I and Thou:
Exploring Relational Mission

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Introduction

While all would agree that there is a category difference between the researcher and those researched upon, or the missionized and the missionary, I wonder if the relationship between these two groups have been sufficiently problematized. There is a lot of mission research done on the unreached groups in our world and also on those groups that have been reached with the Christian message. Equally, much research has been done on missionaries both in the field as well as when they come back 'home' after their mission assignments. For example, Dr. Maik Arnold, who was a research associate at OCMS, received his Ph.D. in the social sciences at the Ruhr-Universität Bochum in 2009; his dissertation involved a systematic investigation of the religious self of German Protestant missionaries in cultural psychological perspective. However, my claim is that not sufficient research or critical reflection has been done on the relationship between these two groups. Let's create a mission vignette that captures mission life will illustrate the issue better:

Brian is called by God to be a missionary to the Garacias of Rajasthan in India. He and his family go to Rajasthan and live at Abu Road and work with the Garacia people. They offer educational and medical help through the week and on Sundays hold a Bible meeting. Abu Road is hot and humid during the summer months and the Garacias a hard lot to work with. Brian and his family genuinely believe that they have been called to serve these people and so give it their all. They take time to make friendships, and even map out the traditions of these people group. They work hard amongst these people. Their family and friends back home do get worried. Their organization sends people out to them to support and refresh them. Of course, they have a local church they attend and especially give leadership to its evangelistic work. On a typical work day in the morning they open their tiny clinic and many Garacias come to them for medical check-up and medicines. Brian's wife is a trained nurse and she is able to offer basic health care. In the afternoon, the children come for English classes. They teach these children songs and Bible verses apart from teaching them English. In the evening, they would visit a couple of families, pray for them and invite them to come to the Sunday meeting. The Sunday meeting group has been steadily growing.

In the world of mission or mission research, there is a clear distinction between the missionary or mission researcher on the one hand, and the others who are being missionized or researched upon. Even this gathering of mission researchers represents those who are involved in collecting and analysing 'mission information' and of course we are not the one getting missionized. In other words, there is a category difference between the 'Brians' of this

world and the 'Garacias'. One does mission while the other receives mission. The issue I am raising is that while there is ample research on the Garacias as well as on missionaries such as Brian and his family, there is not sufficient research and critical thinking on the relationship Brian and his family has with the Garacias. It is this 'mission relationship' that I am interested in for us to reflect on in this presentation.

How should be the relationship between missionaries, mission researchers and the communities, individuals they work with? In the relationship they share, how should the 'other' be understood? Perhaps, more importantly, how should they as missionaries and mission researchers understand themselves in the relationship they share with the communities? I would like to argue that a deep reflection on mission relationship will not only give us a better understanding of the 'missionary self' and the 'missionized other' but also on the nature of mission itself.

This is not to say that there has been no reflection on mission in light of the missionized other. Matter of fact, in the twentieth-century, new models of mission have emerged that have taken the missionized other seriously. So, I begin this paper by briefly evaluating two models that have genuinely sought to reconsider mission in light of the missionized other in their contexts. I then show how in the broader academia the self-other relationship has been problematized particularly in the postcolonial discourse inspired by the works of Frantz Fanon. While Fanon's critique is important and acceptable, how should we move forward? We will briefly meditate on the Austrian Jewish philosopher Martin Buber's central work 'I and Thou' and look for insights that can inform our understanding of the relationship between missionaries and the missionized others. Finally, I will end with some fieldwork experiences to explore what relational mission could look like on the field.

Response of Mission Studies to the 'Other' and her 'Context'

Within mission studies, different models have emerged that embody these changing understandings of the self's relationship with the other. We have come a long way, from a colonial model of mission to indigenous mission to what Jenkins has called 'reverse mission' in his *The Next Christendom*. Two models that come to mind are inculturation and contextualization. The term 'inculturation' is used for the first time in 1962 and then officially by Pope John Paul II in 1979.[1] The term 'contextualisation' had its historic first appearance in 1972 in the ecumenical publication of the *Theological Education Fund, Ministry in Context*. These two models came out of the larger change in the philosophical climate in the academia which has been termed as the postmodern turn.

The revolt against universal rationality had begun to flourish with Neitsche's *Genealogy of Morals* and extended by the works of Lakatos, Feyerabad and Kuhn in the philosophy of science and Peter Winch in the social sciences. In the 1970s Jean-Francois Lyotard defined the term 'postmodern' as an 'incredulity' for universal rationality.[2] The focus shifted from text to the context. The social, political and existential contexts that defined the conditions for the

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[1] Timothy J. Gorringe, *Furthering Humanity: A Theology of Culture* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), 199.

