraway land. Today, I cannot but reflect on the theology of crossing frontiers. To cross frontiers can be both exciting and exacting. It carries a promise of empowerment if one is willing to pay the price of vulnerability.

What I call “frontiers” here can easily be substituted with the term “boundaries” in the way I will use it. As Michèle Lamont and Virág Molnár said, the idea of boundaries (both symbolic and social boundaries) has come to occupy an influential place in various studies in social sciences.⁴ As an analytical tool in socio-political studies, the interest seems to follow the Western psychosocial usage that treats boundaries with a sense of high respect as a mark of individual identity and responsibilities. Richard Miller has rightly said, “Boundaries are important because they define an order of being and value.”⁵ If a boundary refers primarily to what is bounded, a frontier refers to what is beyond. Boundary refers mostly to what is familiar whereas frontier may refer to what is unknown. In crossing a boundary, we step into another (bounded) property. In crossing a frontier, we enter a supposedly unused and unknown territory. Thus I choose the frontier metaphor without excluding some of the good implications associated more closely with the boundary-crossing metaphor.

God’s Frontier-Crossing Mission

Christianity proper began with the Christ-event (the coming, the ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ) in the history of the world. Christ’s coming into the world occupies the heart of Christianity. It is the meaning of this coming, including its purpose, its outcome and its different implications, that becomes the center of our life’s undertaking as servants of Christ’s church. We can reflect on this coming from the divine to the human in various ways from different starting points and angles.

If the synoptic gospels tell the story of what Jesus came to do and accomplished around the theme of God’s Kingdom, the Apostle Paul expounded the meaning and purpose of Christ’s coming. In coming to the world, Christ taught, lived and inaugurated God’s Kingdom, laying the claim of God’s reign in the world. What he accomplished according to God’s covenantal promise of grace is the salvation offered to all by working out the redemption of human beings and all of creation and their reconciliation with God. The gospel of John powerfully simplified the whole process in one stroke by saying, “Because God so loved the world and he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal

life” (John 3:16). God in His Son Jesus Christ came to the world because He loves the world. Jesus was sent into the world, just as he and the Father sent the Holy Spirit into the world. This is the basic foundation of the missionary nature of Christianity.

A religion is missionary if its basic tenets are universal. I define a missionary religion to be a religion that is open to all human beings (or all creatures) by its very nature, teaching, and service. A missionary religion’s message is meant for and addressed to all, irrespective of nationality, race, class, or region of origin and identity. It is a religion whose message possesses a promise for all and invites all to its fold. Catholicity or universality is the basic condition of being a missionary religion.

To invite and proclaim its message to all, a missionary religion is hospitable and self-committing in nature to the life of others beyond its four walls. As such it crosses frontiers to invest in the affairs of those beyond its boundaries.

In crossing the divine-human frontier in the person of the Son, God’s investment is high; God paid a costly price, the life of the Son. Christianity is symbolized by the hanging of its Savior on the cross, perhaps the most humiliating religious symbol. As our discussion on the relational mutuality of the three divine persons of the Godhead will indicate, the crucifixion of Jesus Christ is the crucifixion of God. Quoting Karl Barth’s expression that the “crucified Jesus is the ‘image of the indivisible God,’” Jürgen Moltmann said, “the meaning [of Jesus Christ crucified] is that *this* is God, and God is like *this*.”⁶ The symbol of the cross itself is the symbol of suffering and vulnerability. Yet, the humiliating cross is the way of Christ which he also prescribed for his followers saying, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it” (Luke 9:23-24, also see Matt. 16:24-25; Mark 8:34-35). The divine pathos is a theme that has distinguished Judeo-Christian religion from its neighboring Greek religions. Christ’s suffering seen in connection with the suffering Servant in Isaiah recurred in apostolic teaching. The First Epistle of Peter is about the meaning of suffering as followers of Christ. As Floyd Filson said many years ago, “This letter speaks of suffering which Christians undergo precisely because they are Christians.”⁷ The Apostle Paul often related his own suffering as a servant-follower of Christ, even to the point of saying that in his suffering in the flesh, he is “completing what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church” (Col. 1:24). Not that Christ’s redemptive suffering is insufficient, needing completion, but that suffering is a sign of being a part of the messianic community and of participating in the affliction of Christ.⁸

