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Understanding Oral Hermeneutics and Relational Hermeneutics

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ABSTRACT

In 2011, Tom Steffen and William Bjoraker proposed "oral hermeneutics" (*The Return of Oral Hermeneutics* which is quite different from conventional "textual hermeneutics." In this paper, the author proposes "relational hermeneutics" which is based on the paradigm of "relational interactionism" that can integrate "textual hermeneutics" and "oral hermeneutics." A simple comparison of the three hermeneutical approaches to Scriptures (i.e. comparison of textual/oral/relational hermeneutics) will be included before the proposed integration.

INTRODUCTION

Background of this Study

Past efforts leading to the formulation of "relational hermeneutics" are as follows:

1. Decade-long experience of "narrative preaching" with the use of "who" (i.e. personal beings/ Beings) to develop the main frame of sermon in "inductive Bible study,"[1] focusing on the pattern and process of interaction between personal beings/Beings). See Appendix 1 for selected samples of sermon outline.
2. Research leading to the publication of related articles in past years:
   - Wan, Enoch. "Relational Theology and Relational Missiology," *Occasional Bulletin,* Evangelical Missiological Society. (Winter 2007), 21:1, p.1-7.
   - Wan, Enoch with Mark Hedinger. "Understanding 'relationality' from a Trinitarian Perspective," *Global Missiology*, Trinitarian Studies, (January 2006a). www. GlobalMissiolog
   - Wan, Enoch. "A Missio-relational Reading of Romans." Published in www.GlobalMissiology. org "Relational Study" April 1, 2010. Originally published as "A Missio -Relational Reading of Romans" in *Occasional Bulletin,* EMS, Vol. 23 No. 1, Winter 2010:1-8.
   - Enoch Wan and Paul Hiebert, "Missional Narrative and Missional Hermeneutic for the 21st Century." Published in "Featured Article" of www.GlobalMissiology.org January 2009.
   - Enoch Wan, "Ethno-hermeneutics: it's [sic] necessity and difficulty for all Christians of all

1. It is very common to use the 5Ws for inductive Bible study: who, when, where, why and how.

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times." (A paper presented at the 47th National Conference of the Evangelical Theological Society, Philadelphia, PA, November 16-18, 1995. Published in Global Missiology, January 2004, www.GlobalMissiology.org

3. Formulation and application of "relational interaction" as the theoretical framework for two recent publications:
   - Wan, Enoch and Raibley, Jon. *Transformational Change in Christian Ministry*. (Second Edition). Oregon: Western Academic Publishers. 2022.
   - Enoch Wan, Mark Hedinger, Jon Raibley. *Transformational Growth: Intercultural Leadership/ Discipleship/Mentorship*. Oregon: Western Academic Publishers. 2023.

Purpose and Organization

The purpose of this paper is to introduce the "what" and "how of "relational hermeneutics." We begin with the definition and explanation of "relational hermeneutics," followed by illustrations from studying the Bible relationally in two examples: relational study on Romans in NT and Bible education of poetical books of OT within the Tijik oral cultural context.

Definition of Key-Terms

Dynamic Trinity – the Three Persons internally within the Trinity interacting in mutuality (fellowship, love, glory) and reciprocity (sending and witnessing) and externally in creation, salvation, and glorification.[2]

Favored Humanity – human beings receiving special/ unmerited favor (grace) from the Triune God such as imago Dei in creation, Incarnation of the Son as Jesus Christ and Emmanuel, salvation (as God's children and co-heirs with Christ), as "temple of the Spirit" individually and collectively (1Cor 3:16-17; 6:19), glorious status of judging angels and eternal bliss with the Lamb in the future, etc.[3]

Oral Hermeneutics (OH) – the theory (principles) and methodology (practice) of interpreting oral materials such as story, poetry, proverb, etc. And can be defined as "A preferred way to hear, process, remember, and communicate with the human voice as the primary medium. Orality includes multiple media, such as storytelling, poetry, music, visual arts, drama, and dance."[4]

Relational Hermeneutics (RH) - the theory (principles) and methodology (practice) of interpreting selected items (such as biblical text, oral materials) focusing on the patterned revelatory and interpretative interactions of personal being/Beings at multi-level (e.g. micro-/macro-), multi-contextual (i.e. realms of existence within the Trinity or the created order) and various circumstances (i.e. synchronically or diachronically).

Relational Interactionism – An interdisciplinary narrative framework that develops from practical considerations of dynamic interaction of personal Beings/beings, forming realistic relational networks in multiple contexts (i.e. theo-culture, angel-culture, and human culture) and with various consequences.

Textual Hermeneutics (TH) - the theory (principles) and methodology (practice) of interpreting biblical text.[5]

Transformational Change: The dynamism and process of positive change, originating vertically from the Triune-God and ushered in the relational reality horizontally, through the process of interaction between personal Beings (the Triune God) and human beings, at micro and macro (personal and institutional) levels and multiple dimensions (i.e., spiritual, moral, social, and behavioral).[6] The nature of such change is aligned with the attribute of God and His will/revelation in Christ and Scripture, the opposite of "transgressional change."[7]

Transgressional Change – Change caused by the dynamism from the enemy of the Triune God[8] and by nature that is contrary to the attribute of God and His will, His revelation in Jesus Christ and the Scripture - the opposite is "transformational change."[9]

FOUNDATIONAL PRESUPPOSITIONS

The following foundational presuppositions should guide RH – the proposed approach in "Relational Interpretation of Scripture" -

1. Theologically, RH necessitates that we Christians view Scriptures as the Word of God (i.e. personal revelation of the Triune God - **Beings**) as authoritative and inerrant (Is 8:20; Matt. 5:17–18; 1Cor. 2:13; 14:37). God the Father revealed in the OT orally, visually, and phenomenologically. God the Son reveals the Father incarnationally, God the Holy Spirit inspires and illuminates.
2. Epistemologically, RH presupposes that

2. See chapter 2 of *Diaspora Missions to International Students*. By Enoch Wan. Oregon: Western Academic Publishers. 2019

3. For details, see Enoch Wan, *En-Qing Theology* (Theology of Unmerited Grace - in Chinese 恩情神學). Oregon: Western Academic Publishers, 2024). 恩情

4. Steffen, Tom A. and William Bjoraker, *The Return of Oral Hermeneutics: As Good Today as It Was for the Hebrew Bible and First-Century Christianity* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Pub., 2020), 317.

5. Wan, Enoch, "Rethinking Urban Mission in Terms of Spiritual and Social Transformational Change," in *Missiological Society of Ghana/WAMS Biennial International Conference* (Virtual, 2021).

6. Wan, Enoch, "Relational Transformational Leadership: An Asian Christian Perspective." *Asian Missions Advance*, April 2021: 2-7.

7. Wan, Enoch and Raibley, Jon. *Transformational Change in Christian Ministry.* (Second Edition). Oregon: Western Academic Publishers. 2022:7.

8. The enemy of God includes spirit beings of Satan and disobedient angels, worldly system externally and the fresh (fallen nature) internally, as in the literature on spiritual warfare as illustrated in the following publications:
   • Wan, "Spiritual Warfare: What Chinese Christians Should Know and Do." *First Evangelical Church Association Bulletin*. Dec. 1999:6-9
   • Wan, "Spiritual Warfare: Understanding Demonization," *Global Missiology*, Oct. 2003 @ www.globalmissiology.net
   Transgression (Parabasis = pará, "contrary" + bainō, "go"). See: Rom 2:23; 4:15; 5:14; Gal 3:19; 1Tim 2:14; Heb 2:2; 9:15

9. Wan and Raibley 2022:7.

Scriptures as truth and knowable – relational epistemology (**beings** and **belonging**) as proposed by Wan & Gimple.[10]

3. Holistically, integrative approach of RH requires the complementary use of related disciplines, such as theology, anthropology, history, etc.
4. Exegetically, there is advantage in employing related disciplines (such as biblical languages, linguistics, communication science, etc.) in RH.
5. Practically, the result of RH should lead to Godliness in understanding and practice (i.e. Christian maturity and sanctification - **becoming**); neither mere informational nor cognitive (2Tim. 3:16–17).

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF TEXTUAL HERMENEUTICS

Textual hermeneutics are crucial, as Grant Osborne says, because "it enables one to move from text to context, to allow the God-inspired meaning of the Word to speak today with as fresh and dynamic relevance as it had in its original setting."[11] Textual hermeneutics attempt to observe and interpret the biblical text through various lenses to accomplish various ends.

The **Grammatical-Historica**l hermeneutic was first coined by Johann August Ernesti in the 18th century. Its methods changed over the centuries, but American Evangelicals in the 19th and 20th centuries claimed this method as their counter to the arising *historical-critical* method.[12] This hermeneutic seeks to analyze the culture behind a text to gain a deeper understanding of the human author's intent. It does this by analyzing word choices and sentence structures (grammar and syntax). This model relies on *textual criticism* to determine the content of the original biblical manuscripts based on currently available copies. *Historical criticism* in this view is not the same as the *historical-critical method* in that it does not presuppose an anti-supernatural worldview. It does, however, analyze the history and cultural contexts behind the text. This hermeneutic includes the subdisciplines of *form criticism, source criticism, redaction criticism,* and *tradition criticism.* This hermeneutic is popular amongst American Evangelicals and is convincingly articulated by Craig L. Blomberg.[13]

The **Redemptive-Historical** hermeneutic seeks to discern in each text how God was advancing his redemptive plan for human history. It seeks to find Christ in every text, since "salvation resides ultimately not in who God is or even in *what he has said* but in what he has *done* in history, once for all, in Christ."[14] This hermeneutic is similar to the TIS (see below) in that it relies upon a cyclical relationship between exegesis and theological precommitments. Divine revelation is an interpretation of God's redemptive acts, so biblical *interpretation* is derivative.[15] Geerhardus Vos and many Reformed theologians champion this hermeneutic.

Brevard Childs popularized the Canonical hermeneutic in the 20th century and John H. Sailhamer carried it into the 21st century. This approach is interested in analyzing the final form of the biblical text and how its authors' arrangement of the texts (both portions of the text and entire books) contributes to the way God intends readers to experience and understand it. This hermeneutic presumes the Bible is both *human and sacred, unified* and *shaped*; these qualities reflect God's intention to edify and nourish his Church.[16]

Theological Interpretation of Scripture (TIS), a relatively new term, emerged as a distinct hermeneutic in the late 20th century. This hermeneutic reads the biblical text with theological precommitments; in a repetitive, cyclical fashion, the text directs and informs theological commitments, while those commitments direct and inform a reader's understanding of the text. Kevin Vanhoozer is a notable proponent of this view. Within the TIS umbrella, Vanhoozer nests a new textual hermeneutic that judges critical methods by their fruit.[17] Operating with the orthodox presupposition that Scripture is God's self-revelation intended to teach and train people for godliness, Vanhoozer concludes that an interpretive method is good if it reads the biblical text as God's direct speech through human authors meant to transform human readers. This theological reading will create a culture of readers who become answerable to God rather than authorities *over* the text (contra postmodern narrative theory). Vanhoozer's hermeneutic provides a filter to distinguish between God-honoring and worldly interpretive models based on their presuppositions and effects.

In recent decades there has been an emphasis on establishing the rigor of Pentecostal theology. One recent addition to the hermeneutic discussion is Craig S. Keener's *Spirit Hermeneutics*, where he emphasizes the Holy Spirit's role in biblical interpretation. The **Spirit Hermeneutic** thus recognizes that the Christian relies entirely on the Holy Spirit in interpretation because only by the Holy Spirit can a person embrace God's intended message *with faith.*[18] This is not to minimize any use of the other methods mentioned

10. Gimple, Ryan and Enoch Wan, *Covenant Transformative Learning: Theory and Practice for Mission* (Western Press, 2021).

11. Osborne, Grant R. *The Hermeneutical Spiral : A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 18.

12. Sailhamer, John H. "Johann August Ernesti: The Role of History in Biblical Interpretation," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44, no. 2 (June 2001): 194.

13. See his contribution in Biblical Hermeneutics: *Five Views,* Spectrum Multiview Books (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012).

14. See Robert Hall's contribution in Porter and Stovell, 109.

15. See Richard Gaffin Jr.'s contribution in Porter and Stovell, 93.

16. Porter and Stovell, 112–21.

17. See Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Mere Christian Hermeneutics: Transfiguring What It Means to Read the Bible Theologically* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2024).

18. Keener, Craig S. *Spirit Hermeneutics: Reading Scripture in Light of Pentecost* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2016), 11.

above, but a refocus on the necessity of the Holy Spirit, how global Christianity can inform the Church's interpretation of its own experiences, and viewing the biblical text through one's experience with the Dynamic Trinity.

Along with these hermeneutics, there are simpler attempts to view the biblical text through various lenses, or themes. Moltmann, in his book *Theology of Hope*, combs through Scripture attempting to find the convergence of God's revelation and his eschatological promise for the sake of exciting the believer into righteous action in the present.[19] Other non-Evangelical theologians, such as Gustavo Gutiérrez, use a *liberation* lens. He explains that this lens is grounded upon viewing the daily lives of ordinary people as a source of theological interpretation. This interpretation focuses on "social liberation from unjust structures, personal liberation from prejudices, and spiritual liberation from sin—because in a theological analysis, the root of injustice is sin."[20]

Vern Poythress admits that these lenses are helpful and often contain a bit of the truth, yet he offers an Evangelical approach to glean the best of these insights without distorting the entire theologies. He suggests that we can imitate the above lenses while maintaining Evangelical presuppositions. Using *liberation* as a lens, he argues that one could learn that "God's liberation of His people does include a corporate social and political dimension, not merely the salvation of individual souls," while maintaining a critique on Marxist underpinnings.[21]

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF TEXTUAL, ORAL AND RELATIONAL HERMENEUTICS

In traditional textual hermeneutics (i.e. interpretation and application of biblical text), the use of OT in the NT (e.g. citing of OT texts in the teaching of Jesus Christ in four Gospel books and a dozen epistles by the apostles) is a well-researched subject, as illustrated in the publications below:

- D. A. Carson, G. K. Beale. *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament.* Bake 2007.
- G. K. Beale (Editor). *Dictionary of the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*.2023
- D. A. Carson (Editor), Benjamin L. Gladd (Editor), G.K. Beale. *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament: Exegesis and Interpretation.* 2012.

The figure below is a snapshot comparing three kinds of hermeneutics in terms of "Primary Element(s)," "Particular/Participant" and "Process." Traditionally Christians employ "textual hermeneutics" to study and interpret OT and NT text. Similarly, Muslim believers use "textual hermeneutics" to study the Koran and Mormon members interpreting the *Book of Mormon*.

#		TEXTUAL HERMENEUTICS		ORAL HERMENEUTICS	RELATIONAL HERMENEUTICS
A. Primary Element(s)		OTHER: Muslim/ Mormon	BIBLICAL	Non-literary revelation such as dream, vision, memorized proverb/ poem & verbally told story & parable	Participants interacting in context with resulting relationships & networks
		Koran/ Book of Mormon	Biblical text -OT & NT		
B. Particular/ Participant		Use of texts by authors & recipients & interpreters		Speaker, story & participants	Personal Beings/ beings: Trinity, angels/humans
C. Process	sequence	(1) observing the text (2) understand text literarily (3) understand contextually (4) draw application		Listening, dialoguing & sharing	• interaction (vertical + horizontal dimensions) • relationship resulted • network emerged
	focus	• biblical text • text in context (historical and socio-cultural)		spoken word, stories, proverbs, poems, parables… verbally communicated	• personal Being/beings: attribute/identity • interactive pattern • relational network
	dynamics	• Interpretative process • leading to understand • application for edification and growth		• narrative: beings/Beings • relationally interactive & ontologically concrete: **doing & belonging** • dynamic & fluid: **becoming** (positive &/or negative change)	

Figure 1 - Comparison of Textual/Oral/Relational Hermeneutics

The theoretical framework of this paper is "relational interactionism" which is a framework that helps understand how socio-cultural reality is formed, preserved, and changed through dynamic, repeated, and meaningful interactions between personal Beings/ beings. The process of relational interaction between personal beings/Being forms relational networks, produces perceived meaning, leads to performance of functions.

In contrast to functionalism and conflict theory, symbolic interactionism[22] emphasizes the micro-processes through which people construct meanings while relational interactionism emphasizes the micro- and macro-processes through which relational reality of complex networks are dynamically formed, maintained, and changed.

"Relational interactionism" comes from an interdisciplinary perspective of theology, anthropology, sociology, psychology, missiology, linguistic and communication sciences. It is a study of the way that cultures are formed, and the social world of relational networks are created through interaction between personal Being/beings at micro- (individual) and macro-

19. Moltmann, Jürgen *Theology of Hope : On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, trans. James W. Leitch, 5th ed. (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1967), 21–22, 42.

20. Gutiérrez, Gustavo "A Hermeneutic of Hope," *The Center for Latin American Studies, Occasional Paper*, no. No. 13 (September 2012): 6–7.

21. Poythress, Vern S. *Science and Hermeneutics: Implications of Scientific Method for Biblical Interpretation, vol. 6, Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Academie Books, 1988), 146–47.

22. The definition of "Symboliclinteractionism" is "a micro-level theory that focuses on meanings attached to human interaction, both verbal and non-verbal, and to symbols." Lumen Learning. https://courses.lumenlearning.com (Retrieved Sept. 21, 2024). The key text for "symbolic interactionism" is: BN Meltzer, JW Petras, LT Reynolds, Symbolic interactionism: Genesis, varieties and criticism. London: Routledge 2015.

(institutional) levels as shown in the figure below.[23]

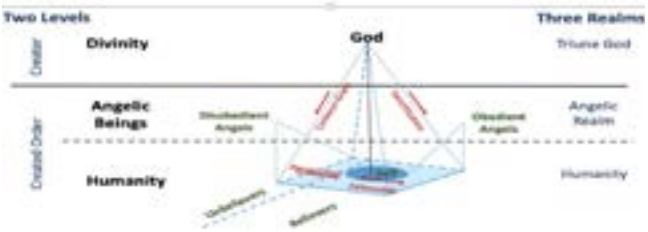

Figure 2 - Macro Perspective of "Relational Interactionism

Dynamic Trinity describes the "*Missio Dei* of sending and being sent to bear witness"[24] by three persons (distinct but united in love, fellowship and glory): the Father sent the Son in Incarnation and redemption and together sent the HS to empower those being sent by the Lord Jesus (John 5:36-37; 14:16-26; 20:21).

