GLOBALIZATION, INTERCULTURAL HERMENEUTICS AND MISSION

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The necessity of intercultural interpretation in theology and mission studies has been raised on two important backgrounds in recent times: (1) the "de-Europeanization" of Christianity in response to the historical result of the missionary movement and (2) the social phenomenon of globalization. The "de-Europeanization" of Christianity is, as Harvey Gallagher Cox said, the dismantling of the thousand-year old idea of "Christendom."[1] Borrowing from Samartha's terminology, here "Christendom" implies a mono-religious, mono-cultural interpretive tradition having a single scriptural interpretative center.[2] Therefore, the "de-Europeanization" or dismantling of western-style Christianity means that worldwide Christianity is now being expressed in various non-European cultural forms, and is beginning to realize its own life in relationship with multiple religious, cultural and scriptural traditions. In this situation, a new method of intercultural interpretation is necessary for understanding Christianity both internally and in relation to other religious and cultural traditions. Asian experiences of intercultural hermeneutics, which were already practiced even before the current discussion of globalization, can provide an example of this needed intercultural hermeneutic.

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[1] Harvey Gallagher Cox, *The Silencing of Leonardo Boff: The Vatican and the Future of World Christianity* (London: Collins, 1988), 12.

[2] S. J. Samartha, "Religion, Language and Reality: Towards a Relational Hermeneutics," *Biblical Interpretation: A Journal of Contemporary Approaches* 2 (1994): 340–62.

Another background for intercultural interpretation comes from a new social phenomenon known as "globalization." Roland Robertson says, "Globalization as a concept refers both to the compression of the world and the intensification of the consciousness of the world as a whole."[3] Globalization addresses the fact that human lives all over the planet have become increasingly interdependent and interconnected, far beyond traditional, national, or territorial boundaries. This new situation prompts us to think of this world as a whole. Responding to this changed phenomenon, which is a matter not only of economics but also of consciousness, globalization highlights our need to develop meaningful communication across cultural boundaries for the future development of global society. In this changed situation, intercultural hermeneutics can assist us in understanding the preconditions for healthy intercultural communication and the kinds of meaning and truth it can produce.

This essay focuses on intercultural hermeneutics from the view of globalization. But I also critically exam the general consensus that an intercultural approach is imperative in order to overcome territory-bound contextual theology and mission, particularly in the age of globalization in which boundary-crossing intercultural encounters are accelerated and a global consciousness is growing. I do this from the viewpoint of the victims of globalization, because this point of view can show us some points that the general consensus has overlooked. Furthermore, I will examine some implications of Asian experiences of intercultural hermeneutics for a hermeneutics responsive to the phenomenon of globalization. Through this critical dialogue, I will point out some elements that intercultural hermeneutics must reconsider if it is to be a useful interpretative tool for promoting the self-liberation of victims of globalization. Finally, I propose some implications of this new discussion of intercultural interpretation for the understanding of mission.

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[3] Roland Robertson, *Globalization* (London: SAGE, 1992), 8.

GLOBALIZATION FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF THE VICTIMS

The word "globalization" began to be mentioned by policy makers in Korea in the early 1990s. The civil government that emerged after a long military dictatorship took "*Segehwa*," their own translation of globalization, as the long-term policy target. At that time, the word "globalization" still had a rosy glow. Although the dream did not last more than five years, at the time the policy dream-makers predicted that, through a policy of globalization, national per-capita income would reach twenty thousand dollars, and Korea would eventually become an economic world leader. Under the influence of this government propaganda, the whole country was filled with the fever for English study and preparation for study abroad. The demand for overseas travel and overseas corporate investments increased dramatically. This was Koreans' first experience of globalization. It was a process filled with the intoxication of a rosy illusion.

But before we could enjoy the smell of the rose, we were pricked with its thorns. "Globalization" for Koreans pointed out the short distance between heaven and hell. After 1997 national bankruptcy became a reality and the Korean economy fell under the control of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The IMF imposed a structural-adjustment program and the dream of economic independence seemed to be shattered. Global financial capital restructured industry, financial, and labor markets in order to incorporate the Korean economy into the global economy, and the result was mass dismissals. An increase in unemployment, homeless people, undernourished children, and destitution followed. This was Koreans' second experience of globalization. It was a bitter and cruel experience for Koreans forced into globalization by the global power of capital, and not by their own decision.