[2] Jean-Francois Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge,* trans. Geoff Benninton and Brian Mass umi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxxiv, 7.

production of knowledge were given supremacy. It was against this background both inculturation and contextualization were born.

Aylward Shorter defines inculturation as 'the on-going dialogue between faith and culture or cultures…it is the creative and dynamic relationship between the Christian message and a culture or cultures'.[3] The term 'inculturation' is a development from old terms like 'adaptation', 'accommodation' and 'indigenization' as the need to move away from the concept of a western culture imposing its universal gospel. Pedro Arrup defines it as:

> The incarnation of Christian life and of the Christian message in a particular context, in such a way that this experience not only finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question (this alone would be no more than a superficial adaptation) but becomes a principle that animates, directs and unifies the culture, transforming it and remaking it so as to bring about a 'new creation'.[4]

It is interesting that Shorter talks about a 'relationship', however, it is not the relationship between the missionary and the missionized that has been reflected upon, but rather the relationship between the Christian message and culture. It is quite revealing that although there appears to be importance given to the other and their context, in inculturation, the other continues to be eclipsed. According to Arrup the sole purpose seems to be on 'transforming' the culture according to the message in order to bring about a 'new creation', and in no way is it bothered about the relationship between the missionary and those missionized.

While contextualization is very similar to inculturation, Darrell L. Whiteman notes that contextualization seeks to make the gospel/text relevant to the context of the culture.[5] It is the model of contextualization that necessitated the rise of contextual theology, giving importance not only to the scripture but also the context in which it surfaces.[6] Stephen Bevans understands classical theology as objective while contextual theology as being subjective.[7] However, he claims that while it does not resort to relativism, it gives due importance to context because meaning is ascribed to reality through 'the context of our culture or our historical period, interpreted from our own particular horizon and in our own particular thought forms'.[8] The contextual model of mission does direct us to the context of the mission field and its horizon. However, once again, the relationship between the missionary and the missionized community remains invisible and unaddressed.

In this brief survey what is seen is that while the context and historical location of those missionized is being taken into consideration, the ontological relationship the missionary has with the missionized community is addressed. Of course, one could counter argue that

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[3] Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1988), 11.
[4] Pedro Arrupe, "Letter to the Whole Society on Inculturation", in *Aixala* (ed.), Vol. 3, (1978), 172.
[5] Darrell L. Whiteman, "Contextualisation: The theory, the gap, the challenge", *International Bulletin of Missionary Research,* 21/1 (1997), 2-6.
[6] Stephen B. Bevans and Katalina Tahaafe-Williams (eds.), *Contextual Theology for the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2012), 9.
[7] Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology,* 2nd edn. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002), 3-4.
[8] Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology,* 4.

mission agency handbooks, particularly for new missionaries would give specific instruction on how to behave and live in a mission context. A quick look at two handbooks revealed that while there is a lot of information and even rules on how the missionary should be and relate with their home organization and supporters, I was unable to find any clear direction on how the missionary should relate with the communities they work amongst.[9] There are resources on friendship mission or friendship evangelism that seeks to use friendships as a starting point for mission. These models have strong critiques, and as one of them countered, 'friendships with an agenda are never true friendships'.[10]

The Postcolonial Critique

The terms 'difference', 'diversity', 'plurality', with a realization of the presence of an 'other' who is different from the self has gained huge currency in the past few decades and have been problematized not only in the public space, but also have a history of discourse within the academia. Subaltern studies, postcolonial studies and even what has come to be known as postmodern philosophy are but to name a few discourses that have focused on problematizing these terms. If in mission studies the discourse focusing on context arose in light of the missionary doing mission in other communities, then in the broader academia this discourse arose in response to colonial subjugation and control. The goal for looking at the postcolonial discourse is for us to identify the critical issues at stake in this debate. For example, as early as in 1952, Frantz Fanon, the famed author of *Black Skin White Masks* from the Caribbean island of Martinique talks about the relationship between the colonizers and the colonized, particularly in the context of the French colonialism. His words are very telling even as he explicitly shares his displeasure as well as his aspiration.

