Divine Love understood by Vanhoozer's Trinitarian Hermeneutics & C.S. Song's Story Theology and its Implication for Religious Dialogue[1]

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Abstract

In this article, the author tires to investigate, from the perspective of contextual theology of Asia, the main works of Kevin Vanhoozer, including *Is there in a Meaning in This Text? First Theology, The Drama of Doctrine* and *Remythologizing Theology*, in order to explore how his the-

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ological hermeneutics may contribute to religious dialogue. Indubitably, the theological hermeneutics of Vanhoozer was formed in struggling with the challenges of postmodernity in the pluralistic age. That means post-modern context influenced his way of doing theology. He integrates philosophical hermeneutics, theory of speech act and the doctrine of Trinity into a Trinitarian hermeneutics of humility and conviction. For him, God, script and hermeneutics are the tripod of First Theology. On the one hand, theology is hermeneutical, because theology is based on interpretation of the Bible. On the other hand, hermeneutics is theological, because the interpretation of texts in general rests on beliefs about God and humanity. In this sense, his Trinitarian hermeneutics is positive to religious dialogue which aims at understanding the meanings of God and humanity by sharing interpretation, understanding and application of religious scriptures to deal with common problems of the world today. Based on methodology of theological hermeneutics, Vanhoozer constructs a communicative theism which is more open to other religions than previous traditional theism, and more loyal to the triune God than *perichoretic* theism at present-day. The author will try to argue that Vanhoozer's contribution might be enhanced in case his theological hermeneutics practiced with story theology of Choan-Seng Song. This connection is possible because both of them espouse "theology of transposition." As Caleb Oladipo rightly said, effective religious dialogue is achieved by "mutual understanding" and "mature differentiation." For Vanhoozer, communicative action of God is the subject matter of theological interpretation of the Bible, and the divine Love manifested in the story of Jesus is the climax of Theo-Drama. Yet, the story of Jesus is more effective for the Asian people when it was understood and interpreted

in relation to stories of suffering people in Asian contexts as the story theology of Song strived. The triune God, understood and experienced by a Trinitarian hermeneutics, is the One who lights and lives in love. Divine love of the triune God calls Christians to be responsible pluralists who seek unity in plurality of theological/religious meanings by improvising, inspired and directed by the Holy Spirit, the Theo-Drama not only among their brothers and sisters in the contexts of Christian cultures, but also amidst their neighbors of other faiths in the contexts of pluralistic religions and cultures.

Religion seeks understanding the truth, the meaning of life and the ultimate concern by interpreting sacred scripture and practicing faith. In the context of globalization and postmodernity, it is the poor and the weak, ever suspicious when one asserts "the validity of one's own religion without reference to the truth claims of other religions."[2] David Tracy is right in warning that "we are fast approaching the day when it will not be possible to attempt a Christian systematic theology except in serious conversation with the other great ways."[3] As we know, the Trinity is one of the most distinctive doctrines of Christian faith. A Christian is not loyal to his faith if he eludes the understanding of the Trinity. There is no reason to ignore the importance of Trinity when a Christian enters into religious dialogue. In this article, the author will try to discuss how Kevin Vanhoozer, a famous contemporary scholar of theological hermeneutics, engages with religious dialogue by his Trinitarian hermeneutics, canonical-linguistic approach, theo-dramatic imagination and by de-mythologizing metaphysics. The author will argue that the approach of Vanhoozer is valuable in keeping balance between loyalty (to one's religion) and openness (to other's religions). However, it will be more productive if it links with the story theology of C. S. Song. This link, according to the investigation of the author, is the notion of "transposition."

John Cobb, a pioneer in religious dialogue, claimed "that the dialogical relation with the religions of Asia today represents "a similar opportunity for reconceptualization in and through engagement with

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2 N. Ross Real & Edward F. Perry, *The Central Spiritual Reality of Humankind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 9: Cited from Kevin Vanhoozer, ed., *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age: Theological Essays on Culture and Religion* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 54.

3 Vanhoozer, ed., *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age*, 44.

Eastern wisdom."[4] If Cobb is right, then "doing theology with Asian cultural resources" proposed by the story theology of Song might be a help as well as a challenge to Vanhoozer's theology in its approach to Asian Christians and to those who are interested in religious dialogue.

Both Vanhoozer and Song are well known and highly regarded theologians. Whereas Vanhoozer concerns how to keep his loyalty to the Bible and the doctrine of Trinity in the religious dialogues, Song strives to go into the deep water of non-Christian cultural resources in searching for the mystery of the Triune God.

I. A Trinitarian Hermeneutics of Kevin Vanhoozer

Religious dialogue has much to do with hermeneutics, and one who engages with religious dialogue has his hermeneutical stand explicitly or implicitly. Although every religion is related to hermeneutics in some way, it seems that the relationship between Christianity and hermeneutics is closest. Ricoeur observed that Christianity always has the problem of hermeneutics, because it originated in proclaiming the Word which comes to us through written text and has to be interpreted again and again.[5] No wonder, Buber claimed, "What Christianity gives the world is hermeneutics."[6] Vanhoozer, facing the crisis of hermeneu-

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4   John B. Cobb, Jr., *Christ in a Pluralistic Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975).

5   Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, ed. Don Ihde (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 377-378.

6   For Vanhoozer, this sentence is both provocative and ambiguous. See Kevin Vanhoozer, "The Spirit of Understanding: Special Revelation and General Hermeneutics," in *Disciplining hermeneutics: interpretation in Christian perspective*, ed. by Roger Lundin (Leicester, Eng-

tics in postmodern context, intended to contribute a "hermeneutics of humility and conviction" based on the doctrine of Trinity, i.e., a Trinitarian hermeneutics.[7]

1. Appropriation of Theory of Speech Act in Theological Hermeneutics

"Theology is hermeneutical," it is easy to understand this thesis, because theology is faith seeking scriptural understanding. But it is not easy to understand "hermeneutics is theological," unless we agree with Vanhoozer that interpretation of text in general rests on beliefs about God and humanity, and the basic issues in literary theory and criticism depend on positions that are ultimately theological.[8] The theory of deconstruction, for example, predisposes one to look at the world from Nietzsche's view that "God is dead!" and to read text according to Barthes' dictum "the author is dead." Derrida, the master of postmodernism, announced that "God is less a presence than an absence, interpretation a matter of what is purely immanent to language."[9] Hermeneutics, in postmodern context, is popular, even flooding, as Kierkegaard complained, "And then the interpretations — 30,000 different interpretations!"[10] The overflow of interpretations make hermeneutics "become a sort of *koine* or common idiom of West-

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land & Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1997), 131.

7   Kevin Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in this Text?: The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan. 1998), 463.

8   *Ibid.*, 455-458.

9   *Ibid.*, 458.

10 See Søren Kierkegaard, *For Self-Examination, Recommended for the Times*, trans. by Edna Hong and Howard Hong (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1940).

ern culture."[11] Postmodern means a culture of interpretations, a culture that truth was lost in too many conflicting and irresponsible interpretations.

Obviously, postmodern thinkers attack not only modernity, but also religious belief. Against the postmodern atheist approach to interpretation and nihilist attitude to reality, Vanhoozer proposes a theological approach to hermeneutics and defends critical hermeneutical realism. He argues that hermementics is theological, and more than that, the best general hermeneutics is a Trinitarian hermeneutics. Indebted to the philosophical hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur, he struggled to go beyond Ricoeur by exploring the question of divine action in general, and to the doctrine of the Trinity in particular.[12] To accomplish this goal, Vanhoozer combined two important philosophical resources, Searle's speech acts and Habermas's social theory, with Ricoeur's hermeneutics, and integrates all of them into a comprehensive theory of literary meaning as communicative action underwrite by a triune God.[13]

Six triads[14] are the constitutes of his theological hermeneutics:

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11   Gianni Vattimo, *Beyond Interpretation: The Meaning of Hermeneutics for Philosophy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997). As Vanhoozer observed, "Vattimo himself notes the self-contradictory of Nietzsche's claim: if philosophical hermeneutics is the discovery of the "fact" that there are different perspectives on the world, then this would be a fact, not an interpretation, and would contradict the very point they are trying to make." See Kevin Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville, KT: Westminster, John Knox Press, 2005), 91.