TRADITIONAL TEXTUAL HERMENEUTICS

Textual Hermeneutics in Christianity

In general, Christians traditionally practice textual hermeneutics to study the OT and NT to discover the truths and values expressed in the Bible by following four steps:[25]

1. understanding the historical and cultural context[26]
2. understanding the literary context
3. making observations
4. drawing application

FROM TRADITIONAL TEXTUAL HERMENEUTICS TO ORAL HERMENEUTICS

Two factors for the shift to "oral hermeneutics" from time-honored "textual hermeneutics" -

1. Benefited from the work of Walter Ong, Steffen and Bjoraker which proposed the definition of "oral hermeneutics" as "A preferred way to hear, process, remember, and communicate with the human voice as the primary medium. Orality includes multiple media, such as storytelling, poetry, music, visual arts, drama, and dance."[27] Another helpful reference on oral hermeneutics is *Exegeting Orality: Interpreting the Inspired Words of Scripture in Light of Their Oral Traditional Origins* by Nick Acker and Paul R. Eddy. Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers. 2024.
2. Strong preference to orality (i.e. stories and symbols, visuals, and rituals by two kinds of people: (a) oral culture (i.e. approximate "70–80% of people in the world")[28] and (b) new generation: "millennial and gen Z" with inclination to be more digital and experiential. Daniel Shaw in the following statement shows us how "relational interactionism" is helpful linking up oral hermeneutics with the understanding of God's revelation to man and the "inscripturation"[29] of inerrant biblical text of the OT and NT as divine revelation:

   "…orality is not only relevant in today's world, but was the hallmark of biblical approaches to understanding human interaction with God, and God's manifestations in and through those who honored him. Orality came before textuality and was never buried deep in biblical text…By introducing biblical characters through time and space, they demonstrate the value of establishing identity through genealogies, names, and patterns of behavior, all to help those who hear the stories see the face of God in the human context." (Steffen and Bjoraker 2024:xiv) (emphasis added)

Relational Interactionism is also helpful in the development of oral hermeneutics because "most people today are looking for relational truth or hear truth more than cognitive academic truth. Stories speak to the heart, and discussion of them created relationships." (Steffen and Bjoraker 2024:xxii)

The following quotations show the differences between textual hermeneutics and oral hermeneutics:

- "When textual hermeneutics interprets a story it usually talks about the story instead of telling the story to hearers, bringing it to life, and digging out the truths through questions…Oral hermeneutics, on the other hand, tends to focus on the communal oral telling, demonstration, discussion, interpretation, repetition, and application of the biblical grant narrative and all the smaller stories that compose her…" (Steffen and Bjoraker 2024:16)
- "In oral hermeneutics, the listeners/viewers focus strongly on characters (human and spiritual, individuals, groups, animals, [e.g. cattle, 1Sam 6:12)], considering the historical context, circumstances, conflicts, conversations, inconsistencies, choices and the consequences of said choices. Oral hermeneutics telegraphs values, morals, and theology character clarification from a context where relationships reign...Oral hermeneutics champions collectivism, volunteerism, the big picture, comprehensiveness, fulsomeness, and the progressive repetition of repeated themes." (Steffen and Bjoraker 2024:17)
- "Relationally based orality takes us back in time, in this book to the beginning of the oral traditions

23. Wan & Raibley, 2022:43.

24. Enoch Wan, *Diaspora Missions to International Students. Oregon, Western Seminary Press. 2019:chapter 2.*

25. Ethnos360 Bible Institute - https://e360bible.org/blog/what-is-biblical-hermeneuticss/ (Retrieved Sept. 21, 2024)

26. Onwuekwe, Agatha Ijeoma. "The Socio-Cultural Implications of African Music and Dance." A Journal of Theatre and Media Studies 3, no. 1 (2009): 171-184.

27. Steffen and Bjoraker, *The Return of Oral Hermeneutics,* 317..

28. Sills, David, *Changing World, Unchanging Mission: Responding to Global Challenges.* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2015), 87.

29. "Inscripturation" is the process and product of God's revelation through inspired writers who penned the inerrant biblical text of the OT and NT. See Enoch Wan, "A Critique of Charles Kraft's Use/Misuse of Communication and Social Sciences in Biblical Interpretation and Missiological Formulation." *Global Missiology,* October 2004, www.globalMissiology.net

of the Israelites …orally through communal relationships…from the inspired, spoken word of the prophets, including Jesus (pretext)…to the entire process is acutely visible to those having the oral-aural-influenced eyes and ears of the Mediterranean ancients." (Steffen and Bjoraker 2024:294)

- "OH (Oral Hemeneutics) begins the cycle from concrete to concepts through audience analysis; it critiques characters in search of God-pleasing beliefs and behaviors for individuals, families, communities, and nations. Rather than diagrammed grammatical analysis and word studies, OH relies on the characters in the story to embody and demonstrate codes for lifestyles that evidence distinctions between godly wisdom and foolishness; Bible characters give life to cold abstract ideas. OH lays the foundation for the possibility of absorbed godly choices through character analysis (ch. 6). (Steffen and Bjoraker 2024:296-297)
- "In summation, the head hermeneutic, TH, unseated the heart hermeneutic, OH, to determine all biblical meaning for all times in all genres, cultures, and countries; OH became obsolete." (Steffen and Bjoraker 2024:300)

However, the three kinds of hermeneutics can be viewed forming a continuum from TH (Traditional Hermeneutics) to OH (Oral Hermeneutics) then RH (Relational Hermeneutics) as shown in the figure below.

TH →	OH →	RH
Bible is a code book	Bible is a case book	Bible is a guide for interacting correctly
Bible studies	Bible discussions	Bible-based interaction
Propositional logic	Narrative Logic	Relational logic
Words are central	Meaning is central	
Fragments	Whole	Process of interaction
Head Hermeneutics	Heart Hermeneutics	
Evidential apologetics	Experiential apologetics	
Critical thinking	Character thinking	
Content-centric questions	Character-centric questions	
Textual analysis	Character analysis	
Grammatical-Historical	Character-Historical	
Text-centric meaning	Character-centric meaning	Person-centric meaning (personal Beings of the Trinity and angelic/human beings
Definitions	Demonstrations	Pattern of interaction
Rational	Relational	

Figure 3 - Continuum of Textual, Oral, and Relational Hermeneutic

As shown in the figure above, RH focuses on process and pattern of interaction between personal beings/Beings within the framework of "relational interactionism" can include TH (revelation and interpretation of sacred text) and OH (revelation and interpretation of oral-aural material such as discourse, prophetic utterance, apostolic teaching, vision and dream).

THE "WHAT" AND "HOW" OF "RELATIONAL HERMENEUTICS"

The term and concept of "relational hermeneutics" (RH) is not the author's invention for it is pre-dated by several published works:

- Van Buskirk, Gregory P. "The 'Relational Hermeneutics' of Contemporary Wesleyan Moral Theology." Academia.edu https://www.academia.edu › (Retrieved Sept. 15, 2024)
- Vaai, Luma Upolu. *Relational Hermeneutics: Decolonising the Mindset and the Pacific Itulagi.* University of the South Pacific & the Pacific Theological College. 2017. file:///Users/enochwan/Downloads/Confucian_Relational_Hermeneuticss_the_Em-1.pdf (retrieved Sept. 12, 2024)
- Smit, Guillaume Hermanus. "Living in Three Worlds: A Relational Hermeneutics for the Development of a contextual Practical Theological Approach towards a Missional Ecclesiology." Scriptura 114 (2015:1), pp. 1-15http://scriptura.journals.ac.za (Retrieved Sept. 15, 2024)

The author's proposed RH is inspired by Thiselton's theory of biblical hermeneutics as stated below:

- "The goal of biblical hermeneutics is to bring about an active and meaningful engagement between the interpreter and text, in such a way that the interpreter's own horizon is reshaped and enlarged. In one sense it is possible to speak, with Gadamer, of the goal of hermeneutics as a "fusion" of two horizons…The Bible can and does speak today, in such a way as to correct, reshape, and enlarge the interpreter's own horizons." (Thiselton 1980:xix)
- "We first identified the underlying problem of hermeneutics as a two-sided one, involving the historical conditionedness both of the ancient text and of the modern interpreter." (Thiselton 1980:22)

From the quotations above, we understand that Thiselton recognized two horizons in Bible interpretation: the "ancient text" of the Bible and contemporary "modern interpreter." To him, "the goal of hermeneutics is a fusion of the two horizons.

Given the presuppositions articulated previously and with the aid of "relational interactionist paradigm," we then can articulate the key concepts in RH as follows:

- The Holy Spirit is actively involved personally (Being) in "inspiration" and "inscripturation" of the Bible (i.e. revelatory interaction with OT prophets and NT apostles - beings).
- With the use of "relational interactionist paradigm," we can benefit from Thiselton's statement – "The Bible can and does speak today, in such a way as to correct, reshape, and enlarge the interpreter's own horizons." God spoke in canonical books of OT and NT in His revelatory

interactions with them historically in multiple forms (e.g. vision, dream, theophany, inspiration, etc. - 2 Tim 3:16). God the HS speaks today (illumination) to contemporary interpreter of the Bible (i.e. interpretative interaction in historic way – John 15:26).

- Thiselton's statement below limited the impact of biblical texts on contemporary interpreter's horizon - "The Bible can and does speak today, in such a way as to correct, reshape, and enlarge the interpreter's own horizons." Based on several Bible verses (such as John 17:17; Acts 21:32; 1Tim 3:16), God's Word can usher in transformational change (i.e. growth and sanctification - becoming) in contemporary interpreters relationally. `

RH is developed by the integration of multiple disciplines as illustrated by two researchers introduced below. The South African theologian Guilaume Hermanus Smit made an attempt to integrate three paradigms to formulate his Missiological ecclesiology: pre-modern, modern & post-modern paradigms in his article "Living in Three Worlds: A Relational Hermeneutics for the Development of a Contextual Practical Theological Approaches Towards a Missional Ecclesiology."[30] There are similarities and dissimilarities between his efforts of integration and this article as shown in the table below:

COMPARISON	G. H. SMIT	ENOCH WAN
Similarity	Missio Dei: "God's self-revelation as the one who loves the world, God's involvement in and with the world, the nature and activity of God in which the church is privileged to participate in God's Mission"[31]	
	relational hermeneutics	
Difference	Integration of 3 diachronic paradigms: pre-modern, modern & post-modern	Integration of 3 types of hermeneutics: textual, oral and relational
	Towards a missional ecclesiology	Towards a relational hermeneutics

Figure 4 – Comparison of two approaches: Guilaume Hermanus Smit and Enoch Wan

Regarding an evangelical theological perspective on Scriptures, I agree with Smit's statement below:

> *"The manner in which Christians engage the world with their testimony about God's work depends greatly on the paradigm from which they read Scripture, or the way they 'let Scripture be Scripture' (Wright 2009:40) and apply these insights to their specific cultural interpretation (McKnight 2008:13). It affects ecclesiological practices, and it dictates Missional approaches. It also stems from the paradigmatic lens through which they engage in Scripture reading."* (Smit 2015:2)[32]

While we agree on "Scripture interprets Scripture," we can interpret Scripture by using the "relational interactionist" paradigm emphasizing the pattern and process of personal beings/Beings in revelatory interaction and hermeneutical interpretation, as shown in the figure below.

	KEY	TEXTUAL HERMENEUTICS		ORAL HERMENEUTICS	RELATIONAL HERMENEUTICS
		OTHER	BIBLICAL		
REVELATION	Personal Beings/ beings	- Allah of Islam revealed to Mohamad the Koran in Arabic - Moroni to Joseph Smith	- the Bible is **inspired** ("God breathed")[33] - human writers of OT & NT books "penned" His inerrant word of the Bible	non-literary revelation such as dream, vision, memorized proverb/ poem & verbally told story by Triune God, prophets, apostles & angels (**inspiration)**	Participants (Triune God, angelic & human beings) of revelatory interaction within specific historical & socio-cultural context[34] with resulting relationships & emerging network
	Process				
	Product/ Conse-quence				
INTERPRETATION	Personal Beings/ beings	- Interpreting the Koran (Qur'ān)[35] - Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon. -Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are to read for personal understand-ing & can have spiritual experience	"**Inscriptured**" biblical text within specific historical & socio-cultural contexts	By the **illumination** of the HS, teacher/ trainer verbally communicates biblical truth through non-literary forms (i.e. spoken word, storing, proverbs, poems, parables, story/ discourse) to recipients when talk & listen, dialogue & share with one and other at personal and/ or communal levels	Interpreting selected items (such as biblical text, oral materials) focusing on the patterned interaction of personal being/Beings of multi-level (e.g. micro-/ macro-) in multi-contextual (i.e. realms of existence within the Trinity or within the created order) and various circumstances (i.e. synchronically or diachronically) to ascertain understanding & narrating the process & pattern of interaction between Beings / beings, focusing on pattern of interaction in terms of **doing & belonging**
	Process		Aided by **illumination** of HS in interpretive process in 4 steps: 1. observing the text 2. understand text literarily 3 understand in contexts: historical & socio-cultural 4. draw application for edification /growth		
	Product/ Conse-quence			Interpretation led to understand and application for edification & growth	Dynamic interaction leading to positive &/ or negative change (**becoming**)

Figure 5–Revelation & Interpretation: Textual/Oral/Relational Hermeneutics

30. Smit, Guillaume Hermanus. "Living in Three Worlds: A Relational Hermeneutics or the Development of a contextual Practical Theological Approach towards a Missional Ecclesiology." *Scriptura* 114 (2015:1), pp. 1-15 http://scriptura.journals.ac.za (Retrieved Sept. 15, 2024)

31. Smit, Guilaume Hermanus. "Living in Three Worlds: A Relational Hermeneutics for the Development of a Contextual Practical Theological Approaches Towards A Missional Ecclesiology." Scripture 114 (2015:1)

32. Smit 2015:2 https://scielo.org.za/pdf/scriptur/v114/17.pdf (retrieved Sept. 17, 2024)

33. 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

34. Onwuekwe, Agatha Ijeoma. "The Socio-Cultural Implications of African Music and Dance." *A Journal of Theatre and Media Studies* 3, no. 1 (2009): 171-184.

35. Interpreting the Koran contextually: Each verse must be understood in light of the Qur'ān itself & not in contradiction with the life of Prophet Mohamad and the Companions of the Prophet.

By using the "relational interactionist" paradigm, the figure below shows God's "revelatory interaction" (inspiration and "**inscripturation**" of the Bible) and interpreter's "hermeneutical interaction" (i.e. aided by the **illumination** of the HS and achieved by interpreter's efforts in studying and understanding the Bible relationally). God's "revelatory interaction" and the interpreter's "hermeneutical interpretation" are summarized in the figure below which shows the relationship between the two.

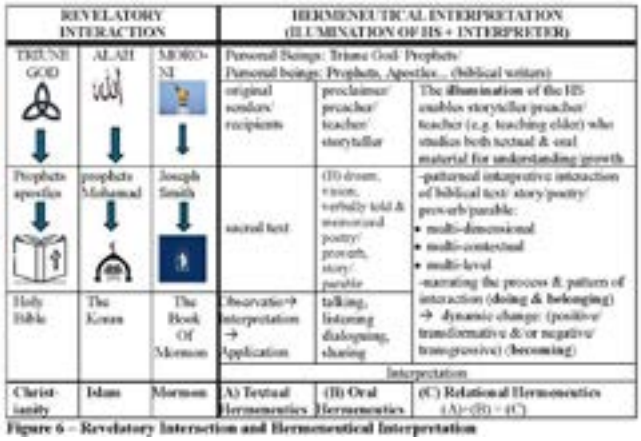

Figure 6 – Revelatory Interaction and Hermeneutical Interpretation

As shown on the left column in the figure above, there is the similar pattern of "revelatory interaction" in the case of the Holy Bible, Koran and Book of Mormon.[36] On the right column there is similar pattern of "hermeneutical interpretation" as found in:

A. Textual hermeneutics of the Bible, Koran and Book of Mormon in similar interactive pattern.
B. Oral hermeneutics involves dream and vision: story and prophecy, proverbs and poetry… verbally told and memorized by people of orality and interpreted and communicated verbally by storyteller/teacher/preacher.
C. Relational hermeneutics[37]
   In the figure above, the illumination of the HS enables him/her (i.e. storyteller/preacher/ teacher) who studies both textual & oral material for understanding/growth., i.e. RH = TH + OH

From the figure above, the emphasis of RH is refocusing towards pattern and process of the social relationship and social networks (belonging) formed by personal interactions between personal Beings/ beings in revelatory interaction and interpretive interaction, leading to "change" (becoming) either positively ("transformative change") or negatively (transgressional change." (See Figure 23 below and the discussion on "the temptation of Jesus")

In summary:

- (C) Relational hermeneutics integrates (A) and (B) in the patterned interpretive interaction
- As a formula: (C) = (A) + (B)
  i.e. relational hermeneutics can integrate textual and oral hermeneutics by interpretating material both in textual form and oral form (story/poetry/ proverb/ parable of in conversation, dialogue and discourse):
  - multi-dimensional (vertical &/or horizontal)
  - multi-contextual (the realms of Triune God, angel and man)
  - multi-level (micro-/macro-, personal &/or group)

RH is a narrative of the process and pattern of interaction (**doing & belonging**) with dynamic change (**becoming)**: either positive (transformative) or negative (transgressive change)

"***Perichoresis***" (from Greek: περιχώρησις *perikhōrēsis*, "rotation") is a narrative term referring to the intimate relationship of the three persons of the Triune God internally. Selected verses from the Gospel of John are listed below to show the relational interaction of "dynamic Trinity" with "favored humanity" -

- "Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you." (John 14:19-20)
- "But when the Counselor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me." (John 15:26)
- "That they all may be one; as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be one in us" (John 17:21)

The divine grace of bringing Christians into "the relationship of *perichoresis* of the Trinity" is God's gift (*from* the Father, *through* the Son's Incarnation and *in* the gift of the Holy Spirit of truth) to favored humanity - with pattern and process of relational interactions vertically and horizontally.

EXAMPLES OF RELATIONAL HERMENEUTICS

Narrative Accounts by Luke in the Gospel and Acts as Practiced by the Resurrected Lord and the Apostle Peter at Pentecost

Luke provided narrative accounts of the practice of relational hermeneutics as precedents:

- "on the road to Emmaus" by Jesus (Luke 24:13-35) and at Pentecost by the apostle Peter (Acts 2: 14-36) at Pentecost. The resurrected Lord met and taught the two disciples by relationally

36. Mormon: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

37. The definition and conception of "relational hermeneutics" are used in two publications are totally different from this article:

• Nelson, Eric S. "Confucian Relational Hermeneutics, the Emotions, and Ethical Life." From: Paul Fairfield and Saulius Geniusas, Relational Hermeneutics: Essays in Comparative Philosophy (Bloomsbury, 2018) file:///Users/enochwan/Downloads/Confucian_Relational_Hermeneuticss_the_Em-1.pdf (retrieved Sept. 12, 2024)

• Luma Upolu Vaai, *Relational Hermeneutics: Decolonising the Mindset and the Pacific Itulagi. University of the South Pacific & the Pacific Theological College.* 2017. file:///Users/enochwan/Downloads/Confucian_Relational_Hermeneuticss_the_Em-1.pdf (retrieved Sept. 12, 2024). University of the South Pacific & the Pacific Theological College. 2017 file:///Users/enochwan/Downloads/Confucian_Relational_Hermeneuticss_the_Em-1.pdf (retrieved Sept. 12, 2024)

interpreting the OT, applying the Scriptures to Himself (24:25-27) for their understanding ("opened the Scriptures to us" - v.32).

- At Pentecost, the apostle Peter preached to the crowd by interpreting relationally OT passages (from Joel and Psalm) and witnessing for the resurrected Christ (Acts 2:14-36, 40) with impactful effectiveness and fruitful outcomes (Act 2:27-47).

Examples of Relational Hermeneutics

Relational hermeneutics was demonstrated as useful and fruitful in the previously published works as listed below:

- Enoch Wan, "A *Missio*-Relational Reading of Romans." *Occasional Bulletin*, Winter, Vol. 23, No. 1. 2010:1-8.
- Enoch Wan & Timothy Hanuk (pseudonym), "Bible Education Through Tajik Orality." In **Oral Leadership and Discipleship.** In Enoch Wan and John Ferch. Western Academic Publishers 2024:Chapter 9.

Examples of relational hermeneutics are organized below in two sections: (a) the study of Romans, and (b) ROPE = "Relational Oral Poetic Education" in Tajik orality. Readers are recommended to review sermon outlines for narrative preaching, based on relational hermeneutics, in Appendix 1).