> On that day, completely dislocated, unable to be abroad to the other, the white man, who unmercifully imprisoned me, I took myself far off from my own presence, far indeed, and made myself an object. What else could it be for me but an amputation, an excision, a haemorrhage that spattered my whole body with black blood? But I did not want this revision, this thematisation. All I wanted was to be a man among other men. I wanted to come lithe and young into a world that was ours and to help to build it together.[11]

The above quote clearly critiques the relationship the colonizer and the colonized shared. McLeod on a commentary on this text says that here 'Fanon's identity is defined in negative terms by those in a position of power. He is forced to see himself not as a human subject, with his own wants and needs as indicated at the end of the quotation, but an object, a peculiarity at the mercy of a group that identifies him as inferior, less than fully-human, placed at the mercy of their definitions and representations'.[12] Anindita argues that Fanon's book,

[9] *Missionary Handbook*, Commission to Every Nation Canada (2016). Available at: http://cten.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/CTENC-Handbook-2016-01.pdf [Accessed 15th April, 2018]; Amos R. Wells, *The Missionary Manual: A Handbook of Methods for Missionary Work in Young People's Societies* (Wilmore, KY: First Fruits Press, 2015).

[10] Karina Kreminski, "The Problem with 'Friendship Evangelism'", *Missio Alliance* (2016). Available at: http://www.missioalliance.org/problem-friendship-evangelism/ [Accessed on 15th April, 2018].

[11] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks,* trans. Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto Press, 1986 [1952]), 112-13.

[12] John McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 20.

Black Skin, White Masks sets forth the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. She explains that the explains that 'the colonized subject who is forced into the internalization of the self as an "other"' is seen in stark contrast to the colonizers who are 'civilized, rational, intelligent: the "Negro" remains "other" to all these qualities against which colonizing peoples derive their sense of superiority and normality'.[13] The tragedy of this was that even after the colonized responded to the colonizer and did everything as required, he was never accepted as an equal. So Anindita says, 'however hard the colonized try to accept the education, values and language of France—to don the White mask of civilization that will cover up the "uncivilized" nature indexed by their black skins—they are never accepted on equal terms'.[14] 'The white world', writes Fanon, 'the only honorable one, barred me from all participation. A man was expected to behave like a man. I was expected to behave like a black man'.[15]

Although Fanon's book captures some of the darkest moments of human history, if we replace the colonizer-colonized binary with the missionary-missionized, it would perhaps reveal insights that make visible the critical issues that govern the relationships prevalent in the mission field.

The first insight is that there is a huge power difference between the two parties in the modern missionary movement. Mission was done from a position of power amongst people who were less powerful and less resourceful. There is a huge difference between the missionary self and the missionized other. This difference continues today. There is a conceptualization of this unequal binary, namely, missionary-missionized. In Al-Saidi's work, I am going to replace the colonizer or imperialist with missionary and the colonized with missionized, in order to tease out the binary at play. Al-Saidi argues that 'to maintain authority over the Other in a [mission] situation...[the missionary] must see the Other as different from the Self...Politically as well as culturally the Self and the Other are represented as the [missionary] and the [missionized]'.[16] Explicating the difference between the self and other, Al-Saidi writes, 'the Other by definition lacks identity, propriety, purity, literality. In this sense he can be described as the foreign: the one who does not belong to a group, does not speak a given language, does not have the same customs; he is the unfamiliar, uncanny, unauthorized, inappropriate, and the improper'.[17] The creation of this binary opposition contrasts for us the difference between the world of the missionary and the world of the missionized community. Although these worlds intersect they do with all the power differentiation that exists between them and one wonders how this relationship can be characterized.

Secondly, within this binary, there is an objectification of the colonized or the missionized. Here if I may come directly to the point, mission research in particular needs to be careful not to objectify those they seek to represent. It is a reduction of a human to characteristics and

[13] Anindita Mondal, "Postcolonial Theory: Bhabha and Fanon", *International Journal of Science and Research,* 3:11 (2013), 2966.

[14] Mondal, "Postcolonial Theory: Bhabha and Fanon", 2966.

[15] Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks,* 114.

[16] Afaf Ahmed Hasan Al-Saidi, "Post-colonialism Literature the Concept of self and the other in Coetzee's Waiting for the Barbarians: An Analytical Approach" in *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, Vol.5, No.1 (2014), 95.

