

# THE HETEROGENEOUS GLOBAL CHURCH AND INTENTIONAL HOSPITALITY TO THE OTHER

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## Introduction

With the internet, rapid international travel, the global immigration crisis, COVID-19, and recent racial tensions throughout the world, the church is confronted more than ever with challenges and opportunities in diversity and plurality, while remaining the welcoming, living, body of Christ it is intended to be for all people. Tisha M. Rajendra, in her book *Migrants and Citizens: Justice and Responsibility in the Ethics of Immigration*, reports over 215 million people are living away from the country of their citizenship.<sup>1</sup> The top four destination countries are the United States, Saudi Arabia, Germany, and Russia.<sup>2</sup> Those seeking asylum in Europe are not restricted to those from the Middle East. Although Russia is the fourth top destination, its neighboring country Ukraine, has been devastated through the crisis of recent years, and is high on the list of those applying for asylum in Europe.<sup>3</sup> The opportunities for radical Christian hospitality for the church of Europe, Eurasia, The United States, and worldwide are exceptional.

## Homogeneous Church?

In 1970, when Donald A. McGavran published his now classic, *Understanding Church Growth*, he submitted the homogeneous church growth principle: When you put people together with similar characteristics, people will be the most comfortable in like-minded groups, so church growth will occur.<sup>4</sup> McGavran insists “people like to become Christians without crossing tribal, racial, class, or linguistic barriers. Human beings like to become Christians with their own kind of folk.”<sup>5</sup> With respect to statistics, McGavran may be correct, but does a positive growth rate in the church equal a positive church ethic?

<sup>1</sup>Tisha M. Rajendra, *Migrants and Citizens: Justice and Responsibility in the Ethics of Immigration* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017), 1.

<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/top-25-destinations-international-migrants>, accessed June 24, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> See <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34131911>, accessed June 24, 2020. The UN Refugee Agency reports that more than two million Ukrainians have been displaced in recent years, and one million “have sought asylum in neighboring countries. Many fled with barely anything in search of safety.” <https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/ukraine/>, accessed June 24, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Although originally published in 1970, as noted, we will make reference to the revised edition. See Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, Revised and edited by C. Peter Wagner, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 69-71; 176-77.

<sup>5</sup> McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, 238. Cf. x, 46, 172-73.

C. Peter Wagner called for “serious reflection” on this homogeneous principle eight years later due to “a world already torn to pieces by racism, social injustice, discrimination, and genocide.”<sup>6</sup> However, Wagner does not denounce McGavran’s thesis, but supports it. Wagner submits that if homogeneous churches are “formed voluntarily” with an openness to others, in love, then “they should be celebrated.”<sup>7</sup> The foundation for this assertion lies in love: love for creational diversity and a respect for the particularity of particular people groups and their particular cultures.<sup>8</sup> We can understand and appreciate Wagner’s nuanced perspective here. Acknowledging and embracing diversity and particularity are important aspects of human persons. If people are simply merged into some collective mass and their particularities of race, culture, and language are ignored or overlooked in the name of “unity,” are we truly just, multicultural, and non-racist? Wagner is right to emphasize respecting “peoplehood” as “a prerequisite for social harmony in a pluralistic society.”<sup>9</sup> If blending people groups together in our churches is for the erasure of various national cultures, we are certainly doing a disservice to the needed diversity to the global body of Christ. However, Wagner surely goes too far when he claims: “[N]o requirement for people to cross racial, linguistic, or class barriers is built into the demands of the Gospel. When the Gospel moves cross-culturally, it is unloving to require the people of the second culture to adopt the behavior patterns or the language or the socioeconomic level of the preachers or missionaries in order to become Christians.”<sup>10</sup> Contrary to Wagner, we submit that the gospel *does* demand that people cross racial and cultural boundaries. Wagner may be right when he claims it is “unloving” to ask another culture to adapt or take on the culture of the preacher or missionary that is bringing the gospel message. This is a complex matter that we cannot take on at this juncture. Regardless, crossing culture, racial, and class lines for the sake of the gospel is one thing, and requiring others to adopt a particular culture is another. These are separate issues.

The gospel, or good news, is about proclaiming Jesus as Lord and King, declaring that he has vanquished the power of sin, death, and corruption in creation through his life, death, and resurrection. With this proclamation, while awaiting future resurrection, we are invited to participate in his work of re-creation both now and into the eschaton. Granted, this is simplistically stated, and more must be said, but for now this will suffice. The proclamation of this good news (and by nature of being “gospel” or “good news” it assumes its message will be announced/ proclaimed), is for all peoples and nations, as implied clearly in the commonly referred to Great Commission passage (Matt 28:19-20). This is expressed more explicitly in Matt 24:14, where the gospel is to be proclaimed to the entire world. The pattern for this proclamation is so clearly multi-national and cross-cultural throughout the book of Acts, most notably perhaps in the narrative of Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch. Although it is beyond the scope of this article to provide an overall apologetic on the multinational character of the gospel, the New Testament is replete

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<sup>6</sup> C. Peter Wagner, “How Ethical Is the Homogeneous Unit Principle?” *Occasional Bulletin of Missionary Research* 2, no. 1(1978): 12.

<sup>7</sup> Wagner, “How Ethical Is the Homogeneous Unit Principle?” 12.

<sup>8</sup> Wagner, “How Ethical Is the Homogeneous Unit Principle?” 13-14.

<sup>9</sup> Wagner, “How Ethical Is the Homogeneous Unit Principle?” 17.