Missio-relational Reading of the Epistle to the Romans

Unlike previous works on Romans by other commentators, the author in the 2010 article[38] used "relational hermeneutics" approach as illustrated in the figures below.

In contrast to popular way of thematic outline of Romans, the following two figures show an alternative view relationally:

Outline	Relationship	Scope
Ch. 1:11	the gospel-effected relationship (grace: needed & made available to all vertically	general (1-8) universality of the gospel
		general (9-11) Jews and Gentiles (grace available to all)
Cs. 12-16	the gospel-transformed individuals in community (grace: received vertucally is to be lived out in "relational reality" horizontally)	general (12:1-21; 13:8-14)
		Spectific ● towards government (13:1-7) ● the weak and the strong (14:1-15:13) - the "gospel messenger" Paul and the church in Rome (15:14-34) for "partnership in the gospel" - greetings to the saints of the church in Rome for "partnership in the gospel" (16)

Figure 7 – Outlining Romans in terms of Vertical and Horizontal Relationships (Wan 2010:2)

text	theme	who
		Jews & Gentiles
1-8	The world needs the gospel	• Both can be saved by the Gospel (1:16-17) • Both are sinners in need of grace: Gentiles (1:8-32) and the Jews (2:1-3; 8) • Both can be saved through justification by faith (3:21-4:26)
9-11	To Jews first then Gentiles	• Both are parts of God's plan (9-11)
		Christians
12	Gospel-effected changes collectively	• All are to present their bodies as living sacrifice and render reasonable service to God (12:1) • All not to be conformed to this world but transformed by the renewing of mind and seeking God's will (12:2) • All are to stay away from sense gratification (13:13)
13	Gospel-effected relationships	• All are debtors to those have not heard the gospel (1:14) • All humble and empathetic an live peacefully with all (12:14-18) • All good and submissive citizens (13:1-7)
14-15	Gospel-effected community	• Love another (12:9-13; 13:8-10) • Be sensitive to one another (14:1-8) • Build up one another (15:1-3)16
16	Greetings --- 30+	• Partnership for the gospel sought by Paul prior to his visit to Rome

Figure 8 - Outlying the Epistle to Romans: Horizontal Interaction (Wan 2010:1)

In this new way of Missio-relational reading of Romans, the epistle is regarded as an occasional letter by Paul the Missionary who, though he desired to visit the church in Rome, had not been able to do so. His strong desire was to rally the saints in Rome to become Gospel partners in evangelizing the unreached western part of the Roman empire, all the way to Spain. Viewed from this historical background and the Mission passion of Paul, we then can use "Mission" and "Gospel" as the theme to outline Romans in a way different from doctrinal focus of "justification by faith."

Text	Theme	Elements of Christian Missions
1:1-17	Messenger of the gospel: i.e. Paul and others	• Paul was called "to be and apostle" • Position: "seperated unto the gospel of God" - Not out of private wished -- "We have received grace and apostleship - Responsibility: "among all nations, for his name" (1-5), also "ye also called of Jesus Christ" (1:6) in Rime Called to be :the apostle of the Gentiles" (11:13) Eagerly longing for Israel his kinsmen to be saved (9:1-3, 10:1)
1:18-Ch. 8	Message of missions	- Sinful Gentiles (1:18-32) & Jews in need of the gospel (2) - God's faithfulness & man's neediness (3:1-20) - God's righteousness manifested: Justification by faith (3:21-5:21) - God'd righteous manifested, leading to struggle & victory (6:8)
Ch. 9-11	Missional sequence	- "through the in-gathering of the nations that God is keeing his promise to Israel" (Wright 2006:528)
Ch. 15	Paul's mission service	- Mission principle: "Not where Christ was named" (15:20), "But now having no more place in these parts [Corinth]" (15:23) - Paul's priestly service: the obedience of the nationals as sacrifice (15:16-18)
15:14-33	Missionary strategy (Rome the capital)	• Prayer before arrival (1:8-10) • Visitation after Arrival (1:11-13) • Taking Rome as a base to reach out westward (Spain) (15: 23-28)
Ch. 16	Greetings to partners of the gospel	• Such as Priscilla and Aquila • The house churches (Rom 16:5, 14-15)

Fifure 9 - Outline of Romans: "Mission" as the Theme of "Relational interactionism

38. Enoch Wan, "A *Missio*-Relational Reading of Romans."

Gospel & Grace	Relational Gospel		
	Who	How	Text
Gospel and Grace ↓	Apostle Paul	set apart for the gospel	15
	Christians in Rome	• called of Jesus Christ • beloved of God, called to be saints	1:6 1:7
	From God	• Gospel truth • All mankind are in need of it from God • God's Righteousness manifested • Salvation: God's grace given to all who believe	1:18-3:20 3:21-5: 6:8
		United with the Lord	6:1-8:4
	Christians	Led by the Spirit	8
	Jews & Gentiles	Covenant-keeping God bringing mankind to Him and together	9-11
Grace →	Gospel-effected individuals are to live in grace horizontally		12-16

Figure 10 - Outline of Romans: "Gospel" as the theme for Vertical Interaction between God and His People :(Wan 2010:6)

What God does for people	What Persons Experience as a Result
"He was born a descendant of David; as to his divine holiness, he was shown with great power to be the Son of God by being raised from death" (1:3-4)	"Through him God gave...the privilege of being an apostle" (1:5)
"CHrist died for us" (5:8)	"We are now put right with God...who has now made us God's friends" (5:9, 11)
Holy Spirit.--God's special gift of new life (5:5) Holy Spirit helps--inner direction of the mind	"the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts" by the H.S. (5:5) Brought in line with God's will (7:23; 11:34; 1Cor. 2:13)
"Christ was raised from death" (6:4)	"So also we might live a new life" (6:4)
"What the law could not do...God did. He condemned sin in human nature by sending his own Son, who came with a nature like man's sinful nature" (8:3)	"The law of the spirit, which brings us life in union with Christ Jesus, has set me free from the law of sin and death" (8:2)
"the Spirit of God...Christ from death..." (8:11) ***Chrismata***, gift from God (12:3; 1 Cor. 12:28)	"Lives in you" (8:11) ***Diakonia***, to serve & live in harmony (12:5-18)

Figure 11 - Outline of Romans: Relational Gospel in Romans with Dual-directional Interaction (Wan 2010:4)

Text	Paul the Missionary	The Church in Rome
1:1-17	Repeatedly desired but failed to pay visit; now determined	"beloved of God, called to be saints" (1:7) "that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world" (1"8) "I long to see you...impart unto you some spiritual gift...comforted together...mutual faith..." (1:111-12)
15:14-33	With "a firm and settled conviction, a confident certainty" (Cranfield 1979:441)	"A mature church of genuine believers in Christ" (Strauss 2003"459) "demonstrated their faith in Christ by their relationships and their firm grasp of the truth of the gospel" (Strausse 2003:459) Anticipated fellowship with them, then being sent by them westward to Spain (15:22-24)
Ch. 16	Greetings & benediction from missionary Paul who desired partnership	Personal greetings of 30+ to individual and house churches; Benediction: "to him that is of power to establish you according to my gospel, and preaching of Jesus Christ" (16:25)

Figure 12 - Outline of Romans: Hotizontal Interaction between Apostle Paul and the Chuch in Rome (Wan 2010:5)

With the help of "relational interaction" paradigm, Romans can be outlined in a new way as shown in the figure below.

Christ	Paul	Text
The Lord	An Apostle	1:1
The Gospel	Because of and for the Gospel	1:1
Sourch of Grace	Recipent of Grace	1:5
Justifier	Justified	3:26
Righteousness	Made Righteous	3:24
Son of God	Gospel Servant	1:9
Example	Follower	8:29-30

Figure 13 - Outline of Romans: "Gospel" as the theme for Vertical Interaction between Christ and Apostle Paul (Wan 2010:6)

In view of the Trinity, chapter 8 can be outlined in terms of the pattern and process of relational interaction as shown in the figures below.

The Father	The Son	The Holy Spirit
God sending his own Son (3) heirs of God (17) the glorious liberty of the children of God (21) who are the called according to his purpose (28) predestinated...called...justified...glorified (30,33) God be for us, who can ne against us (31) sperated not his own Son...delivered him up for us...freely give us all things (32) nothing shall seperate us from the love of God (39)	No condemnation (1) free from the law of sin and death (2) Christ in you: life & righteousness (10) joint-heirs with Christ (17) be conformed to the image of his Son (29) be the firstborn among many brethren (29) Christ died...risen again...at the right hand of God... intercession for us (34) Nothing shall seperate us from the love of Christ (35) more than conquerors through him that loved us (37) the love of God...in Christ Jesus our Lord (39)	Mind things after the Spirit (5) the Spirit of God dwell in you (9) quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwells in you (11) through the spirit do mortify the deeds of the body (13) Spirit of adoption: cry Abba Father (15) bears witness... children of God (16) have the first fruits of the spirit (23) Spirit helps our infirmities (26) makes intercession for the saints (27)

Figure 14 - The Gospel: Vertical Interaction - God and Christians in Romans 8 (Wan 2010:6)

Triune God	Relation in Action
The Father: giving the Son	"He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all..."
The Son giving himself	"...in due time Christ died for the ungodly" (5:6)
The Holy Spirit giving His presence	"...if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you..." (8:9)

Figure 15 - Pattern of the "Self-giving Love" of the Triune God (Wan 2010:7)

The following figures show the pattern and process of relational interaction in terms of the "cross" and "Christ" from macro perspective:

Key	Practice
Providence	God's self-sacrificed love at the cross (3:21-21)
Process	Acceptance of sinners (6-7)
Result	Salvation, reconcilliation and glorification (8-11)

Figure 16 - The Cross: God-man Vertical-Interaction (Wan 2010:7)

Key	Practice	Pricilla & Aquila
Motive	Self-giving love	"Who have for my life laid down their own necks" (16:4)
Process	Life-risking	Cf. Acts 18:1-11
Result	The life of the apostle to the Gentiles spared and the Gentile churches ought to be grateful to them	"not ony I am thankful but also all the churches of the Gentiles" (16:4)

Figure 17 - The Case of Priscilla and Aquila (Wan 2010:7)

Christ	Christian	Text
The Savior	Saved by Gospel	1:16-17
Source of Grace	Recipient of Grace	1:5
Justifier	Justified	3:26
Righteousness	Made Righteous	3:24
Son of God	Gospel Servant	1:9
Example	Follower	8:29-30
The Word of Christ	Faith	10:17
Sacrificial death	Living sacrifice	5:17; 8"32; 12:1
Died for sin	Dead to sin	6:11
Christ --the head	Members of the body ("in union")	12:5

Figure 18 - Vertical Interaction: Christ and Christians (Wan 2010:7)

The three figures below show the pattern of horizontal relational interaction.

Key	Practice	Reference
Motive	Self-giving love	"For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren my kindsmen according to the flesh" 9:3
Process	Acceptance of sinners	"That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart" 9:2
Result	Salvation and reconcilliation	"and not only (so), but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whome we have now received the atonement" (5:11)

Figure 19 - Horizontal Interaction Between Paul and His Kinsmen (Wan 2010:7)

	Vertical		Horizontal
↓	be transformed by the renewing of your mind (2)	↓ the grace given unto Paul (3)	not to think of self more highly than he/she ought (3) ← →
↓	prove what is...good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God (2)	↓ measure of faith from God (3)	
↑	present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God (1)	↓ (Christ--the head) (4,5)	many members in one body (4,5) ← →
		↓ grace given & proportion ↓ of faith (6)	many gifts to serve (6-8) ← →

Figure 20 - Horizontal Relationship of Gospel-affected Individuals

Text	Sub-theme	Target Group
1-8	All are in need of the "gospel"	- Saved by the power of the Gospel (1:16-17) - All are sinners in need of the Gospel: Gentiles (1:18-32) & Jews (2:1-3:8) - All can be justified by God (3:21-4:25) - All are to "love" as debtors (8:12)
9-11	Sequence of the gospel: Jews 1st then gentiles	- Both are in God's plan of salvation (9-11)
12	Gospel-transformed individuals in community	- Apart from the world (12:2) - Governed by "love" (12:9)
13	Gospel-effected individuals are to submit to civil quthority	- Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers (13:1) - Wherefore ye must needs be subject (13:4-5)
14-15	Gospel-effected individuals to fellow believers are to love & share	- Be sensitive to one another (14:1-6; 15:1-2) - Accept on another (16:7) - "grace" received are to be shared (15:27)

Figure 21 - The Gospel-transformed Individuals (Faith Community) of Romans 12:1-8

Relational Interpretation of Poetical Books of Psalms and Proverbs for the Practice of Rope ("Relational Oral Poetic Education") in the Context of Tajik Orality[39]

Ethnographic description of Tajik orality is provided in the article: "Enoch Wan & Timothy Hanuk (pseudonym), "Bible Education Through Tajik Orality." In this section, we follow "andragogical theory" of adult learning and slightly adapt the widely used and respected "Experiential Learning Theory (ELT)" championed by David Kolb.[40] Kolb's four learning modes are Concrete Experience (CE) and Abstract Conceptualization (AC) on a vertical continuum of perception, while Reflective Observation (RO) and Active Experimentation (AE) on a horizontal continuum of processing. (1984:41). He shows learning as the process and pattern of the cycle of these learning modes.

Below is the practice of relational hermeneutics on texts from two poetic books of the OT and the practice of intercultural education of ROPE are explained briefly.

Selected Texts from Psalms 48 and Proverbs 24:30-34

Psalm 48:1-8 coincides with "concrete experience" (CE). The attention is given to feeling whereby the Poet uses metaphor to enhance the mood. He uses the contrasting emotions of seeing the beauty of Zion with the terror of the enemies.

- Psalm 48:9 brings to light relational orality. Notice the communal response of thinking together on God's lovingkindness as displayed in Him being in the midst of His temple. This promotes the discussing of the experience of seeing God's presence.
- Psalm 48:10-11 prods the listener to think, "abstract conceptualization" (AC). There is an appeal to logic here: as is… so is. Notice also the appeal to God's attributes to help understand the situation of why praise is fitting in considering the presence of God as well as the enemies.
- Psalm 48:12-14 appeals to AE. This encourages a return to the first few verses in the Psalm as one participates again in experiencing the grandeur of God's presence in Zion. However, this time the goal is to apply those experiences through interacting with the next generation.

The "ROPE" encircling the "experiential learning theory" (ELT) model shows as shown in the figure

39. Wan and Hanuk. 2024.

40. vid A Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1984), 41.

below. In doing this we show how ROPE incorporates the four learning modes.

As Tajiks practice poetry for "ta'lim," for example, they engage in CE. This is both relational and situational. Practicing poems happens in a wide range of situations. Childhood learning lays the foundation of memorized poems. Adult learning often reaches into that memorized database to engage in the social activity of a situational issue or topic being experienced in the moment. Learners, both listeners and speakers, actively engage in concrete experiences through oral art.

When Tajiks practice poetry for "fikri Chikur," for example, they are thinking and talking about meaning with others in community, RO. The oral poetry enables one to bridge the gap of one's understanding and experiences, as together listeners and speakers involve themselves in poetry. This also touches on AC as ideas or concepts are brought into the process, often through metaphor, to help understand situational circumstances or problems. Poetry is used situational, bringing a form of logic into the life experience.

For a second example, look at the proposition of 'Cyclical' pattern. Proverbs 14:5 with Proverbs 19:5 is an example of the cyclical nature of proverbial teaching. Both passages say the same thing - a false witness is one who is a liar. One proverb says a very similar thing to another. It is repetitive. Psalm 78 tells a condensed story of narrative passages in the Old Testament but does it in poetry. This is a retelling of story showing us a cyclical nature to teaching. ROPE reveals repetitive characteristics. Not only in memorizing, but in the constant quoting of learned poems in a variety of situations. We show these brief examples to show confluence with Bible propositions in learning with Tajik ROPE. The figure below is a summary of the outcome of practicing relational hermeneutics on selected texts of poetical books.

Poem Metrics	Proverbs e.g.	Psalm e.g.	Rope
Poetic	1:5-6	78:1, 2	Uses Poetry
Orientation present to future	2:3-5	78:5, 6	Adult perspective on Child Edu.
Emotive	14:13	78:18-21	*Foridan*
Metaphorical	6:20-23	78:13, 15, 16..	Nature of poetry
Meditative	24:32	78:8	*Fikri chikur*
Experiential	23:29-35	78:3	Situational
Traditional	4:3-4	78:2, 4	Historic, *Tojik*
Relational	2:1-22	78:1, 4	Communal
Onstructive	15:32	78:1, 7	*Ta'lim*
Cynical	14:5 with 19:5	78:6, 7 78:8-72 poetic stroy	Repetitive
Spiritual	1:6-7	78:4	Faith incorporated

Figure 22 - Pedagogical Confluence: Psalm/Proverbs learning propositions with ROPE

The figure below shows the education strategy for Bible education of poetic texts to Tajik oral learners.

Strategy Criteria	Relational Orally Poetic Bible Education Strategy
Theoretical/ Theological	Relational Realism
Framework	Relational Interactionism
Goal	Relational Transformational Change (Being, Belonging, Becoming)
Process	Relational Transformational Growth: God's Person→God's Scripture, God's People - Oral use of poetic forms of Scripture
Contextual Relevance	Cultural Patterns -ROPE
Pedagogical Confluence	ROPE, Kolb adapted model, Psalm/Prov. Edu. method
Procedures & Activities	Resource Development, Transformational Gatherings, Situational Oral Bible Poetry, Encouragement & Challenge

Figure 23 - Relational Oral Poetic Bible Education Strategy for Tajik Learners

USING RH CORRECTLY OR INCORRECTLY?

In the narrative of the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness (Mt 4:1-11; Mk 1: 12-13; Lk 4:1-13), Jesus Christ used RH when citing/interpreting OT passages three times: (1) "it is written" (Mt 4:4); (2) "it is also written" (Mt 4:7); (3) "For it is also written (Mt 4:10). Satan cited/interpreted an OT passage once.

Pattern	Process	Interacting Person		Insight re: RH
		Jesus	Satan	
Narrative dialogue	1.→	Deut. 8:3	• Self-gratifying • Proof of sonship	• Correctly by JC - 3 times
	2. →	Deut. 6:16	Ps. 91:11-2	
	3. →	Deut. 6:13; 10-20	taking shortcuts & deviating from God's plan	• Incorrectly by Satan - once

Figure 24 - The Temptation of Jesus: Personal Interaction

In the narrative dialogue, the relational posture of Jesus Christ can be observed:

1. Resisted basic need for food after fasting for 40 days and was dependent on God's word.
2. Reisted self-serving vanity and submitted to the Father's will.
3. Resisted the sin of idolatry and kept fidelity serving the Father only.

From the above analysis, we can see that biblical interpretation is not an objective exercise (i.e. scientific and non-personal), there is a strong and important relational dimension that is ignored by those who insisted biblical interpretation to be merely an objective act, a cognitive exercise, and/or scientific endeavor.

CONCLUSION

In this paper the "what" and "how" of RH are introduced after a brief overview and comparison of TH and OH. Though there are clear differences between TH, OH and RH, methodologically speaking, they form a continuum. While the major concerns of "relational interactionism" are "who" (personal beings/Beings) and "how" (pattern and process of

relational interaction) of personal beings/Beings, the scope of this paper is limited to pattern and process of "revelatory interaction" of God in the Bible and "interpretative interaction" of human beings of the Scriptures.