[17] Al-Saidi, "Post-colonialism Literature". 95.

numbers, 'placed at the mercy of [our] definitions and representations'.[18] Bhabha adds in his book *The Location of Culture* (1994), that, 'the objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction'.[19] This could be said as true of mission research that feeds into mission strategy. I am going to rewrite a paragraph Anindita wrote but replace the colonized-colonizing binary with missionized-missionary language and the colonial discourse with mission studies:

> …the '[missionized] subject' is a radically strange creature whose bizarre and eccentric nature is the cause for both curiosity and concern. The [missionized] are considered the 'other' of the Westerner or the '[missionary] subject', essentially outside of western culture and civilization. Yet, on the other hand, the discourse of [mission studies] attempts to domesticate [missionized] subject and abolish their radical 'otherness', bringing them inside western understanding through the Orientalist project of constructing knowledge about them. The construction of 'otherness' is thus split by the contradictory positioning of the [missionized] simultaneously inside and outside of Western knowledge.[20]

In Bhabha's words, '[mission] discourse produces the [missionized] as a social reality which is at once an "other" and yet entirely knowable and visible'.[21]

Finally, there is no authentic relationship between these two parties – at least not a relationship of equals. The relationship is always lopsided as it is one-sided. If the other is objectified and is at the other end of the power equation, then how is it even possible to have a relationship? More so, if the missionary has an agenda for the missionized, whom he wants to transform, then how is the missionized able to be equal with the missionary. Apart from the economic, and even political inequality, there is an understanding of the other as incomplete, needing care, like a child to a parent, or a student to a teacher, or a novice to an expert. It is Frantz Fanon who develops the idea of the Other. To him the Other is the 'not me' he is the Other.[22] The missionized other with whom the missionary self can never truly relate.

While the application of the postcolonial critique on missions and mission studies is able to tease out the critical issues involved in mission work and mission research, can we find in the postcolonial discourse resources to move past these challenges so that we have a healthier relationship between the missionary and the missionized. In the work of Homi Bhabha, particularly in his ideas of 'hybridity' and 'third space' we find a way forward in terms of reassigning meanings to the old binary of colonizer and colonized, and in our case the missionary and the missionized.[23]

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[18] Mondal, "Postcolonial Theory: Bhabha and Fanon", 2966.
[19] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 70.
[20] Mondal, 2967.
[21] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 70-71.
[22] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove, 1963).
[23] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994); Homi Bhabha, "Frontlines/Borderposts", in A. Bammer, *Displacements: Cultural Identities in Question* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 15:269-272; Homi Bhabha, "Cultures in Between" in S. Hall and P. Du Gay *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London: Sage Publications, 1996).

Applying Bhabha to our mission discourse, would mean that in the encounter between the missionary and the missionized there is a new hybrid identity that interweaves both these worlds and thus the identity of both parties escape essentialist cultural identities. Hybridity is positioned as antidote to essentialism, or 'the belief in invariable and fixed properties which define the "whatness" of a given entity'[24] as Bhabha would himself argue that 'all forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity'.[25] According to Bhabha, this hybrid third space is an ambivalent site where cultural meaning and representation have no 'primordial unity or fixity'[26] and opens up the space for new forms of cultural meaning that call into question established categories of identity and culture.

The concept of the third space is useful for analyzing the 'enunciation, transgression and subversion of dualistic categories' going beyond colonial binary thinking and oppositional positioning.[27] Despite the exposure of the third space to contradictions and ambiguities, it provides a spatial politics of inclusion rather than exclusion that 'initiates new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation'.[28]

While Bhabha's analysis opens up a new space for us to rethink about the relationship between the missionary and the missionized, he is primarily concerned about identity and cultural representations. While we are interested in these themes, we are more so interested in the existential or real-life relationships between the missionary and the missionized other. It appears that neither the postcolonial critique nor the newer models of mission have rigorously interrogated the fundamental 'I-Thou' relationship, using Martin Buber's language, that underlies mission practice and mission studies. Let's summarise the three critical issues we have raised so far: First, the binary representation of the missionary and the missionized. How should we understand the relation between the missionary self and the missionized other? Secondly, how do we overcome the objectification of the missionized other, especially in mission research. Finally, what is the nature of the existential relationship between the missionary and the missionized community? With these questions let's go to the works of Martin Buber with a view to draw insights for mission studies.

Martin Buber for Mission Studies

Martin Buber is a Jewish philosopher who was born in Vienna in 1878. He studied philosophy and the history of art at the University of Vienna and the University of Berlin and received his PhD at the age of 26 and taught in the University of Frankfurt for 10 years (1923-33).[29] However, Buber does not write from a position of power. He was one of the survivors of the Nazi holocaust and was a leader of the German Jews battle against Nazism. Although he was an interpreter of the Hebrew Bible and a spokesman for Judaism, from his youth he has been deeply concerned with Jesus and the New Testament and has had many significant dialogues

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[24] D. Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature & Difference* (New York: Routledge, 1991), xi.