<sup>10</sup> Wagner, “How Ethical Is the Homogeneous Unit Principle?” 13.

with examples. Responding to this gospel is ultimately about reconciliation between God and humankind, but also between human beings all of whom are created in the image of God while fashioned in marvelous diversity. This requires, in our view, an intentional seeking out of the other as we bear and embrace the gospel. An intentional crossing and intersection of cultures is indeed demanded of and for the gospel.

### Anselm Min's Solidarity of Others

This intentional crossing of cultures mentioned above does not require complete cultural, racial, or linguistic assimilation. But a missional church must be intentional in building post-colonial, multi-cultural, multi-racial bridges. To help us to navigate between an intentional respect for the diversity of particular people groups per Wagner's concern, and the development of cross cultural alliances in the church, we will critically appropriate insights from Anselm Min's paradigm of "solidarity of others" in his assessment of "dialectic of differentiation" and "dialectic of interdependence" from his work, *The Solidarity of Others in a Divided World: A Postmodern Theology after Postmodernism*.<sup>11</sup>

Min begins his overall thesis in this way: "The globalization of the world brings together different groups into common space and produces a twofold dialectic, the dialectic of *differentiation*, in which we are made increasingly aware of differences in nationality, culture, religion, ethnicity, gender, class, language; and the dialectic of *interdependence*, in which we are compelled to find a way of living together despite our differences."<sup>12</sup> In view of our vast diversity, Min calls for a "heterological imperative," meaning a "willingness to subject all our convictions to the challenge of others, their views, their needs, their identity."<sup>13</sup> This does not require, for Min, a pluralist position of abandoning one's own convictions, but it does imply a "pluralistic sensibility:" showing a serious engagement with others and being ready to modify one's perspectives. We do not have a God's eye view of reality, so learning from the other is indispensable.<sup>14</sup>

However, Min takes an interesting direction. Rather than proceeding down the road of diversity and difference (pushing forward from Derridean *différance*), he argues for the "solidarity of the different, the solidarity of strangers, the solidarity of those who are other to one another." Min submits that the unconventional phrase, "solidarity of others," must not be confused with solidarity "with" others. He argues that the usage "with others" may imply a condescending position, as if stepping down to help meet the needs of an impoverished other from a position of greater authority. A solidarity "of" others, however, expresses an equality with others apart from privilege. In this regard, for Min, "other" is used in both an ethical and sociological sense: "In the ethical, Levinasian sense, it means those whose dignity forbids reduction to a system of identity and totality. In the sociological

<sup>11</sup> Anselm Min, *The Solidarity of Others in a Divided World: A Postmodern Theology after Postmodernism* (New York: T&T Clark/Continuum, 2004), 1, 3.

<sup>12</sup> Min, *The Solidarity of Others in a Divided World: A Postmodern Theology after Postmodernism*, 1.

<sup>13</sup> Min, *The Solidarity of Others in a Divided World: A Postmodern Theology after Postmodernism*, 62. See also 61.

<sup>14</sup> Min, *The Solidarity of Others in a Divided World: A Postmodern Theology after Postmodernism*, 62. Min refers specifically to the importance of this sensibility to politicians and theologians, but we will suggest that this is equally applicable to the church.

sense, it means those who have been excluded and marginalized precisely because they have been so reduced to a system of identity.” This type of solidarity, has been, Min insists, “of the very essence of the Christian faith” as exemplified in the Trinity, where there is a “solidarity, of three persons, truly different as persons yet truly united as divine.”<sup>15</sup>

Min’s emphasis on solidarity is convincing, but his emphasis on “solidarity of” rather than “solidarity with” is perhaps overemphasized. We wonder if this emphasis may inadvertently exclude a needed emphasis and corrective with respect to solidarity with the different, even marginalized other, even though this is the opposite of Min’s intention. Understandably, he wants to avoid language and posturing of condescension to the marginalized. Agreed. But there must be a certain intentionality involved when we find ourselves in positions of privilege to reach out to those less privileged. This is not condescension to the other, but a leveraging of position for the sake of mercy, love and justice.<sup>16</sup> Min of course affirms this also when he refers to Jesus’ “preferential love for the marginalized others.” Jesus showed care and sacrifice to those suffering injustices and exclusion in society. As Christ followers, we are called to do the same.<sup>17</sup> Hence, we suggest that the language of seeking “solidarity *with* others” intentionally calls for embodied actions of care for the other that results in a “solidarity *of*” others.

Solidarity with and of others, however, is never intended to remain a general overriding principle of merging the mass of humanity into some sort of altruistic global community, as we noticed with Min’s reference to Levinas above. For Levinas, the face of the other beckons me to a non-reciprocal response, a call from the particular person in whose eyes I see a person, a person like me, yet a person also in need: “The face in its nakedness as a face presents to me the destitution of the poor one and the stranger; but this poverty and exile which appeal to my powers, address me, do not deliver themselves over to these powers as givens, remain the expression of the face. The poor one, the stranger, presents himself as an equal.”<sup>18</sup> Likewise, Min understands that his solidarity proposal “must be rooted in particularity” rather than a “self-complacent theology of universality.”<sup>19</sup> The particular other before me, the one whose eyes meet mine in the everyday, is the one with whom I must seek solidarity.

Min briefly suggests four interconnected categories where the concept of solidarity is expressed. We will mention each of these and suggest how they are applicable to an intentional multicultural church theology and practice. First, solidarity refers to an ontological reality. Human beings are integrally connected with their environment. The second, which stems from the first, refers to the historical playing out of human beings

<sup>15</sup> Min, *The Solidarity of Others in a Divided World: A Postmodern Theology after Postmodernism*, 82, 83.