12   Of course, Vanhoozer knows that Ricoeur had examined the various ways that the Bible names God and notes that the term "God" belongs to these forms of mythos discourse rather than forms of logos discourse. However, Ricoeur did not intend to build a theological hermeneutics as Vanhoozer did. See Kevin Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 11, 15.

13   Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in this Text?*, 207.

14   *Ibid*., 456.

(1) author—text—reader: the literary triad;

(2) metaphysics—epistemology—ethics: the philosophical triadic braches

(3) hermeneutic realism, hermeneutic rationality, and hermeneutic responsibility：three key interpretive issues follow from three branches of philosophy.

(4) locution, illocution, perlocution: three components of the speech act:

(5) creation, Incarnation／revelation, sanctification: three Christian doctrines

(6) the Father, the Son, and the Spirit: the tri-unity of God.

Among them, the triad of Trinity penetrates all the others and act as the foundation of the whole system. The most prominent and attractive point is the close connection between the Trinity and the Speech act theory. Vanhoozer is probably the first one who connected them together.

Speech act theory, initiated by Austin and brought to conceptual maturity by Searle, was applied to the Bible, a collective text of divine／human speech acts, by several theologians. According to this theory, speaking is doing, and in each speech three kinds of linguistic acts are implied: the locutionary act (uttering words, the propositional content); the illocutionary act (what we do in saying something, the force／energy of saying such as greeting, promising, commanding, etc.); the perlocutionary act (what we bring about by saying something; the effect of the saying, for example: persuading, surprising, warning…). Speech act theory helps to distinguish the content of what we say from we do in what we say. This distinction hints at the

speaker's role as doer. A speaker is in fact a doer; likewise, an author (of a text) is an agent who does something by words. There is an author living in a text; likewise, there is a divine communicative agent in the Holy Scripture.

As we know, human communication is a powerful analogy to divine communitive act. From the Christian perspective, God is first and foremost a communicative agent, the one who relates to humankind through His words, spoken words of the prophet, written words of the Bible and the living Word of Jesus Christ. The very being of a triune God is self-communicative act: "If the Father is the locutor, the Son is his preeminent illocution. Christ is God's definitive Word, the substantive content of his message. And the Holy Spirit—the condition and power of receiving the sender's message—is God the perlocutor, the reason that his words do not return to him empty (Isa. 55:11). The triune God is therefore the epitome of communicative agency: the speech agent who utters, embodies, and keeps his Word."[15]

For Vanhoozer, this Trinitarian hermeneutics is the First Theology which involves the intersection of God, Scripture, and human understanding together.[16] It is a way of viewing God, Scripture, and hermeneutics in terms of their mutual implications, all coordinated by the notion of communicative action: the triune God is the ultimate communicative agent of Scripture; Scripture is an element in the triune God's communicative action; interpretation is the way the church demonstrates her understanding of what God is saying and doing in and through Scripture by right theo-dramatic participation.[17]

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15 *Ibid.*, 457.

16 Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, 30.

17 *Ibid.*, 30.

Based on this Trinitarian hermeneutics, Vanhoozer goes further to invoke the mode of theater, by a canonical-linguistic approach, to re-dramatize Christian Doctrines (Drama of Doctrine) and to "re-mythologizing" the mythos of the Theo-drama in contemporary context.

2. Re-dramatize the Doctrine

In the long history of Christianity, doctrine was powerful in directing the way of the church, though sometimes it caused the division of church. However, in modern/postmodern time, there was not only a strange eclipse of biblical narrative in biblical study as Hans Frei observed, but also a strange disappearance of the doctrine in the church. It's lamentable that "there is no place for doctrine in the exegetical inn."[18] "Sound doctrine is suffering from confusion about its nature, from disagreement concerning the locus of its authority, and above all from its captivity to a debilitating dichotomy between theory and practice"[19] The ugly ditch between theory and practice, public life and private faith, biblical study and systematic theology leads to the failure of doctrine. To rehabilitate the dignity of doctrine and to redefine its nature is an urgent task today for Christianity. The book *Drama of Doctrine* (2005) was Vanhoozer's effort to response to it.

Biblical narrative stands in a particularly close relationship to doctrine. It is not wrong to say that doctrine is "conceptual framework" or "propositional content" of biblical narrative. It, however, is important to query further where does this "conceptual framework" come from? And whether it is right to reduce doctrine to propositional con-

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18   Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 20.

19   *Ibid.*, 3.

tent composed by concept.

The philosophical hermeneutics of Ricoeur inspired Vanhoozer to refigure the theological and philosophical meaning of biblical narrative.[20] He also learned from Ricoeur that narrative is not the only genre or mode of discourse in the Bible. Along with narrative, there are poems, parables, proverbs, prophesies, liturgies, letters, legal regulations, creeds, etc. Among them, creedal statements are most noteworthy. For example, Exodus 34:6-7 states, rather than narrates, that God is "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and bounding in steadfast love and faithfulness." These generalizing statements make truth claims about God and God's relationship to the world and "cannot be reduced to narrative form."[21] Creedal statements are from the Bible rather than another philosophical system, they play an important role not only in interpreting the meaning of narrative, and also in building sound doctrine.

Speech act, creedal statements and diverse genres of the Bible impel Vanhoozer to go beyond from narrative to drama, from narrative theology to theo-dramatic theology. Drama (from Greek verb *drao*) means "to do." Drama involves speaking, narrative, character, dialogue, action, plot, etc. According to Vanhoozert, biblical narrative, accompanied by other genres, constitutes a theo-dramatic history which "told with the confessional purpose of highlighting the divine word and the divine deed."[22] Doctrine that comes out of the Bible must be dramatic. Un-dramatized doctrine is static, abstract and fossilized and becomes

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20 Kevin Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

21 Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 57.

22 Kevin Vanhoozer, "Lost in Interpretation? Truth, Scripture and Hermeneutics," *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48.1 (2005), 105.

a conceptual game. Re-dramatize doctrine in the framework of theo-drama is the key to rehabilitate the dignity of doctrine.

To re-gain the vitality of doctrine, Vanhoozer puts forth in Drama of Doctrine, a lot of new metaphors such as Theo-drama (the substance of the Gospel), dramaturgy (the work of theology), dramaturge (the role of theologians), the script (Scripture, the authoritative form of the gospel), performance (theological understanding), company (the church), director (the role of the pastor), *dramatis* personaes (the Trinity).[23] By theo-dramatic interpretation of doctrine, Vanhoozer sets forth a theory of doctrine as the connecting link between the gospel as theo-drama and theology as Scripture's performance. Besides, this theatrical model raises an important issue concerning the disciples' self-understanding and directs them to participate in Christ by playing their parts in the drama of redemption.

By theo-dramatic theological interpretation, doctrines are no more regarded as propositional statements or static rules of Christian theology. Rather, "Doctrines serve as imaginative lenses through which to view the world. Through them, one learns how to relate to other persons, how to act in community, how to make sense of truth and falsehood, and how to understand and move through the varied terrain of life's everyday challenges."[24] In this manner, doctrine become a vital ingredient in the well-being of the church and a great aid to its public witness.

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23 It is very important to have a proper identification of the *dramatis personae*. *Distorted understandings of dramatis personae* will undermine the gospel. According to theo-dramatic understanding, God is a "who" before he is a "what": The Father making himself known in the Son through the Spirit. Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, 25.

24 Serene Jones, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology: Cartographies of Grace* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 16: Cited in Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 18.

3. Remythologizing Theology

The book *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship* marks a new development of Vanhoozer's theology. The key word *Remythologizing* is used deliberately to contrast with Bultmann's *Demythologizing*. The relation between *mythos* and logos is revisited. While Bultmann understood mythos as myth which is superstitious to the scientific mind in modern time, Vanhoozer understands *mythos* as "plot" as Aristotle's defined it. Plot relates closely to narrative and drama. Vanhoozer agrees with what Ricoeur said: the *mythos* of drama is to time what the icon of painting is to space. But whereas for Ricoeur, *mythos* configures human action and personal identity, Vanhoozer regards biblical mythos as the scheme for both divine action and divine identity.[25] Remythologizing begins with the biblical depictions of God as a personal agent who speaks and acts. The biblical *mythos* reminds us that God's communicative agency is both like and unlike that of human beings. If we forget this "unlike," we will fall back into myth. Remythologizing is neither *Demythologizing* nor remythizing.[26]

Remythologizing is a project not only to retrospect biblical mythos, but also prospects the presentation of *logos* in the contemporary world in naming God. What Vanhoozer aims at is not old classical theism, but triune communicative theism. He unfolds biblical *mythos* where the drama of redemption of triune communicative interaction is most clearly on display,[27] and then draws out important metaphysical im-

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25 The difference between Ricoeur and Vanhoozer : whereas the former tends to associate mythos with the narrative form only, the latter uses the term more broadly to refer to all the ways in which diverse forms of biblical literature compose of the divine drama.