The theology of the cross does not end with the death of Christ, but in the resurrection and ascension of the crucified Son of God. As such, death,

resurrection and ascension belong together as parts of a single event. Moltmann explained the theme of “the crucified God” as “the theology of the cross,” saying it means, *inter alia*, “comprehending the crucified Christ in the light and context of his resurrection, and therefore of freedom and hope.”⁹ Christians understood the cross not for its own sake, but for the sake of Jesus Christ crucified and risen. As the Christological hymn of Paul in Philippians clearly shows, the *kenosis* (or emptying), the humility and the extreme obedience of Christ to the point of death led to the highest exaltation by God (Phil. 2:5-11). The losing of life for Christ’s sake is to gain life in Christ. The crucifixion, with all the pains that accompany it, is to be held in tension with the glorious resurrection by Christians in their faith and way of life. Several times Paul reminded the Christians of the combination, so to speak, of suffering in the name of Christ with the promise of life and glory in the resurrection to come. To the Romans, he said, “we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him” (Rom. 8:17). To the Philippians, he wrote that he shared the sufferings of Christ “by becoming like him in his death” with the hope to “attain the resurrection from the dead” (Phil. 3:10). Yet understanding the crucifixion and resurrection as a single event is not to minimize the depth of the pain, suffering, and humiliation on the cross, but to see its goal and meaning.

“Mission” is not a biblical term, but it is a biblical concept. The term that can be most closely associated with it in the New Testament is “send” or “sending” (Greek *pempein* and *apostellein*) with a task to be accomplished. The task of saving the world and the sending-mission cannot be separated. Biblically, sending has to be considered as a semantic concept, and that concept cannot be limited to the two terms *pempein* and *apostellein*.¹⁰ The Gospel of John seems clearest in its avowal of the sending of Jesus by God the Father. The identity of being sent by God the Father is a theological statement for John in his assertion of Jesus’ oneness with the father (John 10:30). The gospel argues its main thesis that Jesus is the Messiah (John 20:31) by asserting his being “from above” (John 8:23) and sent by the Father into the world (John 17:18, 20:21). John clearly emphasized the significance of the theology of sending in the salvation proceeding in Christ. Other New Testament writers who do not give the same emphasis seem to presume the act of “sending” and focus on the salvation event. Paul stated that God sent his son ... in order to redeem those under the law” (Gal. 4:4-5). Rudolph Bultmann observed that “sending” has its counterpart “coming”, and that “His [Jesus] coming and going belong together in one unit.”¹¹ The act of giving the Son to the world by way of becoming fully human discloses God’s loving and gracious nature to the world. The very revelation of God’s nature is the mission of the incarnation. Prodded by the doctrine of God’s incarnation in Christ, Christians came to conceive of God as Tri-unity, or Trinity.

The noted missiologist of the twentieth century, David Bosch of South Africa, informed us that mission as a theological concept was first used in reference to the doctrine of the Trinity. In fact, the term was exclusively used this way until the sixteenth century when the term and concept began to be used (first by the Jesuits) in reference to the spread of Christian faith among non-Christians.¹² The Eastern Church's economic Trinity, duly influenced by the Cappadocian fathers, takes the three persons of the Godhead as the starting point and stresses their distinct characteristics and their mutuality while giving due emphasis to the oneness of God. It is in respect to the inner relations among the three persons in the one substance (*ousia*) of Godhead that the language of divine relational movement, that is, the Son is "begotten" and the Spirit "proceeds" from the Father, which translates to the Triune God's mission, is conceived.¹³ The Western Church's interpretive starting point of the Trinity on the essential unity of God, under the influence of Augustine,¹⁴ may not mark this inner communal relationality of the Trinity as well as the Eastern Church's. As a noted contemporary Eastern Orthodox theologian, Timothy Ware puts it, "God is not simply a single person confined within His own being, but a Trinity of three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each of whom 'dwells' in the other two by virtue of perpetual movement of love."¹⁵ One of the three Cappadocian fathers, Gregory of Nyssa, in the fourth century, also explained this inner relational movement of the Trinity in the "operation of God" very well. He wrote, "But in the case of the divine nature, we do not believe that the Father does anything by himself in which the Son is not also involved. Again, we do not believe that the Son acts on his own apart from the Holy Spirit. Rather, every operation of God upon his creation is named according to our conceptions of it, and takes its *origin* from the Father, *proceeds* through the Son, and is *perfected* in the Holy Spirit."¹⁶