<sup>16</sup> Min speaks to this when mentioning the United States as a “surviving superpower” submitting that “theologians with loci in that superpower cannot remain indifferent to that exceptional responsibility and accountability in the name of difference and otherness” (Min, *The Solidarity of Others*, 140.)

<sup>17</sup> Min, *The Solidarity of Others in a Divided World: A Postmodern Theology after Postmodernism*, 84.

<sup>18</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 213.

<sup>19</sup> Min, *The Solidarity of Others in a Divided World: A Postmodern Theology after Postmodernism*, 138. As Min also affirms: “Solidarity means attention to difference in suffering and preferential solidarity with those who suffer more, not reduction of all to abstract equality” (Ibid, 142).

within their respective nations becoming more and more dependent upon each other.<sup>20</sup> Third, human beings must “recognize” their connectedness to metaphysical reality and to each other and move this recognition to “acts of ethical, political solidarity.”<sup>21</sup> Fourth, solidarity is linked to the community of fellow believers in Christ, “as a destiny to which all are called.”<sup>22</sup> These are indeed brief descriptions, but highlight Min’s notion of solidarity as one containing both metaphysical and ethical implications. Further, this solidarity is not about assimilating minority groups into a larger single “standard” of a more predominant group. It is also not a pluralistic amalgamation that attempts to blur lines of identity among groups.<sup>23</sup> Granted, this is saying what solidarity “is not” rather than what it is in particular. But Min says that a “concrete form of (political) solidarity cannot be predicted because it depends precisely on the concrete sociohistorical forms of interdependence that emerge among different groups in concrete societies ...”<sup>24</sup>

Min’s fourth point about solidarity and the community of the church is of more particular interest to us as it relates to the nature of the missional church. It provokes the question as to how specifically we may manifest an “interconnectedness and solidarity between churches” and for that matter, within local churches according to “the missional calling of the church to bear local witness to the gospel in the context of particular social, cultural, and historical circumstances while remaining faithful to the whole church as the body of Christ in the world, which is not divided but is one.”<sup>25</sup> Rather than the diverse other being seen as an obstacle to the church, or as one to be tolerated, she is rather the opportunity for displaying the Holy Spirit’s unifying role in the body of Christ. The Holy Spirit’s work through the church “will turn *xenophobia* into *philoxenia*, the love of the stranger, and turn hostility and suspicion into solidarity and trust, empowering us to live as human beings with dignity and meaning.”<sup>26</sup> This missional call to “other” centeredness must be first intentional within the local church community. It must be intentional in its hospitality to the diverse other, and intentional about building and reflecting multi-cultural relationships. When a particular church manifests internal cohesive love among a diversity of members, this reflects a microcosm of the unity the entire body of Christ and provides a living picture and witness to the reconciling gospel of Jesus.

### Globalization and Intentional bridge building

It is understood that not all geographical regions of the world will have such international, cross-cultural opportunities in local churches to display unity with radically diverse members. However, with increased globalization, there remain ample opportunities for such engagement, especially in major cities in the world that host international corporations. Further, the widespread migrant “crisis” in Europe and across the world in

<sup>20</sup> Min, *The Solidarity of Others in a Divided World: A Postmodern Theology after Postmodernism*, 140-41.

<sup>21</sup> Min, *The Solidarity of Others in a Divided World: A Postmodern Theology after Postmodernism*, 141.

<sup>22</sup> Min, *The Solidarity of Others in a Divided World: A Postmodern Theology after Postmodernism*, 141.

<sup>23</sup> Min, *The Solidarity of Others in a Divided World: A Postmodern Theology after Postmodernism*, 141-42.

<sup>24</sup> Min, *The Solidarity of Others in a Divided World: A Postmodern Theology after Postmodernism*, 141.

<sup>25</sup> John Franke, *Manifold Witness: The Plurality of Truth* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2009), 129.

<sup>26</sup> Min, *The Solidarity of Others in a Divided World: A Postmodern Theology after Postmodernism*, 110. Italics in original.

various “welcoming” countries has opened the door for many cross-cultural encounters and opportunities for local church involvement. Amos Yong puts it well: “Social ministries ought to be further developed on the one hand, even as, practically speaking, the church should model a multicultural life of reconciliation for the world.... On the other hand, the church also should be a prophetic voice with regard to the injustices many immigrants face.”<sup>27</sup> We recognize that reaching out to migrants in need is a step beyond the local church modeling internal unity. But in locations where there exists a broad diversity of people groups, in part due to migration, it gives primarily homogeneous churches remarkable opportunities for hospitality that will diversify their communities.

Yong develops this idea by pointing back to the beginnings of the early church in the book of Acts. Referring to Acts 2:5, and Acts 2:41, Yong submits the early church of three thousand people was formed from a migrant community from many nations, which eventually grew to over five thousand (Acts 4:4).<sup>28</sup> With such diversity, this was a tremendous challenge amidst various factions, but eventually they developed “an egalitarian leadership by putting migrants in charge.” From this observation, Yong concludes that appreciating “such diversity and pluralism depends on our following the Spirit’s lead in empowering leadership across the spectrum, even when that means putting migrants in charge!”<sup>29</sup> Yong is not saying, however, that this migrant empowering of church leadership was haphazard and unfocused. He points to the Apostle Paul as an example of a migrant church leader who laid strong foundations for leadership in the various regions he travelled. He claims that Paul was following Jesus’ example as a “migrant savior” who crossed many cultural borders including the poor, the outcast, and evildoers.<sup>30</sup> But, this migrant cross-cultural ministry did not merely begin with the early church. This injunction to care for the other goes back to God’s call on the ancient Israelites and is now “carried over into the apostolic community.”<sup>31</sup> The question then becomes how we may also intentionally participate in such border crossing hospitality and ministry in whatever region we find ourselves today.