26 Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, 476.

plications for the issues such as "the active voice of God", "anthropo-morphism", "the Creator-creature distinction", "the covenant Lord-servant relation", "the economic and immanent trinity" and "time and eternity." In short, remythologizing means a robust trinitarianism comes together with communicative theory to provide refreshing in-sights into God's being in act and His attributes. While the metaphys-ical *logos* plays ministerial authority, the biblical *mythos* has magisterial authority in the process of remythologizing.[28] Remythologizing has to be practiced in a new cultural context. Remythologizing means "al-ways returning" to God's self-presentation to attend to the Trinitarian testimonies themselves. The key to read the biblical *mythos* properly is to see that the holy Author has entered into our midst in a threefold manner: disembodied Voice (Father), embodied Word (Son), and em-powering Breath (Spirit). The rubric of divine authorship seeks to maintain both God's distinction from and relation to the world. God is distinct from the world as its Author, the one who originated the world by speaking it into being. Yet, God relates Himself to his created world by spoken and written words. Divine authorship means that God is the "Lord of the wording of His Word."[29]

Based on his previous theological hermeneutics, canonical-linguistic approach, and theatric-dramatic model of theological thinking, Van-hoozer understands God's love and being in terms of neither imper-sonal causality nor personal mutuality alone, but of triune God's self-communicative action.[30] If God's activity is best construed in terms

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27 Those verses are: Gen 1:1–3; 18:22–33; Exod 3:13–15; 33:7–17; 34:5–7; Job 38:1–4; Hos 11:8–9; Mark 15:33–4, 37; John 1:14; 12:27–30; Rom 8:15–6; Heb 1:1–3.

28 The distinction between ministerial authority and magisterial authority is very crucial to Van-hoozer for his different theological position to Yale School.

29 Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, 67.

of the triune communicative agency, then it demands us to attend to the concrete manner in which God projects his own story, which is rather theo-morphing than anthropomorphing. Espousing triune communicative theism, Vanhoozer pointed out the mistakes of *kenotic-perichoretic* relational version of theism and panentheism: (1) the divine persons are seen not in *substantial* term but only in *relational* terms; (2) God's love for the world is seen as *perichoretic* relationality, but not lordship; (3) God's suffering is seen as a necessary consequence of his *kenotic* relatedness, not from His freedom.[31]

In short, remythologizing theology is a grand proposal for construing God, the Bible, and hermeneutics in terms of a unified vision that views God both as Author of the cosmos (Creator) and as communicative agent who comes alongside us (covenant Lord). God communicates indirectly in the Book of Nature and more directly through his living Word, Jesus Christ, who is the subject matter of the Book of the Covenant.

From above, we have drawn the outline of Vanhoozer's theology and explained how the Trinity imprinted deeply in his theological hermeneutics, canonical-linguistic approach, theo-dramatic imagination and demythologizing metaphysics. All of them are related to Vanhoozer's engagement with religious dialogue, directly or indirectly.

II. The Story Theology of C. S. Song

C. S. Song, one of the pioneering theologians of Asia, became famous

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30 *Ibid.*, 176–177.

31 *Ibid.*, 140.

because of his story of theology. He was honored as a "guru of story theology,"[32] through his creative and prolific works: *Third Eye Theology* (1979), *The Tears of Lady Meng — The Political Theology* (1982),[33] *Tell Us Our Names- Story Theology from an Asian Perspective* (1984), *Jesus, the Crucified People* (1989), *Jesus and the Reign of God* (1993), *Jesus in the Power of the Spirit* (1994), *The Believing Heart- An Invitation to Story Theology* (1999), *In the Beginning were Stories, Not Texts–Story Theology* (2010). By practicing story theology, Song intended to interpret the theological meanings of the stories of Jesus Christ in the contexts of Asian cultures. For him, story is the key for theological understanding. Stories of Jesus Christ written in the Four Gospels are stories of how Jesus lived with and died for the suffering people. The Reign of God (Song prefers this term rather than the Kingdom of God) is linked between the stories of Jesus and the stories of suffering of the people inside and outside of Israel. With curiosity, intuition, empathy, association and imagination, Song intends to discern the meaning of God's Reign implied in the stories of Asian peoples in order to realize how the speaking and acting God has worked and are still working among them. When the stories of Jesus and stories from Asian inter-penetrate each other, a the-

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32 John C. England et al. eds., *Asian Christian Theologies: A Research Guide Authors, Movements, Sources: Northeast Asia* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 688-691.

33 In 1981 Song was invited to give the keynote speech for "D.T. Niles Memorial Lecture" in the General Assembly Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) at Bangalore, India. He tried to explore the meaning of political theology by interpreting the folk story "The Fall of Great Wall by the Bitter Weeping of Meng Jiangnu." Later, the manuscript of this speech was expanded and published in book form. This book became the masterpiece and a superb example of Song's way of doing story theology. From a famous Chinese folk story of thousand years ago, Song drew out theological implications for what it means in our time: problem of political tyranny, dictatorship and oppression in the name of "national security" and the soft power of suffering people that resists to it for freedom, equality and justice.

ological imagination is enkindled and a theological space is opened. With the stories of Jesus as the story of God's Reign reflected in the stories of Asian cultures, Song re-examines the faith, doctrine and theology of the Christian church. The stories of Jesus, the stories of people in Asia, the stories in the Bible and the stories from the rest of world form a theological feast of stories that reveal abundant meanings of God's Reign.

Song claims that story is prior to doctrine in doing theology. Whereas story is theology in the first order, doctrine belongs to the second order. In fact, the Bible is full of stories. Indeed, stories in the Bible are essential for doing theology and cultivating Christian community; however, Song reminded us, they are neither unique nor exclusive. Without exception, there are also abundant stories in histories and cultures outside of the Bible. Song opposes strongly the exclusiveness of the stories of the Bible and proposes firmly that we shall listen to and learn from stories from different cultures. Asian Christians shall do theology with the Asian resources of cultures (inclusive of religions), especially folk stories. For him, folk stories of different nations and peoples are the crystals of the wisdom from their collective life experiences, in which theological meanings were hidden. Stories of Asian peoples reveal how Asian peoples struggle for faith, hope, love, freedom, justice, truth, goodness and beauty in their uncertain, suffering and troublesome life contexts. Stories are fountains of theological thinking. Metaphors and symbols used in stories give rise to theological imagination.

Obviously, the story theology of Song does not use the stories of the Bible to exclude the stories of other religions. On the contrary, he encourages dialogue and communication between them. Accumulating

experiences in practicing for a long time, Song summarized his ways of doing story theology in five approaches.[34] We can summarize as follows:

(1) **To be aware of the theological nature of stories**. For Song, a story is not simply a story; it is already a story theology. That means a story has theological meaning implied in it. What a theologian needs to do is to immerse himself in the story by reading and listening to it over and over again, attentively and intentionally, till its meaning discloses to him.

(2) **To do theology by storytelling.** Telling stories is the best way of doing theology. Stories has their life in storytelling. In storytelling, stories continue to live, and the theological meanings implied in them continue to spread out in time and space.

(3) **To respond to stories with empathy.** Storytelling is not a monologue of a storyteller, but a dialogue between the storyteller and story listener. Dialogue is possible because of respect and empathy. By the power of empathy, when a story is told, it becomes a story of the storyteller and that of the story listener. Without empathy, the passion of story withers and the soul of story dies.

(4) **To reform and reunite a faithful community by sharing stories.** A story is not only a story belong to an individual, it also a story of the community he belongs to. Story is a community event, a communion happening. Story can reform and reunite the community. Story can create a common memory of a community by awaking their mutual trust and collective faith. Story has amazing power of unity, solidarity and communion.

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34   Choan-Seng Song, *In the Beginning Were Stories, Not Texts: Story Theology* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2011), 257-281.