From this Korean experience, we begin to understand the complex nature of globalization. First, it illustrates the Janus faces of globalization. As the chairperson of the

Korean business conglomerate Daewoo, which was bankrupted after the IMF's readjustment program, wrote in his biography, "the world is wide enough and there are a lot of things to do." For wealthy elites like him, globalization offers the tantalizing promise of the unlimited exercise of freedom and the unlimited satisfaction of desires. But for those victims forced into the streets after losing their jobs and experiencing broken families, globalization is only the beginning of a tragedy that declines into a state of despair. The two opposite understandings force us to reexamine what we mean when we speak of "globalization." I believe we have to take the side of the victims in our discussions of issues concerning globalization. We should be more sensitive to the negative effects of globalization, if we are to work toward a more humane global society for the future.

Second, we need to recognize the totalizing nature of globalization. The most disappointing fact in the economic restructuring process in Korea was the lack of any responsible, critical voice opposing economic injustice, despite the mass dismissals and the thousands of homeless forced into the street in such a short period. The democratization movement, including the Christian liberation movement, suddenly lost its voice in this most important moment. After national bankruptcy, the economic situation which Koreans experienced under the IMF's debt relief-financing was enough to spread a pervasive fear among the people, enabling the government to strengthen neoliberal market-capitalism in all aspects of society. The government claimed that mass dismissals and homeless people were an inevitable result of the struggle to survive in a world of unlimited competition. The logic grounding the push to strengthen Korea's competitive power overwhelmed any contrary logic of distributive justice. By reserving ethical value-judgments on this economic program, Koreans effectively legitimized economic values as absolute. From this situation, Kim Young Hwan, a Korean critic, wrote that "while the past military dictatorship's power was based on physical power," the current civil government supporting globalization exercised a "new

power based on neoconservatism and an immoral ideology of the logic of competition."[4] While representatives of the new globalized Korean economy seemed to be very open in discussing the economic problems, and despite this apparent "openness", their unilateral logic of competition and the atmosphere of fear which their new economic power created were so pervasive that they functioned, in fact, as a new totalitarian ideology blocking all free, active discussion or opposition at the outset.[5] Thus, the leaders of Korea's new globalized economy were able to assume an unchallenged place in making economic values paramount in Korean society.

From the victims' point of view, it is even worse. The unilateral emphasis on economic competition is an ideology that functions to consolidate more power in investors and their political partners (who are regarded as the real competitors in the global market), to legitimize their economic violence and oppression, to suppress the resistance of victims, and to silence all critics. The totalitarian rule of this competition-ideology was the reason why the voices of victims were hardly heard at the moment of national crisis. Therefore, an urgent issue for us now is how the victims of globalization can make their voices heard in resisting the totalitarian nature and negative effects of globalization.

Third, globalization in Korea has created a social atmosphere of tacit approval for excluding the weak. The powers in the colonial and cold war period used more than just physical means to maintain the weak. Although it did not make economic sense, they attempted to insist on the ethical legitimacy of the weak. Even the East and the West in the cold war period continued ethical persuasion in order to colonize the weak countries under their rule. But the powerful in the time of globalization seem to feel no necessity to do so.

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[4] Yong Hwan Kim, "Discussions: The Problem of *Segehwa* and Its Philosophical Criticism," *The Study of Philosophy* 38 (1996): 200–01.

[5] Ibid., 201–2.

The power which globalization unilaterally cedes to capital avoids any responsibility to persuade the weak. According to Zygmunt Bauman, global economic power is an irresponsible power and freedom released from all ethical burdens to address the results of economic exploitation.[6]

In the past, society presupposed that the strong and the weak live together. The strong had a responsibility, in the face of resistance from the weak, to control their desires. But it is not so now. While the strong are free to ignore the weak who resist them, the options for the weak are very narrow, and their capacity to communicate with others is also very limited. The strong have no need to be disturbed by the "otherness" of the weak. While the strong enjoy the unlimited freedom of global interaction, the weak experience exclusion and isolation. In the past, there was a common understanding that society has a duty to listen to the voice of the weak, called *minjung* in Korea. In *minjung* theology, the weak were sometimes recognized as subjects searching for a new way of communication through their power of resistance. But the social and political response to the weak in the age of globalization is more cold-hearted. The homeless are sent to isolated camps and excluded from society. The weak in this age are isolated and excluded from communication. Where is the way of solidarity and communion in this age of exclusion and isolation?

Fourth, globalization in Korea was a process in which social cohesion crumbled and the crisis of identity intensified. According to Satoshi Ikeda, the most serious sociocultural impact of globalization in Northeast Asia, including Korea, is "the scrapping of the social contracts that existed among the state, corporations, and the workers."[7] As entrepreneurs and

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[6] Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization: The Human Consequences* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 9–11.