Building cross cultural bridges is not easy but it remains an essential task for the missionally focused Christian. Social psychologist and public theologian, Christena Cleveland, draws upon the contact theory research of Gordon Allport for making headway in bringing diverse people groups together. When groups remain separate, erroneous perceptions and prejudices will abound; when groups have opportunities for direct interaction with other groups “under certain conditions” such erroneous perceptions

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<sup>27</sup> Amos Yong, *The Future of Evangelical Theology: Soundings from the Asian American Diaspora* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 179.

<sup>28</sup> Yong, *The Future of Evangelical Theology: Soundings from the Asian American Diaspora*, 168-69.

<sup>29</sup> Yong, *The Future of Evangelical Theology: Soundings from the Asian American Diaspora*, 170. See also 169.

<sup>30</sup> Yong, *The Future of Evangelical Theology: Soundings from the Asian American Diaspora*, 175-77.

<sup>31</sup> Yong, *The Future of Evangelical Theology: Soundings from the Asian American Diaspora*, 178. Yong is drawing here from Matthew Soerens and Jenny Hwang, *Welcoming the Stranger: Justice, Compassion and Truth in the Immigration Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2009). Yong mentions that Soerens and Hwang argue that we must view immigrants as people, not statistics. Further, we must not forget “that among those on the move are other Christ followers, themselves motivated by the virtues of courage and perseverance, perhaps even feeling the divine call to bring the gospel back to the West.” (Yong, *The Future of Evangelical Theology*, 180.)

will be dissolved.<sup>32</sup> This occurs because interaction between groups offers the opportunity for an exchange that reveals evidence contrary to prejudices and also reveals likenesses between individuals of the different groups. Hence, prejudices can be overcome by cross-cultural contact and interaction rather than avoiding such contact. Further, Cleveland notes, once one has a positive cross-cultural engagement, the positive encounter will stimulate further desire for additional contact. Barriers are broken down because people are seen as individuals rather than a faceless group and different groups begin to see what they share in common.<sup>33</sup>

Cleveland is careful to point out, however, that cross-cultural contact is not problem free, as “worthwhile endeavors are never easy – and church unity is no exception.” When people interact and engage, offenses are inevitable. This of course is compounded when differences come into play that stem from one’s cultural perspectives. Reconciliation is grueling work as “we partner with equally imperfect individuals who are also clumsily scaling the crosscultural learning curve, forgive those who carelessly wrong us, repeatedly ask for forgiveness, engage in awkward and unpredictable situations and, like gluttons for punishment, keep coming back for more.”<sup>34</sup>

### Border-Crossing with Boundaries

With this emphasis on crossing cultural borders for embracing and displaying magnificent diversity in the body of Christ, the question of boundaries must be considered. If we are advocating reconciliation, cross-cultural contacts, hospitality, and solidarity not only in the body of Christ at large, but also within particular local churches, what part do boundaries play?

In our border crossing efforts of multicultural hospitality, boundaries are indispensable. In fact, it is difficult to speak of hospitality without thinking about boundaries. Although referring in particular to cross-denominational theological hospitality, David Buschart’s insights in this regard also provide helpful insights with respect to cross-cultural intra-church hospitality:

Boundaries of differentiation help define who we are. Identity, whether individual or collective, entails an awareness of difference ... awareness of difference is a necessary condition for a life that is something other than narcissistic.

<sup>32</sup> Christena Cleveland, *Disunity in Christ: Uncovering the Hidden Forces That Keep Us Apart* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2013), 153. Cleveland notes the research of Gordon Allport in Gordon Allport, S. Kassin, S. Fein, and H.R. Markus, *Social Psychology*, 7th ed. (New York: Houghton Mifflin), 172; and Gordon Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (Cambridge, MA: Addison-Wesley), 1954.

<sup>33</sup> Cleveland, *Disunity in Christ: Uncovering the Hidden Forces That Keep Us Apart*, 153-54.

<sup>34</sup> Cleveland, *Disunity in Christ: Uncovering the Hidden Forces That Keep Us Apart*, 155, 156. On a practical note, Cleveland suggests that mutual collaboration with common goals can build cross-cultural bridges. She refers to the Greeks and Turks (in spite of their divided history) working together in 1999 after both Greece and Turkey experienced the devastation of earthquakes (159). She also refers to research on Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland. When the differing groups worked together, getting to know each other personally, their pejorative images of each other vanished (171-72). For further practical examples and insights on cross-cultural cooperation for the sake of the body of Christ, see Cleveland, *Disunity in Christ*, 158-176. Also see Brenda Salter McNeil, *Roadmap to Reconciliation: Moving Communities into Unity Wholeness and Justice* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2015).

Such awareness enables us to recognize and respect the other as someone other than oneself. It is a necessary step on the way to honoring the uniqueness and importance of other people, or of other theological traditions. ...The goal of hospitality is not to achieve identification, but rather to serve the other in a way that helps the other while respecting them for who they are, and this requires the maintenance of appropriate boundaries.<sup>35</sup>

Hospitality presupposes that people have boundaries for separate spheres of life. To put this simply by way of example, if a family is hospitable to a neighbor by an invitation into their home, the unwritten understanding is that the neighbors will come for a given period of time and then return to their own home.<sup>36</sup> The boundaries are unwritten, but they are certainly implied in the invitation. Of course, this analogy would break down if the notion of hospitality were applied to inviting a homeless person into one's home. Then, a different set and sort of boundaries would be either implied or perhaps specifically stated in advance of the invitation.