[25] J. Rutherford, "The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha", *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 207-221.

[26] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*.

[27] L. Law, "Dancing On The Bar: Sex, Money and the Uneasy Politics of Third Space" in Steven Pile & Michael Keith *Geographies of Resistance* (London: Routledge, 1997).

[28] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 1.

[29] Maurice S. Friedman, *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1955), 8.

with Christian theologians. The German Catholic thinkers Eugene Kogon and Karl Thieme speak of Buber in this way, 'in everything that he writes the undertone reveals that here speaks a man of faith, and, indeed, a man of active faith'.[30] Although he was a leader of the Jews, he has worked for 'Jewish-Arab cooperation and friendship'.[31] Karl Wilker, the German educator, writes about Buber that he must have 'experienced life's deepest essence…He must have lived and suffered…and he must have shared with us all our life and suffering'.[32] Even a quick reflection on biography shows that Buber's insights on relationship between different kinds of people arose from his deep engagement with 'others'. He being a Jew was engaged with Germans, Christians, as well as Arabs and seeking to work out human friendship in each encounter. In 1923 his magnum opus, *I and Thou* appeared and it is from this book that we will seek insights for the missionary self's relationship with the missionized other.

The first insight we get from Buber is about understanding the relationship between the self and the other. He argues that even before there is an 'I' or a 'You' there is a primary or even primal word 'I-You' or 'I-It' that determines how we understand the 'I' and the 'You'. He writes, 'there is no I taken in itself, but only the I of the primary word I-Thou and the I of the primary word I-It'.[33] In other words, according to Buber, our understanding of ourselves and others depends on how we understand the relationship between oneself and the other. So, we do not begin with how I view myself in isolation or who others are in isolation, both these insights on how we understand ourselves and how we understand others are informed by how we understand the primary 'relationship' between ourselves and others. This is counter-intuitive, as normally, if we have to think about our relationship with someone, we begin by thinking about ourselves and then the other, and then about the relationship. That seems to be logical thing to do. However, Buber's argument is that there is a fundamental posture or attitude to relationship with others that predetermines who we are and who the others are for us. In my view this is extremely important particularly for those of us involved in mission research.

What is our fundamental understanding of the relationship we share with those whom we minister to or research upon? First, when we stand in a relationship with another, we do not experience parts of them, rather, we know them in their wholeness, in their unboundedness. It is the meeting of another like oneself, with infinite possibilities. Buber asks, 'what, then, do we know of Thou?' and answers, 'Just everything. For we know nothing isolated about it any more'.[34] Secondly, 'the Thou meets me through grace – it is not found by seeking'. But what does this mean? For Buber it meant that we were chosen and met with, all of which is the action of grace. In this gracious meeting, there is suffering and action. He writes, 'the Thou meets me. But I step into direct relation with it. Hence the relation means being chosen and choosing, suffering and action in one'.[35] Thirdly, this relation is direct, face to face and not mediated by a system of ideas or foreknowledge. There are no ulterior motives or aims. Buber writes, 'no aim, no lust, and no anticipation intervene between I and Thou…Every means is

[30] Eugene Kogon and Karl Thieme, "Martin Buber", *Frankfurter Hefte*, VI. 3 (March 1951), 195-199.
[31] Friedman, *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue*, 8-9.
[32] Friedman, *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue*, 8-9.
[33] Martin Buber, *I and Thou,* trans. Ronald Gregor Smith, (New York: Scribner Classics, 2000[1923]), 20.
[34] Buber, *I and Thou,* 25.
[35] Buber, *I and Thou,* 26.

an obstacle. Only when every means has collapsed does the meeting come about'.[36] Fourthly, 'relation is mutual. My *Thou* affects me, as *I* affect it. We are moulded by our pupils and built by our works'.[37] Both the self and the other are actors and sufferers. It is a relationship that moves both ways, in a sense, equally. Finally, this relation is best characterised by love. This love is not to be confused with feelings. 'Feelings dwell in man; but man dwells in his love'. 'Love does not cling to the *I* in such a way as to have the *Thou* only for its "content," its object; but love is *between I* and *Thou'*. 'In the eyes of him who takes his stand in love, and gazes out of it, men are cut free from their entanglement to bustling activity. Good people and evil, wise and foolish, beautiful and ugly, become successively real to him; that is, set free they step forth in their singleness, and confront him as *Thou'*.[38] The implications for mission practice and mission research are enormous.