[7] Satoshi Ikeda, "Globalization and the Future of Korea, China, Japan, and Russia: U.S. Hegemonic Revival, the End of National Economic Development, and Sociocultural

capitalists acquire greater power, they have more freedom and power in the employment relationship. “The workers are left to compete with each other over limited employment opportunity and little chance to prosper in the global economy.”[8] In the end, antagonism rather than concord is the result for relationships between capitalists and workers. A so-called intentional disorder and confusion is created, as the common goal of national development and the basic consent among social constituents is destroyed.

The social contract among the state, corporations, and workers is one of the most basic elements helping to promote the unity of society. It is a historical product, developed through struggle and conflict since liberation from colonialism. It is also a framework on which Koreans deconstruct past colonial identities while searching for new understandings of themselves, as they reexamine the external cultural influences and their own traditional heritage. It is also a process in which common social goals, like democratization and modernization, have been formed. Therefore, the destruction of the social contract and the fracturing of social cohesion mean that the hermeneutical presuppositions and foundations for self-understanding are now threatened. The process of globalization has generated an identity-crisis for Korean society.

The elite and affluent in Korean society may regard the dismantling of the traditional social contract as a hopeful sign. Because they have marketable skills and economic freedom to move across national and cultural boundaries, a social contract limited to just one society may be a hindrance to them. But for the socioeconomically weak, the disintegration of the national social contract seems to render their struggle meaningless and to deprive them of any hope for self-realization, since globalization provides them with no alternative. New social signs have appeared in Korea, reflecting the despair of the weak—increases in crimes,

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Response in Northeast Asia,” *Discourse* 201/4 (2001): 170–1.

[8] Ibid., 171.

suicides, leaving home, homelessness, and family breakdowns. In this situation, problems of identity arise for the victims of globalization. The elite may address the identity-issue in terms of the freedom to move across all boundaries. They can easily hail their newfound freedom from history and tradition, and over-extol hybridization and syncretism as their identity strategy. But for the victims of globalization, the socioeconomically weak whose history of liberation and weapons of resistance are ignored and denied and who lack the elite's freedom, the range of options is very narrow. As many critics have pointed out, the dangers of fundamentalism and essentialism grow in this situation. Therefore, in this limited and dangerous new situation, it is important to help the victims of globalization find a new way in which to reinterpret their history of resistance and struggle for liberation that will empower them even in these changed conditions of globalization, so that they can find their own voices and make them heard, rather than falling into the alternative dangers of fundamentalism.

I have tried to explain globalization from the viewpoints of the victims of globalization and the socioeconomically weak. I am not rejecting the general perceptions of globalization as a positive force in fostering a sense of greater interconnectedness, intensified interdependence, and growing global consciousness that enables us to see the world as a single whole. But I believe we need to ask what *kind* of interconnectedness and interdependency is now growing and towards *what* the global consciousness is directing us. We must be willing to acknowledge and address the negative, as well as the positive, impact of globalization. Furthermore, I am certain that such a critical approach, starting from the situation of globalization's victims, will show us the right way forward in tackling issues of globalization while doing theology and mission for the church.

DETERRITORIALIZATION, HYPERDIFFERENTIATION, AND HYBRIDIZATION

Here, I would like to examine one influential theologian's understanding of globalization as a changed context for doing theology.[9] According to Robert J. Schreiter, under the impact of globalization, the concept of "context" in contextual theologies has been changed in three ways: It has been *deterritorialized, hyperdifferentiated,* and *hybridized.*[10] Given this change in "context," Schreiter advocates intercultural interpretation and syncretism as methods for the tasks of contextual theology. His understanding comes from general observation of global and local theological trends as well as globalization itself. However, when we look from the viewpoints of the victims of globalization, we can see a certain distance between the "context" of contextual theology and the living situation of globalization's victims.

Let me explain Schreiter's understanding of these three changes in context. He believes that, while "context" in past contextual theologies was defined by the geographical boundaries of territory, "context" in the age of globalization must be defined by other boundaries of difference besides geographical territory. These boundaries of difference "intersect and crisscross" without and within territorial boundaries. In an age of globalization, the emphasis on "context" in contextual theology lies not in "elements of commonality" in a limited geographical territory but on issues of differences that become the "basis of identity." These differences are not confined within territorial boundaries but include all peoples who experience the same difference. Therefore, the context of experience, reflection, and identity-formation is deterritorialized.

Hyperdifferentiation is related to deterritorialization. It refers to the phenomenon that "peoples are now participating in different realities at the same time." Hyperdifferentiation means that a person can have "multiple belongings" within various boundaries of difference.

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[9] Robert J. Schreiter, *The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local* (New York: Orbis, 2002).

[10] Ibid., 26–7.