This illustration of boundaries in hospitality with respect to family and the home is deftly expressed by Matthew Kaemingk:

If my family was perpetually open for all to come and go as they please, if I made no distinction between my wife and my neighbor, if I treated my children and neighbor's children the same, two things would happen. First, my family would lose its integrity and sense of self when no distinction between family and world is maintained. Second, in losing its integrity, my family would lose its internal capacity to offer hospitality to outsiders in the future.<sup>37</sup>

Granted, Kaemingk is drawing a picture of boundaries that is much wider than the internal relationships within the local church, and even broader than ecumenical church relationships. Nonetheless, the principal remains the same. We must acknowledge and embrace our particularities to show hospitality to the other within a multicultural church, in ecumenical church relationships, and in developing relationships outside the Christian church.

Boundaries do not imply a violence or exclusion of the other, but help us maintain our distinctive voices among our differences. Recognizing difference and respecting the other as different and particular is recognizing the value of the other within her context, nationality and cultural background. However, as Buschart cautions, maintaining boundaries must not "become an excuse for a failure to reach out across difference. Yet, in order for the virtue of hospitality to be exercised, there must be the strength of identity that is grounded in differentiation combined with the commitment to use that strength

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<sup>35</sup> W. David Buschart, *Exploring Protestant Traditions: An Invitation to Theological Hospitality* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 265-66.

<sup>36</sup> See Buschart, *Exploring Protestant Traditions: An Invitation to Theological Hospitality*, 266. Buschart uses the "home" analogy in the context of a particular ecclesiological tradition, but the analogy also works for intra-ecclesiological relationships. He says that we "need to be the recipients of the hospitality of others" and also have a home "to which one can return after having enjoyed the hospitality of others" (266).

<sup>37</sup> Matthew Kaemingk, *Christian Hospitality and Muslim Immigration in an Age of Fear* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018), 183.

to extend hospitality to the other.”<sup>38</sup> This understanding is also affirmed by Miroslav Volf when he insists that boundaries allow “discrete identities” which are essential for “a creative encounter with the other.”<sup>39</sup> Of course, this is easier said than done. Understanding the distinction between recognizing differences and making exclusionary moves towards others is unavoidably influenced by “our proclivity to misperceive and misjudge because we desire to exclude.”<sup>40</sup> Volf submits that to navigate this challenge it is important to practice the de-centered self, emphasized by the Apostle Paul, with a view toward the re-centered self in the narrative of the crucified and resurrected Jesus Christ. The heart of this move is in a “self-giving love” towards others as modeled by Jesus that “overcomes human enmity” and makes room “to receive estranged humanity.”<sup>41</sup> Practically speaking, we will no doubt fumble along as we attempt to lovingly engage the other with whom we may be radically different. Admittedly, these statements do not tell us how to precisely navigate this with the other we encounter in particular circumstances, but they certainly provide a reflective framework to help us make strides this direction.

### The Church as a Multicultural Refuge

Although this paper is focused primarily on Christian posturing within the context/relationships within the local church, how Christians engage the other outside the church has a significant bearing on the local church itself. Missionally focused Christians are not called to be insular communities. They are instead called to display to the world the healing and reconciling work of Jesus. This being said, with our border-crossing boundaries in mind, the church has the marvelous opportunity to be a place of refuge for the outcast, the stranger, the “foreigner” in our midst. In view of what has been called the “migration crisis” throughout many countries in the world, considerations in this regard are especially germane to our times.

James K.A. Smith has astutely highlighted the subjects of hospitality, xenophobia, and immigration in the work of Jacques Derrida. For Derrida, hospitality cannot be separated from ethics, and “what is at stake in considering hospitality *as such* is not just international law or immigration but also the nature of intersubjective relationships.”<sup>42</sup> Derrida considers hospitality from the standpoint of cities of refuge. Such cities may provide hospitable places of welcoming the other, embodying the nature of ethics itself.<sup>43</sup> He says:

We have doubtless chosen the term ‘city of refuge’ because, for quite specific historical reasons, it commands our respect, and also out of respect for those who cultivate an ‘ethic of hospitality.’ ‘To cultivate an ethic of hospitality’ — is such an expression not tautologous? Despite all the tensions or contradictions

<sup>38</sup> Buschart, *Exploring Protestant Traditions: An Invitation to Theological Hospitality*, 267-68.

<sup>39</sup> Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 67.

<sup>40</sup> Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*, 68.

<sup>41</sup> Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*, 70-71, 127.

<sup>42</sup> James K.A. Smith, *Jacques Derrida: Live Theory* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2005), 69.