This divine inter-communing manner of "operation" of the Trinity explains the Son's incarnation and the Holy Spirit's comforting and empowering movement. Originating in the Father's love, the Son's incarnation and the Spirit's charismatic procession crossed the divine-human frontier. Thomas Oden has fittingly expressed this crossing over between the divine and the human in the incarnation when he said, "God became flesh not by changing into another reality, but by assumption (*assumptio carnis*), by entering the human mode of being without ceasing to be God."¹⁷ As the Council of Chalcedon affirmed, in his incarnation, Jesus is "consubstantial with the Father according to divinity, and consubstantial with us according to human nature."¹⁸ God entered human history to identify with, to redeem, to comfort and to empower human beings. To affirm God the Son to be fully human, as daring and incredible as this is, is to affirm the mission of God in crossing the God-human frontier. The Trinitarian communion of love is extended to the whole creation in this frontier-crossing act of love to redeem us, identify

with us, and reconcile us with God.¹⁹ Thus, the theology of mission finds its origin in the self-disclosure of God, in the sending of the second and third persons of the Trinity.

The Church's Frontier-Crossing Witness in the World

The modern missionary movement has seized the concept of mission from its Trinitarian origin. Perhaps, that was necessary to push Christians out from their territorially established comfort zones to cross new frontiers in witnessing to their faith. If the divine-human frontier-crossing *missio Dei* is perceived as a vertical movement, the missionary call of Christians to their fellow human beings and other creatures may be described as a horizontal frontier-crossing movement. As mentioned before, the term “mission” is a latecomer in Christian history whereas the enterprise we come to call “missionary” is as old as Christianity itself. The earliest history of the church is a history of missions. By this, we mean that the earliest story of the church is about the frontier-crossing witness to the risen Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. To glean from the history of the early church what this means, we turn to the Acts of the Apostles, focusing the attention on the narrative surrounding Cornelius' conversion in chapter 10 and 11.

“Because Luke's story contains overlapping chronological, geographical, and cultural components and markers, we can ‘outline’ Acts in more than one way,”²⁰ said Craig Keener in his exegetical commentary on the Acts of the Apostles. The approach one takes influences one's understanding and interpretation to some extent. Howard Clark Kee lists three major ways of reading the book of Acts, namely as history, as literature, and as theology.²¹ While one may choose to take one of these three as a point of entry and thus structure the book accordingly, one cannot dismiss any of the three components because they are all intricately related in the book. There is no denying that what Luke intended to show is “the expansion of the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome,”²² as Keener puts it. While the geographical expansion is obvious, the expansion is also cultural, social, and theological as Luke shows the emerging Christian community's self-understanding, growing faith experience, and deepening *apologia* to the world. In connection with the developing social identity of the church, Ben Witherington has rightly phrased Luke's accomplishment in Acts when he said “In a single stroke [Luke] provided early Christianity with a sense of definition, identity, and legitimization....”²³

In her commentary on the Acts of the Apostles, Beverly Gaventa identified two “climactic” events of the book “as keys to the Lukan map”²⁴ and structured the outline of the book around them. The first one is “the inclusion of Cornelius in 10:1-11:18” which showed that “God intends to extend the gospel to the Gentiles.” The other is “the final defense speech of Paul in