(5) **To explore the universes of meanings of stories by curiosity, association and imagination.** Stories invite us to explore the universe of meanings. On the one hand, stories constitute the microcosm of meanings which invite us to explore meanings of the vicissitudes of the life of individuals, families, tribes, and nations. On the other hand, stories constitute the macrocosm of meanings which summon us to discover the immense universe of meanings. To explore the universe of meanings, it requires something else besides logical reasoning, rational thinking and doctrinal competence. Curiosity, association and imagination are more important for exploring the mystery of the universe of meanings.

Song himself used many stories of other religions (Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, Taoism, folk religions and aboriginal mythology) in his own writings. His story theology inspires many Asian young theologians to do theology with their own cultural resources in their multi-religious contexts.

III. Theology of Transposition in Vanhoozer and C. S. Song

Both Song and Vanhoozer notice the problem of doctrine, but suggest different ways to deal with it. While the latter seeks to re-dramatize doctrine in a theo-dramatic scheme which was revealed in the Bible; the former seeks to go back to biblical stories by relating them with stories of other cultures. For Song, "In the Beginning Were Stories, not Texts." means the Word of God, far before doctrine, became story and dwelled among us. Story is prior to doctrine in doing theology.

The task of story theology, according to Song, is not to discuss doctrine, but to be aware of the actions of God in the stories both inside and outside of the Bible. Both Vanhoozer and Song notice the insufficiency of the biblical narratives (stories). For Vanhoozer, narrative is "only" one literary genre, should be merged into the grand biblical Theodrama. For Song, biblical narrative is not enough to grasp the abundance of God's action but serves as a paradigmatic model for understanding the revelation of God in other cultures outsides of Christianity.

Although there are many differences in the approaches of Vanhoozer and Song, it's interesting to note that there is a link between their theological ways. This link is the notion of transposition.

Probably, C. S. Lewis was the first theologian who coined the term "transposition" and related it to theology. He used it to designate what happens when something from a higher medium reappears in a lower medium; for example, a scene from nature is "transposed" into a two-dimensional drawing.[35] In this sense, transposition is the quintessence of Incarnation. Wolterstorff described transposition in qualitative modalities. Transposition means "cross-modal similarity." For example, loudness, modality of sound, "transposed" into largeness, modality of size.[36] Transposition can also refer to a way of doing similar things in different cultural contexts. Learning to fit in a different culture is a matter of learning to discern "cross-modal" similarities between two cultures. Theological wisdom is a matter of transposing

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35   C. S. Lewis, "Transposition," in *Screwtape Proposes a Toast and Other Pieces* (London: Collins, 1965), 83.

36   Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Art in Action: Toward a Christian Aesthetic* (Grand Rapids, Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), 99. Vanhoozer's comments on it, see Vanhhozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 260-261.

biblical modes of speech and action into their contemporary counterparts or other cultures to preserve the continuity between different cultural media.

Following Lewis and Wolterstorff, Vahnoozer applies the term "transposition" in his model of Theo-drama. He compares theological transposition with music: "to transpose a piece of music, one puts it in a different key. The melody, harmony, and rhythm are all unchanged, yet every note is different."[37] Transposition is a striking example of rendering the similar in the dissimilars. For Vanhoozer, the meaning of doctrine involves both knowing and loving the theo-drama, both understanding what God is doing in our world through Christ and fittingly participating in that same work in the different contexts. Theological understanding is an active response to, and a competent participation in, the gospel as theo-drama. To discover, to display and to perform the "similarity" of the theo-drama in speech, thought, and action of dissimilar cultures and different contexts is a theological task.

1. Theology of Transposition in C. S. Song

To keep the essential continuity of the gospel as theo-drama when we are doing theology in the cultural media (resources) of non-Christian world is the main concern of Song. He defines his story theology as kind of "theology of transposition."

In 1974, Song published "New China and Salvation History: A Methodological Enquiry." In this paper, he tried to appropriate the "Exodus Model" in doing contextual theology in Asia. The "Exodus

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37   Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 254.

Model" means the story of Exodus of Israel was regarded as the model of theological thinking to interpret the meaning of the salvation implied in the histories of Asian countries. The peoples of different countries in Asia have their own versions of "Exodus" in their own histories. They suffered under the rule of foreign powers, fell in the sin of idolatry and looked torward the hope of liberation. In *Christian Mission in Reconstruction: An Asian Analysis*, Song made a shift from focusing on salvation history to creation stories. He found that the doctrine of salvation might narrow our vision of mission and theology, while a shift to creation stories will open our theological horizon. Song agrees that salvation and creation are inseparable: God's creation is a kind of salvation, while salvation is a kind of new creation. He, however, claimed that when one starts his theological thinking from a creation story rather than salvation history, one will conceive that since all nations and all peoples were created by God, there must be signs or traces of God's speaking and actions in the histories and cultures of all nations and peoples. If this argument is right, the task of Christian mission and theology shall neither cover the revelation and love that God had shown in all nations and peoples, nor make separation between Christian culture and non-Christian cultures. Rather, the main task of the theologian is to find out and to respond to the signs and traces of God's works in different cultures. It's wrong to dichotomize the Christian and non-Christian world and to abandon the task of exploring theological meanings of the latter. Song insisted that there are theological meanings implied in non-Christian cultures. Every culture is theologically meaningful, because every culture is related to God's creation is some way.

The subtitle of The Compassionate God is "*An Exercise in the Theology*

of Transposition." Song asserts that transposition is a necessary approach to do theology in a multi-religious and multi-cultural world such as Asia. He explained it from three different dimensions.[38]

(1) **Shift in space and time.** Transposition means change from one place to another or from one period of time to another. Christian gospel was transposed from Palestine to the Greco-Roman world, afterword to the rest of Europe and the West, and now it transposes to Asia and Africa. This transposition corresponded to the Great Commission: "You will bear witness for me in Jerusalem, and all over Judaea and Samaria, and way to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:6-8) By the same way, Christian theology had to shift itself in space and time and transpose from ancient Israel to Asian countries at present-day. The main purpose of the theology of transposition is to facilitate a journey from Israel to Asia smoothly and to witness that God has not left the nations and peoples in Asia to the course of their own destruction.

(2) **Translation of language.** Transposition means to translate the meanings of the gospel of Jesus Christ written in Hebrew and Greek into another language, style, and manner of expression. Translation is mutual transposition of languages. In this sense, transposition means also communication. Transposition as communication is at the very heart of human activities that seek to transmit ideas, beliefs and meanings with communicative force. Without communication, we live in a world of misunderstanding, or even worse, distortion. Interpersonal and intercultural transposition is a prerequisite to human communication at all

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38   Choan-Seng Song, *The Compassionate God: An Exercise in the Theology of Transposition* (London: SCM, 982), 5-12.

levels. A theology of transposition is more than formal and linguistic translation. It requires a shift of theological discussions on different subjects, encourages Asian Christians to face new questions and to discover alternative expressions from the world of biblical faith to the world of Asian cultures and religions.

(3) **Incarnation.** Just as C. S. Lewis claimed that transposition is the quintessence of Incarnation, C. S. Song maintained Incarnation is the archetype of transposition. God transposed Himself to the world: Word became the flesh. God incarnated in Jesus Christ and through him, transforms us. In incarnation, God risked becoming less than God and tasting the agony of God-forsakenness on the Cross. The gospel of this incarnated God, when transposed from the biblical world to other cultural worlds, undergoes a change in itself as well as causes this world to change. The gospel has dynamic transforming power, it can change human institutions, create new values and renew the hearts of people. The gospel is not a change-proof thing, rather it can change itself and become any shape and any color.