Hybridization for Shreiter is a concept that changes our understanding of culture. For him, the assumption of cultural "purity" (sometimes shared by past contextual theology) makes no sense in a globalized world characterized by accelerating cultural interaction. The hybrid is an important result of this cultural interaction, so he asserts that contextual theology should accept hybridity beyond a static understanding of culture.

Although I respect Shreiter's observations on the general trends in contextual theologies, I am struck by the thought that the living contexts of the victims of globalization are very different from Shreiter's theological understanding of context. We may agree that globalization is leading to a deterritorialization of context. It seems very clear, in fact, that even antiglobalization movements have been globalized in a certain degree. However, if we look from the opposite direction, we must also recognize that *reterritorialization,* along with deterritorialization, is also going on. In other words, what appears as deterritorialization for the elite means reterritorialization for the victims. Globalization's victims are restrained to a limited territory as much as they are localized. In order to go beyond their geographic boundaries, they must be ready to suffer or to be illegal migrant workers or "resident aliens." Here, territory is no longer a place that gives meaning or identity in their lives, but instead becomes a prison or shackle of a cruel fate. As Zygmunt Bauman observes, "Being local in a globalized world is a sign of social deprivation and degradation. The discomforts of localized existence are compounded by the fact that, with public spaces removed beyond the reaches of localized life, localities are losing their meaning-generating and meaning-negotiating capacity and are increasingly dependent on sense-giving and interpreting actions which they do not control—so much for the communitarianist dreams/consolations of the globalized intellectuals."[11] This reterritorialization forcibly restricts the victims of globalization within a localized territory where the capacity for "meaning-generating and meaning-negotiating" is

[11] Bauman, 2–3.

unrecognized in the globalized world. For those victims, to rediscover the meaning of locality and to restore the ability to negotiate with others seem to be more urgent.

Hyperdifferentiation also has little to do with the victims of globalization; the socioeconomically weak. As we have seen above, rather than having the opportunity to express their difference and otherness, the weak are now in danger of exclusion from the public spaces of society. Exclusion of various differences and segregation from the world is a more realistic fate for the victims of globalization than the possibility of having multiple belongings within those differences. As many third-world theologians already have discussed, it is true that there are differences among the excluded peoples and that we need "a multiaxial framework of analysis".[12] But the truth is that the differences of the victims and the weak are suppressed and localized—not globalized. The issue for them, therefore, is not hyperdifferentiation but social exclusion and suppression of their differences.

Hybridization is also a specific characteristic only for elite globalized cultures. It is not a proper explanation of the experiences of excluded victims. We may accept that a presumption of cultural purity is untenable today. Moreover, we can say that all of us, including the victims of globalization, are touched by hybridization. But are these victims hybridizing or hybridized? Who is being hybridized, and how and for what purposes? I believe that the localized weak are being hybridized by the globalized strong. The weak are powerless observers in a situation in which their cultural products are deterritorialized or decontextualized in order to become elements of cultural hybridization among the strong. The weak become consumers of these hybridized cultural productions that have nothing to do with their own living context, thus throwing them into a state of self-alienation. Globalization may offer new opportunities for agency and self-realization among elites who can actively

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[12] Kwok Pui-lan, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World* (New York: Orbis, 1995), 39.

seek out new cultural opportunities for hybridization in actively constructing their new identities, but, for those who are hybridized—the victims who have hybridization imposed upon them from outside, without regard for their own wishes or interests—hybridization simply generates a crisis of identity.

Schreiter uses these three concepts—deterritorialization, hyperdifferentiation, and hybridization—to advocate intercultural hermeneutics as a method for contextual theologies in a time of globalization. But, as I illustrated above, the life-contexts of globalization's victims is very different from the experiences to which these concepts point. Hence, intercultural hermeneutics based on these concepts carries the potential for uncritically serving the interests of the globalized strong, while ignoring the reality of the lives of the globalized weak. Instead, we need a more critical contextual theology that more closely approaches the reality of victims' lives. Such a theology can contribute more constructively to improving the lives of the victims as well as the future of the globalized world. Therefore, a critical reconstruction of intercultural hermeneutics from the living experiences of globalization's victims is also necessary.