chapter 26” in which Luke established in “fullest form God’s commitment to extend the gospel to Jew and Gentile alike.”²⁵ Although the geographical expansion of the early church from Jerusalem to Judea, to Samaria, and all the way to Rome is very important in the book of Acts, the extension of the gospel to the Gentiles is central in the book. In the middle part of the book (roughly chapters 10 to 15) Luke carefully shows, using different stories and characters, how the church first admitted the Gentiles. Beginning with the story of Cornelius (Acts 10:1-11:18) as the turning point, the story of the church in Antioch (Acts 11:19-30) further reinforces the Gentile inclusion with the translation of the core Christological title of Jesus for the Gentile audience. The ministry of Paul and Barnabas in chapters 13 and 14 shows the practical outreach to the Gentiles as Paul and Barnabas clearly testified in Antioch of Pisidia when they said, “Since you [Jews] reject it . . . we are now turning to the Gentiles” (Acts 13:46b). The whole discussion climaxed in the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1-35), which cemented Gentile inclusion in agreement with Peter’s words that “we believe we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, just as they [the Gentiles] will” (Acts 15:11) and James’ that “we should not trouble those Gentiles who are turning to God” (Acts 15:19b).

Andrew Walls identifies three crucial changes in the center of gravity of Christianity in its history. The first of these, he said, “was initiated when some unnamed Jewish Christians in Antioch presented the Messiah of Israel as the Lord of the Greeks (Acts 11:20).” The second was the coming of Barbarians in Northern and Western Europe to Christ. The third is “the massive movement towards Christian faith in all the southern continents”²⁶ in the twentieth century. The process of translating the Messiah of Israel to the Lord of the Greeks is what we consider here as it began in the story of Cornelius.

The extension of the gospel to the Gentiles primarily involved crossing ethnic and cultural frontiers and more importantly demanded a compelling theological underpinning. In this regard, the story of Cornelius signifies a major turn in the church’s understanding of the foundational meaning of Jesus Christ in order to include Gentiles. Robert Wall declared, “The taxonomy of God’s universal salvation reaches a watershed moment with the introduction of God-fearing Roman Cornelius.”²⁷ Luke Timothy Johnson also affirmed the Gentile inclusion story of Cornelius to represent “the most critical phase of the expansion of God’s people.”²⁸

Was Cornelius meant to be a typical Gentile when Luke described him as one “who feared God”? With a survey of the Septuagint and further New Testament passages together with a host of scholarly works, Ben Witherington concluded those terms like “proselytes,” “God-fearers” and “God-worshipper” were not technical terms, but general descriptions of Gentiles

who worshipped the true God and associated with Synagogues.²⁹ In the Acts of the Apostles itself, references to the practice of proselytes and God-fearers are not really different.³⁰ In Luke's writings, Witherington observes that they become a part of "the bridge between Judaism and Christianity."³¹

In a very well structured manner, Luke tells the story of the conversion of Cornelius to show the inclusion of Gentiles in God's salvation with a series of parallel scenes:³²

- (1) Visions of Cornelius (Acts 10: 1-8) and of Peter (Acts 10:9-16)
- (2) Sending by Cornelius (Acts 10:17-23a) and reception by Peter (Acts 10:23b-29)
- (3) Speech by Cornelius (Acts 10:30-33) and by Peter (Acts 10:34-43)
- (4) Confirmation by the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:44-48) and by the community (Acts 11:1-18)

With an intention to see the ethnic and cultural dimensions of the story, let me recount what may be the bare bones of the narrative. The story begins with Cornelius and his vision in Caesarea where he was affirmed and clearly directed by an angel to send to Joppa for Simon Peter, the spiritual leader of the believing community. In a remarkably similar manner, Peter, in Joppa, also had a vision in which he was instructed to eat what his religious tradition considered unclean, which he had reasonably refused to eat based on his religious law of purity. His refusal was rebutted, and Peter was commanded in God's name to accept what his tradition had called profane. In this puzzling situation, Peter received the men sent by Cornelius as instructed by the Spirit. Accompanied by some believers, Peter went to Caesarea, entered the house of Cornelius, and met him and his relatives. As he explicitly affirmed, his entry into the Gentile home was in clear violation of his Jewish tradition but in obedience to God. In response, Cornelius related his testimony of the vision. He attested to what God has done to him and the great expectation of what God was going to do with him and his relatives.