In this paper, explanation is provided to report the process of shift from the time-honored traditional TH to the recently emerged OH, and the proposed RH. This paper shows the three approaches as a continuum and RH is an approach that can integrate TH and OH with the use of "relational interactionist paradigm." In revelatory interaction, the Triune God is narratively described as dynamic in "inspiration" of the Scriptures, revealing Himself and His will (see figures 4 and 5) to "favored humanity" (see figures 7 to 17).

In summary format, the WHAT. HOW and SO WHAT of RH are listed in three bullet points below:

- "**What?**" - RH is a lens to understand and interpret Scriptures by paying specific attention to the revelatory interaction between "dynamic Trinity" in "inspiration" (2Tim 3:16) and "favored humanity" relationally interpreting the Scriptures with the divine aid of the HS ("illumination" – Jn 14:16-17, 26; 16:13-15) leading to transformational change of salvation and sanctification.
- "**How?**" - With the use of relational dynamic view of Scriptures and interpretation, RH is an attempt to look for actions and effects within the dynamic Trinity and how they specifically interact with "favored humanity" within the created order through actions and dispositions." (like Figure 18)

"**So-what?**" - RH synthesizes TH and OH with the work of the Holy Spirit in illumination (understanding) and sanctification (change/ **becoming**) through the Word of God. By applying RH, favored humanity is able to **belong** and act (**doing**) in accordance with his relationship with God within the created order. This continual interaction of recalling and retelling God's truth, in concert with the HS's work within the person, transforms them. This becoming is influenced by the Christian's obedience (i.e. they grow more into the image of Christ) or resistance (i.e. they deviant and deterioration).

With the use of the theoretical framework of "relational interactionism," RH is shown to be able to integrate TH and OH. This paper included examples of using RH to study selected texts from Romans and the practice of ROPE in the cultural context of "Tijik orality." The analysis of the narrative accounts of temptation of Jesus and the road to Emmaus provided insights into the proper use of RH.

APPENDIX 1 - SAMPLES OF SERMON OUTLINE ON BIBLICAL TEXTS

1. Outlines showing "how" to practice "relational hermeneutics"Psalm 23: Christian life
   Unmerited/favored relationship with the Shepherd:
   - Beings: Shepherd (theme)/Jehovah (X2:1,6)/ Recipient ("I"- X16)
   - Provision by the Shepherd, therefore, "no want" (2-3); drink, food & rest (2); leading and restoration (3)
   - Presence of the Shepherd (4-5): fear no evil, comfort… enemies
   - Promise of the Shepherd (6): time & place
2. The Lord's priestly prayer in John 17
   - pattern and process of relational interaction between the Father and the Son who interceded for the disciples and those who believed because of the ministry of the apostles.
3. The Great Commandment and the Great Commission (Mt 22:37-39; Acts 1:8)
   - vertical love from God impacts horizontal love for our neighbor
   - all authority has been given to the Son by the Father, thus He sent them out with the promise of the empowerment and presence of the H.S.
4. The model group prayer (the Lord's Prayers, Mt 6:9-15)
   - it begins with prayer to the Father vertically on three counts (the Father's name, kingdom and will), and end with exhorting Him in terms of three aspects (Kingdom, power and glory).
   - Four "petitions" related to forgiveness vertically and horizontally.
5. John 3:16 & 1John 3:16
   - Vertical interaction: God the Father sent the Son down, with the promise of "life from above" (vertically downward) to those who believe in Him (vertically upward). (John 3:16)
   - Vertical + horizontal interactions: love from above is evidenced by Christ laying down his life for us, then we are obligated to lay down our lives for the brothers horizontally. (1John 3:16)
6. The code for family (Eph 5:21-6:9)[41]
   Jesus Christ's lordship over members of the Christian household is the governing principle (5:21). "Out of reverence" to the lordship of Christ (vertically), sets of horizontal relationships (husband-wife, 5:22-33; parents-children, 6:1-4; master-servant, 6:5-9) are subjugated to Him vertically and submit to one another horizontally.

   Jn 15:1-8: **Being, Doing and Becoming**[42]
   A. Who? (1-2, 5) The Vine — Jesus Christ; Gardener — the Father; the branches —Christians.
   B. How to bear fruit? (doing for Him)
      - by Being in Him (x2 = 4,5) OR Being in Him → **doing** for Him

41. Enoch Wan, *Question and Answer of Christian Marriage*. (in Chinese) CA: Overseas Campus Ministry Publisher. 2000.

42. For the "transformational paradigm" of being, belonging and become, see recent publications:
• Enoch Wan and Jon Raibley . *Transformational Change in Christian Ministry*. (Second Edition). Oregon: Western Academic Publishers. 2022.
• Enoch Wan , Mark Hedinger, et al. Transformational Growth: Intercultural Leadership/Discipleship/Mentorship. Oregon: Western Academic Publishers. 2023.

C. How to bear more fruit? (**becoming** by Him-#1) be pruned by the Father (1-2)
- Bearing much fruit (8) (doing)→glorifying the Father & proof of being a disciple
- Separated from the vine (6)→withers, thrown away; picked up & thrown into the fire and burned.

D. Abide in Him and His Words abide in us (**being**) (7) →whatever you ask, shall be done unto you (**becoming**-#2)

8. Doxology to our Triune God (Eph 1:1-14)
Theme of book: "blessings" (3) & riches of grace (7), that he lavished on us (8)
Outline: Praise to Triune God for blessings (1:1-14)
A. FATHER (4-6)
   a) He chose (4) & in love predestined us for sonship…pleasure & will(5)
   b) He made known the mystery… purposed in Christ (9) (to the praise of his glorious grace – 6)

B. SON
   a) Redemption through His blood, forgiveness of sins(7)
   b) Every spiritual blessing in Christ(3)
   c) He works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will(11) (for the praise of his glory – 12)

C. HOLY SPIRIT
   a) Heard→believed→saved (13)
   b) Marked in Him with a seal, the promised HS (13-14)
   c) Deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption…possession(14) (to the praise of his glory – 14)

9. Glory to God & The Gospel of Peace (Luke 2:10-14; Eph 1:3-14; 12:11-22)
A. "Glory to God in the highest" (Luke 2:14) / - Eph 1:3-14 the doxology to the Trinity

WHO	WHAT & HOW	WHAT THEN	
1. Father (4-6)	• He chose (4) & in love predestined us for sonship... pleasure & will (5) • He made known,,, purposed in Christ (9)	(6)	"to the praise of his glory" x 3 times
2. Son (7-12)	• Redemption through His blood, forgiveness of sins (7) • Every spiritual blessing in Christ (3) • He works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will (11)	(12)	
3. Holy Spirit (12-14)	• Heard→believed→saved (13) • Marked in Him with a seal, the promised HS (13-14) • Deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption... possession (14)	(14)	

Figure 25 - The Doxology to the Trinity

B. "and on earth peace, good will toward men" – the Gospel of Peace (Eph 2:11-22)
What is the Gospel of Peace? Shalom with God, & among Jews & gentile (2:15, 18)

WHO	HOW	WHAT THEN
1. God & sinners (13)	• but now in Christ Jesus... by the glood of Christ (13) • have access to the Father by one Spirit (18)	• have been brought near (13) • *Shalom* with God (16)
2. Jews & gentiles (14)	• by the blood of Christ who is our *Shalom* (13-14) • destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostality (14) • built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with CHrist Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whold building is joined • together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord (20-21)	• A new "man" (15) fellow citizens with God's people & members of his household (19-20) • new holy temple (20-21) one new humanity out of the two, thus making *Shalom* (15)

Figure 26 - *Shalom* with God, and among Jews and Gentile

10. Intergenerational Widows Enjoyed Blessings from Above (Ruth 4:13-22)
Outline of Book of Ruth
A. In-laws: through thick & thin in Moab (1)
B. Ruth being blessed in Bethlehem (2)
C. Gentile widow: conformed to Mosaic law (3-4:1-12)
D. Blessed widows in sacred history (4:13-22)

Outline of Ruth 4:13-22
Introduction: Ps 103:2
I. Naomi – an older widow being blessed
   A. Naomi – the complaining widow (1:13, 20-21)
   B. Famine & widowhood, with the companion of Ruth who loved Naomi (1:15-18; 2;23; 4:16)
   C. No need to starve & experienced provision (2:17-23; 3:17)
   D. "Mara"(bitter)→Naomi(sweet): Ruth's new family & grandson Obed (1:20; 3:1; 4:13-22)

II. Ruth – the younger widow being blessed
   A. Gentile lady from Moab, but being blessed (X7: 1:22; 2:2,6,10,21; 4:5,10)
   B. "As it turned out" x2 (2:3; 4:1)

III. Blessed widows of two generations in sacred history
   A. Lost husband with no descendant (1:1-5)
   B. In history of Israel (4:14-22; Mt 1:1) & redemption history of mankind (Mt 1:5-6)
   C. The genealogy of Jesus Christ (Mt 1:1,5)

11. Relational Blessings from God in 1Peter
Key verse: (5:12); References: 1Peter 1:1-2, 10-13; 4:9-10; 5:5, 12-14

Grace & Gifts	General Blessings	Specific Blessings (SB) from		
		Father	Son	HS
General Blessings (GB)	Unmerited yet given (1:2; 10; 5:5);/ "use whatever gifts he has received to serve others" & "faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms" (4:9-10)/ "...true grace of God. Stand fast in it" (5:12)			
Specific Blessings (SB)	X	- Chosen: foreknowledge of the Father (1:2) - a chosen people (2:9)	(a) redeemed by the precious blood of Christ (1:18); (b) He Himself bore our sins (2:23-24)	Sanctifying work of the Spirit (1:2)
	X	"Father... Lord Jesus... has given us new birth... resurrection of Jesus CHrist (1:3)		Preached... Gospel by HS (1:12)

Figure 27 - Blessings from Triune God

- General Blessings (GB): Blessings to God's own collectively (1:2; 5:5, 12)
- Specific Blessings (SB): Blessings from Triune God specifically

A. HS and revelation
B. 1:17 "...the glorious Father may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation" (**becoming**)
C. 3:5-6 "...it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's apostles and prophets (**being**)…through the Gospel the gentiles are heirs together (belonging) with Israel, members together of one body (belonging), and sharers together in the promise of Christ Jesus."
D. HS - given by the Father (1:17)
E. Seal: "with a seal, the promised HS" (1:13) (NT) =/= "take not your HS from me" (Ps 51:11) (OT)
F. "…a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance (being) until the redemption of those who are God's possession (belonging) – to the praise of His glory (becoming)" (1:14)
G. Do not grieve the HS of God with whom you are sealed for the day of redemption (becoming). (4:30)
H. Temple of the HS: who & how? (2:20-21)
I. Revelation: "…the administration of God's grace…it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets." (2:2-5)
J. "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God" (4:30)
K. "…Be filled with the Spirit" (5:18)

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Reading the Bible with Asian Eyes

Esther Park

The term Asianization is more prevalent in mission literature these days. In the 20th century, Asian theologies such as Minjung theology (Korean context), "Indian Christian Theology" (by Robin Boyd), and the more recent "Contextual Ecotheology" (Chung 2016; Hong 2013; Hwang 2007; H.Y. Kim 2017; K. J. Kim 2010; Y. B. Kim 2005; Kwan 2014; Lai 2014; Oh 2016) appeared. However, my intention here is not to engage with the new trend: I reject so much estrangement to a universal interpretation. Also, my view and references I am using are primarily evangelical point of view that holds the truth of God's revelation given in Scripture is transcultural. However, my task in this paper is to connect and balance the Word of God (theology) and its cultural relevance (doing theology) in the Asian context. Kirk (Kirk, 2000, kindle, 946) states the difficulty of interpreting the Bible from an Asian perspective like this:

> *Conceptually, it is difficult to separate belief in the Gospel from the values and institutions of Western society in which the Gospel has been subtly shaped. It is also difficult to relate the Gospel to societies molded for so long by vastly different belief systems. How does one commend a faith which has intersected with local cultures only in recent times and is generally seen as an intruder? The difficulties are associated both with a lack of identification and with transplantation.*

I lived in Asia (Korea and the Philippines) for more than half of my life, as much as I spent in western countries. My lenses used to observe the world is through a multicultural and egalitarian perspective; it maybe not be from a typical Asian's. But the goal here is to exegete the Scripture according to the author's original intent and, at the same time, to convey distinct emphases found within contemporary Asian reality. Wu (Wu, 2015, 51) expresses the dilemma of doing so as "we should communicate and apply the Scripture in a way that is faithful to the text's original meaning. If only it were that simple. This point is uncontroversial; however, actually doing it is more of a challenge." We believe the Holy Spirit works on us as much as the original writers; however, some differences in contexts and cultures are unavoidable. The Bible came to us through several layers of processes. Newbigin (Newbigin, 1995, 146) states the complex process of the Gospel deliverers to a particular hearer: the medium of human languages. A missionary does not come with the pure Gospel; the Gospel a missionary brings is already embodied in cultures. At least it is three cross-cultural: the Bible culture, missionary Christianity, and the traditional culture of the hearer. Indeed, we have to consider the complex process of this cross-cultural intricacy.

Kaiser Jr. (Kaiser Jr., 2007, 223) heeds the role of the interpreter as "the interpreter must bridge the gulf of explaining the cultural elements that are present in the text of Scripture, acknowledge [one's] own cultural baggage as an interpreter, and then transcend both to communicate the original message of Scripture into the culture of the contemporary audience."

THE SCOPE OF ASIAN CONTEXTS

Above, I express the ramification of the process cross-culturally. The following is the other geographical and cultural complexity in describing "Asia." Interestingly, Scarborough (Scarborough, 1998, 74) claims that even among Asian countries, there is a clear distinction between Confucian and non-Confucian societies. He distinguishes "doing culture" from "being culture" like this:

> *The primary difference is that the Confucian culture is a doing culture, whereas the non-Confucian is a being culture. The former places more importance on tasks relative to maintaining relationships; has a strong internal locus of control and sees nature as at least somewhat controllable; seeks to bring about change actively to conform to some idealized, abstract, improved state; prefers to think analytically, use objective information, and assign status on merit and achievement; tends to view time as linear and a valuable resource to be conserved; and takes a more compartmentalized, less holistic view of life relationships or family are kept separate.*

Eastern Asia, like China, Korea, and Japan, are "doing "culture categories, while Sout-East Asians are more like having "being culture" worldviews. Scarborough continues with the description of the uniqueness of these worldviews:

> *Being cultures tend to be more relaxed, more holistic in their worldviews, more relationship-oriented (relationships are part of work), and more accustomed to yielding power; view time as a continually recurring cycle; feel less able to control their fate; and want work, which at best can be enjoyed and at worst can be tolerated as a necessary evil. Being people define themselves by their collective affiliations. They "work to live," whereas their "doing" counterparts" live to work." "Doing people" see "being" people as lazy, unproductive, and irresponsible. "Being" people see "doing" people as cold, compulsive, and unable to enjoy life* (Scarborough, 1998,74).

Not only the distinction between Confucious

states and non-Confucious but also other variants are present. Socio-politically speaking, there are various formations of governments, from democrats to dictatorships (and communists). Also, different religious backgrounds of people from Hinduism, Muslim, Buddhism, and Shamanism (and Animism) shape intrinsic worldviews. I also realize that the description of Asia (or Asians) seems unrealistic: geographical gaps, cultural diversities, religious backgrounds, socio-political situations, etc. Geographically, the Asia continent is vast compared to Europe. Because of these presuppositions, I feel reluctant to interpret and apply the passages with "Asian eyes."

HERMENEUTICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND METHODOLOGY

Definitions for hermeneutics abound. One of the trailblazers in hermeneutics, Thiselton (Thiselton, 2009, 1), defines it in this manner: "hermeneutics explores how we read, understand, and handle texts, especially those written in another time or a context of life different from our own. Biblical hermeneutics investigates more specifically how we read, understand, apply, and respond to biblical texts." Top of that, missional hermeneutics requires deeper awareness of the mission of God and his people in both past and present contexts. We can reinterpret such narratives in our own contexts to participate in God's mission (Van Engen, 1991). Kim (Kim, 2017, 71) rightly states that the starting point of hermeneutics like this:

> *If we start with understanding human contexts, our preaching and teaching are susceptible to eisegesis – reading into the text what is not there, based on our specific cultural lens. Therefore, a more appropriate perspective, beginning with God's Word, enables us to keep our preaching grounded in the truth of Scripture. Only then do we apply it to a specific context.*

In this case, Kim (2017, 83) suggests three target points: assumption, conflict, and questions employing Scriptures in the context. First, what assumptions might our listeners have as they read or hear this passage? Second, to interpret the Scripture in our context is to address the conflicts that listeners have with the text. Third, we want to consider what questions this passage raises for our listeners. I will take Van Engen and Kim's concerns seriously when I examine passages to apply in Asian contexts. In this chapter, methodologically, I will use both approaches: getting a Scripture passage (original author's intention) to apply in Asian reality and an anthropological approach (human practices) seeking the answer from the Bible.

DOING THEOLOGY IN A GLOBALIZING WORLD

Doing theology in a particular context is more challenging in the 21st century environment. In Asian faith communities and other parts of the world, like Latin America and Africa, the upheaval of a new consciousness on contextualization of their own theologies is now on the upswing. Van Engen (1991, 57) mentions the practicality of doing theology in a globalizing world in contextualizing ways that align with the oneness of the Church and the Holy Spirit. He emphasizes this glocal[1] balance as "neither monolithic nor atomized uniformity is a satisfactory approach to theology in a globalizing world." Van Engen (Van Engen, 2006, 172) reminds us that regardless of the enormous differences in characteristics of localities, from different worldview assumptions and cultural practices, we still have to stick to the concept of the ekklesia (Ephesians 4:4-6): one Father, one Spirit, one baptism, and one body of Christ. At the same time, the Gospel of John 1:14, "the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us," the concept of the incarnation, actually gives an idea of appropriate contextualization as translatability (Van Engen, 2017).

BIBLICAL THEME, SALVATION: THE WAY OF UNDERSTANDING FROM SHAME TO HONOR AND DEFILEMENT TO CLEANSING

Shame-Honor is not a mere cultural theme but is also a fundamental explanation of God's salvation image: the removal of shame and the restoration of honor. The Bible says much to honor-shame. Raising awareness of this issue has been published by many (Georges, 2010; Georges, 2014; Malina, 2001; Wu, 2016). Both Muller, in Shame and Honor, and Tennent, in Theology in the Context of World Christianity, appeal to Genesis 3 as Scriptural proof for the three major ethical worldviews also explained by Georges in his 3D Gospel: guilt, shame, and fear. Primarily Asian societies belong to shame-honor (from now on, S-H) cultures. The below chart illustrates that S-H holds a place in the Bible alongside teaching about guilt and righteousness. Here we will look into S-H cultural orientation for the relevance to my task (comparison with GI or FP will be omitted).

	Guilt (GI)	Shame-Honor (SH)	Fear (FP)
God (attribute)	Lawgiver, Judge (sinless, just)	Father, Patron (superior, faithful)	Ruler, Deliverer
Sin violates	God's laws and justice	God's face and glory	God's power and authority
Sin is	Transgression and law-breaking	Dishonor and disloyalty	Insubordination and idolatry
Sinners are	Condemned	Rejected	Cursed
Consequences of sin	Judgment and punishment	Disgrace and impurity	Domination and bondage
Emotion of sin	Regret	Unworthiness	Anxiety
Jesus death	Bears the punishment for our moral transgression	Removes our shame and restores God's face/honor	Defeats spirits and power
Forgiveness	Pardon wrongs	Reconciles relationships	Removes strongholds

* The chart created from Jayson George's 3D Gospel page 54

1. The term "Glocal" is the combination word of Global and Local.

The comparison above shows that S-H culture focuses on relational languages, while GI culture expresses action verbs. Based on the above chart, I will explain a more approachable way on how to deal with sin issues and salvation through Jesus, who brings us to save face (explanation follows later).