IMPLICATIONS OF ASIAN EXPERIENCES OF INTERCULTURAL HERMENEUTICS

Here, my intention is not to develop fully an intercultural hermeneutics. Rather, in reexamining Asian experiences of intercultural hermeneutics, I would like to draw out some significant implications for developing a constructive intercultural hermeneutics sensitive to the life experiences of the globalized weak. Intercultural hermeneutics in Asia has related more directly to decolonization and the liberation movement under dictatorship than to the situation of globalization or postmodernity. Most Asian countries faced the task of building an independent, modernized nation-state after liberation from colonialism, achieved through the deconstruction of colonial heritages and the discovery of new identities. For that purpose,

a crucial task was reinterpretation and reappropriation of their own religious cultural traditions as well as modern elements imported from the west. The inculturation of theology and church could be a Christian response to the new situation developing after Asian colonialism. But the process of decolonization has been distorted by the various forms of dictatorship in many countries of Asia. In these cases, resistance and liberation from oppressive power, so-called development dictatorships, became an urgent task alongside the issue of decolonization. Asian liberation theologies, including Korean "*minjung* theology" and the Philippine people's "struggle theology" represent two Christian responses to the situation.

Both inculturation and liberation theologies intimately interacted with each other in Asia. One of the important theological agendas for Asian contextual theologians was how to bring together these two theological flows in the place of peoples' suffering and struggle. This attempt at some kind of union of theologies was very natural in Asia, where a variety of religious, cultural, and scriptural traditions long have coexisted. Searching for help from local traditions, therefore, was just as imperative for liberation theologies as for inculturation theologies. Liberation theologians, in particular, developed connections in an effort to join two different liberation traditions: the Christian Bible and Asian religious and cultural heritages. Aloysius Pieris's *An Asian Theology of Liberation*[13] and Seo Nam-dong's *The Study of Minjung Theology*[14] may be the most important products of this effort. The various forms of Asian intercultural theologies—with titles like crosscultural, interreligious, intercanonical, interscriptural, interpathic, and relational hermeneutics—are in continuity with those Asian contextual theologies. In order words, they are serious endeavors to explain what is the right hermeneutical relationship among various religious and cultural traditions

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[13] Aloysius Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation* (New York: Orbis, 1988).

[14] Seo Nam-dong, *The Study of Minjung Theology* (Seoul: Hangilsa, 1983).

encountering each other in the place of Asian peoples' struggles.

This development toward an Asian intercultural hermeneutics was not an easy process. It resulted from the efforts of Asian theologians to change radically colonial mission-paradigms and to bring about a Christian acknowledgement of Asian religions and cultures in the expression of Asian Christianity. Borrowing from Sugirtharajah's terms,[15] orientalist paradigms by which western missionaries had made *a priori* judgments and definitions of Asian religions and cultures, and the Anglicist paradigm by which western biblical hermeneutics had been uncritically authorized as a scientific method, thus devaluing Asian scriptures and their hermeneutical traditions, maintained their power over Christian and biblical studies in Asia long after the liberation from colonialism. These colonial paradigms were based on the unequal power-relationship between missionary senders and Asian receivers, also translated into the unequal relationship between Christianity and other religions, and between the Bible and traditional Asian scriptures.

Despite their positive intentions, inculturation approaches to theology did little to address the basic problem that Asians and their religious and cultural traditions had no active role in interpretation. Interpretive authority during the missionary period clearly lay in the hands of the missionaries, and, even in the period of inculturation, biblical truth was first packaged in the west and then refashioned in Asian style.[16] In other words, interpretive authority has always been outside of Asia, and Asians have been alienated from Christian and biblical truth and its interpretation.

Moreover, Asian theologians saw that Asians' own interpretive abilities and potentials had been overlooked or negated. Based on this insight, Asian contextual theologies have

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[15] R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism: Contesting the Interpretations* (New York: Orbis, 1998), 3–11.

[16] Kwok Pui-lan, 10, 57.

moved toward a new stage in which Asians, as the subjects of interpretation, can reconceptualize and reformulate the meaning of Christian faith in their own terms, not merely restylize a truth already packaged outside of Asia.[17] As the result of this radical transformation of awareness, an equal relationship between Christianity and other religious and cultural traditions in Asia has been developed, and various forms of intercultural hermeneutics have emerged in Asia.

What hermeneutical implications can Asian experiences of intercultural interpretation point to for the intercultural hermeneutics demanded in a time of globalization? First of all, Asian intercultural hermeneutics upholds the standpoint of victims. Asian perspectives are intimately bound up with the liberation of peoples who suffered under colonial and dictatorial rule. Methodologically, this is an effort to reinstate the victims as the real subjects of interpretation. A representative *minjung* theologian, Seo Nam-dong, saw that *minjung* traditions in Christianity and in Korean religious and cultural history create a confluence in the *minjung*'s struggle for self-realization.[18] Chung Hyun-kung more directly described it as a "survival and liberation centered syncretism."[19] The *minjung* are the subjects of intercultural interpretation and their struggle is its locus or center. I think that the intercultural hermeneutics of the globalizing age must speak more clearly about the subject and the locus of interpretation. We must demand that any intercultural hermeneutics truly responsive to the forces of globalization ask how relevant its methods and interpretations are for the victims of globalization. They are the peoples who are localized and excluded by globalization; they could easily retreat to a segregated ghetto and become victims of fundamentalism. They lack the hermeneutical (and economic) means to avoid these risks. If intercultural hermeneutics is

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[17] Ibid., 57–8.