In the way of doing theology of transition, Song found a big roadblock: the centrism of salvation-history proposed by western traditional theology. This centrism insisted that the center of God's salvation is the history from Israel to the Christian church, the task of Christian mission is to extend this salvation history, and there is no salvation outside of it. Song tries to move away this roadblock by a cross-cultural reading of the Bible. (1) To move away the centrism of the history of Israel, we have to interpret the meanings of the stories of the Old Testament, not only in the historical horizon of Israel, but put them in a broader history horizon of international relationship be-

tween Israel and her neighboring nations, such as Egypt, Philistine, Assyria, Syria, Babylonian and Persia, etc. (2) To move away the centrism of the Christian church, we have to find out how Jesus, in his speaking and actions of God's Reign, criticized the ethnocentrism of Israel and the centrism of the Christian church. (3) In order to go beyond the centrism of Judeo-Christianity, we have to discern how the Spirit of God moved in the historical development of the nations and peoples in Asia, and left us clues to trace the way how God had done this in the vast portion of the world outside the Judeo-Christian history and tradition.[39]

In the first Chapter of *Tell Us Our Names*, "Open Frontier for Asian Theology: Ten Positions," Song emphasized and asserted that "The frontier of our theology must move from the history of Israel and the history of Christianity to the history which we are involved in Asia. With this expansion of historical horizon, we gain broader and deeper insights into the mystery of God's way with the nations."[40] For Song, salvation history western traditional theology proposed an oversimplified God's action in the history of the world and put the complicated questions of history into a very narrow framework of thinking. Even the prophets of the Old Testament disagreed with such a narrow understanding of history. For example, Prophet Isaiah called Cyrus, the king of Persia, God's anointed one, while the Prophet Jeremiah declared that Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonia king who conquered Jerusalem, the servant of God. Both of these two prophets predicted that God's salvation is far beyond the narrow framework of the history

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39 Song, *The Compassionate God*, 16-17.

40 Choan-Seng Song, *Tell Us Our Names: Story Theology from an Asian Perspective* (New York Orbis Books, 1984), 8-9.

of Israel. In fact, there are a lot of nations and peoples whose histories are not directly related to Judeo-Christian history. No understanding of history can do justice to world history as a whole unless it takes "non-Christian" histories into account.[41] Linear understanding of salvation history is suspicious. God's salvation "can no longer be explained in terms of a history moving along a straight line. To explain God's salvation in this way is to explain it away. God moves in all directions: God moves forward, no doubt, but also sideways and even backwards. Perhaps, God zigzags too. It does not seem God's interest is to create neat and tidy landscapes in a certain, selected place. God goes anywhere a redeeming presence is called for."[42] The parable of the good Samaritan reminds us that God's salvation moves not in a straightforward fashion and God has no strict timetable for the journey of salvation.[43]

The theology of transposition, proposed by Song, demands us to move away from the centrism of Judeo-Christian salvation history and to open the frontier of Christian theology related to creation story and salvation factors implied in the cultures. It breaks the prerequisite norm and limitation of western traditional theology, and it explores God's way in Asian nations and peoples. We shall not deny the spirituality of those people who lived in Asian histories and cultures. They are spiritual enough to perceive the mystery of God's creation and salvation, and they are able to understand the meanings of faith, hope and love in their own histories and stories.

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41 *Ibid.*, 8.

42 *Ibid.*, 16.

43 *Ibid.*

2. Transposition as Prosaic and Contextual Theology in Vanhoozer

It is worthy to note that Vanhoozer understands transposition as translation, as Lewis and Song do. For him, the theology of transposition is a prosaic and contextual theology which understands and performs the theo-drama in terms of prosaic language in particular context.

The incarnation itself is a kind of translation, transposition, and thus represents the ultimate paradigm for contextualization. The most striking thing is that incarnation is not supra-cultural but trans-cultural. God's Word transposed into the "vernacular" context of human history, into the "vernacular" culture of first-century Palestinian Jewish humanity. Jesus Christ both identifies with a particular cultural time and place and transcends it. Jesus is in this world but not of it. His life and work may thus be seen as a series of contextualizations of the kingdom of God. As God transposed his Word into humanity, so Christians transposed Christian faith into languages, thought forms, and practices of diverse cultures. Theology as *sapientia* is about continuing the way of Jesus, thus, transposition is an appropriate metaphor for describing how the Church today continues the theo-drama.[44]

For Vanhoozer, contextual theology is not only concerned with the "dynamic equivalence" in translating the message of the Bible into the linguistic level, but also strives for "theo-dramatic equivalence" at the cultural level.[45] Like missiology, theology must be contextual, its subject matter is nothing less than God's triune mission to the world; and its goal is to enable Christians to participate fittingly in that same *missio Dei* in their own contexts. Christian mission and theology alike, in-

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44 Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 254.

45 *Ibid*., 311.

volve ministering the gospel to culture in words and acts of truth, love, and justice of *missio Dei*. In short, contextualization is "the continual process by which God's truth and justice are applied to and emerge in concrete historical situations."[46] A genuine contextual theology is accountable both to the theo-drama (and hence to the canonical texts) and to the contemporary situation (and hence to particular cultural contexts).[47] The *missio Dei* was initiated by the transposition as incarnation. What contextualization involves is not imposing supra-cultural truths and abstract principles, but transposing the constant message cross-culturally and trans-culturally into the everyday life of the people. In this sense, contextual theology is prosaic theology.

To ensure this constancy, is to find the similarity in dissimilar cultures. Theology must study the text of the Bible in self- awareness of its own cultural conditioning. In fact, no theological statement or doctrine is culture-free. This is the first principle of prosaic theology. At the same time, a prosaic theology affirms the trans-cultural nature of the canonical Scriptures. This is the second principle of prosaic theology. The prose of Scripture proposes something of trans-cultural significance and universal interest for our consideration. To affirm Scripture as trans-cultural is not to say that it is acultural or supra-cultural, rather it is to say that the Bible itself addresses every culture. The theo-drama is overarching, it is for the sake of the whole world and relevant to people in every culture.[48] To perform theo-drama fittingly, the task of the contextual theologian is not to compose but to transpose, not to author but to re-contextualize the Bible for a new audi-

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46   *Ibid.*, 313-314.

47   *Ibid.*

48   *Ibid.*, 314.

ence. Such performances are creative extensions of the definitive form of communicative action embodied in the history of Jesus Christ and transpose it into a different cultural key.[49]

As we know, The New Testament was written not in Hebrew but Greek. When the Hebrew *dabar* Yahweh (the word of the Lord) was transposed to the *Logos* in the Fourth Gospel, something new happened: The *Logos* became the flesh. This is a "new" message not only to Hebrew but also to Greek. In the same way, when the Hebrew *Messiah* was transposed to *Kyrios* (a term that Hellenistic pagans gave to their cultic divinities and kings), something new was added. This *Kyrios*, unlike other ones, rose from the dead. These terms, borrowed from other cultures, were used to understand Jesus Christ and the amazing works of God. What a power of theology transposition is! For Vanhoozer as well as for Song, a contextual theology of transposition encourages us to do theology with cultural resources at hand.[50]

Vanhoozer observed that the writers of the New Testament practiced the theology of transposition by means of typological/figurative interpretation. Adam was regarded as the figure of Jesus Christ, and Adam and Jesus was put in a theo-dramatic story. The New Testament writers also interpreted Jesus as Israel and as the Temple. "That is not to say that Jesus in merically the same as Israel or the Temple, but to say that there is "a kind of narrative identity between Jesus and Israel; Jesus plays the same role as Israel and the Temple, only differently."[51] Obviously, it is a theological achievement of the New Testament writers by reading Jewish Scriptures and the story of Jesus in light of one

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49 *Ibid*., 261.

50 *Ibid*., 321.

51 *Ibid*., 187.

another. Another good example of theology of transposition were the breakthrough decisions made at Antioch and at the Jerusalem Council. Thanks to them, the gospel was transposed to gentile cultures and was no longer constrained in the Jewish culture and religion.

All of these examples explain how the Church made progress through continuous cross-cultural contextualization and trans-cultural transposition. Contextualization is ultimately not a matter of following certain procedures but of becoming the kind of persons who, while firmly committing themselves to the gospel, are nevertheless open to the Spirit's ongoing guidance in using different cultural resources. Contextualization is not a matter of preserving any one culture but of localizing the gospel in new contexts and of restating the gospel in prosaic (vernacular) terms of local cultures.[52]

However, it is worth noting that the theology of transposition of Vanhoozer was related and limited to his canonical-linguistic approach. One the one hand, he pointed out that canonical-linguistic theology is all about transposition: of God into flesh, of Law into Gospel, of Israel into the Church, of old covenant into new, of the primitive church into the church today.[55] The cross-modal similarities are what characterize the canon itself. One the other hand, he insisted that we can learn how to transpose successfully by receiving canonical instruction. "We best learn how to transpose biblical patterns of action into contemporary patterns of action through an apprenticeship to canonical practices; typological transposition is, as we have seen, the canon's meat and drink."[54]

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52 *Ibid*., 318.

53 *Ibid*., 262.

54 *Ibid*., 261–262.