Peter, then, delivered his sermon with a confessional statement "I now realize how true it is that God shows no partiality' between Jew and Gentile."³³ He then recounted the story and true identity of Jesus as the one ordained by God to judge the whole world. The main content of Peter's sermon was not very different from his earlier sermons³⁴ although he is much less defensive and is edifying in his tone.³⁵ Placing Jesus in the larger story of Israel, he said that Jesus Christ, anointed by the Holy Spirit, came to preach peace, heal people, and do good. An implicit question may be "Didn't Jesus come only to the Jews?" Peter answered this by declaring, "he is Lord of all" (Acts v. 36b). "They put him to death by hanging on the cross, but God raised him

on the third day and allowed him to appear ... to us as witnesses" (Acts 10:39-41). The focal point is the forgiveness of sin for those who believe him. Compared to his earlier sermons, what is different here is its emphatic introductory statement of the impartiality and universality of God, followed by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Gentile listeners even as he was still speaking. The impartiality of God is a theme also found in the Old Testament. But the mention of God's impartiality in the Old Testament, as Gaventa rightly said, "has a far more limited function;" it always referred to those within Israel. "Here, as in early Christian literature," continues Gaventa, "impartiality becomes a fundamental theological claim (as also in Rom. 2:11)."³⁶

This story is recounted and referred to several times in the book of Acts with due care³⁷ as a radical turning point for the early church in embracing Gentiles to its fold. The narrative significantly emphasizes God's spiritual intervention showing the decisiveness of the work and experience of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church. In a supernatural manner, both Peter and Cornelius were directed towards each other, breaking existing barriers to cross the frontier line for mutual acceptance between Gentiles and Jews as directed by the Spirit. In his sermon, Peter presented Jesus as one anointed by God "with the Holy Spirit and power." What persuaded the existing Jewish church to accept and embrace these new Gentile believers, although grudgingly at first, was the fact that these Gentiles received the same Holy Spirit that had confirmed and had strengthened the earlier (Jewish) believers. The crucial nature of the story is such that it became a point of reference for the church as it continued to grow. In the recounting of the event, emphasis is always placed on the experience of the Holy Spirit by the unbaptized Gentiles. "Nowhere else does Luke narrate an event in which the gift of the Holy Spirit comes before baptism."³⁸

Another point of interest is the manner by which the Spirit interacted with the two men. Appearing to Cornelius, the angel affirmed Cornelius and his prayers and gave him clear direction. What is notable here is Cornelius' openness to be led by God. He was expectant of God's word from Peter saying, "we are here in the presence of God to listen..." (v. 33b). On the other hand, the voice Peter heard contradicted Peter and even rebuffed his former way of believing. As Cornelius was turning to God to be instructed and touched by Him, Peter was turned from his earlier way to a new way of believing. The traffic of interaction does not seem to be one-way, but two. Both men were transformed, one toward believing, the other toward a new way of believing that gave new room for the other as they encountered their oneness in Christ. Perhaps this is also a reminder to existing believers that they need to continually reform and be transformed as they transmit the gospel to others and interact with new cultures. Darrell Guder rightly suggests that the church is always in need of conversion. He said, "The Holy Spirit

began the conversion of the church at Pentecost and has continued that conversion throughout 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."³⁹

Thus, the theology of Gentile inclusion is deeply spiritual with the active and explicit involvement of the Holy Spirit who directs both existing believers and inquirers to the focal point of Jesus Christ. It rests on God's universal salvation and Christ's Lordship above all. On the other hand, it disturbed the existing believing community as it pushed them toward new frontier lines in their ways of believing and service. The crossing of new cultural frontiers by engaging the meaning of the gospel in new cultural settings and at the boundary between cultures is never easy. Faith-understanding and socio-cultural identity (or social self-consciousness) are closely related in human life. Thus, every missionary religion seems to struggle with how faith is transmitted across cultural boundaries. At the heart of the early Christian story of transmitting faith from the Jewish enclave into the Gentile arena is this painful but significant struggle to intersect the gospel with those beyond the believing community and not like them. Furthermore and significantly, the interactive nature we delineate between Cornelius and Peter shows that the cultural interaction involved both giving and receiving. The traffic, as we have said, is two-way. In other words, it is not just crossing cultural lines, but engagement in intercultural interaction where each party is to learn anew God's voice in the very process of the interaction.