[18] Seo Nam-dong, *The Study of Minjung Theology*, 45–82.

[19] Chung Hyun-kyung, *Struggle to be the Sun Again* (New York: Orbis, 1990), 113.

going to provide an alternative way for these victims, it must consider more seriously the life experiences of the victims.

Second, Asian intercultural hermeneutics recognizes the important truth that all religious and cultural assets are intimately combined in the life of the community practicing them. These assets are not resources to be freely commercialized whenever and however the capitalist wants. The diverse religions and cultures in Asia are not simply conceptualized texts, cultures, and religions; they are living communities. The globalized elites are the ones whose connections to community are being lost in the process of deterritorialization. When they separate the religious and cultural assets from a community, harvesting them for hybridization with other cultural fragments scavenged around the globe, such an intercultural play can be seen as cultural vandalism that ignores the victims who are still inevitably responsible for the community even after the elites have left. Intercultural hermeneutics, therefore, should address the life situation of victims' local communities. In order to do this, it must be more sensitive to the relationships existing between religious and cultural assets and the living communities instantiating them. Moreover, intercultural hermeneutics must be alert to the potential violence of an uncritical hybridization that proceeds through irresponsible deterritorialization or decontextualization without respecting or eliciting the voluntary participation of local communities.

Third, intercultural encounter in Asian theologies is understood as an interactive process not only among communities but also among scriptures and traditions of scriptural interpretation. It is an encounter among peoples and communities who have their own hermeneutical traditions. This means that the intercultural encounter must accord equal interpretive respect in the interaction between subjects, regarding interpretation as part of the internal self-development process of each hermeneutical tradition. Even hybridization or syncretism can be a constructive process, when it arises from the voluntary, internal needs of

those hermeneutical subjects and traditions. Until this generosity, civility, and restraint in intercultural encounter is accepted, we may not expect a healthy intercultural ecology in which genuinely creative, constructive, and dynamic interactions among cultures and religions are possible. If we want a globalized world in which various cultures and religions coexist and cooperate actively and creatively, then we must ask whether the present intercultural encounters—predominantly practicing and praising syncretism and hybridization—are really the ways to achieve such coexistence and creative interaction. Many peoples worry about cultural homogenization and the extinction of cultural and religious heritages. If we hope to overcome this fear and realize our hope for constructive, fruitful intercultural coexistence and creative interaction, I believe that intercultural hermeneutics will have to be more sensitive to the relationships between cultures and their subjects, who are interpreters belonging to their own distinctive hermeneutical traditions.

What we learn from Asian experiences of intercultural hermeneutics is that intercultural encounter and interpretation should be based on a clear recognition of the interrelation among culture, community, and text (or religion, community, and scripture). In a globalized world, it is said that actions and thoughts taken by individuals or groups are influenced by global flows and at the same time have global impacts. This means that all responsible actions must be examined in the local as well as the global context. Our sensitivity to the relations among culture, community, and text is one of such global responsibilities—one that intercultural interpreters must particularly keep in mind. While it is true that there is no pure culture and that cultural history is one of syncretism or hybridization, nevertheless constructive intercultural interaction should involve a process of interpretation in which all the related subjects can participate equally. Culture is not made for syncretism or hybridization, but vice versa. Syncretism and hybridization have provided ways for cultures to participate in the world. But today, there are trends that mistake the means for the end, particularly in

syncretism and hybridization associated with the neoliberal globalization of capitalism. This mistaken approach, particularly the unequal cultural interaction of globalization, has produced many victims who now are being forced into hybridization or segregation in unbearable ghettos. Therefore, the most urgent agenda for intercultural hermeneutics must be to develop its potential to help those victims who want to be responsible subjects in a globalized world. I think this agenda is still awaiting our involvement and endeavors.

INTERCULTURAL ENCOUNTER AND MISSION

Let us begin from a well-known definition of the mission of God. The concept of *missio Dei* is an affirmation of God as the center, source, and author of mission. It grounds our understanding of mission in the very nature of the triune God. God shows us what mission is, through the loving activities within the Trinity: God sends Christ, and God and Christ send the Spirit, and the triune God sends the church into the world.[20] These activities are an outpouring of the love that is the very nature of God, a love reconciling all creatures. Therefore, mission in our time is God's continuing activity of love carried out through the Spirit. This classical understanding of mission is a good starting point for the discussion of mission. But we need to go one step farther to understand mission in the context of intercultural encounter.