Shame Means Losing Face and Identity

Shame is connected to exposure and rejection before peers or those in authority. Georges and Baker (Georges and Baker, 2016, 51) give biblical examples that shame causes someone to "lose face," taking away their identity and value. They continue, "in the New Testament, we see that many recipients of Jesus' grace bore some ascribed shame, for example, Gentiles, Samaritans, the bleeding woman, blind, deaf, lame, lepers, and demon-possessed. Their shame stemmed from congenital social realities beyond their control."[2] In the Old Testament, Naomi became socially marginalized because of the death of her husband and sons. Then, through Boaz, God exalts Naomi and Ruth (gentile widow) and recovers their honor. Throughout the Bible, God provides new inheritance and ascribed identity. Many people living in S-H cultures believe their identity depends mainly on the ascribed and inherited shame, like a Caste system. But fortunately, God provides a new inheritance and ascribes a new identity through Christ. A thought-provoking explanation by Wu (Wu, 2016, 377-379) is that to Chinese people, he explains "sin" is like you publicly spitting in your father's face. Because people do not acknowledge God, they themselves become shameful (Romans 1:24-31). If Christ did not die, God would not be righteous (cf. Rom 3:25-26). In that case, God lacks honor. God is shameful. Therefore, according to Wu, Jesus' atonement is the act of saving Father God's face.

Dumitrescu (Dumitrescu, 2020, 318) compares two different realms of the sin issue: "this creates a problem for Western missionaries because, from their perspective, the Gospel requires people first to admit their status as sinners. Admitting sin is a crucial point in the conversion process." Some missionaries sometimes express their frustrations by the implication of locals' sin concept when they do wrongdoing; if they are caught, it is shameful. Without understanding transgression, the cross, and the final judgment are meaningless. In fact, in some cultural settings, it is not easy to explain the concept of sin in their understanding convincingly and decisively. However, the Bible shows that shame is the consequence of sin. For example, in the "Fall "narrative in Genesis, Adam and Eve hid from God because they were ashamed of being naked (Genesis 3:10). Asians generally refuse to acknowledge their failures and mistakes publicly because they will lose face. Public discussions of weaknesses can lead to the view that Christianity is a shameful and foreign religion. Priest (2006, 180) adverts about the consequences that follow in the inadequacy of sin concept as: "an inability to speak plausibly about sin undercuts our ability to speak persuasively of God and of what human relationship with God entails." In many collective societies in Asia, if an action brings shame to a person or a group, that action is considered wrong. According to this value system, if telling the truth brings shame, it is wrong. The community decides on what is honorable and what is shameful. Our challenge would be to make truthfulness a shared honorable value in the community and lying a scandalous matter.

However, the Bible is sensitive to cultural issues when confronting sin and error in S-H-oriented cultures. Confrontation must be done with sensitivity to the culture (cf.1 Tim 5:1). The Bible acknowledges different ways of cultural expression of shame and honor. However, Georges and Baker (Georges and Baker, 2016, 284) point out that Romans 14 unequivocally affirms that only God defines true shamefulness and honorableness. People in S-H cultures must come to acknowledge the falseness of social shame, even though initially it may be excruciating. It is prevalent in Korea, especially among male officers in government (or in a company) who kill themselves on the job—either because they cannot bear the shame or proof of their innocence.[3] In Acts 16, the Philippian jailer also sought to kill himself to cover his shameful failure on the job. He acted to preserve the honor of his people by sacrificing his own life. The Philippian jailer overcomes the weight between God's honor and possible social shame through Paul's persuasion. Mbuvi (Mbuvi, 2002, 295) explains, "by clearly directing people to the correct dimension of honor and shame as the vertical relationship with God, rather than the horizontal relationship with a man. We can affirm that God is the true 'significant other' who ascribes honor to us even when we do not deserve it." Then, how is Jesus' good news to people mired in shame and seeking honor? I found a good illustration from the book Jae-suk Lee's Mission as Integrated Witness: A Missional Reading of the Foot-washing Narrative. Lee (Lee, 2021) sees John's understanding of Jesus' mission as freedom and forgiveness of sin (8:32-34;20;23). From now on, I will bring a survey of the central theme of God's salvation as "removal of shame and restoration of honor" from the selected Bible passages.

Consecrating Community: Jesus' foot washing in John 13

Jesus' feet washing in John's narrative represents how His followers were consecrated from the world. In other words, this ritualistic foot washing also acknowledges that the world is defiled, and the followers of Christ need to purify the community.

2. Georges and Baker comment that though not all whom Jesus freed from shame were in this category, for the prostitutes and tax collectors bore "achieved shame" resulting from their sinful/taboo behavior.

3. South Korea has the highest suicide rate in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), with around 13 thousand people taking their own lives in 2021. https://www.statista.com/topics/8622/suicide-in-south-korea/#topicOverview

Anthropologist Pitt-Rivers (Pitt-Rivers, 1968, 6:505) explains parts of the human body symbolically demonstrate honor and shame in many ways: "the right hand purveys honor with gestures like touching, waving and shaking; the head embodies a person's honor so is kissed and crowned; the face is a metonym for honor; feet are the lowest and dirtiest part of the body and thus symbolize disgrace; private parts signify the shame of vulnerability and desecration; and one's blood transfers honor and is often the price in transactions of honor." These symbolic images--washing the dirtiest part of our feet (cleansing of our transgression) and Jesus' crucifixion (transfers honor) right after this ritual—spell out the ultimate Jesus' ministry for us and ours. Jesus' ministry clearly showed that the most humble act was the foot washing and the ultimate shame was being humiliated on the cross.

In verse 14, "you also should wash one another's feet," Jesus commands His faith community to continuously consecrate themselves to remain in Him and bear fruit (John15:2-3).

Defilement and Cleansing

This is an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshipper. They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings—external regulations applying until the time of the new order (Heb 9:9-10, NIV). Defilement and cleansing are easier to understand in Asian culture because of the religious washing involved, and we can also see similarities in Hebrew people's practices. In the Old Testament, the method of the blood of animals and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who were ceremonially unclean sanctified them, so they were outwardly clean. However, according to Hebrew 9: 9-10, "this is an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered could not clear the worshipper's conscience. They are only a matter of food and drink. Various ceremonial piles of washing validate (external regulations applying) until the time of the new order. Those ceremonial cleansings can make you outwardly clean, as the Hebrew author illustrates, that we need the new order, which can clean "the conscience of the worshipper (9:9). Then, what is the new order the author is mentioning here? Muller (Muller, 2016, 223) illustrates the ultimate picture of God bearing our shame is found in Christ like this:

> *[Christ]who was stripped of His clothing when He was hung on the cross. Roman prisoners were often hung naked on a cross, exposed for the scoffers to see and ridicule. Consequently, even in this, Christ bore not only our sin on the cross, but also our shame. Once for all, Christ died on the cross, bearing our shame so that we might be freed from shame as well as guilt.*

Therefore, those who follow Christ to the cross of shame will never be put to shame: "anyone who trusts in Him will never be put to shame" (Rom. 10:11).

UNDERSTANDING EVANGELISM IN THE ASIAN CONTEXT: "WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?" (ACTS 16:22-34)

Acts 16: 22-34, the jailor's conversion story, provides a suitable example of a collective cultural orientation. Of course, being invited into a community and building relationships are crucial points for evangelism for all cultures, but even more critical to S-H cultures. Georges and Baker (Georges and Baker, 2016, 244) point out that Paul and Silas accepting meal invitations with nonbelievers is one way of honoring people. They also accentuate how important to create a bond with a group (or whole family) as; "a shared table preaches God's honor as loud as a sermon in a collectivistic society." Table fellowship also was a significant way Jesus honored people. Another case in point we can observe in these passages is a group conversion in mind. In collectivistic cultures, individual conversion to Christianity may shame one's biological family and neighboring community. Georges (Georges, 2017, 69) states that many unreached peoples do not reject Christianity for theological reasons but because of social and cultural forces that disgrace one's family.

Another missiologist Tennent (Tennent, 2007, 97-99), suggests that family conversion is plausible in honor-shame culture since this family conversion can avoid the scandal of one person disgracing the rest of the family. Often, the western approach to evangelism (like Evangelism Explosion and 4 Spiritual Law) targets personal confession of faith in Christ, which troubles individuals in a collective society. Especially foreign evangelists (my observation on the street evangelism by the short-term mission team and their native partners) approach strangers and present combative rhetoric of the new ideas that appears to be attacking their identity and honor. Of course, they will say "yes" to it to show their hospitality without knowing what is going on. In a collective society, people view conversion as transferring loyalty and identity to a new group, so they must experience the group before choosing to join it. Therefore, Georges and Baker (Georges and Baker, 2016, 244) suggest that participation in the body of Christ is the first step in the evangelistic process: community (belong), discipleship (behave), and evangelism (believe).

NEW HONOR CODE FOR BELIEVERS: 1 PETER

As Scripture says, "Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame "(Rom 10:11, NIV). Be careful to live properly among unbelieving neighbors (1Pet :12a, NLT).

Ascribed Honor = God's Children

Those who follow Christ to the cross of shame will be inherited with ascribed honor as "children of God.": God exchanges our old status as unclean and hopeless orphans for the status of worthy and honorable children. The epistle of 1 Peter provides believers with a new honor code to guide their level of conduct (Georges and Baker, 2016). Chapters 2-5 outline how Christians live out that divine honor in everyday life to keep believers on the track of God's honor (2:13-5:11). Peter's key to discipleship in honor-shame contexts is profoundly theological and deeply rooted in Jesus' shame-removing and honor-restoring life. Similarly, Eng (Eng, 2022, 672) explains the epistle of James also uses the dynamic of honor and shame to motivate his hearers, and the exhortations demonstrate the priority of relationships within the collective and concern for the group's reputation. Eng continues, "in our experiences, these are significant areas of life in which sub-biblical honor codes can so easily entangle Christians. If a believer's honor code is not resonated with God's, then substantial parts of a believer's life will be determined by the default values of cultures." The Bible appeals to honor to guide Christians' moral decisions in several ways: Christians should glorify God, purify themselves, and love others (Georges and Baker, 2016). These three principles provide a biblical rubric for ethical discernment in honor-shame contexts. Transforming the honor code is central to Christian discipleship in many ways. But ultimately, simply knowing God's honor code for life will not suffice. Here I will discuss some areas that must look into in Asian realities and challenges.

THE AREAS STRUGGLING WITH A NEW HONOR CODE IN THE ASIAN CONTEXT

Lying/cheating issue in the Asian Context

Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him. (Col 3:9-10, NLT)

Lying belongs to our old identity. However, lying is a colossal issue among people, including Christians. Especially to Westerners, lying is inherently wrong; however, to some cultures, a lie may or may not be considered faulty if his group's interest is at stake. Lying (including white lies) is acceptable in some cultures as not a criminal activity or moral violation. Cheating during examinations in Bible college is not easy to eradicate in many places. Missionaries are sometimes frustrated by the implication of locals' sin concept when they do wrongdoing; if they are caught, it is shameful. My American colleague (missionary professor) expressed his frustration regarding cheating in his classroom, and his anxiety became unbearable. He left the mission field for a few other reasons; however, the cheating issue was one of them.

However, admitting sin is a crucial point in the conversion process. Without understanding transgression, the cross, and the final judgment are meaningless. In fact, in some cultural settings, it is not easy to explain the concept of sin in their own understanding convincingly and decisively. Priest (Priest,2006, 180) adverts about the consequences that follow in the inadequacy of sin concept as: "an inability to speak plausibly about sin undercuts our ability to talk persuasively of God and of what human relationship with God entails." He continues that as a believer, it involves a call to repentance to specific self-understandings undergirded and informed by a particular understanding of God. We know that the Bible is harshly judging this moral value. Throughout OT to NT, many scriptures mention that lying causes consequences. "Thou shall not lie" is one of the ten commandments, but even Christians have trouble. Leviticus 19:11, "Do not steal. Do not lie." Do not deceive one another; Prov12:22, The LORD detests lying lips, but he delights in people who are trustworthy; Col 3:9, "Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices."

Sometimes, harmless lies are used without hesitation or guilt since these actions instead create a flattering or pacifying situation. There is a specific illustration given by Fernando (Fernando, 2022, 177) of how this habitual behavior builds up an effect on even a Christian child at home:

> *A child cries when she sees her father leave home. Her Christian mother soothes her by saying that he is going to a shop and will come back soon. Actually, he was leaving on a two-week trip. Some years later, when someone comes to the door, and the daughter informs the mother about it, she tells her, "Tell him I'm not at home." This is the mother who introduced her daughter to Christianity. Over time, she comes to adopt the view that lying is acceptable for Christians.*

MONEY ISSUE

In some countries in Asia, I observed some issues regarding fund raising. It is an area that has brought many scandals to the contemporary Church. Christians distort the facts when applying for funding or reporting about funds use. In some societies, inflating and deflating prices is almost an ordinary practice. In a culture where lying is common, leaders who do not lie would stand out as a challenge to their people. In an environment where lying is acceptable, confronting it would be considered an example of disloyalty to people in the group. I witnessed some elders give testimonies to challenge congregations regarding paying property taxes without inflating the value. I heard many testimonies about how the church elders had been tempted to negotiate with tax assessors to lower the value of the properties.[4] They testified how to fight against corruption and keep

4. I stayed in the Philippines from 2001-2016. You can see "no fixers" sign all over the city hall windows. The government is also trying to eliminate this societal viles while so many Christians are still struggling with the honesty issue in dealing with money in the Philippines context.

integrity as a truly Christian lifestyle: it is easy to identify corruption as one of the critical issues facing discipleship. It stands in the course of the believer's spiritual maturity. Miranda (Miranda, 1990, 2-5) laments the contemporary situation: "corruption is a way of life, rampant in every sector of the Filipino society." She draws attention to "a trilogy of maneuvers" deeply ingrained in the Filipino psyche: lusot, lakad and lagay. She defines them as follows:

1) lusot means to escape from something by wriggling into a hole or through a slit;
2) lakad means "walk,"; a euphemism for attempting to smooth out difficulties by using a network of "connections";
3) lagay means money to smooth over a situation, money set aside for illegal gambling or a bribe, plain and simple(1990, 2-5).

SUGGESTED STRATEGIES COMBATING LYING ISSUE IN A COLLECTIVE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

> *In this new life, it doesn't matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbaric, uncivilized, slave, or free. Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all of us* (Col 3:11, NLT)

Fernando (Fernando, 2022, 179) suggested the strategies for this lying issue in a collective Christian community as a two-fold strategy to combat the epidemic of lying in the Church. First, make revulsion for lying a shared value. Second, let Christians know that the Bible teaches that God abhors lying and that it will be judged. Then it would be considered a shame to lie. And shame is a powerful motivation for action, especially in collectivist cultures.

Saving Face Issue

> *All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.* (Mat 5:37. NIV)

From this Asian perspective of integrity and honesty, maintaining honor and avoiding shame justifies the lie when an untrue statement is necessary to save someone's face. A typical Asian concern is a social harmony—maintaining good relationships with the members of one's family. It comes from Filipino sensitivity that a person's feelings should not be hurt. Lapiz (Lapiz, 2010, 24) introduces two Tagalog terms like "pakitang-tao" (for appearance's sake) and "pakikiramdam" (being sensitive). According to Lapiz, pakitang-tao is superficial cordiality to conceal from those not involved in whatever unpleasantness may exist between parties. Therefore, this superficial cordiality of never saying "no," causes misunderstanding as assent. Pakikiramdam is also concerned about the feeling of others. Pakikiramdam is a request to feel or to be sensitive. It is a shared feeling, a kind of "emotional a priori." Sometimes, foreign Christians put locals in a problematic situation because they have no idea how to identify cordiality and sincerity while they are doing an evangelistic campaign. Even among similar collective backgrounds, people encounter confusion. Kim (Kim, 2016, 81) testified to a case when a Korean mission team visited a local university in Chiang Mai, Thailand. Team members were so excited when some students received Christ with a short acceptance prayer. Later, the local Christians conducted the follow-up among those students who raised their hands during the meeting and found that they had no idea of what accepting the Gospel meant. Their actions were simply out of cultural courtesy to foreigners.

EQUALITY ISSUE IN THE CHURCH LEADERSHIP AND ASIAN REALITY[5]

> *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility, value others above yourselves* (Phil 2:3, NLT).
>
> *Don't lord it over the people assigned to your care, but lead them by your own good example.* (1Pet 5:3, NLT).

A Partnership Issue Between Missionaries and National Leaders in the Ministry

In 2002, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks (Sacks, 2002, 17) posed a pertinent question in his book, The Dignity of Difference. "Can we live together?; Can we overcome long histories of estrangement and bitterness?; Can we find, in the human "thou," a fragment of the Divine "Thou"? Throughout the history of the Church and missions, equality issues between genders and missionary-national relationships have been kept rolling with arguments. Partnership inequality is a sensitive issue and a challenging goal in any society and organization, especially among cross-culturally conditioned groups. Primarily, the implementation of partnerships between missionaries and nationals in mission has frequently concentrated on the issue of power and hegemony.

During the 1970s, tension surfaced as the voice of "missionary moratorium."[6] The distressing voices shocked the missionary sending nations, and mission organizations started reevaluating and recapturing the heart of missionary activity within the Church's mission theology, Missio Dei. Marsh (Marsh, 2003, 373) explains Missio Dei theology in partnership as follows:

> *Missio Dei theology sought to reconstruct mission as an activity of the Trinity in the world, with churches participating together in God's mission as partners. This was an activity that involved all members of the worldwide Church...in light of Misssio Dei, the activity of mission was, therefore no longer to be*

5. See my article on the issue: Park, Esther. "The Theology of Partnership: Equality Issues in the Ministry" *Asian Missions Advance* 44 (July 2014), 27-30.

6. One example was the voice from the Philippines: Nacpil, Emerito. "Mission but not Missionaries" *International Review of Mission* 60: 239 (July 1971), 356-362.

understood as a movement of the Church from Europe and the West to the rest of the world but as the action of all churches participating in God's one mission as equal partners: "partnership in mission."

Philippians 2:3, "in humility," is a challenging unilateral way of giving and receiving conventionalities in missions. Inequality in partnership issues has been recognized, yet not fully applied, and is a goal to be worked towards rather than a realized perception. 1 Peter 5:3, "don't lord it over the people assigned to your care," is also troublesome among leaders in the ministry. A plea from the evangelical national director of the Philippines (PCEC) shows the conflict and is yet far from the goal. "Be intentional in your partnership with Filipino Church leaders and workers regarding them as co-workers and not subjects in the ministry; treat Filipino workers as equal partners by allowing them to share in leadership and decision-making functions in your ministry."[7] Ross (Ross, 2010, 145-148) answers some of the questions I mentioned above from the biblical foundation. First, that partnership is an idea essential to the very nature of God: Trinitarian God's unity and diversity. Second, that partnership speaks of God's relationship with humanity: love and respect. Even in the creation story, the relationship emphasizes freedom, not a forced relationship. Jesus dialogues with the Samaritan Woman at the well (John 4) and Nicodemus (John 3), and we find a model of love and respect. Third, that partnership indicates a genuine relationship between human beings. Ross continues equal partnership as Koinonia: partaking together in or having a share.