From discussed above, it is clear that both of Vanhoozer and Song espouse theology of transposition. Both of them confirm that Incarnation is the quintessence of transposition, and contextual theology is the practice of transposing gospel into different cultures. But they are different in their views of "authority." For Vanhoozer, the canon of the Bible is the authoritative script of theo-drama; while for Song, the authority is the stories of Jesus Christ as God's reign.

The bible and the early church tradition does not hinder but encourage the practice of transposition. There is no reason to stop the transposition from western culture to Asian cultures. In some sense, religious dialogue is kind of theology of transposition, a more difficult task and full of challenges.

IV. Divine Love for Suffering people

God is love (1John 4:8), this very ancient creedal in the New Testament has become one of the prominent themes and a paradigmatic revolution as the doctrine of God in the twentieth-century context.[55] Vanhoozer, however, warned that we might misunderstand God's love for the world if we fail to respect "the Christian distinction"[56] Since God is triune, a Trinitarian interpretation is requisite for the understanding of divine love.

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55 For a review of the issues involved in defining, and locating, divine love, see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "The Love of God: Its Place, Meaning & Function in Systematic Theology," in *First Theology: God, Scripture, & Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 2001), 71–95.

56 This term is from John Webster, it means "the difference between God and creatures which is beyond both reciprocity and dialectic."

1. Divine love *in se* and *ad extra*

Theologically, it is helpful to distinguish first and then unite divine love in se and ad extra. The former is divine love in relation to His own inner life and, the latter refers to divine love working out towards the world, in creation, in redemption and in providence.[57]

Divine love in se means God is complete in Himself. Neither creation nor the cross constitute God as love; rather, they are events that establish and accomplish God's purpose of holy fellowship with the world. Father, Son and Spirit have been sharing light, life and love eternally. Inspired by what Saint Paul said "This mystery is great" (Eph. 5:32), Vanhoozer hesitated but boldly used the metaphor of "marriage" to describe ontologically a concrete form of divine love. Marriage is beings in communion constituted by a word of promise. What constitutes marriage is fidelity to one's vows. In marriage there is a recognition of both sameness (one flesh) and otherness (two distinct persons). The gospel narrative that identifies God as Father, Son, and Spirit calls for and configures an ontological reflection that recognizes the triune life as constituted by covenantal relations.[58]

To describe divine love in immanent Trinity is to avoid the deficient and even wrong direction of anthropomorphism.[59] Divine love is much more beyond human love and our experience of God. We must

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57 "Providence is that work of divine love for temporal creatures whereby God ordains and executes their fulfillment in fellowship with himself." See Kevin Vanhoozer, "Love without Measure? John Webster's Unfinished Dogmatic Account of the Love of God, in Dialogue with Thomas Jay Oord's Interdisciplinary Theological Account," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 19.4 (2017), 523.

58 Vanhoozer, ed., *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age*, 66-67.

59 Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, 482.

not compare God to us as if we human beings are the ultimate reference point. On the contrary, the meaning of love of God is determined not by our best experience but by God's communicative action. Following Webster,[60] Vanhoozer asserts that the love of God is a matter not of God's essential *kenosis*, but essential *plerosis*. "God's integral perfection does not exclude but rather includes the movement of his perfect being toward creatures in the works of love."[61] God's boundless immanent life is the ground of his communication of life. God's love for what is not-God (i.e. creation/creatures) is "a turning out of fullness, not out of lack."[62]

The love of God ad extra is a love eternally expressed out of God's eternal holiness. The intra-Trinitarian love is the source from which all the other meanings of divine love *ad extra* flow. Creation is divine love giving everything its being and existence. Incarnation is the event of God's self-communication and transposition. Atonement is divine love of the Son sacrificed for the world. Salvation of the sinner is the divine love of the Spirit communicated. Reconciliation of all things in Christ is divine love consummated. Creation, incarnation, atonement,

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60　John Bainbridge Webster (20 June 1955 – 25 May 2016) was a British theologian of the Anglican Communion writing in the area of systematic, historical, and moral theology. He was the Chair of Divinity at St. Mary's College, University of St Andrews, Scotland. Vanhoozer regarded John Webster as one of the best theologians in our times.

61　See, Vanhoozer, "Love without Measure?," 520.

62　*Ibid*., 519. According to Vanhoozer, the kenosis of Philippians 2:5–11 is not the revelation of a God who is essentially limited in power; it is rather an assurance that the subject of the history of Jesus is the one through whom all things were created and in whom all things hold together, the second person of the Trinity who has life in himself (Jn 5:26). Even under the form of a servant, says Paul, 'the whole fullness [*pleroma*] of deity dwells bodily' in Jesus Christ (Col. 2:9). All God's perfections must be referred to God's triune life in se: God's love is his self-communicative activity by which he communicates goodness – ultimately his own light and life – to others for the sake of consummation and communion.

salvation and reconciliation are divined love *ad extra*.

Divine love, for Vanhoozer, is especially expressed in God's salvation for human being. Narrative of Gospels "figures" God as economic Trinity, a triune God, the Father who relates to the world through the Son and the Spirit. The ontological Trinity is a "configuration" of this economic figuration. The greatness of divine salvation is magnified when we think how out of their fullness, Father and Son turn outward.

2. *Kyriotic* Love and *Kenotic* Love

The distinction of God' love in se and *ad extra* confirms that divine love is essentially *kyriotic* rather than *kenotic*. It is out of His limitless love that the Creator binds Himself to a fallen creation in taking a covenantal initiative, promising to be with and for the children of Abraham. In Jesus Christ, the covenant Lord becomes a suffering servant, yet without ceasing to be the savior Lord. This lordly love does not simply sympathetically share but sovereignly transforms the human situation. It is a *kyriotic* love because it is self-moved, enduring and effectual. What God communicates is not merely sympathy or condolences, rather God reveals the way, the truth and the life of Jesus Christ. Only a communicative God with *kyriotic* love can help us to overcome the suffering, sin and evil of this world. For this reason, Vanhoozer denies God's "real" (here means necessary and dependent) relation to the world as *kenotic/perichoretic* theism maintains.[63] The God who comes to save the world (economic Trinity) is able to save only because he has no need of and is perfectly independent of the world

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63 *Ibid*., 526.

(immanent Trinity).[64] The suffering Lord can save because He is the triune God beyond suffering when He comes into the suffering world.

If God is complete in Himself, then God's relation to the world is not "real" (in the sense of necessary and dependent). It is because God is not in "real" relation to the world that He can love so freely, intimately and impassionedly. "Only because the God who is for us is in himself God, entire without us, is his being for us more than a projection of our corrupt longing for a satisfying divine counterpart."[65]

3. Practicing Jesus' Love in Suffering People

For Vanhoozer, the lifetime of the man Jesus is the "schema" of the mystery of God. Likewise, Song understands the divine love from the suffering of Jesus on the cross. "The cross of Jesus and the cross of suffering women, men, and children are linked in God and disclose the heart of the suffering God."[66] There is no more powerful witness to the truth of the gospel than the church's creative imitation of God's suffering love for the world. Whenever the Church participates in the love of God, it makes evangelical gestures and acts out the body of Christ. The Church is nothing less than a performance, a corporate response to the Great Commandment: "love God and others as yourself."[67]

Divine love is the super objective of the theo-drama, the through line of divine action, and the key to our improvisations based on authoritative script. The love of God defined by the cross of Christ is our

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64 *Ibid*., 518.

65 *Ibid*., 523.

66 C.S. Song, *Jesus, the Crucified People* (Minneapolis: Fortress (Kindle Version), 1990), 1977-1983.

67 Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 442, 443.

direction, our marching orders on the way to the truth. We are commanded by God to love others as God has done to us with self-giving and suffering love. Christians and the Church are called to perform the theo-drama for the love of God, for the love of the gospel, for the love of truth, wisdom, and justice, and for the love of the world as God's good creation. In short, Christians and the Church must speak and act for divine love exhibited in Jesus Christ, especially His love for and with the suffering people.