We can find a clue from the Indian missiologist Lalsangkima Pachuau, who says that the activities of the inter-trinitarian life of God are boundary-crossing activities. Moreover, "Christian mission is about the boundary-crossing activity of Christians or the church who themselves follow the example of God who crossed the boundary between God and the world

[20] David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (New York: Orbis, 1996), 390.

(*missio Dei*) in and through Jesus Christ."[21] Here, he reminds us that "the call is to cross and not to crush the boundaries."[22] Pachuau offers some important points to consider for a new understanding of mission. While we clearly affirm God as the center and source of mission, the boundary between God and the world remains intact. The boundary is the place where an interactive communication occurs. Maintaining the boundary allows the interactive communication to continue. *Missio Dei* is not one-way traffic ignoring boundary-crossings. This is very true for the horizontal dimension of mission by which Christians or the church participate in a boundary-crossing relationship with their partners in the world. Therefore, I believe the concept of *missio Dei* generates a new insight not only about the *content* of communication but also about the *relationship* between subjects involved in that communication. The two areas of the content and relationship are exactly what intercultural hermeneutics has to deal with in boundary-crossing communications. Hence, we can say that intercultural hermeneutics is directly related to our search for the meaning of mission.

This is very clear in the discussions of mission carried on by theologians and churches in areas that experienced colonialism. As we saw in the Asian experiences of intercultural hermeneutics, Asian theologians wrestle with mission because of their experience with inequalities in the interpretive relationships between missionaries and Asian receivers, sending churches and receiving peoples, and speakers and hearers. Missiology also must address how the meaning of the Christian message is newly revealed in new conditions of communication. Radical assertions that the Gospels should be reformulated and reconceptualized, or that Asians should be reinstated as the subjects of interpretation, result not only from the most serious reflections on past experiences of mission, but also from

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[21] Lalsangkima Pachuau, "Missiology in a Pluralistic World: The Place of Mission Study in Theological Education," *International Review of Mission* 89 (2000): 549.

[22] Ibid.

missionary efforts to correct distorted communication relationships. Here, the correction of communication relationships is itself the mission of God to release oppressed peoples and heal the rift between God and humanity.

Globalization is surely an important challenge to the boundary-crossing mission of God. Globalization appears as a totalitarian system because the intensified intercultural and crosscultural relationships arising now are governed by a single value, the economic demand for profit or efficiency. Thus, many theologians see globalization as a totalizing system in which commercial cosmology rules. Although globalization looks like an extreme development of plurality and the highest development of communication, in reality it moves in the opposite direction from our expectations. Considering neoliberal market globalization, Malcolm Brown wrote:

> The whole philosophy of the free market takes as axiomatic the view that plurality has rendered moral consensus impossible and thus the only principle for the distribution of goods must be the amoral market mechanism, since any planned distributional goals are inevitably coercive on those who do not share the consensus around those goals. In other words, the market, which purports to celebrate difference and thus to transcend moral concerns because no grand narrative of morals is possible, has generated the hegemonic grand narrative of globalization which suppress all difference other than the ability to outwit the competition.[23]

I think this statement clearly characterizes the relationships globalization creates.

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[23] Malcolm Brown, "Plurality and Globalization: The Challenge of Economics to Social Theology," *Political Theology* 2 (2001): 103–4.

Globalization reflects not plurality's positive potential but its relativistic impotence. Although cultural plurality may flourish under globalization, it does not facilitate creative and productive intercultural communication but only meaningless and futile economic transactions. On this pessimistic vision of plurality, globalization rationalizes the rule of the market. Competing moral values, including distributive justice, no longer function as norms regulating socioeconomic relationships. When cultural plurality is understood simply as futile intercultural interaction, cultural subjects are ignored or silenced in cultural interactions and the relationship between cultures and subjects is torn apart for market purposes. Borrowing from Thomas Berry, the world becomes a "collection of objects" rather than a "communion of subjects."[24] In this understanding of globalization, boundary-crossing communication is only a mechanical interaction of objects.