Gender Equality: Women Leadership In The Church

I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent(1 Tim 2:12) / There is neither Jew nor Greek . . . neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Gal 3:28, NIV)

To imply the Scriptures in our context, we should travel to the original historical and cultural background at the time the Scriptures were written. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the origins of the author's and his audience's experience: Judaism, Greco-Roman philosophy, Greek language, and society. We must consider several specifics in the New Testament epistles, such as a church's condition and socio-cultural background. For example, Koshy (Koshy, 2022, 532) deals with a presupposition in the letter to Timothy about the Church of Ephesus: it reflects Paul's pastoral oversight through his involvement in the crisis at Ephesus, and such an understanding gives insight into ministry in today's Asian context. I also can share my experience while working with the Presbyterian sectarian seminary in the Philippines, where strong foreign missionary influences were dominant.[8] Culturally speaking, Filipino society is bilateral and relatively egalitarian. The egalitarianism present in the Filipino family was rooted in pre-colonial times; however, foreign invasions changed the course. Friessen (Friessen, 1988, 3) mentions as:

The economic customs contributed to the autonomous stature of women within society; pre-colonial Philippines was also marked by relative sexual egalitarianism. Spanish law, however, stressed male superiority and emphasized that women belonged at home. The Roman Catholic Church taught passivity and piety as the proper traits for women. Furthermore, the American colonial experience reinforced economic control by men. Much of the pre-Hispanic culture is deeply overlaid by colonial culture.

No wonder Orthodox Presbyterianism (many views as ultra-conservative) was not popular in the country compared to Pentecostalism somewhat; women's leadership is prominent. However, this women's leadership issue is also a hot potato among missionaries and within Presbyterian circles in the Phillippines. According to the female students, unequal treatment toward female M.Div. students, like not providing the same privilege of preaching and other ministerial opportunities as a male student, violates student rights since the school offers the program to female students. They gave vent to their feeling of resentment against these unfair treatments; I had heard their lamentations and felt bitterness.

Only one verse in the Bible explicitly prohibits women from teaching in the Church. Until today some Christians (denominational, too) view this verse as comprehensively declaring a universal and permanent ban on women teaching (preaching is more strict) over men. My experience working in the PCP (Presbyterian Church of the Philippines) encountered this issue as a full-time faculty member in its denominational seminary. A female professor teaches even ordained ministers in the classroom but was not allowed to preach in the chapel service. I thought it was absurd to embrace the controversial exegesis in the passage. If you follow this teaching as the absolute truth, allowing female teachers in seminary classrooms is contradictory and inconsistent. If you take 1 Timothy verses literally, then women in leadership, including the teaching of men, should be prohibited. Paul's writings about women have been cited throughout the centuries as authority for the notion that women are the deficient class in the kingdom of God and the Church (ongoing debate until now). However, the author of 1 Timothy, Paul, is not universalizing the exclusion of women from their teaching role.[9] Koshy (Koshy, 2022, 532) provides three specifics we should consider to face difficult passages like this: cultural, Church, and language. For example, in both

7. This regrettable criticism by bishop Efraim Tendero shook the Korean Missionary gathering (KWMA, 2012). See "Perspectives on the Korean Missions Ministry in the Philippines" in From Shandong Peninsular to Persia: A Century Old Korean Missionary Beyond, ed., Manila Forum (Mokpo, Korea: KWMA, 2012), 558.

8. This seminary was founded by Prebyterians from Korea and partnership with others like Presbyterian Church of America (PCA).

9. There are many evidences through Acts and Paul's epistles: Acts 18:26; Romans 16; Titus 2:2-3;

language and church-specific cases in 1 Timothy 2:12, "silence or quietness (ἡσυχίᾳ)." Padgett (Padgett, 1987, 23) uniquely states that "the wealthy women of Ephesus followed the false teachers, who taught that marriage was tainted and that one should neglect family duties." Padgett rightly concludes the article by stating, "we have not found anything in these verses to indicate that women were not leaders in the early Church, nor anything that would limit their role in the Church today." He continues by arguing that we cannot overlook the social context of the letters "when interpreting this pericope today." Throughout the New Testament cases, neither Luke nor Paul (Acts and Pauline epistles—except 1 Timothy 2:13) disapproves of a godly woman teaching. Hamilton (Hamilton, 2000, 145) suggests that Priscilla's teaching ability was highly regarded.[10] He quotes the early Church Father John Chrysostom's writing the reason why the list of the name "Greet Aquila and Priscilla (Romans 16:3, 2 Timothy 4:19), but "Priscilla and Aguila (Acts 18:26)" as follows:

> *He does not do this without reason, but he seems to me to acknowledge a greater godliness for her than her husband. What I said is not guesswork because it is possible to learn this from the Book of Acts. (Pricilla) took Apollos, an eloquent man and powerful in the Scriptures, but knowing only the baptism of John; and she instructed him in the way of the Lord and made him a teacher brought to completion.*[11]

Regardless of the time difference, God's calling of Abraham and Sarah to Aquila and Priscilla confirms the complimentary leadership among His people. From Genesis to the New Testament era, the pairing of man and woman shows the sense of equal callings in their own narratives regardless of cultural-societal environments. Through those passages, we can detect the principle of the pairing. Let's look into some of the examples.

1) As much Abraham was chosen to become a father of nations, Sarah was too, according to Genesis 17:15-16: "a mother of nations"
2) The godly old man (Simeon) and woman (Anna) in Luke 2 who were anticipating the coming Messiah also show the paring stories
3) Priscilla and Aguilar in Acts 18 show that both instruct Apollos about Christian doctrine together

CONCLUSION

I have discussed mainly three areas we can look into biblical themes in Asian contexts: conversion, sin, and equality. Overall, the discussion focus on the theological motif of the removal of shame and the restoration of honor. Since the Fall, humans experienced shame and guilt until Jesus Christ, who bears our sin and shame, enabled us to enter God's family. However, 1Peter's believer's new codes provide the checkpoints in Asian realities. Since Asians belong to the collective society, applying these new codes should be emphasized in the church as a new community. Wright (Wright, 2013, 132) points out that is why the challenge comes fresh to each generation: "traditions tell us where we have come from. Scripture is a better guide for where we should now be going." The goal I placed in this paper is to stimulate us to think more carefully about our faith in our own setting.

In the beginning, I mentioned the description of Asia: the limitation on environments and characteristics. Therefore, the readers should bear this limitation in mind. Whatever and wherever we are placed, we will grow and pursue maturity as the children of God. I will conclude this paper with my favorite passage: Eph. 4:15, "Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ."

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10. This switching of the list of the name has significant in Acts, where "Barnaba and Paul" becomes "Paul and Barnabas." Barnabas name appears ahead of Paul until Paul becomes the dominant speaker from Acts 13:9 onwards: (Acts 13:43, 46,50; 15:22, 35, 36).

11. Catherine Clark Kroeger, "John Chrysostom's First Homily on the Greeting to Priscilla and Aquila" Pricilla Paper 5:3 (Summer 1991) ,16-20.One of the church's outstanding Bible expositor John Chrysostom (died AD 407) preached consistently through the Scriptures,and many of his sermons are stil extant.Here,for the first time in English translation available by Dr. Kroeger, quoted in Hamilton, 145.

Why Reach the Students With the Gospel of Jesus? Is this Even Possible Especially in this Generation?

Jonathan Bacobo

FUTURE LEADERS

I agree with the words of our national hero, Dr Jose Rizal, that "the youth are the hope of our nation." But I will add and continue to say not just any youth, or any young people, but the youth who are transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ. I believe that when he said "hope of the nation" he meant that they will be the future leaders who can bring positive change to our nation. And you will find these future leaders in the campuses today. But then again, we cannot expect that the education that they are receiving in the schools are already enough for them to make a positive impact. Every time I see a young person, that person can be the future president, senator, judge, school principal, bank manager, a tycoon, or even a famous celebrity or athlete. When we invest our time with the young people, sharing the gospel with them, discipling them, training them and mentoring them, it is never a waste of time. When I looked at the definition of education for the first time, it's not just the impartation of knowledge. I learned that according to Noah Webster, "education is a series of instruction and discipline which is intended to enlighten the understanding, correct the temper, and form the manners and habits of the youth, and fit them for usefulness in their future stations." It is definitely preparing them for what God has called them coupled with character development. Each one has a calling from God. He has a divine purpose or destiny for each one. And a person can only know and understand this as they develop a personal relationship with God. And it is always an honor for me to be able to help and prepare these young person in fulfilling these.

DISCIPLESHIP

Personal discipleship plays a very important role in making this happen.

For almost 37 years, this is what I have proven to work in raising up future leaders who can be the hope of our nation. We start by going to different campuses befriending them and engaging with them using topics that are interesting to them. We also invite them to weekly small group gathering called "small groups," where we have an hour of ice breaker, sharing of topics relevant to them and to their generation, study a portion of the Bible in connection with that topic, then take some time on how to apply them in their everyday life. The meeting will end in a time of praying for one another, then possibly share a snack or a meal together.

FIRST MISSION

My first assignment was in Tuguegarao when I was sent to start a ministry with the young people and specifically reach out to the students of St Louis University, St Paul's University, Cagayan State University and Cagayan National High School. I was only 23 years old and full of excitement because I live in the city all my life. I never lived in a province or even just outside of Metro Manila. It was exciting but challenging too because the people in this town are very religious. I heard that the people are so much against what we are about to do. From the very start there was so much revival among the students because we were sharing something very strange to them, "being born again."

Even the daughter of a Catholic chaplain in one of the universities attended our gatherings. So in one of these universities, the chaplain went from room to room confiscating the Bibles of the students. There was even a time when my name was announced after the school's flag ceremony as one of the people the students should avoid. In another university I was accused of being a KGB, when they found out that I have a map of their whole campus which I drew so I will know where the different colleges and departments are, plus the cafeteria, comfort rooms, etc. But in the midst of all these, I honestly feel that I was privileged because God called me and it was His will for me to be there, reaching out to the students of that town. A church was established in Tuguegarao. I served there from the very start until about a year and a half. All these to conclude that I am grateful to God for the opportunity to minister to those students. It was all worth it, my time, my energy, my sacrifices, and all the spiritual investments. I could say it was the best first year and a half of my life as a full-time minister.

THE MISSION CONTINUES

When I went back to our mother church in Manila, I continued on in this ministry with the students. Aside from the university and high schools at the university belt in Recto Avenue, we also had some open doors among varsity teams. For a start, we have a former basketball player from FEU Tamaraws who got saved and became my friend. We prayed for an opportunity to conduct a Bible study among the varsity players of FEU at the time. The coach allowed us to do it right after the team's practice. It was a joy to see some of them attend church on weekends as long as there's no scheduled basketball competition. We also adopted a

ministry called "Champions for Christ." Through this, the varsity team of University of the East opened up too, as well as other field of sports. Another ministry was able to start is a medical mission and relief operations ministry. I got the idea of this ministry when a pharmaceutical student from the University of Sto Thomas informed me that they are doing something like this as part of their community service curriculum. So when I announced that we are starting this ministry I was surprised that many students taking up medicine, nursing, nutrition, opthalmology, dentistry, showed up and volunteered for future mission. As soon as I formed this ministry, different natural calamities stormed the Philippines that gave our medical mission team a great opportunity. This even became an opportunity to invite qualified student to volunteer to this ministry which eventually exposed them to Christian work that lead them to knowing Christ.

CHANGE THE CAMPUS, CHANGE THE WORLD

And for many years, and in different nations, it is all the same, the young people and specifically the students, are the best investment of our ministry. We can never go wrong when we disciple them, train them and cheer for them. It may take time to see the results or the fruits of your labor, but it will come at the right time. Nothing is wasted. God rewarded our efforts to reach students. We know that they only have four to five years in college, so we have a little window to disciple them and train them. But that is where you have to be fully convinced that God will continue to do His work in their lives after college. I was so blessed to read and followed a book from cover to cover. This has been my guide in starting a ministry with the students. The title of this book is "Change the Campus, Change the World." I read and followed this book from cover to cover. The author of this book is Dr. Rice Broocks. He is one of the founders of Every Nation. Since I became part of Victory Church in 1986, I've been holding on to what he penned in this book called "Campus Manifesto." And these seven are the following;

- The future leaders of society are on our campuses.
- Major movements, bad or good, start on the campus.
- The majority of those who become Christians do so as students.
- International students impact their nations.
- The values on campus become the values in society.
- The most available and trainable groups of people are on our campuses.
- When we reach a student, we reach a family.

EVERY STUDENT IN EVERY CAMPUS

In summer of 1996, I went around the university and high school campuses along Taft , Manila, Philippines to "scout the land", look for areas for possible ministry and for prayer walk. I was able to explore some possible areas inside the campuses where most students gather, talk and hangout. Some called it "tambayan" and others have UTMT, which means "under the mango tree." At this UTMT I was able to meet and start a small group of students inside PNU, Philippine Normal University.

And for many years, and in different nations, it is all the same, the young people and specifically the students, are the best investment of our ministry. We can never go wrong when we disciple them, train them and cheer for them. It may take time to see the results or the fruits of your labor, but it will come at the right time.

I was able to start other group meetings from the school year 1996-1997. Inside the DLSU, De La Salle University, we gathered inside the campus at a place the students called "gazebo" and that's where I met a group of students for the first time. We also had one more small group at McDonalds outside of the school premises beside DLSU. Every other day, I also hang out inside University of the Philippines Manila campus to meet some students, talk to them and eat with them. I always introduce myself to them, informing them about our plans for upcoming gathering inside the UP Little Theater. One of the keys to success of these meetings were the leaders of our local church who happen to be the instructors and professors also from these campuses. They were the reason why I was able to enter the campuses. I can go inside and freely meet students because of the access they have given me. They were a great help in inviting students to our gatherings after their classes.

For UP Manila, our student organization was registered as Youth on Fire, that's what we call the campus ministry arm of Victory Church during that time. Because of this we can freely move inside the campuses and invite the students from different colleges. And since we are registered, we were able to use the Little Theater inside the College of Arts and Sciences with a very minimal fee. We use this venue for our Thursday afternoon fellowship after their classes and with free snacks as well. We have this meeting every Thursday and we have different themes or titles to promote it. And we made sure that the topics are relevant to them. Some of the topics we had are the following: "How to Have Better Grades and Have Fun," "Living a Purposeful Life," "Managing Your Time," "Relationships and Datings," "Rock & Roll - A Search for God," "The

Perils of Love, Sex, Dating in the 90's," "Date Talk," "Career Path," "Family Matters," "No to Smoking, Drugs, and Sex." And of course, we consider some celebrations on Valentine's Day, Christmas Season, the School's Foundation Day, Intramurals and Sportsfest, Freshmen gatherings, and even Graduation.

One of the outreaches we had, we called them "Conspiracy of Kindness," where we offer Free Gift Wrapping during Christmas Season. We also had opportunities to pray for the students during their exam weeks. We also conducted Bible studies inside the student dormitories which were outside of the school premises. Some of the students attending our meetings wanted to reach out to their dorm-mates who are from other universities. Because of this open doors in UP, DLSU and PNU, the other professors also invited us to conduct small groups inside their campuses like Adamson University, Philippine Christian University, Philippine Women's University, St Scholastica's College, Technological University of the Philippines, as well as Manila Science High School and Araullo High School.

God has been blessing all our engaging and evangelistic efforts. We have students from these campuses, but for a time they were not allowed to enter UP Manila for Thursday meetings during campus-wide fellowship. We just continued the small groups inside their campuses until finally after 5 months, we decided to meet during weekends. And it's the Sunday worship service at the UP Little Theater. This time, the students from the different campuses along Taft Avenue can enter the UP Campus and join us. It was indeed a blessing and a favor from God. Through our Youth on Fire ministry we were able to add more small groups and invite more students to our engaging events. This is one of the first campus church of Victory in Metro Manila.

I am privileged to reach out and disciple young people from the campuses. We continually believe God to reach every student in every campus. I love hanging out with young people because it makes me feel young. I got to know their interests, music, fashion, as well as their sentiments in the church, politics and their schools. In fact now that I am 60 years old, I am still doing this ministry. This is our ministry's calling and this is also my calling. And I can honestly say that we never departed from this initial calling. Even as we go and start a ministry in other nations, we always start with the students. We make sure that we know the facts about student population and the major campuses in the city of that nation where we are planning to plant a church.

This is now my responsibility in my "re-tire" or "change my tires" status. Now, I focus more on raising up young missionaries and mobilize them to go to the nations to reach the students. We can also see the hand of God who opens doors of the campuses and showering us with favors. He provided strategic contacts and connections to open wide the doors for the gospel to enter. We even had favor to teach Values Formations and Character Development as part of the school's curriculum. One of the very effective tool is Teaching English and we call it "Free English Classes" or "English Corner" free for everyone but sometimes they pay a very minimal fee for their snacks. And most of the time, the Bible is introduced as a textbook where they can learn as they read. What I have learned when I was starting a campus ministry in UP Manila, now I can bring to other nations.

EVERY NATION CAMPUS

We now called this campus ministry arm of Every Nation Worldwide as "Every Nation Campus. Here in the Philippines it is recognized in many schools and universities. God has been opening the doors of these campuses and they are in collaboration with the principals, school administrators and faculties. For many years, and in different nations, it is all the same, the young people and specifically the students, are the best investment of our ministry. We can never go wrong when we disciple them, train them and encourage them. And we are not yet done. There are still a lot of work to do. We will not stop until we reach "every student in every campus of every nation. "

> ***God promised to pour out his Spirit on sons and daughters.*** (Acts 2:17)

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Christian Missions and the Challenge of Cultural Diversity in the 21st Century

Humphrey Iheukwumere Okereafor and Emmanuel C. Okoroafor

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the dynamic relationship between Christian missions and cultural diversity in contemporary contexts. The paper delves into the foundational concept of Christian missions, highlighting its purpose and relevance amidst diverse cultural landscapes. It offers an overview of cultural diversity, emphasizing its complexities and implications for cross-cultural engagement. The paper draws from a biblical perspective to underscore the imperative of cross-cultural missions, reflecting on passages that advocate for global evangelism and cultural understanding. Challenges inherent in cultural diversity, such as communication barriers, issues of identity, and the struggle with contextualized meanings, are examined. Key recommendations include prioritizing cultural and linguistic sensitivity in mission work, combating tribalism and factionalism within Christian communities, amplifying teachings on cross-cultural missions, and advocating for contextualized approaches to sharing the gospel. The paper underscores the necessity of adapting mission strategies to embrace cultural diversity effectively in the contemporary era.

INTRODUCTION

The reality of cultural diversity in the 21st century constitutes a significant challenge to Christian missions. The diversity of human culture has overwhelming implications for missions, especially in contemporary times. Some areas of concern include language factors, identity problems, cultural awareness, cultural diversity, and worldviews. For example, Nigeria, as an entity, is multi-ethnic, multicultural, and multi-lingual in structure and formation, which poses a challenge to missions. The concept of unity in diversity has given Christians the challenge and task of cross-cultural missions, a herculean task in every ramification. The Bible sees the human race as one, and therefore, cultural restrictions or barriers should not exist in the propagation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Church should imbibe the doctrine of inclusiveness by giving room for the gospel to be propagated to different people, but not without the consciousness of the reality of cultural diversity.

Given the study, this paper discusses the concept of Christian missions, and provides an overview of cultural diversity, and a biblical basis for cross-cultural missions. Furthermore, the challenge of cultural diversity in Christian missions is discussed, and conclusions are drawn from the study.