Conclusion

As social beings, our human life in general and communal-religious life in particular is defined by our social interactions. Crossing new frontiers or boundaries in various aspects of life is a part of our essential identity. Acquisition of knowledge itself is largely about extending the frontiers in our personal or social life. While any new frontier can be a challenge as it presents us with dangers of the unknown and makes us vulnerable to the unfamiliar world, limiting ourselves to the familiar prevents us from acquiring new knowledge. We all build our comforting zones through familiarization. Cessation from the process of familiarization is a sign of decaying. On the other hand, the axiom that "knowledge is power"⁴⁰ means that knowledge empowers us even as we become liable to a discomfiting exposure. As pilgrims in the world, we are called to continually extend the frontiers of our life.

If theology of mission is rooted in the biblical concept of sending or commissioning, crossing frontiers is an essential part in the process. One may ask, "Is not the task for which one is sent more important than the sending itself?" This brief study assumes that sending is a part of the task itself and that it cannot be isolated from the task. This is because the task itself involves

sending, especially the self-sacrifice of the one sent. Yet, we recognize the task to be more than the process. In the crossing of the divine-human frontiers, the task God accomplished is the salvation⁴¹ of the world. The task of Christians, so to speak, in their crossing of geographical, cultural, social, and personal frontiers is to participate in, and to witness to, the saving work of God in Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. We participate in God's saving work both as recipients of God's graceful salvation and witnesses of the saving work itself. Because Christian mission can be done only in Christ's way, carrying the cross of vulnerability and suffering is a part of the task.

The promise of Christ's presence with the disciples as he sent them out (Matt. 28: 20) is a promise of empowerment. As evidenced at Pentecost and in the subsequent ministries of the apostles, the power of the Holy Spirit accompanies the faithful as they cross new frontiers in witnessing to the saving work of God in Christ.

End Notes

¹ I am very thankful to Dr. Dale Walker who proofread this paper carefully. If there are any errors and mistakes in the writing and in the presentation of ideas and thoughts, they are mine.

² James D. Dawson, *John Wesley Beeson and the Beeson Colleges* (Birmingham, AL: Samford University Press, 1995), 3.

³ Joel D. Jones, "John Wesley Beeson Made Impact on Education; Drying Potatoes," *The Democrat Reporter*, June 1, 1944. Republished "Old Times History of Marengo County, by The Late Joel D. Jones, John Wesley Beeson made impact on education; dry potatoes," *The Democrat Reporter*, April 5, 2007, p. 2. (<http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=2159&dat=20070405&id=mepfAAAIIBAJ&sjid=dw4GAAAIBAJ&pg=2987,2021049> last access December 24, 2012).

⁴ Michèle Lamont and Virág Molnár, "The Study of Boundaries in Social Sciences," *Annual Review of Sociology* 28 2002:167-168.

⁵ Richard B. Miller, "Christian Attitudes toward Boundaries: Metaphysical and Geographical," in *Christian Political Ethics*, ed. John A. Coleman, S.J. (Princeton and Oxfordshire: Princeton University Press, 2008), 68.

⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (New York et al.: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1973), 205. Somewhat qualifying the possible consequence of his thought-provoking title *The Crucified God*, Moltmann further stated "Jesus' death cannot be understood 'as the death of God', but only as death *in* God" (207).

⁷ Floyd V. Filson, "Partakers in Christ: Suffering in First Peter," *Interpretation* 9, No. 4 1955:400.

⁸ Andrew T. Lincoln, *NIB* 11, 614.

⁹ Moltmann, 4.

¹⁰ In his study of the mission concept in the fourth gospel, Andreas Köstenberger employed a semantic field approach around these two and included

several other terms “involving movement from one place to another.” They are: come, go, become, descend, ascend, leave, follow, bring, leave, and gather. He identified sixteen clusters of these terms. (See Andreas J. Köstenberger, *The Missions of Jesus and the Disciples according to the Fourth Gospel* [Grand Rapids, MI, and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1998], 27-37.) Reading the list, one realizes the difficulty in exhausting all the related terms. For instance John uses the word “give” in 3:16, which is not included, although its usage here is almost synonymous with “send.”