The second insight we get from Buber is about how we should or not view the other. He postulates that there are two ways of viewing the other, each dependent on what we hold on to as our primary word. Buber gives us two primary words. He says it is either an 'I-Thou' or an 'I-It'. We have already seen how the other could be considered out of the I-Thou primary word. This insight is about how the other should not be looked upon – for him the other should not be seen as an *It*. For Buber for a person to become an *It* is to reduce the person to an object that can be experienced. He writes, 'I perceive something. I am sensible of something. I imagine something. I will something. I feel something. I think something' and then concludes that 'this and the like together establish the realm of *It*'. Buber is strongly against experiencing others because of its superficiality resulting from the use of our senses. He writes, 'man travels over the surface of things and experiences them. He extracts knowledge about their constitution from them...He experiences what belongs to the things'. His argument is that in this attitude of treating others like objects that can be experienced and known, all one gets is an 'accumulation of information'. The human is not a thing amongst other things. The human is not a 'he' or a 'she' but a 'thou' that is unbounded and hence cannot be objectified. A person can be set in a particular time and space, as well as one can describe 'the colour of his hair, or of his speech, or of his goodness' but each time this is done the person ceases to be a Thou. He is quick to add melancholically that in our world however every *Thou* eventually becomes an *It* – an object among objects, one that can 'be described, taken to pieces, and classified...But so long as I can do this he is no more my *Thou* and cannot yet be my *Thou* again'. There is a strong critique against treating those we missionize or research upon as objects for whom we have an agenda.

The final insight from Buber is on how should the *I* be in relation to the *Thou*? If the other is treated as a *Thou* and not an *It*, then what does that do to the *I*? Buber replies, 'through the *Thou* a man becomes I'. Each time a person treats another as a person, the unchanging consciousness of the person that reaches out to the *Thou* emerges clearly and breaks out into an *I* that is reflectively like a *Thou* and takes possession of oneself. In other words, when I treat another like a person then only I am able to reflectively know the kind of person I am. Prior to this, the *I* in treating the other as an *It* was itself an *It* without any real connection. And now that he is able to know himself as a *Thou*, he is able to observe and analyse the other but from the perspective of a *Thou* so that the other appears as a whole, a sum of qualities.

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[36] Buber, *I and Thou,* 26.
[37] Buber, *I and Thou,* 29.
[38] Buber, *I and Thou,* 28-29.

Buber is describing a fundamental posture that one needs to have with regard to the other. Also, this is a journey of discovering oneself and learning to relate with others. His inspiration is that the other is an echo of the 'eternal *Thou*' and hence is as unbounded as his maker. Hence, there is no other way to meet with the other, but as a person, in friendship, without agenda. As we cultivate this *I-Thou* relationship the other addresses and speaks to us and we respond to them. In these responses we discover perhaps for the first time who we authentically are ourselves. Once we have found ourselves in our fullness as a person, not someone who has been machinated or mechanized, but as a person, then each time we meet with the other, we know how to treat them as a person. We don't reduce them to their parts but treat them as persons created in the image of God. In our journey with others, once we have reached this level, we can then indeed to mission work and mission research, but how we do it would be very different.

Mission Research on the Bhatki Community

Even as we come to the end of this presentation, I would like to share two examples, a positive and a negative, in terms of mission research that illustrate various points that Buber makes in his work.

Bhatki Community of Maharashtra, India
The first is about a research team, that went to research the Bhatki community in Maharashtra. As the name suggests, the Bhatkis are travellers. They are an astrologer community. Presently only the men practicing astrology travel while the women and children stay in the villages and take care of their diary business. The two astrologer brothers we met travel for almost 8 months of the year. Astrology has been their occupation for generations. The brothers used to accompany their father and have learnt the trade from him.

We visited their village and got into one of their huts to speak with them. The living conditions were poor and the brothers unimpressive to sight. Immediately the team, ready with their questionnaires, became disillusioned, wondering if any information could be got at all, or was this another wasted trip. The brothers were immediately dismissed. However, one of the brothers started to speak and address us. He asked us our names and where we lived in a slightly provocative manner. He was trying to guess where we were from, on the basis of the information we provided. The team felt frustrated and even irritated with the questions. We had less time and a long questionnaire to complete and of course were not going to entertain these 'irrelevant' questions. One team member, coming from a remote part of North East India, for fun (as she said) gave the name of her village. Immediately, the astrologer brother, started to mention street names and landmarks in her village, which completely bewildered her, and all of us suddenly turned to look, for the first time, these brothers. We knew that we were being addressed and spoken to, and that we had to listen. Pencils down, interview sheets set aside, we leaned forward to listen.