<sup>43</sup> Smith, *Jacques Derrida: Live Theory*, 69-70. Smith draws from Jacques Derrida’s, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*.

which distinguish it, and despite all the perversions that can befall it, one cannot speak of cultivating an ethic of hospitality. Hospitality is culture itself and not simply one ethic amongst others. Insofar as it has to do with the *ethos*, that is, the residence, one's home, the familiar place of dwelling, inasmuch as it is a manner of being there, the manner in which we relate to ourselves and to others, to others as our own or as foreigners, *ethics is hospitality*.<sup>44</sup>

Smith points out that for Derrida, hospitality is at its core relational and also completely unconditional, but practically and institutionally, it will indeed have conditions.<sup>45</sup> Any possible "city of refuge" by its nature, will have boundaries. As we have suggested above, the cross-cultural ecclesiological, missional hospitality we are advocating also has boundaries or conditions that must be navigated, even if they are not explicitly stated. Hospitality acknowledges one's home and context as the framework by which to extend hospitable welcome to the other. In Europe, for Derrida, this hospitable welcoming is essential for what makes Europe, Europe. It is a welcoming that is not simply reduced the integration of the foreigner, but is also about the recognition and acceptance of their alterity.<sup>46</sup>

The "city of refuge" idea of course, as Derrida acknowledges, extends back to the Old Testament from the book of Numbers.<sup>47</sup> We suggest borrowing this term from Derrida's usage in the context of the *polis* and narrowing its focus also to the local church, which may also function as a place of refuge for the stranger and outcast. But how may this be done with boundaries? We turn again to Matthew Kaemingk who provides helpful insights in this regard. For the safety of all, hospitality clearly requires a house with walls. But, adds Kaemingk, it also "requires doors that open." But walls and open doors themselves do not make a home; more is needed. Kaemingk finds this missing element in the "table politics" of Jesus as exemplified in the Holy Week.<sup>48</sup> Palm Sunday represents protest against injustices toward those on the margins, and a call to action. But protest alone does not withstand the ultimate pressure of the sacrifice required in the midst of adversity. The upper room meal shows Jesus taking on the "posture of a servant" by washing the feet of the disciples, then offering a meal, and offering himself—a genuine, embodied hospitality.<sup>49</sup> Later in the evening, Jesus went to pray with his disciples in Gethsemane, and soldiers invade the garden. When Peter cut off the ear of the servant of the high priest, Malchus, Jesus provided healing. Kaemingk suggests that this event "reminds us that power and security are not political ends in and of themselves."<sup>50</sup> This is followed by Jesus crucifixion at Golgotha, where "humanity is forced to gaze upon the ghastly sight

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<sup>44</sup> Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (London, UK: Routledge, 2003), 16-17.

<sup>45</sup> Smith, *Jacques Derrida: Live Theory*, 70-71.

<sup>46</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe* (Bloomington & Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992), 77. See also, 29. Cf. Smith, *Jacques Derrida: Live Theory*, 73.

<sup>47</sup> Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, 17.

<sup>48</sup> Kaemingk, *Christian Hospitality and Muslim Immigration in an Age of Fear*, 302. Kaemingk's remarks are primarily in the context of Christian hospitality to Muslim immigrants, but his ideas are no less relevant to our discussion.

<sup>49</sup> Kaemingk, *Christian Hospitality and Muslim Immigration in an Age of Fear*, 302-303.

<sup>50</sup> Kaemingk, *Christian Hospitality and Muslim Immigration in an Age of Fear*, 303.

of its own naked aggression, fear, and violence.” This reminds us that hospitality does not stem “from some inherent moral superiority” over the other. Finally, the empty tomb ultimately promises renewed life and Jesus “reconnecting with his scattered followers” – again demonstrated through Jesus’ hospitality over a meal on a beach.<sup>51</sup>

Through these events of Holy Week, Kaemingk submits that ultimately the security of walls or generous open doors are not the most significant political ends, but what is most important is “a well-set table.”<sup>52</sup> Walls and doors will remain, but walls must not turn people away and doors must be cognizant of dangers. With hospitality, there will always be vulnerability. These “table politics” of Jesus are meant to dissolve hierarchies, not differences. But rather than the different other being simply reduced to “guests” they are to be considered “friends.”<sup>53</sup> Applying these elements of hospitable posturing in our local churches will open multiple opportunities for the strangers in our midst to seek refuge among people with whom they are spiritually equal in the body of Christ. Immigrants, foreigners, and those seen as “other” in and outside the local church are served and fed as fellow sojourners, without expectations of cultural integration (which itself is difficult to measure).

We are not attempting to simplify the grand, multi-dimensional and thorny issues of immigration that have a multitude of legal, political and social implications. Indeed, thoughtful, reasoned Christian responses are required to varied issues surrounding asylum seekers and those facing deportation. There are certainly no “one size fits all” answers. But we must be committed to Christian centered orientations, beliefs, and practices that are manifested in our manners towards others within our local church context and also towards those outside our immediate contexts that are nonetheless in our midst for whatever reason. Are we charitable, understanding, humble, and hospitable to the other before us? Or, do we come across as closed, doctrinally assured in all matters and confidently arrogant in our church practices? By challenging assumptions of the pragmatics of building homogeneous churches and emphasizing the importance of intentional multicultural relationships within and without the local church we are advocating attitudes of respect and humility for the other. As one actively seeks to understand and engage with the culturally other, one also learns that one’s own particular understanding of the world and context of faith is narrow and contextual. This is not to say that the narrowness and contextual nature of our faith is necessarily wrong-headed. We all embrace faith within particular contexts and practices. But these contexts allow us the space for hospitality to the other and challenge us to wrestle with our own perspectives that have shaped our theological and ecclesiological habits. Multicultural engagement is a delightful theological playground for developing habits of humility.

<sup>51</sup> Kaemingk, *Christian Hospitality and Muslim Immigration in an Age of Fear*, 304.

<sup>52</sup> Kaemingk, *Christian Hospitality and Muslim Immigration in an Age of Fear*, 305.

<sup>53</sup> Kaemingk, *Christian Hospitality and Muslim Immigration in an Age of Fear*, 305.