CONCEPT OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONS

Through Jesus Christ, God had placed on Christians the responsibility of continuing with His redemptive plan. The Church and other mission agencies owe it as a point of duty to join God in this redemptive work of restoring sinful humanity to God through her mission programmes. Missio Dei, the Latin rendition of the mission of God, describes the redemptive mission of God, which is the restoration and redemption of sinful humanity. On the other hand, Missio ecclesia, the Church's mission, is all the concerted efforts by the Christian church in furthering the redemptive plan of God.

In defining and explaining missions, John Mark Terry et al. view missions as the conscious effort on the part of the Church, in its cooperative capacity, or through voluntary agencies, to proclaim the gospel (with all these imply) among peoples and regions where it is still unknown or only inadequately known.[1] George W. Peters asserts that missions should not be seen as an imposition on the Church but rather as something that naturally occurs to her, much like grapes naturally occur to branches that remain in the vine.[2] He further states that missions flow from the Church's inner constitution, character, calling and design.[3] Missio Dei has the central idea that God is the One who initiates and sustains mission.[4]

According to Donald Senior and Carroll Stuhlmueller, mission is the God-given call to appreciate and share one's religious experience and insights, first within one's community and tradition and then with people and communities of other cultural, social, and religious traditions.[5] Gabriel Oluwasegun opines that missions is any deliberate effort by a church or group of Christians to take the gospel of Jesus Christ across to a group of people who have never heard it.[6] Benjamin Kwasi asserts that God's mission is much more expansive than

1. Terry, John Mark, et al. *Missiology: An Introduction to the Foundation, History, and Strategies of World Missions* (Nashville Tennessee: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1998), 2.

2. Peters, George W. *A Biblical Theology of Missions*. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972), 200.

3. Ibid.

4. Moreau, A. Scout, et. al.. *Introducing World Missions* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic.2014), 18.

5. Senior, Donald, C.P and Carroll Stuhlmueller, C.P., *The Biblical Foundation for Missions*. (New York: Orbis Books, 1984), 3.

6. Gabriel, Oluwasegun. *A Handbook for Missionaries*. (Cambria Heights: Covenant Promises Rescue Missions Network Int'l, 2018), 16.

simply planting new churches or gaining a few new members.[7] Missions is man caught up in God's redemptive current.[8] From the ongoing, the mission of God has been firmly established, and Christians are called to engage vigorously in this mission of God.

OVERVIEW OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Cultural diversity is a reality in Christian missions. It is a major factor that must be taken seriously if any appreciable impact is to be made missiologically. Before carrying out an overview of cultural diversity, it will be expedient to discuss the subject of culture and language, which appear inseparable. It is a culture that gave birth to cultural diversity, which is about the different shades of culture, and culture could only be expressed using the vehicle of language. The culture of a people defines who they are and what they stand for. Different authors and writers have defined and explained culture from various perspectives. Eugene A. Nida defines culture as "all learnt behaviour which is socially acquired, that is, the material and non-material traits passed from one generation to another."[9] Marvin Harris views culture as the learnt, socially acquired tradition and lifestyle of the members of a society, including their patterned, repetitive ways of thinking, feeling and acting (behaving).[10] Raymond Williams defines culture as the complex and broad set of relationships, values, attitudes, and behaviours that bind a specific community consciously or unconsciously.[11] Williams further notes that culture, like history, allows for change. In his exhaustive definition of culture, G. Hofstede states that culture is the collective body of information that a group of people have accumulated over generations through individual and collective effort. This includes knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, concepts of time, roles, spatial relations, the universe, and material goods and possessions. According to him, culture is dynamic, shaping and being shaped by those who occupy it.[12] In summary, he said that culture is the collective mental training that sets one group or category of people apart from another.[13] Culture defines a people. This understanding should guide missionaries in their place of primary assignment. Failure to consider culture will apparently lead to culture shock.

Culture shock is one of the experiences missionaries face in cross-cultural missions. The inability of some missionaries to handle this results in frustration, dissatisfaction, and even attrition. It will be proper to discuss culture shock in the context of this study. This phenomenon happens when a missionary leaves his/her culture to another without adequate information and preparation. Culture shock is a universal phenomenon. In his affirmation of culture shock, Louis Luzbetak writes:

> *The missionary apostolate and cultural anthropology share an important common interest: culture change. They are both interested in knowing how the minds and ways of a people change, how such change might be predicted, how such change might be directed and best maintained, and how change might be introduced with as little disorganisation as possible.*[14]

Missionaries, as messengers of God to the people, come face to face with the people and their culture. They are called to bring light into the darkened minds of the people. To achieve this demands absolute carefulness without causing disaffection among the people to whom they have come to witness. In corroborating the missionaries as agents of change, Louis states:

> *Whether missionaries are inclined to admit it or not, they are professional agents of culture change, for there is no other way of establishing, consolidating and perpetuating the Church in society than through its culture. Since missionaries are uncompromising agents of culture change by their very vocation, the study of missionary techniques cannot be divorced from the study of culture.*[15]

For missionaries to do well, they must consider the culture of the people they are called to serve. Culture is a crucial issue in cross-cultural missions. Missions is global and, therefore, cuts across various cultural divides.

Language and culture go hand in hand. It is very much impossible to separate the people from their language. Every missionary activity must be conveyed through the vehicle of language. Culture, language and the people are interwoven. Understanding the language of the people is key to accessing the people socially, culturally and otherwise. Social, religious, economic and cultural interactions are done through the instrumentality of language. Again, language is the symbol that individuals use to identify themselves as participants in their culture and as members of social organisations, which are written or signed.[16] It also means human speech, written or spoken by one nation, tribe, or similar group.[17] According to Charles Kraft, language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols that people use in a society for a range of interpersonal

7. Kwasi, Benjamin A., *Evangelism and Missions. Biblical and Strategic Insights for the Church Today.* (Bukuru: Acts Christian Textbooks, 2018), 8.

8. John et all.

9. Nida, Eugene A., *Customs and Culture* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1954), 28.

10. Harris, Marvin. *Cultural Anthropology* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1983), 5.

11. Williams, Raymond. *Definition of Culture by different authors*.1995.

12. Hofstede, G. *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the mind*. (New York: McGraw Hill, 1997), np.

13. Ibid.

14. Kane, J Herbert. *Understanding Christian Missions* (Grand Rapids Michigan: Baker Book House, 1987), 345.

15. Luzbetak, Louis J. *The Church and Cultures* (Techny IL. Divine Word Publications, 1970), 14

16. Encyclopedia Britannica S.V language

17. Thorndike, EL. Ed. *Foreman's Advanced Dictionary* (Illinois: Scott Foreman and company, 1979), 576.

and intergroup functions, including idea formulation and communication, motivating others, evoking sympathy, evoking fear, and self-expression, such as venting steam or flaunting oneself.[18] Communication, identity expression, play, creative expression, and emotional release are a few language purposes.[19]

In their observation of the experience of Paul and Barnabas in Lystra, Scott Moreau et al. state that "On Paul's first missionary journey, himself and Barnabas encountered the reality of communication across cultural boundaries"[20](Acts 14:8-10). They further revealed that Luke's account vividly captures the peril of intercultural communication. The reality is that misunderstandings in communication due to culture are a regular part of the life of a missionary.[21] In his discussion on the qualifications of a missionary, Harol R. Cook notes that as part of the physical qualification, the missionary needs to learn well the language of the people to whom he/she goes, adopt him/herself physically and mentally to a new culture and new living conditions.[22] One of the reasons Harol put forward the need for language is that the missionary does his/her work in a language other than his/her own. He/she has to learn that language, not superficially to bargain in the market or to give orders to a construction gang, but thoroughly.[23]

BIBLICAL BASIS FOR CROSS-CULTURAL MISSIONS

From its very beginning, the Christian religion had had an identity as one of the challenges facing it. The original custodians of the faith were of Jewish extraction, moulded and grounded in the Jewish tradition and philosophy. Consequent to the inclusiveness Jesus laid as the foundation and the coming of the Gentiles to Christianity, cultural diversity became unavoidable. According to Dean Flemming, the book of Acts narrates the story of a church whose basic identity consists of sharing the good news about Jesus with various audiences and among previously unreached people.[24] He further states that Acts is a cultural product that participates in the particular first-century cultural and literary world that Luke shares with his readers.[25]

Luke acknowledges the reality of cultural diversity in Christian missions as expressed in Acts of the Apostles. Flemming opines that the focus in Acts is on witnessing God's salvation in Jesus, among Aramaic and Greek-speaking Jews, Samaritans, God-fearing Gentiles and finally pagans. As a result, as the word of God crosses linguistic, cultural, and religious barriers, new translations of the gospel are produced under the direction of the Holy Spirit. Despite Jesus' promise of a universal witness by his followers in Acts 1:8, Chapters 1-5 describe a Christian movement that operates within the ethnic and religious borders of the Jewish people.[26] The original articulation of God's new revelation in Christ was tailored for the Jews based on their history, scripture, culture and religious experience. The gospel cannot exist apart from a concrete historical and cultural home. Further, according to Flemming, Jesus was the Jewish Messiah who would bring back Israel's kingdom (Acts 1:6; 5:31). Although the early church was woven around the Jews, this was not a mistake as God's eternal plan of salvation was not restricted to the Jews, but to as many as will believe in Jesus Christ irrespective of tribe, colour, language or tongue (Jn.1:12, Gal. 3:28).

The gospel responded positively in overcoming the obstacles in the early stage of close identification with the Jewish culture through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The miracle of languages made it possible for all people to hear the gospel in their native language, as recorded in Acts 2:1-4. Had the Holy Spirit not enabled those in attendance to hear the gospel in their native languages, many could have missed the opportunity to understand the message and carry it home. This and other experiences gave birth to a multicultural church. Everything worked for God's perfect plan and timing because of the nature of the world in which Jesus came, and the disciples were called to witness. Howard Marshall observes that Jesus was born in the fullness of time into a world that a vast cultural revolution has shaped.[27]

The revolution began under Alexander the Great, whose policy was to spread the Greek way of life throughout his domain, from Adriatic in the West to India in the East, from Macedonia in the North to Egypt in the South.[28] As noted by Marshall, this Hellenistic way of life was characterised by the use of the Greek language as a universal means of communication, the spread of trade, the setting up of a Greek kind of political system, and the spread of Greek thinking, literature and art.[29] Marshall concludes that the New Testament has a world in which different cultures or ways of life were in contact, leading to assimilation and sharp collisions between them.[30]

18. Kraft, Charles H.. *Anthropology for Christian Witness* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996), 247.

19. Encyclopedia Britannica, language.

20. Moreau, A Scott, et. all. *Introducing World Missions: A Biblical, Historical, and Practical Survey* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2004), 251.

21. Moreau, 251.

22. Harold R. Cooke. *An Introduction to Christian Missions* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1954), 110.

23. Cooke, 115.

24. Flemming, Dean. *Contextualization in the New Testament: Pattern for Theology and Mission*.(England: Inter-varsity Press, 2005), 25.

25. Ibid, 26.

26. Flemming, 30-31.

27. Stott, John R.W., and Robert Coote ed. *Down to Earth Studies in Christianity and Culture*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B Publishing Company, 1980), 17.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid.

30. Stott and Robert, 20.

CHALLENGES OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY ON CHRISTIAN MISSIONS

Cultural diversity, no doubt, poses some challenges to Christian missions. There are several instances, scripturally and from practical experience, of missionaries in the reality of challenges due to cultural differences. Paul's affirmation of the Corinthian Church confirms that Christian missions in multicultural situations face diverse cultural challenges that must be approached holistically for maximum impact. The Apostle Paul wrote, "To the Jews, I became a Jew…to those under the law, I became as one under the law, that I might by all means save some" (1 Cor.9:20-22). Paul, a Jew, was born in Tarsus but brought up in Jerusalem at the feet of Gamaliel.[31] Against this background, it is appropriate to highlight some challenges of cultural diversity in Christian missions.

Communication across Cultures: First, Christian missions faces the challenge of communication across cultures. The gospel is meant to be communicated through the vehicle of language. Taking the gospel to people of diverse cultures entails learning and understanding the target group's language. As noted before, the Pentecost experience solved the problem of language, which could have denied many attendees the privilege of hearing the gospel in their native language.

Issue of Identity: Another challenge of Christian missions in the 21st century is the issue of identity. As the early Christian church started experiencing growth, the problem of identity and sectionalism became evident. Luke captured this scenario when he noted that "in those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food" (Acts 6:1, NIV). There was disparity and a case of marginalisation within the congregation. Identity and sectionalism became inevitable. The proactive approach of the Apostles nipped this ugly trend in the bud. Nevertheless, Christian missions in the 21st century is confronted by this challenge. The Christian church needs to arise in the same way as the Apostles to address the problems of tribalism and sectionalism emanating from cultural diversities.

The Challenge of Meaning: The challenge of meaning is another factor in Christian missions. There is a need to contextualize the gospel to overcome the problem of meaning. Alan Tippett queried, "When pagans accept the gospel, what do they take it to mean? Does it mean the same thing to foreign advocates as to the indigenous acceptor? There are theological problems of expressing theological concepts in the pre-Christian terminology…or do you invent new vocabulary? If it is so, it is a foreign imposition."32 The gospel must, therefore, be contextualized for proper understanding and assimilation.

31. Flemming, 120.

CONCLUSION

The challenge of cultural diversity cannot be divorced from Christian missions. This is because several entities have a culture that is peculiar to them. It has been like this from Bible times. The early church witnessed this as it witnessed a great turnout of believers not of Jewish extraction. The Church has the task of dislodging these barriers to reach out to people effectively. To achieve this, missionaries must engage in culture and language learning to understand the cultural milieu from which they operate.

As noted, the challenge of tribalism and its forms should be highly discouraged. Promoting one tribe at the expense of another or others in a multicultural setting is an invitation for crises. There should be a level playing ground for all. Leadership positions should not be an exclusive prerogative or right of a particular section of people. More so, the gospel message needs to be contextualized so that those evangelised will not find it difficult to understand and adapt to the demands of the message. Christian missionaries should, therefore, make a conscious effort to bridge the gap created by diverse cultures.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are recommendations that could be considered for further discussions:

1. Missionaries who engage in cross-cultural missions are to pay attention to the culture and language of the target group.
2. Tribalism and sectionalism should be discouraged in its entirety.
3. Teachings on Christian missions should give more emphasis to cross-cultural missions.
4. There is a need for the gospel to be contextualized.

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Analyzing the Self-Presentation of Missionaries on Facebook: A Case Study of the Partner Filipino Missionaries of GCF South Metro

Patricia Marie D. Nermal

INTRODUCTION

In the early years of using Facebook, it was simply a social networking site I personally used to upload pictures and videos, hoping it will preserve those for me somewhere in the digital space. But when the Covid-19 pandemic happened in 2020, and the world suddenly stood still because of the imposed quarantine, we lost our physical contacts with people and social networking sites like Facebook became a major resource to stay connected with the rest of the world. My current position as the Ministry Director for missions in Greenhills Christian Fellowship-South Metro (GCF-South Metro) also entails me to be connected to more people outside the church, including missionaries, with Facebook as one of my communication tools. But since Facebook is a personal account and used with different motives by its users, including missionaries, I personally would like to understand how their usage of Facebook and way of presenting themselves online impacts the relationship between churches and missionaries through this social media platform.

This study examines the self-presentation of missionaries on Facebook and its impact on enhancing engagement with churches and support networks using the Theory of Impression Management by Erving Goffman. The study focused on Facebook as the most widely used social media platform in the Philippines.[1] During this study, there are 23 Filipino missionaries supported by GCF South Metro Church. Of the 22 Facebook users, 17 participated, with the focus on their Facebook usage from 2022 to 2024.

I employed digital ethnography based on the nature of the study which involved the virtual world, allowing me to conduct an online participant-observation for a total of 43 hours. There were other data gathering methods that were used such as: library research, survey, personal interview, and focused group discussion. I used thematic analysis and narrative storytelling to analyze the data gathered.

This study is limited by several factors. First, the study concentrated on the concept of Front Stage in Goffman's theory based on the data gathered. However, the Backstage concept was also discussed since answers from participants that referred to the Backstage concept emerged. Second, since the research focused on a case study, the sample size is relatively small, which may not fully capture the diversity of missionary experiences and the findings may not be widely applicable, as the social media practices were based solely on a Filipino perspective of using Facebook. Lastly, "Stories" were not accessed since it is only visible for 24 hours and will automatically disappear. Nonetheless, I hope this research will spur more interest and spark more future research on this topic.

GOFFMAN'S SELF-PRESENTATION THEORY

Erving Goffman's book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* uses the metaphor of a theater performance to explain how people managed their presented selves to influence others' decision and perceptions towards them.[2] I find his Theory of Impression Management most fitting in analyzing the missionaries' self-presentation, whether curated or not and whether done consciously or unconsciously, on Facebook and its impact on enhancing engagement with churches and support networks.

Much like other individuals, missionaries who use social media platforms as a new medium in communication allows them to carefully construct a version of themselves that may fit to their intended reaction from their audience. The Theory of Impression Management introduces the concept of Front Stage and Backstage, also known as Dramaturgy. The Front Stage concept refers to being in a setting where an individual may perform an act according to the particular scene they are in and its audience. While the Backstage refers to the private or personal space where an individual leaves the performance and reveals one's true self. [3]

In this study, Facebook is the Front Stage of missionaries on which content they post can be carefully curated and the most important or relevant content to be shared may be highlighted, may it be a ministry or personal life update. The study looked into the "appearance" and "manner" of the participant in Facebook. The "appearance" is described by Goffman as the participant's state or social status when engaging in social activities, work or recreation and in regard to one's decorum.[4] The "manner" refers to the participant's behavior in presenting oneself in a specific role.5 It allows the audience to be warned of the kind of impression the performer is playing. Ideally, the "setting" which is the social media plat-

1. Digital 2024: Philippines," *Datareportal*, last modified January 2024, accessed November 17, 2024, https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-philippines.

2. Goffman, Erving, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1959), 2.

3. Goffman, *The Presentation of Self*, 13.

4. Goffman, *The Presentation of Self*, 15–67.

5. Goffman, *The Presentation of Self*, 15.

form, "appearance" and "manner," are expected to be coherent, because once the participant has already established a social role, they will have a particular front for it.[6] Thus, by using the Theory of Impression Management, I discovered how missionaries actively shape and manage their identities online and how this impacts their engagement with churches and support networks.

SURVEY AND ETHNOGRAPHIC FINDINGS

The survey in this study focused on what the missionaries intended to do and what they believed they were doing, while the participant-observation allowed me to see what was actually done. I analyzed the survey responses and participant-observation of their Facebook profiles, focusing on their frequency of posting, self-presentation, engagement, and privacy and security concerns. The data revealed that missionaries have different frequency and patterns of posting. They also have different behaviors yet share similarities in the type of content they post. Comparing the survey and participant-observation, there are no significant discrepancies between the two. Additional explanations were also gathered from selected missionaries through personal interviews to clarify their Facebook usage and self-presentation. These results provide a foundation for analysis and discussion of the data using the Theory of Impression Management by Erving Goffman.

I discovered that staying connected is the main reason missionaries use Facebook despite its other features and this purpose influence how they present themselves. According to Goffman, regardless of the objective of an individual, for his benefit, he may control or influence how others may respond to his act in accordance with his plans.[7] The missionaries now engage in what he calls "Impression Management."