This outlook is a serious challenge to a Christian understanding of mission, that is, the boundary-crossing communication of the church for the flourishing of humanity and the world. A purely economic view of globalization that assumes the futility of meaningful cultural interaction tells us that the church's intercultural boundary-crossing mission is hopeless. The most important missionary task in this situation is to transform the intensified intercultural encounters that globalization has spawned into true boundary-crossings that allow mutual communication among equal subjects. For this, Christian mission must be very sensitive to the relationships among cultures and their subjects, as we have seen in the Asian experience of intercultural hermeneutics. Furthermore, mission must resist all kinds of irresponsible and commercial cultural interactions, whether hybridization or syncretism, that deterritorialize, decontextualize, or separate cultures from subjects against their wills, and that treat intercultural encounters as interactions of objects, not subjects. Eventually, we must

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[24] Stephen Bede Scharper, "Democracy, Cosmology and the Great Work of Thomas Berry," *Worldview* 5 (2001): 190.

show that a Christian intercultural boundary-crossing mission truly is a fruitful possibility for working out an alternative, healthier vision of humanity and the world in place of the cold smile of globalization's "commercial cosmology."[25]

Another challenge to a Christian understanding of mission comes from globalization's mechanisms of exclusion. Globalization's victims are economically poor and socioculturally excluded. In a world dominated by the "commercial cosmology," the weak are those defeated in economic competition, and who become excluded and invisible. As Niall Cooper has observed, globalization raises the question of the exclusion and invisibility of the poor.[26] Their "otherness" is rejected and uncommunicated. They have no role as subjects of communication. In this situation, a Christian boundary-crossing mission's task must be to reinstate the weak as subjects of their own lives; to restore their agency as communicators. The church's mission must cross the boundary to embrace those whom society has excluded and rendered invisible. In light of the new kinds of "contexts" that globalization has created, boundary-crossings or intercultural missions should not be limited to interactions among geographic territories, religions, or cultures. They must include as well boundary-crossing communication between victims and victors of globalization. It is never an easy job to make possible communication between victims and victors. It may be a very difficult process involving conflict, confrontation, and resistance. However, I believe it is a criterion by which other boundary-crossing intercultural communications and missions can be evaluated, because the boundaries between victims and victors are the places where globalization's problems are most clearly revealed. By helping to lower and erase these boundaries, we can help globalization escape from its inhumane captivity to exclusively economic values.

In concluding this essay, I want to remember a teaching of Latin American liberation

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[25] Ibid.

[26] Niall Cooper, "Tourist or Vagabond?" *Political Theology* 4 (2001): 74–90.

theology. Liberation theologians explain that Christian base communities, the seedbeds of liberation, were born from the confluence of two movements:[27] (1) the movement of the church to become poor, in its effort to be faithful to the message of Jesus of Nazareth, and (2) the movement of the poor into the church to manifest their despair and hope. The meeting of these two movements may be seen as a boundary-crossing communication or missionary event between the church and the poor. Through this boundary-crossing encounter, the church helped to empower the poor to express their needs and to communicate them to the world. I believe the boundary-crossing mission of the church is still a message of hope for the excluded and invisible victims of globalization. The encounter between the church and globalization's victims can be a catalyst for boundary-crossing communication between victims and victors. But in the globalizing world, there are many religions and cultures recognizing the same responsibility to communicate with the victims of globalization. Christian churches are not the only institutions actively engaged in boundary-crossing encounters with victims. Although they are different in their religious and cultural commitments, these religions and cultures can discover common ground when the suffering and liberation of the victims of globalization are concerned. With their specific contributions for the larger society, each can cross boundaries, meet together, and make a common vision for the society. The mission of the church also has to meet them in its effort to communicate with victims. As Samartha wrote, "to identify them, support them, cooperate with them, suffer with them, pray for them, and even die with them is part of Christian mission."[28] In this boundary-crossing, intercultural or interreligious mission of the church, we also can expect the emergence of the new vision of humanity and the world beyond economic

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[27] Armando Lampe, "The Globalization of Poverty," *Exchange* 28 (1999): 332–3.

[28] S. J. Samartha, *One Christ—Many Religions: Toward a Revised Christology* (New York: Orbis, 1991), 151–2.

globalization. I hope that intercultural hermeneutics can serve this mission of the church, which includes both boundary-crossing communication with victims and intercultural and interreligious communication.

ABSTRACT

This essay critically examines, from the viewpoint of the victims of globalization, the general consensus that intercultural hermeneutics and mission are imperative in the time of globalization. It argues that the victims are excluded from, and exploited by, these intensified intercultural interactions. In searching for an intercultural hermeneutics supporting liberation of victims, Asian experiences in the context of decolonization and liberation may provide insight. The church's intercultural boundary-crossing mission must include encounters not only with other religions and cultures but especially with the victims of globalization. Thus, the church as well as the larger world, needs an intercultural hermeneutics capable of serving this mission.

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