## Excursus: The Church and Interpretive Diversity

A multi-cultural, hospitable church will encounter differences in interpretation of Scripture and theological practices even within a particular denomination. One thing deconstruction has highlighted is that we cannot escape interpretation and context. Whatever our cultural background, this background will influence our interpretations and interpretive practices within the church. It is unfortunate that this insight from deconstruction has been misunderstood as advocating arbitrariness in interpretation – anything goes, as long as it doesn't hurt somebody. This is certainly not what deconstruction is about. When Derrida said “il n'y a pas de hors-texte” (there is nothing outside the text) he was not advocating a version of anti-realism that implies objects such as book, clothes, and hairbrushes are mere figments of the imagination. Rather, the point is that nothing is beyond our interpretation; interpretation is ubiquitous.<sup>54</sup> Our particular cultures, contexts, and backgrounds unavoidably influence our interpretations; there is no such thing as a neutral interpretation. In fact, these factors provide the lens for our interpretation.

John D. Caputo, drawing upon Heidegger and Kierkegaard, expresses it like this:

[W]e can never get out of our skin and look down upon ourselves from above. We 'always already' are the being that we are, and rather than trying the impossible, to make a presuppositionless start à la Descartes, we should realize that we are in truth shaped by the presuppositions we inherit. The presuppositions do not bind or blind us but rather give us our perspective, our angle of entry, enabling us to understand in the first place, giving shape to the way the world presents itself to us here and now. Angles do not bend and distort; they give us access. Without them, we would be lost.<sup>55</sup>

Indeed, we are shaped by the angles we bring to the communities in which we are engaged. Granted, as Caputo insists, angles must not and cannot be avoided, and must be embraced for hermeneutical access. However, simply because angles are unavoidable does not mean that some point of entry “angles” may not “bind or blind us” as Caputo affirms. There are some aspects of our backgrounds that must be uncovered and avoided. In this regard, we want to suggest both an affirmation and deconstruction of our angles, in the context of our interpretive communities. For example, one may recognize from one's own tradition and interpretive background that notions of patriarchy pervade one's interpretation of Scripture. In the context of the broader interpretive community this particular “angle,” once acknowledged and exposed, can be corrected in ongoing interpretive practices. Another may have had a family background with an abusive father. The entire notion of God as Father in Scripture will be colored by this background. Once

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<sup>54</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 158. See also, James K.A. Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism? Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church* (Grand Rapids, IL: Baker Academic, 2006), 34-40, 42n9, and Smith, *Jacques Derrida: Live Theory*, 61-62.

<sup>55</sup> John D. Caputo, *Philosophy and Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2006), 45.

revealed, correctives in the interpretive process can be made.<sup>56</sup> This is not to blithely say that once such negative elements are revealed that correction is made instantly, hence removing such distortions to interpretation once and for all. This is why we would stress the importance of community correction and interpretation in the body of Christ. So, we are both in favor and disagreement of what Caputo emphasizes. Angles help, but they can also hinder.

N. Clayton Croy provides helpful insights on how the self-reflection of the interpreter may help in this regard: “A person’s social location can be a blind spot or a magnifying glass: it may obscure one’s reading of the text or enhance it. The aim, then, is neither to repress one’s subjectivity nor to revel in it, but to understand it, be aware of its effects on interpretation, and exercise it responsibly.”<sup>57</sup> Croy submits that social location, theological identity, and life experiences all influence the reader or interpreter. What is key, for Croy, is that interpreters seek “to be aware of both how their subjectivity may *hinder* faithful interpretation and how it may *enable* faithful interpretation.”<sup>58</sup> Croy’s observations are helpful. But in order to come to the awareness to which Croy speaks, a responsible exercising of interpretation must not remain at the personal or individual level, but be exercised within, and for a particular community of faith (as diverse as that may be) and alongside other diverse communities where blind spots can be revealed and correctives may be taken. Croy suggests: “The best solution is not to demonize one group and to privilege another but to strive for diverse reading groups, whether in the academy or in faith communities, so that one reader’s clearer vision will compensate for another’s blind spot.”<sup>59</sup>

Interpretations will inevitably be both individual and communal. Our inhabited communities will have interpretive positions, and individuals within such communities will also have particular positions that may vary from the consensus position. Recognizing biases, presuppositions, backgrounds does not ensure a neutral unbiased “objective” interpretation, neither does a diversity of perspectives, whether cultural, theological or otherwise. But attempting to acknowledge our interpretive biases (as communities and individuals), rather than shunning them will help the dialogical process seeking unity in the midst of diversity.

### Humble Posturing in our Cultural Diversity

Again, we must engage the disciplined practice of humble posturing as we face theological differences within our communities. Justo González modeled this in his book summarizing the gathering of minority theologians in an “the ethnic roundtable.”<sup>60</sup> He insists that the gospel is always culturally shaped and presented. But

<sup>56</sup> Likewise, if one has an extremely positive perspective and experience with a human father or father-figure, it will also shape one’s interpretive perspective of God as father.

<sup>57</sup> N. Clayton Croy, *Prima Scriptura: An Introduction to New Testament Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 2.

<sup>58</sup> Croy, *Prima Scriptura: An Introduction to New Testament Interpretation*, 6.

<sup>59</sup> Croy, *Prima Scriptura: An Introduction to New Testament Interpretation*, 7.