The astrologers said that they have a lot of followers across different cities. They have a process of establishing connections. They stay in the popular hotels in the cities and then publish advertisement about their services in the leading newspapers. They connect with the politicians and leading businessmen and through them their network expands. They visit the

cities at least once in a year to keep the connections fresh. Travels give them a chance to exchange knowledge and they learn a lot in the process. In their words, they usually travel with a mindset of learning something from everyone they meet. When they are open to learning, in turn, the other person will learn too, they claimed. This is their philosophy of engagement. One of the brothers believes that this mindset will reduce a lot of differences amongst people and bring peace between diverse communities. In their own way, the astrologer brothers expressed the need and importance of inter-faith approaches through dialogue. When they visit any village, they make stops in the paan-shops and local markets etc. From these places they get to learn a lot about the local people. They grasp as much as they can about the new village and community. When they visit one household, they also do similar research to find out more about the others. This is how they increase their knowledge base. When asked about what they feel about conversion, the elder brother replied, "*Karne do na bhai! Parivartan kaun nahi karta*?" (Let them! Who doesn't change?) He said it is important to question, criticize and change traditions. Society will not change directly all of a sudden. People have to change.

Mwanzo, Tanzania
In another research trip to Tanzania, we found a positive example of how the community had positively influenced the mission worker and the mission worker had allowed herself to be addressed. We met with a mission worker, a nutritionist, who had chosen to work in a mission organization rather than a secular organization as she wanted her work to involve the faith dimension. She said she enjoys her work because she empowers people and helps the community holistically. She was working with a farming community. However, interestingly, she claimed that her understanding of faith changed after working amongst that community. Looking at how the community were implementing the development projects and being transformed, she decided that she too will venture out and learn from the community and do farming herself when she has free time. Renting three acres of land she worked on it after office hours for months and eventually harvested one thousand crates of tomatoes which earned her more than her annual salary. This gave her a new vision for her life. She wants to diversify her farming this coming year so that with more earnings she can build her house even as she prepares to get married. She credits the community she serves to have inspired and taught her to be more successful in her own personal life. She does not look down on these communities whom she serves, rather sees their work as a collaboration for mutual welfare.

Conclusion

In this presentation, I have tried to problematize the relationship between missionaries and mission workers with the communities they serve. The inspiration I got for this paper was primarily from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Finland. One day I unintentionally stumbled upon their website and was intrigued by their statement of their mission philosophy. Their header read 'Mission is Collaboration'. I have pasted the relevant parts from their website in the Appendix. They seem to understand the Buberian model for mission well. So, in conclusion, following Buber closely and the examples shared above, let me end by listing three characteristics of how a 'journeyed self' would do mission and mission research:
   1. A missionary or a mission researcher would meet with the community as a person meeting a friend on a holiday. There is no need to exercise power or have

condescension or even any agenda. The meeting is premised on enjoyment of friendship. All that differentiates me from my friend – be it money, education, etc, all of that become meaningless in the participation and enjoyment of friendship. It echoes John 15:15 – 'I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you'. It also resonates with Aristotle's discrimination of three kinds of friendship. For Aristotle, friendships based on utility or pleasure or not true friendships. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, he writes, 'Complete friendship is that of good people, those who are alike in their virtue: they each alike wish good things to each other in so far as they are good, and they are good in themselves. Those who wish good things to a friend for his own sake are friends most of all, since they are disposed in this way towards each other because of what they are, not for any incidental reason'.[39]