Impression Management

The gathered data is analyzed according to Front Stage or the performance of the missionaries that appears in their Facebook Timeline and Backstage which is the performance done beyond what the audience may see in public. I also analyzed the data based on different performance strategies, authenticity and limitation, and team concept.

1. Front Stage

Setting: In the digital world, social media platforms like Facebook serves as a setting for the missionaries to show their performance or where they present themselves to the audience and Facebook's user interface, also called Timeline, represents the setting or the stage for the missionaries.[8]

Appearance: In this study, the majority of the participants believe that they are not pressured to present an "ideal" or "perfect" self on Facebook, yet they consider how their audience may perceive them based on their posts. They may want to express their true selves, yet do not want to be misunderstood. Unfortunately, regardless of the caution, front stage is limiting them to truly share themselves to their audience.

Like a theater play, each character must be presented. The missionaries in this study have different ways of introducing themselves in the social media world, and the name and the profile picture are one of the ways to introduce oneself. The following is how the missionaries introduce themselves:

- Using of true name, may it be their legal name or nickname is still normal for majority of the missionaries.
- The selection of profile pictures may depend on how one would like their audience to perceive them.
- The use of clear pictures of themselves, even including their family members, projects authenticity and transparency.
- Majority of the missionaries who use profile pictures that do not show their faces are working in ministries where privacy and security are crucial.
- Less than half of the missionaries introduced themselves as Christians in their profile page, however, it cannot be inferred that they are not bold in their faith; rather, many factors must be considered in making such a choice like preference for privacy and security.

Although the missionaries share ministry-related posts, their Facebook profiles present them as people whose life does not only revolve around ministry. Just like any other individual, missionaries also use their Facebook account for different purposes, including sharing important events in their lives and other matters they are interested in. Limiting their posting on Facebook also depends on their own preferences. Nonetheless, some missionaries choose not to share ministry updates on Facebook because of restrictions in their ministries.

It is also notable that majority of the contents are either photos or videos, mostly raw and unedited which gives a more authentic impression and sincerity to the audience compared to refined-taken pictures. Through photos and videos, the audience may recognize their emotions and experiences visually.[9] Missionaries who show pictures or videos of their ministries in action, though less visually appealing, project credibility and transparency. Tagged posts appearing on their Timelines creates an impression they are unafraid of judgment since they have no control of the photos or videos that will be shown. However, being tagged in posts that ambiguously

6. Goffman, *The Presentation of Self*, 17.

7. Goffman, *The Presentation of Self*, 2.

8. Merunkova, Lucie and Josef Slerka, "Goffman's Theory as a Framework for Analysis of Self Presentation on Social Networks," *Masaryk University Journal of Law and Technology,* 13 (2019): 250, 10.5817/MUJLT2019-2-5.

9. Schroeder, Ralph, *Social Theory After the Internet* (London: UCL Press, 2018), chap 4, Everand.

involves them may create confusion to the audience.

It is also common among the missionaries to share family-related posts, regardless of its frequency and context. Although they often share celebratory posts and birthday greetings of loved ones, sad moments like death are shared with vulnerability. According to a study, chronicling the family is one of the most common cultural scripts from missionaries.[10] Consistent with the data I gathered, these missionaries also received many "likes" or "views" for posts related to their family compared to regular ministry activities. However, it is still unclear why this is a common trend among missionaries and their audience, and if the "likes" and "views" actually translates to an approval from the audience.[11] The same way, the reason for this trend among the Filipino missionaries in this study is unclear due to the limitations of the research.

The study revealed that missionaries never or rarely delete a post that they think does not represent them. Thus, it was observed that some missionaries are occasionally posting "Memories"–a feature of Facebook that shows your post from the past–of themselves, looking differently compared to their current self. Though this action may be triggered by a sense of nostalgia, it could be considered that they are not embarrassed to present a version of themselves that no longer reflects their current identity. Because social media is meant to be asynchronous, it results in less self-awareness in public and has a sense of less threat in interpersonal interactions.[12]

Manner: Since online communication lacks nonverbal cues like tone of voice compared to a face-to-face setting, the missionary's intended character may be revealed based on the behavior of his posts, not only on what is visually shared to the audience.[13] Most of the missionaries appear to be cautious in sharing ministry-related content. Although each missionary has different personalities, they appear to be mindful of their work and the people involved in their ministry. Ministry-related content is shared with a manner of respect, often accompanied with captions explaining the ministry, while personal-related content appears to have a more informal or relaxed tone. Missionaries in this study often share posts that reflects a positive and inspirational tone, whether it is a quote or Bible verses, or updates and pictures of themselves taken. However, since the Facebook accounts of the missionaries are personally owned and not dedicated solely for ministry, the mix of posts and posting style is difficult to generalize and predict. Their manner of posting may also differ, depending on the appearance of missionaries.

Survey shows that no participant intends to use Facebook for the sake of their social media presence. It is assumed that each post was premeditated and intentionally posted, regardless of how deeply they reflect on it. Despite the lack of reactions or engagement from the audience on missionaries' posts, they seem to be unaffected and will continue to share the content they wish to post. Although designed to be interactive, Facebook becomes a stage where the audience watches from afar and regardless of the applause, the show must go on.

2. Backstage

Like an actor in a theater play, each one prepares for the performance. The actors read and memorize the script, study the character, and rehearse the performance. Many things happen behind the scenes or backstage. Just like the actors, missionaries also have different reasons behind their posts, and it must not always be concluded that what is seen has a general intention to it. Each missionary has a character to play and with a different "hugot" or sentiments in life that may not be directly seen in what they share on Facebook.

There is a high probability that the engagement of missionaries does not happen in the front stage. Like a theater play, the actors cannot directly respond to their audience's reactions. But after each performance, as the actor retreats to the backstage, the audience may visit and interact with them. The missionaries prefer to communicate and build relationships with churches far from the prying eyes of the world. The backstage may only be revealed once the audience intentionally investigates the actor at play. Only through personal communication and intentional questions on what is happening in their lives may reveal their true self.

3. Performance Strategies

Every performer uses a strategy on how to deliver an act to achieve the impression he wants to show his audience. Each missionary has a unique performance, adhering to what is expected of them based on their own context. One of the strategies observed in this study is what Goffman called "idealization" in which an actor aligns its performance according to what is socially desirable or acceptable.[14] The missionaries who works in Creative Access communities are private and cautious about their ministry, and even sometimes share very little about themselves. While missionaries who work within cross-cultural communities with low-level risk in security are less private on what they post. Projecting a positive demeanor on posts—often showing them smiling, along with posts of thanksgiving even during unfortunate events—may

10. Nehrbass, Kenneth and David R. Dunatez, "A Multiple Motives Theory of Church and Missionary Relationships", *Missiology: An International Review* 46, no. 4 (2018): 390, EBSCOhost.

11. Nehrbass, Kenneth, "Managing Missionary Identity in the Digital Age: How Missionaries Utilize Digital Media Among Multiple Social Groups", *Missiology* 46, no. 2 (2018): 189, EBSCOhost.

12. Cheng, Zhichao, Yang Pan and Yuan Ni, "Self-Determination Affects the Use of Self-Presentation Strategies on *Social Networking Sites," Social Behavior and Personality: An International Journal* 47, no. 3 (2019): 7, 10.2224/sbp/7758/.

13. Tidwell, L. C. and J. B. Walther, "Computer-Mediated Communication Effects on Disclosure, Impressions, and Interpersonal Evaluations: Getting to Know One Another a Bit at a Time," Human Communication Research 28 (2002): 317–348, https://doi.org/cbs352, quoted in Zhichao Cheng, Yang Pan, and Yuan Ni, "Self-Determination Affects the Use of Self-Presentation Strategies on Social Networking Sites," *Social Behavior and Personality: An International Journal* 47, no. 3 (2019): 7, https://doi.org/10.2224/sbp/7758/.

14. Goffman, *The Presentation of Self*, 23.

be attributed to this strategy.

Missionaries may use the strategy of "self-promotion."[15] Their performance on Facebook projects authenticity and credibility in their role as missionaries for the benefit of those who support them. This is often done through posting of actual ministry activities, mission trips, speaking engagements and achievements. Self-promotion should not be viewed as inherently negative and does not equate to self-centeredness, but a strategy to present oneself to achieve an intended impression from the target audience.

The last strategy observed is "silence."[16] To avoid conflict of interests or backlash from posts, missionaries may appear to remain neutral or silent especially on controversial issues. Majority of the missionaries in this study have not shared opinions on matters relating to politics. Silence may also be related to idealization and may come from the expectation of their role as missionaries especially for ministries with high-level risk in security. Specific social roles may require one's discretion or to be silent of what they know to maintain professional ethics.[17]

4. Authenticity and Limitation

In the mystery movie Knives Out, Marta Cabrera, who was known for her honesty and inability to lie, witnessed the death of her employer. Unfortunately, she cannot reveal the whole truth to the highly skilled and observant Detective Benoit Blanc, due to the possible consequences for her and the others. Thus, she only revealed parts of the truth. According to Goffman, "cynical performers" are interested in deluding their audience for purposes of what is called "self-interest" or "private gain." But a cynical performer may also delude his audience to their own good or the good of the community.[18] In this case, the cynical performer is also not allowed by his audience to be sincere. Despite the desire of missionaries to present their true selves, their role as missionaries may not allow them to be "sincere" performers, sharing only parts of the truth or portions of their lives to their audience, just like Marta.

Social media platforms like Facebook allow users to create multiple accounts for themselves. This allows the users to create different online identities even considering the possibility of creating fake accounts.19 All the missionaries in this study, except one, declared to own only one personal Facebook account, with some managing Facebook pages for ministry. Thus, having only one Facebook account for personal and ministry purposes may lead the missionary to omit certain information about himself. They may limit their posts to protect the interests of the church, ministry, family, or pre-believers, given their diverse connections and limited control over who sees their content. One missionary acknowledges Facebook as a tool to reach out and communicate with others, but it does not mean that every part of his life will be available on it. He prefers to limit his posts for the sake of his children and how his supporters may perceive them. Another missionary prefers to post stories on Instagram rather than Facebook about his personal interests, such as sports activities, because they are visible to a limited audience only.

5. Team Concept

In Goffman's self-presentation theory, actors are believed to often work with other actors or what he calls a "team". A team is defined by Goffman as "a set of performers who co-operate in presenting a single performance."[20] Each team member is forced to rely on the good conduct and behavior of his other teammates to maintain a good performance. Regardless of roles, the church works together to shape the public's perception of Christianity, projecting the image of Christ to the people around us. Thus, there are expectations for missionaries on how they also present themselves in specific social settings. An individual belonging to a group or identified with a social status may be calculating his action based on what is expected of them.[21] Missionaries may be expected by the churches and their support networks to be highly involved in the ministry; thus, they may portray themselves as serious and dedicated missionaries. However, when one shows an unusual behavior, it disrupts the performance and may disappoint the audience. For example, two missionaries have shared posts that were tagged as fake news. Although one was called out by Meta and the other by an audience, it remained undeleted. Since missionaries were bearers of the Truth, it is also expected that they will be bearers of truthful information. An action like this may disrupt the performance expected of them and may also affect the impression missionaries project to their audience.

Impact of Self-Presentation on Engagement with Churches and Support Networks

The survey and interviews revealed that the presence of the missionaries on Facebook has either a positive impact on their ministry or no impact at all. For the missionaries who believe that there is some or even significant impact in their ministry with how they present themselves on Facebook, believe that Facebook is a way for them to connect with their ministry partners, easily update them on what is

15. Bahar, Varqa Shamsi, "Self-Presentation Theory: A Review," in *TheoryHub Book*, ed. S. Papagiannidis (Newcastle upon Tyne: Newcastle University, 2024), Theory section, https://open.ncl.ac.uk.

16. Premeaux, S.F. and A.G. Bedeian, "Breaking the Silence: The Moderating Effects of Self Monitoring in Predicting Speaking Up in the Workplace," *Journal of Management Studies* 40, no. 6 (2003): 1537-1562, quoted in Varqa Shamsi Bahar, "Self-Presentation Theory: A Review," in *TheoryHub Book*, ed. S. Papagiannidis (Newcastle upon Tyne: Newcastle University, 2024), Theory section, https://open.ncl.ac.uk.

17. Goffman, *The Presentation of Self*, 97.

18. Goffman, *The Presentation of Self*, 11.

19. Ferreira, Chantal, Hannelie Yates and Alfred R. Brunsdon, "Who are we online? The interplay between online identity formation and Christian marriages," *HTS Teologiese Studies/ Theological Studies* 77, no. 4 (2021): 4, 10.4102/hts.v77i4.6630.

20. Goffman, *The Presentation of Self*, 50.

21. Goffman, *The Presentation of Self*, 3.

happening on the field and even ask for prayers. However, for those who do not think there is an impact are missionaries who are not as active in posting about their ministries. These missionaries do not rely on Facebook to connect with their churches and support networks, but through other platforms like private messaging apps and email newsletters, they still build relationships with them. Some believed that it is not through the posting on Facebook that helps them engage but through Facebook's messaging app, Messenger. Occasionally, there are situations when a missionary gains a new ministry partner or receives support through a Facebook post that was seen. However, communication is done privately rather than responding to the post.

However, it was revealed that the missionaries in this study have different reasons for using Facebook. They post mainly for connections with family and friends and utilize it for ministry purposes. It is generally not for their ministry supporters that they post but they also consider them. Not each missionary is the same and has their own self-presentation on Facebook. Though they have different behaviors which may be influenced by their context in ministry or personal preferences, it also appears that as missionaries, they share the same perception in the use of Facebook for ministry, particularly as a tool for connection, and concern for their privacy and security.

One of the limitations of this study is that missionaries may not be able to properly assess how their self-presentation on Facebook may affect their engagement with the churches and support networks. The analysis discussed is based on the missionaries' point of view on how they think using Facebook affects their ministry. Although reactions from the audience to the user's post confirms the impression by the performer, Facebook's continuous changes in algorithm makes it also difficult to predict who among our audience will be reached with our posts, [22] Like an actor in a theater play, one does not really know if his performance is well-received or not while still engaged in the act. He just continues to play his character until the end of the show.

Thus, to explore the impact of missionaries' self-presentation on Facebook on their engagement through the church's perspective, I conducted a study among the pastoral staff of GCF South Metro through a Focused Group Discussion, drawing on their observation of Filipino missionaries they know and are connected with on Facebook, not limiting to the missionaries who participated in this

For the pastoral staff, the use of proper captions in any type of post—whether ministry-related or personal—is essential. Properly written captions may help reduce misunderstandings. This principle also applies when using Facebook for fundraising. Although raising support in general is not negative, the properly written caption will help explain the context of posting for support raising as with the other posts. However, posting a picture of a material item with a vague caption may create a negative message for them as an audience. As missionaries, they must be responsible with what their audience will see. But it should be acknowledged that not everyone has been taught how to use social media especially in the context of ministry. Thus, missionaries should not be immediately criticized but be properly educated on how to present themselves and the ministry in social media. The posts of actual ministries in the mission field help them to be engaged in missions through prayer, financial support and going on mission trips. However, they only engage with missionaries they already have a relationship with. Although it helps to see their ministry, there are other ways the missionaries can give updates like through Messenger or closed online groups as intentional communication helps to build relationships.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Facebook provides an easy connection for people, including missionaries. Geographical distance is no longer a hindrance to be connected, especially among missionaries, churches, and support networks. However, it was revealed that the missionaries in this study have different reasons for using Facebook. They post mainly for connections with family and friends and utilize it for ministry purposes. It is generally not for their ministry supporters that they post but they also consider them. Not each missionary is the same and has their own self-presentation on Facebook. Though they have different behaviors which may be influenced by their context in ministry or personal preferences, it also appears that as missionaries, they share the same perception in the use of Facebook for ministry, particularly as a tool for connection, and concern for their privacy and security.

The data revealed the differences in the frequency and behavior of posting of missionaries. However, they also share similarities like type of posts which focus mostly on ministry, personal and family

22. Merunkova and Slerka, "Goffman's Theory as a Framework," 270.

updates and posts referring to the Christian faith. The study showed that the majority of the participants are not concerned with social approval based on reactions received in their posts but have concerns of what others may think of them as they post. Most missionaries also accompany photos and videos posted with well-written captions, with some attempting to engage their audience through it. Though some engage with their audience through the comment section, many of them have limited engagement. Majority of the missionaries are also concerned with their privacy and security in using Facebook, while there are mixed reactions on how Facebook impacts their engagement and relationship with churches and support networks. Furthermore, the true meaning of one's messages may not be properly delivered if the audience will only depend on watching the performer at their front stage, thus, the possibility that a relationship is built less in this stage. Instead, one goes backstage to be more personal with the other.

Christians are called to be the ambassadors of the Gospel and missionaries are privileged to be called to the places where Jesus Christ is not yet known. As ambassadors, missionaries were entrusted to bring the message of Christ so that the people will be reconciled to Him (2 Cor. 5:19). In Paul's letter to the Corinthians, he appealed to the believers to act as new creations, putting away the old self (v. 17). Both believers and non-believers may see the missionaries' online self-presentation. Though a missionary's Facebook account ownership is personal, it does not entitle them to use it without considering the image they are presenting to their audience. This image must represent Christ regardless of the choice of strategy they are using to present themselves. Facebook is not separated from the identity of a missionary; it is part of who they are. The self-presentation of missionaries in Facebook must not be ignored because it creates opportunities when done properly but may also pose ministry concerns when done poorly.

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COMIBAM 2025 REPORT
"The Same Mission for a Moving Church"

Noemi Troncoso

Panama Hosts the Fifth Ibero-American Missionary Congress

Panama, April 2025 — Panama City served as the backdrop for the Fifth Ibero-American Missionary Congress, held from April 22 to 25, which brought together 1,600 pastors, missionaries, religious leaders, and observers from over 25 countries across Ibero-America and other regions of the world. Under the theme "The Same Mission for a Moving Church", the event became a space for celebration, inspiration, reflection, and strategic planning to strengthen missionary work in the region.

Since its founding in 1987, COMIBAM — the Ibero-American Cooperation for Missions — has evolved from a simple mission field to a dynamic force that coordinates and promotes collaboration among countries, churches, and organizations. During the congress, leaders and attendees reaffirmed the importance of relying on the Holy Spirit and God's power to fulfill the mission, expressed by COMIBAM's president, Paulo Feniman: "There is no testimony without power."

The figures show significant growth in the number of Ibero-American missionaries: only 1,350 in 1987, and today over 34,000, with more than 19,000 serving within the region. Additionally, over 80% of these workers have chosen to dedicate their lives indefinitely to missions.

Despite these advances, the data also highlight notable challenges. Only 6% of sending churches actively participate in missions, and just 12% are involved in Bible translation efforts. However, an encouraging 36% of mission-engaged churches work with indigenous communities, demonstrating a commitment to vulnerable populations.

During the congress, attendees participated in workshops and sessions on emerging areas and future horizons of missions, including polycentric missions, working with immigrants, refugees, indigenous communities, diasporas, and utilizing sports and arts as evangelization tools. Emphasis was also placed on adopting an attitude of listening, compassion, and incarnation to bridge cultural and religious differences, rather than approaching them with aggressive apologetic methods.

The event concluded with an inspirational message from Cristian Castro, who shared an ambitious vision: "We are praying for 10,000 new workers and 20,000 new churches in the next ten years. We must keep praying and giving ourselves to missions."

As the congress ended, participants departed with a renewed commitment to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ to every corner of the world, reaffirming that the church's mission is the same — in motion, it can be fulfilled with passion and purpose.

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