Jesus's parable of the good Samaritan interprets the way of practicing Jesus' love to our neighbors and religious others. This parable was reinforced by Jesus' call for forgiveness for those who crucified him. If we follow the divine love revealed by Jesus, we will abandon the "we/they" thinking, and strive to overcome all kinds of centrism: ethnocentrism, denomination-centrism, sectarianism, Judeo-Christianity centrism, etc., and to build a community of love. As Cobb said, the "we/they" thinking ("we Christians," or "we orthodox," or "we Protestants," or "we liberals." vs. "they pagans", or "they Jews" or "they Muslims", of "they heretics", "they Catholics", or "they conservatives") has been a profound violation of everything for which Jesus stood.[68] To practice the divine love commanded by Jesus is take one's cross to follow Jesus and to love our neighbors and religious others. Recognizing the voice and face of the other in his alterity is an ethical imperative (Lévinas). Respecting other religions is an ethic imperative for Christians.[69] The Christian is called not only respect, but also to love his neighbors.

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68   John B. Cobb, Jr., "Why Jesus?" *Dialog* 53.3 (Fall 2014), 219.

69   Vanhoozer, ed., *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age*, 68.

V. Theo-drama of Trinity and Divine Love Impel the Religious Dialogue

Trinitarian hermeneutics responds to the speech act of the tribune God, theo-drama of the doctrine of Trinity by canonical approach, de-mythologizing theology of divine love and passion, all of these theological thoughts of Vanhoozer have implications to religious dialogue. Against those pluralistic theologians, like John Hick and Paul Knitter, who presupposed "the other religions concerned with the same reality as is the Christian faith,"[70] Vanhoozer insists that a theologian participating in religious dialogue have to be loyal to the Trinity, the most distinguished doctrine of Christianity.[71]

In order to do justice to other religions, we do not need to follow the pluralists in their assumption that interreligious dialogue presupposes a commonality of subject matter. On the contrary, to enter into sincere conversation, one must check all his true beliefs and be honest about it. The pluralistic assumption that dialogue is a means to truth depends on the presupposition that all religions are expressions of the same fundamental reality. It seems that the "Other" was not best

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70 *Ibid.*, 48. Vanhoozer criticized the approach of John Hick for his ruling out "the possibility of viewing God as a personal, effective, purposeful communicator. The Real has given no effective revelation of his reality as personal. For if there had been such an effective revelation, it would not be optional, but mandatory, so to regard the Real. If there is no such revelation, the Real is either unwilling or unable to reveal. If the Real is unwilling, then we may have a personal being, but one utterly unlike the personal deity of Christian belief. If the Real is unable, then we do not have a personal being at all in the sense conceived in Christian thought. On neither account is the Christian option open. Hick, therefore, is not really allowing that it is valid to think of God as personal provided that we concede that other ways are valid." See, Vanhoozer, ed., *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age*, 36-37.

71 *Ibid.*, xi.

served by this pluralistic presupposition. In fact, various religions are not all talking about the Same thing, nor believe in the Same God or have same Ultimate Concern. A true religious dialogue is to encounter with the alterity of the Other, rather than to reduce the Other into the Same. Vanhoozer worries that many theologians who engage with religious dialogue intend to reduce "the particularities and otherness of the gospel's narrative identification of God to a bland, homo generous, unitive or 'monistic' pluralism in which the differences in the Christian identification of God are subsumed, sometimes violently, under the intolerant category of the Same."[72]

Some pluralistic theologians prefer Theo-centricity to Christ-centrism and abandon the uniqueness of Incarnation. They claim that Theo-centricity entails that "even the revelation of God in Christ (is) itself relative to God whose reality exceeds all that is revealed in Christ."[73] The claim that Jesus is the only way and the truth "contradicts the Christian theocentric axiom that God alone is absolute."[74] It sounds good but not right. If we understand the Trinity rightly, the conflict between Theo-centricity and Christ-centrism is in fact a pseudo question. There is no God without Jesus Christ, and no Jesus Christ without God. Other pluralistic theologians claim that the Spirit is universally active, therefore Christian must try to discern the Spirit in all religions. It's true that we cannot limit the work of the Spirit, but according to the Trinity, we have to admit that God presents the Spirit as the Spirit of Jesus Christ, the crucified and raised Lord. The doctrine of the Trinity emphasized the inseparability of Word and Spirit, the

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72 *Ibid.*, 46, 49.

73 *Ibid.*, 206.

74 *Ibid.*, 207.

two hands of God the Father.

Obviously, those pluralistic theologians ignore the interrelatedness and mutual communication of the triune God. Their interpretation of the Trinity depends on metaphysical speculation or religious experience more than biblical narrative. Actually, the identity of Trinity based on biblical narrative identification is not *idem* identity of a Same God but *ipse* identity of a Triune God: one God with the plurality of Father, Son, and Spirit, and equally in terms of oneness and threeness. The being in communion of the triune God is not the *idem* identity of the Persistence of the Past. There are dynamic relations between the three persons, relations not merely of causality but of faithfulness. Just as the Father's identity is at stake in his promise to the Son, so the Son's identity is at stake in his promise to the disciples.[75] God's triune identity is one that embraces the Other in a non-coercive way. The well-being of the Other is constitutive of the identity of God, insofar as God has not only spoken to but also has become a Word of promise for others.

The presupposition of a pluralistic theology of religions is based on the idem identity of the one God of sameness and thus has not escaped the violence of reducing the many to the same, and falls into the trap of an ontology of violence.[76] On the contrary, the triune *ipse* identity of God is the foundation of an ontology of peace and harmony which gained, not by excluding the Other, but by God's covenant promise to be for each other, and for the creature precisely in its difference from

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75   Vanhoozer, ed., *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age*, 66.

76   Vanhoozer agrees with John Milbank. Milbank argued that the only alternative to an ontology of violence is the ontology of peace that emerges from narratives of Jesus. Milbank asserts, that "the Trinity provides the only ontological ground for a harmonious reconciliation rather than a violent repression of the plurality that so marks our age." See Vanhoozer, ed., *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age*, 54–55.

its Creator.[77] In this sense, the Trinitarian approach to religious dialogues could be exclusivistic (one), pluralistic (three) and inclusivistic (inclusive of all creature in covenant relation). Rather than a *skandalon*, the doctrine of Trinity can serve as transcendental condition for interreligious dialogue in the postmodern context.

In fact, a pluralistic theology of religions might be exclusivistic and repressive of the Other as traditional orthodox theology. Pluralism, with its ideology of Western modern liberalism, does not get rid of its attitude of exclusivism. It excludes those who are not pluralistic. D'Costa is right to charge that pluralism is imperialistic and absolutist inasmuch as it proposes "to incorporate religions on the system's own terms rather than on terms in keeping with the self-understanding of the religions."[78] Kathryn Tanner accuses pluralism as a form of colonialist discourse that hinders rather than helps interreligious dialogue.[79] Paul Knitter and other pluralists wield a liberationist-pragmatic criterion for "true" religion: the concern for human welfare, not doctrine, provides grounds both for religious cooperation and for criticism of religion. But this stance is every bit as ideological as an exclusivistic theology of religions.[80] Perhaps the blandness of a pluralistic theology of religion is its worst fault, as it reduces the wealth of distinctness and amazement into boring common sense.[81] Banality can kill specialty,

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77   *Ibid*., 67.

78   Gavin D'Costa, "Introduction," in *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: Myth of Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), ix: Cited in Vanhoozer, ed., *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age*, 56.

79   Kathryn Tanner, "Respect for Other Religions: A Christian Antidote to Colonialist Discourse," *Modem Theology* 9 (1993), 1: Cited in Vanhoozer, ed., *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age*, 56.

80   Vanhoozer, ed., *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age*, 56.

81   *Ibid*., 53–54. Vanhoozer criticizes that the approach of John Hick to religious dialogue make

distinctness and characteristics.