2. In such a friendship, often one is not in control of the conversation or action. The friend has the power to speak and address, and we are called to respond. Buber says in responses we find ourselves. I have deeply reflected on this to get a sense of what is being said here. Let's get back to our opening mission vignette: if Brian has been called to the Garacias, then for the years he lives with them, just as he is called to serve the Garacias, God has ordained the Garacias to serve and nurture him. It is not his home church or organization who will be ministering to him, but the Garacia community with whom he lives. Let me push this thought, if God has the best plan for Brian's life, then there is no other community in the planet who can nurture Brian better than the Garacia community. In other words, Brian is amongst the Garacias because it there where is discipleship and spiritual growth is ordered by the Lord, not just his ministry and mission. So, we look at those we do mission with as those who are ordained to minister to us. Amos Yong claims that emergent churches are already participating in these forms engagement in that they 'emphasize genuine dialogue, encourage visiting other sacred sites and even participating in their liturgies, and insist on learning about the lives and religious commitments of others'.[40] On the basis of Gibbs and Bolger's *Emerging Churches*, Yong argues that 'these activities are informed by the conviction that there is much to be learned from other cultures, even to the point of being evangelized by those of other faiths in ways that transform Christian self-understandings'.[41]

3. Once the missionary or mission researcher has participated in this friendship and in that participation has discovered herself, then, Buber suggests that the missionary is able to do all the research and mission work she wants to do. One is able to now avoid cheap reductionism and is able to appreciate the person as a whole – as a friend. So, it appears that Buber is not against research or doing acts of good but looks at it as a later event only to be done by those who have journeyed to personhood through their friendships.

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[39] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated and edited by Roger Crisp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 147.

[40] Amos Yong, *Hospitality and the Other: Pentecost, Christian Practices and the Neighbour* (NY: New York University, 2008), 36.

[41] Yong, *Hospitality and the Other*, 36.

Appendix

Mission is collaboration

Mission is carried out in collaboration with local churches, communities and people. In practice, our aim is to provide support and expertise to enable locals to do missionary work. Finnish missionaries and aid workers support and train locals and undertake duties they have expertise in. Our aim is to enable locals to continue the work independently in order to achieve lasting results. An integral part of Christianism is spreading the good. This involves having faith in our being able to alleviate the distress and need of those who have less than we do. By working together, we can do more.

"No church is so poor that it cannot give to others. And no church is so rich that it cannot learn from others." (Bishop Josiah Kibira, 1925–1988, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania)

Interfaith dialogue is about encounters

It is about how we can engage in dialogue and learn from and about one another.

All religions answer questions about fundamental issues, the world and people in their own way, but people from different religions nevertheless have a great deal in common. What we all share is the human experience of religion.

When people of different religious backgrounds meet, they engage in interfaith dialogue. Through interfaith dialogue, we can

- increase our understanding of people with different religious and cultural backgrounds,
- lessen radicalisation and
- promote peace.

Positively together

The mutual ground for different religions and opinions lies in advocating peace and other themes that benefit us all.

Positive freedom of religion means that society allows its members to disagree, lets everyone believe in their own way, and ensures that everyone can enjoy peace and mutual respect.

Religions and opinions do not always meet, but people do. And it is in everyone's best interest that we do.

Living side by side in peace

How can proponents of religions that represent different world views life together in peace? This question is relevant to both politicians and ordinary people. If people of different religious backgrounds or no faith are to live in peace, the following must be taken into consideration:

- Ensuring the smooth operation of everyday life
- Preventing violence
- Resolving conflicts
- Tolerating dissimilarity
- Protecting nature
- Caring for the disadvantaged
- Ensuring financial security

A greenhouse for radicalism?

All religions and religious opinions have features that, when taken out of context, can brutalise and radicalise that religion. In extracting these features, we completely ignore the human features of that religion – for every religion involves an ethical aspect, an ideal of doing good.

In world history, radicalisation has applied to both religious and secular traditions. But terrorism never springs from religion alone; for someone living in a war zone with no money, hope, paths to or

prerequisites for a good life, joining a radical movement can seem like the only way out. From their perspective, radical movements seem to offer a community and an objective that is larger than life. To prevent radicalisation, we must thus help the members of our society who are at risk of exclusion.

Everyday life tests our faith
The main arena of interfaith interaction is our everyday life. A friendly smile, a helping hand and a warm greeting help make life peaceful – regardless of the ethnicity, language or religion of our neighbours. Getting to know the festivities of different traditions or even taking part in them also helps make our lives richer.

Doctrine and experience are open to discussion
Religious doctrine is open to discussion, both at the theological level and at the level of everyday experiences. Actual doctrinal dialogue is quite rare, however, and requires receptiveness and toleration of dissimilarities.

We can also compare our inner experiences of religiousness or irreligiousness. This requires that we are familiar with each other and willing to listen and give the other person space. Sharing experiences is possible even if we do not agree on or understand everything.
Human experience can be shared, but reality is always more than just our experience of it. World views are families of truth that verbalise our human experience in a way that includes faith in something greater than ourselves.

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