¹¹ Rudolph Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* 2, 35.

¹² David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 1.

¹³ For a helpful reflection on ministerial implications of the personhood and mutuality of the Trinity, see Stephen A. Seamands, *Ministry in the Image of God: The Trinitarian Shape of Christian Service* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2005).

¹⁴ Justo L. Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought*, Vol. 1 (Nashville and New York: Abingdon Press, 1970), 338. The idea that Augustine’s theology of the Trinity is in “sharp contrast” has been opposed by a number of theologians in recent years (see Keith E. Johnson, *Rethinking the Trinity and Religious Pluralism: An Augustinian Assessment* Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011, 54). However, it seems clear that Augustine does not emphasize the communal or relational nature of Trinity.

¹⁵ Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, New edition (London et al.: Penguin Books, 1997), 209.

¹⁶ Quoted from “Gregory of Nyssa on Human Analogies of the Trinity,” in Alister E. McGrath, ed. *The Christian Theology Reader*, Third ed. (Oxford et al.: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 189.

¹⁷ Thomas C. Oden, *The Word of Life*, Systematic Theology: Volume Two (New York: HarperCollins Publisher, 1992), 96.

¹⁸ Quoted in Oden, *ibid.*

¹⁹ Our emphasis here is on the divine-human frontier-crossing mission of God drawing intentionally from the communal-relational nature of the three persons of the Godhead. For other studies of the *missio Dei* drawing missional theology from the three persons of the Trinity for three ways of looking at Christian mission, see Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission* (Grand Rapids, Mich: W. B. Eerdmans, 1995), 19-65, and Timothy C. Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions: A Trinitarian Missiology for the Twenty-First Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2010).

²⁰ Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, Vol. 1, *Introduction and 1:1-2:47* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 576.

²¹ Howard Clark Kee, *To Every Nation Under Heaven: The Acts of the Apostles* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), 11-25. Robert W. Wall followed Kee. See Wall, *NIB* 10, 5-26.

²² Keener, 576.

²³ Ben Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans Pub, 1998), 76.

²⁴ Beverly R. Gaventa, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 55.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 68.

²⁷ Wall, *NIB* 10, 162.

²⁸ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Sacra Pagina, ed. Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 1992), 186.

²⁹ Witherington, 344.

³⁰ Wall, *NIB* 10, 162.

³¹ Witherington, 344.

³² Here I combine and modify the structure as formulated by Gaventa (163) and Witherington (345).

³³ Wall, *NIB* 10:165. NRSV translates this as “I truly understand that God shows no partiality.” Wall’s rendering fits the context better.

³⁴ For a detailed study of Peter’s sermons in Acts, see Hans F. Bayer, “The Preaching of Peter in Acts,” in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, edited by I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson (Grand Rapids, MI, and Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 1998), 257-274.

³⁵ Wall, *NIB* 10, 165.

³⁶ Gaventa, 169.

³⁷ Luke Timothy Johnson wrote “Nowhere else in Luke’s writing do we find such painstaking attention to minute detail at each stage of the action.” Johnson, *Scripture and Discernment: Decision Making in the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 89, quoted by David Lertis Matson and Warren S. Brown, “Turning the Faith: The Cornelius Story in Resonance Perspective,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 33, No. 4 2006:455.

³⁸ Gaventa, 172.

³⁹ Darrell L. Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans Pub, 2000), 206.

⁴⁰ The axiom “knowledge is power” as attributed to Francis Bacon and Michel Foucault’s “power in knowledge” relate the two (knowledge and power) although in seemingly opposite directions. (For a brief discussion, see James K. A. Smith, *Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism?: Taking Derrida, Lyotard and Foucault to Church* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006], 84-86.

⁴¹ The word “salvation” is used here in the broad sense that includes such other biblical terms as redemption, reconciliation, atonement, liberation, healing, et al.

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