In a pluralistic theology of religions, God is identified ontologically by extrapolating from religious experience or through philosophical reflection; the various "economic" relations are considered incidental to the one God rather than constitutive revelations of the divine identity. According to Trinity, we have to identify the one God with the plurality of Father, Son, and Spirit, and think of God equally in terms of Oneness and Threeness. God, based on biblical narrative identification, is best viewed in terms of communicative agency. God communicates indirectly in the Book of Nature and more directly through his living Word. The triune God is the voice, word, and breath that engages with nature and human beings. He authors space-time as the scene and acts as a *persona* within it. God comes to the world with his both hands: Word and Spirit. For Vanhoozer, God in the theo-dram is the sovereign speaker and manifests three dimensions of His speech acts: locator (Father), illocutionary force (Son) and perlocutionary effect (Spirit). He makes himself known as a triune communicative agent, and what He communicates is not merely information (truth), but energy (life) and purpose (way). Only prior divine communicative action disambiguates the speech of God. Self-communicative action of the triune God is the real foundation of our understanding of God. Apart from prior divine communicative action, theology is only an anthropomorphical projection of human experience. Only reverence for God's self-communication is a dialogical truth between human and God made possible. Divine communicative action is ultimately oriented to communion, a divine–human fellowship, the transforma-

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religion boring, for it "reduces the rich tapestry of religious belief and practice to a throw rug (all synthetic, with no natural fibers)."

tion of human communicants into the image of Jesus Christ.[82]

1. The Trinity as the Transcendental Condition of Religious Dialogue for Christianity

As discussed above, Vanhoozer interprets the Trinity by his canonical-linguistic approach, theo-dramatic imagination and remythologizing metaphysics. A canonical-linguistic approach emphasizes that the canon of the Bible obtains authority in witnessing what the triune God communicates Himself to human beings. A theo-dramatic imagination begins with the speech and act of God, and inquires continuously what God must have said and done in new cultural contexts. It provides categories for understanding what God has said and renews all things in Christ through the Spirit.[83] Remythologizing metaphysics is an effort of revisionary metaphysics. It aims at allowing one to say something new about God that scripture seems to require but our inherited metaphysics prevents or overlooks it. We can summarize as follows: "The Father is the playwright and producer of the action; the Son is the climax and summation of the action. The Spirit, as the one who unites us to Christ, is the dresser who clothes us with Christ's righteousness, the prompter who helps us remember our biblical lines, and the prop master who gives gifts (accessories) to each church member, equipping us to play our parts."[84]

From the Christian perspective, God is first and foremost a communicative agent, one who relates to humankind through words and the

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82 Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, 494.

83 *Ibid.*, 79.

84 *Ibid.*, 458.

Word. Indeed, God's very being is a self-communicative act that both constitutes and enacts the covenant of discourse: speaker (Father), Word (Son), and reception (Spirit) are all interrelated. Human communication is a similarly covenantal affair, though we cannot pour ourselves into our communicative acts and ensure their effects as God can through his Word and Spirit. Human beings have the dignity of communicative agency, though not its perfection. The communicative theism of a triune God helps to clarify the foundation of the human communication. The Trinity of communicative theism thus serves as the role of "transcendental condition" for the possibility of meaning communication and dialogue. It encourages a well-trained theologian to engage with religious dialogue, with loyalty and openness, to preserve as much of the richness of the canonical and catholic testimony as possible, and to listen humbly the voice of God in other religions.

2. Concluding Remark: to Angler as Well as to Cast Theological Net

As Peter Phan observed, "Today writing on the Trinity has become something of a cottage industry, and the Trinitarian mystery is unquestionably enthroned at the heart of Christian theology."[85] Vanhoozer's understanding of the mystery of the Trinity are multi-dimensional: theological hermeneutical methodology, canonical-linguistic approach, drama of doctrine, theo-dramatic imagination and demythologizing projection. His canonical-linguistic approach learned and differed from cultural-linguistic approach of George Lindbeck. Lindbeck contributes in offering a third way beyond the dilemma of

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85   Peter Phan, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Trinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 13.

liberalism which inclines to human experience and the conservatism which reduces doctrine to propositional contents. However, his cultural-linguistic approach restricts itself in the biblical narrative and church community. In Linbeck's approach, "cultural" refers to culture of the Church and "linguistic" the grammar of how the Church uses biblical narrative. Church community has the authority in practicing the doctrine. But, as Vanhhozer points out, if doctrine is merely descriptive of what the Christian community says and does, it will be unable to criticize and correct its malpractice. In Vanhoozer's canonical-linguistic approach, "linguistic" means not the grammar of Church practices, but the speech act of divine/human communication, and "canonical" covers not only biblical narrative but also diverse modes of discourses in the Bible. To interpret doctrine from the multi-medium of theo-drama rather than "mere" biblical narrative is kind of a paradigm shift. The static, abstract, theoretic statue of doctrine was injected with dynamic, concrete, practical and dramatic life.

Vanhoozer endows the authority of interpretation and doctrine to the biblical canon rather than to church community. By this way, his theological thinking gets rid of church-centrism but it might fall into the danger of "biblcism". To avoid this danger, he re-interprets the principle of "*sola scriptura*" by a Trinitarian Hermeneutics in which the canon of the Bible is a witness to the communicative actions of the triune God. The triune God, rather than the Bible matters ultimately! For those who live in the context of Christian culture, Vanhoozer's approach is valuable. But, from the perspectives of those who are doing theology in the context of non-Christian cultures, we need to inquiry further the possibility of God's communication and revelation beyond the Bible. Is it possible God chose some oriental sages, poets, thinkers,

even "vernacular" people to communicate divine wisdom and divine love, just as God chose Cyrus the Great as His servant, even Cyrus himself was not conscious of it, to liberate His people from the suffering of exile? It seems that the Bible itself approves this possibility. Further, is it possible that the wisdom, the love and the saving action of God were written into stories of suffering people outside of the Bible and Christian tradition? Vanhoozer's approach seems to disapprove it and warn the danger of syncretism and idolatry, but Song's story theology recommends and explores it. Both Vanhoozer and Song propose theology of transposition, but the former emphasized much more to transpose the gospel into the contemporary contexts in contemporary Western Christian culture, while the latter insisted much more on the non-Christian cultures, traditional as well as contemporary.

The Trinity understood by Vanhoozer's theological hermeneutics, identified by his theo-dramatic imagination and demythologizing metaphysics is holy, glory and full of divine love. As he asserts, the Trinity is apt for religious dialogue, it can exclude the hegemony of modernity which assimilates the many into the one, and prevent the abuse of postmodernity which oppresses the one by the many. The doctrine of the Trinity, with its dual emphasis on oneness and threeness as equally ultimate, contains unexpected and hitherto unexplored resources for dealing with the problems, and possibilities, of contemporary pluralism.[86] As Oladipo said rightly, "Christianity and non-Christian faiths each carry elements of unique particularity that should be taken seriously. Religious differences cannot and should not be harmonized. Christians and non-Christians should examine the view that religions are different, but each capable of fostering healthy relationships."[87] Rather than a hin-

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86   Vanhoozer, ed., *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age*, xi.

drance, the Trinity can foster a healthy relationship of Christianity with other religions in the postmodern and pluralistic age.

However, it seems that the triune God of Vanhoozer allows him only to be an Angler, but prohibits him to move the evangelical "boat" to the deep water of foreign cultures and cast down theological "net" as theo-anthropo-drama to catch the suffering people as he would catch fish. An Angler has elegant posture to be appreciated, but sometimes we need a bolder action to transpose into deep water and cast down our net. Contrary to it, the story theology of Song aims at mutual interpretation between the stories of the Bible (and that of Jesus) and the stories of suffering peoples, between human actions and divine action, between the wise saying of sages with the teaching of the prophets and apostles. Maybe Song's approach is a good way to weave a theological net for religious dialogue among the suffering people of non-Christian cultures. To engage with religious dialogue, maybe we can have different ways: to be an angler or to cast down the net.

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87   Caleb Oladipo, "Living in a Pluralistic Age: Constraints and Opportunities for Christians," *The Muslim World* 99.4 (October 2009), 635–645.
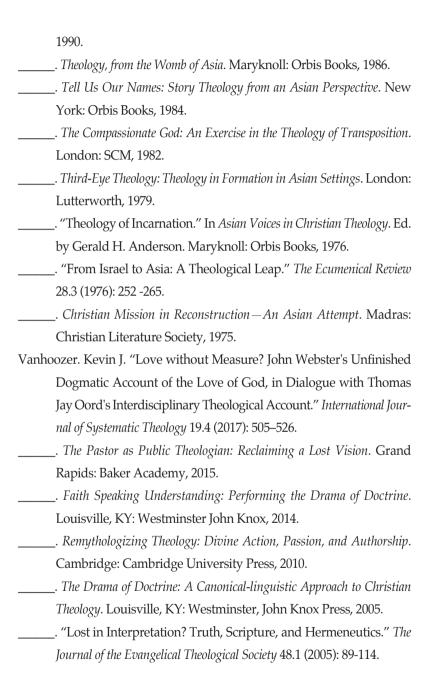
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