<sup>60</sup> Justo L. González, *Out of Every Tribe and Nation: Christian Theology at the Ethnic Roundtable* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1992).

this is a positive feature of the gospel that is readily apparent in Scripture and the early church in the diversity of the four gospels. Our catholicity includes a pluriformity of cultural manifestations among various people groups.<sup>61</sup> González is not advocating some wishy-washy inclusivism here, but acknowledging the radical particularity and diversity in the greater body of Christ for the sake of and in the name of the gospel of Jesus Christ. He is not simply making a point about diversity, but also about cultural humility. Later, González references the work of one of the ethnic roundtable conferees, Daniel Rodríguez. Rodríguez points out that the church as the “chosen race” and “royal priesthood” must not be mistaken as some sort of elitist separation of people for God. This is a people set apart and chosen not from the merits of the group itself, but from its weakness, so that the group may manifest the strength of God.<sup>62</sup> González writes: “It cannot boast of any wisdom or power, or virtue of its own, by reason of which it has been chosen. On the contrary, it has been chosen, if for any reason at all, precisely because of its powerlessness, its folly, its nothingness.”<sup>63</sup> John Franke, commenting on González’s insights, suggests the following: “We must assume a place at the ethnic roundtable along with all the other participants, with the particular responsibility of assuming the posture of a learner rather than that of a teacher. We must be willing to give up the assumption of self-supposed theological and intellectual supremacy and be prepared to listen rather than to speak.”<sup>64</sup> The irony of such posturing is that in the activity of such humble posturing among others, one ends up teaching just the same – not in a didactic, classroom setting, but in life-example. Humble posturing before others as learners and listeners is essential for theological practice and discourse. As this is modeled before others, it provides a visual embodied narrative of theological virtue, opening up spaces for ongoing dialogue, interaction and even cordial, constructive debate. This is what promotes a “Spirit-guided flourishing of plurality in the church” as we “relinquish power for the sake of the gospel.”<sup>65</sup>

We have been emphasizing cross cultural bridge building in this article, which has primarily referred to different racial or national people groups. However, we all know well there are many “sub-cultures” even within our dominant cultural groups in any given church: old, middle-age, young, male, female, abled and disabled, and the list goes on. Learning to posture ourselves with humility and intentionally building and strengthening relationships across the board of diverse people groups within our churches is critical for missionally focused communities. This perspective is expressed poignantly by Brad Harper and Paul Louis Metzger:

A true familial community is a place where the strong and the weak, the healthy and the diseased, the young *and* the old, the wise *and* the simple live. So many of our churches bearing the name *community* in their titles need to be very intentional

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<sup>61</sup> González, *Out of Every Tribe and Nation: Christian Theology at the Ethnic Roundtable*, 30-31, 36-37, 115.

<sup>62</sup> González, *Out of Every Tribe and Nation: Christian Theology at the Ethnic Roundtable*, 110-111.

<sup>63</sup> González, *Out of Every Tribe and Nation: Christian Theology at the Ethnic Roundtable*, 110.

<sup>64</sup> Franke, *Manifold Witness: The Plurality of Truth*, 123.

<sup>65</sup> Franke, *Manifold Witness: The Plurality of Truth*, 123.

so as not to succumb to the pressures of free market spirituality and target only the strong, the healthy, the young, the wise, and the successful so as to survive and thrive. Such ‘success’ comes at the expense of building true community and bearing witness to God’s own targeting practices revealed in scripture.<sup>66</sup>

The missionally focused church must intentionally display God’s work to redeem and reconcile all peoples, whatever their culture, race, sex, backgrounds. Cross-cultural, multi-ethnic, economically and socially diverse ecclesiological hospitality *is* missional theology in practice. Our posturing and practices for the sake of solidarity and diversity in the local church influence our theological reflections, and vice-versa. One does not precede the other, it is an ongoing dialogical engagement.

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<sup>66</sup> Brad Harper and Paul Louis Metzger, *Exploring Ecclesiology: An Evangelical and Ecumenical Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009), 242.

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**Ronald T. Michener**

### **The Heterogeneous Global Church and Intentional Hospitality to The Other**

**Abstract:** Globalization, combined with the current crises of global immigration, the coronavirus pandemic, and widespread racial tensions, all confront the church with critical challenges to practice hospitality both locally and worldwide. This article will challenge the homogeneous church growth model, insisting on intentional cross-cultural bridge-building, while drawing upon Anselm Min’s paradigm of “solidarity of others.” It will submit that the missionally focused church will show radical hospitality toward all marginalized people groups within and outside the local community. This requires intentional openness and humble posturing towards various cultures and differences in biblical interpretation and practice.

**Keywords:** Christian diversity, cross-cultural church, heterogeneous church, homogeneous church, hospitality, interpretive differences.

**Рональд Міченер**

### **Гетерогенна вселенська церква та усвідомлена гостинність до іншого**

**Анотація:** Глобалізація в поєднанні з нинішньою кризою глобальної імміграції, пандемією коронавірусу та широкомасштабною расовою напруженістю ставлять церкву перед викликом здійснення гостинності як на місцевому рівні, так і в усьому світі. Ця стаття переосмислює гомогенну модель зростання церкви, наполягаючи на усвідомленому налагодженні міжкуль-

турних відносин, спираючись на парадигму “солідарності інших” Ансельма Міна. У статті стверджується, що церква, орієнтована на місію, виявлятиме радикальну гостинність до всіх маргіналізованих груп у місцевій громаді та поза нею. Це вимагає усвідомленої відкритості та покірного ставлення до різних культур та відмінностей у біблійній інтерпретації та практиці.

**Ключові слова:** християнське різноманіття, міжкультурна церква, гомогенна церква, негомогенна церква, гостинність, інтерпретаційні відмінності.

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*Надійшла до редакції / Received 02.07.2020*

*Прийнята до публікації / Accepted 17.09.2020*